



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 5, 2022

Day 4

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
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Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 5, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I invite you to participate 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: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Page Biographies

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to proceeding to introductions today, I'd like to just briefly note that you will find a copy of the new page biographies for the 2022 fall sitting of the Fourth Session of the Legislature, which I will table at an appropriate time later today. As you read through it, you will notice that we have a record number of 18 new pages alongside nine returning pages. I would also like to mention that these biographies will be available online through OurHouse.

Hon. members, I know that it goes without saying, but I ask you to provide them with a warm welcome and that you will show this bright, young group the utmost patience as they learn the ropes of this important role. There will be a test on their names next week for each of you.

Thank you all, pages. Please, members, provide them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am pleased to introduce a familiar face around the building. Seated in the Speaker's gallery is former Member for Lacombe-Ponoka Rod Fox. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has a school to introduce.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Welcome to the wonderful grade 6 class from Virginia Park school. They're joined by their

fabulous teacher Kirsten Elliott and their wonderful EA Abdul Mohamed. Please join me in welcoming them.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to also introduce a school group to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. It's école Rio Terrace. They've brought their teacher along, Andrea Bluteau, and I know that there are about three parents who have come along, and I just welcome them also.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce grade 6 students, teachers, and staff from St. Kateri Catholic school in Edmonton-Meadows. Please join me in welcoming them into the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has an introduction.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House Mr. Ashok Gupta and Devindra Singh Tiwana, who are businessmen here in Edmonton and residents of the South West constituency here in Edmonton. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Alberta grazing lease association, Mr. Kevin Meneice and Mr. Kyle Forbes, as well as members of the Western Stock Growers' Association, Graham Overguard, Bill Newton, and Callum Sears. Last but certainly not least, the wonderful Lindsye Murfin, who keeps all of them in line. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education. The hon. the Minister of Education, do you have an introduction?

Member LaGrange: We didn't get any today. Sorry.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. member – my list actually isn't up to date. The hon. Member for Camrose is rising.

Affordability Plan

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our United Conservative government knows that affordability is a primary challenge facing Albertans right now and that families are counting on us to take decisive action to address rising costs of living. That is why we are not hesitating to deliver timely and meaningful inflation relief for Alberta families and businesses: relief for fuel, relief for utilities, relief for seniors and our most vulnerable. Our government is in a position to provide this relief to Alberta because of our balanced budget and strong fiscal position.

We recently delivered the second-quarter fiscal update, which showed that not only is our economy strong but that it has momentum. Despite global uncertainty our province is on track for a projected surplus of \$12.3 billion and repayment of \$13.3 billion. The restored strength of Alberta's economy is in stark contrast to the

disastrous economic policies we saw Rachel Notley and the NDP put in place. The NDP's ideological policies and tax hikes chased hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of investment out of our province. This also wreaked havoc on our budget.

Shockingly, the NDP is now attacking the inflation relief we are providing Albertans even though they have no alternative plan. We are focused, however, on keeping Alberta's economy strong and delivering timely relief to Albertans. We have already committed \$2.8 billion over three years to help Albertans with cost-of-living concerns and are committed to \$1.3 billion in new funding to help make life more affordable, but as we have said, there will be more help coming. Our commitment to fiscal discipline and economic growth is allowing us to pay down our debt, lower our burden, and save for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose will be well aware that the use of proper names under any circumstance would be inappropriate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning is rising.

Industrial Heartland Investment and Alberta Sovereignty Act

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September I had the pleasure of attending Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association conference. I heard presentations from several companies that talked about their plan to reduce emissions and achieve net zero in their operations as well as produce energy such as hydrogen that will help our province achieve its emission-reduction goals.

There are currently several large-scale projects being considered in the Industrial Heartland. Dow is proposing to build a net-zero facility that will produce 3.2 million metric tonnes of polyethylene and ethylene derivatives. Suncor and ATCO have partnered to build a hydrogen production facility capable of producing 300,000 tonnes of hydrogen annually. Inter Pipeline has proposed blue ammonia and blue methane facilities that will support the transportation of hydrogen.

These projects represent billions of dollars in investment and will create thousands of good-paying jobs; however, none of them have reached a final investment decision. This is a pivotal moment for the heartland and for Alberta's entire economy. The government, rather than embracing investor certainty and economic stability, have chosen to introduce their job-killing, undemocratic sovereignty act, a piece of legislation that has been panned by venture capitalists, investors, the Calgary Chamber, the Canadian chamber, and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. It is the exact opposite of what we need right now. It will create uncertainty and drive away investment. We need to scrap the sovereignty act so that we can attract investment into the Industrial Heartland, build a more resilient economy, create jobs now and for future generations.

