Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 2, 2022

Day 27

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
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Vacant
Vacant

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Dach
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Monday, May 2, 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, please remain standing as we will 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: Let's go Flames, I think, is appropriate here. Hon. members, please have a seat.

I feel like we almost needed a special prayer for the hon. the Minister of Health given such choices that he's making today.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests who are joining us. I'll invite the members who are waiting to proceed to their chairs while I am speaking.

Joining us in the Speaker's gallery today, I'm pleased to introduce to all members Arnold Viersen. He is the Member of Parliament for Peace River-Westlock. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I'm not sure that he was able to make it yet, but I do know that His Worship Greg Rathjen will be joining us here, the mayor of Bentley. If you are here, please feel free to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. I think he's coming in now, but don't all clap and make him feel embarrassed at this point. Welcome. Join us, Your Worship. It's not that we were waiting for you, but we were waiting for you.

Hon. members, also joining us today in the Speaker's gallery are some very special guests of the hon. the Minister of Finance. Please join me in welcoming Mel and Bernice Toews, his parents; and his wife, Kim Toews. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We also have a school at the Legislature joining us today. They are from the constituency of Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. Wabamun school, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Now, hon. members, I ask that you hold your applause until the conclusion of the remainder of the introductions today. Joining us in the galleries, there are 14 members of the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta here today meeting with members for the Resident Physicians in the Legislature event.

Also seated in the gallery are guests of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction – Darlene Rasmussen, Wayne Rasmussen, Kevin Kocher – and guests of the Member for Peace River: Ed Hoogerdyk and Will Faber.

Also joining us in the gallery: Allan Nielsen, a constituent and guest of the hon. the Minister of Children's Services; and Josiah Gurnsey, pastor of Thrive church in Calgary, a guest of the Minister of Infrastructure.

Also in the gallery: a guest of the Member for Calgary-Currie, United Conservative Party board member Maxwell DeGroat.

Finally, I'm pleased to introduce to you 10 ministerial interns who'll be working at a variety of ministries over the summer.

I invite you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Economic Recovery and Growth

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the members of the opposition on any given day, you will hear them constantly beat down and drag out our province. The socialists and their friends will constantly tell us what an awful place they think Alberta is. They will attack our economy and job creators, and they will tell you all about the terrible future that they think lies ahead.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good thing that these talking points from the NDP are nothing but a left-wing delusion. Let me tell you Alberta's real story. It is the opposite of the NDP story of decline and downfall. The story of Alberta today is one of renewal and growth. We all know that we have been through some tough times in recent years, but Albertans have done what they always do. We have faced down tough times and come through stronger than ever with a bright future ahead of us.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP claims that people are running from Alberta, but nothing could be further from the truth. In the last half of 2021 net migration to Alberta was nearly 30,000 people. That is more than any time during the NDP government. The Alberta family is growing. The NDP also claims every day that we have faced economic doom and gloom. They could not be more wrong. Every reputable projection has Alberta leading Canada in economic growth not just this year but next year as well. Our economy is forecasting to grow faster than at any time under the NDP. The Alberta economy is growing.

You know what is not growing, Mr. Speaker? Alberta's debt. That's right. After four years of the NDP fiscal train wreck, the budget is balanced, and we are no longer burdening our children and grandchildren with tens of billions of dollars to pay down.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is growing, and our government will make sure that that continues for years to come. Thank you.

Economic Indicators

Mr. Bilous: For the past year the UCP has been claiming that Alberta would lead the country in economic growth, but preliminary data from Statistics Canada shows that that simply isn't true. In fact, figures released today show that Alberta was actually sixth in the country for economic growth in 2021, and to make matters worse, we still haven't recovered the losses from the pandemic. Our economy is actually smaller than when the UCP formed government.

But it isn't just GDP; Alberta is also lagging on investment, jobs, and wages. Capital investment is still well below levels seen under our government, and Alberta only attracted 4 per cent of venture capital investment in the country last year. Alberta's unemployment rate is still well above the national average, and Calgary continues to have the highest unemployment rate among major cites. A recent report found

that wages aren't keeping up with inflation. While prices have increased approximately 7 per cent, incomes have increased by just 3 per cent on average since COVID, the lowest wage growth in the country. As a result, Albertans are struggling more than Canadians in any other province, and many have cancelled a major purchase or are finding it difficult to afford basic necessities.

So while the UCP tries to claim that jobs and the economy are doing great, the facts tell a much different story and are just one more reason Albertans cannot trust this government. The fact is that Albertans continue to struggle under the UCP government, and when they are presented with the facts, the UCP just blames Albertans and tells them to get a better job. The answer isn't to get a better job. Albertans need a better government, and soon enough they'll have it, with the NDP.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

1:40 Members of the Legislative Assembly's Role

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is actually my first member's statement since returning. I've sat in the House of Commons in Ottawa, and I've sat in the front bench here. I'm now enjoying the view from the back, this back corner, which reminds me that every seat in this place is important and everyone here serves Albertans. That is very important.

Having been away for a while gave me a chance to look at this place and see it the way everyday Albertans see it, and Albertans sometimes, too often, don't like what they see. Colleagues, you are all leaders here. You were sent here to fight for the wants and the needs of the Albertans you represent, for all Albertans. You represent the diversity and the unity of Alberta, and you must all do your part to make Alberta better for today's Albertans and tomorrow's.

We need to improve how we do things around here, how we write laws, how we govern, and how we show Albertans that we care about the things that matter to them. We all have our roles. Cabinet runs the powerful ministries. The opposition tries to hold the cabinet to account. But the most important role is that of the government caucus. It is the government caucus's job to know Albertans the best. They talk to the people who feel the pain and live the hopes of Albertans. They understand when the government is getting it right and also when the government needs to improve. Caucus meetings should be where the Premier and ministers hold the government to account by their friends in caucus. Lougheed and Klein understood this. They understood that caucus matters more than cabinet. Cabinet does things; caucus makes them do them right.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, we need to improve how things are done here. I'll be talking about that more in the coming weeks.

Thank you.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling because of this UCP government. The UCP hiked taxes by a billion dollars using a tactic called bracket creep, a move the Premier himself once adamantly opposed, deeming it insidious. The government is taxing inflation and taking money away from families at a time when they need it most. The UCP lifted caps on insurance, utilities, tuition – you name it – then stood back and watched as costs skyrocketed.

Not only is this government making life harder for Albertans; they refuse to take any responsibility or show any compassion at all. The Finance minister heard stories about people seeing 30 per cent increases in their insurance bills and, instead of acting to help them, told them to just shop around for better prices. The Finance minister heard from a woman who told him that her utility bill was over $1,900, and in response he dismissed her concerns by telling her that his bill was also pretty high. Now, when told that inflation is outclimbing wages and families are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet, he told those struggling families that the solution to their problems was to get a better job.

Get a better job: Mr. Speaker, that's the solution that this government has to this crisis that they created. Only this government, with this Premier and this Finance minister, could hear the concerns of Alberta families and make the deliberate choice to blame them, blame the families who, because of the decisions by the UCP, are forced to choose between groceries and heat, between their work vehicle and keeping their lights on. This is just the latest evidence that this government is out of touch with the people they claim to represent.

Albertans deserve a government that cares about them and ensures that they can make ends meet. The UCP does not care about Albertans – we've long known this – but the Alberta NDP does care, and if we are elected to government, we will show the compassion that this UCP government so desperately lacks.

Thank you.

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

Inflation and Provincial Cost-Reduction Programs

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the seasons are changing and spring brings with it new beginnings, Albertans continue to feel the lingering presence of high inflation. High inflation has forced Albertans to struggle with the continued rise in the cost of living. Even though Alberta remains the most affordable place to live of all the other provinces, Albertans are still affected by the rising global inflation caused by supply chain issues and high energy prices. With inflation hitting a staggering 6.7 per cent in March, Alberta remains slightly below the national pace of 6.5 per cent.

The Bank of Canada governor told the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Finance: "Inflation is too high. It is higher than we expected." The Bank of Canada governor has also noted that the federal carbon tax is aiding higher inflation, boosting it by nearly half a per cent. Our government is committed to doing what we can to counteract the insensitive federal carbon tax that is aiding in the rising cost of living for Albertans.

We introduced a pause in our provincial fuel tax. This will automatically save Alberta drivers 13 cents per litre while filling up at the pump starting on April 1. Our government will be providing a $150 rebate to over 1 million homes, farms, and small businesses. Albertans will begin to see rebates on their power bills as early as June.

Along with electricity many Albertans have also seen higher natural gas bills there. To begin to protect Albertans from spikes in heating costs next winter, a rebate program will run from October 2022 until March 2023. This rebate will kick in if regulated natural gas rates exceed $6.50 per gigajoule.

I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes our current reality and takes immediate action to provide support to Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Record

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, as we approach the next election, Albertans are getting a good look at the UCP. The UCP promised to work hard, stay humble, and earn every vote. They promised to be happy warriors and to raise the bar on decorum and more. They promised to be respectful and disciplined.

Instead, Albertans got a joke of a government, a government that, according to its own MLAs, rules by fear, is only looking out for

number one, has only the Premier's personal political future in mind, has created a culture of fear and intimidation, engages in bullying tactics, is corrupt, is arrogant, is about cronyism, is not engaged, is not accountable, and is not focused on what's best for Albertans. And that's just from the UCP members in this room.

There is more that we hear day after day on this UCP soap opera. The Municipal Affairs minister's former EDA president said that "this government is not transparent and . . . not grassroots." He called out the UCP, who claims its own members are lunatics and compares them to clowns and says that they are sad and sour. This former long-time conservative activist told the media that he is worn out making excuses to people who ask why this government is doing what it's doing, and I know he's not alone.

This government and the UCP are a mess, fixated on drama, division, and infighting, ignoring the people they were sent here to serve. The Premier promised to restore a culture of discipline after his MLAs thumbed their noses at the health rules and jetted off to tropical vacations while the rest of Albertans stayed home and followed the rules. He failed just as he's failing on his promise to stand up for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a team united around a strong, ethical, compassionate leader who is dedicated each and every day to delivering the best for Albertans and standing up for them. Thank you.

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

Cold Lake Air Show

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, with the weather finally warming up and summer on the way, we can start planning to attend a very exciting event coming up in my constituency. The Cold Lake Air Show has been going on for many decades and will be taking place again this year from July 16 to 18.

What some of you may not know is that Cold Lake is home to 4 Wing, which is the busiest fighter base in Canada. This base not only hosts Canada's world-class tactical fighter force training but also deploys and supports fighter aircraft at a moment's notice to fulfill the domestic and international roles of Canada's air force, and the Cold Lake Air Show allows people to see these hard-working fighters do what they do best.

Both the wing commander, Colonel David Moar, and Mayor Craig Copeland have been working together to continue the tradition of showcasing these talents and to bring people together in this beautiful part of the province. The Cold Lake Air Show kicks off with Full Throttle Festival on Friday, which will have family activities, live entertainment, beer gardens, food trucks, a classic car show, and a flypast. On Saturday and Sunday you'll see the outstanding demonstrations from Canadian Armed Forces members such as the SkyHawks Parachute Team, CF-18 Demonstration Team, the RCAF Snowbirds, and more.

As the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul I'm proud to represent a riding that is home to 4 Wing, and I want more Albertans to experience the thrill of those CF-18s flying by, that I often get to experience just by living in this area. Tickets are free for kids 12 and under and around $25 a day for adults, so grab your tickets today from the Cold Lake Air Show website. Come join me in beautiful northern Alberta to witness the biggest military air show in Canada, and while travelling through the area, be sure to stop in and visit the many lakes, museums, and great restaurants the area has to offer.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Cost of Living and Economic Growth

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I can think of few things more arrogant than this Finance minister telling families struggling with higher costs that the best cure is to get a better job. We have record inflation, 6.7 per cent, and at the same time wages are falling behind. Albertans working hard for their pay need help with that inflation, not job search advice from high-powered UCP ministers who make over 200 grand a year. Will the Premier stand today and apologize to all Albertans for his minister's elitist attitude and disdainful advice?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, he said no such thing. He did say that a good job with a high-paying salary is a good cure for inflation, and that's why this government is focused on a strong economy and on job creation. That's why we're leading Canada in job creation and in economic growth, with the highest incomes in Canada. The reality is that with investments from hydrogen to film and television, from high tech to agriculture, from forestry to manufacturing, with a record year in exports, with oil and gas back, Alberta is headed into an economic boom, and Albertans will be benefiting.

Ms Notley: Well, no question, Mr. Speaker, the Premier likes to say that things are looking up, and he's right. Inflation: up. Insurance premiums: up. Utility bills: up. School fees: up. Tuition: up. Income taxes: up. You know what's not up? Full-time jobs. In fact, they're down compared to this time three years ago. What is up is part-time jobs. Just how many so-called better jobs does the Premier think each Albertan needs to have at the same time just to afford this failed government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, after the economic, job-killing catastrophe of the NDP and their tax-hiking government, I am pleased to report that Alberta now has the lowest unemployment rate since December 2018. We have the highest employment rate; that is to say, the percentage of our population that is in jobs is higher than all of the Canadian provinces and territories. The Conference Board, BMO, RBC, TD, and so on all predict that we are leading Canada in both economic and job creation now thanks to this government's policies.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we had the highest number of people employed before this government got in and started ruining things.

Now, last year the Premier tried to claim, as he just did, that Alberta would lead the country in GDP growth, but where did we finish? Well, sixth, after B.C., Quebec, P.E.I., Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Yukon. Moreover, according to ATB, Alberta has not recovered from our pandemic losses. GDP is still $11 billion below what it was in 2019. Mr. Speaker, you know who does need a different job? This Premier. When will he realize that?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the NDP for leading question period today on the economy, and I want to encourage them to make that the key issue for the next 12 months as we go into the next election because what Albertans will see is: the fastest growing tech sector in North America is happening right here in Alberta, a 1,000 per cent increase in investment in our film and television industry, the best year ever in agriculture revenues last year, the best year ever in Alberta exports. Last year was the second-best year ever in Alberta manufacturing. We just hosted

Canada's first hydrogen conference, with major companies from around the world investing billions of dollars in this economy.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this weekend Albertans learned that most major surgeries are being diverted from the Red Deer regional hospital due to staff shortages. Alberta's third-largest city: this impacts so many Albertans, including those waiting to see if they have bowel cancer or those managing pain from appendicitis. This government's failure to manage the pandemic has pushed health care workers to the brink, and now we are struggling to maintain care. What is the Premier doing today to address this crisis? Why has he failed Albertans so miserably?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let me decode NDP talk for you. When the NDP leader says "a failure to manage COVID," what she means is that this government did not put Alberta in a hard, two-year lockdown. We know that the consequences of that to people's mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial well-being would have been catastrophic had the NDP been here to put us in a New Zealand-style deep freeze for the past two years. Now, this government is spending the highest amount ever on health care and investing $1.8 billion in a new Red Deer hospital.

Ms Notley: What I am saying , Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta's third-largest city is diverting surgeries to other hospitals. That is what I am saying.

Now, in the media statement from Alberta Health this government acknowledged some, quote, regret that the situation has come to this, but that was a little too vague for me and the people of Red Deer. Will the Premier stand today and state clearly what he regrets? Is it his best summer ever, his privatization agenda, his fight with doctors, his general level of chaos in our health care? Which is it, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the baseline budget for Health in Alberta today is $2 billion higher than it was under the NDP. We continue to lead the country in health investments. We are leading in capital investments to increase capacity, a key learning from the COVID era. We've increased by 1,800 the number of nurses working in Alberta, by 230 more paramedics working now than was the case two years ago, and, of course, with more doctors working in our system as well. We expect AHS to ensure that these resources are properly deployed to address the urgent needs of Albertans.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it isn't just the people of Red Deer; it's Albertans across this province who can't get the health care they need. Drumheller's operating room currently has a gap in coverage due to a lack of physicians. The Two Hills ER has no overnight physician coverage on weekdays. In Hanna seven out of 17 acute-care beds have been closed. Rocky Mountain House, Sundre, Rimbey, Drayton Valley: there are 21 communities with bed closures or space reductions or service loss across this province today. Can the Premier name a single community where health care has actually not gotten worse?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that many of our hospitals continue to be under stress, both as a legacy of the last COVID wave but also we have had some increased pressure on the hospitals. That is particularly the case in central Alberta where there's been a disproportionate number of new cases and hospitalizations in that region. But what are we hearing from the NDP? What they did from day one of COVID, which is to seek to exploit politically a public health crisis. That alone, I think, disqualifies them from being Alberta's government.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for question 3.

Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the temperature goes up, we can expect to see more and more Albertans struggling with homelessness and camping outside. The city of Calgary is tracking around 150 people across 80 encampments right now, but they expect that number to increase significantly in the next few months. Now, recent studies show that more than half of Albertans using emergency shelters are in Calgary, higher than any other area in the province. What is this government doing to better address this issue in Calgary, and please could the Premier be specific and refrain from name-calling?

Mr. Kenney: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will refrain from doing what she does at every single opportunity in this place.

Alberta's government is maintaining funding for homeless shelters at nearly $49 million while ensuring that those who require emergency shelters have a safe place to stay. In fact, we invested $9 million in the new Herb Jamieson emergency shelter for the Hope Mission here in Edmonton. We announced a homelessness task force, co-chaired by Edmonton police chief Dale McFee, to look at the issue of minimum standards of care within the shelter system and a better co-ordinated community response.

