



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 23, 2022

Day 14

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Third Session

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

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
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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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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
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Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
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Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
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Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
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United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Jacqueline Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
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Dan Williams	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
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Reid
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Dreeshen
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Long
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Ganley
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen, 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, we have a number of guests joining us in the galleries today: guests of the hon. the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, OP Gothaang and Dee Adekugbe; guests of the Member for Calgary-Klein, Jasneet Lakhyan, Ellen Rose Alog, and Jodi-Lyn McCaw.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Federal Equalization and Transfer Payments

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Albertans well know that we make massive contributions to the rest of Canada. They know that through inequitable taxation we disproportionately fund the federal government in Ottawa. Through federal transfer payments and equalization we also disproportionately fund provincial governments. We help fund their health care, their education, their social services. We fund all these things through net federal taxation out of Alberta into Ottawa to the tune of nearly \$20 billion a year. Our economy drives much of the national economy, yet we are forced to make oversized subsidies to the budgets of other governments.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are more than generous. Albertans support everyone in Canada having similar access to public services, but we also believe in fairness. Fairness is what drives our desire for equalization reform. Unfortunately, this year yet again we see the opposite of fairness. As Albertans work hard to build our economy despite the challenges we face, Quebec has announced that they will be taking \$3.2 billion, the money we send them, and writing \$500 cheques to every Quebec adult with an income of less than \$100,000.

This is outrageous. This is clearly not a matter of providing similar public services across the country; this is a case of direct transfers from the pockets of Albertans to the pockets of Quebecers. If Quebec has enough to start doling out money to everyone, then they have enough money to write a refund cheque payable to the taxpayers of Alberta. This is perhaps the most egregious abuse of transfer dollars that we have ever seen. This is not only unfairness; it is fiscal injustice.

Now more than ever Albertans must stand behind our government. Just as we did in the fall equalization referendum, we must continue our campaign to demand reform and demand that Ottawa fix equalization now.

Utility Costs

Member Irwin: We're going to lose both gas and electricity. I owe over \$1,200 on both. We've been unable to pay rent, extreme utility

bills, and buy food. This has never happened to me before. I'm ashamed and sad.

Those are the words of Patti, just one of thousands of Albertans who've written us to share their very real struggles. Yet this Premier truly believes that Albertans like Patti are simply making "modest sacrifices." Those are his exact words. If you've never had to choose between buying food, paying rent, your utility bills, then, yeah, you probably think Albertans are just making modest sacrifices, or maybe it's that you're completely out of touch with the lived experiences of working Albertans, or maybe it's that you're a Premier with a seven-figure pension coming who can't seem to empathize with anyone ever, the same Premier who justified his cruel cuts to AISH by saying that they wouldn't be onerous.

But it's not just this Premier. This kind of thinking is insidious in the UCP. I urged this government to take real action to address skyrocketing utility costs. Instead of offering tangible help, like through reintroducing a rate cap or a rebate program that would actually provide Albertans immediate relief, I was told that my constituents should just go look at fixed-rate contracts. Those words aren't helpful. They're not helpful to Patti. They're not helpful to a single mom navigating multiple jobs who doesn't have time to try to figure out the complicated system of fixed-rate contracts. Albertans are being told to go figure it out on their own. It's every person for themselves when it comes to paying their bills, that old "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" mentality, an incredibly frustrating attitude that assumes that everybody has boots.

Listen, Albertans deserve real help. This government had an opportunity to make life more affordable, to make life easier for all of us, and they chose not to. It doesn't need to be this way. People like Patti shouldn't be forced to fight daily for their own survival. If you are someone struggling right now, I promise you that you're not alone. You are seen, and you've got a party on your side that will do all we can to help you.

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

Coleman History and Roxy Theatre

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to share some exciting news with you today about my riding. I've frequently shared in this Chamber about the amazing people in my riding of Livingstone-Macleod and how it's full of rich culture, with a wide variety of provincial landmarks that many should visit. One of those is the town of Coleman, located in the Crowsnest Pass near the Frank Slide, which is another place I highly recommend that all Albertans visit. Coleman is a small community that was founded in 1904. It was one of the most important coal-producing centres in the Crowsnest Pass and the greatest coalfield in Alberta prior to 1913.

But it also played a part in a more interesting way in Alberta's history as it was the location of Alberta's only armed train robbery. In 1923 Russian men boarded a train in Lethbridge and waited until they were just outside of Coleman before robbing the passengers. After escaping, a few of them were involved in a deadly shootout with what were then officers from the Alberta Provincial Police force and the RCMP. Along with about \$400 in cash, the robbers also stole the conductor's pocket watch. This watch led to the arrest of the final suspect and can now be found at the Crowsnest museum, also in Coleman.

In 2001 the community was designated as a national historic site of Canada. Among the many historic buildings in Coleman there is a theatre which just recently, thanks to the Minister of Culture, was also declared a national historic resource. I had the honour of receiving that message earlier this month, and I couldn't be happier for the people of

Coleman. The theatre, now known as the Roxy, has so much rich history. It was originally built in 1908, when it was known as the Palm Cafe and Palace Theatre. Unfortunately, they burnt down in 1948 and were rebuilt and were renamed the Roxy. The theatre represents a key piece of Alberta's history when it comes to film and live performances.

I want to thank the Minister of Culture for designating it as a provincial historic resource. I once again encourage all Albertans and extend an invitation to my fellow members to visit Coleman and the pass when they have a moment as a community that is rich and a great place to learn about Alberta's history.

Thank you.

Eastern Slopes Protection Act

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, it takes a special act of cowardice to refuse to debate. In the seven years that I've been in this Chamber, I've taken part in many debates, some where I've agreed and some where I've disagreed, but I've never been afraid to stand up for my views and the people who have sent me to this Chamber to represent them. Sadly, though, this is not something we can say about members across the way.

Our leader put forward a bill that would have protected our eastern slopes from coal mining and enshrined this government's finding from their own coal report into law. This bill was also drafted after we consulted with thousands of Albertans and was supported by tens of thousands. The UCP even supported debating this bill last year, but rather than show some consistency and integrity to debate the exact same bill, only months later the UCP used their majority to kill the bill in committee.

Killing Bill 201 and preventing debate shows us two things: one, the UCP are hypocrites who Albertans can't trust to stand by their own words, and two, the UCP is still reserving the right to tear apart our beautiful Alberta mountains and risk poisoning our water supply with coal mining. The UCP claimed they acted when the minister signed a ministerial order to theoretically put protections in place, but we know those protections are not worth the paper they're written on. With one stroke of a pen the minister can undo all the protections and allow coal mining back into some of Alberta's most environmentally sensitive areas.

Albertans can't trust a government that didn't even want to at least debate the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. They all know full well that this government will undo those so-called protections when the opportunity strikes. Just like last year, I fear that when this UCP government feels that Albertans are no longer paying attention, they will sell off the rights again to strip-mine Alberta's beautiful landscape and risk critical waterways. Albertans just can't trust this Premier or the UCP to protect the eastern slopes.

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

1:40 Dee Adekugbe and Ruth's House in Calgary

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are people one meets in their lifetime that remind them of what is at the core of all of us, humanity. Compassion is a main component of our survival. No nation succeeds, no community succeeds, and no individual succeeds without the deep-rooted humanity that is in all of us. The trouble is that sometimes this compassion gets buried so deep behind the trials and tribulations of our lived experiences and earthly existence that we lose sight of our innermost core and compassion. This oversight not only causes pain and suffering to ourselves, the people closest to us in our communities, but it inhibits our ability to aid each other in our struggles.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today to recognize one of the beautiful human beings on this earth and in our province who has not only overcome struggle but has continued to be a pillar of support and a beacon of hope and light to others. Dee Adekugbe, referred to in her community as Mama Dee, is one of these exceptional human beings that you meet, and it reminds you of what it means to be human. A survivor of domestic violence, Dee has overcome exceptional circumstances of hardship and used her incredible strength and resilience as an opportunity to help others solve a problem in our society that has gone on for too long.

Dee has founded Ruth's House, a safe-haven organization that provides community homes, family support, and community outreach and advocacy for those who've experienced domestic violence. Mama Dee always says that those who have been affected by domestic violence is one too many. The route to being a victim or a perpetrator is a dreadful road of exposure and experience of ugly realities that leads to broken parts in people. Reconciliation and healing need to occur between everyone and in our society.

Mama Dee, I'm so grateful that I got to meet you, and I'm so looking forward to the many bright days ahead as we lean on you and your courage and those you serve to rid our world of corrosive control and support families through organizations like Ruth's House. Thank you so much for inspiring us all to be better.

COVID-19

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, COVID has taken the lives of over 4,000 Albertans. Countless more have been infected by this deadly disease. Thousands have been hospitalized. Thousands fought for their lives in intensive care. Thousands were forced to have surgeries or medical procedures postponed while our front-line heroes fought this pandemic. Students were forced to move from in-person to online learning time and again. People were forced to isolate, lose work, their jobs, their businesses. People had the rugs pulled out from under them by this government, who raced to open for summer and then vanished, nearly collapsing our health care system.

It's been a very difficult two years, and these years will live forever in the minds of the people who have witnessed it. From the first day this pandemic hit Alberta, we've seen friends and family members getting sick, and we stepped up as a community to wear masks, get vaccinated, distance, and stay home when sick. The impacts of this pandemic will live with this province for a long time, but people are still getting sick with COVID. People are still going to the hospital with COVID. People are still in the ICU with COVID, and tragically people are still dying of COVID, leaving devastated loved ones behind. My heart goes out to everyone who has lost a family member, friend, neighbour to this pandemic. It's a pain that too many Albertans have been forced to share.

Now, I completely understand the desire to put this pandemic behind us, but while this government tries to wash their hands of this pandemic, we must always remember that COVID is still here. That's why I urge all Albertans to wear a mask, limit your contacts, and demand clean air in our public buildings. We must be supportive and work to ensure that as we emerge from this pandemic, no one is left behind. So please continue to get vaccinated, continue to stay home when you're sick, continue to support your family, friends, and neighbours. We will get through this together. We just have to choose to do so.

Thank you.

Road Maintenance and Repair in Camrose Constituency

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, this past winter and the seasonal change have been rough for the Camrose constituency. It was a cold and

harsh winter, and now for the past month we have seen dramatic changes between warming and freezing. This weather has been doing an unimaginable amount of damage to the roads and highways, with many roads falling behind in maintenance and in some cases, according to some residents, just not being maintained at all.

Highways 14 and 630 have been a huge area of concern, especially with safety. We have experienced many hardships within the community due to the tragedies that continue to happen on these roads. All of us in the Camrose constituency and the surrounding communities need the issues around safety on these roads addressed and dealt with. We are all painfully tired of hearing about crashes that happen on these roads. As parents and loved ones keep getting calls about their child or loved one not coming home, the concerns for safety when one must drive on these highways grow.

Everyone has the right to safety on the roads as a driver. When we wake up in the morning to go to work, we shouldn't have to worry about being able to miss the big pothole just to avoid damaging our vehicle. In more rural areas, where individuals don't have the luxury of paved roads, they shouldn't have to worry about the roads being washed out or ending up in the ditch in the winter and perhaps not being found for hours, let alone days.

Mr. Speaker, not all roads have bad tales, but some occasionally slip through the cracks. We have a tremendous opportunity to make highways and rural roads a safer place for everyone and the best in Canada. I can't think of a better government that can do just that.

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

National Indigenous Water Operator Day

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oki. I rise today to tell the House about National Indigenous Water Operator Day. It is celebrated on March 21 annually, but as parliamentary secretary for water stewardship I believe it's an occasion that needs to be acknowledged. Many of us give very little thought about the quality of our drinking water, and when we do, it's often because something went wrong. National Indigenous Water Operator Day is in recognition of the vital work done and the dedication shown by those who work to provide safe drinking water for our Indigenous communities. These are not necessarily high-profile positions or even ones that are well known unless something goes wrong, and then we value these workers with our very lives.

So thank you to each and every one of the many Indigenous water operators for the incredibly important work that you do and because of your many successes. We may not know you personally, but we celebrate you now on the day dedicated to your service.

I had the pleasure of attending an event at Calgary city hall this past Saturday to recognize some of the front-line water operators. Many of them work and live in Alberta; however, many were able to come from across the country, including Saskatchewan, B.C., and Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, our rivers, streams, and lakes cross many jurisdictional boundaries. We all appreciate the front-line workers, engineers, and students who keep our water clean and safe. It is a team effort, and please know that you are supported by your provincial government. Your ingenuity and initiative often lead to many creative and effective solutions to everyday problems, but more support is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, to you and to all my colleagues in this Chamber: the next time you pour a glass of water and take that first sip, take a moment to reflect on the many men and women who make sure that our glasses or bottles are full of clean water. We all know how essential water is; water is life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Charter School Funding

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Providing education for children and youth in Alberta is a high priority for the United Conservative government. In 2019 our government was selected with the mandate to bring back parental choice and education, and that's exactly what we have done. Last week our government announced \$25 million in operational funding and \$47 million in capital investment over the next three years for charter schools in Alberta. This investment was made possible through Budget 2022 and will greatly improve and upgrade the facilities used for public charter schools.

Mr. Speaker, our government is working tirelessly to get Alberta's economy back on track after the damage caused by the NDP government. As proof of our success in this recovery, Alberta is in desperate need of skilled tradespeople to work as plumbers, electricians, pipefitters. The skills required to work in these industries can be developed through learning in public charter schools. Mr. Speaker, this investment is great news for Alberta. The funding will allow for schools to utilize different teaching styles and will offer students specialized learning in science, technology, mathematics, or engineering. This unique programming will continue the course of providing parental choice in education, which I am very excited and happy to see. I extend my gratitude to the hon. Premier as well as to the Minister of Education for working hard to deliver on the promises made.

My constituents in Calgary-Falconridge are grateful to see a government that is defending our students and parents from the intrusive educational changes made by the NDP. In addition, they're also happy to have a government that is giving their children an opportunity to pursue a specialized education early in life. Mr. Speaker, by investing in education for children and youth, we'll continue to build a strong workforce.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Budget 2022 Vote

Ms Pancholi: Tomorrow is the final vote on this Premier's bogus, no-help provincial budget. It is also a confidence vote on this Premier. I can tell you that our caucus will stand on behalf of our constituents, the people who elected us to serve them, and vote against this budget. We will do so because it fails so deeply to help Albertans as they face a cost-of-living crisis. It also does not properly fund public education. It levels massive cuts to postsecondary and actively attacks public health care. To the Premier: with everything I've just outlined, how can he expect Albertans to support . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Everyone is going to have their opportunity to ask questions today. As members know, I am not opposed to the occasional heckle. What I am opposed to is members having full on conversations with others all in sedentary positions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: May I begin again, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: No.

Ms Pancholi: Okay.

To the Premier: with everything I've just outlined, how can he expect Albertans to support this budget and have confidence in his incompetent leadership?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP once again characterized this budget as a "no-help budget" when, in fact, it increases the base Health budget by \$2 billion, taking Alberta from being the second most expensive health care system in Canada per capita to being the second most expensive health care system per capita in Canada, with \$600 million of additional investment in this budget on top of \$900 million last year to double the number of surgeries that are performed in charter facilities, to provide surgeries more quickly, to increase by 50 the number of baseline ICU beds, to hire more doctors and nurses, taking real action for Alberta health.

Ms Pancholi: But there's no help in that budget for Alberta families. Inflation rates not seen in 30 years. The cost of everything is rising, from groceries to rent to clothing to gas. The UCP knows this, and they still pressed ahead with a \$1 billion tax grab on families. They've spurred massive increases to car insurance, to tuition, to school fees, and more. So why would UCP MLAs wait until April 9 when we have a confidence ...

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Pancholi: ... or a nonconfidence vote on this Premier tomorrow? My question is: will it be a free vote? Will the Premier allow MLAs to vote on their conscience?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:52.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a budget bill in front of the Assembly. There will be a bill to reduce the fuel tax by 13 cents, to eliminate the Alberta fuel tax as long as oil prices remain high. That is \$1.4 billion in direct cash in the pockets of Albertans on an annualized basis on top of the \$300 million in support for high electricity prices through the \$150 rebate. Meanwhile the NDP is cheering on their coalition partner Justin Trudeau, who wants to quadruple the carbon tax starting April 1.

Ms Pancholi: It sounds like the Premier is afraid of a free vote.

My message to the MLAs on that side of the House is that they can take a stand, a stand against this Premier and a stand for Albertans. Eighteen members of the government caucus is all it takes to defeat this budget. I'm encouraging each UCP MLA to think long and hard today about why they were elected and to vote on their conscience tomorrow. We know that some members across the way won't be voting for him on April 9 anyway, so will someone in the government caucus or on the front bench stand right now, support your constituents, and vote no confidence in this Premier? Let's take a stand together, and let's build a budget that gives Albertans real hope.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm confident in saying that Conservative MLAs will be thrilled to vote for the first balanced budget in 14 years. [some applause] A balanced budget that we got by responsible spending restraint, dynamic growth across the entire economy, and a balanced budget that is allowing us to eliminate the fuel tax for Albertans starting April 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Budget 2022 and Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: This budget does nothing to support Alberta families, and the Premier knows it. Alberta families have been hammered

with months of skyrocketing natural gas and electricity bills, and this government refuses to act. The Premier boasted about a natural gas rebate, and it was fake. He planned to do nothing for electricity rates and then offered them 50 bucks. Albertans have lost confidence. They feel abandoned by this entire UCP caucus. Will someone over there do the right thing, stand up, apologize, and actually do something to help Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the NDP and their ally Justin Trudeau want to do – you know, of course, they've actually formally created the coalition. By the way, in case anybody is misunderstanding this, the Alberta NDP is a branch plant of Jagmeet Singh's federal NDP, which is a branch plant of Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party, and they're all in cahoots to make life more expensive for Canadians. They're not satisfied with the punishing carbon tax like it is today. They want to more than quadruple it starting April 1. Will the member opposite stand in her place and vote against the Liberal-NDP hike in the carbon tax?

Ms Ganley: This is the government that dines out on the sky palace roof while Alberta families can't put food on their table. As MLAs we have to demand better. We've demanded a real rebate for natural gas and electricity. We've demanded a ban on utility shut-offs for the next six months at least. The associate minister of electricity has boasted about doing nothing. He's shrugged off concerns from Albertans about having their utilities shut off, and he offered them a fake rebate. Can the Premier tell families why he thinks it's okay to pass a budget that will drown them in debt?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, on inflation the NDP supported Justin Trudeau's ridiculous vax requirement for truckers that created further problems for our supply chains. They supported the teamsters, against Alberta farmers and commodity producers, in opposing a settlement to that work action, further driving up inflation. They brought in the carbon tax. They're cheering on Justin Trudeau's plan to more than quadruple it, and with their coalition with Justin Trudeau they want to keep printing money, driving up inflation even further. There is no party that is further away from Canadians than the NDP on the issue of inflation.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, this Premier's ability to ignore the genuine struggles of Alberta families is absolutely astounding. The budget is due for a vote tomorrow. Albertans can't afford their utilities, their car insurance, their property taxes, all because of this government. They even want to tax the family camping trip. This budget fails to recognize the realities facing Albertans and is not worthy of this House. Will someone over there stand up, commit to do the right thing? Don't support that budget that does nothing for the people they were elected to represent.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are excited to see the first balanced budget in 14 years because of responsible spending, because of pro-growth policies, the recovery plan that created last year the best year ever in Alberta forestry, in high tech, in venture capital, in exports, in manufacturing, in film and television, even in ag revenues during a tough year. This economy is diversifying. It's growing. The big problem of cost of living is being made a whole lot worse by the Liberal-NDP plan to quadruple their carbon tax. We're going to fight that every step of the way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert is next.