1:40

I won't vote for the job-killing sovereignty act. I ask every member in this House to think about what voting for this bill could mean for workers, for future generations. I and my colleagues are proud to stand in this House each day in support of Alberta's rural economic future, in support of the Industrial Heartland, and in support of a future for all Albertans.

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

Paramedic Dallas Boyko

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's member's statement is in honour of Dallas Lee Boyko, a long-time paramedic

who lived in my riding and died in the line of duty while working to save others. On Saturday, September 10, paramedics across Canada, Alberta as well as residents in my home of Spruce Grove and Stony Plain were deeply saddened and mourn the loss of such a tremendous life gone too soon.

Throughout her distinguished 25-year career Dallas treated thousands of patients with tremendous courage, compassion, and skill. Dallas mentored and trained hundreds of students and new staff and made a massive impact on the paramedic community across the province. In recognition of her tremendous dedication and service Dallas was awarded the 12-year provincial service medal in addition to countless commendations from patients, families, peers, and supervisors.

Paramedics are a selfless breed. I believe it takes a very special kind of person to not only do the job but to excel in such a vigorous and demanding career. Being a paramedic isn't like the TV shows. It isn't always fast-paced lights and sirens that we like to see. Sometimes there are car accidents, explosions, and heroics, but most of the time it's the complete opposite. It's twisted ankles, toothaches, fevers, and coughs. Sometimes it's literally just having a conversation with someone about their life while you take them to the hospital or making sure a child has their favourite teddy bear to comfort them on a dark day.

Paramedics have played a big role in our society. They are those individuals who sacrifice a lot in order to help residents in our communities. We cannot pay back the goodness and the services that paramedics offer to us. The only thing that we can give them is our full respect that they are modern-day heroes.

Dallas was one of those heroes, and her loss will be felt for a very long time. May she rest in peace. Thank you.

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

Financial Literacy Education

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government recognized November as Financial Literacy Month to remind Albertans about the importance of personal finance and to highlight government programs that help keep money in their pockets. No one is too young to learn about saving, budgeting, spending, and investing in today's world. With rising interest rates and inflation due in large part to poor federal policy it has never been more important for us to ensure young people are learning financial literacy skills.

Junior Achievement of Southern Alberta does a tremendous job of teaching financial literacy skills to young Albertans. As a proud former Junior Achievement alumnus myself, as are several of my colleagues, I know first-hand how valuable financial literacy, career readiness, and entrepreneurship skills are for our students and how engaging JA programming is for young people. I have such gratitude to organizations like Junior Achievement. They have a legacy spanning 60 years of teaching young Albertans about budgeting, saving, and investments.

During Financial Literacy Month they provided over 10,000 youths in our province with financial literacy education. They expect to achieve the same for 75,000 Albertan youths within this school year. Mr. Speaker, that is 75,000 young minds that will grow up to become contributors to our province's economy, patrons in their community, and adults holding the tools necessary to become financially responsible.

I'm proud that we have committed funding to Junior Achievement and other organizations, and our government has also shown that we recognize the value of financial literacy lessons by implementing them into our K to 9 curriculum. Fiscal responsibility is not only something we talk about; we act on it. We are choosing to put budget surplus towards paying off provincial debt instead of continuing to

borrow and spend beyond our means. Thank you to this government for continuing to support financial literacy. The progress we make in empowering Albertans, including our students, women and girls, and our newcomers, will lead to financially prosperous lives.

Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Transformative Solutions for Inclusive Development: the Role of Innovation in Fueling an Accessible and Equitable World. That statement is this year's theme for International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Since '92, for 30 years, we've marked this day by talking about wonderful people we know, new innovative programs, and a few stories that make it to the newspaper or social media. What we continue to fail to do is to make real progress towards inclusion for all in all areas of life: child care, early learning, K to 12, postsecondary, employment, health care, built environment, communication, and more.

These last three and a half years have been a crash course on how to make it exponentially more difficult for inclusion to flourish in Alberta. The UCP is directly responsible for deindexing benefits of disabled, senior, and low-income Albertans. Sure, they reindexed benefits six months before an election, with a projected surplus of \$13 billion, but that does nothing to undo the damage of three years of growing poverty. This government has systematically ignored exploding wait lists for disability supports and affordable, accessible housing while patting themselves on the back for recent announcements after months of arrogantly claiming all was well.