Ms Notley: Maintaining shelter funding: according to Alpha House Society, who does outreach with these Calgarians, a big part of the problem is actually the lack of affordable and transitional housing. Outreach workers say that the wait-list is just too long. These Albertans often choose to live in camps instead of shelters, and that's why funding for shelters and detox spaces alone is not good enough. They need housing. Last year the UCP left $187 million for affordable housing on the table in Ottawa. Why is the UCP leaving so many vulnerable Albertans behind?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I should have mentioned as well the some $73 million provided by Alberta's government to homeless shelters through the COVID pandemic to deal with the surge in homelessness during that difficult time. We continue to maintain stable and generous funding to support the homeless populations. We want to thank those who work in this sector – the nonprofits and charities and the private donors – who make very important contributions to supporting those who live without homes.

2:00

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, at a time when more and more Albertans are struggling, the Premier's policies are pushing them out the door of their homes and onto the street. The UCP cut $66 million from income support and kicked at least 2,600 people off their rental supplements. This government has put more focus on selling affordable housing than building it, and they were so late with their shelter money last fall that Albertans were already sleeping in the fall. Poverty is rising. So is homelessness. Will this Premier take any responsibility for the suffering he is causing at all?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, sadly, there have always been homeless people in Alberta, and sadly that continues to be a reality, but this government is taking action with our new housing strategy, with investments that are also being made together with the federal

government and municipal governments. But, you know, for example, I know that when the Hope Mission went to the NDP to say that they needed to replace their 60-year-old emergency shelter in Edmonton, the NDP slammed the door in their face. This government helped them open a new emergency shelter, that I have been proud to visit, that's offering a bed and safe roof over the heads of well over 200 homeless Edmontonians. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the UCP's culture of elitism was on full display last week as the Finance minister blamed hard-working Albertans for not making enough money to pay for skyrocketing tuition fees, soaring utility bills, and the government's billion-dollar bracket creep income tax hike. Get a better job: that's the arrogant and tone-deaf statement the Finance minister gives Albertans who are struggling with massive cost-of-living increases and stagnant wages. It's a sign the minister has lost touch with reality and the Albertans who are struggling to afford life under the UCP. Will the Premier condemn these remarks?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's absolutely ridiculous. We recognize there is an affordability challenge in the province of Alberta, and we're taking action. That's why we've come forward with the electricity rebate program. That's why we've created a consumer price protection mechanism for natural gas. That's why we've suspended the fuel tax, saving Albertans up to $1.3 billion. The members opposite raised taxes. We're reducing them.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the minister's statement was ridiculous. Families are struggling because of the increased costs that this government and this Finance minister have inflicted on them, and his only advice is that they should try harder and get a better job. The arrogance of this government knows no bounds. The government promised Albertans wages would rise. Families are falling further behind. Inflation is outpacing wage growth by six times. To the Premier: when will you stop layering extra costs on the average Alberta family? Will you get serious about helping Albertans make ends meet?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're taking real action on affordability, up to $2 billion of relief for the upcoming year. But, yes, the other responsibility of government is to position the economy for investment attraction, job creation so that Albertans can find their first job. Then Albertans can find a better job. Then Albertans can get a promotion. That is government's responsibility, something the NDP never understood.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, they are responsible for fewer full-time jobs now than when they were elected. They are responsible for a billion-dollar income tax hike thanks to sneaky bracket creep. They are responsible for skyrocketing tuition, for high utility bills, for insurance costs, and Albertans struggling because of their policies. Half of Albertans are $200 away from being able to pay all their bills, but this Finance minister thinks the answer is to get a better job. Is the Premier really going to stand here and continue to pretend his economic plan is working when Albertans are living paycheque to paycheque?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be crystal clear. The only members in here who've raised taxes are the members opposite when they were in government. They brought in the carbon tax. It increased the costs for every family, every senior, every homeowner. They're supporting their friend and ally Justin Trudeau in pushing the carbon tax up four times. [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: They're supporting their friend and ally Justin Trudeau in pushing up the carbon tax four times by 2030. The members opposite have no grounds to complain about affordability. This government is taking action.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Technology Innovation and Industry Development

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We talk a lot about technology and the role it plays as a strong pillar for economic diversification. To that end, the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation recently released the Alberta technology and innovation strategy to help cement our province's reputation as a serious player in the tech and innovation sector. To the minister: can he please tell us why having this strategy is so important to the overall tech sector here in Alberta?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are proud of the tech sector in the province of Alberta. They had a campaign: I Heart Alberta Tech. It's gone viral, and I encourage people to go check that out online. We're seeing rapid growth not only when it comes to the venture capital opportunities – we had 200-plus million dollars invested in venture capital in the first quarter of this year, another record in Alberta – but we're also seeing major institutional players like Rogers, and now it's an expansion of over 500 new jobs at its tech centre in the city of Calgary. It's bright times for the tech sector, and we're a hundred per cent behind them.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that, as the minister of Service Alberta has frequently said, tech is not just an industry; it is the future of every industry and given that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation regularly talks about and promotes the incredible innovation we're seeing from Alberta-based entrepreneurs and given that we're seeing a lot of advances in the health care sector, can the same minister tell us how Alberta's government is supporting innovation with Alberta's health care?

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

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just today I had the opportunity to go to NAIT to announce $1.2 million of financing for training and commercialization. I encourage everybody to take a look at what NAIT has to offer. I had an opportunity to go check out a simulated surgery today. I also had a chance to drive an ambulance. I must say that you wouldn't necessarily want me driving that ambulance, but it's amazing to see the training

opportunities for Albertans. NAIT is an amazing facility, and we're going to continue to make those strategic investments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given the support of our government for advancing technology and innovation in our province and given the government's announcement this morning supporting health care innovations, partnerships with postsecondary institutions and small and medium organizations, can the minister please tell us how health care and the services that our residents require are changing and adapting to the challenges ahead and the role that technology plays moving forward?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we have going at NAIT – I'll use that as an example – is the training opportunities that are there for people that have new, innovative products. Trying to get them to commercialization, they have the opportunity to test it out on what that patient experience would be like as well as probably adding training opportunities for people for everything from an ambulance to a surgery when it comes to our hospital systems overall. It's amazing to see these training opportunities for people that need microcredentials, people that need all the skills training at the younger stages of their career. It's amazing to see this. It's going to help provide health resilience both for job opportunities but also for innovators that are creating companies.

Minimum Wage for Youth

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, each and every day thousands of Albertans go to work jobs earning minimum wage. During the pandemic many of these workers were on the front lines at stores, cafes, and restaurants. The Finance minister's comment to get a better job is completely condescending. It is yet another example of the UCP's lack of respect for the people of Alberta. Meanwhile this UCP government is looking to lower liquor servers' wages and has already lowered youth minimum wages, making their paycheques cover even less. Does the minister stand by his statement that the hard-working Albertans who serve our communities should find a better job?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I'll absolutely stand by my statement that it's government's role to create the conditions that make us most competitive, that result in investment attraction, that result in economic growth, that result in job opportunities for Albertans, that result in career opportunities that maybe didn't even exist five years from now. That's what I'll stand by.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that this UCP government claimed that it relied on expert advice to slash the wages of youth workers but given that now we see massive hikes to inflation that are drastically outpacing wage growth for workers, even those who haven't taken a pay cut as a result of this government, and given that this government could take a small step to show it's listening, that it truly cares by restoring the youth minimum wage today, Minister, let's see some compassion. Let's see something to help with the cost-of-living crisis. Will the minister restore wage cuts earned by youth workers right here and right now?

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

2:10

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. From day one of this government we have been working so hard to make sure that we create the environment to ensure prosperity in our province. In Budget 2022 alone we allocated a record $600 million that would help Albertans who are looking for work, who need to upskill their training and implement skills to make sure that the jobs are going to be there today and tomorrow. We are making those investments and much more.

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, given that youth workers are facing significant barriers to affordability and employment and given that some youth face substantial financial obligations like parenting and given that people like my own mother, who raised me as a single parent when she was only 14 years old, are being forced to drop out of school because of policies like the UCP's tiered minimum wage and given that under the UCP government youth retention in our province has plummeted, will the minister advise the House on why he doesn't care about our future leaders and why he stands behind policies that are actively driving them out of the province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the members opposite now care about jobs and economic opportunities for everyone. Between 2015 and 2019, under the NDP, there were a record 170,000 Albertans that they drove out of employment, more than a hundred billion dollars, that would have created good-paying jobs right here in our province from region to region, that were driven away by those members opposite. We will take no lessons from them on economic policies.

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

Health Care System Capacity
(continued)

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I was in Red Deer speaking about the growing health care crisis in Alberta's third-largest city: paramedics forced to provide parking lot medicine, Albertans who need surgery being forced to hit the highway to Calgary or Edmonton, expectant parents forced to travel hours from their homes to give birth, health care workers that are burning out. They want to give help but have literally nothing left to give. What is this Health minister doing right here today to put an end to this crisis, and what will it take to get real action? Serious injury? Death?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for raising the issue in Red Deer. Some general surgery patients are being diverted from Red Deer to other hospitals due to shortages of physician assistants and GP hospitalists who care for patients after surgery. There were seven patients who were diverted. I want to put this into perspective. Roughly 250 surgeries per week are performed in Red Deer; we had to move seven. But that's the strength of our system, to be able to move people around. Our system is under strain, but we are focusing on delivering more resources to our system, and I'll talk more about that in a moment.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that those hospitalists are under attack by this government and given that it's not just Red Deer – our inboxes are flooded with people who can't get the health care they need – and given that we've also heard of children being bumped from their beds in the children's hospital in Calgary and given that the South Health Campus in Calgary is also seeing surging emergency room wait times, can the minister advise where surgeries are going to be cancelled next? Where does he next expect

to find an ambulance stuck in a parking lot, unable to transfer a patient? At what point do we have to simply conclude that this government just doesn't care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before in this House, our system is under strain right at this point in time. It's been a challenging last couple of years, but we understand this, and we are reacting to this. We are investing in our health care system: $600 million this year, $600 million next year, a total of $1.8 billion over the next three years, the highest amount ever in terms of expenses for the health care system. In addition to that, we are investing in capital: $3.5 billion, including $1.8 billion over the next 20 years associated with the Red Deer hospital. We are increasing staff, and I'll talk more about that in a moment.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this government is continuing to undermine and attack staff, and given that all we hear from this government is more platitudes about what's being done, promises for the future and given that, clearly, whatever strategy this government has had for health care has failed because doctors are leaving and half as many are accepting new patients as two years ago and given that this government attacks health care professionals online, attacks patients, removes internal voices that dissent against their failed approach – just ask Dr. Verna Yiu – will this minister stand in this House, apologize for his repeated failures risking the lives of Albertans? At what point do we have to question whether he should still have his job?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is indicating that we are attacking health care workers. It's simply incorrect. We are investing in our health system. We are investing in our health workers. We have 1,800 more nurses today than we had two years ago. We have 230 more paramedics than we had two years ago. We even have 99 more doctors Q1 this year compared to Q1 last year. AHS: we're investing more money, and we'll be hiring 2,800 more staff in AHS to deliver health care services this year over last year. We're investing in capacity. We're able to deliver . . .

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

Fair Deal Panel Recommendation

Mr. Barnes: Two years ago the Fair Deal Panel called for immediate creation of a provincial police service. Now, even with a two-year head start, we are falling behind other provinces, with an all-party committee of the B.C. Legislature calling for the creation of a provincial police service just April 28. On April 1 Saskatchewan launched a 450-member provincial protective services branch while Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland all already have their own provincial forces. To the Premier: after two long years of consultations, studies, and delays, when can Albertans finally expect concrete action?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As I've said publicly, both at Rural Municipalities as well as Alberta Municipalities at their spring conferences this year, I've heard from many of our municipal leaders that they have further conversations they'd like to have with our ministry regarding some concerns that they have with the PricewaterhouseCoopers report that has been received after the consultations that the ministry has had with Albertans throughout the province. We're going to continue to have those conversations with our municipalities, be able to answer their questions, and be able to get their feedback.

Mr. Barnes: Given that last week this Assembly approved my private member's motion urging the government to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool to fight for a fair deal, given that the Assembly previously approved a government motion to recognize the results of the equalization referendum, given that this referendum was approved with a clear majority, and given that both MLAs and the public have democratically expressed their desire to fight for a fair deal, when can Albertans expect this Premier to stop writing empty letters and start taking real action?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking real action. We've negotiated a much better deal, an excellent deal, with the feds around child care. We landed a billion dollars on well reclamation. We've made progress on fiscal stabilization – more work to do – and we have equivalency on methane and our TIER program. We're leading by example on wealth creation, and we're leading by example on fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Barnes: Given that I was proud to serve on the Fair Deal Panel – I can tell you that some of the most passionate testimony during the panel was relating to our own provincial police force – given the growing rates of crime, particularly rural crime, and given that the creation of a provincial police force is most strongly supported by rural Albertans while 58 per cent of Albertans use a tribal or municipal protection option anyway, again to the Premier: why does your government continue to ignore the will of rural Albertans and force them to contract with the RCMP?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that's completely ridiculous, as probably most of what we hear from that member. But, look, here are the facts. We're going to continue to get advice on what is possible. The key, though, is that we have many problems with agreements that we have with the federal government. Regardless of what the solution is going to be, we have many important, key problems with police governance that we need to be able to fix either through that agreement that we have with the federal government – they provide contract policing to us and to our rural communities and 47 of our urbans. But we need to fix those governance issues one way or the other, and we will commit to Albertans that we will provide those . . .

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

Calgary's Economy

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, day after day we hear from the jobs minister about the fantastic job he's doing in Calgary, about how everyone is swaggering because of the UCP. However, while the minister is partying, Albertans and Calgarians are struggling with the aftermath of the UCP's decision to hike costs, kill successful programs, and fail to respond to the needs of Calgarians. Our caucus has proposed a downtown plan; the UCP has proposed doing nothing and hoping the problem solves itself. Can the minister of jobs please tell this House: how many head offices are in Calgary today versus when his government took office?

2:20

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the unemployment rate is lower than it's been since December 2018, and we expect that it's going to continue to go down. Unlike the NDP, who told Albertans, "Go get a job in British Columbia; we've got no ideas in the NDP," we are

diversifying Alberta's economy: the film industry, the tech sector, logistics and manufacturing, and – oh, yes, two words the NDP will never utter – the oil and gas industry. It's thriving again in the province of Alberta.

Member Ceci: Given that we've lost 15 head offices in Calgary – could the minister stop yelling rhetoric and just admit to Albertans how badly this government has failed to keep head offices in Calgary? – and given that Calgary still has the highest unemployment rate of any major Canadian city and given that you'd think this is something the jobs minister would be concerned about but is too busy boasting about his swagger and sticking up for the least trusted Premier in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I hesitate to interrupt the member – and I appreciate that he continued to raise his voice – but it was difficult to hear him with some of the interruptions. He still has about 10 seconds remaining if he wants to conclude his question in a manner in which I can hear.

Member Ceci: Thank you.

This minister is too busy boasting about his swagger and sticking up for the least trusted Premier in Canada. Can the minister tell us the unemployment rate in Calgary? Be specific. Show there's some capacity for research over there.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this government will never apologize for fighting for jobs for Albertans, unlike the NDP, who gave up on Albertans. You know what we've never heard from the NDP? Congratulations when it comes to bringing in new investment to this province. Amazon Web Services: crickets. Rogers Communications: crickets. When it came to RBC's innovation hub, crickets when it comes to the NDP. We know how to get investment into this province. We will not apologize for fighting every single day for jobs for Albertans.

Member Ceci: Given that Calgary's unemployment is 7.7 per cent and given that while everyone in this House enjoys hearing the joyous shouts of the jobs minister trying to deflect from his failures to revitalize the downtown of our largest city but given that I'm really concerned that he either doesn't know the unemployment rate in Calgary or refuses to tell this House and given that wages earned by Calgary workers haven't kept pace with inflation and that the economic failures of this government continue to pile up, is the reason the minister of jobs is doing such a bad job because he's badly informed, because he's ignorant of the reality, or both?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, you know what's interesting right now that's happening across Alberta? Canadians are moving to this province. And you know why? High-paying jobs and affordable big cities. You know what was extinct under the NDP? Licence plates from any other province. Nobody was moving here when the NDP were in office. Everybody was leaving. Now we have people coming to this province. You know why? There are opportunities in Alberta again. That's a record that we're proud of. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Utility Rebates and Small-business Supports in Morinville-St. Albert Constituency

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, the people living in the constituency of Morinville-St. Albert deserve a real leader for their communities. The current MLA and associate minister of electricity promised a natural gas rebate but failed to deliver. Then he promised an electricity rebate. Still nothing. It's been more than 60 days and nothing. Can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity explain to his own constituents and all Albertans, for that matter, why he continues to fail them so badly when they need help the most, right now?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, we have a front-row seat to a master class in absolute gaslighting, Mr. Speaker, because that is absolutely what they're doing. We signed royal assent on the rebate legislation last week, on Friday, but you know what's interesting? We could have had royal assent a week before. In fact, we could have had royal assent six business days before, but the NDP voted against doing it. Shame on them.

