



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 28, 2022

Day 16

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Third Session

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)  
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)  
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)  
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),  
Official Opposition Whip  
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)  
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)  
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)  
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)  
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),  
Official Opposition House Leader  
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)  
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)  
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)  
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)  
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)  
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy Whip  
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),  
Government Whip  
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)  
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),  
Premier  
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)  
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)  
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)  
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)  
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)  
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

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

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

## Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

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

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

### **Executive Council**

Jason Kenney	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Jason Copping	Minister of Health
Mike Ellis	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Tanya Fir	Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction
Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
Nate Horner	Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development
Whitney Issik	Associate Minister of Status of Women
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Jason Luan	Minister of Community and Social Services
Kaycee Madu	Minister of Labour and Immigration
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Environment and Parks
Ronald Orr	Minister of Culture
Prasad Panda	Minister of Infrastructure
Josephine Pon	Minister of Seniors and Housing
Sonya Savage	Minister of Energy
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Transportation
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Children's Services
Doug Schweitzer	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

### **Parliamentary Secretaries**

Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism
Jacqueline Lovely	Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women
Nathan Neudorf	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship
Jeremy Nixon	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society
Searle Turton	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy
Dan Williams	Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie

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

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

Chair: Mr. Rowswell  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard  
Eggen  
Gray  
Hunter  
Phillips  
Rehn  
Singh

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

Chair: Mr. Neudorf  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

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

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

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

Amery  
Frey  
Milliken  
Rosin  
Stephan  
Yao  
Vacant  
Vacant  
Vacant  
Vacant

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

Chair: Ms Lovely  
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery  
Carson  
Dang  
Frey  
Gottfried  
Hunter  
Loewen  
Reid  
Sabir  
Smith

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

Chair: Mr. Walker  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard  
Carson  
Dreeshen  
Ganley  
Long  
Sabir  
Stephan

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

Chair: Mr. Rutherford  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard  
Ceci  
Dach  
Long  
Loyola  
Rosin  
Shepherd  
Smith  
van Dijken

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

Chair: Mr. Cooper  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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

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

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

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

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

Chair: Mr. Smith  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

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

Chair: Ms Phillips  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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

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

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey  
Ganley  
Hanson  
Milliken  
Nielsen  
Rowswell  
Schmidt  
Sweet  
van Dijken  
Yao

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

Chair: Mr. Hanson  
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach  
Feehan  
Ganley  
Getson  
Guthrie  
Lovely  
Rehn  
Singh  
Turton  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 28, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

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

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Members, seated in the members' gallery are special guests of the Minister of Education. A very warm welcome to Gabe Williams and Amelie Williams, who are seated in the members' gallery with their mom, Nicole Williams, chief of staff to the minister.

Also seated in the galleries are Mary Velthuisen, Kayla Quiring, and Haley Quiring. I'd like you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

### Human Trafficking Task Force Report

**Mrs. Allard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Alberta's government officially accepted the final report, *The Reading Stone: The Survivor's Lens to Human Trafficking*, from the Human Trafficking Task Force.

First, I would like to praise and acknowledge the Human Trafficking Task Force for the work they've done over the last several months. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Paul Brandt. His profile, his experience, and his commitment to the cause made him an ideal candidate to serve as chair. Joining Mr. Brandt on the task force was a group of individuals with decades of experience in law enforcement and social work: Heather Forsyth, the former Alberta Solicitor General and former Minister of Children's Services; Jan Fox, the executive director of REACH Edmonton; Dale McFee, the Edmonton Police Service's chief of police; Douglas Reti, the former senior executive director general of RCMP Indigenous

relations services; Patricia Vargas, the director of Catholic Social Services; and Tyler White, the CEO of Siksika Health Services.

Their final report is the result of months and months of often difficult but ultimately productive and extremely valuable work. Mr. Speaker, the task force liaised with experts and thought leaders from around the world and listened to presentations from nearly 100 individuals and organizations who shared upsetting, often first-hand details of one of the fastest growing crimes in Canada.

Alberta's Human Trafficking Task Force has compiled several calls to action that will make it more difficult for this horrific crime to continue and, just as importantly, will empower the survivors of human trafficking to recover from their own experiences and see justice done. One of their main recommendations, for instance, is to create an Alberta office to combat trafficking in persons. This office would be established as a partnership between government and community. It would provide support and access to services to victims and survivors of human trafficking.

All told, Mr. Speaker, the report contains 19 calls to action, 18 of which our government has already accepted or has accepted in principle. It will be a challenge, but it's vital that we all rise to meet it. Once again I want to reiterate my gratitude to the task force and each member for their work on this important issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### 2017 UCP Leadership Contest and 2022 Review

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, no one is surprised that someone currently caught up in an investigation by the RCMP for their leadership race is again raising countless corruption red flags around their leadership review. For those who don't recall, the Premier won the leadership race for the UCP over the newly elected MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, but he couldn't win without becoming wrapped up in an RCMP investigation around allegations of fraud, forgery, bribery, and propping up a kamikaze candidate to help him defeat that opponent. Shortly after becoming the Premier, he fired the Election Commissioner, who was also looking into his leadership campaign. The commissioner was fired after placing over \$200,000 in fines around that highly suspect UCP leadership race.

This Premier also changed election laws by allowing wealthy friends to buy over 400 party memberships a year for their closest friends, co-workers, employees, or whoever's information they have on hand without getting that individual's consent. The Premier legalized the exact corrupt practice he was already being investigated for.

Albertans cannot trust this Premier to run a fair leadership review, and he's made a mess of Alberta's election finance laws. Now, each and every one of us has heard the anger UCP members have with this Premier's shenanigans, rule change after rule change to help the Premier prevent an almost inevitable defeat at his leadership review – well, inevitable if it was run fairly. Just yesterday we learned that the increase in memberships is from the Premier's organizers securing thousands of memberships in bulk, again likely without the knowledge and consent of individuals who are now members.

We cannot trust this Premier anymore, and that's why my colleague is calling for the RCMP to look into these allegations with the upcoming leadership review. UCP members deserve to determine their own leader. This Premier is up to old Tory tricks. A decade ago we had ghosts on government planes; now we have phantom party members, and it's not lost on me that both haunted Premiers like to hang out in the sky palace. Here's hoping the UCP caucus can finally make the change Albertans deserve.

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

### School Construction in Sherwood Park

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are exciting times ahead for the children and parents within my constituency of Sherwood Park. The balanced budget presented last month has introduced funding to begin the design process for a new school in Sherwood Park. This new school would replace Sherwood Heights and l'école Campbelltown and provide children in Sherwood Park with a new school facility in which they can grow and thrive.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few groups and individuals I would like to thank for advocating strongly for this funding, that will ensure the best for the students of Sherwood Park. I would like to thank Pine Steet, Brentwood, and Westboro elementary schools as well as Sherwood Heights junior high school and l'école Campbelltown parents for their advocacy for a new school, which has made this investment a reality. The dedication of these parents to the children's success is inspiring and admirable.

Next I would like to thank the Elk Island public school board trustees and their chair, Trina Boymook. This group of parents and community leaders has been working tirelessly to ensure that the best educational experience is provided to the children of Sherwood Park.

Last but certainly not least I would like to thank the principals of Sherwood Heights and l'école Campbelltown schools. Mr. Amit Mali, principal of Sherwood Heights, and Mr. Greg Probert, principal of l'école Campbelltown, are two individuals who are invaluable members of the Sherwood Park community. Their dedication along with the dedication of the school's administration and teaching staff ensures that the children of Sherwood Park receive the quality education that will set them up for success in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, we love and support public education. Thank you very much.

### 2017 UCP Leadership Contest and 2022 Review

**Mr. Deol:** The allegations made concerning UCP election practices are deeply concerning. The idea that anyone in the UCP would think it's okay to use someone's ID without their knowledge to acquire their vote is horrible. It's corrupt, and it cuts directly against the democratic values that come with being in Canada. The idea that anyone in the UCP would think it's okay to take advantage of those with a language barrier to win a political contest is simply disgusting, but sadly this is where we are with this Premier and those around him.

1:40

The RCMP has been investigating the leadership race that elected the Premier for over three years now: allegations of fake e-mails, stolen personal identification numbers, the use of software to hide where votes were being cast, and stolen votes. People have found out from the media and the RCMP that votes were cast in their names using e-mails that weren't theirs. The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Seniors and Housing, the Minister of Community and Social Services, the former Minister of Culture, the deputy House leader, and the Member for Sherwood Park were also questioned by the RCMP in this investigation.

But it hasn't stopped there. Only last week we heard a disturbing allegation that people supporting a candidate in the UCP leadership review were approaching certain companies to get copies of

identification to attach to membership forms, likely to get ballots. I deeply hope that this allegation is false.

This Premier likes to pride himself as an ally of ethnic communities. He calls himself the Minister of Curry in a Hurry. Not fear, not smear: serious allegations have been investigated by Canadian police since this Premier has been in office. If this Premier has any real respect for these communities and their families, who make their home there, he will stand today and condemn anyone who attempts to campaign like this. He will welcome transparency into his party to ensure that this isn't happening, and he will do it now. I hope the Premier does the right thing.

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

### Budget 2022

**Mr. Milliken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week your United Conservative government voted for Budget 2022, and for the first time since 2014 I can say this: the budget is balanced. Now – and this is very important – the budget is balanced on the projection of \$70 oil. For context, right now western Canadian select is about 100 bucks; WTI is about \$114. This is important because it shows that our government is not gambling with any high oil price lottery windfall to balance the budget. At \$70 oil a balanced budget is no fluke.

In fact, if we kept spending on the trajectory of the NDP budgets, today we would have a \$6.5 billion deficit, meaning even more debt that would have to be paid off unfairly by future generations like my son and daughter. Don't ever forget that the NDP added over \$70 billion in new debt, which still has to be paid off, still has to be financed. All they did was make a bunch of bankers rich and effectively bankrupted our province. The NDP drove away hundreds of billions of dollars of investment. All those jobs and people forced to leave the province: I met many of these families and their hard-knock stories while door-knocking in Calgary-Currie. Possibly worst of all, under the NDP the GDP shrank, which ironically made us more reliant on oil and gas royalties to pay for social programs, AISH, schools, and health care.

Mr. Speaker, there is good news in our balanced budget. Revenue increased across all sectors of the economy: manufacturing, fintech, venture capital, film and television, energy, hydrogen, agriculture. All this means real economic diversification. We are also spending the most ever in history on our children's education, and to support our world-class health care system, we did something the NDP never did and – let's be honest – they never would: we brought fiscal responsibility back to the province. We did what Albertans asked. We balanced the budget.

Thank you.

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

### Official Opposition Policies

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the UCP is making memes celebrating interpersonal violence and ruining Alberta's international reputation in environmental, social, and corporate governance, the NDP has been working with Albertans to build excellent policies focused on Alberta's future. Over the last year albertasfuture.ca has had over 75,000 Albertans participate in consultations focused on where the Alberta economy needs to go and building a path to get us there.

Many of the policies have been announced before the government has been able to even cobble together anything, and policies such as our hydrogen policy are described by industry as

more detailed, thoughtful, and realistic than UCP policies. The tech industry has celebrated our Alberta investor tax credit policy, that was created after extensive consultation on [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca). Most recently our significant consultation process has led to a private member's bill calling for race-based data collection.

Occasionally we have seen the government borrow from our policy website, but we encourage Albertans to go directly to the source. At [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca) you will find policies on economic expansion, agricultural innovation, infrastructure development, affordable child care, protection of the eastern slopes, renewable energy, postsecondary education, tourism, hydrogen, lithium, making life more affordable, and many others.

Albertans want a government that is focused on building our province, not a government that wastes its time on internal fighting day after day. While this government is wasting \$82,000 a day on a useless war room that hasn't produced anything of value in over three years, [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca) has produced dozens of policies that will make life better for all of us. We will help you fight inflation by reindexing personal income tax and seniors' benefits, we will create new jobs in the fast-growing tech, agriculture, and renewable energy sectors, and we protect the history and the environment, on which we all depend.

Albertans, join us at [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca).

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

### COVID-19 Vaccination

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year there was a disproportionate amount of interest in my health by the mainstream media and the NDP. Heck, even one of the members hacked into the public health care system. Given his position with the NDP it begs the question if the leader actually put him up to it.

In contrast, I maintained that people's choices for vaccination were their own and that they would do what's right for their families, their communities, and themselves with the information that was made available. When it comes to personal health information, in my opinion, the only thing a waitress or a server should be asking you when they're taking your order for a burger is, "Do you want fries with that?" not what your health history is.

I never asked for a QR code. I paid for my own testing results, that were showing negative. My family and I, back in January 2020, had COVID, so I had much interest in the serology test results as they became available. As a private pilot I have to complete a medical performed every two years. The medical includes an ECG, all relevant blood work, vision, et cetera. It served as a baseline for my health postvaccination as I passed my flight medical with no issues at all.

The same day as my medical I had my first shot of Pfizer. Though I didn't believe I needed it because my immune system is working fine, I did it anyway for a couple of reasons. One was to be able to document my own health information, serology, and potential side effects first-hand. The second was so that I didn't lose my voice in this place. The rhetoric and the mainstream media pressure of last fall was in hyperdrive, pitting Albertans against one another, and I didn't want to lose the ability to speak for those people that made their own choices.

Postinjection I was sick in bed for two days. Over the next three months I had progressive health issues, losing function in my right shoulder, pains in my left jaw, pain in my left side, chest pains, severe aches and pains in my legs. Postinjection serology showed that I'd posted 197 out of a possible 250. I saw my doc on the 22nd, seeking help. In the examinations he saw my health declining and ordered immediate workups. He found that I had a partially

collapsed lung, which was causing the chest pains, but no heart damage because of the blood work.

To put it in short, Mr. Speaker, there are way more than 2,000 people out there suffering. If you're having issues with people listening to you, send it to me. I'll see what I can do.

### Ukraine Donations

**Mr. Bilous:** A lot of times in this Chamber people stand up and talk about the things they don't like, the people they disagree with, and the topics we can't align on. But sometimes we get to come together to work on a common cause. Today is one of those days.

A little while ago something really meaningful started to take shape. Two former members of this House dedicated to stand up for what they believe in asked us all for some help. Former Premier Ed Stelmach and former Deputy Premier Thomas Lukaszuk put out a call to action to help Ukraine, and Albertans answered.

More than a thousand Ukrainians fleeing their ravaged homeland are set to arrive here in Edmonton today on a flight supported by donations from LOT Polish Airlines and Shell Canada, with hosts awaiting them in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Proving that politicians of all stripes can work together on important things, Lukaszuk and Stelmach worked with Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland to identify those who could come to Canada on that plane, entirely free of charge. Once they land, after the passengers depart, the plane will be stocked with donations organized with help from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Canadian Polish Historical Society as well as people from all over Alberta. Donations heading back to the war-torn region will include essential supplies such as emergency medical equipment, items for seniors, and items such as sleeping bags and other outdoor survival equipment.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Ed Stelmach is of Ukrainian heritage. Thomas Lukaszuk lived under martial law in Poland. This is a personal effort for both the organizers and those who have donated. I want to thank all members of this Chamber who collected or made donations to help the people of Ukraine. Albertans' hearts are with Ukraine and with those going through unimaginable trauma fleeing a war zone while missing their families, their homes, and their country.

This is an important initiative, and I want to thank these two former members for this important work, helping a thousand Ukrainians, and the many Albertans opening up their homes and hearts. But there is more to be done, and I'm calling on the provincial and federal governments to step up and do more for people who need their help. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

### Ukrainian Refugees

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the generosity and support of donors, corporate partners, organizations like the Ed Stelmach Community Foundation, and volunteers like former Premier Stelmach and former Deputy Premier Lukaszuk, tonight about 400 Ukrainians will arrive in this province after fleeing war with Russia. Albertans are united behind the people of Ukraine, and they are fighting this conflict with compassion. This may be the first plane, but we all know it likely will not be the last. My question to the Premier is: has he been advised on how many

more Ukrainian refugees are expected to arrive in Alberta? Is there a number he's preparing for?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the very relevant and thoughtful question as well as for the statement from her colleague. No, I have not received information from the government of Canada on an estimate although I have heard that approximately 30,000 temporary resident visas have been issued under the special federal program by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. We can certainly expect more, and we have certainly indicated that Alberta would be delighted to receive and help settle a disproportionate number of those individuals. They will overwhelmingly be women and children as men under the age of 65 are not permitted to leave the country, and we will be there to do everything we can to support them.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much for that answer, and I want to acknowledge that Alberta has been providing both humanitarian and nonlethal aid on an overseas basis. Beyond that, though, as folks arrive, we must do work to prepare with our immigrant settlement agencies. I know that when we engaged with settling 4,000 Syrian refugees, that work was complex as we had challenges related to trauma and integration. As such, at the time we increased funding for settlement by about 30 per cent. Has the Premier considered targeting more funding to settlement agencies to help meet these challenges?

**Mr. Kenney:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for another good question on this, Mr. Speaker. The answer is yes. When refugees are resettled, as government-assisted refugees they are typically supported by the government of Canada, including through the refugee assistance program and their funding to immigrant settlement organizations. However, these folks coming from Ukraine are not classically *de jure* refugees. They are, rather, temporary residents, and therefore there is no automatic federal support for them either through RAP or the settlement organizations. We are prepared to provide that support should it be necessary. We're working with the settlement organizations on . . .

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

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you again for that answer. We know this is the largest displacement of people since World War II, almost 4 million people. Imagine the population of our entire province fleeing war and violence, folks curled up in train stations and humanitarian aid tents and evacuation convoys, hoping for the chance to come to places like Canada. This pressure means we're going to have to look at support services in other areas like mental health counselling and schooling and health care. To the Premier: what type of work is being done now to prepare our children's supports, social services, education system for the arrival that we are anticipating?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Mr. Kenney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I can inform the House that the government, through the Department of Culture, has already provided \$350,000 to the Canadian Ukrainian Congress, Alberta chapter, partly to help with their efforts to begin welcoming those individuals. I think many of them could be provided special support through the community that speaks their language and is familiar with their culture and context. But we certainly are working across departments and ministries to prepare for the additional kinds of social services that will be required by this population, that has been traumatized.

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

### 2017 UCP Leadership Contest and 2022 Review

**Ms Notley:** Well, change of pace, Mr. Speaker. Last week our party put forward ideas to protect Albertans facing utility shut-off because they can't pay their bills, to prevent coal mining in the eastern slopes, and to create more jobs in the tech sector. Meanwhile this UCP government is collapsing: shocking court documents, leaked recordings, more allegations of wrong-doing and corruption, a Premier who, in his own words, calls his party an asylum and his members, quote, lunatics. My question is simple: when does this end? How much longer do Albertans have to put up with this callous, corrupt, and chaotic government?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, that's all ridiculous, and that word I was applying to people we have not permitted to run for us because of extreme views outside of the mainstream of Alberta politics. This government is leading Canada in economic growth, in job creation, almost historic diversification across our economy, which is why last week we passed through this place the first balanced budget in 14 years, a government that has kept 88 per cent of our campaign commitments. I understand why the NDP is concerned, because they're now falling behind in the polls, because Albertans want a government focused, like they are, on economic growth, jobs, and pipelines.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the allegations of corruption are actually coming from inside the Premier's own party. This weekend we learned more details about the alleged fraudulent actions undertaken by the Premier's 2017 leadership campaign; you know, the one under RCMP investigation, where the Premier was apparently interviewed. These details included the wholesale acquisition of ideas to create fake members and log fake votes. Today we wrote to the RCMP and asked them to keep an eye on the April 9 leadership vote. Does the Premier support this call, and if not, can he explain why he feels he's above the law?

**Mr. Kenney:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP tried all the same fear and smear in the last election, and you know what it got them? The first majority government to be defeated after just one term, and this government secured a million votes for the first time ever in Alberta electoral history. While the NDP talks about internal party democracy, maybe she can explain to us why it is that 25 per cent of the votes in the NDP leadership elections is reserved for Gil McGowan and his union boss friends as opposed to regular NDP members. Is that why they call it the New Democratic Party?