Budget 2022 and Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: I remember this Premier claiming to be offended at the suggestion that he would take money away from Albertans with disabilities. He called it fearmongering, a scare tactic, and then immediately after being elected, he took thousands away from disabled Albertans. He left them to fend for themselves in a cost-of-living crisis unlike anything we've seen. This budget was the Premier's opportunity to make amends, but he chose to continue to make life harder for them. This budget should not be passed, period. Will the Premier commit to bringing forward more supports for vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is growing. The problem we have right now is inflation being worsened by the NDP-Liberal carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting hearing the member opposite talk about ethics when she's sitting next to an NDP colleague who broke the law to violate my personal privacy and the personal privacy of another Alberta citizen. The question is: how long did the NDP know that was going on, and why did they create an environment where it was ethically acceptable in the NDP to violate personal privacy?

Ms Renaud: Our caucus presented Albertans with a plan to put more money in their pockets. The Premier's budget squeezes Albertans for every cent while wealthy CEOs get billions. This selfish, hurtful budget should not be endorsed by this House. I and my colleagues will proudly vote against this no-help budget. We're asking MLAs from all parties to have a conscience and think long and hard about this and vote against this Premier. Will someone on that side take a stand in this House against this cruel budget? Disabled Albertans are watching. They don't care about your spin.

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP could refer to a budget that has increased support for education, for health care, for Children's Services, for community services as cruel. You know what I think is cruel? Burdening future generations with an enormous debt that, basically, is an intergenerational transfer of wealth from kids who can't even vote for consumption by today's generation. We think that endless deficit spending is immoral, and the NDP is wrong to continue campaigning for even more debt on future Alberta generations.

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, disabled Albertans are hurting. This budget is cruel, and it is harmful, and it will drive Albertans into debt. It will see some households lose power and heat. Imagine that in Alberta. That's unthinkable. It will push more vulnerable Albertans onto the street. If this Premier is so proud of this ridiculous budget, then put it to the test. Put it to a real vote in this House and drop the UCP pageantry. Will the Premier or someone in this House rise right now and commit to tomorrow's vote on the budget, commit that it'll be a free vote?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what. It's not cruel. It's compassionate to invest 600 million new dollars in job training for underemployed and unemployed Albertans. What is cruel is quadrupling the carbon tax to make it more expensive for Albertans to buy groceries, to fill up their gas tanks, to take their kids to school. Do you know we've had 18 per cent food inflation... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: We've had 18 per cent food inflation since the NDP started with their carbon tax in 2015, but they want to impose even greater cruelty on Albertans right now who are having to go to the food bank by making food even more expensive by quadrupling the carbon tax. Shame on them.

Technology Industry Development

Ms Sweet: Upon being elected, the UCP declared diversification a luxury and cancelled several tax credits that support start-ups, attract investment, and support economic diversification. Now Alberta is losing ground to other jurisdictions because we're just not competitive enough. Last year Ontario attracted \$7.9 billion, a 295 per cent increase; British Columbia, \$2.9 billion, a 224 per cent increase; Quebec, \$2.8 billion, a 180 per cent increase. Meanwhile Alberta, a \$561 million increase. Is the tech industry really a priority for this government, and why are we falling so far behind?

Mr. Kenney: Well, I'm delighted the member asked that question, Mr. Speaker, because when she was in office in 2018, there were 24 ven cap deals in Alberta, worth \$96 million. Last year, because of our recovery plan, there were 87 ven cap deals, worth \$561 million, a fivefold increase in the volume of venture capital, a doubling of the number of tech companies operating and global companies like Amazon Web Services, Infosys, Mphasis, and others that are setting up shop here in Alberta in a tech boom that we've never seen before.

Ms Sweet: Billions for other provinces, millions for this government. It's a failure, Premier.

The UCP likes to point to their \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway as helping the economy, but there's actually no proof. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce says that the UCP corporate tax rate reduction only applies to large, profitable corporations and not to start-ups. They and the Calgary Chamber of commerce and tech leaders have all been calling for the reinstatement of the Alberta investor tax credit. Reinstating this tax credit would put Alberta entrepreneurs on equal footing with other jurisdictions. Why does the UCP continue to ignore our business community?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP claimed that the job-creation tax cut was going to reduce revenues by \$4.6 billion. In fact, no, it didn't. The budget projected that revenues would grow by incentivizing new investment, new job creation, new taxpayers, a broader tax base, and that's exactly what happened. We are now generating \$400 million more in revenue at an 8-point corporate tax rate than the NDP was at a 12-point rate. Today their leader told the chamber of commerce she wants to raise business taxes by 50 per cent to put more Albertans out of work.

Ms Sweet: Again, Mr. Speaker, by the end of 2018 the Alberta investor tax credit leveraged \$94 million in investment, with 71 per cent of the credit going to Calgary companies. This was vital to the growth of the tech and innovation ecosystem we are seeing in Calgary and included investment in everything from energy to ag tech. The tax credit, if it had not been cancelled, was expected to create 4,400 jobs and attract an additional \$500 million in private investment in Calgary. Just this morning our leader promised to reinstate the AITC, which will attract investment to Alberta and help diversify the economy. Why is this government refusing to do the same? It's hurting our competitiveness.

Mr. Kenney: Let's sum up the NDP in today's question period, Mr. Speaker. They stand with Justin Trudeau and his plan to quadruple the job-killing carbon tax. They want to increase taxes on job creators

in Alberta by 50 per cent. They defend their 50 per cent increase in income taxes on Albertans. They defended Justin Trudeau's higher tax on jobs through the CPP premium. They support an unfair employment insurance system that hammers Alberta workers to transfer money elsewhere in the country. Why is it that the NDP did not learn the lessons of their disastrous economic record? Why do they want to raise taxes on everything in Alberta?

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

Auditor General Report on ARCHES Expenditures

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We just learned more about the depths of the incompetent fiscal management under the NDP. Yesterday the office of the Auditor General released their report on the management of the ARCHES grant program in Lethbridge. It revealed how under the NDP millions went missing due to the NDP's wilful blindness. As a reminder, under the NDP's watch this organization couldn't account for 1.6 million in taxpayer dollars of the total \$18.3 million they received over three years. To the associate minister: how are you cleaning up the NDP's mess and bringing fiscal accountability to your grants . . .

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question by the member. That's what we get, quite frankly, when we get an NDP-Trudeau alliance to manage our finances. We get missing money, we get inappropriate spending, and we get lining of their friends' pockets in the name of helping those who are most vulnerable. It is shameful. We're committed on this side of the House to strong fiscal management. We're committed to improved access to services, strong partners. This organization is under new management, and I am very optimistic about working with them in the future.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his efforts. Given that it just does not end, that under the NDP's watch this organization's staff attended conferences in Europe, luxury staff retreats in British Columbia, and bought thousands in gift cards from their own families' businesses, and given that the NDP turned a blind eye to this gross misuse of taxpayer dollars, dollars that should have been used to help people, to the associate minister: how can we make sure this never happens again in the future?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The best thing we can do for the people of Alberta is to make sure the NDP do not get into government again and that they do not have an NDP-Trudeau alliance in this province ever again. Our government has resolved this issue. This government is hard at work ensuring that taxpayer dollars are being spent properly in this province, and that is why we've had the first balanced budget in over a decade in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't argue with that. Thank you to the minister. Given that the question on everyone's mind coming out of the Auditor General's report is on how this was allowed to happen, to the associate minister: how did this happen?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question by the member behind me. I'm not sure how I can actually even answer that question without the assistance of the members opposite. Maybe the former Health minister, who oversaw the grants, could really help everyone out by publishing her own white paper, quite frankly titled *How I Did It: Helping ARCHES Lose 1.6 Million Taxpayer Dollars*. You know, that's a report that I'd be willing to read and, I'm sure, all Albertans would be willing to read.

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

Health Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New data from the Canadian Medical Association shows that over half the doctors in Canada have experienced burnout during the pandemic. But while every province has had to grapple with COVID, only Alberta's doctors have also had to deal with the incompetence and scare tactics of the UCP, who put politics first and pushed our health care system to its limits while driving doctors away. Doctors remain under enormous strain as hospitals remain over capacity while this government looks the other way and continues to fight with them. Why is the UCP continuing to create chaos and undermine our health care system at a time when our health care heroes need support?

2:10

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question, because it's important that we get the facts out on the table. We actually have more health care professionals in the province today than we've had at any other time. There has been an increase in the number of doctors, and we have been working very closely with the doctors and supporting them. We put in our budget this year that it continued the \$90 million to be able to support doctors, to be able to ensure that we have doctors in rural Alberta. In addition to that, we have made changes to the formulary in terms of virtual care codes to enable family physicians to be able to continue billing through COVID. We made that change in the fifth wave. We are supporting our doctors, and we're supporting health care.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that doctors and health care workers do not feel supported by this government and given that this was shown in a post by Dr. Neeja Bakshi – she said: “We are still over capacity . . . The new steady state of healthcare. Where demand is high and resources are low. Where we are forced to squeeze every ounce of moral and ethical obligation out of an exhausted workforce” – and given that she says, “I am tired of speaking up and speaking out to a void that doesn't listen,” why are the UCP continuing to devalue health care heroes fighting to hold our system and themselves together by driving to cut their wages instead of giving them help?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the resources are at the highest level ever. In Budget 2022 that increase is \$600 million for this year, and that's in addition to the \$900 million in the base operating budget last year, another \$600 million the year after that, still an additional \$600 million the year after that. That's a \$1.8 billion increase over a three-year period. In addition, we are investing \$3.5 billion into infrastructure projects across the province. Our government is focused on providing the resources to health care, we are focused

on supporting health care professionals, and we are focused on supporting Albertans getting the health care that they need.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that anyone watching can see this minister is not listening, just like health care workers know that this minister and this government are not understanding the realities on the ground – indeed, health care professionals find the UCP want to cut their wages even though they’ve been on the front lines of this pandemic throughout this government’s mismanagement – and given that the UCP even wants to cut the wages of respiratory therapists, who helped Albertans who were sick with and dying with COVID breathe their last breaths, and that they want them to take an 8 per cent pay cut, why is this government repeating these same scare tactics and undermining our health care workers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused on supporting our health care system and our health care workers. I want to thank all the health care workers, who have done a phenomenal job over the last two years. You know, we are providing increases to health care workers. I’m pleased to point out again the agreement that we reached with UNA, which provided an increase. By the way, that increase was not provided by the previous government. No, we provided that increase. We also provided additional payments and the critical worker benefit to thank health care workers. That wasn’t done across the entire country, but we did it here in Alberta because it was important we say thank you.

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

School Construction Capital Plan and Calgary

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government’s disrespect of my constituents in northeast Calgary is well documented. The Premier and the local MLA did nothing to support residents after the devastating hailstorm. The Premier accused and blamed the people of northeast Calgary for the spread of COVID-19 in Calgary, and now this government’s budget again ignores the need of my constituents by failing to invest in the schools and other infrastructure that’s badly needed. Can the Minister of Education please explain what metrics she used to deny my constituents the new school they need in northeast Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We’re supporting schools right across this province. There are 66 current projects on the go, 15 new projects announced, and of course it goes through a very rigorous Auditor General approved process, 10 gates that they have to go through. We look at all of those projects, and they will rise to the top as they’re needed.

Mr. Sabir: Given that none of the schools the minister mentioned are in northeast Calgary and given that I raised these concerns with the Premier in budget debate last week but he was unable to give me a reason why northeast Calgary was not given a much-needed school and given that the northeast is one of the fastest growing regions in Calgary and is badly in need of new schools, what message does the minister have for my constituents who will spend a longer time travelling to school to learn in overcrowded classrooms because she wasn’t willing to make these investments in northeast Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The message I have for his constituents is that, unfortunately, the member opposite is incorrect. We have two schools currently being built in Calgary-North East: Skyview middle school and the north Calgary high school. Of course, that’s in northeast Calgary. We’re happy we announced another school in northwest Calgary. We will continue to announce and take care of Calgary.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Premier has constantly refused to apologize for his harmful remarks blaming northeast Calgary for spreading COVID-19 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. It’s very difficult to hear the hon. member’s question, which he has a right to ask.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

. . . and now given that this minister refuses to acknowledge the difficulty she is putting my constituents in by failing to invest in a new school for the area and given that my constituents want answers, will the minister agree to attending a town hall that I will organize in northeast Calgary so she can tell my residents in northeast Calgary . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I previously indicated, there are two schools currently being built in northeast Calgary, but the two public school divisions in Calgary, Calgary public board of education and Calgary Catholic, both got schools, their number one priorities. Their number one priorities were in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I’m not sure who was making unparliamentary remarks on the government side about perhaps encouraging people to not speak, but it’s certainly unparliamentary, and I hope not to hear it again.

The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The two schools that were announced in addition to those ones in northeast Calgary that are currently being built: one is in Evanston to address an issue in northwest Calgary of a school that has 103 per cent utilization; the other one is in Legacy in south Calgary.

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

Rural Health Care and Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans have been blessed not only with blue skies and picturesque landscapes worthy of the silver screen but resources and industries that feed the nation and fuel the world. I’ve been told many times that money is made in rural Alberta, but it’s counted and spent in the big cities. When it comes to health care in rural Alberta, we have the buildings, but we need the people to run the systems, to provide the health care and services that rural communities deserve. To the Minister of Health: can you advise how Budget ’22 will address the gap in rural health care services and infrastructure and specifics, if possible, regarding ambulance services?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the important question. Alberta’s EMS system is under

increased pressure. That's why Budget '22 adds \$64 million to address needs of the EMS system and make EMS more responsive to community needs. We formed the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee to provide ongoing and timely recommendations to improve EMS service as well. In the meantime the initial steps of Alberta Health Services' 10-point action plan are already yielding results. One step they're taking is piloting a rural interfacility transfer project that will increase the availability of ambulances in rural areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister, for the answer. Given that \$22 billion was proposed in Budget 2022 and promises to improve health and operating expenses and given these measurements will improve health standards for rural communities deserving better health care services from AHS, to the Minister of Health: can you provide more detail on the ministry's plan to implement the recommendations from the 2020 AHS performance review as it relates to rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member. AHS submitted a comprehensive implementation plan in August 2020 for review. As a result, 19 of their savings initiatives are either complete or under way, and 50 were approved to move forward. Now, AHS moved forward to better virtual care options, consolidating regional EMS, dispatch operations, and contract laundry services. These savings initiatives reinvested \$83 million into our health care system, and these funds directly benefit rural, remote, and northern Albertans, who deserve access to the same quality of care as those in urban areas. We are investing in the health care system, and we will deliver for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic is now behind us and the Alberta province has removed many of the previous restrictions and there was a large uptake in vaccines that were intended for the initial COVID strains and given that I'm hearing many have experienced adverse reactions or side effects from the vaccines – there are a lot of questions and concerns of how to report these incidents – to the Minister of Health: what is the process for reporting, compensating vaccine injuries in the province, and what is being done to make sure that that process is available to the general public?

Mr. Copping: Well, thanks to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member pointed out, we are moving into the endemic phase, but I want to be clear that COVID-19 is not yet behind us. While we are transitioning to the endemic phase, restrictions are still in place in high-risk settings. As we've indicated in the House numerous times, vaccines are safe and significantly reduce the chance of severe outcomes from COVID-19. Of the 8.5 million vaccine doses administered in Alberta, only 2,636 adverse events were reported to Alberta Health. That's a safety rating of roughly 99.97 per cent. Now, Health Canada is responsible for certifying pharmaceuticals, and Canada is not offering compensation for . . .

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

2:20 Canadian Energy Centre

Member Ceci: Thank you. The war room's blooper reel includes hiring a failed UCP candidate to run the organization, stealing logos, impersonating and attacking journalists, and attacking an

animated kids movie about Bigfoot. Naturally, Albertans would like to see some transparency around the war room and answers about how that money is being spent. In a recent ruling the Information and Privacy Commissioner found that the war room was not subject to FOIP, but the government has the power to change that. Will the government open up the war room to FOIP? If not, what's being hidden there?

Mrs. Savage: The Canadian Energy Centre is needed now more than ever as we see the fallout of global energy supplies with the need to weed out Russian barrels of oil. We see the U.S. now looking to Venezuela [interjections] Oh, listen to the NDP cheering on Russian oil production again. Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why we need the Canadian Energy Centre. We need it to stand up for our oil and gas sector as the United States starts looking to Venezuela, Iran, Saudi Arabia for replacements. We're right next door; they can look to us, and that's what the Canadian Energy Centre is . . .

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

Member Ceci: Given that the government continues to defend the war room despite repeated failures and given that just a few days ago the UCP voted against cutting funding for the war room despite the minister being unable to tell us what the war room actually does and given that the war room is nothing but an example of the UCP's failed energy policies – while we were successful in making the case for market access, the UCP have not been – zero pipelines, 130,000 fewer jobs than promised, and Calgary has the highest unemployment rate among major Canadian cities, can the minister actually provide the House with one tangible . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to report and note that the energy industry is thriving. Drilling is up, the service sector is employed again, the land sales have gone up, price has gone up, people are back to work, and that's why we are standing up to the opponents of oil and gas. One of the reasons why the Canadian Energy Centre is not subject to FOIP is to not share its strategy. Why would we share the strategy of the centre to protect our oil and gas industry with those who want to cut it down? We're protecting it.

Member Ceci: Their strategy made oil go up. That's pretty good.

Given that the war room is intentionally designed by the UCP to evade public scrutiny and the Energy minister has been unable to provide even the most basic details about how Alberta's money is being spent and given that the war room is nothing but a money pit that provides no value for the people of Alberta – worse yet, it's a slush fund for the UCP to spend tax dollars for partisan gain – and given that the war room has not provided a single tangible thing for Albertans, will the UCP do what's right and shut it down?

Mrs. Savage: As the members opposite know very well, the Canadian Energy Centre is subject to the Auditor General, and every single penny that they spend is publicly disclosed. But, Mr. Speaker, we will not share the strategy of the Canadian Energy Centre with those who want to use that strategy to stop it. I don't know. The NDP seem to be really good at hacking information. I would assume that their hacker can get into the Canadian Energy Centre website and find out what the strategy is.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's NDP know that a well-funded and well-supported postsecondary sector is critical for helping Alberta's future leaders. We've seen two studies from the Canada West Foundation. Now they're showing more young people are leaving Alberta than moving to the province, for the first time since 1988. These are young people that would be starting a family, starting a business, buying houses, launching innovation, building strong communities in Alberta if they weren't leaving. The numbers are crystal clear. The UCP policies on postsecondary are causing significant harm. Why is the UCP gutting our colleges, universities, and polytechnics and driving young people out of Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear from that statement that the member just read the Coles Notes version of the report and didn't actually open it and read it in detail. If he would, he would know that there are many factors contributing to that. As well, he would know that there are a number of recommendations in the report that touch on postsecondary education. And you know what? We're already doing those things. It calls for the government to invest more in work-integrated learning. We're doing that. It calls for more focus on competency-based learning. We're already doing that.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the UCP is ramming through senseless cuts to postsecondary, pushing the best and the brightest to leave our province, and given that, on top of that, they're stacking massive increases to tuition, forcing more students to take out student loans, and then actually hiking the interest on those same student loans, can the minister explain why he is balancing the budget or trying to balance the budget on the backs of our students here in Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the budget is balanced because we stopped the reckless spending that those members had us on the trajectory to continue. We've reined in spending. We've balanced Alberta's finances and have presented a balanced budget for the first time in eight years. When it comes to tuition, tuition today is below the national average, but, in addition, we've added more to scholarships, bursaries, and other student awards to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to access postsecondary education. That's being maintained through Budget 2022 and being committed to.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister has and still stubbornly thinks that cuts and cost hikes are a good idea when so many postsecondary students and young people are voting with their feet and simply leaving this province, will someone on that side of the House rise and tell this minister that his cuts are putting our postsecondary institutions in jeopardy and his cost hikes are cruel and he's driving out the very future that we rely on, which is our young people? It takes generations to build the reputation of our schools, but it takes only months to let it wash away in a sea of cuts and disrespect to postsecondary education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we've worked over the last few years to bring funding in line with other provinces. Across the U15 the universities of Alberta and Calgary, which are included in that category, remained at the top of the U15 when it comes to funding levels on a per student basis. The average funding level across the U15 was approximately \$12,000 dollars. Many of our universities in Alberta were way above that at \$15,000, \$16,000 in funding. Again, coming back to the report, one of the other things the report – and I have it right in front of me – talks about is creating apprenticeships in other careers. Again, another example of . . .