Ms Renaud: Given that I've spent a lot of time communicating with the residents of Morinville-St. Albert, who tell me that after three years of the UCP they are looking for change, and given that they're tired of a government that drinks and dines on the sky palace patio, flies their friends on private planes while the Finance minister insults everyday Albertans by telling them to get a better job, will the associate minister of electricity stand in this House, yell a little less, and apologize on behalf of the Finance minister for insulting them? Or, actually, does he agree with the insulting comments made?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, last week we had Canada's first hydrogen conference. We had 2,000 delegates. We had 20 international delegates. This was an incredible opportunity for us to put Alberta on the map in hydrogen. Well, guess what the NDP were doing at that time. They had an eight-page grade 11 book report on hydrogen, and they were standing in front of the conference giving it out to passersby. They reminded me of guerrilla marketers in Vegas. It was that moment when I realized how irrelevant they are.

Ms Renaud: Given that small businesses I've spoken to in the constituency of Morinville-St. Albert are still – still – waiting in some cases for funding they were promised in earlier waves of the pandemic and given that this government's support for these small-business owners has come up short time and again – the funding provided, when it does come, wasn't even enough to keep the lights on – and given that those businesses deserve representation in this House, that they deserve an MLA at the cabinet table who supports them and doesn't just do what he's told, does the associate minister of electricity have an answer for these businesses that are struggling in his riding? They're drowning in debt. They truly are struggling.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, do you know what the residents of St. Albert deserve? They deserve an MLA that lives in their riding. That's right. They don't even have an MLA that lives in their riding. Well, let me tell you that despite that, we made a commitment that we are going to stand up and support Albertans. We did that with $2 billion worth of supports: the electricity rebate, the gas rebate, the 13 cents a litre that we paused at the pump. That is $2 billion worth of supports. We made a commitment to have Albertans' backs, and we will always do that for Albertans.

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

Community Facilities and Live Events

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have endured many challenges to their lives and livelihoods over the past two

years, and it's now time to heal, revive, and support community-spirited activities that we hold close to our hearts. Arts, culture, history, and heritage are paramount to community well-being and reflect upon the vitality and diversity we share and the uniqueness each of us brings to this great province in forming a brighter and more inclusive future. To the Minister of Culture: what is being done by your ministry to assist our dedicated and passionate civil society organizers so that 2022 can be a banner year for our community recovery and celebration?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his question. I, too, love the dragon boat festival, which is in my very riding. Live events are an important part of Alberta's economic, social, and emotional recovery. Our government has and will continue to provide grant funding to assist organizations in hosting live events. Funding available is both operational and project based and is provided by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and through the community initiatives program. Alberta Culture Days funding is also available to community organizations to host events in 2022.

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that community associations and facilities are important to the wellness of our citizens and given that varied sources of funding are imperative to operations and facility upkeep and further given that many facilities are aging and require considerable life cycle maintenance or upgrades, to the same minister: what supports are available from our government for community organizers and their facilities as they focus on rebuilding the strong sense of community we value and desire in our great province?

The Speaker: The chief government whip.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, public facilities like community associations, I think we can all agree, have an important part in building healthy, vibrant communities across Alberta. Just last week we announced another round of funding for CFEP, or the community facility enhancement program, to support these organizations. These spaces provide a place for people to connect and are an important part of the emotional and social recovery for Alberta. If community organizers would like to apply, there are multiple intakes during the year. The next annual intake for CFEP large is on June 15 and CFEP small on May 15.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that outdoor festivals and events are pivotal to a community's vibrancy and given that celebrating heritage and diversity, including my personal favourites, that you referenced, GlobalFest, Calgary folk fest, dragon boats, and the Chinatown Street Festival, to name a few, is crucial to Alberta's fabric – oh, and did I mention the Calgary Stampede? – to the same minister: what is the ministry doing to promote the importance of and participation in outdoor public festivities in a post-COVID world?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is so great, I think we can all agree, to see people coming together and participating in outdoor events, especially grassroots events put on by local communities. Our government is supporting these events with the Alberta Culture Days grant. Alberta Culture Days is a great way to celebrate the talent, community spirit, and cultures that make Alberta so special. Applications this year are open until May 12, and I encourage any community not-for-profit organization to apply for a grant and become a part of the month-long celebration.

2:30 Employment Leave for Pregnancy Loss and Bill 17

Member Irwin: Pregnancy loss can be a deeply traumatic experience, impacting 1 in 4 pregnancies. Along with this come many complex emotions: grief, shame, guilt, self-loathing, feelings of isolation, to name a few. Pregnancy loss can include miscarriage, stillbirth, termination for medical reasons, or abortion. All of these forms of loss are distressing, and we must ensure to be inclusive and compassionate to all forms it may take. Will the labour minister make Bill 17 more appropriate and comprehensive by allowing bereavement leave to include pregnancy loss alone rather than legislating specific types of pregnancy loss?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have worked with colleagues and those in the not-for-profit sector to bring forward Bill 17. There's nothing more heartbreaking than a loss of pregnancy, and we want to make sure that the supports are there for those of our fellow citizens to be able to grieve with their family members in peace and quiet. I look forward to debating Bill 17 and making it law in this province.

Member Irwin: Given that there are significant barriers for those experiencing pregnancy loss, particularly in employment situations where someone cannot afford to take on paid leave and someone who may not have access to sick leave, and given that some people may experience the pain of multiple pregnancy losses, often within several months of each other, experiencing both physical and emotional pain, to the labour minister: again, will you expand the definition of pregnancy loss in Bill 17, and how are you ensuring that your government will make sure that all Albertans are supported during their recovery?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Bill 17 has been crafted in a manner that ensures that you don't have to disclose to your employer the circumstances under which you are seeking the leave, and we're to make sure that anyone out there that has suffered a loss of pregnancy has the ability to benefit from Bill 17. I look forward, again, to additional debate on Bill 17 before this Assembly.

Member Irwin: Given that there's still a whole lot of lack of clarity here in terms of what types of pregnancy loss are covered and we know that this is an incredibly difficult topic to discuss with those closest to us, let alone our own employer, who may not realize that an employee does not need to provide medical details to access leave, does the minister think that it's appropriate for an employee to have to have a personal discussion or have to educate their employer on their own tragic circumstances to acquire bereavement leave? If so, how can you justify this to Albertans?

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, my thoughts of this nature are deeply personal to those of our fellow citizens going through these issues. That is why in Bill 17 there is no requirement anywhere in that particular bill to disclose the reasons for requesting bereavement leave under Bill 17. At the end of the day, we have

faith in our fellow citizens and their employers to make sure that this leave is going to be there for anyone that needs it.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Last month Rocky View schools asked the province for $1.6 million to help bring in 10 modular classrooms to accommodate new students who are choosing public education. On Thursday the UCP government said no. Actually, the minister gave the school district the classic UCP response. According to the board chair, quote: she's given us permission to use our own dollars. Can the Minister of Education tell her own UCP colleagues why she's refusing to help support the communities they represent in Airdrie, Cochrane, and Rocky View county who are choosing public schools?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. The school board from that area asked to utilize, move some modulars around, et cetera. What the member opposite didn't share was that they did this outside of the regular planning for capital. If they wanted to wait and allow for the capital expense to go through, that would've been a different conversation, but because of the fact that they have increasing reserves in their school authority, we certainly allowed them to go ahead and use the reserves.

Ms Hoffman: Given that there's no help from the UCP for public schools in Rocky View county or, really, most communities in Alberta and given that north Calgary itself has been shut out of school buildings by this UCP government and given that the UCP has found capital money for charter schools, why is the minister intentionally sabotaging the public, Catholic, and francophone schools that families rely on in north Calgary and its surrounding communities?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to show that she doesn't do her homework. We are spending $2 billion to build schools, over 66 schools across this province. We are continuing – in the francophone community there are over, I believe, eight projects ongoing right now. The member opposite should do her homework, but she doesn't, and I'm not sure why.

Ms Hoffman: If the minister read her own budget instead of trying to take credit for projects announced under the NDP, we'd see better answers in this House, Mr. Speaker.

Given that in Edmonton public schools there are 1,700 new students headed to schools for the first time this fall but the government refuses to fund them and given that Rocky View schools are also expecting their student population to grow this year and in the years to come, can the minister tell the families sending their kids to kindergarten in overcrowded classes in Rocky View schools this September why the UCP refuses to fund their families' educational choice, why the minister won't properly fund public education?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the members opposite that they did not support choice. When I went across this province, the one thing I heard over and over again: "Thank you. Thank you for supporting choice and funding it." We have increased the budget overall for education over three years by $1 billion. The members opposite need to recognize that and appreciate the fact that our schools are well funded, and the Edmonton public in particular is gaining an additional $11 million on their over $1 billion budget.

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

Opioid Addiction Treatment

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Justin Trudeau and the NDP are misguided when it comes to the issue of addiction. The belief that drug policy should be completely focused on decriminalizing drugs and that providing a free supply of narcotics and needles will result in better outcomes is questionable. Alberta's committee to examine this issue heard clearly from a range of experts that there is no evidence to support the distribution of public supply of addictive drugs. To the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: how will this government address these different strategies?

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

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I'd like to thank the member for his work on the select special committee on safe supply. What concerns me the most is what the Liberal-NDP alliance is actually advocating for. Let me be clear. What they're advocating for is a public supply of addictive drugs for which there is no evidence to support that policy decision. In fact, the evidence clearly says that the more opioids there are in the community, the more harms are caused to the community. So let's be clear. Just because we brand something an opioid and make it safe does not actually make it safe.

Mr. Yao: It is given that one expert, Dr. Keith Humphreys, chair of the Stanford-*Lancet* Commission on the North American Opioid Crisis, said this about the OxyContin era: pharmaceutical opioids were legally produced and regulated, "public health would benefit by increased [opioid distribution]", and opioids would only be taken as prescribed by those it was prescribed to. Mr. Speaker, this may sound familiar because the same points that were used to sell OxyContin are being used by activists today to sell safe supply. My question to the minister is: will it be any different today than it was then?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. Let's be very clear. Dr. Keith Humphreys is one of the foremost experts in the field of addiction medicine not just in North America but on this entire planet. He led the Stanford-*Lancet* Commission on the North American Opioid Crisis. There is no greater expert than Dr. Humphreys. But let me be clear. Safe supply is not a medical term. It is a marketing term. Let's be very, very clear on this. I support the work of Dr. Keith Humphreys, and I support the work of the members of that committee.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. It is given that good governments should rely on data and evidence to make decisions, not just listen to the most vocal and aggressive advocates. There is no scientific data to suggest that facilitation and a public supply of addictive drugs is an effective way to manage an addiction crisis. Can the minister advise this House on the concrete actions this government has taken to address the addiction crisis and to help people get their lives back?

2:40

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It is so important that we are trying to get people's lives back. The illness of addiction is something that has affected almost everyone, either directly or indirectly. We are committed to recovery coaches, the DORS program, the VODP program, which is an award-winning program. We created 8,000 spaces. We've eliminated user fees. Under the previous government only the rich were able to get treatment. We've eliminated those fees whereby everybody can get help. We are committed to a recovery-oriented system and care to help everyone.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements
(continued)

Ramadan

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, today Muslims in Alberta join over 1.6 billion people throughout the world celebrating Eid, which marks the end of the month-long fasting during Ramadan. The holy month of Ramadan highlights and shows the best of not just the Muslim community but all of our communities here in Alberta. Throughout Ramadan community members and many of my colleagues from outside the faith joined in the celebrations and iftars, the daily breaking of the fast. This is an important aspect of Ramadan. The iftar is a community event, allowing for people from other cultural backgrounds sometimes to join in the celebration, enjoy new friendships, and participate in the generosity that is the core of the Muslim faith. I saw this myself many times this year at the iftar events that I was honoured to join. I actually cosponsored an iftar with the Palestinian youth council and was able to join the Islamic Academy and the Muslim Association of Canada school iftar events as well. Fantastic community events, all of them.

Alberta is stronger as a whole for the Muslims that live with us and are fundamental to who we are as Albertans and Canadians. The first Canadian mosque, for example, was built in Edmonton more than 80 years ago. And all this time we've helped to build this province, building it together with our Muslim brothers and sisters. Throughout Ramadan Muslim communities have celebrated and recognized their connection to faith and all communities.

Today in this Assembly we have the opportunity to come together, celebrate, and support the Muslim communities by voting to move Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, through the debate in this Assembly. This legislation comes from what we have been hearing from racialized communities, including Muslims, and today all members of this Assembly should consider how listening could actually improve this community that is Alberta. This year's Ramadan celebration showed the very best of Alberta and showed the vital connections that Muslim communities have in every corner of the province.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

2022 Provincial Legislation

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we start to approach the summer, I would like to recognize all the amazing legislation this government, our government, has been introducing. Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, makes steps towards protecting the continuing care system throughout the province. It closes gaps exposed by the COVID pandemic and will strengthen the effectiveness of the additional 1,500 continuing care spaces being added to the health care system.

As a teacher I feel that Bill 15 is long overdue. The Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022, will bring greater confidence to the teaching profession disciplinary process currently controlled by the Alberta Teachers' Association. By removing their control and the conflicts of interest that come with it, we are creating a transparent and reliable system that Albertans can have confidence in.

Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, aims to improve and support leave for families that lose a child through stillbirth or miscarriage. It's important that we support those who deal with these losses and give them the time they need and deserve to grieve. This is just some of the amazing legislation that has been introduced, and I can't wait to see what comes next as we continue to improve the lives of all current and future Albertans.

Even though I'm not surprised, I still find it reckless that the NDP continue to side with their union buddies that are fighting to keep their archaic conflicts of interest that only benefit themselves. They continue to oppose a better future for all who reside in Alberta and choose to promote division amongst us. Mr. Speaker, it's time the NDP wake up, take out their union-certified earplugs, and listen to Albertans for once.

I'm proud to be part of a government that continues to listen and improve the health, safety, livelihoods, and education of all Albertans. Thank you.

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 Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-South East, and Bill Pr. 2, Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein. These bills were referred to the committee on March 22, 2022. The report recommends that Bill Pr. 1 proceed and that Bill Pr. 2 proceed with amendments. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on bills Pr. 1 and Pr. 2.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, has requested concurrence in the report on Bill Pr. 1 and Bill Pr. 2. This is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18. If anyone wishes to speak to the motion for concurrence, that ought to be done now.

Seeing none, the hon. chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has requested concurrence in the report.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 23
Professional Governance Act

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act.

The Alberta government delegates self-governing responsibilities for certain professions and occupations to professional regulatory organizations. Currently these organizations are governed by a confusing and inconsistent patchwork of nine separate acts and 28 supporting regulations. The proposed Professional Governance Act will consolidate, modernize, and streamline this patchwork into one umbrella act with one supporting regulation, making it easier for them to do their work of protecting the health, safety, and public interest of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 204
Anti-Racism Act

The Speaker: Hon. members, on April 25, 2022, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills presented the report of that committee on Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act. The report recommended that the bill not proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on April 22, 2022, debate on the motion will proceed today.

The motion to concur in the committee's report on Bill 204 has already been moved, and therefore I will now recognize any member wishing to speak. Are there members wishing to speak to concurrence? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am quite pleased to be able to have a brief moment to speak to this, because the government has done everything possible to ensure that the opposition has the least amount of chance to speak to these kinds of bills.

2:50

In fact, what's happening here is a continuation of the assault on democracy that's been consistent with the government ensuring that every private member's bill brought up by the opposition side has been prevented from even seeing the light of day in the House, which is an absolute attack on the Westminster democratic principles that have been established and have been maintained in this province for generations and, of course, in the Westminster system for centuries. It is completely repugnant that the government would continue to act in this way. They clearly do not appreciate democracy. They clearly do not understand the functions of democracy, and they are using their ridiculous ideology to prevent a discussion from happening in this House yet again, just as they have with every other private member's bill.

They should be fully ashamed of themselves, and they, you know, really need to go back and learn some basic facts about how democracy works and the fact that it is not about a single party governing at their own whim but a balance of views being presented, reasonably contested, and encouraging the best of ideas to rise to the surface after that kind of testing. This government has failed completely to do that in every single case, and they're continuing to do that here, and I think the government absolutely should be ashamed of itself.

Now, with regard to this particular piece of legislation they are piling on top of the antidemocratic with the imposition of, essentially, a systemic racist model of understanding. Again, how this government can do these things without complete shame is just appalling to me.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

You know, I had the opportunity two years ago to meet with some young students at the University of Calgary who had proposed a process of collecting race-based data to this government and had come forward and challenged the university and challenged this government to proceed. This government completely failed to heed this kind of request, not because there isn't good, scientific reason to pursue race-based data but because this government simply is taking the position that: if we don't see it, it doesn't exist. This is a complete lack of developmental growth by this government. We know that children under the age of six months act in this way, that if they can't see it, then it doesn't exist. But by the time they're one year of age, they understand that things exist even when you don't look at them, yet this government is continuing this really childish attitude that not collecting data is the way to move forward.

I absolutely cannot support this government's motion because of that. It is clear that people of the Black, Indigenous, and people of colour communities have said time and time again that they are experiencing a problem with inequality with regard to the services that they receive largely from public institutions such as the police, social services, health care, and education. All of these areas are areas over which the government has some ability to make some changes.

What they don't have is the data to support where the changes should occur. What they're doing here is that they're saying: well, if we never learn where the problem is, then we don't have to fix the problem. What kind of an appalling attitude is that for a government to take? You know, this is the government that handed out earplugs in this Legislature, very antidemocratic behaviour right from the very beginning.