**Ms Notley:** Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier keeps claiming he has nothing to do with this stuff – deny, deny, deny, deflect – except we also now have sworn statements from his former associates made to a public investigator, you know, the one they fired, saying that when it comes to the kamikaze campaign, he was in the room. He gave the orders, he talked about the money, he poured the Dark Horse. These allegations of illegality keep coming one after the other after the other. My question is this: is the least trusted Premier in Canada really saying that it's everybody else being dishonest, not him?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP is becoming so politically desperate that they're now resorting to citing somebody who was prohibited from running for the UCP because his campaign team physically assaulted a journalist to the point of unconsciousness. Now, that's just about what you would expect from the NDP, who



had one of their members break the law to seek to violate my personal privacy and who did violate the privacy of another Alberta citizen. That was acceptable in the NDP because of the campaign of personal destruction led by their leader.

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

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here today on behalf of our democracy. Albertans should be able to vote their conscience and do so free from intimidation and coercion. This Premier has thrown all of that into question. The allegations of what happened in the 2017 UCP leadership race and what is happening now during the current UCP leadership review undermine trust and confidence in our elections. Can the Premier assure this House here and now that no vote will be cast in the UCP leadership review without an Albertan's consent?

**The Speaker:** You know, I take a fairly wide swath of questions about government policy. I find it very difficult to find that that particular question had anything to do with government policy, more an internal party matter that is to take place. If the Premier would like to respond, he's welcome to; if not, we'll move on.

**Mr. Kenney:** Yeah. Mr. Speaker, every member in the United Conservative Party will get a secure mail ballot, handled by an internationally recognized auditing firm, with scrutineers overseeing the whole process, unlike the NDP. When they have a leadership election, according to their constitution 25 per cent of the votes are reserved for big union bosses, for Gil McGowan. Maybe the leader of the NDP could tell us: what deals did she make with Gil McGowan to secure his 25 per cent of supervotes, which they have in their twisted, nondemocratic NDP system?

**Mr. Sabir:** The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that no one trusts this Premier. So many in his own party believe that he won the leadership of the party using corrupt practices. We know that the investigation into that corruption is still ongoing, and today we learned that the Premier was interviewed by the RCMP in regard to this matter. Can the Premier tell this House here and now when he was questioned by the RCMP and why he waited until today to make this public, and can he also update this House on which ministers and staff have also been questioned as part of this investigation?

2:00

**Mr. Kenney:** Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the Election Commissioner and the office of the electoral officer investigated these allegations, and you know who were fined? You know who were fined? The two people that they are citing as sources; one of whose campaign team physically assaulted a journalist to the point of unconsciousness. This is classic politics of personal destruction from the same NDP whose ethics critic violated the law by seeking to violate my personal privacy. Why do they do this?

**Mr. Sabir:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier plays games instead of giving real answers. He treats these questions as if they are not legitimate when our democracy and free and fair elections are being called into question.

Today I have written to the RCMP to urgently request that they immediately expand the scope of their investigation into the 2017 UCP leadership contest to include the current 2022 UCP leadership review. Will the Premier commit to supporting the request by also writing a letter to the RCMP and urging them to expand the scope of their investigation?

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the pattern of the politics of personal destruction that leads the NDP ethics critic to believe that it is right and justified to clearly violate the law in order to violate my personal privacy. They are reckless about this.

But here's the good news. Albertans observed their politics of fear, smear, and personal destruction in the spring of 2019, and they sent the job-killing, high-tax NDP packing. [interjections]

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

### Premier's Office Staff Political Activity

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, during my time as minister I was proud to work with dedicated public servants who devoted their time working for Albertans. This government's approach seems different. During a time when Albertans have been hammered with a cost-of-living crisis by this government, the Premier is telling his staff that it's more important to help him keep his job as party leader than it is to help struggling families and businesses. He's been dispatching more and more of his staff to campaign for him even if it means the normal work of the Premier's office is sitting undone. Can the Premier confirm how many staff have stopped working for Albertans and are instead working to save his career?

**Mr. Kenney:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what. If the NDP wants a new rule where no political staff ever work on political campaigns, they should tell us.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you this. On the cost of living – on the cost of living – we are going through 30-year-high inflation. Food prices are up 18 per cent since the NDP brought in its carbon tax, and right now they are cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to raise the carbon tax by another 25 per cent on April Fool's Day and by 400 per cent over the next eight years. That would cost the average family \$2,000 a year. Will the NDP vote with us to stop the April 1 carbon tax hike?

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, I asked a straightforward question.

Now, when this government promised to be laser focused on jobs in the last campaign, we didn't know the Premier meant laser focused on his own job. I'm hearing daily from Albertans scared about making ends meet, who are seeing utility bills skyrocket month after month, with no support. Weirdly, not a single constituent has stopped me worried about this leader's campaign and his political fortunes. Can the Premier explain why keeping his leadership is more important to him than supporting Alberta families? How much of the job of Premier is going undone as he spends his time campaigning?

**Mr. Kenney:** You know, Mr. Speaker, this government is spending its time balancing the budget, growing the economy, creating jobs, and, yes, reducing the cost of living for Albertans, which is why on April 1 we will suspend the Alberta fuel tax, saving \$1.4 billion for Albertans on an annual basis, in addition to the \$150 electricity rebate – together, \$1.7 billion of consumer relief – while the NDP is cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to raise the carbon tax by 25 per cent later this week.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier keeps saying that it's very normal for his staff to be staffing call centres for his leadership campaign. It is not normal. The government is not the Premier's reserve campaign team. It is not a taxpayer-funded call centre to bail him out of the situation he created. Phone calls are not being answered, e-mails are not being responded to, and concerned Albertans are feeling abandoned during this cost-of-living crisis that the UCP government has created. What do Albertans desperate

for help who want to raise concerns have to do to be heard? Buy a UCP membership? Oh, wait; someone already did that for them.

**Mr. Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, I distinctly recall at my by-election, in December 2017, seeing so many cars with Legislature parking passes as NDP staffers drove down to Calgary-Lougheed. They'd never been there. They don't spend a lot of time in the Calgary suburbs, but they did that day, and they were probably still on the public payroll, unlike a handful of staff who have taken a leave of absence, an unpaid leave of absence.

The NDP is standing here telling us that they are cheering on the 25 per cent increase in the carbon tax on April 1. Will they stand and vote with us to tell Trudeau to scrap it?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

### Utility and Fuel Costs

**Mrs. Frey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rising cost of everything from food to fuel and electricity has put pressure on individuals and families across the province. People in Brooks-Medicine Hat are suffering from price hikes to essential and everyday items, and households are not able to budget like they used to. The cost of living is becoming overwhelmingly unbearable. Albertans are wondering how they can continue to make ends meet, especially with rising fuel prices. To the Premier: what measures are being implemented to reduce the price Albertans are paying at the pump?

**Mr. Kenney:** I thank the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat for her good question, Mr. Speaker. With inflation at a 30-year high and fuel costs going up because of the carbon tax, we need to take real action, which is why this government is stepping up with by far the boldest cost relief of any government in Canada effective April 1, reducing the provincial fuel tax by 100 per cent, 13 cents a litre. That will save Albertans on an annualized basis, if prices stay high, \$1.4 billion. Unfortunately, some of that will be lost to the Trudeau carbon tax unless he . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Mrs. Frey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier. Given that the cost of electricity has also continued to rise in recent months, partly due to the failed policies of the previous NDP government, in which electricity hit its highest prices ever, and given that our government is taking action to provide relief for families from fuel prices, to the Premier: what measures are being implemented to help Albertans who have faced and continue to face high utility bills this year?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Mr. Kenney:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, Albertans are paying for the NDP's huge energy policy mistakes. That's why we've seen electricity inflation. They spent 7 and a half billion dollars on additional transmission. They wasted \$1.3 billion on their power purchasing agreement fiasco. They stopped the cheapest and most reliable baseload power in our thermal coal plants and then conspired with Justin Trudeau on their carbon tax. We're taking real action to protect Albertans from the costs of all of those bad policies with a \$150 rebate that will be on their electricity bills as soon as possible. That's worth \$300 million to \$400 million of relief . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Mrs. Frey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier. Given that these relief measures are helping Albertans through a

volatile period but there's still federal legislation that affects us all and given that the federal government has a plan to continue to increase the carbon tax on fuel on April 1 in perpetuity and further given that this will only create more financial pain for Albertans, to the Premier: what will the government of Alberta do to try to stop the increase to the federal carbon tax and stand up for Alberta families?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Mr. Kenney:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. The Bank of Canada itself has said that the April 1 25 per cent increase in the Liberal-NDP carbon tax will raise inflation by another half a percentage point when inflation is already at a 30-year high. That is why we today have tabled a motion calling on the federal Liberal-NDP coalition to stop this scheduled increase. I've also signed a letter with the Premiers of Saskatchewan and Manitoba with the same call. Please, to Justin Trudeau, just show a bit of common sense and a little regard for people who can barely pay the bills today.

### Premier's Leadership

**Ms Hoffman:** Mr. Speaker, on Thursday UCP MLAs heard what the Premier really thinks about them. In a recording the Premier describes his leadership review as, quote, the lunatics taking over the asylum, and described his opponents as: bugs attracted to the Premier's bright light. Earlier that day five UCP MLAs stood in front of the Legislature in protest to the Premier changing the rules. For the sake of those watching at home, can the Premier clarify which of his MLAs are lunatics, in his opinion? The MLA for Red Deer-South, Airdrie-Cochrane, Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, Calgary-Fish Creek? Which is it, Premier?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier already said today, some of the people that he was referring to are not members of our party and have not been allowed to run for our party, including a member, who the NDP are using as their source, whose campaign beat a member of the press to unconsciousness. Shame on the NDP. Let me tell you, this side of this House is never going to be lectured by that member, who referred to Albertans as sewer rats. Shame on her. She should never stand up in this place and try to lecture people on how to speak about Albertans after her despicable actions when she sat on this side of the House.

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 2:10.

2:10

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that Albertans are beyond exhausted with the unending drama and disrespect coming from the current government and given that the current Premier of the Divided Conservative Party is forcing government staff to campaign for him and given that 58 per cent of Albertans think it's time for this Premier to resign, can the Premier clarify for all Albertans who don't trust him or his leadership why he thinks we're the lunatics or bugs?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, the desperation from the NDP is quite humorous. The more their polls go down, the more you're going to see this. This is the only playbook that the NDP has, complete fear and smear, trying to hide from the great things that are taking place inside this province. But don't worry; we're not going to fall for it, and Albertans can rest assured that this side of

the House is going to stay united and make sure people like that never get power again inside this province.

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 2:11.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that the current Premier fired the Culture minister after she criticized him for his sky palace patio party but given that the Premier stands behind his liquor cabinet and will defend them to the bitter end – like the Health minister, who shouted at doctors in his driveway in front of his family, like the Justice minister, who tried to interfere with the administration of justice, and then there's the Minister of Environment and Parks – since the current Premier cares more about loyalty than the ministers being competent at their jobs, will the Premier admit that he believes his own UCP MLAs are the lunatics and bugs? Or why won't he kick those guys out of cabinet and put in . . .

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

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, the deputy leader of a party who hid the Member for Edmonton-South hacking members of this party's personal records, their health records, who has had, on top of RCMP investigations – there's only one party in this House who has had their doors kicked in by the RCMP with search warrants. You will continue to see this behaviour from the NDP because – you know why? – they're losing and they're desperately panicking as their poll numbers go down. This side of the House, though, is not going to focus on junior high politics because we came here to make life better for Albertans.

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

#### **Cancer Care and Medical Physicists in Calgary**

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP's war on health care continues to harm Albertans and their families. At the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary a quarter of the facility's medical physicists have resigned, including the program director. Two more are expected to leave soon. These highly trained specialists are a critical part of the care team for cancer patients in Alberta. Why is the Minister of Health putting Albertans with cancer at risk by driving these essential health care professionals away?

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

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. These medical physicists play an important part in providing cancer care to Albertans, but I'd like to set the facts straight. There is an issue in regard to personnel. There are currently four vacancies out of 22 positions in Calgary. I've been speaking with AHS. They have a plan to be able to fill those vacancies and work with the University of Calgary to be able to hire more. But let me be clear. This will not impact treatment for cancer patients now, nor in the future. We will get this solved.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given, Mr. Speaker, that if there was not a problem, 24 physicians would not have tried to speak out and given that if there was not a problem, this government would not have tried to muzzle those doctors at the cancer centre by telling them not to speak with reporters and given that a letter signed by those doctors says, "We are concerned that we will be unable to provide our current standard of care or indeed any treatment; the safety of our routine daily cancer treatments are put at risk by a medical

physics department that's understaffed, overworked, and inexperienced," does the minister understand that his failure to act highlights exactly why Albertans cannot trust the UCP on health care?

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

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member may not know this, but AHS has already acted. So just to put this into context, we have 50 of these types of positions across the province. There is an issue in Calgary, which has been identified. AHS has already made an adjustment in pay to be able to better attract and retain, and they are working to be able to fill the four vacant positions. We understand how important these positions are. We're working to fill them, and we're also working with the University of Calgary to be able to create a pipeline for the future.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given, Mr. Speaker, that if this government understood, we would not be repeatedly coming down to the wire with physicians in this province – the work done by these medical physicists is crucial to world-class care in Alberta, and they're expecting that the Calgary cancer centre will deliver that – and given that the UCP hasn't set aside a single dollar to staff that facility and given that now it seems this government can't even hold on to the staff they have, will this minister admit responsibility for his failures, or will he simply admit that the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock was right and their plan for the Calgary cancer centre was simply to have a fancy box?

**Mr. Copping:** Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated, I'm very pleased with the work that's going on in building the Calgary cancer centre. This will be one of the largest cancer centres in North America, and we have committed to be able to provide funding for the cancer centre. In fact, we have committed to increase the capacity of our entire health care: \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year and the year after that, an increase of \$1.8 billion. We are making significant investment in terms of capital, and we have more health care professionals than ever in this province, 28,735 nurses, up to . . .

#### **Premier's Leadership** (continued)

**Mr. Loewen:** In recently leaked remarks the Premier took a page out of his buddy Trudeau's name-calling playbook and compared his opponents to, quote, bugs and lunatics, yet there's been no apology for these disgraceful, dehumanizing remarks. The Premier's complete focus on mudslinging means he's failed to deliver on many items, including the Recall Act, which is still not in force. The result is a recent poll showing that a majority of Albertans from every region of the province want this Premier to resign. To the Premier: is it current government policy or just current practice to refer to 57 per cent of Calgarians and 62 per cent of Edmontonians wanting you to resign for failing to deliver on key promises as, quote, lunatics?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, that's not what the government said at all. But I can tell you that what I heard from a lot of constituents about that member is his close friendship with Brian Jean, who's called for a coalition with the NDP, similar to what we've seen in Ottawa. In fact, that member and his friend Brian Jean have called for putting the Leader of the Official Opposition, the NDP leader, into cabinet. So I guess my question to him: does he support her as well with mandatory vaccinations? And what's

next? He's going to stand in this place and call for door-to-door vaccinations like the Leader of the Official Opposition?

**Mr. Loewen:** Given that that's more fear and smear, just like the NDP, from that member and given that in the Premier's slanderous leak the Premier stated, I quote, the lunatics are trying to take over the asylum and given that the, quote, lunatics the Premier is referring to include duly elected members of the UCP caucus and cabinet and given that managing the asylum now takes up so much of the Premier's time that he has failed to deliver on a number of platform commitments, including the citizen's initiative bill which is still not in force, can the asylum operator please rise and tell us exactly how many lunatics are currently within the UCP caucus opposing this Premier and his practice of failing to deliver on key promises?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier was referring very clearly to people who are doing racist things and bringing forward hate, who have no space inside our party, not to our members or any members of the Legislative Assembly. But, again, I can't help but notice that the hon. member avoided the question. Does he support the Jean-NDP alliance? Yes or no? Is it part of his policy to bring the NDP into cabinet and force their disastrous policies on this Legislature and on the people of Alberta? Is he even going to stand up today and vote with them as they – I suspect the NDP will continue to support the Justin Trudeau carbon tax.

**Mr. Loewen:** Given that the minister continues to give misinformation and given that with the way things are going, the Leader of the Opposition won't need a kamikaze candidate in the next provincial election because she has this Premier and given how the Premier's failed leadership was felt in the most recent federal and municipal elections and given that this Premier is so wrapped up in his own drama and scorched earth politics that he can't get any work done for the people of Alberta, including failing to deliver on this government's fair deal agenda, to the Premier: were you really Alberta's kamikaze candidate all along, or is it just your government's policy to fail to deliver on key promises?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, while this hon. member focuses on playing junior high politics, this Premier and this government have been hard at work doing things like balancing the budget, restoring 130,000 jobs or so just recently, recovering all of the jobs lost by the NDP, on and on and on. While that member plays junior high politics and works on trying to develop his coalition with the NDP, like you see in Ottawa, and playing games inside this Legislature, this government is going to continue to go work every day for the people of Alberta.

### Postsecondary Education Funding

**Mr. Bilous:** Mr. Speaker, if you looked out your windows at the Legislature today, you would have seen students coming forward on a day of action to fight for their own well-being. Investing in the postsecondary sector is a surefire way to grow our economy, to attract and retain brilliant people, and to build resilient and thoughtful communities. We need to equip future leaders with the tools necessary to thrive, not push them away. Students came here to demand an end to the cuts in postsecondary and to call on this government to reverse their disastrous decisions. What does this government have against students? Will the minister listen to them and restore funding to our postsecondaries, and if not, why not?

2:20

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we have nothing against students. In fact, we're doing the opposite to implement many of the objectives and goals that students have asked us to implement. The students have asked us to provide more funding for low-income students; we've done that. The students have asked us to put more into work-integrated learning opportunities; we've done that. As well, we're providing over \$171 million in new funding to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions to ensure that every student has the opportunity to pursue . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Bilous:** Given that last year almost half of the provincial cuts to postsecondary were absorbed by the U of A to avoid harming students but there's only so much these universities can take and given that this year millions more were cut and given that this government has allowed tuition to increase anywhere from 17 to 105 per cent and given that these massive increases will deter students from coming here, therefore shrinking our talent pipeline, to the minister: will he recognize his actions are hurting students, businesses, and our economy and reverse these cuts already?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Mr. Speaker, as I've done, you know, numerous times in the House – I guess the member opposite hasn't heard that tuition in Alberta today is below the national average. I have to repeat it many times, but I just can't get through to the members opposite. You know, I have some fancy charts in my office as well I'd be happy to share with them to help highlight that information. As well, as I mentioned, we're providing \$12 million over three years to support our existing scholarships as well as \$15 million over three years to create new bursaries to assist low-income students.

### Speaker's Ruling Gestures

**The Speaker:** I'm not entirely sure what sort of hand gestures the government deputy whip is making or the Opposition House Leader – you know who I'm talking to – but whatever this is, it's not appropriate inside the Assembly.

### Postsecondary Education Funding (continued)

**Mr. Bilous:** Only the UCP would celebrate being average.

Given that Alberta already falls short of other provinces in offering financial aid and given that this government isn't even getting the student aid out the door to students and given that more young people are leaving Alberta, wanting to leave Alberta, or wanting to stay away from Alberta than in a generation, to the minister: is this government really going to stand there and claim their policies are working when it's so clear that they're driving future leaders out of the province?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not true, what the member opposite is suggesting there. You know, there have been some recent reports that I think the member is referring to from Can West and other organizations. I encourage the member to take a close look. There are a number of recommendations in there as to what the government can do to support postsecondary education, and in fact the government is already moving forward on many of those. It calls for greater investment into work-integrated learning; we're doing that. It calls for actually expanding apprenticeship education; we're doing that. We're taking these steps and more to

ensure that our students here in Alberta are able to find the programming that they need right here at home.

### Utility Costs

**Mr. Nielsen:** Mr. Speaker, recently I received a message from Margaret. She has a child with a disability and cannot afford this month's gas bill. She's looking for assistance from this government, but all this government chose to do is create a fake gas rebate plan that won't impact her and doesn't come into effect until next year. I know that the associate minister is proud of his plan to do nothing for Albertans, but how can he hear this story of Margaret and refuse to do anything? Why do big-time CEOs get billions and Margaret gets nothing? She's drowning in debt, and this government won't lift a finger.

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

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we are empathetic with any Albertan that is struggling with the high cost of utilities. What I would encourage the member to do is to speak to that individual and let them know that there are options and there are supports. The place that they should start, because they don't have to do the work themselves: they can actually contact the Utilities Consumer Advocate. They can actually speak to people online, and they will give them advice not just on different contracts but also on the supports that are available for Albertans that are struggling. Again, that's the Utilities Consumer Advocate, and I advise the member to share that information.