Here's an excerpt from a letter from a disabled friend of mine.

I need decision-makers to hear about the pain they caused by deindexing benefits. Just indexing is not enough. We lost three years. How can you boast about making your books look better on the backs of disabled Albertans who can't afford to buy food? Health care keeps me alive. I can't fund raise extra dollars to pay for health care, and I certainly don't want to beg for money. The disability community has been left behind by the UCP. You're hurting us every day. Our families, our communities know of the hurt and are working hard to make change and have a Premier who hears us in 2023.

Change is coming, friends. Given the opportunity to form government, we will establish real-time goals and measure inclusion and access so that we can meaningfully celebrate the success on International Day of Persons with Disabilities in the future. We will get that done.

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

Affordability Plan

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have proven time and time again that they are resilient. We can overcome any obstacle that is thrown our way, and we can stick together. We have seen this over the past couple of years: the 2014 oil price crash, four years of NDP tax hikes, and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, Albertans have been tested once again. Dealing with record-high inflation, families are struggling to provide for their basic needs, and we are faced with deciding whether to fill up on gas or put food on the table. No parent should ever have to make those decisions. The rise of rent, groceries, and gas is taking a toll on Albertans. While Alberta is trying to mitigate the situation, Ottawa continues to ignore the rising cost of living and has even decided to triple the carbon tax.

Our government understands the struggles of Albertans. We have provided many initiatives to ensure that this life is more affordable for Albertans. Some of the major affordability measures we are enacting consist of providing \$600 over six months to parents for each child under 18 and seniors; \$600 over six months to AISH,

income support, and PDD recipients; suspension of the entire provincial fuel tax for at least six months; indexation of provincial tax brackets; and \$200 to pay home and electricity rebates. I am thrilled that the natural gas rebate program will continue to help Albertans, especially as we are heading into the colder winter months. The indexing of AISH, PDD, seniors' benefits, Alberta's child and family benefit, and income support program will begin as early as January, Mr. Speaker. Our government is also investing in Alberta's food banks and low-income transit passes.

We realize that affordability is a challenge many of us are currently facing, and our government is working hard to provide substantial relief for all Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Taxation and Provincial Autonomy

Mr. Barnes: Albertans are optimistic about the direction our new Premier is taking when it comes to greater autonomy within Canada, just like Quebec has sought and received for years. Autonomy is a concept that has deep meaning throughout our history. It is an idea that focuses on maintaining a decentralized federation which respects the constitutional rights of provinces, thereby strengthening national unity by respecting regional diversity.

Ottawa has continuously taken more from Alberta than it has returned, leading to a deep feeling of alienation towards our federal government amongst Albertans. It's time we did something. Taxation has long been a flashpoint when it comes to federal-provincial relations as Ottawa collects most of our tax revenue and passes it out conditionally through several transfer programs like equalization. Ottawa's overreach and interference have harmed the ability of Albertans to provide for their families.

On the other hand, Quebec has a long history of effectively fighting for autonomy of its citizens. In fact, during the 2019 federal election campaign the Conservative Party of Canada agreed with a unanimous motion from the Quebec National Assembly for the implementation of a single tax return system administered by Quebec and all federal and provincial taxes collected by Quebec.

In fact, I served on the Fair Deal Panel, and thousands of Albertans expressed their desire to receive a more equitable, decentralized deal with Ottawa. Recently Alberta's Premier has said, "That means establishing a tax department so we can collect our own taxes and make it completely transparent how much we collect for our own provincial needs and how much we send to Ottawa." I now urge this government to strengthen provincial autonomy. Follow Quebec's lead in advocating for the creation of a single provincial tax collection agency for all the taxes that Albertans pay.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has the call.

Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I know that every member of this House will always step up to protect our province. Today our disagreement is in how we do that. Now, last week the Premier claimed ignorance when we challenged her about the undemocratic powers buried in her job-killing sovereignty act. First she said that we were wrong. Then she claimed that we didn't read the bill. Then she called us fearmongers. Now she admits that there are problems while her caucus demands amendments. To the Premier. She's lost people's trust with this bumbling and stumbling, so now her bill is beyond saving. Why won't she just withdraw it?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, first the Leader of the Opposition didn't even want to read the bill, voted against it on first reading. Then she asked her friend in Ottawa, Justin Trudeau, to quash the bill, and now she's said that she doesn't even want to propose any amendments. I don't think that the Leader of the Opposition is approaching this in good faith. My caucus is. My caucus identified some issues that they wanted to address – they wanted to seek some clarity – and that's the kind of leader I am. I want to make sure that we get this bill right, and I'm grateful that my caucus is going to propose amendments to do that.