Now they are actually using this legislative earplugs set by denying the right for opposition members to bring forward bills even for debate. They know that they're going to be able to defeat them when they're in the House, so it's not as if somehow legislation is going to be forced on them. They can defeat it because they have a majority, but they do it anyways because they actually do not appreciate democracy and what holds it together.

Now, getting back to this bill, there are a number of very strong reasons why this bill should be brought forward. We know that if we actually use race-based data to gain a greater understanding of the issues in our society, then we'll be able to act differently. The advantages of having a race-based data collection process is that you can monitor the discrimination, you can identify and remove systemic barriers, you can address historical disadvantages, and you can promote substantive equality. Those seem like some pretty solid reasons, to me, to have race-based data collected.

If the government actually thought that there were, you know, some problems in the way it was worded or how it was framed, they could have allowed this to come into the House, where they would shape it, change it, and perhaps even introduce a bill of their own with regard to this, but they have not done so. They clearly do not wish to do any of the things I just mentioned. They don't want to identify systemic barriers because then it would be requisite upon them to actually do something about it, and they don't want to do

anything about racial discrimination. This is just an appalling position for this government to take. They could actually take the opportunity to really bring substantive equality into our public systems.

Now, we know that there are no rules written down any longer that say, "Blacks, do not enter" or "Do not serve Indians," the kinds of things we saw in our history, and thank goodness we don't have any of those things any longer in actual rules, but it doesn't mean that the problem has gone away. The problem has shifted from some of the overt language that we used to see to a more subversive, systemic, and more difficult to see yet fully experienced by people of the Black, Indigenous, and people of colour communities. They can tell you that when they go in to receive services from places, they can see the difference between the services they receive and the services that people of the non-BIPOC community receive, and they can tell you, by demonstrating in terms of outcomes, how much they are suffering as a result.

In health care we see all the time that people in the Indigenous community actually have worse outcomes, and I've seen evidence on this with regard to people of the Black community as well. So it's the reason why these communities are coming together and saying: it's actually hurting us physically in terms of our actual outcomes in terms of our health, but it also violates our citizenship, our right to actually believe that we will have equality with our fellow citizens in terms of the nature and the substance and the direction of services provided to us. That's what they're telling us.

The only way to ensure that we are able to identify these insidious forms of racism is to spend some time actually analyzing the data to look for the situations in which it occurs so that we can build upon this good evidence a system that eliminates and removes this kind of racism. But a government that doesn't understand democracy and prevents these things from coming to the House clearly doesn't understand racism either. I think it is completely unacceptable that we find ourselves in this position, and I certainly encourage the government to reconsider this. For the members opposite not to vote for this bill is far too telling about who they are and why they are ill-equipped to run this province in this day and age.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague. The debate of legislation in this place and the democracy that follows with that is one of the most important things we do. On that I can agree.

One thing I just wanted to say – and I'll just speak quickly to this – is that race-based data requires a lot of consultation and a lot of work. I don't disagree with the premise of what's trying to be done here, but I think for any of us who have had the privilege – and especially as a person who is of Southeast Asian origin and Caucasian origin, it has been my privilege speaking with many of the communities across this province, either previously as a minister or now, and race-based data can be very, very nerve-racking for folks that don't understand how and why it's being used.

3:00

I don't disagree with my colleague. I think it's really important. I think the minister would also agree with that. But what we do need to do is make sure that it is collected appropriately and that it's used appropriately. I think there will be an opportunity, as more legislation comes forward, to actually see that happen. I would hope that my colleague across the way from the loyal opposition – the character assassinations and the assumption around bigotry and around racism towards a very, very diverse caucus on this side I think are inappropriate.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I think that the proof is in the pudding of the legislation that comes forward in the future and the use of that legislation in order to do exactly what the member is asking to do. Having said that, though, I do believe, based on my very, very small part in this discussion, that there is really a tremendous amount of consultation and work that needs to be done to make sure – those of us who have dealt with racism in the past know how easy it is to use information that you give against you. Even being female has been used against women. It's absolutely imperative that the data that we collect is used in an appropriate manner and that the legislation actually outlines that to make sure that the best version of that data is actually helping out exactly what the member was talking about, making sure that the data is fixing and helping to attain better policy that legitimizes the work that all of us are trying to do.

Also, the assumption, I would also say, Mr. Speaker, to not speak about the work that has been done: there's been a lot of great work that's been done not only by our government but by other governments as well. I think that to undermine that by suggesting that the decisions being made around this bill somehow undermine the antiracism work is going 10 steps backward. Whether or not we're debating it in this Legislature, that democracy piece – I actually would prefer to be able to debate the legislation.

Having said that, I also believe that there's a lot of work that needs to be done on a piece of legislation, where that debate can actually look at the work that we've done with consultation with multiple, multiple groups of multicultural groups and First Nations groups. Like I said, I will say this on the record here. I have had, oh, hundreds of conversations with various groups across the province, and I'm not saying this because it's something I believe. This was information that was passed on to me by people who are truly concerned about what will be done with that data.

So while I very much appreciate the bill that was brought forward, I do believe that there is going to be an opportunity to debate that within the premise of a larger piece of legislation that will allow us to actually look at the data and how we're going to present that data. I look forward to that day, and I'm very excited to be able to debate that in the future.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to be able to speak on Bill 204. Let me begin by thanking the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for bringing forward this bill. No one on the floor of this Assembly would contest that racism, discrimination, and systemic racism are real and continue to negatively impact people from cultural and minority communities, including our First Nations people, so I appreciate the intention, the good intention, behind the tabling of Bill 204.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I have taken some good time to read through Bill 204. It essentially has 10 sections in this bill. The major sections of the bill: you will find that section 2 speaks to the purpose of the bill; section 3 speaks to the establishment of an antiracism office and the appointment of an antiracism commissioner, something no other province except for one or the federal government has done in this country; then section 4 talks about the duties of the commissioner; section 5 talks about consultation; and section 6 talks about impact assessment.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleague rightly noted, a bill of this nature requires a great deal of consultation, not just from the activist class or from the academic class but from a wide range of cultural communities. From the inception of this government, on day one of this government, we began the hard work of making sure that we build an inclusive Alberta. You know, beyond the work that we have done out there, you don't need to look for that anywhere other than the composition of the members of the government caucus to understand why this is a deeply important issue for us. I am part of a caucus that is more diverse than any government caucus in the history of our province. Not even the members opposite, the NDP, could come close when they were in office between 2015 and 2019.

Mr. Speaker, I have also stood before the floor of this Assembly to say on complex, important matters of race and racism and systemic discrimination that the last thing we want to do is to adopt tools or an approach that creates a wedge between fellow citizens. Instead, we should endeavour to build bridges, build relationships, so that collectively we can tackle the issues that we face as a society. One of those issues that we face as a society today is racism, discrimination, and systemic racism. That is why – you know, I have already talked about what led me to the Legislature. It was a protest that was taking place on the steps of the Legislature between 2016, '17, and '18 by members of the cultural minority community when the NDP were in office.

Members of the community where I come from called upon the NDP to ban the practice of carding. They did not lift a finger. They did not do that. Instead – I tuned into question period to listen to some of the debate on this particular issue – the then Justice minister, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, dismissed the idea that carding was a problem. This was not 10, 20 years ago. This was just a few years back, in 2018. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who shares some cultural affinity with myself, stood before the floor of this Assembly and indeed in media interviews, saying at that point in time that he agreed with the then Justice minister that that was not a problem.

Mr. Speaker, when I brought forward the bill that would legislatively ban carding, the reason why we have so many young people, Indigenous people in our correctional facilities, the members opposite voted against that bill, the first of its kind in this country. Alberta is the first province to start to truly ban the illegal practice of carding. I have my own personal stories to tell about these issues. The members opposite: I would want them to walk the talk.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, we went on to institute, when I was Justice minister, the hate crime co-ordination unit within the Department of Justice. Never happened anywhere in this country before: Alberta will be the only province where you have a hate crime co-ordination unit within the Department of Justice. We went further to appoint a liaison on hate crime.

Mr. Speaker, in the dying months of the NDP they put together the Alberta Anti-racism Advisory Council, and I thank them for that. Even though it was a month before the election in 2019, I still thank them for that. When I have the recommendation coming out of that committee, that is working through cabinet, that includes – one of the recommendations is actually the collection of race-based data. That work is making its way through the government process. Then from nowhere and while the NDP knows that this government is working on the recommendations of that council – there are 48 of them; as of today 22 of them have been implemented – they brought a bill. Rather than taking into consultation different communities, they propose an unwieldy bill that would make it harder for government departments to function.

What we are going to do, in line with the work that has been going on since the inception of this government and with the report of the Anti-racism Advisory Council, is bring forward a bill, a workable, functional bill, that actually solves the problem and addresses the problem that we face, the gap in data, and how that impacts minority communities and First Nations people, not a political football.

You listen to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talking – I mean, calling names – about: this government didn't do that; this government didn't do that. Baseless. I will remind the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford – and I hate to say this, but I have to put it on the record – that between 2015 and 2019 the government that they led had only one Black member of the Legislature on their side. We may not agree philosophically with the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, but you will never deny that he's a brilliant, well-spoken member of this Assembly. In NDP's traditional fashion they appointed all kinds as members of cabinet, chairs of committees, associate ministers, yet nothing.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member to catch my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the concurrence motion on Bill 204. I appreciate that members of the government have stood and spoken. Certainly, this is more engagement than we've had on this private member's bill than at any point in this process so far.

I think I've outlined my concerns with the committee process which this government has put in place, the incredibly weak, thin arguments that a sole two members of that committee brought forward. Others spent the entire committee meeting looking at their phones, Mr. Speaker. That belies the respect that this government has claimed they had.

That aside, I appreciate that we have had some members rise and offer some more substantive discussion on this particular bill. In response to some of what's been said, the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore talked about this kind of work, the collection of race-based data, needing wide-ranging consultation. The Minister of Labour and Immigration referred to the same. Indeed, that was a comment made in passing by the two members from the UCP on the committee that spoke. Mr. Speaker, this bill laid out a robust process that would have had to be fulfilled to develop the regulations which would govern what data was collected, how it was used. The bill laid out the requirement that that involve consultation with racialized communities across the province of Alberta. The bill does not mandate immediately stepping in and simply starting to collect. It puts out the process by which to undertake that which they say needs to be done.

Now, what I hear them saying is that they want to do that work first. They want to do it as a government before they bring out the legislation, but my question is: what would that look like? In Ontario, where they have brought forward legislation of this kind, indeed they brought forward the bill, set out the framework, and then embarked on extensive consultations to develop the regulations that oversaw the collection of that data. That is what I based this on. Now, admittedly, Mr. Speaker, I do not have the resources of government as a private member to go forward and speak with all of the racialized communities across the province of Alberta. Admittedly, I do not, and I did not claim that I did.

But those that the minister belittles as activists and academics and whose opinions he apparently thinks are not worthy have been doing this work, people from his community. Dr. Bukola Salami: extensive work and research benefiting our community. She is not to be dismissed as an activist, as a mere academic whose opinion

does not matter. She is someone who has done the real work benefiting communities in the field, stood with me in support of this bill. Indeed, it seems that the government is saying: "We've got this. We're good. Thank you; we're working on our own process, our own legislation."

The Minister of Labour and Immigration dares to say that I introduced this bill as a political football, that somehow I was disingenuous in bringing forward this legislation after months of consultation, conversations with hundreds of Albertans, reaching out to those experts I could speak with, speaking with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Let's be clear. They are not raising this, Mr. Speaker, to say that this bill should not be passed or that this bill needs to be amended. They said: it should not even bother being debated; it is not worth our time.

I recognize that indeed there are historically reasons for BIPOC communities, for racialized communities to distrust government – absolutely, Mr. Speaker – which is why we laid out the robust process in this bill, carefully thought that through.

The minister spoke about: there is no province in Canada that has an antiracism office and an antiracism commissioner. As far as I know, there's not any other province that has a Chief Firearms Officer, but this government decided that that was a priority.

If you want to talk about politicization, we can certainly talk about many ways in which this government uses its relationships with these communities to look for political gain, but that is not why we're here. We are here to talk about the actual bill. The Minister of Labour and Immigration suggested that this is a bill that could create wedges between fellow citizens. Mr. Speaker, let's be clear that setting up a structure to allow us to collect the data to identify where real issues and inequities exist and then having someone in place to work with government departments to address those inequities is not driving a wedge. That is an assumption on the part of that minister. That is simply setting up an actual process of accountability to get this work done.

Now, in Nova Scotia I know they don't have – the office is not called an antiracism office and an antiracism commissioner, but they do have an office and a commissioner for work with racialized communities. Again, that was part of what we brought into this bill as a means of accountability.

3:20

The minister talked about the Anti-Racism Advisory Council. Yes, our government established that. We put them in place. They came forward with some excellent recommendations, and indeed members of that advisory council spoke out in favour of Bill 204 and its realization of those objectives. I wonder: has the government reached out to speak to the members of that first committee who made that recommendation to talk to them about their thoughts on the legislation it's apparently developing, which the minister said we should have known about? Mr. Speaker, any time we have asked about the progress of the work on the recommendations from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, we've gotten a series of talking points and, on occasion, attacks, but the minister says that we should have known this; we should have assumed. He calls Bill 204 an unworthy bill.

Mr. Madu: That was not what I said. Unwelcome, not unworthy. I did not say that.

Mr. Shepherd: I apologize if I misheard the minister. I will withdraw that comment.

But they suggest that this bill is not worthy of going forward. I would note that Dr. Jared Wesley, professor of political science, six years of experience in the public service, including leading in developing policy development education within the public service here in the province of Alberta, said of Bill 204: "[It] is a great piece of legislation. Likely one of the most thoughtfully-crafted and publicly-engaged private member's bills to come out of this legislature . . . It deserves a debate in the legislature."

So the reasons I am hearing certainly are more substantive than the ones that were put forward at committee. But what I am hearing is that this government simply was not interested in working with me on this issue or having my bill be debated. They want to move forward with their own, and indeed, should that bill come forward, we will engage in debate on that bill, just as we engaged in debate on the minister's bill on carding, which is more than he is willing to do here. The minister repeatedly criticizes, and I have stood in this place before and said that, yes, absolutely, I admit that we did not get that across the line. We did not take the action on carding that he brought forward.

But when he brought that bill forward, we debated the bill. We went out and we talked with community. We brought in amendments to the bill based on what we heard from people in the community and concerns that were brought forward, and we debated those amendments, and the minister stood and debated those amendments and gave his reasons for turning them down. Then, because we felt that there were loopholes within that bill and concerns that had not been addressed, yes, on principle we voted against that bill.

All of that, Mr. Speaker, is more than this government is willing to do on this private member's bill. They are unwilling to actually do any work on this. They talk about the need for consultation, to hear from more people. Not one member of the government on that committee brought forward a stakeholder. Not one. I didn't hear a single one of them come and say: "I went and I talked to my constituents. I reached out to folks, and here are the concerns they brought forward." Indeed, what we got was a recitation of some weak talking points and key messages.

Now, again, I appreciate the contributions from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who has actually looked at this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. member for – I believe the individual who caught my eye, though, was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I'll clear that up after.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, am I allowed to speak to it twice? I don't know.

The Acting Speaker: I don't think that you can speak to it twice. That's why I saw the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and then I was just going to clear it up.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, sir. I appreciate it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Yeah.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 204. You know, it's disappointing that, as opposed to rising to speak to the contents of this bill, we have less than half an hour to discuss the fate of this bill because a committee that has a majority of government members on it has once again decided to vote down this bill. I can tell you – you know, it's extremely disappointing. I've spent 10 years in this Chamber, and it's only recently that private members' bills go to a committee that was quite frankly set up to kill bills and to do it in a way that was a little more discreet and private than through this Chamber. There is no other reason for it. It never existed in Alberta's history.

One of my frustrations is that a government comes in and brings Ottawa to Alberta. A government that claims to be standing up for Albertans to Ottawa can't bring in enough of Ottawa's traditions to Alberta. Well, I'm proud of this place, of our traditions, and it's disappointing that this government – and later on today we're going to talk about another motion to amend the standing orders for, I don't know, the 10th time in the last three years – continues to dismantle the very processes and cultural fabric of this Chamber. I don't know if it's because their leader has spent too much time in Ottawa for whatever reason. I don't need to speculate. The point is that it's disappointing.

Here we have a bill that I know my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has spent years working on. You know, a great point was raised when the member was answering questions by the government side, that this bill was written in a similar spirit to the previous bill that the Chamber voted down in that it left many of the details to regulations, because cabinet has the whole civil service to support them in writing regulations. Mr. Speaker, do you know how many staff work on a private member's bill? Three; actually, two and then Parliamentary Counsel, which, again, I give the utmost kudos to because those folks work extremely hard.

The point is that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has gone out and consulted, unless my numbers are incorrect, with over 600 Albertans and groups of Albertans on this legislation. We've heard an acknowledgement from the government that collecting race-based data is necessary, yet the answer is: we'll get to it sometime.

To the Member for Edmonton-City Centre's point, if there is something missing or wrong from this bill, then let's amend it. I believe that my colleague would accept government amendments to improve the bill, which this place was actually set up to do, yet we have an example, another example, Mr. Speaker, where a private member's bill doesn't even get debated in the Chamber. Yes, for people at home to understand, we're debating concurrence, which is a 60-minute time limit on whether or not the Assembly should agree to kill the bill before it even gets to second reading. Yes, I agree with my colleagues that this act is shameful, and it looks of cowardice, cowardice to debate the issue and, for government members, to put forward actual reasons as to why this isn't needed.