**Mr. Nielsen:** How about a real gas rebate?

Given that another constituent of mine, Amerire, recently received a \$500 electricity bill and given that rather than stepping up and helping these Albertans, the associate minister is high-fiving himself and boasting over a \$50-a-month rebate – \$50 – as in they're covering a measly 10 per cent, can the minister explain to my constituents: what are they supposed to do to cover the other 90 per cent? Take out a loan, another credit card, or sit in the dark freezing?

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

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fear on the other side of the House is just palpable. I guess they have access to the same polling data that we do.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I can only impress upon the member that we have brought in meaningful supports that will help Albertans, things like the \$150 electricity rebate, cancelling the 13-cents-a-litre gas tax on April 1. But the number one thing that we can do to keep utility prices low is keep the NDP away from the natural gas and electricity grid. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, given that I have more stories for the minister, like my constituent Marilyn who got a \$402 electricity bill, Charlene's bill has doubled, Danielle got a \$246 bill for natural gas alone, and Lorrie a \$300 electricity bill – these are real people with real struggles who can't make ends meet – what message does the associate minister have for all of these people? Will he finally take responsibility and commit to a real support program or pass the buck and ignore the concerns since he's done that since day one?

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

**Mr. Toews:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly acknowledge and understand that electricity prices have been going up. We are in a time of real inflation driven in part by high energy prices. We're doing all we can to position Albertans well to deal with these higher costs, but what Albertans need to understand around electricity is the fact that as consumers we're all paying exponentially more today because of the failed policies of the members across the aisle. They added 7 and a half billion dollars of unnecessary transmission costs, prematurely paid out power purchase agreements, costing Albertans \$1.3 billion, plus they brought in a carbon tax.

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

### Postsecondary Education Funding and Programs

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta 2030: building skills for jobs strategy aims to improve student access, and the UCP government has shown a commitment to doing so by prioritizing targeted enrolment growth at postsecondary institutions with a strategic investment of \$171 million in Budget 2022 to ensure students can meet labour market needs. To the Minister of Advanced Education: can you quantify the seat expansion the \$171 million will create for Alberta students? In what programs will these seats become available and when?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Mr. Speaker, great question, and, yes, happy to provide more details. The \$171 million, the historic investment, in fact, that we're making over three years in Budget 2022, will create over 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions and, just to be clear, more spaces than the NDP ever created when they were in government. We will create these seats in programs where there is additional demand, high-demand programs, including aviation, tech, health care, finance, engineering, and other areas, so that we can ensure that students are able to access in-demand programs.

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

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Budget 2022 provides over \$600 million in additional funding over the next three years for Alberta at work to ensure access to postsecondary education opportunities and the fact that expanding work-integrated learning opportunities is a key component of the Alberta 2030 strategy, to the same minister: how will students have guaranteed access to work opportunities within the province both during and after their programs of study so they can remain right here in Alberta?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Another great question, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, you know, there are many recommendations from Can West and the Alberta Colleges Economic Recovery Task Force and many other organizations that have outlined the importance of strengthening work-integrated learning. We're listening to them, and we're doing precisely that. In fact, in this recent budget there's \$6 million over three years to increase work-integrated learning opportunities. As well, we provided in previous years \$15 million to create new internships with Mitacs. These internships and co-ops will help ensure students . . .

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

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that a core part of Budget 2022, Alberta 2030, and Alberta's recovery plan is ensuring that individuals develop the

skills needed to thrive in the workforce of today and given that the changing nature of work demands that people remain agile in learning and skills development, to the same minister: what pathways exist for students and workers who want to reskill, upskill in how to do microcredentials? How do these feature in Alberta's postsecondary degree landscape?

2:30

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is bang on. You know, there are a number of reports, again, the Conference Board of Canada and other organizations, that point to the changing nature of work and point to the importance of fostering and developing reskilling opportunities within the province, so we're doing precisely that. Within this budget there's \$8 million over three years to create additional microcredential programs. These will help all Albertans reskill and upskill for the new economy. As well, this past summer we announced new funding for additional microcredential programs.

### Utility Costs (continued)

**Member Loyola:** Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to represent the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie and bring concerns of my constituents into this Legislature. My constituents are struggling because of the decisions of this government which cause utilities to skyrocket. I hear from them every single day. Families cannot afford to wait. They should not have to choose between paying utilities and putting food on their table. My constituent Wanda e-mailed me and said, quote: something needs to be done to stop these fees; please explain to me how this is fair. End quote. To the minister: how is removing price caps and allowing prices to skyrocket fair to Wanda?

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

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. The member is absolutely right. On the fee side, costs have continued to go up. You know, during their time in government they spent \$7.5 billion on transmission infrastructure, and now they want to gaslight all of us and ask: why are fees going up? Not only do Albertans have to pay off that \$7.5 billion, but they also have to pay the carbon tax as well, that their friend Justin Trudeau will be increasing on April 1.

**Member Loyola:** Joy, a constituent, e-mailed my office and said, quote: the increase in costs right now is ridiculous; I want to know how these increases can be justified. End quote. Given that this UCP government does not recognize that skyrocketing electricity bills hurt Albertans and their families, especially those on fixed incomes, and given that they are delaying taking action and given that any of the programs they claim to have put in place are completely fake, can the minister justify these cost increases to Albertans like Joy?

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, the member is correct, and their constituent is correct. Costs are rising. At the end of the day, there's one reason and one reason alone. That's because the NDP broke it. We are going to fix the issue that we have with transmission and distribution costs in this province, but it is going to be a longer term fix. While we're doing that, we have given all Albertans the \$150 rebate to give them some short-term relief. Again, the best thing

that we can do is to make sure that the NDP never gets near the natural gas or the electricity grid again.

**Member Loyola:** Not taking action is almost as bad as taking terrible action, and with this government it's always one or the other. Given that less money in the pockets of Albertans is less money that goes back into the local economy and given that in the fall the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity boasted in the Legislature that he would do nothing to help Albertans from massive price increases, will the associate minister acknowledge that the UCP government is responsible for this mess? Do the job of government, step up, lead now, stop living in the past, and help ...

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

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, the historical revisionist on that side of the House wants to quote me and tell me what I said, so let me say it clearly so the hon. member can write it down this time. We were asked if we were bringing rate caps like the NDP. Of course, we know that rate caps don't work. We're bringing in real, meaningful solutions that will address the fact that the NDP raised the cost of utilities for every Albertan. They broke the system; we're going to fix it.

### Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

**Ms Sigurdson:** Homelessness is increasing across the province, shelters are overwhelmed, and the UCP is inconsistent with funding shelters such as the Hope Mission. The Mustard Seed expressed in an *Edmonton Journal* article today that they want to be a temporary place where they can redirect people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing. Shelter staff are burning out, and the UCP is ignoring requests from the city of Edmonton to fund permanent supportive housing. While poverty and homelessness increase, why is the Minister of Seniors and Housing ignoring calls for permanent supportive housing with mental health support?

**Mr. Luan:** Mr. Speaker, providing support for people who have no home through shelters and the co-ordinated support for housing is important for our government. That's why in this budget we committed \$49 million for shelter support services. In addition to that, at the time when we provided more funding to the shelter services, \$21.5 million, we also established a provincial task force. We're looking at a structure, a new way, how we can provide comprehensive, co-ordinated support services for this.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Given that there's a clear solution to this ongoing crisis of poverty, one that has been researched and supported around the globe – that is, housing, particularly an investment in permanent supportive housing – and given that the province ignores calls from the cities and from organizations to fund permanent supportive housing and given that these support systems rely on the government funding for their operations, why is the UCP ignoring experts, ignoring municipal partners, and ignoring people in this province with lived experience and leaving the most vulnerable Albertans on the streets?

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

**Ms Pon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The capital plan for 2022 increased overall funding over three years by \$42.4 million compared to capital plan 2021. This budget is, in fact, the first year of stronger foundations as we conduct the needs assessment in communities, develop innovative models, and expand our

partnerships. The budget in the coming year will ramp up as the community needs and assessments and partnerships are developed.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Given that it's not just front-line workers who are calling on the government to act – chambers of commerce and downtown business associations all know the solution to social disorder and concerns brought forward by their customers is to provide a home with wraparound support – and given that there is a human rights argument in favour of supportive housing as well as an economic one, what will it take for this government to realize the crisis is their responsibility and to commit long-term, stable funding to support those impacted by the rising levels of homelessness?

**Mr. Luan:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the hon. member raising a very complex issue. Homelessness is a complex and difficult social issue to tackle. That's why we appointed a provincial task force with experts from various sectors, from shelter to supporting housing, from social services, health, the recovery-oriented continuum of care. We're taking a drastic new approach, looking at the issue from a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach for this.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

### Ukraine-Russia Conflict

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of World War II, in 1946, many in Europe were on the verge of starvation. Their cities were bombed-out ruins. People were homeless and living as displaced persons all over Europe. With the defeat of fascism in 1945, the first issue was to help feed and house the millions of displaced Europeans. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: what can the people of Alberta and this government, who have a long and close relationship with the people of Ukraine, do to help meet the needs of those Ukrainians who find themselves displaced in Europe?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that very important question. You know, the people of Ukraine, who helped settle our province: they helped build our province. I have been inspired by the phone calls, the e-mails, the contact, and the meetings that we have had from ordinary Albertans across all regions of our province asking how they can help. I can assure that particular member that Alberta and Albertans have a strong bond with the people of Ukraine, and we will be there for them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Ukraine is one of the key nations in the world for food exportation and given that it is likely that the war in Ukraine is going to affect world food supplies and given that Alberta is going to be looked to by the world to help replace the food losses from the war in Ukraine and given that fertilizer costs for farmers in Alberta have skyrocketed over the last several years, to the minister of agriculture: what can the Alberta government do to address the shortage of fertilizer production in this province and help farmers to grow the food that is going to be so badly needed around the world in the next few years?

2:40

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great question. I know that the whole agricultural community globally is watching what's happening as Russia has invaded the literal breadbasket of the world. Fertilizer prices: historic highs globally. We're fortunate here in Alberta. In talking to our fertilizer companies, we know that there is enough supply in Alberta for spring plant 2022, very fortunate in that regard. But the biggest thing: we need to continue our fight against things like the carbon tax. When I talk to these companies, they want to build more production in this province, and they won't. They'll do it south of the border and rail it up.

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

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in post World War II Europe the Marshall Plan helped to rebuild European prosperity by targeting the goods and services that Europe needed to rebuild and given that one of the major issues that Europe is going to face as a result of the war in Ukraine is energy sufficiency and given that Alberta has the third-largest reserves of natural gas and that this gas is needed by Europe to replace Russian energy, to the Minister of Energy: what actions are being taken to supply Europe with the energy it needs and the resources that we have to provide?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for the question. As he said, we do sit on the third-largest oil reserves in the world, yet we see the United States first banning imports from Russia, and now they're looking to other dictatorial regimes like Venezuela, Iran, and Saudi Arabia to fill their supply gaps. Importing from these regimes when there's an ethically sourced, environmentally friendly oil and gas supply available right here in Alberta, ready to ship to Europe and to the U.S. if we can get the necessary infrastructure built, is senseless. There is an answer to this problem, and it's called Alberta.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of Members' Statements.

### Members' Statements

(continued)

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

### Budget 2022

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans can be proud to know that their elected government has balanced the books for the first time in nearly a decade. Despite the constant fear and smear from the NDP, this is good news for Alberta. Inheriting a damaged economy from the NDP wasn't easy, but Albertans knew that if anyone was going to fix it, it was our government.

The NDP showed up in pathetic numbers last week to vote down this budget. They claim that it was damaging to Albertans and decreases spending across the board, but it's just not true. Leading up to the days of the vote, they told Albertans that it would be the day that the government would fall; it was going to be the Armageddon. However, nine out of 23 caucus members showed up to vote, and I think that that sends a loud message to their Twitter followers, more than anything they could have actually tweeted. It's unfortunate to see an opposition party so deep into political theatre that they would try to lead Albertans to think that this balanced budget is bad news.

The UCP is proud to provide Albertans with quality health care, education, and other supports while still maintaining fiscal responsibility. Rather than heading in the direction of the \$6 billion

deficit of the NDP, our government has brought Alberta back on track with a \$500 million surplus for this fiscal year. Mr. Speaker, it's understandable that the members opposite are upset. They were a part of a caucus and a government that tried to fiscally and morally bankrupt Alberta. The NDP hates to see a government that spends money with sustainability and responsibility in mind. The UCP did what the NDP could not: we balanced the books and worked hard to deliver on promises despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. I know that Albertans are happy to see those promises being kept, and that is what they'll remember when they vote in 2023.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 201, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. This bill was referred to the committee on March 14, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 201 not proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 201.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 201, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak? There are.

Hon. members, given that members wish to speak to the motion for concurrence in the report, that debate will take place on the next available Monday under the item of business motions for concurrence in reports on public bills other than government bills. This procedure is in accordance with the ruling that I made on Monday, June 7, 2021, with respect to then Bill 218, Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries) Amendment Act, 2021, which will afford some time for members to prepare for concurrence debate. The next available Monday is anticipated to be April 25.

### Notices of Motions

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 18, sponsored by the Minister of Environment and Parks. It reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

**Mr. Copping:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill establishes clear and consistent authority and oversight for the licensing, accommodations, and delivery of publicly funded care in the continuing care system. Alberta's current legislation falls under multiple acts and regulations, some dating back to 1985. The delivery of continuing care has evolved, and existing legislative requirements do not reflect present-day practices, services, or settings, and the COVID-19 pandemic revealed further gaps and inconsistencies. As a result, the government is introducing new, streamlined legislation under one act. It will strengthen government accountability and transparency and enable better co-ordination and alignment of care. Therefore, I move first reading of the Continuing Care Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first 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. Luan, Minister of Community and Social Services, responses to questions raised by Ms Renaud, hon. Member for St. Albert, and Mr. Hunter, hon. Member for Taber-Warner, on March 10, 2022, Ministry of Community and Social Services 2022-23 main estimates debate.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, points of order. At 2:10 and again at 2:11 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

### Point of Order Insulting Language

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that these are two points of order; however, my arguments for the two are the same, so with your indulgence I will make the argument a single time. I look forward to your ruling.

My point of order, under 23(h), (i), and (j), is specifically because in this place, in this Assembly, the language that we use in relation to other members is very important, Mr. Speaker. As outlined in *Erskine May* as well as the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, one of the basic principles of this House "is that the proceedings be conducted in a respectful manner," page 610.

At 2:10 and then again at 2:11 the Government House Leader, in response to questions from the deputy Leader of the Official Opposition, was using language that I believe could cause disorder in this House and very specifically showed a lack of respect for another member in this place. I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but, Mr. Speaker, what caught my ear at 2:10 was the Government House Leader telling the member that she should never stand up in this House, which I think is particularly problematic, unparliamentary, and likely a point of order; as well, at 2:11 referring to a colleague in this Chamber as "people like that," a very disrespectful and insulting disparagement that, I believe, is unparliamentary and should be considered a point of order.

Certainly, this government has spoken about raising the bar in this Chamber a number of times, yet we continue to see patterns of behaviour like this and talking down to other members in this Chamber. I believe that these are a point of order and did not live up to the standard of this Assembly that we should all be trying to reach. I look forward to the arguments and your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

**Mr. Schow:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think context is everything, and I think that would apply to this as well. I don't have the benefit of the



Blues, so I wouldn't be able to speak to what the hon. House leader had said. In respect to the comment that that member should not stand in this Chamber, certainly, that comment on its own would be unparliamentary, but if it was with regard to not standing in this Chamber to spout off something that was not factually accurate, that would certainly lend itself well to context and I'd say is not a point of order.

In terms of the comment of "people like that," again, I was not aware of the context. I don't recall it, so I leave that to your ruling. If it is in fact a point of order, I'm happy to withdraw and apologize. I just don't have the benefit of the Blues to suggest if it was or wasn't.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues. "She should never stand up in this place and try to lecture people [about how to talk to] Albertans after her despicable actions when she sat on this side of the House." *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 623: personal attacks and insults are not in order. I would suggest, between a combination of suggesting that a member shouldn't stand up and referring specifically not through the chair but to "her despicable actions," that this has raised to the level of a point of order.

The Deputy Government House Leader to apologize and withdraw.

**Mr. Schow:** Most certainly, Mr. Speaker, I apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

### Privilege Misleading the House

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I am prepared to rule on the point of privilege that the Government House Leader raised on March 23, 2022. The question has to do with statements made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South in the Assembly on Tuesday, March 22, 2022. The Government House Leader provided notice of the question of privilege to my office at 11:15 on March 23, with a copy to the Member for Edmonton-South, therefore fulfilling the notice requirement under Standing Order 15(2). This matter was raised at the earliest opportunity, as required under the standing order.

In his notice, the purported question of privilege, the Government House Leader indicated that on March 22 the Member for Edmonton-South stood in this Chamber and asked questions while denying that he was guilty of using personal information of the Premier to hack vaccine records. The Government House Leader argued in his submissions to the Assembly on March 23 that publishing a document publicly detailing the steps that the Member for Edmonton-South took to use another MLA's identity was enough to form the conclusion that the MLA was admitting his guilt.

The Government House Leader contends that the Member for Edmonton-South made statements in the Assembly denying that he was guilty of using personal information of the Premier to gain access to the Premier's COVID-19 vaccination records and, more broadly, denied that he broke the law. The Government House Leader claims that in making such statements, the Member for Edmonton-South was deliberately misleading the Assembly and, therefore, committed a contempt.

Members can find these submissions on pages 358 to 360 of the March 23, 2022, *Hansard*.

On March 24 the Member for Edmonton-South presented arguments on the purported question of privilege. In his submission

the member indicated that with respect to making misleading statements, he has "not admitted to committing any crimes" and that he believes that, "clearly, any statements [he has] made in the House are not misleading to this effect." These submissions can be found on pages 410 and 411 of the *Hansard* for March 24.

Hon. members, the Assembly has had this type of question of privilege, deliberately misleading the Assembly, before on a number of occasions during the 30th Legislature. As noted in past rulings, this type of question of privilege is treated as purported contempt of the Assembly. The reference is found in *Erskine May*, privileges and practices and usage of parliament, 25th edition, on page 307.

As noted in previous rulings, the test for deliberately misleading the Assembly is a very difficult test to meet. As set out in the fourth edition of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand* at pages 775 to 776, the test has three elements. "The statement must . . . have been misleading; the member must have known that the statement was inaccurate at the time the statement was made; and the member must have intended to mislead the [Assembly]."

Hon. members, I have reviewed the *Hansard* of March 22 and specifically the statements made by the Member for Edmonton-South that day. I can find no reference by the member denying that he was guilty of using the Premier's personal information to access vaccine records. In addition, I find that he made no statements confirming or denying that he was culpable of an offence in connection with the matter at hand. As such, there is no evidence that these statements were made. As the Member for Edmonton-South himself has indicated, there was no possibility to mislead the Assembly. Therefore, the first part of the three-part test has not been met. Accordingly, I find no question of privilege. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

### Orders of the Day

#### Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills

##### Bill 202

#### Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on March 22, 2022, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills reported the report of the committee of Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022, and requested concurrence of the Assembly in the report, which has recommended that the bill proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on March 22, debate on the motion will proceed today.

The motion to concur in the committee's report on Bill 202 has already been moved. Therefore, I will now recognize any additional speakers that would like to speak. Are there members who wish to speak to the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me to rise today and speak to concurrence of private member's Bill 202. It's my proposed legislation to amend the Public Health Act. Now, before I get into the details, I just want to offer my sincere thanks to the folks who helped me determine the substance of this bill. The select special Public Health Act committee put forward a list of recommendations, and this bill aligns with those recommendations. These recommendations have not been implemented yet. These recommendations encourage checks and balances and transparency, which is what Bill 202 does.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I listened to people from across Alberta, and I came up with Bill 202 because it was of great concern, the Public Health Act and how it was used during the pandemic. It takes a firm commitment to listen to all constituents regardless of political affiliation; however, in my experience it is well worth the effort because no single person, party, expert, or interest group has a monopoly on good ideas. The recent pandemic has impacted the lives of every single Albertan over the past two years, so I wasn't entirely surprised that pandemic management was the top concern of the majority of those people who provided input.

Bill 202 aims to address three main concerns: transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight. The importance of addressing these issues cannot be overstated. I am certain that every single member of the Assembly has heard from Albertans, directly and through correspondence, about these matters. We also know that these concerns were raised as part of the legislative review of Alberta's Public Health Act conducted more than a year ago. The report issued following the review specifically recommends that the Public Health Act be amended to enhance transparency and democratic accountability. Speaking to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee on August 27, 2020, the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, stated that

there need to be checks and balances, there need to be assurances that there's not going to be use of this act in an inappropriate way, I would advocate that tools not be taken out but, rather, if additional checks and balances are needed, that those be put in.