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Culturally Appropriate Foster and Kinship Care

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Mr. Speaker, as you know, prior to politics I managed youth homeless shelters. For many of the children we served, their guardian was the provincial government. During this time working with youth in care it became clear that removing a child from their family could be more traumatic than what they were dealing with at their home, more so when they were placed in an entirely different cultural setting. To the Minister of Children's Services: can you tell us what efforts are being made today to increase the availability of culturally appropriate foster care?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the member for the important question. Our goal, whenever safely possible, is to support families so that children can stay safely in their homes, but if we can't do that, we do want to keep kids connected with their families, with their community, and with their culture. We work with community organizations and families to identify culturally appropriate foster and kinship care placements, and we provide training for kinship and foster caregivers to meet a child's cultural needs. We're moving in the right direction as the growth of kinship care placements continues to surpass the number of foster care homes, and we'll continue to support this important work.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her efforts. Given that culturally appropriate placement is critical for reconciliation and given that it has also been an issue that has been raised as a concern by many cultural groups in my community, including the Somalian, Ghanaian, South Sudanese, Eritrean, and Ethiopian communities and leadership at Ruth's House, to the same minister: can you tell us what efforts are being made to increase the availability of kinship care as well as supports and safety for kinship care homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do first want to thank Dee and the volunteers and board members of Ruth's House for taking the time to meet with me this morning and for the important work that they do to support women and families in our communities. We know the importance of keeping kids connected to their families and their culture, and as kinship care placements increase, we're continuing to make sure that we have culturally responsive support services in place as well. We've improved kinship caregiver training and training for our staff to better understand and assist the unique situations kinship provides, and this also includes supporting the work of our . . .

2:30

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for her response. Given that we know that if we truly want to meet the needs of young people, we need to support the families and we need to build strong communities and given that in my experience African Canadians have a strong sense of community and are ready and willing to help their brothers and sisters in need if they could only access the resources that are needed to help, to the same minister: can you share with this House what efforts are being

made to partner with volunteer organizations, faith and otherwise, to aid in the efforts of building stronger communities?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do work with a number of amazing volunteer faith and community organizations right across Alberta to help support families to stay together and identify safe and culturally appropriate temporary homes when they're needed. We're also improving the supports that we have in place for kinship caregivers. As part of our review that we're doing in our ministry, we're creating more culturally relevant home assessment tools for caregivers who are caring for members of their own family or community. I know there is more work to be done on this front, but we're committed to making changes where and when they're needed.

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

Education Concerns

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Monday I met with the Red Deer Catholic school board, a board that the Minister of Education was very familiar with. They told me that they do not believe this curriculum should move forward this fall. They are grateful that the minister finally delayed some subject areas and some grades. But it's March 23, and there are no resources, no professional development. Clearly, this curriculum is destined to failure. Will the Education minister listen to her former colleagues and promise Albertans she won't force this failed curriculum on the students she once claimed to represent?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We embarked on the largest, most transparent engagement process on the curriculum, which is exactly what we said we would do. I am very proud to say that we will be introducing the three subjects of mathematics, English language arts and literature, and phys ed and wellness. You know what? I spoke with a Red Deer Catholic elementary school teacher that is excited about bringing in the English language arts program this September.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Wolf Creek public board and the Red Deer Catholic board both desperately need schools in Blackfalds since the existing one is already over 100 per cent capacity, given that the UCP's no-help budget offers no hope for Blackfalds, can the minister explain to these families why she failed them in her no-help budget? Did the minister even bring a proposal to cabinet? Was she ignored, or is it that she didn't even bother to fight for the people of Blackfalds?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated over and over again to the member opposite – she was a former school board trustee. She should know exactly how it works; obviously, she doesn't. There is a gated process approved by the Auditor General in which case – and I'm happy to tell her that there is a new high school going to be built in Blackfalds. She must have forgotten that element. The member opposite should do her homework.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's not in this no-help budget and given that Fort McMurray public has a new superintendent in town and given that she's not very happy with this government's Dumpster fire of a curriculum and given that Fort McMurray has asked the government to pause – the superintendent knows that the current draft curriculum is developmentally inappropriate. Given that the feedback isn't new, Minister – the minister has been getting this feedback from school boards, from educators, from academics, from community leaders, from teachers, from people on the street – will she finally listen to Albertans and stop with her bungled curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, through the chair.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the member opposite that, yes, I'm listening to the people of Alberta. We have made refinements. We are bringing forward three subjects in September. We are going to bring other subjects forward. We've been listening to the implementation advisory council made up of teachers, curriculum experts, superintendents, all telling us that we can move forward with the curriculum.

Utility Costs

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, I received an e-mail from Robert, a constituent who wrote to me because his latest utility bill has reached \$750 – \$750 – in a single month. He's worried because his income is barely covering his basic expenses, and he's having a hard time making ends meet. While Robert struggles, all this government is prepared to do is cut him a \$50 cheque. How can this government think that reducing utility bills from \$750 to \$700 is an improvement? Are you even listening?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can appreciate that utility costs are going up. Electricity costs have gone up. I want to inform this House, though, of the reasons why they're going up. The previous government's policies are a big part of that reason. They overbuilt the system by close to \$7 billion when they were in office. They prematurely went from coal to gas, costing Albertan consumers \$1.4 billion. Then they teamed up with Justin Trudeau and brought in a carbon tax, costing every Albertan thousands of dollars.

Ms Goehring: Given that another resident of Edmonton-Castle Downs, Ceilia, wrote to me about their utility bills, which have climbed to over \$600, and given that she is worried that bills like this will push some Albertans past their fiscal breaking point and into poverty and given that she's looking for support and a fake natural gas rebate and 50 bucks won't help them at all, how many Albertans like Ceilia is the associate minister willing to push past the fiscal breaking point before he steps up to help them?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always appreciate the questions even when they aren't supported by the facts. You know, as we all are aware on this side of the House, the NDP brought in disastrous policies that drove up the cost of electricity for everyone. Now, my advice to the NDP is to simply advise these people that there are supports to help them. There is help at the Utilities Consumer Advocate. They don't have to do the work. Despite what they tell you, they don't have to do the work themselves. There are

people standing by that will help walk them through all their choices, including supports for people that are suffering from a utility . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Given that I could stand up here every single day and read more of these stories of my constituents struggling while this government ignores them and puts more effort into yelling in this House than helping Albertans and given that two of the constituents I spoke of today are worried about making ends meet because this government refused to step up when needed but given that this government simply doesn't care about the people who can't make ends meet because of their no-help budget, will the associate minister look into the camera right now and tell Robert and Ceilia why he refuses to help them at all? Better yet, will he stand and admit that he's done wrong by them and commit to voting against this budget?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly do acknowledge that Albertans are facing some increased cost pressures, and we are responding. [interjections] We have brought in a natural gas consumer protection program of gas price . . .

The Speaker: I find the irony of the question referring to certain individuals in the House yelling only to be followed by yelling of that same member's side – it makes it very difficult for the Speaker to understand and, particularly, hear the Finance minister.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have brought in a natural gas price protection measure that if gas prices go up, like they are in Europe or Asia, consumers will be protected. We brought in an electricity rebate program. It'll be \$150 for every Alberta electricity consumer, and we are halting our fuel tax in this province, saving Albertans \$1.3 billion.

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

Athabasca University

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One key mandate of Advanced Education is ensuring postsecondary learning is available for all who desire it, regardless of location. Athabasca University provides distance learning education for students in Alberta and now around the world. The board of governors' move to a near-virtual strategy has many of my constituents concerned over a loss of jobs in their community. To the Minister of Advanced Education: is the government cognizant of the potential impact Athabasca University's near-virtual agenda may have on the local economy, and what is being done to mitigate it?

Ms Hoffman: Nothing.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education is the one with the call.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, just let me commend and thank the member for his incredible advocacy. I know the member has spoken with me on a variety of occasions, bringing these concerns to me directly, and I want to thank him for being such a strong advocate for his constituents. I will say that we are indeed aware of these challenges, and I'm speaking with Athabasca University to outline next steps. In fact, just this very

morning I had a conversation with the board chair to help ensure that we continue to support jobs in the community.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that the decision some 40 years ago to base Athabasca University in Athabasca led to incredible growth and success of the university and given that this was propelled by great communication among university management, academics, professionals, and support staff in Athabasca community and given that the Keep Athabasca In Athabasca University support group fears that the near-virtual strategy may be putting the future success of the university at risk, to the same minister: how will Athabasca University's physical presence be managed, and what support exists for the university to ensure . . .

2:40

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, on this very point I have been speaking with Athabasca University, and I have mentioned to them the importance of maintaining their physical infrastructure in the town of Athabasca. I know that the institution has some administrative offices in other centres, but I believe it is critically important that we look at strengthening these physical offices in the town, in the community, to continue to support job creation and job development in the community.

The Speaker: The member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a key factor in ensuring the development and sustainability of rural Alberta is jobs and given that jobs in government-funded institutions provide steady employment and act as a shock absorber for the rural economy during downturns in our core industries and given that Athabasca University's near-virtual strategy threatens to quietly move jobs out of Athabasca and potentially out of Alberta altogether, to the same minister: what do you say to my constituents who are concerned that Athabasca University jobs may no longer be recruited from and attracted to the town of Athabasca?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member to inform his constituents that we are taking measures to ensure that Athabasca University remains in Athabasca. In my conversation just this morning I asked the board chair and the entire board of governors to develop a strategy that will not just maintain but also grow jobs in the community. I firmly believe that Athabasca University can excel as Canada's online university while at the same time building and supporting jobs for the local community.

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader, the Minister of Environment and Parks.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15 I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to raise a point of privilege regarding the comments and actions of the MLA for Edmonton-South. I have the necessary number of copies of the letter I provided to your office this morning. In part my letter reads:

In accordance with Standing Order 15 of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I am hereby providing you with written notice of my intention to raise a point of privilege today.

Yesterday the MLA for Edmonton-South published a document entitled “How I did it” and held a press conference to explain his actions to the media. Furthermore during yesterday’s proceedings the same MLA stood in this Chamber to ask questions while denying that he was guilty of using the personal information of the Premier to hack vaccine records. I intend to argue that these statements were intended to mislead the Assembly and therefore rise to a contempt of the Assembly.

I look forward to addressing this issue at the appropriate time.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board annual report 2021.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 1:52 the Government House Leader called a point of order which he subsequently withdrew.

That leads us to points of privilege. At the appropriate time, under Notices of Motions, the hon. the Government House Leader provided the House his intention to raise a point of privilege, which I invite him to do now.

Privilege Misleading the House

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for giving me that opportunity. First, let me start with the formalities. Standing Order 15(2) reads:

[Members] wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least 2 hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting and, before the Orders of the Day are called, shall call attention to the alleged breach of privilege and give a brief statement of the nature of the matter addressed in the complaint.

This part of the standing order, Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you, was met when I provided a letter to the Speaker’s office that was time-stamped at 11:15 a.m. today and an e-mail from myself was sent to the MLA for Edmonton-South at 11:23 a.m. today.

Next, the matter, Mr. Speaker, as you know, must always be raised at the earliest convenience. While the MLA for Edmonton-South posted his confession, that he titles a white paper, online yesterday morning, his press conference did not conclude until 11:30 a.m. yesterday, and we still had not had the chance to see what remarks the member would choose to make yesterday inside the proceedings of the Chamber. Therefore, I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the earliest opportunity I had to raise this matter was by submitting a letter at 11:30 a.m. today.

Now to the issue itself and the context behind it, which is very important. I would submit, Mr. Speaker, to you that it would be important that we measure what is part of the public record against what the member alleged yesterday in this very Assembly. First, we know that the MLA for Edmonton-South has been frankly obsessed. That is the only word for it. I will table multiple documents from social media as well as transcripts from the member inside the Assembly over the period of the last several months that I believe would illustrate the obsession with the vaccination status of the government and private members of this Chamber.

We also know that the member, Mr. Speaker, raised a motion in Members’ Services on October 18, 2021, seeking to elicit confirmation of the vaccination status of MLAs. After that motion

failed at Members’ Services, the MLA for Edmonton-South attempted to introduce an identical motion in the Assembly on October 27, 2021. I do note that in these motions he suggested the Speaker designate a Legislative Assembly Office employee to receive the proof of those vaccinations though it does look like in some of his first drafts he actually suggested that he himself should be the one to receive those vaccination statuses.

Now to the issue and the history of the issue at hand. Mr. Speaker, in December 2021 the RCMP announced – and there was a statement from the RCMP to this effect from the cybercrime investigation team – that they had initiated a criminal investigation after receiving information regarding suspicious activity related to unlawful access of private information related to the vaccination record portal of the Alberta government. The Alberta RCMP cybercrime unit in the course of their investigation developed reasonable grounds, they say, to apply for a warrant to search the residence of an Edmonton resident at that time.

Now, at the time the Member for Edmonton-South announced, with the NDP caucus, that he would be leaving the NDP caucus and indicated at that time that he may or may not have been associated with that investigation. If you fast-forward to yesterday, the member publishes a document and does interviews in advance of publishing that document. I do want to stress that the document is available online, and I will table it as well. It is authored by the Member for Edmonton-South, and it is titled *How I Did It*, in which he outlines how he used the personal information of a member of this Chamber, who happens to also be the Premier of Alberta, to be able to go and get vaccination records on the computer.

He also at that time does interviews with the *Edmonton Journal* in which he admits to hacking the Alberta government’s COVID vaccination record system last year and admits that said search warrant had been served on his place of business. He goes on to say that he used a hacking script to try to guess health care numbers of Albertans and then, ultimately, would go on to use personal information that he found online of a member of this Assembly, the Premier of Alberta, the MLA for Calgary-Lougheed, which is the very definition of identity theft, to be able to go into that computer system and be able to attempt to access that member’s information.

He goes on, inside his own document – this is a document that has been published by the hon. member – to say that after modifying that script to be able to try and get access, he also then ultimately would obtain the records not of the Premier but of another private citizen of the province of Alberta while he was attempting to do so. That record is, clearly, a matter now of the public record and will be tabled in the Assembly tomorrow.

2:50

I will also draw your attention to the following. The Health Information Act says:

- (2) No person shall knowingly . . .
 - (b) gain or attempt to gain access to health information in contravention of this Act.

Also, the Criminal Code says in section 342.1:

- (1) Everyone is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than 10 years, or is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction who, fraudulently and without colour of right,
 - (a) obtains, directly or indirectly, any computer service using false information or pretending to be somebody else.

Mr. Speaker, I’m almost there, and I will move on with the point of privilege, but I will table these documents as well.

When you access the COVID-19 vaccination portal, you have to go through both a record of terms of service and agree to the terms of service to use that computer system. You also have to go through and indicate that you understand those terms of service, indicate

that you agree to those terms of service. You also have to go through a COVID record of privacy statement and agree to the statements that are associated with that.

I will draw your attention to a couple of specific things that I think are very relevant to this conversation. It says, Mr. Speaker:

By submitting information to this Service, you acknowledge and represent to Alberta Health:

1. You are either requesting Covid Records for yourself, or you are legally authorized to submit information, and request Covid Records, on behalf of the individual whose information you are requesting.
2. You [must indicate] you understand that
 - a. It is an offence under the [Health Information Act] to knowingly collect health information, or gain or attempt to gain access to health information, in contravention of the [Health Information Act].

On the COVID record terms of use you have to agree and indicate that you agree that

your use of the Site shall not violate any applicable local, national or international law . . .

In addition, you agree that you will not use the Site for any purpose other than that for which it was intended and you agree you will not:

- (i) use the Site to impersonate another person, or otherwise attempt to gain unauthorized access to another individual's health information or to infringe the intellectual property or any other rights of [a] third party.

To gain access to the site, you have to indicate that you agree with that, that you understand that, and that if you did, Mr. Speaker, in fact, as the member did and has admitted in his documents, use information of another person, you would be in fact breaking multiple laws. That member had to indicate to do that.

I will turn your attention to *Erskine May*, Mr. Speaker, which says, as you know, that a point of privilege – this is about privilege, I should say.

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of their duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results, may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice illustrates the following as a potential breach of privilege:

deliberately attempting to mislead the House or a committee (by way of statement, evidence, or petition).

There is also a three-part test, Mr. Speaker, to be found when allegations are made about a member misleading the Assembly. This test, of course, can be found on pages 653 and 654 of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*. The three parts of this test are as follows. One, it must be proven that the statement was misleading. Two, "it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement . . . was incorrect," and three, that "in making [the statement], the member . . . intended to mislead the House."

I think it has been clearly established that during yesterday's proceedings the MLA for Edmonton-South said that it was a false allegation when I said yesterday, in response to a question, that he had broken the law. I guess I felt it was self-evident, Mr. Speaker, that by publishing a document publicly detailing the steps that you took to use another MLA's identity, which, as I pointed out earlier, is in contravention of the Health Information Act and in contravention of the conditions to access the COVID-19 proof of vaccination records, it was enough to form the conclusion that the MLA was admitting his guilt. I understand that he can maybe say that he hasn't broken the law because he hasn't been convicted of

anything yet. However, I think the hon. member is trying to establish that he isn't guilty because he broke the law out of the goodness of his heart and that his motives mean that he can't be guilty of a crime. I hesitate to point out that that isn't how the law works.

On the second point, we know that the MLA knew the statement was misleading because he posted a document detailing how he used the Premier's private information to access vaccination records and then held, Mr. Speaker, a press conference in case anyone had missed his incriminating document. Then not more than three hours later he's trying to stand up in this very Assembly and claim that I was making allegations against him. He was now stating that he was innocent of wrongdoing after he had held a press conference announcing his wrongdoing. Either the member doesn't know what he believes, or he's attempting to gaslight this Chamber and Albertans.

Finally, we can all know that by calling the point of order, the MLA was intending to mislead this Assembly. Therefore, I think there's no option here except to find that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred, and the government is prepared to refer this matter to the appropriate committee for review if you do decide so.

I want to close with one other thing, Mr. Speaker, and then I will be done. I will refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017, Privilege Versus Contempt, in chapter 3.

The House of Commons enjoys very wide latitude in maintaining its dignity and authority through the exercise of its contempt power. In other words, the House may consider any misconduct . . .

Any misconduct, Mr. Speaker.

. . . to be contempt and may deal with it accordingly. Instances of contempt in one Parliament may even be punished by another Parliament. This area of parliamentary law is therefore extremely fluid and most valuable for the Commons to be able to meet [the] novel situations

that it finds itself in.