Now, I do appreciate that the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore did raise her concern about privacy. That's a very real and relevant concern, so I appreciate that. My understanding of the bill is that that is a very important issue that is also being addressed in the bill and part of the reason why the government regulations will decide which data is collected and how it's collected to ensure that people's privacy is upheld, because we also agree that that is paramount. One hundred per cent I agree with that.

I disagree with the hon. minister's comments about using this as a political football. I mean, you know, frankly, my colleague is bringing forward a bill to allow government to be able to capture important data that will help fight systematic, systemic racism. There's nothing partisan about that. I'm not about to stand and say: you did this, and we did this, and we did this, and you did that. I think that's ridiculous. The point is driving toward outcomes.

I also think it's silly to bring up comments of: we should have done it in your four years. Okay. Well, you know, for those who believe in God, God didn't build the world in two days or six days or seven. Six days; seventh is rest. Six days, but you know what I mean. You can't do it all in one term, right? So to attack a party or the opposition for not getting everything done is ridiculous. I think it's also, you know, disingenuous that the minister is trying to say that our government did nothing, which I know is factually false, and it's misleading Albertans.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I wish all members were bound to stick to the facts. There was a bunch of work that was started under the NDP on antiracism. I know this because I participated in cabinet discussions about this, in caucus meetings about this. The work was started.

Mr. Madu: Give me one example. Point to one. Point to one.

Mr. Bilous: I'd appreciate, Minister, if I can speak. You had your turn. I listened respectfully.

We started a bunch of work. I know that the current government has continued some of that work. Again, the world isn't black and white.

Here we have a bill that my colleague put forward which – you know, I mean, maybe it's naive optimism that this bill could lead to the eventual elimination of systemic racism. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? Even if it impacted one individual and one individual's experiences with the system, then it's doing good, and it's worth while. Every member in this Chamber: we represent an incredibly beautiful and diverse province. We all represent constituents who have suffered discrimination, who have suffered from systemic racism, and here is an opportunity to address that, and the best argument that the government can come up with is: we'll come up with something better at some point down the road.

We're missing an opportunity here, Mr. Speaker. Albertans elected all 87 of us to do a job and to bring forward legislation that will improve the lives of Albertans, and it's infuriating to Albertans that the message over and over again is that only one side of this Chamber has good ideas or that only one side of this Chamber has ideas that are worth putting into legislation.

I was hopeful, when my colleague brought forward this bill, because the government has talked about taking more actions to combat systemic racism, that the government would look to this bill as one potential vehicle, a potential vehicle, that would help get us closer to the goal, that I believe we all share, of ending systemic racism. But what's disheartening, Mr. Speaker, is that the government is using these new standing orders to shut down debate and not even discuss the merits of these ideas.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for this opportunity to stand in the Chamber today and to debate this motion for concurrence. You know, the other day I spoke in this very Chamber about the value of disaggregated data and how it can help us create good public policy and also help us evaluate the outcomes from that policy. It is important. I don't stand here today because I'm being partisan. I don't stand in support of this motion because I'm partisan. I stand in favour of this motion because it is so very important that we get this right.

You know, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood spoke the other day about Statistics Canada publishing data on transgender Canadians, census data. This was the first time it was published, and I'd like to remind people that it wasn't so very long ago where, had you asked for that, had you asked transgender Canadians, had you asked 2SLGBTQQIA Canadians questions to be recorded in the census, they would have been terrified.

We need to remember that why we are collecting this data is incredibly important, and also how we're collecting this data is incredibly important. A lot of thought and consultation needs to go into that process. We have very, very many communities in our province – BIPOC communities, Indigenous communities, First Nations, Métis communities – who all come from different

places in terms of how they feel about privacy, how they feel about authority, where they might have come from in their past, where they might have been discriminated against or terrorized. We need to recognize that there is a need to make sure that we do this properly. How we collect the data is important. Privacy considerations are important.

I want to thank the member across for bringing this bill forward in the first place. It is important. It's important work, and it needs to be done. But as was mentioned, you know, there are two staff to help write a private member's bill. I would argue that this bill actually requires the full force of everybody we can bring to the table to get it done correctly, because it's so important that it's done correctly. We must not cause any harm while we are collecting the very data to help us address the issues that we're trying to solve.

This isn't partisan. This is about doing the best thing, doing the right thing for Albertans, to really address the issues of racism that we face in this province, to solve the problems, to help people live freely and equally in this province. I know this is difficult – I know this is, because a lot of work has gone into this – but I think we can all come together and work for a very good bill in the near future.

I can tell you that as the Associate Minister of Status of Women I'm not prepared to wait another 10 years for this. We need good outcomes; we need them now. And we can have them, but we need to do it properly.

Mr. Schmidt: If not now, when?

Ms Issik: In the very near future as we work together and bring more resources to do it properly, sir, through you, Speaker.

You know, the member across had said that if it helps even one individual, then it's worth doing. Agreed, but in the process we must not harm other individuals. That's why it's critical that we do it correctly. That's why I'm standing in favour of this motion. Again, I appreciate the work that's gone into this, and I really hope that we can spend some really good time with communities consulting and making sure that we've heard from everybody and how they feel about how the data should be collected and that we are in agreement as to all the reasons why we collect the data.

Anyways, I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to add my voice to the debate today on Bill 204, Anti-Racism Act. You know, like my colleagues on this side of the House previous to me speaking have said, we, of course, disagree with the report that's been presented by the UCP government. We believe that this bill does need to proceed, and we would like to debate it in this Assembly today.

3:40

Certainly, as a member of the private members' bills committee myself, it was extremely disheartening to see the UCP decide not to proceed with this bill. We know that certainly, here in Edmonton even, we've witnessed and learned of some very tragic events that were racially motivated. If there is not a time for this bill to be debated in the Legislature, I don't know when is. I mean, it is such an important concern currently in our society. Of course, any just society needs to make sure that all its citizens are respected, treated with dignity, and sadly that's just not the case.

This bill is, you know, one of many things the government should be moving forward on for all Albertans, regardless of whether they're like myself – you know, obviously, I'm a privileged white woman – or someone who is an Indigenous woman or a woman of colour or a man of colour or anyone in the BIPOC population. Certainly, we all deserve to be respected. Because of how we dress, how we speak, the faith that we follow, we must have the right to practise – it is a human right that we be able to follow our own convictions, what we believe is true, obviously as long as it's not hurting another, but sadly this is a serious concern in our society right now.

There's something that we can do about it, and one of these things is some of the information that is shared in Bill 204, where we are collecting race-based data. One of the things that the UCP did say and the reason that they thought, "Well, we don't need this bill because we can already collect information through FOIP legislation" – but the tragic thing about that is that it's not being collected. It says that they may collect it, but they are not collecting it. So it's very important that, you know, this is a must. This needs to be collected so that we can make evidence-based decisions.

We understand the populations that we're serving, we understand what their needs are, and if we are just perhaps making decisions – if I'm making decisions just based on my own personal experience as a woman who grew up in rural Alberta, then moved to Edmonton to go to university, who has lived here since, and as a woman of the dominant culture, I'm excluding so many people's different lived experiences than my own, whether that person has disabilities, whether that person is a newcomer to our province, a transgender person, you know, someone with different experiences. That's why who's sitting around the table at these decision-making times, when people are making decisions – we have to make sure that everyone is included, and this is kind of a way to do that.

Certainly, I know that when I was Minister of Seniors and Housing, a lot of times it was dominant-culture people sitting at those tables. That doesn't mean that they're excluded from them, but we need to make sure that the voices of all Albertans are heard. Certainly, our population is becoming much more diverse, so it's so important. I don't have the lived experience of an Indigenous woman, or I don't have the lived experience of a newcomer to our country, so how can I make a good decision without being well informed? That's why this bill is so important, that we make sure that all the voices of Albertans are heard and that we make policy based on that. That's why I certainly encourage all members of the House to pass this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

That takes us to 55 minutes of debate. Under Standing Order 8(7)(a.1), which provides for up to five minutes for the mover to close debate, I would invite the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, to close debate on the motion to concur in the committee report on Bill 204.

Mr. Rutherford: I'll waive.

The Acting Speaker: That is waived.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:46 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

Allard	Nally	Savage
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Neudorf	Schow

Copping	Nicolaides	Schweitzer
Ellis	Nixon, Jason	Shandro
Fir	Nixon, Jeremy	Sigurdson, R.J.
Glubish	Panda	Singh
Gotfried	Pon	Smith
Issik	Reid	Toews
Jones	Rosin	Turton
LaGrange	Rowswell	Williams
Madu	Rutherford	Wilson
McIver		

Against the motion:

Bilous	Gray	Shepherd
Carson	Phillips	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Schmidt	

Totals: For – 34 Against – 8

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Bill 205
Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, on April 27, 2022, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills presented the report of that committee on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, and requested the concurrence of the Assembly in the report, which recommended that the bill proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on April 27, 2022, in that debate on the motion, it will proceed today.

The motion to concur in the committee's report on Bill 205 has already been moved, and I will therefore now recognize any additional members who wish to speak. Are there any members who wish to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Highwood has risen.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first start by explaining why I was so passionate about introducing this bill and now look to the House for support on concurrence so that this bill can move forward to second reading and further debate. I've told this story many times in the past few months, but I think it's important that I share this story with the whole Assembly today. Only a couple of days after being drawn fifth for a private member's bill in this session, Cindy Krieger, a local area resident, contacted me to share her tragic but inspiring story about her daughter Morghan. Morghan was in her early 20s and had previously left to attend school in Nova Scotia. While attending school, she, regrettably, suffered multiple severe seizures. Her mother made the immediate trip to her side at a hospital, and prior to her passing Morghan expressed her intent to give the gift of life and donate her organs and tissues, which helped save and improve so many lives.

In addition to stories that exist like Morghan's, in 2018 the country went into mourning due to the tragedy of the Humboldt Broncos bus crash. One of the men who lost their lives, Logan Boulet, had just signed up to be an organ donor. His choice to be an organ donor inspired almost 200,000 people to follow his example. Countless stories like Morghan's and tragedies like the Humboldt crash brought forward important conversations on the need to improve our organ and tissue donation system.

Honestly, as legislators it is our responsibility to do all we can to make sure we have the best system possible. It is important to note that we have fallen behind most other Canadian and international jurisdictions here in Alberta. We are currently the second lowest provincially in deceased donation rates. Currently we have a seven-year wait for kidney transplant alone. My Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, is a strong step in the right direction to build a system for the future, a system that will increase the number of lives saved.

The Alberta ORGANization Group, in line with many other foundations, has done immense work to identify gaps in current systems, and they have identified many recommendations that will improve the current system in Alberta. The most important recommendation that was identified was that of mandatory referral. Bill 205, if passed, will put in place three of the most vital recommendations to build a strong foundation for a much better human tissue and organ donation system here in Alberta. First, it will implement a mandatory referral process; secondly, it will improve agency guidelines; and lastly, it will improve education and awareness.

With regard to these changes first and most importantly is the implementation of that mandatory referral, a change from our current law of only mandatory consideration. Mandatory referral is a legal requirement that health care professionals report all patients who may become potential donors to their organ donation organization. This requirement is an essential building block of high-functioning organ and tissue donation and transplantation systems because it supports the timely identification, referral, and assessment of potential donors. Notifying the ODO reduces the effect of clinical bias or lack of knowledge regarding donation, which has been identified as the leading cause of nonreferral.

Mandatory referral is independent of the consent model and does not affect how families are approached to discuss the consent to donate. Registering as an organ donor or sharing your wishes with your family does not mean you will automatically become an organ donor. The pathway to becoming a deceased organ donor is complex because individuals need to die in special circumstances where donation is even possible. Contrary to common assumptions, those circumstances are very rare. As a proportion of total deaths in Canada approximately 1.2 per cent have the potential to become donors. Each patient who is a potential donor is rare, and identification and referral of those patients is the only way they will actually become a donor.

However, failure to identify possible donors is the largest factor in explaining differences in deceased donation rates nationally and internationally. Missed donor opportunities occur when potential donors are not identified and ODOs are not notified or referrals are received far too late. Missed donor opportunities also occur when potential donors are identified by the treating medical team but they choose not to notify the ODO. In cases of later nonreferral, life-sustaining therapy is withdrawn in a way that excludes the possibility of donation, preventing the wishes of the patient and their families towards donation to even be considered.

The benefits of mandatory referral ensure that every family and individual is given the opportunity to include donation in their end-of-life care if they so desire. The patient's medical suitability for donation is assessed earlier by clinicians who are experts in donation and transplantation. This may reduce delays for the hospital and ensure the availability of supporting infrastructure.

Assessment of donation suitability can occur in all instances, with the timely identification of potential organ donors helping to avoid missed donation opportunities. It ensures that a potential donor is maintained on life support, which is essential to the usability of organs. Family discussions can be planned when suitability for donation has been determined, which gives families the right information at the right time. This reduces uncertainty and disappointment on occasions when families are

approached too soon and then later told their loved one is not actually eligible to be a donor.

4:10

Secondly, amendments within Bill 205 will be made to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency that will pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions submitted directly to the minister. This will help improve our tissue and organ donation year over year. Mandatory referral is only effective if there is a way to review referrals. This is a critical part of the bill to verify that a stronger system of donation is continued.

Lastly, the education component will be expanded to ensure the most current and up-to-date information, education, and awareness is issued to Albertans.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the medical specialist foundations, business community members, Alberta Health Services, registered donors, and recipients for the constant back-and-forth discussions I've had with them over the past few months, and I want to express my gratitude to the many individuals who brought forward their very moving stories as well as to the nonprofits, transplant institutes, organ donation advocacy groups, foundations, and physicians who have been instrumental in helping me to draft a bill that will create the fundamental pillars that will reduce wait times and ultimately save lives. It is for these individuals and those waiting on the transplant list that I would urge this Chamber to allow this bill to proceed to second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. Member for Highwood for bringing forward this private member's bill. I certainly see a lot of potential in regard to this private member's bill. We know that organ donation is, you know, sort of a work in progress here in this province and in many other jurisdictions around the world. We had to do a lot of education to allow people to understand exactly what it entails and just the value of it as well. Certainly, with the technology and the medical technology that we have available to us today, transplants have never been more effective, nor have they saved more lives, quite frankly.

The main problem is having timely dispensation of various organs when a donor is, unfortunately, in a position to do so. It's not to say that people have to be deceased or in imminent danger of being deceased in order to be a donor, right? I mean, kidneys are a good example of a donation system that involves people who are not dying and, in fact, are making a selfless choice to help someone else.

Again, it's very important for us to build an infrastructure for organ donation that is working within a public health system, right? We know that in other jurisdictions, places around the world, this can be a for-profit thing, and I don't think it's, Mr. Speaker, a better way to illustrate the absolute importance and paramountcy of having a public system to deliver health care for when you need it for you and your family than when we talk about organ donation, because you just couldn't imagine having anything that would resemble a private element of buying and selling body parts. Again, it's just a pretty good education moment for all of us to remind us about how important our public health system really is, especially delivering something at this level.

Yeah. I mean, I just had a chance to look at the bill here this afternoon, and I find the most intriguing part, certainly perhaps the biggest innovation, is this mandatory referral element – right? – so that we are using the health system and compelling people to be diagnosed and to be analyzed if they have signed their donor card to just make sure that there is a plan that is taking full advantage of that in a timely sort of way. You know, I think that that's very clever. I'm guessing that this is somehow based on other jurisdictions around the world. I'd be curious to see who else is doing it, this mandatory referral element to this bill, to see how it's working in other jurisdictions. I would expect that it would be a marked improvement for sure – right? – because, of course, time is of the essence always in health care generally and certainly in organ donation specifically. You have to make these decisions around, especially, you know, certain organs like your hearts and so forth, eyes and corneas and so forth. I mean, these things need to be accessed within hours or even minutes, so I think this whole mandatory referral element that the Member for Highwood was describing is intriguing, and certainly I would encourage all members to allow this bill to move forward around that.

Just another thing I wanted to mention: again, the mandatory referral element. I mean, again, I'm not an expert, but I can just see this is not a small thing to do. It's not just, like, written on a piece of paper, and away you go, right? You need considerable resources to be able to execute a mandatory referral, and, again, you know, making sure that our public health system is sufficiently resourced so that we can do these things is absolutely essential. Running our acute-health hospitals like we are now, at 95, 97, 110 per cent literally on a day-to-day basis, leaves us no room, quite frankly, for expanding into what would be required in a mandatory referral system. So in order to successfully have an organ transplant system that would be province-wide and so forth, we're talking about capacity, Mr. Speaker, and we're talking about making sure we buttress our public health system so that you can actually pull this off.

What's happening in our hospitals right now is nothing like that, right? The whole concept of triage is being used on a daily, hourly basis, people just trying to get by on what is an emergency type of situation. I don't know if any of you besides myself, a few of my colleagues had meetings with the Alberta resident physicians society, who were just talking about how critical the situation is in our hospitals, in our intensive cares especially, but all elements of acute-care units are running far too hot, at capacity or over capacity, right across this province. We see it in, you know, Red Deer. We saw the situation there in the last 72 hours or so. I mean, these kinds of things are being replicated, Mr. Speaker, all over the place in our province, with emergency shutdowns and people just trying to triage a situation where the capacity of the hospital is strained to the limit.