Recommendations included in the committee's report included three key measures. First, the committee recommends that the Public Health Act be amended to ensure that an order declaring a state of public health emergency under section 52.1 cannot lapse and subsequently be reinstated without the approval of the Legislative Assembly.

Secondly, the committee recommends that ministerial orders issued under section 52.1 cannot be renewed without the approval of the Legislative Assembly.

Thirdly, the committee recommends that sunset clauses be included under section 52.1 to ensure health orders are reviewed in a timely manner to ensure they are removed when no longer necessary.

3:00

While these recommendations have gone ignored for more than a year, it is perfectly clear that the public wants action when it comes to transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight. MLAs and all Albertans need access to timely, accurate information concerning public health orders during declared emergencies.

Furthermore, MLAs need to be seen taking an active and public role in pandemic management. It is important to me to ensure that Bill 202 ensures MLAs can carry out our duties while ensuring cabinet and medical officers of health can take swift action to protect the public when necessary. While there is room for improvement in many other areas of the Public Health Act, Bill 202 is limited in scope to sections of the Public Health Act concerning states of emergency, particularly pandemics.

I just want to take a quick dive into the details of Bill 202. Every MLA here today has a duty to represent the families and communities they're elected to serve. Bill 202 provides MLAs with additional oversight powers during a public health state of emergency. The Public Health Act currently requires that a public health state of emergency may not be extended without the approval of the Legislative Assembly. However, during the recent COVID-19 pandemic no such vote was ever held. Under Bill 202 the Assembly's essential role in debating and voting on the extension

of public health states of emergency will be strengthened. Future ministers of Health will be prevented from circumventing the Assembly by allowing a state of emergency to elapse, only to declare a new state of emergency without seeking the Assembly's approval.

Albertans have told me repeatedly that it is not acceptable for cabinet or bureaucrats to operate for months on end without a democratically expressed mandate. Democracy matters more during an emergency, not less. If Justin Trudeau and the federal government must seek House of Commons and Senate ratification for the federal Emergencies Act, there is no good reason why Alberta's government can't seek similar ratification before extending a public health state of emergency.

In addition, Bill 202 proposes a new section to be added into the Public Health Act. This new section provides a framework by which the Assembly may opt to review, revoke, or amend some public health measures during a public health state of emergency. Under Bill 202 any two members of the Assembly may file a written request with the minister to initiate the Assembly's oversight process. This process must be carried out within two sitting days, it must include a debate of at least two hours, and a vote must follow the debate.

Bill 202 also includes some simple and straightforward transparency measures. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic some elected officials and many public members grew frustrated and concerned regarding the emergency powers being exercised by the government and public health officials. Bill 202's transparency measures are designed to ensure Albertans have timely access to specific and accurate information regarding public health orders.

Bill 202's transparency requirements are limited to three specific sections of the Public Health Act. One, under Bill 202 medical officers of health will continue to be able to issue isolation and quarantine orders as well as exemptions to these orders. Bill 202 requires that such orders be tabled in the Legislature in a timely fashion to ensure legislators and the public understand the nature of the orders, including which specific section of the Public Health Act is being invoked. Bill 202 applies to general orders only and not to orders that may allow private citizens to be identified.

Two, under Bill 202 the cabinet will continue to be able to issue orders that may be necessary to protect public health, including the emergency closure of specific facilities. In addition, for example, the government may request that the Lieutenant Governor delay an election. Bill 202 requires that such orders be tabled in the Legislature on a timely basis to ensure legislators and the public understand the nature of the orders.

Three, under Bill 202 the Minister of Health may declare a public health state of emergency in consultation with the chief medical officer of health. Bill 202 requires that such declarations be tabled in the Legislature on a timely basis to ensure legislators and the public understand the nature of such declarations, including which specific section of the Public Health Act is being invoked.

These three measures are necessary to provide clarity to legislators and the public alike. In addition, I think we all recognize the impact that misinformation spread on social media has had on public morale over the past two years. There are those who believe the answer to this is to restrict speech. I am not one of those people. Restricting speech will only make things worse. The answer is to provide clear and accurate information in a timely manner. The more we can do to promptly address Albertans' concerns and reduce unnecessary public frustration, the better.

In conclusion, let me say again that I fully understand the complexity of the current legislation, and recognizing this, I have intentionally limited Bill 202 to these changes. If any of you have questions, I'm more than willing to provide answers. At the end of

the day, this bill is quite different than many of the others presently introduced during this session of the Assembly. This bill isn't about politics. Rather, it's about democracy and good government. It's about providing checks and balances. It's about ensuring the supremacy of the Assembly.

It has been more than two years since the world first learned of COVID-19. Since that time we have seen governments go from preaching, "We're all in this together" to implementing some of the most divisive policies the free world has seen in generations, without holding a single vote.

Now, with the pandemic finally shifting to endemic, health restrictions and emergency mandates are slowly being lifted. I think it is safe to say that we all hope to never face another public health emergency like the recent pandemic, but if and when we do, it is important to learn from our mistakes and address the systemic issues that left so many Albertans feeling confused, frustrated, and ignored.

The best place to start is by ensuring greater transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight. Until we address these issues, there is no reason for any Albertan to truly believe that we are all in this together.

Thank you very much, and I would hope that we can all vote in favour of concurrence.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

**Mr. Barnes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I first of all want to thank my colleague for bringing such an important bill forward. I, too, am absolutely in favour of this bill going forward and being passed. I, too, am in favour of democratizing the Public Health Act.

Madam Speaker, how often during the last two-plus years did our constituents reach out to us looking for answers, looking for help with their families, looking for our ability to get their needs, their ideas, their questions on the floor? This bill goes so far as to still allow the important checks and balances that the government may have to put in but allows the 87 of us in here to represent, through the democratic process, our constituents. Easily in the last two-plus years there have been an overwhelming number of calls to my office, people questioning the rationale, people wanting to understand, wanting to help, wanting to do different things but not being able to have their voice heard, and this bill goes a long way to do it.

Of course, a lot of the people across the floor are, like me, from the legacy Wildrose side of the UCP merger. In 2011-2012, when I was first elected, when I was first talking to Albertans, the concept of free votes and democratic reform was probably the biggest reason that Cypress-Medicine Hatters were looking for change. What an opportunity that my colleague from Central Peace-Notley has put forward for Albertans that want to protect each other but want to have an opportunity to be heard.

Not only, Madam Speaker, in 2011-2012 were Albertans crying for democratic reform and free votes; they still are today. The number of times that I've heard recently, you know, "How come we couldn't get votes on this in the Legislature, and how come we couldn't get this talked about on the floor of the Legislature as the Public Health Act was in place?" – I hear it every day when Albertans say to me: how come citizen-initiated referendums and recall haven't been passed and put fully into law with proclamation and put in a more realistic form?

Every day, Madam Speaker, Albertans are looking for the opportunity to be involved in their government, for the opportunity to reach out to one of the 87 of us and have a say. Again, my hon.

colleague from Central Peace-Notley has come up with a step that will allow this to be enhanced. As he pointed out, the chief medical officer of health suggested that it was necessary.

3:10

Bill 202, of course, is a direct response to a legislative review of the Public Health Act completed more than a year ago. Speaking before the Public Health Act Review Committee in 2020, the chief medical officer of health stated that checks and balances may need to be added to the Public Health Act to provide "assurances that there's not going to be use of this act in an inappropriate way."

Well, again, Madam Speaker, my colleague has presented an idea where two MLAs can get an idea on the floor, where all relevant documentation relating to changes and orders of the Public Health Act have to be brought here. What a better way. We can make it so that 4.4 million Albertans can have their voices heard. Again, clearly, it's something that the people that had to deal with this daily highlighted as important.

I'll also say that we're not through this yet. Hopefully, we are at the endemic stage, but there's a lot of healing that Alberta needs in our business community, in our families going forward. To me, the sooner the better, the sooner that we have the opportunity, so that Albertans know when they phone my office or e-mail another MLA's office, their ideas have a realistic chance of being heard, debated, and their individual rights protected.

Of course, as my hon. colleague pointed out, even the federal Emergencies Act was subject to parliamentary approval and Senate reform. We all know that the Senate never got to the point where they approved it or turned it down because it was revoked.

Madam Speaker, I want to end with an example. Do you remember when the Premier apologized at about the six-month mark for getting it wrong when it came to small businesses? Do you remember how at the start the guideline was that essential could be open, that nonessential couldn't? Do you remember how many of us said: "No, no. This is wrong. It should be safe versus nonsafe. If you're a business with safe practices, you should be allowed to be open, just the same as the big box store with its social distancing and safe practices." It was approximately six months of not having the opportunity to debate that in this House, of not having the opportunity to fully expand upon why the decision was different that that decision stayed in place.

Madam Speaker, here's what happened. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business put out that after six months the average small business was \$170,000 in debt and that if you were a hospitality business, you had probably incurred over \$200,000 of additional debt because of the COVID mandates.

When the Premier came forward and apologized for getting it wrong, for not listening to the fact that some of us were saying that it should be safe versus nonsafe instead of essential versus nonessential, although I think that the apology was welcomed, it still didn't change the fact that Albertan businesspeople had individually lost hundreds of thousands and collectively lost tens and tens of millions.

Madam Speaker, this is our opportunity to further democratize Alberta, to further democratize the Alberta Legislature, to add accountability and transparency and democracy to the Public Health Act. For that reason, I will fully support it every step of the way, and I thank my colleague from Central Peace-Notley for bringing it forward.

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

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the mover and the last speaker for their comments as we consider Bill

202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022. I know it's not every day that private members have the opportunity to bring forward bills to this place, so I want to recognize the Member for Central Peace-Notley for the work that's gone into crafting a bill and the staff, of course, who supported him along that journey. While I do appreciate the work that went into this bill, at this point I am not comfortable supporting it as a member of the Assembly. I have to say that I appreciate that the last two speakers spoke about this bill in relation to the current pandemic, the global public health emergency that we've all been living through for what feels like way, way, way too long. Legislation doesn't just apply to one point in time or one public health crisis; it's in place until the law changes yet again.

With that in mind, I'm going to share a few examples of public health emergencies that have taken place in the last few years. The one I'm most closely aware of, the one when I was the Minister of Health, was, of course, the wildfires in Fort McMurray. When I think about the importance of being nimble and being able to adapt in a time of crisis, I have concerns that the procedures that are laid out through the proposed bill today would impede our ability to act in the public interest and to save lives. One of the concerns I have is noted, that it's just two MLAs to basically stop the business of the House and change direction completely to consider the ideas that those two MLAs have as it relates to an ongoing public health crisis. I can tell you that when I was getting regular updates – and we had essentially daily cabinet meetings, sometimes more than once a day, because, of course, the wind changes, the trajectory of the fire changes, and of course the response needs to change as well.

To think that at any point everyone who's working on evacuating – I'm thinking specifically about the hospital and the long-term care that was in the hospital, the upper floors of the hospital at the time, because, of course, the PCs had promised many times to build a stand-alone long-term care facility for Fort McMurray, but it hadn't happened. So we had seniors and people primarily with mobility issues living on the top two floors of the hospital in need of evacuation immediately, in need of accommodation and a safe harbour in another health care facility somewhere else in the province, and we needed to make sure that we evacuated that hospital incredibly quickly and found ways to get people to a safe place to be. At the same time, the entire municipality was fleeing.

I do pause to reflect on the fact that some MLAs chose to go towards the fire instead of welcoming people when they were fleeing. That's their choice. But it could have also been their choice to bring forward potentially a motion in this place to stop the important public health orders and to consider whether it was appropriate or not as opposed to politicians making sure that they assess the information that's being provided by front-line firefighters, by health and welfare officers, by local emergency disaster response preparedness folks and making sure that we put the right tools in place and the proper orders in place to make sure that people could evacuate in an expeditious fashion and get to a safe place to be while the worst of the fires were upon us.

But the emergency didn't end the day the fire was extinguished. The emergency lasted because, of course, the chemicals that are used to dampen a fire and to stop its spread and to prevent it from spreading have often very serious health effects themselves. They're very effective in putting out fires, but you don't want to rush back in after everything has been dampened with these chemicals because that could have health consequences as well. Again, it's important that you go through the checks and measures.

Where I do absolutely agree with the remarks of the prior two speakers is that there has been a significant lack of transparency, a deep lack of trust with the citizens of this province. The actions that

we have experienced felt like they were covert, like they were in the darkness of chambers that nobody would be able to access.

3:20

For those reasons, we've put forward a number of proposals on how to address issues as it relates to this pandemic specifically and other pressing public health issues. One is that we've called for the creation of an independent COVID-19 advisory panel. We've called for that for about a year, and it's following what's happened in some other provinces where there have been others who have actually brought forward science-based advisory panels that report back to the government in a public way so that all Albertans – it would be Albertans in this case, but I'll insert the names of other provinces here – would have an opportunity to receive that unbiased, unfettered, open, and honest information.

We've also asked questions about the appropriateness of the current reporting structure between the chief medical officer of health as a member of – oh, I'm trying to remember the term. There are four different models that you can have in which public health officers report, but what's in place here in Alberta is that the chief medical officer of health reports through the department to the Minister of Health, to the Premier. That is very removed from having what the government would like to pretend is a relationship directly with the public. Just because you tell somebody to talk to the media doesn't mean that they are indeed able to be open and transparent and speak publicly to Albertans.

We have asked many times if this is the proper reporting structure and proposed again, about a year, year and a half ago, that it might be time to consider independence, making the officer an independent officer of the Legislature, which would enable greater opportunities to receive public reporting in this place, to be able to hold the recommendations made to government to account, and to allow for greater transparency.

But, again, what's being proposed in this structure is that two MLAs can get together, and they can say: we need to put a stop to this; we need to make sure that we change course. They can't necessarily change course, but they can sure put a stop to it, because what they would require is – I believe it's within two sitting days of the Assembly for that business to take priority over everything else. Really, what it would do, when you have folks at the POC, the Provincial Operations Centre, seeing this type of – the greatest analogy I can think of is that when you are in the middle of a crisis and you're driving a speedboat and you're trying to get away from a disaster and you hear that you might be put on a different route and be sent in a different direction, that certainly isn't the most respectful way of engaging with the folks who spend their careers focused on responding to disasters.

Again I want to say that I'm trying to think about this in the context of other public health disasters and other major crises that we faced in our province. I wish that there was only the current one to think of, but there isn't. There are always the ones that have come before, and I hate to say that there will probably be more again in the future, Madam Speaker. To pass legislation just thinking about one specific point in time and the frustration that I think all members of this Assembly – or at least those of us who are able to speak freely, without being given direction from the Government House Leader, I think, have felt a very strong sense of undermining the public's right to information, the right to fair, transparent government, the right of all of us to have an opportunity to have the government present in a fair and open way so that we can have trust that the government is acting in our best interest.

Of course, when there was a report done by an auditing firm after the first wave and it took well into the third wave, after immense public pressure, for that to be made public, I think that probably

helped contribute to the lack of trust and the lack of confidence that Albertans have in this government when it comes to their management of our collective public health.

I guess one of the questions I would have to the mover is how he landed on only two members being the trigger to initiate a debate. It seems like an incredibly low threshold and, I think, would be an outlier certainly in this place and an outlier for probably any other Assembly. So if the member has done any other interjurisdictional comparisons within parliamentary democracies or specifically within Canada, are there any other times where just two members can trigger this type of debate on any issues, let alone a public health disaster that is an emergency? I would find that information helpful because it does seem like an incredibly low threshold.

Yeah. I will just say again that I know how difficult this has been for all of us.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill. As my colleague noted, you know, we don't often see opposition bills get any opportunity to come and be debated in this House. That's been an unfortunate circumstance of changes that this government has made to the process by which private members' business takes place. Certainly, I appreciate that we have the opportunity to consider this member's bill. Certainly, I hope that my own bill, that I've brought forward, will get the same opportunity.

Unfortunately, though, I think I have to join my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora in saying that I will not be supporting this bill. Now, certainly I can appreciate the concerns that the member has brought forward and the concerns that have motivated him in bringing forward this bill and proposing these changes. He has spoken about the need to seek further transparency, and indeed a distinct lack of transparency from this government throughout the COVID-19 pandemic – and on that point I certainly do agree with the member. They have noted that Dr. Deena Hinshaw, our chief medical officer of health, indeed commented that there need to be checks and balances built into the system, and I would also agree with that, Madam Speaker.

Indeed, as my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora outlined, we have made repeated calls throughout this pandemic, first of all, for the government to release the data on which it was making decisions. We called for the release of all modelling data, we asked for them to be transparent with all recommendations that they had received from the chief medical officer of health, and indeed we called repeatedly for a full public review or inquiry of the government's handling of the pandemic. Unfortunately, on every one of those points, at every turn this government has rejected those calls for additional transparency. They have continued to undermine the trust of Albertans in the decisions that they were making and seemed to repeatedly demonstrate that in many instances they were indeed making decisions that were far more motivated politically than they were by protecting the public health.

We just have to look back at how things went throughout this pandemic, how during the second wave the government indeed sat on its hands and refused to take action until case counts were soaring, Madam Speaker. It was well into December before we saw any significant action from the government. Indeed, before they took the actual significant action that we knew had been recommended and that we'd seen other jurisdictions taking, the government made a number of small measures that did nothing but actually create more confusion amongst the public, because they

seemed like seemingly arbitrary measures. Again, that is why we called for the government to provide all the information it was actually looking at, to help restore that faith from Albertans. We saw that again in the midst of the third wave.

Now, that speaks exactly to the substance of this bill, where this member is suggesting, which my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora noted is concerning, that two MLAs – only two out of 87 – would be able to stop the business of this House and force a debate on any public health measure. What we saw during that third wave is 16 MLAs in this House who wrote a letter demanding that all public health restrictions be removed. All, Madam Speaker. That was as the third wave was just beginning to rise, and we saw the devastation that wave brought on Albertans. Imagine how many more lives would have been lost, how much more damage might have been done to our economy, how many more Albertans would have been left suffering with long COVID if those MLAs would have had the ability to come into this House and try to force the removal of all public health measures against the advice of the actual medical experts and the science. That is one reason why I feel I could not support this bill.

Again, what we saw clearly during that wave of the pandemic, Madam Speaker, is that this government was delaying taking actions because it was concerned about its own political fortunes, more so than the public health, which is a reason why indeed we do need to have more transparency. That, of course, led into the best summer ever – and we're all well aware of how that played out – where we found ourselves again going into a much higher, rising case count with the Premier on vacation, not a word from this government, dead silence, while Albertans and public health experts and our doctors and our health care workers were crying for this government to take action and step up.

By the time we finally got there, where they began to consider taking action, these guys were arguing behind closed doors amongst themselves about taking the step that proved to be the most effective public health measure in raising vaccination rates and helping lower case counts, lower hospitalizations, and indeed prevent deaths, that being a vaccine passport system.

3:30

Because of this government being delayed, arguing amongst themselves, caught up in their own political turmoil, we saw that wave grow far worse. We saw thousands more surgeries cancelled, thousands more Albertans that were infected with COVID and indeed having health effects as a result. Indeed, when they finally even brought in that policy, the democratization of that vote within their caucus watered down that policy from what had been recommended, as was revealed by one of the members from Grande Prairie.

One of my concerns is that what we saw within this government alone, simply their democratization within their caucus, led repeatedly to steps being taken that undermined the public health, that caused more damage to our health care system, that made a public health emergency worse. Not only that, Madam Speaker, but I would say that from the first wave through the fifth what we repeatedly saw was that this government's lack of transparency led to them releasing not enough information about the actual public health measures they brought into place.

Indeed, the health measures were confusing. They constantly shifted and changed. They made no sense initially, before they finally got to the measures that were actually effective. And when they brought those measures in, even when they went to lift measures, Madam Speaker, this government's communication was so incredibly poor that my office continued to field hundreds of phone calls and e-mails from individuals, organizations, businesses

trying to make hide or hair of what this government was in fact asking them to do, indeed repeatedly bringing out public health measures, putting them into effect before they were even publicly available and published online through multiple waves of the pandemic.

I can understand why the member is bringing this forward. Certainly, I share his frustration with the incompetence with which this government handled so many aspects of the pandemic and made this so much worse and indeed undermined the public trust. But therein lies the problem, Madam Speaker. This government undermining the public trust did not mean that the scientific and the medical experts were, in fact, wrong.