Mr. Speaker, I will table, am happy to provide to you, repeated social media posts, repeated questions in question period to ministers, including the Premier of Alberta, whose information was used to illegally hack into a website, by the Member for Edmonton-South for months. Not once did that member rise in his place and say to the members on this side of the House: I've been hacking your information. Instead, he continued inside this place over and over – and it does beg the question what the Official Opposition knew, when they knew it, but it's not relevant for today – repeatedly stood in this House asking questions of the member whose privacy he was violating and had violated. Certainly, if that is not contempt of the House, I don't know what is.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has also indicated that he went to the NDP caucus and his leadership on September 23, 2021, and asked them to go forward to the Department of Health to say that there was something wrong while he was doing what he calls ethical hacking. That is outrageous, to in any way try to say that it is ethical to use any member of this place's, let alone any other Albertan's, information to try to illegally access a website. But he says that at that point he wanted to draw attention to the government that there was a problem going on with the computer system, which in and of itself is ridiculous. He could have asked that at any moment in question period on September 23, 2021.

As a result of that, the NDP caucus wrote a letter to the Department of Health in which they indicate that they had heard through anonymous sources that there might have been potentially a problem with the website. At no time do they say that their member, their ethics critic, was the one who had been hacking that

website. At no time do they say that. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they remain quiet about that for months. Not just the member but his entire caucus remains quiet about that inside this Chamber for months while asking questions of the Premier of Alberta, while asking questions of ministers about this very issue that they were hiding for months. The only time they finally admit that they've been involved in hacking and using a member of this place's private information was when it came to light from the RCMP that there was an investigation, because a search warrant had been served on the hon. member's house.

Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous that a member of this place would be treated this way by another member. It's completely and utterly unacceptable, and I think the member, first of all, should be honest with this Chamber and certainly is in contempt of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as is the convention with respect to points of privilege, those who are named in the point of privilege have the opportunity to respond. They also have the opportunity to delay their response to tomorrow, and I certainly will take time to consider my decision.

3:00

The other thing that I might just add for the member: the member may make decisions to respond to the point of privilege or may in fact choose not to respond, given that the matter at hand is under some form of investigation, and may not want to prejudice that in any way, shape, or form in this forum, being that it's being investigated in another. But, of course, that is up to the member to decide. The question for now is: would the member like to respond today, or would you like to provide me notice of not responding at another time as well?

The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to reply at the next possible opportunity.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Can you repeat?

Mr. Dang: I'll delay my response till tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. member has elected to provide additional comments tomorrow, and we will take him at his word for that.

That brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 4

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

[Debate adjourned March 14]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is second reading of Bill 4. Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and offer a couple of thoughts on Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, I think, first of all, it's important to just recap for everyone here in the House the purpose of this bill. The bill is extremely

confined in scope, and it's my understanding that if this bill were to be passed, it would prevent municipal governments in the province of Alberta from passing any bylaw which would require citizens living in that municipality or wandering around in that municipality to wear masks or to be asked to provide proof of vaccination when entering places of business or municipal buildings, that sort of thing.

I'd like to make a couple of points with regard to this particular piece of legislation. First of all, I want to make some points around the efficacy of the measures that the minister is intent on preventing municipalities from implementing. Then I also want to make some comments on the impropriety, I guess, of the Municipal Affairs minister overreaching in this case and imposing his will upon locally elected municipal governments.

Now, I think the first thing that I wanted to say was with regard to the efficacy of the COVID protection measures that the government is intent on preventing municipalities from making bylaws around. That's with respect to wearing masks in public places and requesting vaccination status when going into places of business, public places, those sorts of places that were subject to the vaccine passport that the provincial government implemented in September.

Now, the best that I can understand, Madam Speaker, as far as the reasoning for the government choosing to bring forward this bill is that they failed to implement protection measures sufficient to keep people safe from COVID, and instead of actually correcting that, they decided to overreact and prevent other local governments from also implementing COVID protection measures that were sufficient to protect people. It's incredibly frustrating to me.

Madam Speaker, when the government implemented the vaccine passport in late September, we saw an incredible uptake in vaccines in this province the day that the vaccine passport requirements were implemented, which was a good thing. We know from having delivered billions of doses world-wide of the COVID-19 vaccine that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe. It protects people from dying from COVID. It protects people from having severe nonfatal consequences of COVID. It was a good thing that the government did to implement the vaccine passport to create an incentive for those Albertans who were reluctant to get the vaccine to actually get the vaccine.

I think that the government deserves some credit for doing the right thing in September and encouraging uptake, but as soon as they implemented the program, they started to undermine it. They created a whole host of exemptions, most notably exempting children aged five to 11 from being subject to the vaccine passport, which, I can tell you, created some difficulties for a whole host of kids' groups. My own son was on a soccer team with kids aged 11 and 12. The kids who were 12 years old were subject to the vaccine passport when they showed up to their soccer games, but the kids who were 11 weren't. That didn't make any sense. It created a lot of confusion.

When the omicron variant of COVID reached Alberta, when it became clear that two doses of the vaccine were not sufficient to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 among the population, that we required three doses of the vaccine to have a hope of mitigating the transmission of COVID, what did the government do? They scrapped the program.

What they could have done instead, Madam Speaker, was update the program. They could have said: "Look, obviously, two doses of the vaccine are not enough. We need to encourage people to get three doses of the vaccine." Encourage uptake that way. They could have updated the vaccine passport program and said that, no, you're not considered to be fully vaccinated unless you've had three doses of the vaccine. I can't help but wonder how many people would

have been prevented from getting sick and dying if the government had actually taken that approach to the vaccine passport instead of scrapping the program entirely.

We know from the statistics that the government puts out that Alberta lags the rest of the country when it comes to third doses of the vaccine. We are last in Canada with the number of our citizens who have three doses of the vaccine. When it comes to kids aged five to 11, less than half of the kids province-wide have even had one dose, much less two, and they're not even eligible for a third one. It's incredibly frustrating to me, Madam Speaker, that instead of improving the program to respond to the changes in the COVID-19 pandemic, to make the program more effective, they scrapped it entirely. And now we're paying the consequences.

This is also true of masks. When the province implemented their mask mandate requiring people to wear masks in public, they didn't specify what kind of mask was sufficient to protect people from contracting COVID-19 when in public. Public health experts were raising the alarm all along that surgical masks, the cloth masks that people were wearing at the beginning of the pandemic, weren't as effective at preventing transmission of COVID as N95s, the kind that I have on right now. We know that wearing N95 masks or an equivalent is much more effective at preventing the transmission of COVID than the blue surgical masks or the cloth masks that people have been wearing so frequently.

3:10

We also certainly know that the government didn't make any efforts whatsoever to enforce these measures. We had an admission as much from officials from the Ministry of Justice when they appeared before Public Accounts last year, that they wanted to take a light touch when it came to enforcement, which essentially meant doing no enforcement whatsoever. So we have a couple of half measures that didn't work, and they weren't adequately enforced.

Yesterday in debate around the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022, I talked about how we've upgraded vehicles to have better safety measures. You know, the government's approach to COVID is like saying: well, strap yourself into your car with baler twine, and hope that that prevents you from dying in a car accident, and if that doesn't work, well, might as well scrap the idea of a seat belt altogether and then make it illegal for people to even try to wear seat belts. That's the kind of approach that they're taking here.

My wish for the government is not only that they would retract this awful piece of legislation but that they would go back to the drawing board and look at COVID protection measures that are adequate to the challenge that the province faces right now, implement them where they need to be implemented, and ramp up enforcement so that they're widely adopted enough to prevent the transmission of COVID. We just got through the fifth wave. Cases, hospitalizations, ICU rates, daily deaths started to decline, then the government lifted all COVID protection measures, and now we see it again. COVID cases are going up all across the province, but you have to do a little bit of digging in order to see that happening because the government won't even report their statistics on a regular basis anymore.

But we know, thanks to the University of Calgary, who is tracking waste-water data from waste-water treatment plants all across the province, that COVID levels are spiking up. They're higher right now in Edmonton and in Calgary than they've ever been except for that period of the fifth wave in January. We have levels of COVID in our waste water right now in the city of Edmonton that exceed the level that we saw during the fourth wave, when the Premier was on holidays and left the hospitals to collapse under the complete lack of oversight from Alberta Health and the government. So we urgently need COVID protections that will keep

people safe. I'm willing to entertain the fact that maybe vaccine passports and masks aren't enough. Maybe we need some other COVID protections as well.

My colleagues and I here in the Official Opposition have repeatedly pushed for measures to clean the air in public spaces, particularly in schools. But when the Education department came in front of Public Accounts a few months ago, we asked them how much they spent on improving ventilation and filtration in schools. The amount was zero. This government has completely given up on protecting people from COVID, and it's astounding to me that they are comfortable with the level of sickness and death that we continue to see all across this province. They don't want to do anything, and not only do they not want to do anything; they want to prevent local governments from doing anything to help stem the tide.

That brings me to my second point, this idea of local autonomy. Now, I'm a resident of the city of Edmonton. I've complained loudly about the management in the city of Edmonton on a couple of occasions here in the House. Just yesterday I aired some grievances about the lack of snowplows clearing the roads during the wintertime.

Mr. Eggen: Did they come after that?

Mr. Schmidt: No. The snow melted thanks to the 18-degree temperature. That was the city of Edmonton's plan all along, I guess, to let the snow be self-plowed by the sun at the end of March. I also continue to have issues with the way they manage waste in this city, but what I didn't have an issue with was the way they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The city of Edmonton should be given credit for doing the best that they could with the tools that they had in hand to stem the tide of transmission when they did. They acted before the provincial government did, and for that I'm grateful. I think we should all be grateful because the fewer Edmontonians that are getting sick, the fewer spaces that are taken up in our hospitals, the fewer cases.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this bill because it is a serious concern not only to myself, of course, but to citizens of the province of Alberta, who we are here to represent and to try to make rules that provide them with the best amount of support and protection to live good lives.

Unfortunately, this bill is clearly intended to do exactly the opposite. The intent of this bill is to prevent people from being able to make a declaration that as a community they wish to protect themselves with the use of masks, public health measures being taken by a local authority in order to be able to protect the people in their community. The fact that this government is actually actively seeking to prevent communities from acting in a co-operative way for the well-being of their own citizens is truly appalling.

We know from research over the last number of years that the use of masks is effective in reducing the number of cases of COVID that occur in a province and occur anywhere and that the use of masks helps to reduce the rate of spread and indeed has helped to prevent significant numbers of deaths in the COVID crisis that we now experience. The research is there, has been done in multiple places around the world, and is readily available to anybody who chooses to spend 10 minutes online to find that masks are indeed effective.

The question isn't one of: should we prevent the city of Edmonton or other places from imposing something on citizens? "Should we prevent them from preventing the deaths of others?" is essentially what we're saying in this bill. We know that if they implement this mask mandate, fewer people will die. The evidence is clearly there. This government has constantly taken the position of doing too little too late with regard to this pandemic, and, as a result, statistically Alberta is the worst place in the country to live in terms of the likelihood of acquiring COVID.

Just a quick look at some numbers from StatsCan from March 17, the latest day that's available. Some other provinces are available after that day, but Alberta has decided not even to report the number of COVID cases, so I had to go back a week to find the last time that Alberta did report. We can see that Alberta reported that they had 533,000 and change, the number of people with COVID, as compared to British Columbia, who had only 353,000 people with COVID.

3:20

Now, given that B.C. has a population of approximately 5.1 million and Alberta has a population of about 4.5 million, that means that Alberta's rate of COVID is almost twice what the rate in British Columbia is. You have to ask why two provinces right side by side would have such dramatically different rates of COVID. The answer is that one has a government, British Columbia, that has taken various serious measures and provided absolutely every support they could in the community to try to reduce the acquisition of COVID whereas in this province this government has done only what it has been forced into doing at the last possible second and behind the time when the strategies for reducing COVID would have been most effective.

These kinds of statistics are repeated when we look for incidence of death because, of course, the rate of death follows the rate of COVID. What we find is that Alberta has an excess number of deaths, or a disproportionate incidence of death, over other places such as British Columbia.

We're actually talking about government making a policy decision that is directly related statistically to the number of deaths that are occurring in the province. We have a provincial government now that is making the decision to prevent people from stopping that happening using the best medical research possible. To prevent that from happening.

You know, this is on the same lines as if the government said: "The city of Edmonton can no longer clean its water because that would be unfair. Not everybody has access to clean water, so now the city of Edmonton is not allowed to clean its water. Whatever comes through your tap is what you live with." Can you imagine, if we shut down the systems in the city of Edmonton for chlorinating and cleaning and fluoridating our water, what would happen to the health and well-being of the citizens of Edmonton? It is exactly the same kind of thing that we're doing here. We are actually preventing people from taking public action.

This is a complete turnaround of the last 500 years of science on public well-being. Since we discovered the whole issue of microbes and viruses and so on, our western society has moved toward taking public measures to actually prevent people from becoming sick. We know that having clean drinking water has actually been better for our population than most other medical inventions over the years. More people have been saved by clean drinking water than have been saved by the most advanced heart surgery that has ever been brought into this province or invented in the world.

Public health measures save lives. The statistics are there. They're reflected here in the same way they're reflected in issues such as clean drinking water. Why the government would actually

make a decision to interfere with duly elected representatives of the citizens of Edmonton or any other jurisdiction in this province from actually taking action to protect those citizens is really ridiculous and appalling. It's certainly a return to the Dark Ages in terms of science, and it certainly cannot be supported by anyone who has any depth of understanding of the history of well-being of citizens and wishes for the citizens of the province of Alberta to be the beneficiaries of good science in terms of the policy decisions that are being made in this province.

It's particularly egregious that we have a Premier who at one time, just a little while ago, was suggesting that the cities do their own mandates because he was refusing to act on the science at the time, and now that they are doing their own mandates, he's wanting to take that power away from them. Why is he wanting to take that power away from them? Because there is a radical fringe group, that is no longer fringe within his party, that has taken over the party just as they took over our capital city, took over our border at Coutts. Now they've taken over this party, and he is making bad public health policy, that has the consequence of people dying, in order to preserve his electoral ability within his own party.

That's it. That's the only reason why this would happen. There's no logical reason for this thing to happen other than there are people who might vote against him if they perceive him to be taking policy actions for the benefit of Albertans. That's it. There's nothing, there's no explanation in here that explains why you would take this power away, why you would interfere with the good science. We're left with this circumstance of the radical fringe finding a way to push their extreme – and, we now know, morally dangerous and physically dangerous in terms of deaths in this province – into the policy of the party which the Premier represents.

I can't think of a worse reason to actually introduce a bill into this House than to actually want to preserve power in the face of death. You know, in the comparisons around the world if I mentioned the other countries that do that kind of thing, we would have people leaping up on the other side of the House objecting, as they always do. They're always wrong, but they always like to cut me off. We know that they clearly do not take into consideration the evidence before them with an eye for the well-being of the people of this province. We know that under Conservative rule life has become more expensive, more difficult, and now we also can see that it has become more deadly.

I think that we need to take this kind of thing extremely seriously. This isn't about internal party politics. It shouldn't be, but apparently it is on the government side of the House. It should not be about internal party politics. It should be about: how do you actually prevent people from dying? If we look at the number of people who died in this province, if we had the same rate of death as they had in British Columbia, we would be much closer to saving the lives of almost 2,000 people in this province. The statistics are there. People can read them themselves. They're available on Stats Canada when the province decides to update their section, and we can see that the number of people that have died here has been in excess of the number of people that have died in other provinces.

We know from the research that part of the actions that can be taken by governments, good policy decisions that can reduce the number of deaths, are masks. Masks save lives. It's that simple. It should be written on the outside of every mask, that they save lives. And because they do, we should be doing everything possible to get them in people's hands. We should be making sure that people have every support they can to wear those, and in those places where they have no choice but to go, because they are public places, where they need to conduct the circumstances of their lives – to pay their bills, to buy their groceries, and so on – they should be able to feel safe. They should be able to feel like they can leave their home and enter

into a place where they will not acquire COVID and the potential of dying.

You know, that means that they should be able to live in a place where it's okay for the local government to say that people should be wearing masks in those kinds of public places. If you don't want to wear a mask and you want to stay at home, that's fine, but that's a personal choice. What government is doing is that they're trying to make a public-level decision, the same kind of decision that we make when we say that every child has to go to school because we want an educated citizenry, when we say things like, "We will provide a public health care system so that you don't have to pull out your wallet in order to go into a hospital," and the same thing we say when we're going to actually chlorinate the water so that we don't have viruses being spread.

That's the tradition and the lineage that this government is rejecting in their attempt to interfere with another level of government completely unnecessarily. They don't need to do this. They could have simply stood aside and let other governments make their own decisions. They would be appalled if the federal government started making decisions about the province of Alberta in this way and started saying: we're taking away your powers in order to make decisions. They'd be standing up and lighting their hair on fire, but they're not now because it's them that are doing it. The philosophical consistency is absolutely lacking in this decision-making here.

3:30

It's really appalling to see a government who is acting against the best interests of the citizens only because it aids or abets someone within their own political party for their own political advantage. That's the kind of thing that, you know, we do not want to see happening in our society, where a government seeks only to maintain its own power even at the expense of the lives of its citizens, something that we reject anywhere else around the world and that we should be rejecting here at home as well. I wish that it was a more complex or nuanced thing that we were talking about here and not just simply the lives of Albertans because then you might sort of go: well, they're just wrong, but I guess it's too bad. In this case the outcome, the severity of the consequence of this government decision is such that you cannot stand aside and watch this happen without absolutely condemning the government's decision-making here.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 4. I say this all the time, that I'm going to keep my comments brief, and then I'll probably ramble on for way longer than I anticipate. I do think it's important to speak to the bill in the bigger context of the democratic process and how this is really signalling an intrusion into the levels of government. I mean, we hear often from the government side that there are concerns about the federal government and the jurisdiction that the federal government has and how it impacts the ability of the provincial government to do the work that they want to do or, you know, the relationship between the federal government and provincial governments.

Then we also see the relationship between provincial governments and municipal governments. I would say that this piece of legislation is challenging in the context of the relationship. I do believe and I am a strong believer in democracy, and I have had numerous concerns as we move forward through the years about the shift of relationships and the erosion around political parties and the discourse that I continuously keep seeing when it comes to how

citizens view politics and then how others are treating each other within political settings and just this shift that continuously keeps coming up as we see different scenarios, different pressures happening.

It concerns me that the government felt the need to go here with Bill 4. It concerns me because I truly believe that there is a reason why we elect different levels of government. Local governments are elected by the citizens that they represent to make local decisions, whether it be, you know, like my colleague said, shoveling or clearing roads or not clearing roads, filling potholes, looking at rec centres, services, different things at that local level. Lots of those decisions happen in partnership with the province because there are funding agreements that have to happen.

There are lots of different things that occur between those relationships, but ultimately bylaws are the discretion of the municipalities. Municipalities get to set their own bylaws, and there's a reason for that, because they're responding to the community needs. When we see the province deciding that they want to start injecting themselves into the conversation around bylaws, I become concerned.

This is just one example. You know, I'm not going to get into the debate around the actual content of masks versus no masks, vaccines versus – I'm not going to entertain that conversation because it's actually not the issue of this bill. The issue of this bill is the fact that we have levels of government who have decided that they're going to override the local authority of another government because they disagree with a decision that's being made by the elected officials. That's a really slippery slope.

I think that there are members of the government side that would be very concerned if they made a policy decision and all of a sudden the federal government came in and made a different decision. In fact, we hear almost daily about decisions that the federal government has made that impact the provincial government that they don't like, that they disagree with. They constantly talk about how upset they are about the decisions the federal government is making that impact the provincial abilities to do the work and all the things. It's hypocritical, in a way, for that to occur and then to say: but it's okay that we're going to do it because if we do it, it's okay; if anybody else does it, it's really not. You know, a "Do as I say, not as I do" sort of mentality, right?