So we want to move and expand into human tissue and organ donation with mandatory referrals built into it. That's great. I am totally behind that. I would work hard to ensure that we build a legislative framework which would allow that. But, of course, foundationally, Mr. Speaker, you have to make sure – you can't do it for free, right? You need to invest and build and expand the public health system to be able to accommodate for that. I mean, that's an obvious thing, but it's always worth mentioning, because if we have these wonderful new ideas and new technologies and, you know, a system to expedite organ donation and to move on that in a timely way like you have to do, then we can't just write it down on a piece of paper and hope that someone will do it. We have to resource that concept here through this Legislature as well. Yeah.

The other element to this, again: I think it's ongoing, and it sort of waxes and wanes, I've kind of noticed. I mean, I use myself, Mr. Speaker, as a litmus test as to whether I am conscious of the importance of signing my organ donor card, right? At different times they have an education program, and you get all excited about it and away you go, and then it kind of somehow disappears over time as

well. So for us to have a sensitive but emphatic education system for people to sign their organ donor cards and for families to understand what that means and building part of an end-of-life strategy or emergency contingency so the people know what's going to happen, what's going to come next, and what the mandatory referral thing means for someone who is a potential donor: that education all needs to be emphatic and it needs to be constant, right? You can't just say, "Oh, now we're done that," because people forget. That's the way we are; we need a refresher course on how these things work, and new people need to know that they can sign up, you know, as a choice for organ donation. I mean, it's not anything but a choice. That should be quite obvious but bears repeating as well. I mean, people have fear around these things, and we have to make sure that it's understood to be a life-giving choice and not anything but that.

4:20

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will conclude my comments. This is a great idea. I think I could totally support this bill as long as we support the bill with the resources it needs in order for it to be successful.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, also known as the mandatory referral act. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Highwood for introducing it. Over the last three years I've met with constituents with loved ones who are waiting for organ transplants and, sadly, constituents whose loved ones are no longer with us because they weren't able to get the transplant they needed in time.

Mr. Speaker, organ transplantation is the most clinically cost-effective treatment for organ failure, but every year Albertans die while waiting for an organ donation. These are our family members, our relatives, our friends, and our neighbours and colleagues. Those who remain on the wait-list often experience poor quality of life, depression, and can require regular medical appointments. On the other hand, individuals who receive organ donations often live with few restrictions. They can travel, spend more time with friends and family, return to school and work, become involved in their communities, and lead very normal lives.

While organ and tissue donation and transplants are life-saving and life improving, Alberta continues to lag behind other provinces and other jurisdictions in this area. Today over 4,500 Canadians are waiting for a transplant that could save, extend, or improve their life. Over 700 of those people are Albertans. Thousands more are waiting for tissue transplants. The good news is that one donor can save up to eight lives and enhance the lives of 75 more.

According to Canadian Blood Services upwards of 90 per cent of Canadians support organ and tissue donation, yet less than 32 per cent have made formal plans to donate. The number of organ and tissue donations further diminishes when you factor in that only 1 to 2 per cent of deaths occur in a situation where a donation is possible. The goal of an improved organ donation system should be to ensure that no missed donor opportunities occur to help meet the demand for human tissue and organs in the province. That is precisely what Bill 205 works towards.

One of the most significant changes brought forward through this bill is the implementation of a mandatory referral process in place of the current mandatory consideration process. This change requires physicians to refer a patient to the appropriate organ donation organization when death is imminent, which will enhance and optimize our organ and tissue donation system. Mandatory referral increases the likelihood that sensitive discussions with families experiencing a tragedy about the potential to donate are conducted by specialists explicitly educated in this area. Professionally trained organ donation organizations are better positioned to engage with families. Streamlining the notification process will also ensure an adequate timeline for assessing the viability of potential donors and will decrease missed donation opportunities.

To emphasize the importance of mandatory referral, consider a recent survey of physicians on why they did not refer eligible organ donors. I should note the physicians surveyed could choose more than one of these options. Fifty-nine per cent of the respondents stated they did not make a referral because they deemed the patient not to be eligible, 45 per cent said the family was too upset, 39 per cent said they believed that the family had religious reasons not to, and, finally, 34 per cent said they did not due to their desire to leave the hospital unit. These are all understandable reasons, especially when you consider the stress and tragic circumstances, yet donation opportunities continue to be missed and lives continue to be lost. Mandatory referral will help to reduce missed donation opportunities.

This bill also seeks to advance education and awareness around the subject of organ donation. This includes improving the information provided to Albertans within our registries to better educate them on the organ and tissue donation process and its importance.

Finally, this bill will modify our agency guidelines. The changes to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions directly to the Minister of Health to help minimize missed donor opportunities and build a more robust donation system.

Every so often we as legislators have an opportunity to make a meaningful, tangible difference in the lives of Albertans, to address issues that transcend partisanship and touch the very lives of the people we represent. That is what Bill 205 does by seeking to improve our organ and tissue donation process and practices, hopefully saving and improving lives. I hope that this bill will be a catalyst for further discussions and other changes that will also improve our system and bring government policy better in line with the supermajority of Albertans, who support organ and tissue donation.

I encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill. Again, a big thank you to my colleague the Member for Highwood for his work.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments as well in the debate on concurrence around Bill 205. Let me just, first, start off by thanking the Member for Highwood for bringing forward this bill as a private member's bill, and I want to thank my colleagues from Edmonton-North West and Calgary-South East for their thoughtful comments on the bill and why we should vote in favour of allowing it to proceed to debate here in the Legislature.

I just think it's really interesting, Mr. Speaker, that we've heard, in discussion around the aspects of the bill, the fact that this is a piece of legislation that is trying to address a serious problem that we all acknowledge exists. The rates of donations of organs are far too low, and the private member is taking steps to try to solve a problem that exists. Is it a perfect solution? No. In fact, the member who presented this bill admits such, and my friend from Edmonton-North West raised some additional questions with regard to how effectively this piece of legislation, if it's passed, would be

implemented. But we are voting in favour of allowing this bill to proceed to debate in the Chamber, recognizing that it is not a perfect solution.

It's incredibly interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, that we have admitted that even though this isn't a perfect solution, this is progress in the right direction, and therefore we are willing to entertain the possibility of debating this piece of legislation in the Legislature, but we weren't willing to extend that same consideration to my friend from Edmonton-City Centre's bill on collecting race-based data to combat racism. All we heard from the members opposite, when they engaged in that debate, was the fact that it wasn't a perfect solution so now is not the time to even consider making progress on that.

It's incredibly interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, the different thresholds for acceptability that we have when the government caucus members bring forward legislation for consideration by this House as opposed to opposition members when they bring forward private members' bills. It's incredibly distressing to see this double standard consistently at work. Not once have we seen an opposition member's private member's bill proceed past the committee stage and reach full debate here in the Legislature. Not once. You know, I wish the government members would hold every private member to a consistent standard of acceptability when it comes to whether or not the House should consider these things and not put on their partisan glasses, which they've said over and over again that they don't do. I guess it's just a coincidence that every single opposition private member's bill has been voted down by this House but that hasn't been the case for government members' bills.

Let it be said that even though I'm airing my grievances about the process, we, in practice, don't hold grudges here in the opposition, and we are in fact voting in favour of allowing this bill to proceed because we agree that it's progress. We're moving in the right direction on the issue of organ donation here with this legislation that's being brought forward.

4:30

So let's talk about it here, and let's allow other members to consider the issue and bring forward some thoughtful amendments, I guess, to address some of the shortcomings or weaknesses of the bill that will be exposed as debate proceeds. You know, one of the shortcomings that I think exists or has the potential to exist with this system that is being proposed to be set up here in this private member's bill is increasing education through the registry system. That's a good idea in theory, Mr. Speaker, but we've seen this government fail to make any meaningful changes to the registry system whatsoever, just simple promises that the government has failed to deliver on.

I'm thinking in particular about Alberta health care cards. It was there in black and white in the UCP's election platform that they would eliminate the system of issuing paper health care cards and move to a system of distributing durable health care cards made out of plastic or some kind of material that would last a lot longer than the paper that is currently used to make health care cards. They scrapped that idea. In fact, they kicked around the idea of maybe altering drivers' licences so that if you had an Alberta health care number and a driver's licence, that could be put together on the same driver's licence card, but that also went nowhere. This government will not make any meaningful changes on how Alberta health care numbers are presented to people.

So how can we trust the government to implement what is a significant change here through the registry system when they've failed to even demonstrate that they can make even a minor, simple change like issuing plastic health care cards or even changing drivers' licences to allow for the printing of a health care card on the driver's licence? They can't. I think that is a significant failing, Mr. Speaker, that should be discussed at greater length as this bill proceeds to debate.

I want to pick up on another thing that my friend from Edmonton-North West touched upon in his comments regarding this bill, and that's the issue of public health care capacity. You know, right now no surgeries are being conducted at the Red Deer general hospital, as far as I understand. Everybody is being shipped up and down the highway to either Edmonton or Calgary to receive life-saving surgery. So it is good, in theory, to widen the accessibility of organs for donation, but in actual practice, if hundreds of thousands of people can't get access to life-saving medical treatments in the third-largest city in the province, all of these changes that the Member for Highwood is proposing are theoretical improvements. They won't lead to in-practice improvements.

So my friend from Edmonton-North West is quite right when he raises the issue about the ability of the health care system to be able to deliver these organ transplants in a timely matter. I'd submit to members of the House that if this piece of legislation were in effect right now, the people in dire need of organ transplants in central Alberta would still not be able to get the life-saving surgeries that are needed and that the Member for Highwood himself wants them to be able to get. Without some kind of meaningful changes to protect the health care system from collapse, all of this is just good intentions written down on paper with no meaningful follow-through.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in the last few minutes I want to just remind the House that COVID is still the top health care issue of the day here in the province of Alberta. The reason that the general hospital is no longer conducting surgeries is because the hospital is overwhelmed with COVID. By failing to address the underlying cause of the collapse of the health care system, all of these proposed changes that are intended to lead to better health care outcomes will lead to nothing, but we all just act as if COVID is done and hope that by creating other causes of problems in the health care system and maybe making some feeble attempts to address those, we will actually get to the root of the problem and make the system better, and that's not the case. I also worry about the suitability of people's organs because so many people have been infected. We know that COVID causes long-term organ damage.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to support the motion for concurrence on Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. This bill has the goal of raising awareness for organ and tissue donations as well as encouraging more Albertans to sign their donor cards.

For me, there is also a deep and profound Lethbridge connection to this bill. Mr. Speaker, our nation was heartbroken following the tragic crash in Saskatchewan that claimed the lives of 15 players and personnel of the Humboldt Broncos from the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League. Many of us remember where we were when we first learned about the tragic crash on April 6, 2018. Lethbridge's own Logan Boulet was one of the 15 lives that were lost that day. Logan, a son, an athlete, and a defenceman, was 21 when he passed away, but a month before the crash he did something remarkable that saved lives. Logan signed his organ donor card. His gift of life benefited six people directly, which is remarkable. What it also did was start the Logan Boulet effect and inspired over 200,000 Canadians to do the same. In Lethbridge we remember Logan every time we drive by the Logan Boulet Arena and every year on Green Shirt Day, which takes place on April 7. Canada-wide it started a very important conversation.

One issue we have in Alberta is that we lag behind our fellow provinces when it comes to registered organ and tissue donors. As has already been stated, over 4,500 Canadians are waiting for life-saving transplants, including over 700 Albertans. Many more are waiting for tissue transplants that would vastly improve their lives. A major component of this bill is to improve the information provided to individuals within our Alberta registries to better educate Albertans on the process and on the importance of organ and tissue donation.

Mr. Speaker, another component of this bill I appreciate is the implementation of a mandatory referral process for physicians. This will require physicians to report all potential donors to the appropriate organ donation organization when death is deemed to be imminent. I can't even imagine how difficult those discussions might be. However, it's a conversation worth having and one that could have the potential to save lives.

This legislation also increases the chances to make sure that those discussions about a possible donation take place. It is so much easier to have those conversations with a trusted family physician well before a tragedy strikes instead of during a time of incredible grieving, anxiety, and stress. Losing a family member or a close friend is indescribable, so having the ability outlined for the highly trained individuals to have those conversations early and independently is prudent planning.

I want to reiterate that if a patient and his or her family does not want to be a donor, that decision will be respected. However, every donor decision made is a win and a legacy to the tragedy of Humboldt. What if someone was on the fence about this very sensitive topic? One signed organ donor card can save multiple lives.

Mr. Speaker, it's good to know this bill addresses improving agency guidelines. The changes to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will also pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions directly to the minister to help minimize missed donor opportunities and build a stronger system of donation in the future.

I'm also glad that education and awareness are an important aspect of this bill. It's intended to improve the information provided to individuals within Alberta's registries and better educate the population on the process and the importance of organ and tissue donation. Logan Boulet's decision directly resulted in six saved lives and, indirectly, thousands and growing.

4:40

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'm not here to tell any family what the right decision is for them – that is theirs to make – but to raise awareness of increased education and make the referral process for physicians mandatory to an organ donor organization are important steps to take. I wholeheartedly support this bill and the Member for Highwood in his work to, hopefully, save more lives. If one person's decision to donate his or her organs and tissue can save multiple lives, imagine what an increase of, say, 100 donors can accomplish. I see tremendous potential in this bill, and I commend the Member for Highwood for bringing this forward. As difficult as these conversations can be, they are necessary and should be continued, and this bill should continue into second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I am going to begin my comments, as I always do on private members' day regardless of what the business is at hand, with providing some lament as to the state of democracy in this House and the abomination that it is that members of any type, whether it is backbenchers on the government side or Official Opposition members, have to somehow seek concurrence of the House. That we have to go through this exercise in the first place is an absolute aberration of the traditions of this Assembly.

Now, I can appreciate that our friend the acting Premier right now likes to take his traditions from elsewhere, but in this House private members' business gets debated by private members, not at the whim of Executive Council, and this is really too bad because this is a really good bill. I don't like having to rise when I like what's coming from the members across the way and having to preface my comments with my usual lament for the state of democracy, but I will do it because the fact of the matter is that that's in the public interest.

It is not okay that we have to go through this hoop-jumping exercise every single time so that government backbenchers can be heard. Not at all. It is completely offside the traditions of this Assembly. Therefore, it is with a heavy heart that I provide critical commentary on a bill that is probably required.

Now my commentary. I will point out that many of the shortcomings that the government found with the previous bill could potentially – we don't know – be applied to this one. That is to say, it is complex, for sure, likely requires more stakeholder consultation, potentially could require some horsepower within the civil service for appropriate implementation, but that does not stop us from wanting to pass this bill, just as it should not have stopped the government from allowing the other one to proceed to the House floor, but we see the double standard at play here, Mr. Speaker.

Now, there is no question that we require a better framework for ensuring more expeditious donation of organs and tissue. There is no question that public policy sometimes lags public urgency and public need and, in fact, even public appetite, which I think is the case with organ donation bills. Number one, they require for their implementation in the first instance public education, as my hon. colleague for Edmonton-North West pointed out. It requires a functional health care system in which we have hospitalists, anaesthesiologists, physicians' assistants, and others actually working in hospitals, which is not the case in the Red Deer hospital right now and has not been the case in a number of other rural places.

It is well and good to ensure that we have better processes in place, but there is no guarantee whatsoever that our health care will be there for us in time given the calamity that has been visited upon communities not just in central Alberta but certainly across the province as a result of the unrelenting and specific war on doctors, beginning with the tearing up of the agreement prior to the pandemic, persisting in the war on public health care through the pandemic, and now, as we exit it, doubling down on what Albertans do not want, which is more chaos in the system.

Having said that, there is no question that this bill likely is a thoughtful approach to public policy, and it is for that reason that the Official Opposition will support its expeditious passage. There is also no question, though, Mr. Speaker, that it is likely that the development of the regulations and so on will require more consultation with the public and with health care professionals, with Alberta health care services, which is, in fact, as it should be.

Now, when our government passed a ban on eviction of domestic violence survivors from the residential tenancy arrangements in I believe it was the fall of 2015 if I am not mistaken, there was a great deal of work on the regulations that had to be done as a result of that bill, that I believe passed with unanimous support through the House. Not that that unanimous support necessarily meant anything when it came to, for example, the deindexation of AISH and income support benefits, which, you know, the Official Opposition at the time made great fanfare about supporting and then at their first available

opportunity reversed themselves on. That private member's bill, brought forward by Deb Drever, was in fact supported by the two opposition parties at the time, but it did require, complex as it was, a great deal of regulations that had to go through cabinet subsequent to that, and I have no doubt that this bill will be similar in nature.

You know, I think that that is fine, Mr. Speaker, but there is no question that you need leadership at the level of the operations of the Alberta health care system, which currently this province does not have because they saw fit to fire the CEO of Alberta Health Services simply because she had the temerity to express a fondness for public health care, which, in fact, Albertans have asked us to respect, and this government caucus has seen fit to disrespect that request on behalf of Albertans.