It's unfortunate that perhaps our chief medical officer of health was undermined repeatedly at so many turns by this government's own political decisions, to the point where her own reputation began to be undermined. [interjections] As others have noted, Madam Speaker, we have had a serious epidemic of misinformation during this pandemic, indeed spread at times by some of these government members who sit and heckle now. Perhaps they'd like to get up and speak for themselves at some point.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, that the member said that no single expert, no politician or interest group has a monopoly on good ideas. The medical consensus was clear. The vast majority of medical experts said that drugs such as hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin were not effective in treating COVID. That is what the vast majority of peer-reviewed studies said, yet that information continued to be spread. The vast majority of public health experts said that, yes, in fact, masking is an effective way to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 as an aerosol virus, yet misinformation about that spread and indeed has been actively undermined by or spread by members of this government.

That is why I do not support this bill in terms of trying to give MLAs the power to override the actual public health experts. We have seen it repeatedly demonstrated, whether because they personally believe the misinformation or whether because they are seeking some other form of political power or opportunity or advantage, by members of multiple governments across Canada, including the MPP Randy Hillier, who is indeed up on charges today for his support of the convoy protesters and blockaders in Ottawa and indeed was himself responsible for spreading an enormous amount of misinformation throughout this pandemic. I cannot support the idea that those sorts of individuals should have the opportunity to override actual medical experts, the actual public health advice.

Now, I do appreciate some of the points that the member did bring forward. For example, one of the changes in this bill is to make it so that medical officers or the cabinet must provide a copy to the Health minister when they make an order. Now, certainly, again . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who I saw afterwards.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill. While I appreciate the intent of the bill, which is, obviously, a throw to transparency, I think my concern here is that it works in the opposite direction of what, I would say, was most needed during this pandemic. The challenge during this pandemic was the fact that this government was leading based on politics instead of based on science and data and public health advice. That was probably the single biggest challenge we faced.

Now, certainly, we saw a wild overreach with this government's Bill 10, a wild overreach which was rapidly followed by a number of government members standing up and yelling, "Fear and smear; it's nothing like that," and then, of course, members of their own party stood up and rallied against it because that was incorrect, Madam Speaker. It's not a word that I can say in this place, but certainly it came rather strongly to light that the government's defence of Bill 10 was not factually accurate, so ultimately they chose to reverse their position on that.

But I would say that our largest problem as we trucked through this pandemic, so to speak, I suppose, was the spread of misinformation, the wild spread of misinformation, and the spread of misinformation which went unchecked. It went unchecked by this government because it was in their political interest to leave it unchecked. That, Madam Speaker, I think, was the biggest concern we faced.

Public health decisions ought to have been based on what was good for the people of this province, on the opinions of the people of this province, on advice from medical health experts, but that's not what we saw. Instead, we saw a flailing government, desperate to bolster its own support, being blown around by wherever the political winds happened to be blowing, a government so desperate to hang on to the support of people their own Premier has now called all sorts of names, has referred to as the inmates running the asylum – that's their own Premier that said that. They were so desperate to appease those people over the course of the pandemic that they allowed their own members to join illegal blockades, that they allowed their own members to spread misinformation about vaccines and masks and science. Madam Speaker, it's incredibly problematic.

I actually think that as we move forward as a society, with the sort of increase in access to the Internet, which is in many ways an incredibly good thing, the access to information that we have at this moment in time is unprecedented throughout history. The problem, Madam Speaker, is that it cuts both ways. It leaves us with access to unprecedented misinformation at the same time, and most people, unfortunately – or many, anyway – lack the ability to determine what's a credible source. We all sort of suffer from natural and inherent cognitive biases, but many people are not informed about these cognitive biases and therefore are not able to counter them in themselves.

You know, we see these stories online, these sorts of trumped-up stories where someone happens to have gotten sick and there is some sort of linkage in time to the point at which they were vaccinated. Now, many of these things have been undercut, very clearly, by science.

3:40

I think back to, for instance, the well and truly debunked myth about the MMR vaccine and autism, which was sort of started by a media celebrity figure whose child turned out not to have autism at all, and it certainly wasn't caused by a vaccine. That sort of problematic misinformation is often started by bad actors but often supported by those who simply lack an understanding of their own cognitive biases, lack an understanding of the difference between correlation and causation. In fact, many of the people who start those stories don't necessarily do it through ill intent. They're simply so badly misinformed that, you know, their own brains may tell them that this is the truth when it transparently is not.

That's incredibly – incredibly – problematic, and I think that in particular, Madam Speaker, it's worth noting that when members of this House engage in that sort of disinformation, it actually doesn't matter whether they are intentionally misinforming or are themselves misinformed. It ought to be beneath every member in

this place, and the public ought to hold us to a higher standard than that.

My concern with this bill is that it would take us in a direction where we're seeing more politicians who are sort of being blown around in the winds of strange misinformation on the Internet, interfering in decisions that should be based on reason and science. One of the things that drove me, Madam Speaker, to this House is evidence-based decisions, ensuring that we make our decisions based on the best facts and evidence that are presented to us.

I think this would take us backwards in terms of that. This would encourage members to sort of come forward with unfortunate and ill-informed views that are unhelpful going forward. I think that as a society we're going to have to struggle with this, and I don't know that it's necessarily – certainly, the government has a hand, but I don't think the government alone can do it. Certainly, the UCP's backwards curriculum, their attempt to remove critical thinking skills from the curriculum, is absolutely a step in the wrong direction, is absolutely a step that will make this problem worse, that will ensure that our children do not have the capacity to evaluate the source and the reasonableness of information in the right sort of way. On the Internet information and disinformation can look very, very similar. If you don't have the appropriate skills to figure out what's what, a person can get very quickly into trouble, and in a democracy when enough people get into trouble, we're all in trouble in that way.

I certainly think that this government ought to have done a better job throughout this pandemic at circulating information, at attempting to combat misinformation, at making decisions based on public health. We can look back historically, Madam Speaker. We can look at the data and we can see that this government's strategy of acting last and least, of trying to ignore the science, like, this sort of faked-out, "Oh, we wouldn't have done it except we were forced by your lack of personal responsibility" resulted in some really bad results and really bad results in a population in this province who are younger than the average population in this country, a population who ought to have fared better because of our relative youth, and a population in a province that has one of the best health care systems in the country.

I think it has been incredibly problematic. This government's handling of this pandemic has been incredibly – incredibly – problematic but not in a way that is fixed by this bill. That is why I won't be supporting this bill. I think it takes us in absolutely the wrong direction. I think it takes us in a direction of rhetoric and misinformation and the opposite of the direction we should go in, which is the direction of science and information and rational debate and rational argumentation and conclusions which flow logically from their premises. I think there are a lot of ways that that can be achieved. Unfortunately, I don't feel that this is one of them, and I hope that this government takes this as a lesson.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege, always, to be able to get up in this House and to be able to speak to a bill, especially a private member's bill. For those that maybe aren't aware of what we're doing this afternoon, we're being presented with a motion for concurrence. That's a motion that asks us whether or not we want to pursue a particular bill, a private member's bill, and whether we want to actually have debate on that bill and move forward in the House with discussion on that bill, in this case Bill 202, the Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022.

Madam Speaker, it's a privilege, any time we get into this House, to be able to speak to a bill, and for those out in the real world that

are trying to make a living, when we get into the Legislature, most of the bills that we discuss and that we deal with are government bills. They're brought forward by the executive, by the government, and they're important often. We debate them and we discuss them, and we make our arguments pro or con in this House. We try to represent our constituents. We try to make sure that, if possible, we can bring forward amendments and make any kind of bill, a government bill or a private member's bill for that matter, better and that through the process of that debate and through that process of exchanging of ideas, at the end of the day we have a bill that's either appropriate to move forward and to work in the interests of the citizens of Alberta or whether we believe, at the end of the day, that that's a bill that should be turned down and should be voted against and, in the process, not be brought forward in a way that's going to affect Albertans.

Now, we have today the opportunity to bring forward Bill 202 to this Legislature. Private members' bills are actually really important, I believe, when you take a look at the fact that, you know, not every good idea is brought forward by the government. There are many good ideas that are brought forward to us as MLAs on a daily basis. We have constituents. All the time we're all meeting, on both sides of the House, with constituents that bring forward ideas and suggestions for how we could better run this province in the interests of the people of Alberta. As MLAs it's important for us to have a private members' process that allows us to bring forward bills that will make this province better, make it work better for the constituents that we all face, whether it's an MLA's idea for moving forward or whether it's something that's come from our constituents through the MLA.

You know, I can remember bringing forward and standing up in this House to speak to what I call the silver alert, which would help seniors that get lost, and it was brought forward and passed in this Legislature. That came from stakeholders within the seniors across this province. It was an idea that was brought forward to us. I liked the idea, and we worked on that, and it was brought forward and passed in this Legislature. Now, this is a way, through these bills, for people in Alberta to be able to use their elected representatives to bring forward good ideas that can represent them. I believe that it's an important part of the process.

I think that when we talk about a motion for concurrence, we should be very careful that when we actually speak to a motion for concurrence, we're actually speaking to the bill and that it's not about, for instance, past rights or wrongs that we may have thought in this House that have come forward with government policy. It's not about, for instance, whether or not it was a wise thing for the NDP to spend \$7.5 billion on electricity infrastructure that's jacked up the electricity prices and bills for all Albertans. That's not what Bill 202 is about. It's not about – you know, it's a motion for concurrence as to whether or not we in this House believe that we should move forward and debate this bill and the merits of this bill. It's not about the NDP's support for a carbon tax, which has jacked up all the costs for all Albertans.

I'm not sure that we get very far on private members' business when we don't speak to the actual bill, so I want to just focus for a couple of minutes on this bill. It's been brought before the House already that, you know, this bill is going to allow us what's in the title. It's Bill 202, the Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022. You know, if we take a look at this bill, in a state of a public health emergency

if an order under subsection (1) is made in respect of a public health emergency that exists or may exist, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may not make a subsequent order under that subsection in respect of that public health emergency unless the

Legislative Assembly passes a resolution approving the making of that subsequent order.

Maybe the Legislature should get involved in these kinds of situations.

3:50

Under section 52.2 amending as follows:

(a) by repealing subsection (1) and substituting the following.

In part (b)(3):

If an order under subsection (1) is made in respect of a public health emergency that exists or may exist, the regional health authority may not make a subsequent order under that subsection in respect of that public health emergency unless the Legislative Assembly passes a resolution approving the making of that subsequent order.

Again, it's an opportunity for the Legislature to become involved in a public health emergency and in the order that is coming out of a public health emergency, that

a member of the Legislative Assembly may, in accordance with this section, bring before the Assembly a request to revoke, or amend any term or condition of, an order or exemption, a copy of which has been tabled under section 29(7), 38(2.1) or 52.4 [and that] on receiving a request under subsection (2), the member of the Executive Council must, within 2 sitting days of receiving it, bring the request before the Assembly for its consideration [and] consider the request for at least 2 hours [and] dispose of the request by resolution.

Madam Speaker, this Bill 202 is speaking to the fact that the author of this, the MLA for Central Peace-Notley, would like to see the Legislature become more involved in that process of public health emergencies. We can debate the issues, should this come before the House, as to whether this is the piece of legislation that should actually move forward or whether it should be amended or whether maybe we, at the end of the day, decide that it shouldn't go forward, that it should be voted down. But I believe that this is a worthy piece of legislation for the consideration of this House, so the motion for concurrence will have my support.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** That was beautiful timing, my hon. member.

Would the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont like to close the debate?

[Motion for concurrence carried]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, the Assembly has concurred in the report, and the bill will be placed on the Order Paper for second reading.

### Motions Other than Government Motions

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It is a great honour to rise and speak to this motion before this House. First off, I wish to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for his great work on this motion. It is often paramount to invest in postsecondary...

**The Deputy Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt. The mover of the motion would be very pleased to move the motion.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

### Rural Health Care

504. Mr. Hanson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to improve access to health care

for residents of northern Alberta by increasing opportunities for postsecondary training in health care fields for rural students who agree to work in areas of rural Alberta that require medical professionals, once they have completed their training.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My apologies to the House. I was on a Zoom meeting with the local municipality and one of the ministers. The one error, if I might say, in Motion 504 is that it says, "for residents of northern Alberta," and actually it's for residents of the entire rural area of the province. Thank you for that.

Northern Alberta has been struggling to have adequate access to health care for several years. It's not the first time I've gotten up and spoken about that in this House. I think that pretty much all of my members' statements and most of my questions for the last couple of years have been on this issue, that doesn't seem to be getting any better with what we've gone through with COVID, advocating to AHS for better recruitment of medical professionals for over six years that I've been in the House here. Recruiting med students originally from rural communities is successful because they're more likely to commit to staying in rural communities for the long term.

This is something that I've been talking about for quite a long time. You know, rather than trying to attract foreign doctors – with all due respect to the foreign doctors, we've relied on them for many, many years, but they tend to not stay for very long periods of time once they get into rural Alberta. You can't really blame somebody that's grown up in a country with the average temperature of 28 to 30 degrees Celsius, and they come up to northern Alberta and discover what minus 30 feels like, right? It's not a surprise to me that not a lot of these folks stay.

I guess my priority is to work with the government. I know we've had some success working with the Minister of Advanced Education and the Minister of Health to create some more spots in the U of A and the U of C, which I think is where we need to concentrate to get some more seats and get our rural students accepted. I know that the program that we came out with on March 29 – the Minister of Health announced the \$6 million program to help pay for students' medical school costs. In exchange for financial support, students have to complete their residency training in rural Alberta and agree to practise in a rural Alberta community when their schooling is complete.

What I'd really like to see, since we've got that and it's going to be a very successful program, I believe, is that I'd like to see it expanded not just for doctors and surgeons but also RNs and LPNs, lab technicians, nurse practitioners as well as midwives. I'd really like to see the RESIDE program, as good as it is – I think it's a step in the right direction. I've had really good feedback from my local communities and municipalities on it. But one of the things that we did hear about is increasing that to RNs, LPNs, and lab technicians, et cetera.

I do understand that the University of Calgary has got a program, where they're working with some of the local colleges, for allowing LPNs and RNs to go to school within their own communities. I know they're talking about a program with Portage College, which I'm pretty excited to hear about as well, so that local LPNs can get their upgrading right in their own local communities and get their training there as well as at least starting RN programs in rural Alberta and possibly finishing them up in the city. You know, the same shortage that we see for doctors is present for nurses, lab technicians, and midwives. That's why I'd like to see them added on to that.



Just as an example, I think last week I talked about it in the House here when I asked a question to the Health minister. For 44 eight-hour shifts at the Cold Lake hospital ER department, the ER was closed for all of those 44 shifts in one month, the month of – that's coming up in the month of April. Sorry. It was 35 in this month of March. I've also met with St. Paul nurses on a couple of occasions, with the local mayor, as well as with the northern director for AHS to address some of their issues. It just seems to be a spiral that the more stress we put on the system, the more nurses we lose. It just keeps getting worse and worse.

A big part of the complaints that the nurses had was that because of the medical emergency that was called, it gives AHS kind of special powers to redeploy. A lot of the nurses are concerned that they may have been working in home care for 10, 15 years and haven't actually worked in the hospital in their entire career, and suddenly AHS can have the power to redeploy them to an ER situation or an obstetrics situation that they haven't been trained or orientated to. So there are a number of things that we could work at to improve, but, like I say, it isn't just the doctor situation; it's the entire medical situation out in rural Alberta.

Attracting doctors during their medical degree does work. We have some stats here that 72 per cent of rural family medicine program graduates from the U of A and 66 per cent from the University of Calgary are practising in rural and regional communities; 57 per cent of rural integrated community clerkship program graduates from the U of A and 66 per cent from the University of Calgary are practising in rural and remote regional communities. We do have some practices that are working, but we need to, I think, increase those numbers of students in those rural programs. You know, if we can maintain that percentage of those students coming back into communities, the more seats, the better. I've actually been pushing for dedicated seats at the U of A and the U of C in the doctorate program, but we should also be doing that with all of our health care professionals.

4:00

Madam Speaker, according to enrolment data at the U of A – this is from 2020 – 138 rural applicants for their medical school in 2020: of those 138, 111 were deemed to have met all of the academic requirements, but only 25 of them were offered admission. That's kind of a step back. We recognize that there's a problem in rural Alberta. Our postsecondary institutions need to recognize that. With the amount of funding that we put in as a provincial government, we should have a little bit more say in addressing the problems. As I've said in the House many, many times, I'm not looking at a permanent change to postsecondary education, but what we need to do is highlight the issues that we have in the province and direct our efforts toward those. Basically, yeah, again, you know, only 22.5 per cent of qualified rural students actually received an offer from that school. On the same day I talked about the University of Calgary. We had 127 applications to med school; 119 were deemed to be qualified, and out of those 119 qualified applicants, only 11 rural students received an offer of admission.

This is where we're having the problem. I don't expect, you know, students that have grown up in Edmonton, Calgary, or major centres to be as attracted to a small-town setting, but if we can take our students from those small areas of Falher or northern Alberta, St. Paul – my son is a good example of that. It took him three years to get accepted into med school because he couldn't answer all the questions at the interview process properly and they score heavily against you because you don't have access to the research facilities and to be able to work in a hospital setting, which is something that they like to prioritize. You know, I've often said that they need to change the questioning to a little bit more rural standards, like

maybe talking about cattle. I know it has nothing to do with med school, but it might get a lot of these kids accepted a little bit earlier.

These are the things. Like I say, it's nothing against urban students at all, but we need to address the fact that we have a problem in rural Alberta. I think it's far more likely that a student that grew up in that town gets accepted at the U of A or the U of C, gets some help from the provincial government with tuition, and maybe gets some help from their municipality as far as living expenses, with the agreement that they're going to move back to that community. We're really seeing in our small rural settings that, you know, we're trying to attract young families to come back and live in those communities. As a young couple that wants to raise a family and you're looking at moving anywhere in the province, one of the big things that you look at is access to health care. Are you going to be able to have an obstetrics facility to go and have a baby in? Right now we're in a crisis situation in Bonnyville, Cold Lake, and St. Paul when it comes to delivering babies.

I look out at the snowstorm that we had this morning. We got about three inches of snow last night again. The highways were glare ice for 30, 40 miles coming in. We're getting it again. Putting these people into a situation where they have no choice but to travel down these highways is tough. These are all things that we have to consider when we're looking at expanding and promoting our rural physicians and rural medical professionals. I mean, I can . . .

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

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Motion 504, brought forward by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. I appreciate him bringing this motion forward, and admittedly I have not been advocating on this file nearly as long as this member has. Admittedly, as a resident of downtown Edmonton I did not know a lot about rural health care in the province of Alberta at the time that I had the honour of being appointed as the opposition critic for Health.

However, in my first year in the role I very quickly got a crash course, and that was, unfortunately, because of the chaos and disruption that was caused certainly for physicians and then later on throughout the pandemic for many rural health care professionals due to decisions by this government. Indeed, when the former Minister of Health moved forward with a number of changes that he was demanding, after this government tore up the contract that existed between doctors and the province of Alberta, it was rural health professionals, rural doctors that reached out to my office the most.

We have a short time for debate, so I'm not going to go into all the details, Madam Speaker, of what happened during that period, the concerns that were raised, but I will simply note that rural doctors were among the most that expressed the biggest concerns about the impact that this government's short-sighted decisions would make on their ability to continue to practise and provide services in their areas.

[Mr. Rowsell in the chair]

Rural physicians, of course, tend to work both – a lot of them like to have their own family clinic, and then they also work in the rural hospital. They are multidisciplinary. They enjoy the challenge of taking on a number of different roles and providing full service in their communities. The decisions made by this government directly undermined their ability to do that, and it took weeks for this government to sit up and listen and begin to make some changes. In that time, unfortunately, we did see some very good rural physicians, like the folks at the Moose & Squirrel in Sundre, that withdrew from

the local hospital and have not yet returned. We saw the loss of doctors from the province of Alberta, and we've seen that continue since. Three times as many doctors left this province in 2021 as in 2019, 140. And, sadly, that impact is being felt far more deeply in rural communities.

I appreciate what the member said about this being a long-standing issue, but absolutely this problem has been badly exacerbated under this government. Now, that said, the proposals that the member is bringing forward, the things that he's talking about in terms of how to remedy this: absolutely – you know what? – I would agree with him on those.