I think that, you know, that is a concern. I would like us to get to a place where we start really just respecting the levels of government and leaving the authorities that are given to those levels of government the ability to do the work that they want to do, and I would really, really enjoy it if we could do it in collaboration and if federal, provincial, and municipal governments could actually just come together at a table and discuss issues and get to a place of – they don't have to agree; I can appreciate that we have different views of how to get to places on lots of different topics – at least being able to have a respectful conversation where maybe there is an ability to discuss the issue and compromise on issues.

My concern that I continuously keep seeing – and it's at all levels – is that that willingness to have a respectful and open debate and to disagree is eroding, and it's becoming very much one side versus the other side. I think it does a disservice to Albertans. I think it does a disservice across the nation, to be honest, when it comes to other issues. I think that there is a real opportunity for us to evaluate how we work with each other and how we have these conversations and how we disagree. We can disagree. In fact, healthy debate is good debate, in my opinion. If it's done respectfully and in collaboration and we remember that we are all doing it for the purpose of the good, then it's fine to disagree, but when power is used to try to influence the outcome because there's just a fundamental disagreement, then I think we're on a slippery slope.

I think that that's what Bill 4 does. The province, obviously, we knew, disagreed with what the city of Edmonton was doing. This is very much targeting the city of Edmonton. Yet we also see that there are legitimate concerns that are being brought forward, transit being an example of a bylaw being put back on public transit, which aligns with what the province is also talking about doing because of the close connection, because of the fact that there are many people going on LRTs, going on the C-Train, you know, being on buses. There's a recognition that that needs to happen. Obviously, there's a way to have that conversation where there is a common agreement that that makes sense.

I will just say that I think that is where this bill goes sideways. I don't think it's necessary, for one. I think it was a serious overreach. I think it was used to posture to a municipality that the government didn't agree with and tends to disagree with on a frequent basis and that this was used as a signal. It's a very adversarial way to engage in conversation and to use the ability for legislation to try to influence a discussion.

3:40

I would really just appreciate if the government recognized that it wasn't necessary, that it doesn't need to happen, and withdraw it. I mean, that's a great solution to this piece of legislation. The issue is over, right? And if there's going to be a future issue, sit down at the table as adults and have a conversation about it and, like, figure it out.

There is a mechanism here within our legislative process where the government can just say: "You know what? We were a little heavy handed. We created this piece of legislation. We don't need it. Maybe we shouldn't keep fighting with our colleagues and the people we're supposed to be working with in local governance and withdraw it." Like, let's move on.

I think that that's the summary of what I have to say. I mean, again, I said that I would speak for not very long, and I went on longer than I anticipated. Let's just try to get to a place where we can all start working in more collaboration and actually have these conversations without using the power of our positions to try to influence other people.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 4 just briefly. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning: I'm glad that she did linger on this bill because towards the latter part of her comments I think she hit on exactly what needs to be done with this bill, which is simply to withdraw it.

We have lots of important things to deal with here in the province right now around affordability. This is the highest inflation rate that we've seen for more than 30 years. Affordability for so many essential services – food, energy, and everything else we might need in our lives – is becoming unaffordable for hundreds of thousands of Albertans right now, and those are the kinds of things that we need to deal with that are within our purview and indeed within our responsibility, Madam Speaker, in this Legislature.

You know, for us to be lingering on a bill that simply is out of step with events that took place in the matter of days after this bill was introduced or the threat was sent out by the Premier to force through legislation on any municipalities that chose to retain a masking bylaw on their books after the province had thought that they would end their masking law – so from the beginning, I mean, the part that we should probably linger on a little bit is a cautionary

tale for governments to not abuse their position of responsibility and power.

You know, it wasn't lost on me that right after they did this, we went to the municipalities convention and people were hopping mad. They really were. Lots of people who otherwise – I know I've seen some of these guys for a long time, right? They're otherwise conservatives, maybe mayors or councillors, and they wanted nothing to do with this bill. They found it to be insulting. They found it to be the provincial government overreaching into municipal matters. It broke that sense of trust, that caveat between municipalities and the province to do the right thing on a practical level.

Even if you thought, "Well, we should have a unified mask mandate across the province and everything should always be the same" – I mean, you know, there is something to that – the way that this government chose to do it through Bill 4 and all the threats and bilious thundering and waving of hands and whatnot was not just not appreciated; a lot of people, mayors and councillors, found it insulting, Madam Speaker. I bet you that down in Airdrie would be amongst those people, right? Say, like: back off, provincial government; you just told us a few months ago that we should maybe have regional standards for COVID, which include municipalities choosing to have masking or not according to their COVID rights, right? That same thing came out of the same mouth of the same Premier who then suddenly comes out and waves this thing and says: you're all following the rule; we're going to make a law that you can no longer exercise your right as a municipality to create bylaws to protect your citizens. That's totally the wrong message for relationships between municipalities and provinces. You know, it takes a long time to build relationships, and you can torch them just in an instant by doing things like that.

Again, I've been going to municipality conventions and so forth for a long time, and I never felt the sense of animosity like I did in this last meeting that was just here a few weeks ago in Edmonton. People were mad, and when they're angry, there's not just the emotional reaction; it's being less able to provide the goods and services that municipalities and provinces are responsible for, you know? That's just kind of what happened with this bill. As it happens, the municipalities went through their normal council process and debated this in their own time frame, which is all very fine, and chose to rescind their masking mandate. Not because of this bill. In spite of this bill they chose to do that, right? If you think it's anything else besides that, this sort of macho thing to try to bully people into doing it, it was nothing to do with that at all. In fact, you probably got their backs up, and maybe they said: well, maybe we'll wait a few more days; maybe we'll wait for the weekend, and then maybe we'll think about the masking mandate. You know, like, you get quite the opposite reaction when you choose to do the wrong thing. I learn that all the time.

This is a good learning moment for all, for this government, definitely. This bill is irrelevant, this bill should be pulled, and the longer it lingers, I would suggest, the more damage it does. It's as simple as that. Madam Speaker, that's kind of my feeling on it. You know, I think that we've had long-standing municipal powers to ensure the health and safety of inhabitants of a town or a city, and I think that those laws have served us in good stead for as long as we've had a province, probably even before, when it was a territory. So for this idea that you can play with those things to suit your own political agenda, to try to send some kind of message or whatever it is, is just the wrong way to go about the business of creating legislation and good governance. So there we go; that's my two bits, right? Free advice. Pull the bill, and everybody will be happier. Maybe say, "Sorry" as well, just as a side note. It's not a bad idea.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to get up and speak to this particular bill. One of the things that I have to say I found very surprising is that one of the members on the other side of the House talked about having to spank municipalities, and just that language in itself is – well, I don't even know what to call that. Now, what the members on the other side of the House like to do in the privacy of their own homes: that's completely up to them, you know, if they're into that kind of thing.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, this is probably a good time to interject. I'd just caution you to stay on topic, the matter of Bill 4, and not on members of this Assembly. We've had this discussion before in this House, and while you're not quite that far down the path, I feel like you're getting there. I'm just going to interject and provide some caution early on into this speech so that I can hear some other great debate that you have planned. Please continue.

3:50

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I mean, I am staying on topic, the fact that in regard to this particular bill is where one of the members on that side of the House actually made the comment about spanking, and it just goes to show the type of attitude that members on the other side of this House have when it comes to others.

Now, I prefer to treat other people, especially adults in our society, as equals, equals in that, through dialogue, we can actually come to agreements on stuff, on issues and concerns and whatever the case may be. But this just demonstrates the kind of attitude that some of the members on that side of the House have, as if, you know, they're the authoritarian power that has to come in and lay down the law and tell others how it is and that they either listen – essentially, it's either their way or the highway. That's not the way that we reach productive, number one, relationships, especially when it comes to legislation.

In this case municipalities have the right to establish whatever bylaws they deem necessary for the areas that they represent. I don't think that that's unheard of. I think that's a part of our democracy. But you see, Madam Speaker, the reality is that members on that side of the House love to talk about freedom when it suits them. When it suits them. They're all about talking about freedom when it suits their ideological objectives. But when it doesn't serve their ideological objective, they're ready to run in, in a very authoritarian way, lay down the law, and spank whoever needs it. That's what this bill does.

Now, I've got up in this House a number of times and I've talked about how, you know, proposed bill after proposed bill after proposed bill that this government has brought into this House since they became government is actually taking power away from Albertans, specifically – I've talked about it before – agencies, boards, and commissions. Agencies, boards, and commissions are an avenue by which Albertans themselves can participate in the governing of this here province that we all love. So, to me, it's abhorrent. It's abhorrent that members on that side of the House, Madam Speaker, would actually take that privilege away from other Albertans. It's absolutely unnecessary.

In fact, we should be trying to democratize processes here in the province of Alberta even further, not take power out of the hands of people who are serving on these agencies, boards, and commissions and centralize that power in the hands of ministers of this cabinet or any future cabinet for that matter. I can only hope that when we

see a change in government, that's something that – at least I can speak for myself – I would be happy that we would actually change and put that power back in the hands of Albertans so that these agencies, boards, and commissions are actually an avenue by which Albertans can participate democratically, provide input, help make decisions, and then will be implemented by the government.

Here again, Madam Speaker, we see a particular bill that is taking power away from other Albertans and, in this particular bill specifically, from other orders of government. If we saw this happening in any other jurisdiction around the world, I'm sure that members on the other side of the House would be screaming: "Well, that's a dictatorship. It's a centralization of power. How can they do this? This is an affront on freedom." But again, Madam Speaker, as I've said before, members on the other side of the House like to talk about freedom when it serves their ideological objective and only then. When it comes to rights, when it comes to our political rights, our individual rights, when it comes to our social and our cultural rights, yes, these are all things that have to be respected, but your rights end when they butt up against someone else's human right. You should not have the right to exploit another. You should not have the right to oppress another. This government time and time again has created proposed legislation where they come in here, run roughshod, and simply pass on Albertans that actually does that. Quite frankly, I believe that they should be ashamed of it.

This isn't the first time that we're seeing it here in this House. There have been a number of times when they've come into this House and they proposed just such matters. As many of the other members on the other side of the House, you know, we've been at conferences, at meetings of the RMA, AUMA, and people out there, people who have the responsibility of representing their constituents, their regions, are completely dumbfounded that this government would actually bring this piece of proposed legislation into this House.

It's just another example of why not only this Premier but this entire cabinet and, I would say, even this entire caucus cannot be trusted. Albertans should be very, very, very concerned when it comes to the type of legislation that they're proposing inside this House. This is just but one example. Can't be trusted. Municipal leaders all around the province are talking about this. As was stated by the Member for Edmonton-Manning, this sets a very dangerous precedent. This sets a very dangerous precedent. Today it's Bill 4. What's it going to be tomorrow, Madam Speaker? If the government doesn't like what municipalities have decided in terms of what services they provide their citizens, are they again going to bring in another bill that limits how that particular order of government then provides services to its citizens?

You know, they're already tying the hands of municipalities. This is what I find incredibly unfortunate, strange even, Madam Speaker, that they were able to convince a lot of the people from these municipalities, these municipal leaders, that they somehow were going to govern better for Alberta, and in budget after budget after budget that they've presented in this House, they have been underfunding municipalities, taking programs away from municipalities, leaving municipalities with no other avenue but than to tax their citizens more to provide the same level of service. Now those citizens either get a reduced amount of service or they have to pay more in taxes. Which is it? This coming from the party that says that they're going to lower taxes. They're going to lower taxes for Albertans, yet their economic, political decisions are actually making it so that municipalities all across Alberta are having to raise taxes on their citizens so that they can get the same level of service from their order of government. I believe that, Madam Speaker, the members on the other side should be ashamed of that.

It's like they're talking out of both sides of their mouth. They want to be popular, so they say: yeah, we're reducing taxes; we're reducing taxes. Yet the political decisions that they're making inside of this House actually lead to increased taxes on the average Albertan.

4:00

Not only that; they decide that they're going to take the cap off insurance. Insurance goes up by 30 per cent on Albertans. Here we are attempting to recover from COVID, and it's getting worse and worse and worse for Albertans because of inflation, because of the economic decisions that this government has made in terms of removing the cap on insurance, removing the cap on utilities, that are making it absolutely difficult for Albertans to actually make it to the end of the month. I can't tell you, Madam Speaker, how many people that I've heard from that tell me they're one paycheque away from not being able to pay their mortgage.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, I hesitate to interrupt, but I am finding a hard time tracking your relevancy to Bill 4. Just a gentle reminder to get back on track. If you need a copy of the bill, I can certainly have one sent to you. We are discussing Bill 4, and the arguments should be as such.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate your words of caution. But as you can tell, I'm simply making the association that decisions made by this particular government are actually making it economically unfeasible for a large amount of the population to actually make it to the end of the month. I'm drawing an association between the decisions that are being made by this government in association with this particular bill because of the centralizing of authority, centralizing of power, and, in this particular case, actually taking decision-making power and freedom away from municipalities.

So I ask the members on the other side of the House: which is it? Do you stand for freedom or not? That's the simple question here, Madam Speaker. You can't speak out of both sides of your mouth. You can't govern trying to be all things for everybody. You just simply can't. But you do have to try to do your best to meet as many of the needs of Albertans as possible. What do we hold in common? These are the things that we should be striving for when we govern.

Again, Madam Speaker, through you to the members on the other side of the House, I would say that there . . .

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

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this afternoon's debate on this bill and the conversation around freedom from Edmonton-Ellerslie and the points made, I believe, about the Constitution, if that even came up, and how the constitutional powers are divided in this country between federal powers and provincial powers. They seem to have a great deal of concern for Edmonton city council and not of Edmontonians, who overwhelmingly wanted the mask bylaws removed, just as a gentle reminder. I think Edmonton city council heard that, and I'm glad that they heard that and removed the mask bylaw.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? First to catch my eye was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Calgary-East.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. You know, it is of deep concern to the people of the province of Alberta, and whenever we are in the House looking at how the money that they contribute to the well-being of us all is spent and if it is spent wisely and with an eye to the benefit of all the citizens of the province – we know that even just yesterday this government refused to allow debate on some aspects of how we spend our money in this province, and they certainly have been hiding from the public eye some aspects of their spending such as the war room, the Energy Centre, that really are quite appalling decisions by a government in a democracy, to not make available to the citizens an opportunity to examine how money is being spent. Here they are hiding great sums of the money, so I'm glad that we have an opportunity now in terms of this Bill 7, the appropriations bill, to have some kind of a conversation.

What I'm disappointed about, though, is that this bill is clearly one that we cannot support because it continues all of the negative things that we have been quite rightly pointing out to the citizens, both in the House and outside of the House, about this government's decisions over the last number of weeks and how those decisions are making life harder, more difficult, more financially expensive, and with fewer positive outcomes for the average citizen. We know, for example, that the government has deindexed the tax rates in this province so that even though citizens may not have received a raise at all in the last year, they'll certainly be paying more in taxes, because inflation is taking some of their money away but is not being reflected in the bracket that they have to pay, so your actual purchasing power has decreased significantly. We know that over the next number of years that's over a billion dollars of money taken out of the pockets of Albertans, without any good reason for doing so, at a time when they're already highly stressed.

We know that the government is also deindexing a variety of other programs, and those programs are reflected in this bill. We see that people on AISH are losing substantial amounts of money. In fact, under this plan AISH recipients will lose about \$3,000 in real purchasing power. We're talking about some of the poorest people in our society moving in a downward direction. Now, sometimes you might stand aside and say: unfortunately, it's just the circumstances of the time; inflation is going up and so on.

But it takes no time at all to do a little bit of statistical research online to find that that is not true for everyone in society, that there are significant portions of our society that have actually done much better over the last little while. There are segments of our society whose income has gone up dramatically, and this government themselves has been contributing to that. When it came to making decisions about pay changes to members of the staff of AIMCo, this government made decisions to allow their raises to be considered up to a 39 per cent increase at a time when other people are being asked to take a 10 or 11 per cent decrease.

4:10

It's not just incidental or accidental or outside of the hands of the government. This is actually a decision on the part of the government to take money away from the most vulnerable and the poorest

in our province and to dramatically increase the profits of shareholders and corporate executives across the province at a time that has already been extremely difficult for citizens in this province, and it's really just completely unacceptable. In looking at this particular bill, we see that there is a whole variety of ways in which citizens are losing that money. We see that the average person will lose about \$500 from the deindexing of the income tax. We see that the AISH recipients will lose about \$3,000. We see that the Alberta seniors' benefit recipients will lose about \$750 at the same time that executive pay in this province has gone up.

There are incidents that are widely available in the public of seeing executive pay that has more than doubled over the last number of years, but we're not talking about doubling the pay of someone who's earning \$16,000, where we would say: well, you know, maybe that'd be okay because \$16,000 isn't very much. In fact, that's what people who live on AISH are living on, so doubling it would not be that dramatic. But doubling the pay of somebody who's already earning in the multiple millions of dollars and allowing that to happen by reducing taxes on that, by giving a break to large corporations – we know this government has already given a break of \$4.7 billion, their own number in their own documents, to large corporations, already-profitable corporations, by the way. It wasn't to help young corporations or small corporations to grow. It was simply giving money to the wealthy.

We have a very strange circumstance in this government's budget where the clear intention is to help the rich become richer and to ensure that the poor become poorer. We hear the government rail against all kinds of measures that have been taken to help average citizens. They continually complain about the carbon levy as somehow an attack on people when it was clear that over 60 per cent of the population was actually benefiting from the amount of the rebate, something the government hates to mention. They don't mention the rebate because the rebate only went to poor people, and that really doesn't matter for them. If you actually look at something like the carbon levy, you will find that it actually enables and helps people, the vast majority of people. The only people that end up paying a bit more under a carbon levy are people that can afford it.

Here we are in this bill doing the same thing over and over again, stealing from the poor, giving to the rich. Monty Python had a little song about that, which I can't repeat because it's against the rules of the House.

Mr. Eggen: Monty Python?

Mr. Feehan: Monty Python, yeah. About stealing from the poor and giving to the rich.

I think we can quite seriously refer to this as the Monty Python government. The specific reference for anybody who is looking for it is the Dennis Moore sketch, by the way: Dennis Moore, stealing from the poor, giving to the rich. You know, this kind of thing is really just appalling.

We stand here saying that the government got lucky. The government got lucky because oil and gas revenues went up, obviously through no control of their own. This government does not set the price of oil. They have themselves said that on numerous occasions. As a result, they got a windfall bonus, but what they're doing is making sure that that windfall bonus is not shared appropriately across the province of Alberta. They're not saying: look, hey, we got all this extra money, billions of dollars, in fact, over what we actually predicted in our own budget.

We know that it was a surprise to this government, and it was, you know, legitimately a surprise. Nobody can predict the price of

oil. We know that they didn't count on it, but they're sure celebrating it now and pretending that somehow they had something to do with it when it was actually the international price of oil which brought this government into the black. But they're not saying: "Okay. Look, we got this benefit. It's a benefit for all Albertans, so why don't we share that with all Albertans?" They're instead ensuring that only the wealthy are deriving that benefit, only the major corporations.

This government likes to talk about itself being a pro-business government, but it's not, really. It's only a corporate business government. It doesn't actually do anything for small businesses. I can tell you that the small businesses in Edmonton-Rutherford, the district that I represent, have had a very rough two years. Many of them have had to close shop for periods at a time, had to lay off workers for a significant period of time. They have made applications to the government to try to get something to help them to change that circumstance, to bring back their employees and so on, but they got denied the support because they happened to use an iPad, and the government failed to develop a system that would read the information off an iPad. Then when the government was told that this was a legitimate application that your system rejected because of the particular piece of technology I used to apply: "Oh, too bad, so sad. You didn't apply; you don't get the money." The government was informed of this, but they didn't do anything to change it at all.