Now, I am pleased to see as the Member for Lethbridge-West – and, in fact, Toby and Bernie Boulet are constituents of mine – that this government has taken some of their advice. They have focused their advocacy effort since the loss of their son Logan on this matter of increasing organ and tissue donation given as it is that on Green Shirt Day, which is April 7, we redouble our efforts in public education, which, as I indicated at the very beginning, is the foundation of expanding our organ and tissue donations. Certainly, there are administrative processes and other health care processes that help, but in the first instance public education and public awareness are very important, especially in end-of-life planning. So I am pleased to see that this has happened and that the government has in fact consulted with and listened to advocates like Toby and Bernadine Boulet.

I would be remiss if I did not put a pretty fine point on the fact that Toby and Bernie have been very clear in all of their representations that a strong public health care system, a strong education system, strong support for communities, for infrastructure, for traffic safety, all of these things, also must follow if we are to appropriately recognize the life and the contribution and the legacy of Logan Boulet and all those who perished in the Humboldt bus crash. I believe that with this government – given the fact that they stubbornly refused to recognize the requests of that Humboldt family and those who perished in that crash when it came to appropriate amendments to driver safety and driver training.

I am pleased that April 7's legacy has actually resulted in more government action. I am looking forward to seeing that happen in other Legislatures across the country as well. There is no question that that advocacy by Toby and Bernie Boulet has actually been national in scope and in nature, and they have attempted and, I think, succeeded in taking their tremendous grief at the loss of their son and doing something positive with it. I think that there are not very many of us who can see in ourselves the strength to be able to do such a thing after such a devastating loss of a child.

4:50

There is more to be done; there is no question. Mandatory referral is yet another step in being able to address this issue of better uptake of organ and tissue donation, Mr. Speaker. The biggest thing is speed and having the right kinds of health care specialists on-site to be able to do those procedures, and that's what we don't see.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to concurrence on Bill 205. I want to start by expressing my gratitude for the hard work of my colleague the hon. Member for Highwood. I want to take this opportunity to thank him for his dedication in bringing this important piece of legislation forward.

While the circumstances surrounding organ donation are typically tragic, Mr. Speaker, the decision to donate organs or tissue is a tremendous gift to give another person and their family. It's the gift of life. Bill 205 will improve the organ donation and transplant system, and for that I'm grateful. It will refine the organ and tissue donor registry. It will improve the education surrounding the option to register for organ donation and agency guidelines. Furthermore, the online registry will be improved by creating a clear path, making it easier to indicate one's consent.

As other speakers have mentioned, Mr. Speaker, while almost 90 per cent of Canadians say that they support organ donations, only 32 per cent have actually registered their intent to donate. Unfortunately, a very small number, approximately 1.2 per cent, of people that pass away are considered for organ donation in Alberta. Therefore, the more people who understand and choose to register and the better the notification system to the organ donation organizations, the more lives that will be saved. At this point in time, as others have said, there are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that could save, extend, or improve their lives. Of those 4,500, 700 of them reside in Alberta. These numbers directly represent the urgency and the need for donors and a clear process here in Alberta. It is troublesome that Alberta has fallen behind other jurisdictions in terms of our rate of successful donation, which is costing Albertans on the transplant wait-list their lives.

Bill 205 is a major step forward, I would say, in modernizing Alberta's tissue and organ donation system. It's broken into four sections: first, breaking down how the tissue and donor registry will be improved; second, detailing the implementation of a mandatory referral process, which will decrease confusion for patients and ensure optimization of the process; further, agency guidelines will be refined, and as a result annual reviews, reports, and suggestions will be made to the minister to help minimize missed donor opportunities; lastly, this bill will enhance education efforts of organ donation and aims to elevate general awareness of organ donation for all Albertans. I think we could all agree that education is a big part of this, as many speakers this afternoon have mentioned, people understanding the importance of this.

Mr. Speaker, from what I can see, this bill will serve to facilitate a clear and simpler process to register for organ donation and ultimately to save lives. One organ donation can save up to eight lives, and a tissue donation can improve the quality of life for up to 75 other people. That is the intent of this bill, to do just that.

While I have the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to highlight a personal story about an inspiring Albertan, a retired nurse, actually, who has chosen to save a life through the donation of her kidney. She's a living donor. I first met Dianna Havin in a business setting over 20 years ago. We connected as businesswomen and even more so as businesswomen with young children at that time. Dianna has a very rare blood type, and as a retired nurse she understood how rare that would be and how critical it would be for somebody with that same blood type on a transplant waiting list. In a selfless act she chose last year to donate one of her kidneys. She's an inspiration to all of us. I just wanted to recognize my friend Dianna for what she's chosen to do, for her selfless act, to thank her and her family, her husband, Mark, and their children, for supporting her in that process.

Assisting others is always valuable, and it's notable that clinical studies have found that organ and tissue donation can help families and loved ones with their grieving process. At a time that can be very difficult to get through, many donor families take consolation in knowing their loved one helped save and/or drastically improve the life of another or multiple others. Donor families can also take

great comfort in the fact that their loved one continues to live on through others as life-saving donors.

Many have spoken about Humboldt. I won't repeat what has been said for the sake of time, Mr. Speaker, but I, too, am inspired by the Logan Boulet story and want to thank that family for their advocacy on behalf of all Albertans. The actions of one young man ignited passionate individuals around the world and spurred them to action.

I'll close with this: it's because lives will be saved that I wholly support Bill 205. Once again I want to thank the Member for Highwood for introducing such a crucial bill, for all the work he did in the background, and also for the countless individuals who have already made an impact on the lives of others by signing up to be a donor. As I previously stated, I am pleased to support this bill, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to join me in supporting Bill 205 and ultimately seeing more lives saved in Alberta.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede my time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen, with about two and a half minutes.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. Like my colleagues who have spoken, we are certainly going to vote in support of concurrence for this bill. Really, this bill works to fix something that, you know, Canadians actually want fixed, so I commend the government for bringing this forward. It is, of course, what people have already spoken about, that missed donor opportunity. The bill would alleviate this difficulty. We know that about 33 per cent of Canadians have registered as organ donors. That's too low. We know that when Canadians are asked, surveys have said that 90 per cent would have said, "Oh, I'd happily donate my organs," yet there is a huge discrepancy there. Only 33 per cent have actually done that. So there is, really, a 57 per cent missed donor opportunity.

Here in Alberta we know that there are more than 700 people on the wait-list for organ transplants. Therefore, if the missed donor opportunity was eliminated, those 700 people would be well on their way to having a transplant and improving their lives. I think that this bill is an important bill that we recommend proceed, and it can make a significant difference, of course, for people's lives here in Alberta.

As I said, you know, for people who are on the wait-list, a significant number of Albertans, it would make a huge difference for themselves and their families. It makes it mandatory. A medical practitioner, having assessed that the organs are suitable for donation, then must refer the patient to an organ transplant and tissue donation agency. This is mandatory. It's not something that is going to happen if things all align. It's something that the health practitioner must do, so of course that is going to be very supportive of more people who have been assessed that their organs are useful for . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt. However, under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i) , which provides for up to five minutes for the mover to close debate, I would invite the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills to close debate on the motion to concur in the committee report on Bill 205.

Seeing that that is waived.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:59 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Issik	Rosin
Allard	Jones	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Rutherford
Bilous	Long	Schmidt
Carson	Madu	Schow
Copping	McIver	Schweitzer
Eggen	Nally	Sigurdson, L.
Ellis	Neudorf	Sigurdson, R.J.
Frey	Nicolaides	Singh
Glubish	Nixon, Jeremy	Smith
Gotfried	Panda	Toews
Gray	Phillips	Turton
Hanson	Reid	Wilson
Totals:	For – 39	Against – 0

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Review of Standing Orders

506. Ms Rosin moved:
Be it resolved that
(a) the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing
(i) conduct a review of the standing orders, procedures, practices, and traditions of other Westminster-style parliaments for the purpose of identifying the rules, processes, or practices of those parliaments and their committees that facilitate collaboration and co-operation among their members and
(ii) recommend changes to the standing orders and practices of the Assembly, including its committees, that would facilitate increased collaboration and co-operation among all members of the Assembly,
(b) during the course of its review the committee continues despite prorogation of a session of the 30th Legislature and may, without leave of the Assembly, meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued and
(c) no later than nine months after the beginning of the committee's review the committee must submit a report on its review to the Legislative Assembly that sets out the committee's recommendations, if any.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In short, my motion tasks a legislative committee with the responsibility of studying the processes and procedures of other parliaments around the world to find the ways that we here in Alberta can work together more constructively, something that I've grown to be very passionate about over my course of three years in this institution.

Mr. Speaker, when I ran for public office, it was because I truly believed in the wonderful, beautiful concept of democracy, the idea that every individual could play an active role in creating the world

which they lived in, the idea that every citizen, regardless of their status or socioeconomic position, deserved a voice and the ability to be the determiner of their own destiny and the idea that we, the 87 individuals bestowed with the unique privilege of being elected to this House, could bring the citizenry's vision of a better world to life by listening, engaging, and collaborating. Perhaps I was an idealist. Perhaps we all were once, but unfortunately it doesn't take many days of sitting in this place, this incredible marble palace that was once built to be the house of hope and faith in humanity, to realize that the idealistic system which most believe exists is much different. That which I will be highlighting today may come as a bit disheartening to some listening.

I want to be clear that much good does still happen within these walls. Collectively, we have worked with bipartisanship to establish the first-ever legal definition of human trafficking, to stand up for law-abiding firearms owners, and to support our agricultural producers.

Yet by and large, this institution, once established to guarantee representation of the people who elected it, has fallen prey to hyperpartisanship. In fact, if we break down the voting record from the past session, out of 158 pieces of legislation, only 33 per cent of the time did the opposition and the government vote together in support of government legislation. From the surface this suggests that two-thirds of the time the opposition was completely unwilling to work with the government to advance what had the potential to be positive policy initiatives.

Yet if we look further into the data, a second side of the story emerges. Throughout debate on those 158 pieces of legislation our opposition proposed 216 amendments to that legislation. Now, before I go any further, I do want to recognize that many of those proposed amendments were, honestly, partisan junk. They were amendments to kill bills entirely, delay processes by months, or defer our work outside of this Chamber. Not every one of those 216 amendments was put forward with any amount of good faith, but, Mr. Speaker, many were. Of those 216 amendments, only seven were supported by the government, 3 per cent. The remaining 97 per cent were voted down largely without honest consideration by the members of this House as to whether or not they might actually make our legislation better.

5:20

Now, with the full information presented, suddenly the conclusion can clearly be drawn that both sides of this House do have an honest intention of drafting and passing good legislation, but we are too blinded by blue and orange to make those efforts a reality and to work together to transform good legislation into great legislation or to consider ideas that might be positive but that lie outside the hypothetical box of our party lines and ideology.

Similarly, two years ago the *Globe and Mail* reported that Members of Parliament in Ottawa voted along party lines 99.6 per cent of the time. Objectively, these statistics wouldn't be so damning if an honest effort was made along the way to collaborate on creating good legislation and doing our best to represent the people that sent us here. After all, the party system in our Westminster democracy does play an incredibly important role in preserving the ability of governments to govern and allowing voters to vote for a mandate that they know can actually be achieved, contrary to the American system, in which Presidents can maintain office without the majority of seats in their House or Senate and often struggle to achieve key priorities.

A strong party system and honest debate should not be the antithesis of each other. We should be able to debate, question, and amend legislation to the best of our abilities, then vote with our parties on the finalized version. Unfortunately, the behaviour that is more commonly exercised in this place and similar places all across the world is that of shouting, hurling needless and outlandish insults across the aisle, fabricating unapologetic and undisciplined lies, spreading exaggerated misinformation for the sole purpose of furthering selfish party objectives, theatrically shredding up amendments for the cameras before even reading them, and entering into the debate with nothing more than phony, premeditated scripts and talking points to contribute.

Mr. Speaker, we all agree on the basics. Alberta is the greatest place on Earth, filled with the most brilliant entrepreneurial people, the most breathtaking landscapes, and the most ingenious businesses. I know we all agree on those fundamentals, so why can we not work together a little bit more to advance them? No individual, party, or leader has a monopoly on good ideas. The divulgence of democracy away from its idealistic roots may not be a reality that our broader society is ready to face, but we need to because democracy can continue to exist but only if we fight for it.

Now, I want to be clear that neither my motion nor my speech are intended to directly point a finger at the leadership of anyone in this Assembly. The hyperpartisanship of society is not a problem unique to Alberta; it's a crisis plaguing democracies all over the world. I also know that I'm not perfect, and I have certainly thrown my fair share of punches in this House, but honestly I do try to stay away from partisan rhetoric just for the sake of partisan rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that democracy and our democratic institutions were established to truly serve the people, not just serve as a concept for people to believe exists somewhere off in a faraway land. The people of Alberta may not have the time nor the care to watch the televised proceedings of this House every day, but they deserve to have the confidence that they don't need to because whatever is going on in this faraway land is in their best interest.

I know that every member of this House was elected with honest intentions. As a member of the government caucus I can promise you that every piece of legislation put forward by this government has been thoughtfully constructed with the sole intention of building a thriving province where no dream is too big and no citizen is left behind. Similarly, I'm not a member of the opposition caucus, but I do believe that every member of the New Democrats shares a similar honest intention of making our province the best place to live, work, and build a future. Unfortunately, our democratic institution has become so that we are largely unable to share in those common goals that I know we all hold. The dysfunction is institutionally based, not intention based. I know this to be true, that deep down we all have pure intentions and that we can work together to accomplish so much good, because I've witnessed it.

There have been moments, and these moments have been the most rewarding and fulfilling of my political career. They haven't been the moments where I've made a splash on camera or received the loudest applause in the Assembly or gotten lots of likes on Facebook. The most fulfilling moments have been the ones that no one saw or witnessed, the moments when we worked together. To quote former President Harry Truman, "It is amazing what you can accomplish [when] you do not care who gets the credit."

Two of the moments that stand out to me were the time as deputy chair of the Public Health Act Review Committee where I and my colleagues whipped others to support several of our opposition's proposals that we believed to be reasonable and positive amendments. Similarly, just last month myself and several members of my caucus sat down with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to discuss his private member's bill. After our conversations we continued that dialogue with other experts in the field, many of our colleagues, and several ministries, and though we eventually came to our own conclusion, that the legislation in its current form would not work, and ended up voting against it, honest bipartisan conversations were had,

and a pure willingness to collaborate and really go to bat for an opposition member who had a potentially really good idea existed.

Mr. Speaker, these moments where representatives come together across party lines in recognition that all of us here are duly elected by the people and have an obligation to work together on behalf of those people to ensure that those people have a voice in this place should not be so rare, and they shouldn't need to exist outside the ordinary confines of the institution that was once established to accomplish that very outcome. This institution called democracy should be constructed of procedures and practices that foster collaborative behaviour rather than hinder it.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have all the answers on what reforms are needed. Perhaps we should utilize the less politicized committee format more. Perhaps we need revisions to the standing orders. Heck, maybe we should get rid of these desks and replace them with cozy benches. All I know is that we can find ways to work together to further the interests of the people we represent if we put down our arms.

So, Mr. Speaker and to all members of the Assembly, I hope today that you will all join me in exploring other Westminster parliaments across the world to better understand what works, what doesn't, and what we can improve here at home. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see there are a number of you wishing to join in the debate. We're going to go with the Opposition House Leader, followed by the Member for Calgary-Klein, the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, and – holy cannoli. We're going to run out of time. Let's do that to start, and then we will see.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In debate on Motion 506 I bring to this discussion a great deal of frustration after three years in opposition working and attempting to work with this government in a number of ways. And in my role now as Official Opposition House Leader I have to be very, very blunt. Collaboration and co-operation have not been something that this government has sought. We have seen 11 changes to the standing orders of this place without working in collaboration or co-operation with the Official Opposition, and Motion 506, which proposes to send further changes to a committee that is dominated by government members, does not give me a sense of collaboration or co-operation going forward. I look forward to more debate on 506, but at this point I rise in opposition to this motion, and I do not plan to vote to support Motion 506, sending this to committee.

Changes to our standing orders began very early on in this Legislature, the 30th Legislature. On May 30, 2019, the first package of changes to the standing orders was brought forward. The government intended to bring a new tone and decorum, which, I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, has not worked well, and we have not seen that in this place. But right from that very first start of changes to the standing orders the Official Opposition at that point said that we should send these changes to the exact committee that Motion 506 is referencing, and the government members, including the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, voted against that and were not willing.

For three years changes to the standing orders have been imposed on members of the Official Opposition, oftentimes with very little consultation and certainly not seeking to find compromise with us, and it's incredibly frustrating because that is not how the Alberta Legislature has operated in the past. Eleven changes in a single Legislature: my understanding is that it is historic, Mr. Speaker, and it shows, I think, a government intent on imposing their agenda and their opinions on the Official Opposition repeatedly as we've been sitting here trying to make life better for Alberta families.

I think that examples of collaboration or co-operation would have been the government perhaps supporting more of the amendments from the Official Opposition. I appreciate the Member for Banff-Kananaskis acknowledging that many of those amendments were voted down without honest consideration. That is my sense of it in many cases as well.

5:30

I will say to the Member for Banff-Kananaskis that 33 per cent voting with the government actually surprised me a little bit – that was a little higher than I thought it might be – but I have to disagree with the conclusion from the Member for Banff-Kananaskis because I don't think it shows that the opposition was unwilling to work with government. I believe strongly that government has very rarely reached out to the Official Opposition to find common ground.