Ms Notley: “The worst piece of legislation introduced in Alberta since the Social Credit bills of the 1930s”: that's Don Braid, the Premier's ex-colleague. Mr. Speaker, when Albertans pointed out this blatant power grab, the Premier claimed that they just didn't understand the bill, just like she did right there. Now she's kind of changing her tune. Here's the thing: she either got caught in her attempt to seize power and is now desperately scrambling to cover that up, or she literally didn't know what was in her bill and very possibly still doesn't. So which is it?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition may want to quote a journalist, but let me quote former Canadian Supreme Court Justice John Major saying that he doesn't find this bill particularly alarming. In fact, he says: what's so terrible about the province saying if you want to impose on us, you'd better be sure you're doing it constitutionally? Geoffrey Sigalet as well, University of British Columbia, centre for constitutional law, says that it's totally constitutional. I will take my advice from the constitutional scholars who are looking at this bill and saying that it is the right thing to do.

Ms Notley: Well, those particular scholars, Mr. Speaker, are very much in the minority. Meanwhile the Premier is ignoring the many voices worried about the impact on our economy. CAPP has concerns, the Calgary Chamber has concerns, and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce said that businesses are caught in the middle and uncertainty is now the order of the day. Meanwhile the Premier claims that she's getting quiet phone calls from CEOs who disagree. So here's the question, and it should be an easy one: can the Premier stand and name those CEOs, and if not, why not?

Ms Smith: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that neither the head of the chamber nor the head of CAPP consulted their members because I have been getting dozens of phone calls all weekend. I will just say that, in point of fact, when you look at the business investment climate and the kind of uncertainty that was created – I remember the Leader of the Opposition talking down Northern Gateway, which cost Northern Gateway; talking down Keystone XL, which cost us Keystone XL; talking down the coal industry; \$4 billion is what it cost us on the early phase-out of coal. These are the kinds of things that the business community does not want to see again.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Clearly unable to name even one CEO.

Children's Health Care and Hospital Capacity

Ms Notley: Meanwhile the surge in pediatric patients arriving in ERs across the province is alarming. This weekend Albertans learned that respite care at the Rotary Flames House is being sacrificed to ensure care at the Alberta Children's hospital. This is a serious blow for some of Alberta's most medically fragile children and their families. This

staff shortage was not manufactured; it is because of decisions made by this UCP government. To the Premier. These children need our help, and they deserve action from your government. What are you doing to restore these services today?

Ms Smith: The crisis that we're seeing in health care right now is a crisis that's taking place across the province and across the country. We see in British Columbia as well that they've called a code orange alert. In Toronto they are also taking additional measures. We know that we need to have additional staff onboard. In fact, I'm going to give some credit to the UNA boss, Heather Smith – she's been working very collaboratively with Alberta Health Services – because we know the way the nurses' contract is written is that they have to sign off on any redeployment of staff. She's been excellent to work with, and I hope that we'll be able to continue doing that.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in B.C. we heard for hours today from the chief medical officer of health trying to find ways to keep children safe. In Alberta we have a volunteer chief medical officer of health who is silent. Meanwhile Dr. Sam Wong says that the surge in pediatric care is having a severe impact on areas like in-patient and emergency care, and right now they're just trying to keep surgeries happening. To the Premier: what specifically is she going to do to prevent surgeries for children from being cancelled today?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we already know that the wait in emergency rooms is way too long. It's part of the reason why I appointed Dr. John Cowell to take over as official administrator, so that we could be making some of these decisions in a very rapid way. We also know that one of the issues we're facing across the country is the shortage of children's Tylenol, the shortage of children's ibuprofen, the shortage of other children's medication. [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: I may have something more to say on that very soon. [interjections] Yeah, maybe as soon as tomorrow.

This is the thing that we need to do. We need to make sure that children are getting the medications that they need so that parents can take care of their kids at home.

Ms Notley: We're not talking about Tylenol; we're talking about palliative care for children.