What we're finding is a government that really is not focused on the lives of everyday, average Albertans, not focused on the lives of people who are experiencing dramatic increases in their utility bills, not focused on the lives of people who are experiencing dramatic increases in their insurance rates, people who are experiencing dramatic increases across the board. What we are seeing is a government who is happy to make sure that those who are already financially successful get more successful, that the millions of dollars that they reap every year for whatever their position is turns into millions plus but not caring about the people that are living on \$1,600 a month, the most vulnerable people who simply have no other alternative. They're on AISH because they cannot actually derive an income on their own. As a society we should be concerned about those people. We should be concerned about their well-being. We should be concerned about them actually living a decent life, not just surviving barely moment to moment, month to month but actually living a vibrant, fulsome life, thriving in a community that's thriving.

But that's not what this government is focused on. It's not focused on the community thriving. It's focused only on individuals thriving. It's really just completely unacceptable that they would introduce a bill that repeats this same error, yet again taking advantage of their ability to determine the lives of poor people in order to be able to support their close personal friends and international business, who subsequently take the monies that they're given and use it to move money offshore, away from Alberta, to other parts of the world.

You know, the government complains about the fact that Alberta has had a really great resource-based economy for many years and, as a result, many people are able to pay taxes to the federal government because they actually earn a good income. They're actually complaining about that and saying: "That's not fair. If we earn a good income here, we shouldn't have to contribute to the federal government because other people don't have a chance to earn that other income, that same kind of income in another province." That's what they're complaining about.

But the same thing can be said throughout the province of Alberta. In some places people have greater incomes and in some places have lower incomes. But do they apply that standard there?

Do they say: oh, we're going to go through the province and look at the municipalities where people on average have a lower income and stop giving them money because why are we supporting them? They don't use that because they know it's absurd and because it would actually affect their electoral chances if they did that. They would actually be hurting the communities that they're representing.

They're willing to say that on a federal level because, as usual, they're completely inconsistent in terms of their economic policy. You know, they certainly have taken on the chance to brag and boast about having brought in what they refer to as a balanced budget, but they are not showing any responsibility as to how that actually was derived and not using that wonderful opportunity of that windfall to actually make lives better for all the people in this province. They could have done many different things. They could simply start by stopping attacking people, stopping deindexing things, and start looking at our seniors and saying: how can we support them more?

4:20

We know that, for example, when we increased the child tax credit, we helped to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 50 per cent. If they had simply made the decision to take this windfall profit, put it into more of the child tax credit, they may have been able to reduce poverty up to 100 per cent. They could have added the other 50 per cent, but they took a look at it, they said: "Hmm. Child poverty; executive salaries. Now, which one should we support?" Executive salaries every time.

They could have gone to reduce child poverty. They know, they have actual evidence, that the child tax credit does that because it happened during our term as government. They heard that mentioned many times in the House, that child poverty was reduced by half, and they could have said: "Hey, we found a successful program that actually helps citizens in the province of Alberta. If we reduce child poverty, then we might be able to reduce things like school dropout rates, adult health incident rates, addictions rates, incarceration rates. We could have done all that, because we know that the social determinants of health have indicated that all of those things go up when child poverty goes up, and if we reduce child poverty, we can reduce the demand on other government services over the next number of years."

If you're long-term thinking, that's the kind of thing that you can do. You can actually just take the available research on the social indicators of health and say: let's put extra money into all those things so that we will actually have a better province down the road. They could have chosen to do that. They could have actually had five- and six-year-olds not worried about whether or not they're going to have food to eat for dinner tonight, but instead they're worried about whether or not rich Texas millionaires have a swimming pool in their backyard. That was the choice they made.

They had some extra money that flowed in, through no work of their own, to government coffers, and they had a clear choice as to who would benefit from that, and look who they picked. It wasn't Albertans, it wasn't people who are most vulnerable, and it wasn't the future, a future in which we would have better health, reduced addictions, less incarceration, and greater high school and postsecondary graduation rates. All of that was available to them, and they didn't pick any of it.

This bill is just an example of a continuing desire to adhere to a widely discredited economic idea, that was brought in in another country some years back and has been simply copied by this government from a 1970s manual hidden somewhere in the Premier's office, in which they believe that somehow if you make rich people rich, other people will benefit. It's very clear that this

government is unable to read the information on trickle-down economics and how it is being consistently decried by researchers around the world as being a transfer of wealth away from the average citizen to the top 1 per cent of society.

In fact, during these very difficult last two years, we've actually seen the wealth of a few individuals in society more than double and triple in that 1 per cent while the rest of us are either standing still or, in fact, under this bill are actually losing ground. The wealthiest people in America, for example, actually gained \$1.7 trillion worth of net wealth over the last two years – \$1.7 trillion – and that's who this government has decided to be on the side of, not on the side of the AISH person who is living on \$1,600 a month; \$1,600 a month.

They couldn't even allow them to maintain that \$1,600 a month; they're going to allow inflation to eat that away for the year. All they had to do was just do nothing. If they had done nothing, they might have an argument, that, well, we have some good rates, so why don't we just leave it alone? They actively sought to take money away from people who are living on \$1,600 a month. I suspect there's not a single person on that government side of the House that could live on \$1,600 a month if they tried, yet they're expecting other people, typically people who have severe disabilities – that's the nature of why they're on the program – who do not have the options to pursue wealth in other ways that may be available to you and I, who absolutely must depend on that money, to do so. They've taken money away from them. They actively do so in this bill. It's just really, completely unacceptable.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair, for this opportunity given to me to rise and express my support for Bill 7. First of all, I would like to applaud the Premier and all the ministers for coming up with a budget that will fulfill our promise to Albertans. It is aimed to have financial stability as the government maintained all the needed services with the assurance of creating jobs and more businesses in the province.

This government had planned to balance the budget from day one. It is a wise and thoughtful plan to eliminate the largest deficit in Alberta's history. In fact, during the start of this government's administration the deficit has decreased even faster than initially planned. However, a new challenge came when every jurisdiction's economy in the world faced the major impact brought by the pandemic, economic downturn, not to mention the decrease of oil prices, which at some point reached into the negative. Through the well-thought-out strategy of the government our economy is showing encouraging signs of recovery and growth, but there is a lot more to be done to further diversify, strengthen our workforce, grow our resources, and extend the needed help for all Albertans.

What is the importance of balancing the budget? The question, Madam Chair, never crossed the thoughts of the previous government. Balancing the budget would mean a lot to Albertans as it would give us the ability to reduce the debt-servicing charge and eventually pay the debt. It would remove the burden to future generations, a debt that they did not incur.

When the previous government assumed governance of the province, debt servicing was under \$800 million a year. When they were ousted from office, it was about \$2.3 billion a year. Balancing the budget will put an end to a spending spree path being asserted continuously by the NDP so that we can go to the path of redirecting the debt-servicing amount to more useful services that Albertans

rely on, including health care, infrastructure, social programs, child care, and education.

Madam Chair, this budget is not only focused on balancing the budget and reversing the deficit; it also includes input from Albertans and stakeholders. The government received feedback and submissions from Albertans and various stakeholders through consultation conducted by way of online surveys, written submissions, and telephone town halls. Everyone's views were all considered by the government, and they were all received as great help in understanding the priorities of families, businesses, and communities. Having said that, let me express my appreciation to all who participated with the Budget 2022 consultation.

After many challenging years of economic and pandemic hardship Alberta is finally moving forward once again. The government's focus on responsible fiscal management and relentless pursuit of economic growth has put the province on a more sustainable fiscal trajectory, creating expanded financial capacity, resulting in additional government revenues.

4:30

The job-creating corporate tax cut introduced by this government, Madam Chair, is proving to be the more sensible approach than the increasing of taxes imposed by the previous government. Through this approach we will collect roughly \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenue at an 8 per cent rate than the previous government did at 12 per cent, demonstrating the huge investment framework established since the government took office.

As multibillion-dollar investments are expected to come into Alberta, the Conference Board of Canada, Desjardins, RBC, and TD forecast that Alberta will be leading the country in economic growth this year. Amazon Web Services announced its plan to establish a second cloud computing hub in Calgary, amounting to \$4.3 billion, while Infosys and Mphasis are to create thousands of tech jobs in the province. RBC is also creating a tech hub in Calgary with about 300 jobs while EY will create a new finance hub with about 200 jobs in Calgary, impressed with the talented workforce. Northern Petrochemical also announced a \$2.5 billion project in the municipal district of Greenvue, and Dow Chemical plans to work on a project that would be the world's first net zero carbon emissions petrochemical plant, which is predicted to cost about \$10 billion.

Another huge investment that has landed in Alberta is Lynx Air, Madam Chair, Canada's newest low-cost airline. It joins Flair and WestJet as Alberta-based airlines. These are just some of the many investments creating jobs in Alberta and boosting our economy, Madam Chair.

As we saw, the unemployment rate hit prepandemic levels in December 2021 by gaining about 130,000 for the year, including 6,100 in the oil and gas industry. Moreover, in January this year we heard that Canada lost 200,000 jobs, but Alberta's economy gained over 7,000 jobs. Our unemployment rate continues to drop, and unemployment is at its lowest since September 2019. Eight thousand two hundred jobs were created in February, which means more Albertans are returning to work and receiving a regular paycheck.

Let me also add that Alberta continues to be the world leader in sustainable and responsible resource development among oil-producing jurisdictions. This shows that while we recognize that Canada's largest export is still the oil and gas industry, we are experiencing broad-based investment and economic diversification in our province. Nonetheless, this investment climate and composition does not mean that the government's approach of carefully handling the province's finances will twist. Alberta's

government continues its disciplined spending to maintain balance. Budget 2022 is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black.

As we move forward, Albertans need a strong health care system with the capacity to manage extraordinary surges and provide an excellent standard of care to all. Madam Chair, Budget 2022 provides more than \$22 billion in Health's operating budget, a \$550 million, or 2.4 per cent, increase from the 2021-2022 forecast, excluding COVID-19 costs – it will grow by a total of \$1.8 billion by 2024-2025 in order to scale up capacity – another year of record-high investment for health care in Alberta. Record investments in health care mean that Albertans will see expanded access through additional ICU beds, new facilities in their communities, and more mental health and addictions care around the province. This record investment will also ensure that Albertans across the province have access to the highest quality and most modern services our health care system can provide.

Over the next three years Alberta will invest \$100 million per year to provide additional health care capacity on a permanent basis, including adding new intensive care unit beds. The budget also includes a \$750 million COVID-19 contingency this year, which will help address the surgical backlog and ensure the province can cover evolving pandemic-related costs.

To expand continuing care programs and services for seniors and vulnerable Albertans, Budget 2022 provides nearly \$3.8 billion in operational funding for professional health care and support services across the continuing care system, a 6.3 per cent increase over last year.

Through Budget 2022 Alberta's government continues strong support for the education system. It provides an increase of more than \$700 million over the next three years to support teachers and to address cost pressures in transportation. This increased funding also recognizes enrolment growth. It includes a 1 per cent increase to both base funding and operations and maintenance funding. In 2022-2023 this increased funding will ensure school authorities can hire the required number of teachers and support staff, address increases in property and vehicle insurance premiums, support schools in maintaining enhanced cleaning protocols, and mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning. Targeted funding of \$110 million over three years, including \$30 million in 2022-2023, will enable schools to support students experiencing academic challenges and create school environments supporting student well-being and positive mental health.

Recognizing the needed support for working parents and families, Budget 2022 also includes about \$2.5 billion over three years in support of a child care agreement with the federal government. Since the program was announced, Alberta parents are already experiencing lower costs, with the price of child care targeted to average \$10 per day by 2026. To ensure families can choose the child care that works best for them, 42,500 new licensed child care spaces will be added over the next five years.

To cope with rising inflation caused by global supply issues and the federal government's unrestrained spending, Budget 2022 provides funding for an energy rebate program to help Albertans manage higher natural gas prices.

Madam Chair, Budget 2022 is also investing \$390 million over the next four years to bring high-speed Internet to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta. This proves that the government is taking action to address Albertans' concerns about connectivity. The pandemic has made clear that access to a high-speed, reliable broadband Internet connection is not just important to Albertans but essential for Alberta's recovery and economic diversification. The government's broadband strategy will power

education, workplaces, venues, and homes across the province and will deliver access to connectivity that provides livelihoods and makes life better for hard-working Albertans. From education to health care and from agriculture to small businesses, connectivity will help Albertans interact with the global marketplace, innovate for local solutions, and help diversify our economy.

4:40

Madam Chair, Budget 2022 increases the operating expense budget for Seniors and Housing by 4.2 per cent compared to last year. With this budget the government is maintaining the seniors' benefit for those most in need, ensuring that vulnerable seniors can count on a stable source of income. It also enables the 10-year stronger foundations affordable housing strategy, with \$118 million in capital funding and \$25.3 million in operating funding over three years. Capital plan 2022 allocates \$281 million over three years and is a \$42.4 million increase over capital plan 2021. It will provide 2,300 new and regenerated affordable housing units.

As the government fast-tracks Alberta's economic recovery, supports will be provided to all Albertans finding opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families. Budget 2022 devotes more than \$600 million over three years to a new initiative called Alberta at work. This new component of Alberta's recovery plan will provide \$47 million over three years in capital funding and \$25 million over three years in operating funding to support collegiate programs and charter school expansions, creating pathways for students into higher learning and in-demand careers.

Alberta at work also provides \$171 million over three years to expand student enrolment in areas with skill shortages. This initiative will create approximately 7,000 additional postsecondary seats in areas such as computer science, information technology, data modelling, finance and financial technology, fintech, engineering, health care, and aviation. A further \$30 million will be provided for apprenticeship expansion programs, giving Albertans the training and education and opportunities they need to secure a rewarding career. Over three years \$64 million will be allocated for skills development, training, and employment programs. Additionally, investments of about \$30 million will be provided until 2024 to address barriers to employment, including training in literacy and numeracy as well as English as a second language courses for unemployed Albertans.

In addition to these investments, Budget 2022 includes \$30 million over three years, mostly in commercial driver grants, to address a severe shortage of skilled drivers in Alberta.

There's so much more to mention about Budget 2022, Madam Chair, which brings more great news for Alberta's economic recovery, but I may not have enough time today. Budget 2022 increases supports for vulnerable Albertans, including increases to help them find jobs. Through the Alberta at work program the government has enhanced funding so there can be more practical training to more Albertans looking for work. The budget supports the goal to help individuals and families gain independence and stability by providing opportunities for them to enhance their skills and get connected to jobs.

Budget 2022 ensures community and social service programs remain fully funded, including AISH, income and unemployment support, disability services, and help for people experiencing homelessness or fleeing violence.

Having said that, let me conclude by applauding the Premier, the Minister of Finance, and all the ministers for sticking to our thoughtful fiscal plan and making Alberta move forward to a prosperous financial future. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I know tradition in the House is to go back and forth between parties; however, I already stated that the hon. Member for Calgary-South East would go, but then followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleague, through you, for highlighting many of the important aspects of Budget 2022. In response to the member opposite: we will make no apologies for standing up for our world-class energy sector. Given that the members opposite did everything they could when they were in government to stifle and harm that industry, it isn't surprising to see them frustrated and confused by our continued support for the most ethically and responsibly produced oil and gas.

The member did raise one real issue that Albertans and Canadians are facing. No, it's not the NDP. It's affordability, an issue that they contributed to with the introduction of the carbon tax, their unsustainable and irresponsible spending, by chasing away virtually all investment, by attacking our own businesses and industries, and through their continued support of Justin Trudeau and the Liberals. The best affordability initiative our government has done so far, in my opinion, was the removal of the NDP from office.

Alberta's current government, on the other hand, is providing real relief to Albertans who are struggling with the increased cost of living. We're stopping the collection of the provincial fuel tax beginning on April 1 to offer Albertans relief from high fuel prices. We're also providing \$150 in electricity rebates to ratepayers across the province.

The member did highlight another reason why it's great to live in Alberta. He talked about the basic personal amount, which continues to be head and shoulders above other provinces, the highest in Canada. And he mentioned one other thing, that our supports in Alberta continue to be some of the highest and most generous to Albertans in need. AISH. AISH continues to be at the highest level in Canada. The reason we can do that, the reason we can maintain world-class benefits like that, is through continued financial discipline and responsible government.

Budget 2022 includes record funding for Health and Education, increases to Advanced Education, Children's Services, and Community and Social Services. We're doing this while running balanced budgets, projected surpluses for the next three years.

Thank you for your comments. I'm interested to hear what else you have to say about Budget 2022, which has returned this province to balance.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I expected that to go a little bit longer.

It's an honour to rise and speak to this bill. I do have some comments, though, that I think it's important that we highlight. Again, I mean, we're fundamentally going to disagree that this budget is actually doing anything for Albertans. The government will say that this is the best bill ever and the best budget ever, but the reality of it is that it's actually flat.

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

Two point eight billion dollars less on expenses is the reality of what this budget actually says. It's flat. It's not actually investing and increasing what the government would like to say in looking at their expenses. In fact, even with this surplus the budget has completely flattened out. There are no big investments happening.

A lot of what we've been hearing from the government are re-announcements of past budgets, of things that they've committed to repeatedly, and we have yet to see any type of outcome.

The Kananaskis pass would be an example of that. The Kananaskis pass was put in the last budget, a fee on Albertans to enjoy their backyard, where there was a commitment that that fund was going to be used to actually do something for the Kananaskis area. The announcement that the government made in regard to that investment was a reannouncement from last budget. It wasn't a new announcement; it was a continuation of the same announcement. In fact, the revenue that this government has created with their fees on Albertans has just been put into, basically, a whole bunch of little savings accounts that aren't actually benefiting Albertans.

4:50

I want to highlight something that I think is really important that the government members hear. There is a report – and this comes out on a quarterly basis, so the members are more than welcome to read it every quarter if they would like – that MNP puts out. Now, MNP does, and has been doing this since 2017, a review on the confidence of different provinces on their ability for individuals to be able to leverage their own personal capital. In January, before this budget came out, we were already on shaky grounds. We'll see in April whether or not these numbers have changed, but what I can say is that the title of it was Alberta's Confidence in Personal Finances, Debt Repayment Abilities Plummet amid Pandemic Fatigue and Uncertainty.

In January, before the budget came out, before this government had an opportunity to look at the affordability that was happening in the province, how Albertans were feeling about being able to pay their day-to-day bills, before we saw this massive increase in gasoline prices, before we saw what was going on with natural gas and insurance premiums going up, and now we see farming premiums going up and all the things going up that we've seen in the last even couple of weeks, Albertans were saying:

Compared to the last quarter...

So before Christmas.

... the number of Albertans who are concerned about their current level of debt has jumped nine points to 50 percent, the highest level amongst the other provinces. Slightly fewer are confident [they're comfortable covering] their living expenses in the next year.

Fifty-seven per cent don't believe they can cover their expenses without going into debt.

Making matters worse, four in 10... say they're finding it even harder to pay down [their] debt. Compared to other regions, Albertans are [more] likely... to say it's become much less affordable to set aside money for savings – up a significant six points since last quarter.

Now, in continuation of this report, the Consumer Debt Index...

If anybody would like to read the Consumer Debt Index and do some research when you speak to some of these pieces of legislation.

... which measures Canadians' attitudes toward their consumer debt and gauges their ability to pay their bills and endure unexpected expenses, has fallen seven points [in Alberta] since last quarter to 88 points – the lowest reading since... 2017.

"It's clear households in Alberta are becoming increasingly worried about the debt they are carrying... We often see financial optimism wane [around the] holiday bills.