Again, I've had the chance to speak with doctors from all corners of the province and indeed a number in rural areas and a number who worked at some of the clinics that were most respected for training rural doctors: the folks down in Pincher Creek, the folks in Sundre, and others who have been training up young doctors in the province and have been responsible for helping us get so many of the excellent rural physicians that we have been able to get. They agree with the member, as does the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta and others, that the best way to recruit more doctors – and I'd agree, probably other rural health professionals as well – is, first of all, to offer more training where they are.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

If we recruit more people from rural areas, give them the opportunity to learn in their community, to get experience in their community, they're more likely to stay and to work in that community. So, absolutely, that is a good investment, and I'm pleased to hear that this government, after some of the real damage that it did, is taking steps to try to correct that. That is one step that absolutely I would agree with.

The RESIDE program: certainly, it's a small step, again, compared to the damage that has been done, the doctors that have been lost, but indeed I have heard support for that from some of the folks that I've talked with, some of the rural physicians, who feel that could help work towards that. I would agree with the member that perhaps looking at other incentive programs to bring other health professionals into some of these rural areas – absolutely, I agree. That could help solve some of these problems.

But, frankly, Madam Speaker, I think the most important thing that we need to get if we want to attract more health professionals is to actually have a fair contract, and sadly that's been undermined by this government. It's been dragged out far longer than it had to be. The initial contract, when it was unilaterally cancelled by this government – let's be clear; let's remember: this government went on an incredibly aggressive campaign to attack and smear physicians.

The then Minister of Health went on social media. They put up an entire website accusing these doctors, including many of these rural doctors, of abusing their position, misusing the billing system. For two years as these doctors, including many rural physicians, called on this government for virtual codes to be extended, to add the complex modifiers so that they could provide care to their patients in the midst of a pandemic, this government sat on its hands and refused to act, refused to listen, in large part at the beginning because they were intentionally trying to grind doctors down to try to get a better budget line.

4:10

This government has created an atmosphere. Again, I have talked to physicians as recently as last month, talked to physicians in Red Deer who said: "You know what? They lost contracts with anaesthesiologists who definitely specifically named the lack of a

contract, the antagonism of this government as the reason why they decided not to come to Alberta."

Now, I know that the member who brought this forward was himself advocating and that he was demanding that the health care minister take action. Indeed, I believe that is in part why that Health minister finally did backtrack on a portion of the changes that he was trying to force through. I respect that the member brought forward that advocacy on behalf of his constituents, but there is still a lot of damage that needs to be undone, and all the programs in the world, all the incentives are not going to undo the fact that we still have a lot of uncertainty.

I recognize that the current Minister of Health certainly presents a much better face for this government in those negotiations. We are seemingly seeing some progress made, but this government still continues on many levels to push things to the very last minute. I know there's a situation right now with hospitalists in the province of Alberta. We have the situation with medical physicists in the province of Alberta where this government is indeed grinding right up to the very last minute within days of contracts ending. That still creates further chaos in the system. That is going to make it more difficult to recruit health care professionals indeed and specifically to rural areas, too.

The member mentioned, you know, speaking with nurses and others who were talking about the concerns they had about being redeployed during the pandemic and the stresses that were created. Again, Madam Speaker, those were decisions by this government on how it handled its COVID-19 policy, and again they repeatedly seemed to use our health care professionals – doctors, nurses, others – as a crash mat to take the impact of their political decisions. They were more concerned about their ability to stay in office than they were about doing the right thing for Albertans and indeed our health care system. As a result, we exhausted many of our health care professionals, which led us to the situation which began last May, where, as the member noted, we had these rolling closures of emergency rooms, closed beds. The Galahad seniors' care centre is still closed, 20 seniors still displaced because of a lack of nurses and other health care professionals. That has exacerbated this situation that we find ourselves in now.

Let's not forget that as we went into the fall, then, and into that fourth wave, as case counts were rising, this government was demanding 5 per cent wage cuts from those same nurses. Now, certainly, they arrived, in the end, at a better place, but let's not forget that that was the message this government sent to nurses in the midst of the fourth wave. Again, that creates an atmosphere where it's far more difficult to recruit.

It creates an atmosphere where it's far more difficult to convince people to go into postsecondary and study to be a nurse or a doctor when they see that their government is not going to value or respect them and indeed when they're going to have a Premier and others who talk about them as being a cost on the public balance sheet that has to be rectified as opposed to people who are bringing valuable services and, as the member noted, helping to support the economy in rural Alberta. As many members in this House have said in this House as they've spoken up for their constituents, our rural communities depend on having health care services available. That is at the core of these communities, and if the hospitals are undermined, as they have been in this last year because health care professionals have been undermined and attacked, then that hurts those communities.

With that said, I absolutely support this motion from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. I appreciate him bringing it forward. I appreciate the very practical suggestions that he is putting forward on how we begin to address these issues. It's just my hope that this government will also address the other many

outstanding issues. Again, these programs are not going to be enough to undo the lack of trust that currently exists between this government and many health care workers. That is going to be the chief thing we need to overcome if we want to support our rural communities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to speak on my good friend's motion. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has been an excellent advocate for rural health care. Though I know that we shouldn't say names, I do have to acknowledge his nickname when we were in the opposition during the 29th Legislature. It was Dialysis Dave for his advocacy for the community of Lac La Biche in getting a permanent dialysis centre. Again, we can acknowledge the former Health minister also for her support on that. That was definitely a demonstration of good co-operation by both sides of the House to address the real needs of communities.

The system that we currently have, with the educational systems being focused in the larger centres, which is natural and is a model that is throughout the world in every nation – let the big schools be in the large centres. But the problem with this is that when we see people getting educated in these communities, in these large centres, they certainly become attracted to and desire to live in those very same centres and they become acclimated to all the amenities and the services available in large cities. I believe my good friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul's hope is that perhaps more educational opportunities in rural areas will be supported.

Certainly, one example of this, if we were to look at Ontario as an example, is the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. Madam Speaker, back in 2005 Ontario decided to invest in a college to produce physicians in the communities of Sudbury and Thunder Bay, two smaller communities but very far away from Toronto. Many years later, when they reviewed the success of this school of medicine, it has exceeded expectations. It has been just a wonderful demonstration of what happens with this. To that effect, my understanding is that approximately a large percentage of students that are educated in this program actually stay in rural and remote communities, not necessarily in Thunder Bay or Sudbury but certainly in some other small communities around there, and to great success, keeping physicians in rural areas where we really need to attract these people.

Not only that, Madam Speaker, but this school in Ontario has also succeeded in supporting Indigenous Canadians in becoming physicians and who then practise their skills in many of these rural areas where they're from. This is a fantastic thing and something certainly that I hope we consider mimicking here in Alberta, perhaps a northern Alberta school of medicine with locales in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, as an example. Again, when we're trying to attract physicians and other health professionals to these rural communities, we have to look at the current impacts. Certainly, if we take Fort McMurray as an example, right now there are 46,000 trips a year from Fort McMurray to Edmonton just to see health care specialists and other professionals that aren't available in Fort McMurray. Despite a very rich community with an average household income of almost \$200,000, despite the fact that the industry there creates, according to our last budget, \$10.3 billion in revenues for this government, we have a hard time attracting people to this community to work as health professionals.

The ability to have a school of medicine in Fort McMurray, as an example, would be fantastic and certainly a way of not only

attracting physicians but keeping them if not there then in other rural areas. Again, we continue to struggle in maintaining a lot of physicians in these rural areas as well as other health professionals. Lab technicians, diagnostic imaging, like people with nuclear medicine abilities so that they can run CT scans and whatnot, are so valued and so important. Paramedics are another area that we need more of. Certainly, in Fort McMurray we're blessed to have a paramedic program at our local college, but a program like that needs to be expanded in other areas. Certainly, northeastern Alberta, in particular, could definitely use some ability to attract people to this field.

Now, don't get me wrong; our government has done a lot to try to help in these areas. Our government committed \$90 million towards the recruitment and retention of physicians to rural areas, and our government is also providing \$57 million towards programs like the rural, remote, northern program and other programs similar to that like the rural education supplement and integrated doctor experience, or RESIDE. These programs play an important role in physician recruitment in local areas, but again we can do more. We can listen to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul and start institutions that educate these people and get them acclimated to working and living in rural, northern, and remote communities.

With that, Madam Speaker, I just wish to thank you for the opportunity to speak here, and I hope the members of this House support this fantastic motion from my good friend.

Thank you so much.

4:20

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

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I do want to take a few minutes and talk about Motion 504, brought forward by the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. I really appreciate this motion. I know that this member has been working on this issue from the time he first was elected, and it likewise has been a great concern in my constituency, too. I just want to read it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to improve access to health care for residents of northern Alberta by increasing opportunities for postsecondary training in health care fields for rural students who agree to work in areas of rural Alberta that require medical professionals, once they have completed their training.

This has been an issue for quite some time in rural Alberta, of course, not having enough physicians, and now we see a shortage in nurses, too. It's been a great concern. We need to be able to get this under control. We've seen many shutdowns in my constituency of hospitals, and I think that when we look at the difference between rural Alberta and urban Alberta, again, we don't want to see urban Alberta suffering the same way as rural Alberta is as far as having hospital closures. Likewise, I don't think urban Alberta wants to see rural Alberta have hospitals shut down and not have access to health care in a reasonable distance from where you live.

Recently the Swan Hills hospital was shut down. I've got a daughter that lives there, and she's 34 weeks pregnant. Of course, it caused me alarm, when she was having some issues with her pregnancy, that she wouldn't be able to get to a doctor without a minimum hour's drive, maybe even more. Depending on the roads it might have been inaccessible altogether because weather in that area is very temperamental. We've seen the Fairview hospital close down beds from a nurse shortage. We've seen McLennan hospital shut down many times for lack of physicians.

I think there are many issues, and I know that this will take care of some of the issues or will work towards some of the issues that we see as far as health care professional shortage in rural Alberta, but we also have some other issues, too, and I just want to point out

a couple of things. Right now we have students from Alberta, youth born and raised in Alberta, that want to become doctors, want to become nurses and can't get into the Alberta educational program, postsecondary educational program, so they travel outside Canada to be able to get their licence. The problem is that there are barriers to get back.

I know, for instance, a young lady in northern Alberta that grew up in a small rural town. Her grandmother was a doctor. She wanted to be a doctor, too. She couldn't get in in Alberta, so she travelled to England to become a doctor, and now I think she's been licensed there for over a year and a half. She's trying to come back to Alberta, but she can't because the process takes too much time. She could go almost anywhere else in the world, but for some reason we can't get her back here, and she wants to come back. She wants to practise in northern rural Alberta in a small community. The exact people that we want are not able to come back and do what we want them to do, so we need to be able to take away those barriers for bringing people in.

I know that we need doctors where we need doctors, not just doctors coming into Alberta, but we need them specifically where we're short doctors, and we see that need all across northern Alberta and all across rural Alberta. It mentions that in this motion, that we need these doctors in rural Alberta. It starts off talking about, you know, health care for residents of northern Alberta, but I know that it mentions in here, too – it talks about all of rural Alberta.

Another problem we had. We had a female doctor that wanted to come into McLennan, and the process and the testing – I think originally they were doing tests twice a year to allow the doctors to be certified to come in and practise. Well, then with COVID they shut it down to just once a year. This doctor came in, I think, a month or so after the test, which means she had to wait 10 or 11 months before the next test to be able to come in. There are processes like that that need to be changed so that we can remove these barriers to get doctors and health professionals to rural Alberta.

But I think one of the things we can be working on immediately is what this motion addresses, our postsecondary institutions right here in Alberta, where we can bring our Alberta students that want to practise in Alberta, particularly rural Alberta, and make sure we have places for them so that they don't have to travel outside the country to get their education and then go through this long, drawn-out process to get back.

I really do support this motion. I think it's fantastic. I want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for bringing this forward. It is very important. It's very timely. There's never a bad time to be talking about the importance of rural health care and making sure that we have the services in rural Alberta that the people in urban Alberta have. Again, we don't want to see people in urban Alberta suffering, and they don't want to see us suffering in rural Alberta either. I think it's something that could be supported all around in this House, and I'm going to support this. Again, I appreciate the member bringing it forward.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Long:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. First and foremost, I want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for introducing this important motion in the House. As a member and resident of a rural area I have experienced the health care shortage issues present in our community first-hand. On March 15 Alberta Health Services sent out an e-mail to many of my constituents in Whitecourt informing them of a temporary interruption of C-

section services at the Whitecourt health care centre. Many people might hear this news and wonder what the big issue is and why they can't go to another clinic. Unfortunately, they can't. The next closest health care centre is in Edson, over 95 kilometres away. Under perfect conditions that trip takes over an hour.

Can you imagine going through all the stress of pregnancy and then being told you may not be able to receive a life-saving C-section that you may need? It's not a feeling any expectant parent should go through. In a country like Canada no pregnant woman should worry about whether or not she and her baby will make it through labour and delivery, especially not in Alberta, the province with the third-highest GDP in the country.

I must admit that now seems like the perfect time for this motion to be brought forward, considering it will benefit everyone: the residents of rural areas, the students, young professionals starting their careers, and current health care workers experiencing significant strain. Earlier this year our government announced a \$6 million investment to increase Albertans' access to the care they need, and those funds will be used over three years to help students pay for medical school costs.

Some exchange students will complete residency training in rural Alberta and agree to practise in a rural Alberta community when their schooling is complete. That is excellent news; however, physicians are not the only health care workers who are scarce in rural areas. All health care professionals are. This includes nurses, mental health professionals, social workers, physician assistants, respiratory therapists, dentists, pharmacists, speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, physical and behavioural therapists, medical laboratory scientists, dietitians, and many, many more. Therefore, it is essential to have a plan in place to attract allied health care professionals to rural communities.

It's also important to remember that working in rural areas requires knowledge about those specific communities. Madam Speaker, that is why this motion is so important. Having a chance to gain experience and training from rural areas will allow students to understand rural upbringing, available resources, common health concerns, and societal needs. Studies have been conducted in Canada and the U.S. regarding the success of retaining health care professionals in rural areas, and they have all concluded that a positive undergraduate rural exposure and targeted postgraduate exposure outside urban areas are consistently associated with a greater probability of physicians choosing to practise in rural communities in the long run.

I would also like to point out how this motion is beneficial to students in different health care fields of study. This program will grant them hands-on experience, including the scope of practice required of a primary care physician. In many cases because the community is so small, students are able to work closely with the same attending physician all year. This is particularly valuable because it allows them to build on their experiences, have a more in-depth knowledge of their area of study, and grow as part of a team that can identify their strengths and weaknesses and provide tailored mentoring.

4:30

Madam Speaker, many of the leaders in different health care fields are of the opinion that rural rotation should be a part of every health care related curriculum. They're correct, because a rural rotation would introduce students to a career path that some may never have considered. What is more, according to a 2019 study in the long run working in rural communities has resulted in practitioners being less burned out than their urban counterparts. This is mainly due to the strong presence of community and family

in rural areas. So often health care workers will take care of whole families. They will see and help them through birth, death, trauma, and, really, all parts of individual lives. In rural Alberta health care professionals forge relationships with their patients, which is vital for patient care as well.

Madam Speaker, an increased number of rural training programs alone won't solve the crisis in rural health care. Most pressingly, we need additional government funding for rural residencies. In addition, the lack of adequate infrastructure in some rural areas still needs to be addressed. Currently our government is modernizing and improving rural health facilities across the province, including in my constituency, and I look forward to watching this process continue as rural health concerns are heavily dependent on having appropriate facilities.

Now, I don't want to turn the focus to only doctors, because Alberta is currently facing a health care worker crisis in many fields, but most of the research available has been focused on doctors. Many people may not realize this, but the number of physicians that left Alberta last year nearly tripled compared to prepandemic years. Of the total of 568 physicians who left the profession in 2021, 140 left the province to simply practise elsewhere, in comparison with 87 in 2020 and 54 in 2019. While it may not be the cause in all cases, more often than not individuals in the health care field decide to leave due to burnout. This is particularly strong in rural areas, where health care workers continue to feel a growing strain and increased workload as there are staff shortages all around.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2022 has assigned specific funding for postsecondary institutions to target seat expansions to support Alberta's recovery plan. Now more than ever before we need to address the disproportionate shortage in rural communities and help stop the brain drain that the Alberta health industry is experiencing. The current partnership with the Rural Health Professions Action Plan has an initiative dedicated to offering educational resources and school outreach to encourage students to pursue careers in rural health care and providing enrichment and training programs to rural health practitioners to maintain and upgrade their skills.

Madam Speaker, advocacy is another important part of improving rural health concerns, which is why the Rural Health Professions Action Plan supports communities to attract and retain health professionals, brings a stronger voice to rural health workforce issues and accomplishments, and conducts research and analysis to develop innovative programs and policy towards improved rural health services.

I support these investments and the focus on expansion, and I do want to thank the government and the Minister of Health and the Minister of Advanced Education for their devotion to addressing Alberta's health care crisis. But I really want to once again focus on thanking my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, who, like many rural colleagues, has truly been advocating at length for improving access to health care across every profession in rural health. Thank you, hon. member.

I would encourage all members of the House, like me, to vote in support of this motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Barnes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I so appreciate what all my colleagues before me have said, especially the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for putting this motion forward. I'd just like to start by reading it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to improve access to health care for residents

of northern Alberta by increasing opportunities for postsecondary training in health care fields for rural students who agree to work in areas of rural Alberta that require medical professionals, once they have completed their training.

Madam Speaker, I want to start by talking about rural Alberta. I've lived in Medicine Hat and in rural Alberta since 1974, and I absolutely know that there is no better place in the whole world to live. The people are so friendly. I could spend all 10 minutes here telling you about my neighbours, all they do for me. I just have to open up my garage, and they come running to help me. It's amazing. And people are like that everywhere. You know, throughout rural Alberta they are so willing to be friendly, to lend a hand.

We all know about the economic opportunities in agriculture, forestry, oil and gas, and with some expansion of irrigation, and that is wonderful. Of course, Medicine Hat and Cypress county have the added benefit of the best weather in all of Alberta, so let's not forget that. Madam Speaker, rural Alberta is so extraordinary a place to live. But this is our biggest challenge: health care, to protect, as the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley said, our young families, our opportunity to have children and watch our families grow.

I'll just tell you about three stories that are on my mind. I heard about a young hockey player who broke his leg on the ice in small-town, rural Alberta. They had problems getting him to the hospital because there was only one person in the community with the level of EMT that it took to drive the ambulance, and, like everybody else, he was on a holiday. He needed a holiday. So they had to come up with another system to get him there, and fortunately it worked out. But that is one of the stories why, when people think about taking their family and their friends to rural Alberta, they do it with caution. It makes them think twice.

I think about when previous governments have changed some of the diagnostic laboratory testing. I think about one lady who did it for years and years in small-town Alberta and went to everybody's house and knew their neighbours, knew what they needed and when they needed it, and when that was centralized, it wasn't properly taken care of. We all know about HALO and HERO. We're expecting good news this week on some fairness and equity there. But, Madam Speaker, those are the kinds of things that make people hesitate before they move out to areas that have so many other things.

But also doctors. I'm so grateful to have represented for 10 years Cypress-Medicine Hat, and it's easily three young Albertans a year that come to my office with perfect university scores – you know, 4.0s out of Calgary or 9s out of Edmonton – with lists a mile long of volunteer work and community engagement, and for some reason they can't get into medical school. Now, I missed some of the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul mentioning some of the statistics, but I think that it was, like, almost three-quarters of those that apply can't get in. At the same time, some of our emergency rooms – we just saw last week that Ponoka's emergency room was closed overnight. What, to me, was amazing about that one: it was the very day that we had just approved \$25 billion in health spending from the year before, with the 700-plus million dollars in supplemental supply, and we're announcing an emergency room being closed. I hope they got it going again. I hope the locum or whatever was necessary got figured out for that, you know, what could have been done.

Madam Speaker, again, I think of three or four of these younger people that have come to me that have ended up leaving Canada for their training: Ireland, the Caribbean, America. I don't think a single one of them has come back. My hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley talked about some of the bottlenecks to coming back, but I don't think these other young Albertans, these other young

doctors, ever decided to come back, where their first preference was to practise in rural Alberta, to practise in Medicine Hat.

I think of how word spreads. When their 10 or 20 or 40 friends in university or high school with similar aptitudes and similar interests hear that one of their shining stars, one of their champions couldn't get in, do you think that encourages these other people to try? I bet you not. That's why I'm so thankful that the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul put this forward. This is not only about the 30 people or so, the 30 young Albertans that came to see me in the last little while. It's about the hundreds of their friends behind them that would pursue a similar career, and it's about the hundreds of Alberta patients that aren't being serviced in emergency rooms.