Now, the Premier perhaps should have read about Amanda Weger, an Airdrie mother who had to drive into Calgary when her 23-month-old daughter needed emergency respiratory care. She arrived to a packed ER full of sick children, some in heated trailers. Mr. Speaker, this is a crisis, and it is real, and it is urgent. The silence from this Premier since we last raised this issue in the House has been deafening. We must have an emergency debate today. Will the Premier commit to ensuring that this debate proceeds?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition knows what's going on in the country, that we do have a shortage of children's medication. As a result, when children get high fevers, they're going to the hospitals, and it's happening all across the country. It's the reason why we've been working collaboratively with the federal government to try to address this need for urgent medications, so that people can get the care that they need in their home. We are also working with Dr. John Cowell, the chief administrator, to make sure that we are addressing the issue in the emergency rooms, and that includes children's services. I'm glad that the union is working with us on doing that.

Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act (continued)

Ms Ganley: Today I stand for Alberta's economic future, for new investment and good-paying jobs. One of the major job-creation projects under our NDP government was the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, which to date has led to nearly 30,000 jobs. This game-changing project runs through British Columbia to tidewater. Imagine the scenario where B.C. put in their own sovereignty act: no more Trans Mountain expansion, no access to tidewater. How exactly does the Premier expect us to get our products to market if she cuts Alberta off from the rest of the country?

Ms Smith: You know, Mr. Speaker, I want to work collaboratively with the federal government. I wish that they had worked with us on approving Northern Gateway, but the Leader of the Official Opposition opposed that. I wish that they had stood up for us when the Americans cancelled Keystone XL, but that was another project that the Leader of the Opposition opposed as well. The reason why business investment is leaving our province is because of decisions being made by the federal government that are supported by the NDP and the Liberal-NDP coalition that continues to chase investment out of our country. The reason why we need to put up a shield is so that we can attract that investment back.

Ms Ganley: The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Calgary Chamber of commerce, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, venture capitalists: the list of groups and investors speaking out against the job-killing sovereignty act grows longer by the hour. Rather than addressing their concerns, the Premier decided to go on national television and call them liars. Can the Premier explain why she thinks it's a good strategy to insult the very Albertans and international investors who drive our economic growth?

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I was at such an exciting event this morning. I don't understand why the NDP keeps on talking down our economy and keeps on talking down our business community, because WestJet has just announced the expansion of their direct flights: Barcelona, Rome, Paris, London, Dublin. This is the thing that is going to not only give us access to the world, but they're looking forward to using that as an access for the international community for investment here. One of the biggest things that they've done is that they've now launched a direct flight to Tokyo. I talked to the consul general; he's really excited about ways in which we can have partnership to have more investment here.

Ms Ganley: Those aren't my words, Premier; they're the chamber of commerce's.

Long-time *Calgary Herald* columnist Don Braid wrote this morning that the sovereignty act might be "the worst piece of legislation" seen in this House since 1930. That was when the government of the day moved to imprison people who spoke out against them. This is generationally bad legislation, but this government wants us to trust them to use it judiciously. If this Premier wants to claim, contrary to the business community, that her act won't cost jobs, it is on her to prove it. Release the economic impact analysis today.

Ms Smith: Well, if we're just going to be trading quotes, let me give another quote. Keith Wilson said that he has reviewed Bill 1. "Bill 1 is moderate in scope and goals." You guys just quoted Don Braid, for heaven's sakes. Keith Wilson is at least a lawyer. "The truth is [Danielle Smith is] standing up to Ottawa's anti-Alberta

policies [and it] will encourage investment and more jobs in Alberta." The real issue here is Ottawa. I'm wondering when the Official Opposition is going to stand against Ottawa and start standing up for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the call.

Alberta Sovereignty Act and Indigenous Rights

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I sat down with Treaty 8 chiefs and staff who are deeply concerned about the job-killing, undemocratic sovereignty act. They asked me to relay their questions and concerns to the Premier directly. To the Premier. Grand Chief Noskey wants to know: since this act gives your government the power to circumvent the federal government, the courts, and, by extension, treaty rights when the government deems it in the, quote, public interest, what guarantee do First Nations have that she will not bowl over their inherent rights for what she sees as public interest, because it's clear that her definition of public interest does not include First Nations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Indigenous affairs minister has been fielding calls from chiefs who are concerned. The reason they're concerned: I think he's alleviated that. When you look at the bill, the bill asserts that everything we are going to do does not abrogate or derogate from anything, any rights, that is enumerated in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. If you read section 25 of the Charter of Rights and ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The Premier has the right to answer the question just as you have the right to ask it.