Of course, people buy presents, and you've got all the expenses that come with those holidays.

But additional factors such as [COVID] pandemic fatigue, as well as rising inflation and the potential for interest rate increases are

making Albertans feel [far] more financially insecure [than in past years]..."

Fewer than three in 10... are confident in their ability to cope with life-changing events without increasing their debt burden. In comparison to the other provinces, Albertans are the most likely (35%) to say they are not confident in their ability to cover an unexpected car repair, jumping a significant 10 points since September. They are also the most likely (41%, +10pts) to say they are not confident they can cope financially with an illness that renders them unable to work for [more than] three months. Four in 10... have concerns about coping with a loss of employment or change in wage or seasonal work, [which is] a jump of 14 points since [last] September – by far the largest increase compared to [any other province]. Albertans are also less confident in their ability to handle a change in their relationship status (27%...) or cope with the death of an immediate family member (13%)...

Four in 10... Albertans report they're \$200 away or less from not being able to meet all of their financial obligations at month-end... This proportion also includes nearly three in 10... who say they already don't [have] enough to cover their bills and debt payments, remaining above the national average.

"The cost of living is on the rise, and we expect those households who were already overextended throughout the pandemic may feel they have to resort to [their] credit just to afford basic necessities and make [their] ends meet..."

In fact, Albertans are the most likely to admit to paying only the minimum balance on their credit card... compared to the other provinces – and [most] Albertans say they have borrowed money they can't afford to pay back... ([about] 16%...). More also say they were lured in by deals or special offers on... Black Friday... Additionally, six in 10... Albertans point to low interest rates [as being part of the problem]...

With concerns over inflation and cost of living at the forefront of many Albertans' minds, two in 10... believe their debt situation is worse than a year ago. [Fifty per cent] of Albertans say they regret the amount of debt they've taken on. When looking five years into the future, more Albertans appear to be apprehensive about the road ahead.

They believe the debt situation is going to get worse. Reality check for Albertans.

This government stands up and says, "Look at our balanced budget, look at how great we've done, look at all of these things," yet there is nothing in this budget that addresses all of the concerns that I just brought forward. The cost of living is going up in Alberta. Albertans feel it. Fifty per cent are concerned about the future of their finances. When a government stands up and continuously talks about, you know, "Look at all of these great things we've done; we've done all of these amazing things; Albertans want a balanced budget; they're not concerned with what the opposition is saying," that is factually incorrect.

I can't wait until the next quarterly comes out by MNP and I can see what their next report says in March now that they've seen the increase in their utility bills and the increase of trying to put fuel in their vehicles and their new insurance premiums and the bills that they've received in the mail recently, when they see their property taxes from municipalities have gone up because of the cuts that this government has done to municipal funding and the downloading that this budget is doing on the pocketbooks of Albertans. It has a serious impact. To ignore those comments and to say that that's not the case is disingenuous to every single one of our constituents. Fifty per cent, according to this report, of Albertans are worried about their financial security. Fifty per cent. It's factual. I will table this tomorrow if other people want to read it.

It's not just about individuals living on AISH. It's not just about individual seniors' benefits. Those are serious issues that should

have also been addressed in this budget, absolutely, but it is the average Albertan who is sitting at home, 50 per cent of Albertans who are sitting at home going: "I don't know how I'm going to pay my bills. I'm worried about our economy. I'm worried about whether or not I'm going to have a stable job and whether or not I'm going to come out of COVID with some kind of financial security."

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

When the government talks about, "Look at all the job creation that we've done," those are part-time jobs. I would really enjoy the government to stand up and talk about how many full-time, long-term, mortgage-paying jobs this government has created versus the part-time jobs that this government continues to use in their job numbers. That's also disingenuous. That's not true to what is actually going on for the average Albertan.

It's not a celebration. This budget hasn't addressed the needs of Albertans, and when you see that the expenses have gone down, \$2.8 billion less – \$2.8 billion less – of what this government is spending on their overall budget, that isn't addressing any of those concerns, real concerns.

We have a financial instability problem with the amount of capital that people have access to right now. That drives our economy. When people spend, our economy does well. When people can't spend, our economy slows down. People don't have the capital. They don't have the personal financial liquidity to be able to spend, and if they do, they go into debt, which is also not a good thing for our economy. We don't want people going into debt, my members of the government.

Ideally, we want people to have financial security, where they feel like they can spend on those extras, they feel like they can go camping for a weekend and now spend an extra \$5, according to the press release that just came out, to be able to reserve a camping spot. They should feel confident in being able to look at new vehicles or look at those luxury items, but clearly Albertans don't feel that way. It will slow down our economy because right now people are trying to figure out how they're going to buy their groceries and how they're going to pay their utilities and how they're going to pay their rent, which ultimately slows down the economy. If you don't have people spending, the economy can't keep going. It's a pretty basic economic idea. I see people shaking their heads, which I don't really understand. I'm a little concerned by that.

Mr. Getson: I'm nodding.

Ms Sweet: I know. I have one member who nods at a lot of things, which is also very concerning to me.

The reality of it is that this budget hasn't addressed how we're going to keep the economy driving forward. That is a concern.

5:00

Talking about the investment of big business, sure. And you know what? If we were getting capital coming in that was big capital, that was investing in big projects, that was actually creating good-paying jobs, that were full-time jobs, there would be a discussion, but the reality is – I mean, we just saw an announcement about Walmart coming into Alberta, but those aren't high-paying, long-term investment jobs. They're not paying people's basic necessities. It is a problem when we can't seem to attract companies to hire people for good, mortgage-paying jobs.

When we're talking about part-time employment and people are working two to three jobs, that's a problem. [interjections] It's a problem, Minister. It is an absolute problem. The fact that I'm

getting heckled by the government, by a minister, when I'm talking about basic economics and how to encourage people to be able to have full-time, mortgage-paying jobs is actually very concerning to me. Very, very, very concerning.

Like, read the report. This is about investment and Albertans' personal finances. This is consumer debt indexing. It's real numbers. It's how Albertans feel, and to not have any understanding or respect from this government about the reality that this budget doesn't actually do anything to support that shouldn't be something where the government thinks they should heckle. In fact, they should be listening, re-evaluating, and going: maybe this budget isn't doing what we think it should be doing. What it could do is that it could help to support some of that consumer confidence again by helping bring down some of that cost of living.

The concern that I have is that, again, the government will talk about a 13-cent reduction in gasoline, but there is no guarantee that that 13 cents is going to get down to the consumer. There's nothing that locks that in and guarantees that. So the government can give 13 cents off the taxes, but how do you guarantee that it's going to be in the pocketbook of the person that's buying the gasoline? Where is it in this budget – well, it's not even in the budget. But where is the policy that protects the consumer to know that that 13 cents is coming back into their pocketbook? There's zero. Nothing. It is a false promise.

It is super frustrating to me that when there's an announcement made, there isn't a policy that actually shows Albertans that they're going to get that money back. The \$150, which is \$50 a month, is also not going to address the cost of living today, because we know it's not actually going to come into effect until maybe October. We also know that right now the cost of natural gas isn't even at the threshold the government set, so it's another false promise on how to address the cost of living going on in this province.

There are strategies that could have been implemented in this budget that would still have maximized being able to have a surplus budget and would still have supported Albertans to feel like somehow this budget supported them, and I don't see it. I don't see it stimulating the economy to ensure that Albertans are actually going to get the jobs that they need, that are good, high-paying, full-time – let's emphasize the full-time part. This inconsistency from the government to keep talking about job numbers that are part-time is absolutely ludicrous, in my opinion. It's not genuine to the reality of what Albertans are looking for, which is good-paying, full-time positions that are long term, not even contracts. Let's get people long-term employment, where they feel confident in staying in Alberta and want to live here long term and want to invest in the economy and want to spend money and want to keep our economy driving. I don't see it, and I don't see it happening in rural Alberta. I don't see it. I don't see that job creation happening in a way where we're encouraging people to stay in rural Alberta. I want them to stay in their local communities. I want people to learn, to live, and to play where they want in rural Alberta, outside of the Edmonton and Calgary areas.

I absolutely, fundamentally agree – I come from a small town. I love my community. I enjoy being able to go there. And you know what? If there was a job for me back in the day, I probably would have been there still. But the reality is that there were no employment opportunities for me, so I moved to the city. I went to school in the city. I got a job in the city. It's what happens. And many of my cousins, of whom I'm sure the chair is aware because she knows some of my cousins, also moved into bigger communities, away from smaller communities, because there wasn't the opportunity for them to do what they wanted to do. It is a fundamental problem.

I was hopeful that when we heard and we could see the writing on the wall that the budget was going to be balanced, there was going to be some ability to address what is happening in Alberta. We benefit from our resources. The price of oil going through the roof right now – I mean, it's gone quite high, and it continues, as my computer keeps telling me, to go up as we speak; well, the market is closed, but prior to the market closing – should be beneficial to all Albertans. It's our resource, yet this budget, which is significantly benefiting from the price of oil, is not reflective of how that's transferring back to the average Albertan.

You can do both. You can absolutely do both. With the royalties that we have and the ability to look at the future and what is going on, there was an ability to do both. I'm not saying: spend it all. Absolutely not. I believe that, you know, we should be financially prudent, and we should be able to have a budget that could have a surplus. There were things that could have happened in this budget . . . [interjection] You know, some of us can talk about the economy, Member. There's an ability to use a budget with a surplus that can still stimulate the economy and can still help relieve the stress for Albertans. It just wasn't done. It didn't address the concerns that have been brought up. It hasn't supported consumer confidence, to be honest.

You know, there are lots of fiscal conservatives that I speak to who like the idea of a surplus budget, but when they looked at this, they said: yeah, the surplus was great, but I was expecting something else. Like, there should have been something else, and there should have been a forward vision. There should have been something that was clearly going to create jobs and do all of the things, yet that's not here.

I'll be honest with you, government members. There are fiscal conservatives that aren't impressed with this budget. There just aren't. Like, they don't think that just because you have a surplus, it's a win. There has to be more in a budget than just a surplus. Where's the vision? Where is this government planning on going? How are they going to create the jobs? How are they going to take care of those people that can't pay their bills? What is going on? Why wasn't . . .

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

Mr. Getson: Thanks, Madam Chair. I need to stretch my legs. I really appreciate the debate that's taking place in here. I have to admit that the last speaker I listened to intently. Some of the other members from the other side – I can't speak freaky-deaky socialist, so I don't catch most of it. I've got to step up and leave the room sometimes; I hate to say it. But with the member opposite, from Edmonton-Manning, I can listen to her. She does a ton of research. I have a ton of respect for the lady.

I made some notes here because there were a bunch of items. I wasn't originally planning on speaking to the budget even though it's a phenomenal budget, even though it's the best budget that we've had in – how many years? – eight years, a balanced budget. Now, it doesn't come with, you know, as some would think, the unholy coalition of socialism that we're seeing down in Ontario right now, with budgets balancing themselves. [interjection]

The member opposite is heckling. He prefers democracy in action by groups that he supports, like propping up an emergency act that was only used for times of war, unless you have protesters you don't agree with and are silencing speech and going after people's bank accounts, the same group that he's talking about, who are on AISH payments, who actually made contributions to some of those having their bank accounts frozen. He's okay with that type of democracy. I'll continue, Member. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Just a slight caution to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Getson: Oh, I'm sorry. My head was in the wrong direction. I have this one bad eye. Sorry, Madam Chair.

To the Member for Edmonton-Manning: again, I really appreciate that. The bad news out there – and I was agreeing with her. She's making comments about my head movement. I was actually nodding with a lot of the items that she had. There were impacts on people's cost of living that we have. There are driving inflationary costs. Consumer confidence is down, absolutely.

5:10

There is a ton of pressure on folks, both socially and economically, right now as we come out of COVID. Not to blame everything on COVID, because that would be a cop-out entirely, but there is that lack of confidence. She was talking about part-time jobs. She was talking about lesser paying jobs. She was painting, quite honestly, a very dark picture, but this is the same picture that we inherited in a lot of cases when we were elected. We saw a decline in jobs, of high-paying jobs. We saw a lot of people switching to part-time. We saw a lot of people not having the same consumer confidence, not spending the money.

Now, we compound that with what took place with COVID. Absolutely, people are a little concerned and cautious, and they still should be. They should still be cautious. Don't throw caution to the wind just because we've had a good year, just because we happened to balance the budget, just because we happened to push down the spending, just because we happened to save about \$6 billion versus the trajectory of where we would have been if we didn't make those changes.

Now, the other thing the member opposite had mentioned was the windfall from oil prices. Yeah, we got a win. At one point last year we actually were in negative values. The deals that were made with some of the larger companies for curtailing production: the Minister of Energy had to go to those folks and put acts in place to curtail production while they allowed the smaller companies to still produce. We were in negative values. That is bad for everybody across the board, Madam Chair, through you to the other members. We were in pretty dire straits and circumstances. Now, the budget itself – and although some of the members will speak to the great \$110 or \$120, depending on the commodity prices in the market that are taking place at the time, it's actually pinned at \$70-a-barrel oil, so we haven't accounted for all those other windfalls yet.

Ms Sweet: Oh, I know.

Mr. Getson: Well, yeah. We're in agreement, one hundred per cent agreement, on that.

So the question is: what do you do with these potential windfalls? It also has to do with that cash-flow projection and the duration that it takes. I would think – and I think most Albertans would agree – that if there is an opportunity, if there are any windfalls, we make sure we don't send them away in transfer payments, that we don't send them back to the east so they can get on it, or that we don't have that projection forward.

Part of the thing that we'd have to look at is: what can we do? What levers are at our disposal? Although some of the opposition scoffed – not the Member for Edmonton-Manning; she didn't scoff at it. She asked a good question, but some scoffed. They're saying about these 13 cents that you're taking off everyone's fuel prices at the pumps: well, that's no big deal. Well, yeah. It's kind of off-set by that flipping carbon tax coming back again and getting compounded for us April 1, April Fool's. I wish that the members opposite, the one that particularly likes that style of coalition

democracy taking place with his fans down there, through you to that member so he can hear me, would actually step up and say: "Maybe we should ratchet back the carbon tax. Maybe it was really a failed experiment, and we don't really know where the dollars are going other than to a Ponzi scheme, in principle, moving shells around and taking it out of people's pockets." That would really give us more of an impact.

The fuel tax itself, the road tax: there are only 13 cents that we have. For some of these things, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning pointed out, we don't have anything in legislation to make that stick. You're right; there isn't a price protection. But with these same companies that curtailed it, the same companies that have been working with us, there's also an agreement. There's a leap of faith. There's trust in that, and there has to be something held to account on that. We're going to be monitoring those items to make sure that that doesn't take place, but we won't be so punitive to try to put other measures in place. It's temporary, too. It's also tied to the commodity prices themselves. What we had to do was make sure that the supply that was already in the tanks ran through the system so that we weren't inadvertently taking away from those other small businesses.

Now, inflation. Well, inflation is on a bit of a runaway. Imagine that, with the financial logic – some are talking about trickle-down economics. Well, I'm not sure when you've got Captain Fancy Socks running around driving up a higher deficit than we've ever had, over all other Prime Ministers combined. You've been having warnings nonstop from the financial community on how to stop that, and it hasn't. Now the chickens have come home to roost. When you put all these pressures on normal people, yeah, they've had enough.

The coal policy. When it came down to rapidly shutting down the electricity – in my area, again, folks, just come out a little bit to the west, and I'll give you a tour of where the mines used to be in production. Thousands of people were put out of work, the compound effect not only from the folks that worked in those mines – high-paying union jobs, I might add, full-time jobs, legacy jobs, and positions where families made their incomes. Legacy: from one generation to the next for years, Madam Chair. The Devon coal institute: they did a ton of research on that front, and Keephills 3 was, I would argue, the cleanest source of electricity in our province. That technology could have been packaged up and sent around the world.

We drastically changed that. Well, not we. When I got here, I jumped out to the project manager that I happened to work in a carbon capture and storage project with, who was from TransAlta, and asked him if we could turn this thing around, fire those plants up. We could extend the life still, keep those thousands of people working. It was too late, but they did get a \$1.3 billion package payout because the other folks broke the contracts, and we did add an overbuilt transmission system. And you're absolutely right. To the members opposite, we're having to deal with that right now, and the folks at home, unfortunately, with the way the system works, the ratepayers: it gets pushed back to them. The chicken is coming home to roost again.

It may be paltry, but at least the members, the ministers on this side are putting in programs to try to take those reliefs. We've got to make sure that people know there's an advocate out there for them to call so they can try to get those rates reduced, and we need to figure out the electricity file because – you're right – we can't do it.

And I came to some of this as we're just starting to launch. We're coming off – we're in ground effect, using some aviation terminology; you have an extra buoyancy when you're coming off the ground – and if we come off too quick or we keep getting these

other things pulling back on us, offering that additional drag, like that inflation, like the carbon tax, all those things, we do risk falling and stalling. Members, all of us from both sides of the aisle have to make sure that that isn't the message we're sending. We've got to make sure we're doing things that are prudent.

We have to make sure that folks don't overspend at this point as well, and we have to make sure that even if they're taking part-time jobs now, at least there are jobs for them to take. We weren't in that circumstance before. And once we have those part-time jobs filled and the new jobs become available with all the investment we're seeing, then they're moving up the ladder. Again, there was a point in time when, if you served at Starbucks or one of the Tim Hortons, you were getting 30 bucks an hour to serve coffee, not that we want to see that again. It was pretty disproportionate, but that was happening in different markets. When the market starts to roll again and things start to go in place, those wages will come back, and you will see that.

Right now we're seeing a scarcity of labour – believe it or not – a scarcity of skilled labour. Now, arguably, we could have or should have spooled up more people to jump off the couch, get training, and do that. There are a bunch of programs in this budget to help that. When I look at aerospace and aviation – I mentioned this a number of times, and hopefully it resonates with the folks on this side and the members opposite. We did a look over the glass, if you would, into the aerospace and aviation sector. We have 80 per cent transferable skill sets from the energy sector to get in that area. You need the same engineers. You see the cost-control people. You need the technicians that do similar work. We can do that, and that side is taking off.

In fact, I was approached by a company called Nexus Space, that was looking to try to set up here and build satellites and launch vehicles, crazy things that we never would have heard of until we had the Alberta International Airshow, where we started connecting the dots. We were literally doing things and going outside of our comfort zone. Again, they're looking at a stable environment to do that in. A lot of the reasons why these corporations come are the value of living, the cost of living, the quality, and the other amenities that we have. We have that, and we're attracting and garnering that attention globally.

Now, if you take in current circumstances, a lot of us were looking at, you know, short-line rail trying to fill some of these voids. We're talking about the rural Internet package because we need that. The members opposite had mentioned as well: what is rural getting out of this? You're absolutely right. The way we have to build out rural is that we have to make sure that they have some of the services, because they're living in the shadow of these bigger cities, which is commuting time. Also, if we do things like in aerospace, for example, you need to be out in the country, so to speak, utilizing these things on the shadow of the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, et cetera. So having high-paying skilled jobs: we're just on the cusp of that again. It might pain us sometimes to agree on things, but we have to make sure we agree on that. We're trying to get to the same outcomes with the same futures.

The tourism and travel industry. Well, holy crow, you wouldn't believe the amount of attention we got from these little air tours of taking pictures and showing that and with the First Nations, the Indigenous groups around the area. Heck, even Grand Chief Arcand now was helping us with, you know, the gentleman from Michel, Gerard. I'm messing his name up, Minister, offhand. He helped introduce the air show with me. They're full partners in the Villeneuve landing network. These are the types of things we're bringing there. So when the international stage sees First Nations people and fighter jets and the rest of us all together: holy crow.