4:40

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo mentioned – I think he said that 46,000 of his citizens and constituents come into Edmonton every year for their treatments. Okay. So it costs the citizen, it costs the Albertan money to get here and do that rather than the system, but it's a huge cost. It's a huge lack of service, again, when it was stated that we have the third-biggest GDP in the world.

**An Hon. Member:** In Canada.

**Mr. Barnes:** In Canada. The third-biggest GDP in Canada. Thank you.

Anyway, regardless, two years ago oil and gas royalties were \$3 billion, this year were \$13 billion. What an opportunity to put some of that money into solving a long-term problem. Of course, a motion is a value statement to the government. A motion doesn't have the means to measure the government actually doing this, but I hope that this government will give it direction to not only increase spots at the U of C and the U of A for doctors, but I hope it will also go a long way to make sure that all the other allied health professionals have the opportunity to receive service and give service.

Again, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo mentioned about 46,000 people a year from his area going to Edmonton. In southern Alberta they go to Montana. They end up spending big money to get a knee or a hip or a shoulder fixed in Montana instead. Wouldn't it be better to take care of those people here? Wouldn't it be better to give them that quality of life and that opportunity for professionals to grow here?

It's always hard to talk a bit late, when a lot of the things have been talked about, but again my compliments and my thanks to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for a motion that is bang on, exactly what Alberta needs. I hope the government will put in the measurement and the desire to make this happen. I will be supporting it.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wish to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, I'd like to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for proposing Motion 504. It will go a long way to ensure that rural Albertans receive adequate health care services. Rural communities represent a significant part of Alberta's population, and they are key to our province's economic growth and overall success. I remember that the same member has said numerous times the amount of revenue that flows into the province's coffers from rural Alberta, and it's incumbent upon us to make sure that we create a good lifestyle

there, where people can get medical services, which is part of a lifestyle, to maintain those places so that we can continue to create the revenue that comes into the province's coffers.

There's more that contributes to ensuring that local populations are met with the best health care than just building hospitals. We need the people. We need outreach programs, satellite clinics, mobile services, in-home services, digital services, which we found out about this year relative to telehealth and virtual care. We also need to expand opportunities for other practitioners such as nurses and health care aides to shore up medical services.

To achieve these services, we must first be cognizant of the differences and the challenges separating rural health care from urban health care. It wasn't one of the things that I was up to date on when I first came to this House. I had certain things I wanted to work on, and health care wasn't one of them, because I didn't know exactly how it worked, but I've learned. I know that in an urban setting there are doctors that are clinical doctors. There are doctors that specialize in the emergency units and other ones that specifically do rounds at the hospitals. In rural centres they do all of that. They do their clinicals in the morning, and they're available on shifts for emergency care. They can put in a lot of time, and that may not suit everybody. You know, it takes a special person to accommodate that and work at it.

They're very well known in the community. I know that when I wander around my community and you get talking to people, they know their panel size, which is interesting, you know? They know who's got the biggest client list or patient list or whatever, and they do know that.

I know they've been very involved. Like, we raise a lot of money for – we find a specific need. For example, Wainwright needed a new CT scanner, so it became a project of the community. Actually, on April 23 we're doing another fundraiser in Wainwright just to continue to do this, and they put money in as well as other people in the community, but they're there. They're supporting it. Everyone knows. They know who everybody is. We did another one in Lloydminster, and it was the health foundation that was helping raise money to relocate our dialysis machine. Well, the doctors were there and very involved in raising money for that, and in the end we got the money. The CT scanner is going into Wainwright as we speak, and the money is in place for the renal dialysis machine in Lloydminster to get replaced, so that's good.

Another thing that I found that was interesting was medical students. We met with a group of medical students in the Legislature in one of the rooms up here. You know, all I'd heard was how tough it was to get rural doctors. When we sat down and met with this group of people, they said, "We loved coming to rural Alberta to do our residency." That kind of took me aback. I said: "Well, what do you mean? All I hear is that you guys don't want to come out to rural Alberta." The reason they liked it is because they got a broad range of experiences. They didn't specialize and get pigeonholed into a certain area, so they really enjoyed the fact that they were able to get a broad range of experience. But then they left. They went back to wherever they came from, so it was a problem keeping them in those, and it might have something to do with the potential hours of work.

Another problem that happens is when we're trying to get a lot of doctors. When they're trying to recruit another one, they're looking for specific talents as well to fill in the complement of skills that are available in the community. And the doctors got very involved in that, with health councils and trying to get people to come in for that, and that's the doctors' component of it.

The other one: like, we do have the RESIDE program, and that is specifically for doctors, where we're going to – just going to check my notes here and make sure I get it right. Anyway, I think it's

about \$2 million for 60 students, in that range, that we're putting that money to, and the goal is to say: "Okay. Come here. We'll pay money towards your tuition, but you've got to commit to stay in the community for a certain length of time." And the goal is that . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt.

Under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes to the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul to close debate on Motion 504.

**Mr. Hanson:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all the members that spoke in support of my Motion 504. This is really nothing new, folks, a decades-old issue. It's been going around for a long time. As a matter of fact, I have a 72-page report, the rural health services review, that was initiated in 2014 by Premier Prentice and then Minister Mandel under the supervision of Dr. Richard Starke, the MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster. The issues – I've read through the whole thing. It's 72 pages long. Nothing has changed, right? The good thing about it is that we don't have to do another review, because it's already been done. We need to take some action.

I'd just like to point out to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat that it's actually worse than you stated, sir, because only 9.2 per cent of rural applicants were accepted at the U of C in 2021. Nine per cent. We have a problem in rural Alberta. We need to recognize that as a government. We need to recognize that at the postsecondary school level as well. We need to work together with all levels of government – federal, municipal, and provincial – as well as with our post-secondaries to fix this problem.

4:50

We need to encourage rural students: work hard, and we will support you to improve your community and train in your community. We need to step up our program a little bit. As a matter of fact, exactly what the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat said, it's that students watch these, you know, superintelligent students that grew up in their school apply and apply and apply and apply and apply, get rejected and rejected, so if you're a grade 11 student, you're going to kind of change your focus from med school to something else because you see that it's just nearly impossible to get accepted to it. I think that's something that we really need to change.

I'm trying to change that at the municipal level. I'm trying to encourage my junior high and high schools to start talking to those students in the grade 6, grade 7 level, so that they can work on their marks so that they're the top of their class and get accepted, and make sure that we have the support, that finances aren't the roadblock when we have a good student that can get into med school. They're very valuable to their community. They improve the overall value of the community for attracting young families, which is what we need to continue to make our communities grow.

Remuneration may be a part of it. Like the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo said, you know, when we look at the contribution from these areas to the province and rural Alberta, maybe we need to spend a little bit more. I know that there is a program out there, but it needs to be reviewed because it's not been very effective.

We need to remove the roadblocks for assessments of our international students. I know a number of them personally from St. Paul, two young men that couldn't get into U of A and U of C, so they went and studied abroad and cannot get back in. They're willing to come back to rural Alberta, practise and stay and raise their families for 30 years but can't get in, can't get an assessment.

We need to make it a priority with the College of Physicians & Surgeons that when we have an applicant that's willing to commit to a long term in rural, they get the high priority for those assessments.

Surgical facilities. We've got some great surgeons that are living out in rural Alberta. Cold Lake and St. Paul specifically I can speak to. You know that yellow line that runs down the highway? It's because traffic goes in both directions, and I can't see why a person from Edmonton – if they could move up four months in their surgical wait time, they're going to come out to St. Paul. They'll come out to Cold Lake. They don't care. If they knock four months off a wait for a knee surgery, why wouldn't we do that?

I'm going to probably run out of time here, but we need to make better use of our rural facilities and our rural colleges to get the education upgraded so we can educate our rural students to come back to our rural communities. Please, everybody.

I thank you in advance for supporting Motion 504.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

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

**Mr. Shandro:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to be here today to move second reading of Bill 9.

This is the Public's Right to Know Act, which will make it easier for Albertans to find information about crime in communities throughout the province. As the name of the bill itself indicates, we believe that folks have a basic right to know how crime is affecting their community. Madam Speaker, today we're delivering on a platform commitment to put forward legislation that's designed to uphold and to strengthen that very right. Another promise made, another promise kept. If passed, this legislation would require the provincial government to report currently available crime and justice system metrics annually. This would involve publishing information like police-based crime data on the government of Alberta website and tabling the information in a report to this House every year. This annual reporting requirement would enhance transparency by creating an expectation among the public that the government will provide Albertans with this information at regular intervals and ensure that it's easy to find and easy to understand.

Now, we know from talking to folks that there's a strong appetite for this kind of information as well as valid reasons for wanting it. During a tour of the province in 2019 the former Minister of Justice and Solicitor General heard from many rural Albertans who were concerned about crime, and they also told him that they wanted more information about what was happening in their communities.

Transparency is certainly a principle that's worth upholding, but increased openness isn't the only benefit of legislation like this. There's a saying that goes back centuries: knowledge is power. Well, there's a reason that expressions like that have become so popular. It's because they're true. Information empowers people to make better decisions. Improving access to crime data could help decision-makers at many different levels develop policies and take actions that are based on evidence. A troubling crime trend could expose gaps in services and lead to the development of new initiatives or the development of new enforcement strategies. An example: a rural crime watch group may make different decisions about the need for volunteering or volunteer patrols or public

awareness efforts after they've taken a look at and studied crime data that's in their area.

At a more basic level this is also about empowering Albertans to make better decisions about their own personal safety. Knowing property crime statistics may prompt someone to lock up their car instead of idling it with the key in the ignition, or a business owner may decide to invest in surveillance cameras or an alarm system. What these examples have in common is that in both cases having access to reliable information can bring about better outcomes. A better informed public can help build safer communities for everyone in Alberta, and it starts with ensuring that folks have easier access to information that they're entitled to know.

I hope members on both sides of the House will support this legislation, and I ask that we move second reading of Bill 9. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 9? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 9. I think that to open my comments on this bill, the first thing worth saying is: what, Madam Speaker, does this bill do? And the answer is: nothing. This bill doesn't do anything. It's called the public's right to know, and it requires that the minister publish a report.

What needs to be in that report? Well, Madam Speaker, what needs to be in that report is information and data. "What does that mean?" one might wonder. Well, unfortunately, the answer sure can't be found in this bill. It requires the publication of information and data that the minister considers necessary or advisable. That's what it requires. I mean, I would love for someone to explain to me how this requires the minister to do anything. Now, we certainly just heard the minister speak, and he said that it will require the publication of crime data. Well, he may choose to publish crime data, but it's sure not required in this bill. This bill doesn't require him, again, to do anything at all. It requires simply that he publish a report and that that report contain information and data. For all we know, he could publish a report entirely filled with the number of patrons at some coffee shop. This bill doesn't require anything.

Now, the Lieutenant Governor in Council – that's cabinet – can in fact make regulations about this, but we don't know what those regulations are going to be. They're not made at this time – they can't be; that's the normal course – but my issue with this bill is that it is entirely void of substance. Leaving literally everything to be defined in regulation, leaving literally everything up to the discretion of the minister isn't really legislation. The point of legislation is to bind government officials. The point of having to come forward to this House and put forward a bill is to have something that is before this House, that the members of the Legislature get to decide on the substance of, to require the government to do things. This bill doesn't require the government to do anything except to publish a report which may contain information; we know not what.

5:00

I think this bill is incredibly problematic, and it's incredibly problematic because it's being sold as something that's going to increase transparency, but the bill itself lacks anything resembling transparency. If the minister had come forward to this House with a bill that required him to publish reports and then listed the type of information and data that was required, I would be supportive of that, but this, I mean, essentially says that he can publish a report and it can include things. Well, I mean, I think the minister probably could have published a report and it could have included things

without this bill. This wasn't something that needed to come to the Legislature. He could have just published a report if he was feeling so inclined.

I think it's worth talking about what ought to be in this bill. I mean, one of the things that could be included in this bill, that's definitely worth reporting on, is information about cases at risk from Jordan. The Jordan case, as members of this House will be very aware – myself in particular because I was the minister when it came down – significantly altered timelines before criminal courts. It was a big change in the law when it came down, and it required governments, particularly provincial governments, to move very quickly, and in fact the federal government made multiple changes to the Criminal Code arising from Jordan to try and tighten up the timeline procedures. Now, that's not to say that cases didn't get tossed out for unreasonable delay before Jordan, but it certainly became a much bigger issue after Jordan.

Now, this minister, the minister who gets to decide what statistics are relevant to be published, went out in the media and declared that no cases were beyond the Jordan timeline, that nothing was at risk. It's difficult to describe that using language that I am allowed to use in this place, but it was factually inaccurate in the most large sense of the word. There are, in fact, many cases, and in fact the Crown prosecutors' association came out and contradicted the minister because it was just completely inaccurate. It just absolutely isn't the case. And this is the minister who gets to decide what's published in the report, the minister who doesn't think any cases are at risk for Jordan.

How about information on how many sexual assault victims have been denied funding as a result of this government's changes to the victims of crime act, changes that were rejected by the community, changes that were rejected by victims' advocates and which this government trotted out and did consultations on fixing?

[The Speaker in the chair]

What happened to those consultations? Well, Mr. Speaker, who knows what happened to those consultations? We never heard back from them. This government went out, they consulted on how to fix the mess they had made of the victims of crime act, how to fix the fact that they had cut victims of sexual and domestic violence off from what little supports they were entitled to; nothing ever came of it. It's still like that.

This same minister actually proudly walked into estimates and told us how much money is being taken from the victims of crime fund, money that was intended for victims, and being used in other priorities that this minister has. So he's the one who gets to decide whether that's relevant data or not?

How about race-based data? I mean, I'd say that there could be very little more relevant to the criminal justice system, but that's certainly not mentioned in this bill.

We have, Mr. Speaker, a problem and have done for a long, long time. Anyone who denies the existence of systemic racism, quite apart from being wrong, is saying something quite problematic about the data, because the data is quite clear in terms of incarcerations that, you know, Indigenous Albertans, Black Albertans, many Albertans of different races are far more likely to come into contact with the justice system: they are far more likely to be incarcerated. If we take seriously the idea that every person is equally likely to be capable of committing a crime, then it has to be something in the system that is responsible for those results, because the results are clear, and that is incredibly troubling. It should be incredibly troubling to us all.

What we need is information because there are, unfortunately, many people out there who still believe that systemic racism is not



a thing that exists. So let us test that hypothesis, let us publish the data, and then we will know, because as a justice system we absolutely must take accountability for the impacts of decisions and for the impacts of the system that we have created. To suggest that in a system where, you know, close to 40 per cent, at least at last look, of the people incarcerated at any given point in time are Indigenous when they represent closer to 6 per cent of the population, to suggest that there is nothing wrong in the system that's causing that problem is to suggest something incredibly troubling.

I think we need to take this seriously, and I certainly think that that is the sort of data that should be in this bill but isn't. It's certainly possible to do, because my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has brought forward a bill on precisely that.

Here's another thought. How about data on how many police resources are being used to deal with the lack of affordable housing? This is a huge, system-wide problem. We use the wrong systems to deal with the wrong problems. We use the most expensive and the least humane solution we can think of, in many cases, to deal with people who aren't housed. This government has embarked on a mission of cutting affordable housing. They brought forward a bill that they claimed would increase it but didn't.

I won't go down the rabbit hole of that bill, because it was incredibly troubling to say that something's doing the opposite of what it's actually doing, but definitely the amount of affordable supportive housing being built under this government has been significantly lower. Municipalities have been begging for help to build affordable housing, to build permanent supportive housing. People from throughout the sector have been begging for help to find better solutions than people staying in shelter for the length of time that they stay in shelter, and this government has turned a blind eye and a deaf ear and everything they can think of. This government has ignored them, and that's incredibly problematic because this is extremely costly.

How about data on the number of people who wind up in the justice system, in police custody, in our jails, going through the court system and the cost of that relative to the cost of housing those people? I think that is information that would be extremely informative to Albertans. I think if Albertans saw that information, if they saw the true cost of cutting affordable housing, they would be incredibly supportive of investing.

How about data on how much social disorder and how much crime is due to underfunded social programs? That would be important data. I mean, if there's one thing I heard consistently from police throughout the province it's that they don't want to be the first line of intervention for a mental health crisis. When we talk about police funding versus funding in other areas, it is often the case that people misapprehend, and they think that the police want to be the people who are responding. They don't, but you have to answer 911. There's actually case law on this.

When someone phones 911, there is a duty to respond. When every other system fails, when someone falls through every other crack, that's what's left, 911. They have to come. It's not because they want to come. It's not because the police want to be in charge of the most acute mental health crises in this province; it's because they are legally bound to do that. So if we could get the data on how much we pay to essentially underfund mental health services, I think that would be incredibly illuminating information for Albertans. I think that would completely change public opinion on how we spend and where we spend.

5:10

This is supposed to be an act about the public's right to know, the public's right to understand information about the criminal justice

system, so it should require the publication of information. I think that this information, information about the true costs of not investing in affordable housing, about the true costs of not investing in social programs and mental health programs and programs that support people to not come into contact with the justice system, would be incredibly illuminating, and I think that this bill should require that information.

How about progress on Indigenous overrepresentation in our correctional centres? That would be incredibly important information. This is an issue that has plagued the justice system for decades, probably since its inception, although we probably don't have good data that goes back that far, but I would suspect that it is. How about data on that? How about if we publish that? I think if the people of this province truly understood the scope of the problem, truly understood the level to which we, as a set of government systems and individuals who work within those government systems, have failed Indigenous people in this province, I think that would be very illuminating information for them.

This, at the end of the day, is my big issue and my big concern with this bill, that it allows the minister to cherry-pick data to support whatever narrative he happens to choose to drive at that moment. It doesn't require anything. It doesn't require the publication of data on any subject, and it leaves it entirely to the discretion of the minister. That is incredibly troubling because in the hands of the wrong minister what it means is that the data that is being published can be used to paint an inaccurate picture. You can use truth to paint a picture that is not, in fact, the truth by simply picking and choosing what data you put forward. That is my huge concern with what's going to happen with this bill, that they're going to pick and choose what data comes forward based on what data happens to support whatever the narrative of the moment is.

This is a government with a demonstrated history of willingness to be blown around by political whims. They claim to be the government of law and order, and they sit silent while members of their own caucus go to support an illegal border blockade that cost hundreds of millions of dollars to the economy.

**Mr. Hunter:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is called. The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

#### **Point of Order Allegations against Members**

**Mr. Hunter:** Mr. Speaker, I call a point of order on 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member knows that this has been an issue that has been talked about in this House. Speakers have not made rulings but have cautioned the members to be careful in the way that they are expressing the events that actually happened down at the border. The hon. member knows this. She's been in this House many times when this has been an issue. I would ask that she apologize and withdraw those comments.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is absolutely not a point of order. In fact, this would not fall under 23(h), (i), and (j). The member has been really quite measured and reasonable in her approach, and she's stating a fact in mentioning the illegal blockades. This is not a point of order, and I would love for the member to be able to continue her eloquent speech.

**The Speaker:** Are there any others?

I am prepared to rule. I'm not convinced that at this time this is a point of order. The member was speaking quite broadly and not specifically.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

### Debate Continued

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I think the point there that I was attempting to make is that this government's support for law and order, much though they may espouse it, waxes and wanes depending on the political will of some of their members, and that's problematic.

Again, this is a bill that doesn't require them to do anything. It's a bill that allows them to pick what data they bring forward. We've literally just seen a member of this House rise and attempt to argue that something which is illegal was not illegal. I mean, I find it problematic that that's where we're leaving this.

Meanwhile, as we have this bill that doesn't require the minister to do anything, this government is in a position to move on a myriad of issues. They could move on the victims of crime fund. They've certainly done the consultation. They could put back the supports – put back the supports – for victims of sexual assaults, for victims of domestic violence, for victims of any sort of crime at all. This government has massively cut the supports they give to victims. They've shortened the timelines, and they've disallowed a series of lines of benefits in a way that suggests they just don't understand trauma at all or what the costs of trauma are. The benefits were very small, but they allowed, say, a victim of sexual assault to take some time, not a long time but at least a few days, off work to deal with their trauma or to pay for some counselling to deal with their trauma.