The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: If you read section 25 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it's very clear that Aboriginal and treaty rights, not even just existing treaty rights but future land claims, are fully protected under the law. This is not about abrogating anyone else's rights; it's about asserting Alberta's.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chief Rupert Meneen of Tallcree First Nation is well aware that this Premier is ignorant to the fact that First Nations are sovereign. From the extensive history of treaty signings with the British monarch to today, these treaties are essential, and they're why Canada is a country. First Nations are not a subset of the Alberta government or just another stakeholder but stewards of their own land. This means that the Premier needs to seek consent when developing resources on First Nations land or changing the environmental standards protecting their hunting and fishing rights. What will the Premier do when First Nations inevitably push back on her heavy-handed overreach?

Ms Smith: The hon. member is absolutely right. I mean, I don't think that there's going to be a single project that proceeds in this province anymore without an Indigenous partner. It's part of the reason why we have the Indigenous opportunities agency. It's part of the reason why specifically in the bill, in contemplating it, it said that it does not abrogate or take away from the Charter rights represented in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I know that we are going to have a partnership of economic reconciliation with our First Nations, and as soon as we assert that we have the right to

develop our resources, we're going to do that in partnership with our First Nations communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Grand Chief Arthur Noskey pointed out that the sovereignty act is the second UCP bill that directly attacks First Nations. First was the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, which was passed in retaliation to First Nations' protests fighting for their treaty rights but never once used on the Coutts blockade. To the Premier from Grand Chief Noskey: do you have enough resources to arrest everyone in Treaty 8 using the critical infrastructure act when they oppose the utilization of the sovereignty act?

Ms Smith: Well, once again, the sovereignty act is about affirming First Nations' rights, affirming Alberta's rights under the Constitution, and affirming the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. If you look at the throne speech and you look at all of my statements that I have made on economic corridors, it begins with reaching out a . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Our approach begins with reaching out a hand to our partners in the First Nations communities. We know that all of our future development is going to take place in partnership with First Nations. I commit to doing that, and I'm looking forward to meeting with all of the chiefs to make that point.

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

Affordability Plan

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Calgary-Beddington families, seniors, and individuals on a fixed income are struggling due to inflation, but Justin Trudeau continues to double down on inflationary spending and his carbon tax increase rather than simply supporting everyday working Canadians. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: what is the government of Alberta doing to help everyday Albertans afford their heat and gas and put food on the table?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While we can't stop inflation, we can offer substantial relief thanks to our strong fiscal position. Our affordability action plan provides households up to \$900 in broad-based relief, including extended electricity rebates, protection from utility spikes this winter, 13.6 cents a litre off gas or diesel from January to June 2023, and additional targeted support, \$600 over six months, to families for each child, seniors, and vulnerable Albertans. Unlike the federal government and the members opposite, who support increasing costs on families, we are making life more affordable.

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the affordability crisis has increased the cost of virtually all basic needs, including food, utilities, and more, and given that thousands of Albertans rely on the social benefits such as AISH and the seniors' benefit and given that Alberta's government announced this week that they will index these supports, increasing them by 6 per cent, can the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social

Services tell the House what this increase will do to help those who rely on these programs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About seven years ago I had the opportunity of meeting with a mother in our community named Leah, who's the proud mother of Taisa, and seven years ago we sat down and talked about some of the challenges facing the disability community. Leah has sacrificed so much for her daughter, to be able to be there for her, and one of the challenges that she brought up was slowly watching things become more and more unaffordable as AISH payments were not keeping up with inflation. This announcement is going to have a great impact on not just Leah and Taisa but so many others in the community so that they can make sure that they can pay their bills, and that support is ongoing.