From that interaction there, we talk about the education file. Grande Yellowhead took that leap of faith. I had the superintendent there, the board chair at the time. We got the schooling program from the Calgary board of education in place where we've got students now – four schools in that area are taking flight training, the basics of flight training, aerospace and aviation, the ground schooling, and getting high school credits for it. Recently at RMA the reeve from Westlock came to me and said that because she saw what we were doing there, she actually reached out to that same school division, so now they can start doing that in Westlock county. These are the things where we've got these skilled jobs, these high-paying jobs.

5:20

We have to give people hope again. We have to talk about the brighter future. We have to talk about providing our energy, literally our energy, getting it to markets because it's our place where we should do that. A lot of these jurisdictions have no choice but to go to the communist countries like Venezuela, Russia. Start naming the other ones that go down the lines, the Kazakhstans, the Syrians. They have to get that oil from there. They have to get the energy, and it's our duty, quite frankly, because regardless of how the rhetoric goes in here, we produce the cleanest, most ethically produced oil in the world. In 2018 on the hydrogen file, which is a massive thing, by the way – the hydrogen economy is going to be huge – Japan does an independent study on their own between blue hydrogen and green hydrogen. We were number two only to Russia for producing the most efficient blue hydrogen, so we can see how Russia operates versus us. On the green file, heck, we were in the lower quartile.

Members opposite, please tell some of those stories, too. We don't have to agree on everything, but stop saying that we're going to crash this thing before we've even taken off again. This is something to be celebrated, the fact that we do have some higher commodity prices, the fact that we're weathering the COVID storm and coming out of it. Let's talk about joining people together again, have a grand vision for all of us – for all of us – to gain in. We can be that light again in the country. A lot of people have lost hope, but they're looking towards Alberta because we are leaning that way and we're leading the charge. Please help us tell that vision.

Budget 2022 does that. It might not be the be-all and end-all of where we're going in the next four or five years, but, boy, it sure is one heck of a good start, Madam Chair. We've navigated through the worst of the storms, made it past the icebergs, and we're coming out the other side with a balanced budget that's looking good for the future, and people are paying attention to it. We have to tell that story because the only way you make a story stick is by singing off the same song sheet, being on the same stage, and presenting your best foot forward. The worst thing that we can do is keep shooting each other in the feet here while we do our own little political tap dances and paint the wrong picture.

This is business 101: fake it until you make it. The proof is in the pudding. The minister is down in New York, and the proof is in the pudding. Even the folks in Toronto had to begrudgingly agree: yeah, we're getting it. We're getting it. Grand vision and future building: let's look towards the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, let's look towards our trading partners that are in agreement with us, that hold the same social values globally as well. Let's be that bastion of hope. Let's get them the energy they need to transition to the fuels of the future, but we're it; we're here right now. Alberta is back. Help me help you to make that dream come true.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Jones: The previous NDP government measures success by the amount of money that they spent, not by outcomes or value for taxpayer dollars or with any regard for sustainability or future Albertans. It's not surprising, then, to see that during their time in government they raised spending an average of 4 per cent per year. At that rate of spending, even at the budget's projected commodity prices and assuming their policies hadn't harmed businesses or our energy sector further, Alberta would have a \$6 billion deficit this year, a 7 and a half billion dollar deficit next year, and a \$9 billion deficit in 2024. They also significantly increased taxes and regulatory burden.

This year Alberta will collect approximately \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenues at our 8 per cent rate than the previous NDP government did at 12 per cent. Our government has cut over 21 per cent of red tape, saving Albertans and businesses an estimated \$1.2 billion while making Alberta a more desirable place to invest. Our government continues to work to ensure that Alberta remains the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family. Budget 2022 reflects our government's focus on investment attraction, economic growth, and diversification as we move forward to a time when all Albertans will have opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families.

That is why Budget 2022 includes more than \$600 million in new strategic investments for Alberta at work. 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'll also add approximately 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.

Unlike the members opposite, we're creating jobs, we're attracting investment, and we're diversifying Alberta's economy, and Albertans have every reason to be optimistic. With continued responsible government and financial discipline we can avoid burdening our children so they can share in that optimism.

Madam Chair, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3 Special Days Act

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the minister for introducing this important bill, Bill 3, Special Days Act, which will establish a new process for Alberta's government to recognize special days. Since time immemorial, different societies have given high priority to the commemoration of special occasions. This theme is common in all kinds of civilizations. Cultures, nations, and traditions have their special honorific days for celebrating special occasions, and Alberta is no exception. Special days of celebration help to cultivate a sense of community by giving everyone the chance to connect with those we love and care about on a more profound level.

Every year the province of Alberta recognizes special days to celebrate and commemorate different milestones in our collective history. Indeed, the Alberta government recognizes these special days as days of particular significance for Albertans. These anniversaries, celebrations are significant for many reasons. First, they help us to acknowledge the contributions of past generations

by helping current generations remember historic events that are significant.

Also, through the commemoration of these special days such as Hindu Heritage Month, Islamic Heritage Month, Philippine Heritage Month, Black History Month, or Francophonie Month the province can appreciate the diversity and shared heritage of our nation and acknowledge the contribution of different racial groups. This bill will be in recognition of the cultural awareness that is unique to Alberta.

Thirdly, the special days inspire Albertans to take actions that help them to be more involved in important issues within our communities, like Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month; International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation; Sexual Violence Awareness Month; Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day; or Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Special days instill a sense of significance and meaning in our lives. Special days also create a perfect opportunity for everyone to be joyful and give thanks for the year's accomplishments.

Currently the government of Alberta does not have a formal legal mechanism to recognize a special day, week, or month. In 2016 the government created a process to declare or proclaim special days, weeks, and months with specific criteria. That process involves the creation of order in council proclamations, but there is no specific statutory authority to make a proclamation.

5:30

Some special days have been recognized through the creation of arts while other special days are recognized through proclamations or declarations, which have no formal force or legal effect. The unique rituals that accompany special days appreciate the essence that connect us all to a common source. Also, through proclamations recognizing special days, the government is ensuring that there is a legal framework that supports these special days.

Madam Chair, this is exactly what Bill 3 seeks to achieve, to create a process that we legalize, recognize special dates, and promote greater cultural awareness in our communities. The Special Days Act will regularize how the Alberta government decides to recognize days, occasions, or events that are of great importance to Albertans. Part of what the Special Days Act will also achieve is to give a known legal protection to special days through an act, a one-time declaration, or ongoing proclamation of an order in council. This will equally fast-track the acknowledgement and recognition of special days each year.

If passed into law, Madam Chair, Bill 3 will empower ministers to issue ministerial declarations that recognize the special days for as long as necessary. The act will also continue to recognize days that have been previously announced and recognized through proclamations. More importantly, the bill makes it a requirement for recognized special days to be published on a web page where Albertans can keep track of it. This bill will also allow Albertans who are seeking recognition of special days to submit a request to the relevant government minister through the request declaration form. By simplifying the process of recognizing special days, Albertans will be able to participate in the democratic process, and the government will also be able to avoid duplication of efforts in determining special days.

The Special Days Act will make it easier for the Alberta government to celebrate Alberta's cultural history, diversity, and heritage and focus our attention on values that we hold in high esteem. Currently we have not done enough to recognize the special days because they are only limited to proclamations and declarations and because none of these methods are protected by any legal framework. By allowing this bill to be passed into law,

ministers in Alberta government, through ministers' declarations, will have the authority to recognize special days in perpetuity. These days can be easily traced by members of the society. The Special Days Act proposes a simple solution for the government to increase awareness of important issues to our province.

There are so many wonderful things to celebrate throughout the year. Some of these are special dates that still need to be legally recognized by the government of Alberta. Some of these dates are a reminder of how far we have come. The ad hoc process by which special dates are recognized in Alberta needs to be reviewed, and I believe through this bill this process will be corrected. There are currently 11 dates that are recognized through proclamations and nine dates that are recognized through acts. Apart from what I have already mentioned, the other special days as of this moment, Madam Chair, include the Month of the Artist, Alberta Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day, Day of Older Persons in Alberta, Disability Employment Awareness Month in Alberta, Ukrainian-Canadian Heritage Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day, Family Day, Polish-Canadian Heritage Day.

Though a special day recognition through an act is an important procedure, as members of this Chamber can debate or cast their support for such recognition, Bill 3 will make it faster and easier for days to be acknowledged. Albertans will still be able to request recognition of special dates the same way they always have. They will be able to either write to the relevant cabinet minister or submit a request through the prescribed form.

Having said that, Madam Chair, let me end by applauding the minister and all the ministry's officers for making this initiative, a new way for Alberta's government to recognize special days, making it more efficient to acknowledge and track important occasions. I encourage all the members of this Chamber to support Bill 3, Special Days Act, as we promote greater cultural awareness and inspire Albertans to take action on important causes.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there members wishing to joining the debate on Bill 3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the colleague from Calgary-East for his comments on this bill. I am pleased to rise and offer a few comments of my own on the Special Days Act. You know, it's interesting to me that this is one of these pieces of legislation that attempts to set out the job description for the Minister of Culture and kind of continues a tradition that we saw last session, where the Minister of Infrastructure needed to have his job description set out in legislation with the adoption of the infrastructure act. Here we have the Minister of Culture setting out his own job description, at least in part, with the adoption of the Special Days Act that we're considering here today.

You know, the minister knows full well that the powers that are being given to him in this piece of legislation are already available to him, that any organization can request a special day or week or month be declared at any time and that currently those declarations have to fulfill some specific criteria. They must recognize important events, milestones, cultural groups, or organizations that directly impact or connect with the province of Alberta. They have to be requested by organizations and not individuals, and they can only make the request once per calendar year. They have to be apolitical, can't be offensive, and adhere to the principles in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta human rights code.

It's a little bit concerning to me, Madam Chair, that we don't see those same criteria set out in this piece of legislation. One can only wonder what the criteria for being declared a special day will be,

and I certainly hope that the minister or any of his colleagues in Executive Council with knowledge of the matter will be able to enlighten us here in the Chamber and let us know what conditions must be met before a special day can be recognized under this act.

5:40

It should also be concerning to members of the government backbench in particular but all private members about whether or not this bill will have any impact on the ability of private members to bring forward legislation that would set out declarations of special days. I quite clearly recall the colleague from Peace River bringing forward and passing unanimously through I think all three stages of debate as well as Committee of the Whole in one afternoon a declaration celebrating a Polish heritage day here in the province of Alberta. I think this was something that was meaningful not only to the member himself but to constituents that he represented. I certainly hope that this piece of legislation doesn't take away the ability of private members to bring forward this kind of legislation and declare special days on behalf of significant cultural groups or organizations that have a special day in mind.

You know, I do have to say that I struggle with the concept of special days, and anyone who knows me knows that this is true. My children often have to remind me that their birthdays are coming up and, in fact, have to often remind me that that particular day is their birthday. More than once I've been in the position of having to buy my children happy-day-after-your-birthday cards just to make up for the fact that I've neglected their birthday.

The same is true for anniversaries, Madam Chair. I find that I'm now divorced and probably in no small part because I couldn't remember the day that I was married. Now, you know, that relationship ended so badly that I don't want to remember the day that I was married anymore, but I certainly wasn't able to do that when I was married. This is something that continues to irritate the people in my life, but it's still a struggle for me to remember and properly recognize those special days.

However, that's not to say that I don't appreciate the fact that special days do exist and that there is some benefit, I think, to recognizing some special days. You know, the minister, I'm sure, is listening intently to debate and is probably taking suggestions for some special days that I think Alberta would be wise to recognize. I have some suggestions here for him should he choose to consider them.

First of all, today is National Puppy Day. I think we all appreciate – well, my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has some reservations about dogs, but the majority of the members here appreciate our canine companions. I think it would be appropriate for the minister to formally recognize puppy day here in the province of Alberta just to celebrate the benefits of canine companionship. That's one suggestion.

There could be a national cat day. I don't know, off the top of my head, when an Alberta cat day would be. I know that that would be an incredible irritant to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, to officially recognize an Alberta cat day. Perhaps even just out of spite the minister could recognize a provincial cat day here just to irritate the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I think there'd be no better way to honour cats than by acting out of spite, because that's how cats tend to act towards their owners.

You know, Madam Chair, another month that is important to me and a lot of people I know is the month of June, which is National Accordion Awareness Month. The accordion has made significant cultural contributions to the life of the people of the province of Alberta, and I think it would be only fitting for the minister to formally recognize June as accordion awareness month here in the province of Alberta.

Another potential day that the minister could recognize – in my past life, Madam Chair, before I was elected, I was a professional geologist. Now, geologists are, I would really say, the unsung heroes of the province of Alberta. We have the knowledge and skills and the work ethic that have kept this province going for a very long time, developing the natural resources, the water resources, the groundwater resources in particular, in the province of Alberta. I think it's only right and fair that Albertans recognize the contributions that geologists have made to this province by recognizing December 4, which is the feast of St. Barbara, who is the patron saint of geologists. I think it would be a worthwhile endeavour for the minister to recognize a geologist by declaring that as a special day.

Some other suggestions for special days, Madam Chair, also in the month of December. I had the privilege of living in Germany for a couple of years in my student days, and in wide sections of southern Germany as well as in Austria December 5 is what's called Krampusnacht. Krampus is the evil spirit the Germans believe comes around on December 5 and punishes all the bad boys and girls for their misdeeds in the year. Now, I understand why the minister wouldn't be too keen to recognize Krampusnacht here in the province of Alberta, because I certainly think that there are 61 boys and girls on that side of the House who would probably suffer greatly at the hands of Krampus should he visit the province of Alberta on December 5. But, regardless, I think that there is a significant swath of the population who would take great delight in watching that happen. You know, I think the minister could at least serve the people of Alberta in that way.

My final suggestion, Madam Chair, and I raised this with the Member for Peace River when he brought forward his legislation recognizing Polish heritage day. Just from the name alone, I think it's worthy that the province recognize this day, and that's Dyngus Day. Dyngus Day is widely celebrated in Poland. It happens to overlap with the day that we call Easter Monday here in Canada, but it's a day that Poles world-wide celebrate Polish heritage. I think that it would be an excellent complement to the Member for Peace River's legislation if the Minister of Culture also recognized Dyngus Day as an official day here in Alberta.

You know, Madam Chair, I think that, all things considered, even though this bill is not, in my view, the most productive use of the time of the legislative Chamber since it creates no new powers and only sets out a partial job description for the Minister of Culture, it's relatively inoffensive, and I think that it's worthy of support. So I'm pleased to offer my support to this legislation, and I sincerely hope that the minister takes into consideration the suggestions that I've made for declaring some additional special days here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm not sure whether I can follow the previous speaker and do better or worse, really, perhaps staying on the topic. Offering any special days, I think, probably will not be part of my remarks, but, you know, part of what my remarks do circle around, as I review this bill, is that it doesn't seem to change the way by which special days can be enacted here in Alberta right now.

5:50

You know, while I think it's important to have special days and I think it's important to be able to be flexible around proclaiming special days – I know, for example, the city of Edmonton will

declare a special day and that it's only for that day, so it doesn't go on in perpetuity, right? Maybe that's part of what this bill is. I see the Culture minister thinking about that right now, and it seems to be. Yeah. Okay. All right. So it's a way by which we can have a declaration of a special day and for it to not live on necessarily for ever and ever. Of course, at some point, exactly at the number 365, you run out of days, so it's good to perhaps have that provision in there. Otherwise, of course, all the days become special, and then you have to maybe have an extra special day. I don't know. That, I guess, has some practical application for Bill 3.

You know, I guess I don't want to belabour the point, because that would actually go against what I'm going to say now, which is that I think we have other things that we need to do here in the Legislature right now besides this bill. I mean, we are okay with it, we're down with it, for sure, but I don't think we necessarily need to linger on this very minor change in regard to the proclamation of special days here in the province of Alberta.

Yeah, I mean, it's always great to do so. People take a great deal of pleasure and pride at being recognized for certain things, and some of those proclamations need to live on, too. I mean, we don't just want to have Black History Month once – that wouldn't work – or other days or weeks or months like that, right? I just want to make sure. Again, I'll ask the minister, just rhetorically right now but in committee, to ensure that this legislation would in no way endanger some foundational special days, weeks, and months that we already have enacted here in the province of Alberta which I think, you know, have a lot of history and have a lot of organization around them. We don't want to jeopardize the integrity of those special days, weeks, or months.

So, yeah, I mean, that would be my thing. You know, really, I think that it would undermine my argument here for me to belabour the point around Bill 3, because, in fact, my main issue with this is that we have other things that we should be doing that are more important. I know that sometimes bills can be big, medium, small, and in between and so forth, so I think that with this one, we can carry on, agree to agree, and get on with it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for such an enlightening and insightful interjection in the House regarding this bill, because, of course, he brought up a really good point, and I'm hoping that the Minister of Culture can actually address this particular point: will all members of the House be able to participate in actually providing input, I'll say, into proclaiming special days?

As you may know, Madam Chair, I'm a big fan of these proclamations. I think they're important because through them we recognize the ongoing and historical contributions of communities that call Alberta home. Of course, as I've stated in the House several times, my community of Edmonton-Ellerslie, my district, is one where 50 per cent of the population is actually ethnically diverse.

I was very happy that during our mandate, when we were in government, the Alberta NDP took it very seriously to acknowledge the contribution of the Sikh-Punjabi community, for example. I was

just at an event earlier today of that community. It was the founders day celebration of the Millwoods Cultural Society Of Retired and Semi Retired, and we know that, for example, Sikhs have been contributing to Alberta for more than a hundred years.

Another example of that is the Muslim community, Madam Chair. You know, the narrative that tends to be told about Canada is one that it is not necessarily ethnically diverse, and I would hope that the members on the other side of the House would work with us to actually make sure that the narrative of Alberta is one that is multicultural, one where people from diverse ethnic backgrounds have been contributing to Alberta for a very, very long time to make Alberta what it is today, and, of course, that these communities should be recognized for their contributions.

I remember meeting one of the families of the first Lebanese people that actually came to Alberta more than a hundred years ago. Of course, up in Lac La Biche is where many of them settled, and they continue to this day to call that community their home and participate in the economy by running businesses there. They have small businesses.

Many of the Muslim community have actually been elected to municipal office in communities all across Alberta and have been contributing insightfully and making sure that we have not only an equitable economy that encourages everybody to participate but are making sure that because of their cultural values, which, at the end of the day, Madam Chair, are really not that different from values that Albertans hold when it comes to making sure that we're there to take care of one another as a community, you know, that we provide assistance to one another when in times of need specifically – that's one of the things that I really love about Alberta, about all of these communities. Whether it be the fire that actually occurred or the floods that have occurred throughout Alberta on a number of bases, communities come out to actually help.

I'm reminded of some of my good friends in the Sikh Motorcycle Club, which I was able to help very early on during our mandate, when we were in government. The Sikh Motorcycle Club is one that works very hard to raise funds and donations when there's emergency relief that is required throughout the province, you know, really a contribution that they have made, actually, throughout all of Canada because there are Sikh motorcycle clubs in Ontario, in Saskatchewan, in B.C., of course, here in Alberta. They pride themselves based on the culture and religious values that they have, and so much of that, just like many other cultural communities, is the fact that they want to help people, especially in times of need, when they're being hit hardest.

I think that that's a lesson that all of us have in common, a lesson that we all can share with one another: to be there for one another when we most need it. I think, in my own particular and humble opinion, that Albertans want to see a government that actually acts that way, especially in times of crisis, whether it be through COVID or in an economic crisis like we're experiencing right now with inflation going up and life becoming less and less affordable for Albertans. I'm hearing it from multiple communities.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6. The committee will be recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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