Respectfully to the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, I don't believe that you've reached out to the Official Opposition to talk about this prior to the debate here in this Legislature. Certainly, in my role as Official Opposition House Leader I did not receive any overtures to discuss or to talk about this, which would have shown more interest in collaboration and co-operation.

The same day that we are discussing this and that the member is espousing the view that we should be able to work together more constructively feels very difficult after seeing the Member for Edmonton-City Centre's private member's bill defeated and knowing that we now operate in a Legislature where no opposition member's private member's bill has been able to proceed because this government chose to change the standing orders to impose a new committee process that no opposition member's bill can get through. Knowing that the private members' business, including private members' motions and private members' bills – it's a lottery system that few and far between get through.

The amount of time for private members' business is quite restricted, yet this government has chosen to essentially impede the ability. So now through these concurrence debates the government can vote down ideas rather than having to do it at second reading or at Committee of the Whole or to try and work with the opposition to amend things. I find that incredibly frustrating. Yes, we can look to other jurisdictions and other Westminster-style parliaments, but I suggest that we are better off to look within this House and to have conversations together about how we are functioning and what is happening in this Chamber, and there has been no willingness from this government to do that.

I think collaboration and co-operation would mean needing to perhaps consider not using the time allocation to limit debate on legislation as often as this government has, which I do not have the stats for but was very heavy handed and done a number of times. Co-operation and collaboration: perhaps having the Premier not handing out earplugs during early debates in this place, which set a real tone for this place. Collaboration and co-ordination would be supporting some of the emergency motions that the opposition has put forward under standing orders 30 and 42 as we went forward.

Now, the reality of what passing Motion 506 would mean for this place: it means a great deal of additional meetings, again, at a committee that is dominated and that government members have a majority on. I am very skeptical at how productive and nonpartisan that work could be, and that work would be taking place in the first summer that we have to connect with our constituents since the pandemic has really released its hold on restrictions and our ability to connect with people. So instead of connecting with constituents, to enter into a committee process that I do not believe is genuine, to analyze the standing order changes with members of a government caucus who have shown little to no willingness to collaborate and co-operate with members of the Official Opposition is quite frustrating.

Now, I believe that I have a reputation in this place as being someone who is collaborative. I've tried to work in a collaborative way with the ministers that I have been critic to. I was very, very pleased to have collaborated with the now Minister of Health but then minister of labour to pass job-protected paid leave for vaccination status. That was something we were able to accomplish together and I thought was incredibly valuable to the lives of Albertans. I have had several substantive amendments to pieces of legislation accepted by this government because of reaching out to the minister and having those conversations, but it's a bit of a one-way street, Mr. Speaker.

The government and the private members on the government side I do not believe have any genuine interest in collaborating or co-operating with the members of the Official Opposition based on my experience in this 30th Legislature. Even just how we've seen opposition members' voices drowned out through heckling and yelling when we are trying to debate legislation in this place has been very, very frustrating throughout my time here in this 30th Legislature.

Now, knowing that members of the government caucus, including the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, three years ago on May 30, so almost three years exactly in just a few weeks, voted against the opposition at that time, saying, "Let's work on this at committee," it's very disappointing to see it now coming back at the tail end of the Legislature, when we have very little time to even operate under any changed rules.

For these reasons, I will not be voting to support Motion 506, and I look forward to the debate.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some prepared notes here, but I feel like I need to just address a little bit about what was said there. You know, understanding some of the frustration, of course, from members of the opposition, I think those frustrations actually speak to the importance of this motion and the need to review this. Some concerns are merited, some less so, but more to the point, we need to discuss this.

I don't at all question the sincerity of the private member that has put this forward, and I want to emphasize that this isn't government that's put this motion forward, that this is a private member who sincerely wants to address some of the concerns that she highlighted in her speech.

You know, I also want to note that I have seen – and the Official Opposition House Leader is correct – some really wonderful debate, constructive debate that has taken place here, and I've seen some less constructive debate, and most of the constructive debate that I have seen is when that Opposition House Leader is a part of it. I'm certainly all in favour of any efforts to improve decorum in this place and to improve constructive and collaborative debate because that's what my constituents sent me here to do, and that's what I'm hearing from them at the doors.

During my election night I addressed my volunteers and friends and family in a speech, and I closed my remarks to them that night talking about the division that I had seen that took place during the last election. The last election was very divisive, and we saw neighbours put against neighbours. In my own constituency I saw a house vandalized. A wonderful Filipino couple: written on their house was "Nazi" and "racist." Another house took a rock through the window. Another house: they just flat out refused to take my sign because they were worried about the reprimanding that they would take from their neighbours on this. All of this happened because they had my sign on their lawn. They were called racists, they were called Nazis, and I heard this over and over again at the door.

You've got to ask the question: how did we get here, and how are we going to fix this? We need to fix this, and I think the first step in fixing this is acknowledging a truth. Author, psychologist, and professor Jonathan Haidt addressed a crowd at the Colgate University in 2019, and he came up with three untruths that are being taught right now. One untruth that I think is particularly relevant to today's conversation:

> The untruth of Us vs. Them, which views life as a battle between good and evil people. This is the mistaken notion of the righteous mind that treats ideological opponents as bad people and presumes that one's own side has a monopoly on virtue.

Based on some of the language and the tone that we have seen and heard both inside and outside of this Chamber and also on social media, I think that addressing this mistruth will be central in our ability to address the growing divide that we see within our communities and in this Chamber.

5:40

It starts with us. This divide is centred on politics and has been made worse as politicians have used rhetoric designed to create fear and anger to drive their base, ignoring the centre. The result has been a growing dissatisfaction of the ever-growing majority of voters that are out there.

I wanted to make some points abundantly clear in today's conversation. First of all, I believe that we all want an inclusive community. We are all wanting a welcoming community. We all want good for our children. We all value and care for the poor and those who are vulnerable in our community. We care and want to help those with disabilities in our communities. We want all people to have access to health care. We want to leave a legacy for our children.

This past weekend I had the pleasure of going out door-knocking in my neighbourhood, and I spoke with one of my constituents who had a deep concern for the growing discord that we're seeing in politics and the growing divide that she's seeing in her community. I hear this at door after door after door in Calgary-Klein. It's a common and growing concern. The result has led to more and more people feeling disconnected and disillusioned with their government and their representatives on both sides.

The urgency behind changing the tone of the political debate, especially in this Legislature, cannot be understated. We need debate, we need discussion, and when that debate and discussion is discouraged and replaced by condescending speech and name-calling, we get into the yelling and the heckling that the good Opposition House Leader talked about. I wholeheartedly support any review that will lead to more decorum, more constructive debate here so we can have more robust discussion and debates on proposed legislation and motions.

Let's be honest. Not a single member here was elected on the premise of heckling and yelling and name-calling. Certainly, we won't get re-elected on that. That is why I rise today in support of Motion 506 and want to thank the Member for Banff-Kananaskis for bringing it forward. I truly believe that we all, every member here, has our constituents' best interests at heart when we represent them in this Chamber. However, sometimes debate in this House can be tense, as we have witnessed from time to time. It can get personal.

Mr. Speaker, the traditions of our new Westminster political system have been etched into stone long before Alberta became a province, and they have evolved over time. However, rules need to be reviewed, debated upon, and updated based on the times that we are living in. The timing of this motion is not lost on me considering the tone of the debate that we just observed earlier here today. I think it's a great idea to have a discussion about the rules governing

this Legislature, and I strongly believe it would be in everyone's best interest to have this discussion sooner than later.

I remember in a previous election I was door-knocking, and a wonderful lady opened the door. Her daughter was there working on her school work at the table, and we were having a great conversation about the future of education in our province and supports for students, more teachers in the classroom, the challenges that her daughter was facing, and how we help make sure her daughter has success. At that moment this woman's wife came up the stairs. She saw me, she saw my badge, and she started screaming: "Close the door. Close the door." And as that door was flying towards my face, I very quickly went: "Wait, wait, wait. Let me tell you what I used to do for a living or what I do for a living."

That door slowly opened up as I explained to her that I used to help homeless kids get off the street. I watched as her expression changed from complete anger to confusion because she had been told that Conservatives hated the LGBTQ community, that we wanted harm for her and her partner, that we wanted to take her child away from her. We got an opportunity to then – I spent at least 20 minutes at that door talking about what the truth was and what I wanted for her and her family. We were able to address some of those legitimate concerns.

I remember another door. I went up to the door. "I'm the Member for Calgary-Klein." He said, "I can't vote for you because your party is racist." At that moment my good friend and volunteer came up behind me, and he was born in South Sudan. We had the opportunity at that point to address what was going on there. I found out through that conversation that NDP door-knockers had just been through that community, and they were telling people that Conservatives were racist, that you couldn't vote for Conservatives. This is the type of politics that's going to destroy our democracy, and it's causing further division. The more we sit here and say, "They're bad" and the more the opposition sits and says that we're bad, the more people just come to recognize that this is all bad.

That's why I'm standing in support of Motion 506. Maybe it should have happened three years ago, but we are here now, and we have an opportunity to address the challenges that the opposition has brought forward, the challenges that Banff-Kananaskis has brought forward and discuss how we can improve decorum and improve collaboration and constructive debate. Our constituents are relying on us to do that, and our democracy is relying on us to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to speak in support of this motion. I think that there a few things. I'm just going to speak for a small moment. One of the things that made me very proud when we had first entered into this House and had the privilege of being government was the changes to decorum. It seemed to be, you know, moving in the right direction, but I think we can all agree that that has declined immensely and that there have been moments in here where we can't hear anybody speaking, and it's not coming from one side or the other. It's everywhere, in fact.

There's equal frustration when members are doing members' statements or anything that happens to push the buttons of somebody who happens to be speaking and you can't hear people say these statements. I mean, there may be some rhetoric – there is – but a lot of times, you know, these members' statements are reflecting what's happening in our constituencies, people, really important issues, and things that people can actually really relate to. It's one of those moments in the Legislature that's very much dedicated to our beautiful constituents, who put us here.

I think that the great thing – and I agree with my colleague from Calgary-Klein. Maybe this needed to come earlier. That's quite possible, but if I could add just to the debate on that, in doing a bit more research on this, I think it's something that as government we should probably try and do, like, every time a government comes in and look at it maybe six months before the next election to see how we've done so that concerns like standing orders and other things can be brought forward so that as we head into the next Legislature, we've had a chance to really revamp. The fact that this committee has met – what? – twice in 10 years I think really tells you that we've left an opportunity wide open to really, really look at the standing orders to see how we can improve. If we're not collaborating enough, if we haven't been thoughtful enough in our approach, then it's a really, really wonderful opportunity to take a look at that approach and see how we can do better versus, you know, the rhetorical attacks that seem to happen back and forth.

We all understand this is the theatre of the Legislature. That's going to happen, but this is one of those rare opportunities – I would like to thank the member – where we can actually look at the standing orders and see what we can do better. I'm very grateful that she's brought it forward.

I think, too, being able to look at other Legislatures to see where they've been successful and where they haven't is an important part of the expansion of what we do here because, at the end of the day, this is an evolving space. You always hope that you're moving towards and evolving and changing to understand. I think it was my colleague from Calgary-Klein who said, you know, that this is a different world that we're living in now than even when we first started. Very, very wise words from my friend. That wisdom is something that can be imparted into this work that we're going to be doing at this time.

I'll just finish with this. I have the utmost respect for all of my colleagues in this House. There have been many, many times where I've disagreed with multiple things, not just on the opposition side but even on my own side, but we do it with respect because there are bigger things at hand when we're talking about these decisions. We don't do any of these things lightly when we have these conversations, but we do it with respect and kindness and to hold each other in the highest regard. We're all serving the same cause here, for different reasons. In some form or another it's to keep Alberta prosperous and moving through, the purpose of ensuring what's in the best interests of Albertans. In my heart of hearts, I would love to see this Legislature reflect that respect, the respect that my colleagues have talked about, when you're at a door and you're trying to explain your side of things and you have a moment to show them your heart. That needs to be reflected here.

Again, I would just like to thank my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis for her excellent motion. Thank you so much for the opportunity to be able to debate this and to do better in the House.

Thank you.

5:50

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see so many members are eager to speak to this motion. I'll thank the Member for Banff-Kananaskis for bringing this forward.

I wholeheartedly believe in the spirit of this motion. The frustration that I have with let's just call it the culture of the Assembly, with where we are today versus where we were – and I agree with other members saying that we have gone down a path that is much more

divisive. Unfortunately, more debate on individuals has occurred at different points in time versus policy. Interestingly, I actually had a conversation with the Premier about this very issue on Saturday. I think, you know, there are a number of reasons why we are where we are, and I agree with members who have stated that no one side of the House is to blame. All parties have contributed to that, including myself. But when I look at the intention of this, I mean, yes, I wish this would have been brought in years ago.

I appreciate the member bringing it forward today. Again, the best time to plant a tree: 50 years ago. Second-best time: today. I appreciate that. I believe in the sincerity of the individual member; I struggle to believe in the sincerity of the government. I'll give some examples, Mr. Speaker.

A couple of hours ago, today, we debated concurrence on an antiracism bill, that wasn't even allowed to go to second reading. The bill was nonpartisan, yet the debate was shut down. And my bill from two weeks ago, the Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act: the same thing happened. To the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, who mentioned that I did have an opportunity to sit down with a number of government private members – which I did appreciate; they took a genuine interest and, I believe, were sincere about the merits of the bill and wanted to see it move forward – the attitude toward the bill was a one-eighty from the first meeting to the second meeting. I appreciate that members have – and I'm not trying to relitigate the reasons that they gave of why the bill shouldn't proceed. I think they were a little light. Again, there was a willingness expressed to strengthen the bill, to accept amendments from the government side, to be able, for us as a Legislature, to have a shared victory, so to speak. There have been times that that's occurred.

You know, in my time in this Chamber one bill that I think of was the declaration of the Alberta Ukrainian-Canadian Heritage Day Act, that was passed in one day, all three readings, that required unanimous consent, to which all parties in the Chamber provided that consent. That's not the first time that's happened in Alberta's history. I think there have been about five. I will give a shout-out to the late Speaker Mr. Gene Zwozdesky, who brought forward the Holodomor bill back in I believe it was 2012 – it might have been 2011 – that also received unanimous consent to pass all three readings in a day. So there have been times in this Chamber where folks have shown an ability to be able to leave our party hats and partisan stripes at the door and work in the best interests of Albertans. Now, I completely agree that we need to do that much more, you know, in all parts of the day in this Chamber, and it will require an effort by everyone, a hundred per cent, Mr. Speaker.

The challenge that I have is that when we look at something like standing orders – standing orders in the past in this Chamber, for the majority of, like, decades and decades of us having an Alberta Legislature, were only ever changed when there was unanimous consent of all parties to change them. That has changed in the recent past. Now, I will admit, one hundred per cent, as someone, I'm sure, will point out, that under the NDP we changed the standing orders twice. For one of them, we had consent or agreement from the entire Chamber; for one of them, we did not. So I'm well aware that, with what I'm asking for, we committed that same fault. It is surprising, or was surprising to me, the number of times the standing orders have been amended in the past three years. It is a record. I believe we're up to 12 times in the three years that we're here.

Now, I'm not opposed to updating or refreshing or reviewing the rules of this place, but some of the rules have a history. I, for one, was opposed to getting rid of desk thumping. No, it doesn't exist in Ottawa. Why? They don't have desks. I mean, I guess they could thump their own thighs, but that probably wouldn't be as effective as clapping. I mean, this is just an example, Mr. Speaker. There are some changes that I know the Official Opposition didn't agree to, and we've seen the government make use of their majority on a number of examples, right? Introducing time allocation or closure: again, I recognize that the NDP government also invoked closure twice in our four-year term.

You know, the spirit of this motion, of getting all parties to come together to discuss standing orders, to look at best practices in other jurisdictions: I support the spirit of that. I just really struggle, as I've mentioned, Mr. Speaker, when there are tangible examples where both sides have decided not to pursue that path. I appreciate that in order to break that cycle, it's going to require all members to move this forward.

You know, there are times where members of the opposition have brought forward amendments, many different amendments, and I appreciate that – I will allocate some as being maybe more partisan in their nature, but there are and were and have been quite a few amendments that have been brought forward that have not been accepted.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I ever told you this story. In my first term, in 2012, the NDP had an amendment. We brought forward six or seven on one bill. We had one amendment, the final amendment, that was a completely nonpartisan amendment. In fact, during the division I was speaking with a number of ministers on the front bench, and they acknowledged that it's nonpartisan, and they said, "This is actually a pretty good idea." And I said: "Great. So will you vote in favour?" And I was told to my face: "No. We won't, because it's coming from the NDP. It's coming from you." And let me tell you: that was probably one of the most disheartening moments that I've had in my time in this Chamber.

I think that actions speak louder than words. When we were government, I know that there were multiple amendments on pieces of legislation that I brought forward from the opposition that were accepted. Again, I'm not looking for an attaboy. I'm just trying to demonstrate that there have been times, I believe the current government included – in the past three years have any amendments been accepted? I'm looking to our House leader to confirm or not. [interjections] Okay. Great. We have confirmation. There has been at least one amendment, maybe more. [interjection] Seven. Oh, okay. So there have been a few amendments that have been accepted . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time for debate for the item at hand has elapsed. There will be 14 minutes remaining in debate next week on this hotly contested motion other than a government motion.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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