The government could be bringing forward a bill that fixed that problem. The government could be moving forward with ensuring that we continue forward with the RCMP contract. I mean, this is a huge concern to many Albertans. There are lots of things that could be in this bill, but instead it has nothing.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate this evening? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View for framing what are arguably some of the greatest flaws in this legislation. I am of course pleased to speak to Bill 9, which is titled the Public's Right to Know Act. It's a three-page bill, but certainly it doesn't really insist on the right to know because most of the sections begin with "may." We all know that "may" is just about saying that the government can choose to do something or may choose to do it, but there is nothing actually compelling them to do it. The section that says "shall," the only section really that has a "shall" in it, is section 3(1).

The Minister shall prepare a report respecting data and information relating to the criminal justice system in Alberta, including data and information in respect of the year immediately preceding the year in which the report is prepared, that the Minister considers necessary or advisable to carry out the purposes of this Act.

Now, I want to say that when I think about reporting annually, we have an excellent process in place in this Legislature. It's actually annual reports that relate to each and every ministry, and within them they should be related to the actual business plan objectives as outlined in the government's budget, a budget which we have just finished considering in this Assembly, the ministry business plan for Justice and Solicitor General for 2022-25.

5:20

The government has chosen to only have three outcomes that are going to be measuring their success of their delivery of the business of the Ministry of Justice. One of the reasons why I highlight this is because we used to have much more extensive publication of what our goals and objectives were for each of the respective ministries, but this government has significantly pared it down over the last two years to only three actual measurable performance objectives.

Then even within that, the performance metrics that they tie to them don't necessarily make sense to the actual objectives; for example, performance metric 2(a), "Performance Measure: Provincial Court of Alberta lead time to trial for serious and violent matters." There are some targets mentioned. There's no reference to prior years, so you would have to go back. Oh, and the target is 24 weeks, so half a year, half a year for lead time to trial on serious and violent matters. That's a flat target. They don't plan on reducing that at all for the next three years that their business plan is out.

If the government actually wanted to take the matter of serious and violent matters seriously, they would adjust the way that they present and the way that they plan through their actual business plan, just like any private organization has objectives that they outline for their shareholders. Albertans are the shareholders of Justice in the province of Alberta, and we deserve to have a government that takes their role seriously in actually addressing serious matters of justice being delayed and therefore denied.

If the government wanted to take this matter seriously, I would strongly encourage them to amend the way that they're conducting themselves through their business plans in the province of Alberta, specifically as it relates here today to the Ministry of Justice, because what happens with the business plan and then, in turn, an annual report is that the Auditor General can actually provide some of that auditing function on behalf of the people of Alberta as an independent officer of this Legislature to actually say: "The government set these as their key objectives. This is how they govern themselves. Did they achieve those objectives?" Then that information comes back to an all-party committee of the Legislature, of course, Public Accounts, and we have an opportunity to actually probe more deeply into: did the government indeed work to achieve the objectives that it said it set out to achieve, and what are the measures of success or failure as it relates back to that?

However, Mr. Speaker, instead what we get is a three-page bill full of may's, that "the Minister may enter into an agreement with any of the following bodies for the provision of data," that the minister may "collect and use data and information, including personal information," subject to regulations. The minister, oh, shall lay a copy of the report before the Legislature. But, again, what value is the report when it's predicated on "may"? Giving the minister already – and I will say that the minister absolutely has the ability already to do these types of things if he or she so chooses.

The city of Edmonton, for example – I just went to pull it up, but they're doing some work on their website – has an interactive heat map of the city where you can actually look at the different types of calls that happened and what's going on in a variety of neighbourhoods. You can do that throughout the entire city. There's nothing limiting that sharing of data in real time, and it's all data. It's not the data that the minister so chooses at that point in time, as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View so rightfully pointed out. There are ways for us to have consistent, transparent, and available to the Auditor General opportunities for accounting and holding the government to account on actually delivering its mandate if that was what the government actually wanted to do.

Instead, what appears to be the case is that the government wanted a communications exercise, to be able to say that they're doing something when it's really that they're doing nothing. They're giving themselves the right, if they so choose, to report on things that they may or may not want to choose to report on. Like, it is such an exercise in a government that once claimed to care about law and order, but clearly there are multiple RCMP investigations, as the Premier just reminded everyone of today, one including his own leadership campaign from the last time and, as has been highlighted, the well-documented participation in matters that significantly harmed the economic well-being particularly of southern Alberta through the most recent blockade measures that members have participated in.

Again, if the government wanted to be more open and transparent and actually wanted the public to have a right to know, I would ask . . .

**Mr. Rutherford:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted. The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

### Point of Order Allegations against Members

**Mr. Rutherford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j). I just caught, I think, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora referring to our side participating in blockades. I think members have been clear about when they spoke to constituents, when they went down to Coutts, what they did, what had happened at the time when they went. To continue the narrative that they participated in the blockade is a false accusation.

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

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that this is not a point of order, that this is a matter of debate. My colleague was talking about a wide range of issues, including the reported-on fact that UCP MLAs attended the blockade and attended what was happening at Coutts, well reported in the media. I believe this is a matter of debate. I was listening to my colleague's language. She did not mention any specific members, did not accuse anyone of anything. I don't believe that this falls under 23(h), (i), or (j), but I look forward to your ruling.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I know that members inside the Assembly will quite often make accusations about a wide variety of protests that members of the Assembly may or may not have attended, with a variety of facts of their attendance at any of those events, so at this point in time I don't find this a point of order but a matter of debate.

Edmonton-Glenora.

### Debate Continued

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about outcome 3 in the most recent business plan for the government of Alberta. I did talk about outcome 2. Outcome 3 talks about introducing "a new model of victim service delivery to ensure victims have the help they need, when they need it." But, of course, we know that it doesn't restore the actual victims of crime fund. That could have been a much better use of the public's right to know. This bill, in my opinion, could have been about something. It could have been about helping those who are survivors and victims in having a path

back to being able to have some compensation to help address some of the harm that's been caused to them, but the government instead has chosen simply to put, you know, a new model as one of their objectives and no accountability with regard to that in terms of legislation. They could have brought forward a bill.

Then 3.2 talks about continuing "to implement digital transformation to improve Albertans' access to services, promote system sustainability." Sure. No measures at all to talk about what it is that they'll be measuring to determine whether or not they were successful in achieving that objective. And then 3.3: "Work with the courts and other stakeholders to develop options for individuals and families interacting with the justice system who could benefit from targeted services, interventions and supports, where appropriate." Again, no actual ways of measuring this identified clearly through the actual business plan and budget documents. So if the government wanted to take the opportunity to create a bill and try to package it as a communications exercise, they certainly had the opportunity to address any of the key objectives outlined in the budget that the government just passed and could have acted in that regard.

Earlier today we had an opportunity to reflect on some of the challenges that the province has been facing in terms of crime, and the minister, I think, is right to highlight that those who have been impacted directly by crime – it has a serious negative consequence for most Albertans who've experienced it, whatever that crime might look like. Again I want to say to folks who've already worked to ensure greater levels of transparency that, unfortunately, I don't think this bill is going to do that in any sort of meaningful way given the way that the legislation is written, the vagueness, and that it, you know, simply appears to be a communications exercise rather than actually talking about the types of information that will be included or disclosed and in what ways.

5:30

Again, there is an annual report for Justice each and every year, which the Auditor General reviews, and that is probably one of my other biggest concerns with this bill, that it is simply a way for the minister, whoever that happens to be, to package some information that they want to share with people and say that they're doing it in a bill. The minister can certainly write reports any time he or she sees fit and can present information to the public much more frequently than annually if they so choose and can do it in a way that is responsive to the needs of the citizens of Alberta, but this bill doesn't compel any of that, and it doesn't ensure that there's any rightful oversight when it comes to actually reviewing the information to see if it's actually responsive to the needs of Albertans.

I do want to take a moment here to say that if the government wanted to do something to take a bill and to turn it into a government bill, I suspect that my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre would welcome the opportunity for his private member's bill to be taken by the government and moved forward as a government bill. I think that he's done considerable outreach with the community, and we've heard repeatedly how having broken-down analytics, including race-based data, would make for more honest reporting and for an opportunity to have better demographic analysis and better programming in place to address some of the root concerns that people feel with the justice system here in Alberta. Of course, it isn't just an Alberta-specific problem, but there are some serious problems with the justice system that I think we as a society need to address, and we could do that through a meaningful piece of legislation that talks about gathering actual race-based data to help inform better policy-making decisions.

Maybe the minister wants to do something around that, this minister today, in relation to this bill, but there is certainly nothing

compelling that in the way this bill is written, and I don't think Albertans have confidence that this government will act on that in a meaningful and sustained way. It really does feel like this is a bill about nothing, and that is disappointing, because there are so many pressing issues as we continue to navigate through this important time in Alberta's history, and I would have loved to see a Justice bill that talked about restoring some of the harm done to the victims of crime compensation fund and about having greater accountability and transparency when it comes to the government's decisions and the government's actions and the way that those are carried out in our society and how it impacts the justice system. I think that we did have an opportunity for that, and the government has really missed seizing the day. It was sort of teed up for them, and they have really missed the mark, I think, on this.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll cede the remainder of my time to my colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to engage on this discussion here today.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to briefly address Bill 9 and to just carry on where my colleagues both from Calgary-Mountain View and Edmonton-Glenora have talked about the shortcomings in this bill. I, too, see that this bill does little to address the priorities of Albertans. It does little to address the key justice issues that are before this province at this time, and my colleagues identified some of those key justice issues, like the victims of crime fund, where there is a report that has been laid before members of this government and could be followed up with in terms of a bill to positively impact the situation for victims of crime, serious crime.

There is, again, another issue of overrepresentation of Indigenous persons in the correctional system and institutions. That could be the subject of a bill, and I think all would welcome that. Of course, the underinvestment in the mental health system and the impact on those people who have mental health challenges by the system of enforcement in this province or indeed the impact on people in poverty with regard to the system of enforcement and policing services. The significant number of Albertans that are dying daily as a result of drug poisonings, five Albertans daily: are there better ways that the public could find out through the Solicitor General on how to deal with that situation?

All those important issues are overlooked by a bill that purports "to increase transparency and accountability with respect to the criminal justice system." That's purpose (a); (b) is "to help Albertans better understand the criminal justice system;" and (c) is "to ensure Albertans have information about safety of their communities." You know, when I read those purposes, the three of them, I'm struck with the fact that any Justice minister and Solicitor General could do those things today. They don't need a bill. The fact that it's codified to say, "This is your job" is a failing, I think. I don't see the purpose of this although the minister stood up and said, "Well, this was a platform commitment made, commitment kept," or something similar.

**Mr. Madu:** Promise made, promise kept.

**Member Ceci:** Yeah.

Like, you need to be told how to do your job? That's what's incredible, that you don't know coming into this place that you're here to serve the people of Alberta, that you need to be told how to serve the people of Alberta. That's astounding. And the fact that these purposes are written here when they can be done already – you don't need a bill. It's another example of a bill, Mr. Speaker,

that seems to be wasting the time of this Legislature. Is that side so bereft of ideas about how to improve the lives of Albertans that they have to go back and say, "Well, maybe we'll put down what our jobs are and bring that into the House"? That's what I'm hearing from the other side. Though you can talk about how much you're following the platform commitments, it seems to me that what you're not following is common sense in the big sense of the word.

**The Speaker:** I'll just remind the member to speak through the chair.

**Member Ceci:** I was looking right at you.

**The Speaker:** Well, just because you're looking at me doesn't mean you're speaking through me. If I say "you" but I'm looking somewhere else, it doesn't mean that you're not speaking through me. So if you speak through the chair, you might be saying "they" as opposed to "you." This is very helpful and lowers the temperature.

**Member Ceci:** All right, Mr. Speaker.

I will continue. Where's the crossjurisdictional analysis? Has any other province brought forward a bill like this? I would say I haven't seen any crossjurisdictional. Maybe our critic, who was informed about the bill, may have heard about it, but I doubt very much that any province or territory is bringing forward something like this before their Legislatures.

I doubt that time has been taken to do these things, because already information can be provided to citizens of Alberta. If they want to know about rural crime watch, they can sit down with their police detachments and find out more. That happens now. That happens every day in this province. That was an example that was used by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, and he talked about knowledge being power. Well, if that's such an important consideration for him, he and the previous Justice minister have had three years to put that knowledge before Albertans. It says, you know, in here that the year you start working on a report, you will prepare it for the year before, so 2019 information could have been prepared in 2020; 2020 information could have been prepared in 2021; 2021 information could have been prepared this year. None of that's happened.

**5:40**

I'm not so sure that the government is all that concerned about information getting out to the communities, or they would have started this. Here we are three years into their mandate, and they bring this bill that they say is a result of a platform commitment. Why the wait? If it was so important, why wait three years to bring it forward? Only they can answer that, Mr. Speaker.

I think this bill doesn't do much. I think I've made that pretty clear. I think that the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General should know what their job is, and they should share information that's important to Albertans with regard to justice matters, with regard to policing matters, and if they need a bill to tell them to do it, then maybe they're not the right person for the job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

**Mr. Deol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this bill, Bill 9, Public's Right to Know Act, on behalf of my constituents and fellow Albertans. I'm going to restate some of the comments my colleagues made. You know, it's very sad to see that we are quite not utilizing the time of this House to do the things that

Albertans expect from this government. The other way I could say it is that this is obviously another example of this UCP government wholly out of touch and still having not learned lessons from their previous three years' experience and discussing legislation that does not really change anything in the law that already exists.

I just wanted to go back two years. In June 2020 15,000 people showed up to the Legislature grounds. We heard them and we promised: "We will go back to the public. We will consult with them, we will hear their issues, we will consult, and we will summarize the report. We will develop recommendations based on that and will bring them to the House." We have done that. Since then we spent almost from June, July up to May of 2021, almost 10 months, consulting with Albertans, hearing their concerns when it comes to racism, and summarized a broad report of 12 pages. I just wanted to echo their concerns with regard to the justice system, what we heard. Those were individuals, racialized Albertans and community leaders, and they were experts. They were experts from universities, colleges, with their extensive experience and knowledge on the issue of hate crimes.

There were a few things they actually echoed, and they loudly said their minimum requirement if the government wanted to really progress to further tackle hate crimes or the issues that minorities are experiencing in this province.

One of the biggest concerns that we heard was about creating citizen oversight processes. There's a huge complaint that there are not enough resources, that there are not enough processes and procedures to go through or to get help with that, to help them address, file complaints, then, further, to investigate complaints when it comes to the challenges they're facing in communities with law enforcement. They ask for ongoing antiracism and cultural knowledge and sensitivity education and trauma-informed training for law enforcement. These were kind of the issues they raised. They expected that by those consultations, by raising those voices while advocating in communities, this government would listen and hear them and, further, actually take initiative to establish these processes.

The other thing they asked for was creating and funding a cultural and diversity liaison – that position could help better integrate the needs of our communities and policing and building and supporting trauma and for mental health supports for vulnerable populations – again and again. Even a few weeks back the members from the South Sudanese communities did not only demonstrate after the painful death of their community member in Calgary – not only in Calgary, but they drove all the way to Edmonton to raise their voices and concerns on the Legislature steps here in Edmonton. They handed a letter to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, and I expect that letter would have been passed and forwarded to the Ministry of Justice. I would have been so happy to hear if the minister would have something to act on or announce or acknowledge that he has received those concerns and complaints, the issues that the community members are raising, and, if he heard anything, to send a message back to those community members so that he is willing to take actions, according to that, to address their concerns.

The biggest thing: the motion I brought back when the then Justice minister of this government announced the Police Act review. The government totally failed to acknowledge and address the communities' call, the communities that were disproportionately represented in the remand centres, in the jails and cells. That was a call that the government needs to establish an antiracism panel that would have been comprised of the community members, community leaders, Indigenous community members, and racialized communities, specifically those communities that are disproportionately represented in these problems. But the government did not give

unanimous consent. We reiterated that call many times, community members reiterated that call many times, and I'm reiterating that call once again in this House, and we don't see – the government did not even acknowledge that concern that we have been raising for the past more than a year now.

Those are kind of the concerns. When we go back to our ridings, when we go back to the communities, that's the type of concern that they're raising and the types of issues that they're concerned with, not what we're discussing in this House, that does not even make a single change to the law that already exists, that the government is claiming to do that they can already do under the existing law. No one is stopping the Justice minister from issuing annual reporting or listing the data that this bill is claiming it will allow the minister to do.

5:50

The other biggest thing that I hear from my community members is the government's changes to the victims of crime fund, that I heard from the women's association within my community. Not only that; I remember that institutions, of which I can name a number of organizations – the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, the Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association – out loud unanimously, like, all together in solidarity, spoke against the government's move to make changes to the victims of crime fund, but the government seems to be not listening. That is why Albertans still cannot trust this government. Still the government is out of touch with Albertans.

If the Justice minister wanted something to be doing in this House, that was something: to revisit their decision, listen to Albertans, listen to the people who are suffering, who are impacted by those changes, and address those issues in this House. We would have been happy to debate that bill as well. We would have been happy to support that bill as members of this House, but that is not happening.

The other biggest concern that we have been hearing about and that is not really helping and that is the biggest concern right now in this province is Jordan timelines for the cases in the courts. The government has said many times that they will hire more prosecutors. They acknowledge the lack of prosecutors and the lack of staffing in the justice system, but there's no piece of legislation they brought forward to really address any of those issues. Even though the government itself has acknowledged those problems, the piece of legislation we are discussing does not even touch those issues. They are important.

In 2016 the Supreme Court of Canada condemned the culture of complacency, complacency within the legal system, that led to lengthy and excessive pretrial delays and strained the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms' protection of the rights.

The government has acknowledged that lack of staffing, lack of prosecutors could compromise the Jordan time frames, but again in this bill we are not seeing that this piece of legislation will bring any kind of improvements, that they will hire more prosecutors or hire more, you know, staffing in the justice system or improve in any way to achieve the Jordan time frames regarding the justice system.

The other thing that Albertans are out loudly saying – and an overwhelming majority of Albertans showed again and again that they're not for Alberta policing. More than 90 per cent of Albertans showed their trust and their feelings. They don't want to get into a kind of debate that does not really help Albertans or Alberta as a province or Alberta's economy or Albertans' lives.

These are the kinds of issues the Justice minister could have been, you know, moving forward or bringing the debates to discuss in this

House what Albertans are currently concerned about. None of these issues, none of these concerns that were raised by Albertans are a piece of this legislation, what this legislation is focusing on, or what legislation will achieve if this bill, this legislation, is passed. Due to this, right now I can just say that we cannot really support this piece or proposal under Bill 9, Public's Right to Know Act, as it does not further the interest of Albertans. It does not bring the changes to the justice system that are important to Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, second reading of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. The hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. You know, sitting down here and listening to members opposite, all you hear are issues that have absolutely nothing to do with Bill 9. That is consistent with what we have come to see from the members opposite in the last two and a half years. Certainly, that was also the case when they were in office between 2015 and 2019. You hear them talk about a particular bill that seeks to address a real problem, and all of a sudden they take interest in that particular subject matter but devoid of any substance whatsoever. They had four years. Each and every one of the concerns that they have raised: they had four years to have tabled a bill to address each and every one of those things. But, no, they didn't do that because they were solely interested in hammering Albertans, in hammering businesses. They chased billions of dollars out of our province. Their policies drove away investors, created hundreds of thousands of people out of employment.

Here we are talking about a bill that is the product of consultations and town halls that my predecessor, Doug Schweitzer, had with rural Albertans. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** I'm sure that the hon. minister knows not to and will refrain from using proper names.

**Mr. Madu:** Yes. I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

My predecessor, the former Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, took the time to tour all across our province, including rural Alberta. He heard from them that they want to understand why it has been so difficult to tackle rural crime. I as Justice minister continued on that particular work throughout last summer. I travelled all across our province, mostly in our rural communities, and I heard the same thing. This bill is the product of the consultation that we had with folks in our rural communities.

At the end of the day, the question is that we need data to better understand what is going on in our rural communities. That is exactly what Bill 9 seeks to do. Bill 9 would establish a regime by which the province, the Department of Justice, enters into an agreement with the government of Canada because there are certain data that we can't get from them. The RCMP would not release certain data to us without an agreement. There are certain data that we can't even get from the municipal governments. There are certain data we can't even get from other areas of government, so this particular bill, in section 4, would require the Department of Justice to enter into an agreement with those municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of this particular bill, and I'm proud to support it.

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt. However, pursuant to Standing Order 4 the time for debate has concluded.

The House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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