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that there are many Albertans struggling to afford today's inflated costs, especially those on fixed incomes, and given that our newly elected Premier directed that this payment be increased to address the affordability crisis, can the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services tell Albertans and the House about when vulnerable and low-income individuals will see this much-needed increase?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that question. I know that she's out hitting the doors, like I am, and just seeing story after story of constituents that are struggling with increases to costs and inflation. This is urgent, and that's why I'm pleased to report for folks on AISH and income support that they will see a bump before Christmas, December 22. For our seniors they're going to see a bump coming into January. This relief is coming quick, and in addition to that, they're going to be receiving the \$100 per month payment starting in January.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:10 Alberta Sovereignty Act and Fiscal Policies

Ms Phillips: In the weeks since the UCP government introduced the sovereignty act, opposition has been swift and fierce from the business community. The Calgary Chamber of commerce, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers all say that it will create uncertainty and drive away investment. When presented with this fact, the Premier lashed out and insulted the Calgary Chamber and just now CAPP as well instead of listening to them about the risks of this flawed legislation. Why is this government attacking the business community and business leaders instead of listening to them and shelving this job-killing sovereignty act?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are always going to stand up and fight for Albertans. That's what we're here for, and that's what we're going to do. But I don't understand: last week the Leader of the Opposition applied for a job with Justin Trudeau. Now, I know that up to this time he's always been a friend of the boss of the NDP, which is Jagmeet Singh in Ottawa, but I didn't really realize that she was applying for a job with the Prime Minister. I think what she should do is think about this, stand up for Albertans, and quit

following through with the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party of Canada.

Ms Phillips: Given that it isn't just the sovereignty act that the business community is opposed to and that, in fact, a recent survey by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce found that their members are also opposed to a UCP plan to demolish our Canada pension plan retirement savings and given that the government's own analysis showed that withdrawing from CPP would lead to \$130 billion in unfunded liabilities – no wonder it is so deeply unpopular with Albertans of all backgrounds – why is this government pushing ahead with this risky scheme that will increase costs and, like the sovereignty act, is also opposed by the business community?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're pushing ahead with is in fact doing the econometric work, the actuarial work so Albertans can make an informed decision on the opportunities and risks of an Alberta pension plan. The members opposite would have Albertans not make that choice, would have Albertans not privy to the information so they can make an informed view. An Alberta pension plan holds great promise not only for the business community but for Albertans in general. We will be pleased to provide the report.

Ms Phillips: Now, given that the chamber of commerce survey also showed that business is opposed to the UCP plan for an Alberta police force and this new tax and revenue agency that will add 5,000 public servants, grow the bureaucracy by 20 per cent, cost up to half a billion dollars, and result in all of us having to file our taxes twice – oh, goody; people will love that – will the UCP, anyone over there, commit to abandoning this ever-lengthening list of job-killing, red tape wrapping, unnecessary, embarrassing, antibusiness policies? Just commit to listening to business. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lethbridge-West is very animated today in the House. I assert this: why would we not investigate every opportunity to strengthen Alberta within the nation of Canada? That's what this investigation is about, understanding the opportunities and risks, benefits and costs of an Alberta revenue agency. We will do the work. We will inform Albertans. We will engage Albertans. Albertans ought to know.

Grocery Prices

Ms Renaud: Albertans are struggling to keep up with the cost of groceries. CPI data shows that grocery increased 10 per cent from last year, and it's only getting worse. According to the food price guide 2022 groceries will increase almost an additional \$1,000 for a family of four. With Alberta being the second-worst province for wage growth, more and more Albertans are being forced to use their savings, credit cards they can't afford, or predatory lenders just to buy food. To the Premier. Later today I'm tabling a motion that will help us make an Alberta-based solution for grocery prices. Simple question: will you support this motion?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that families are being hit hard by inflation and especially the increase of the cost of groceries. The average family of four will pay approximately \$15,000 in groceries over the next year. That's why we'll be

providing \$100 per month per child under 18 to families to help off-set the increase in the cost of groceries and other costs facing Albertans due to high inflation.

Ms Renaud: Given that Food Price Report showed that Albertans are facing the worst price increases in the country and given that Alberta's grocery sector is arguably the least competitive in all of Canada, with only two large corporate grocers and the smallest per capita number of independent grocers, will the Premier support our call for a study into how to increase competition in the grocery industry in Alberta? This is something real we can do. We can help lower costs for Alberta families today. Will the Premier do this? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member is quite aware, at least she should be, the Competition Bureau announced in October that they're currently investigating that. In fact, they're accepting submissions up until December 16. I would encourage the hon. member to use her time valuably in the Legislative Assembly and focus on things that are important to Albertans, like affordability. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Renaud: Perhaps the minister should focus on the question, and that is that people can't afford food.

Given that the increased cost of food hurts those living in poverty the most and given that increases are pricing out many essential and nutritious items like pasta, up 45 per cent; margarine, up 40 per cent; rice, up 14 per cent; soup, 18 per cent – they're pricing it so that vulnerable Albertans are just missing meals. They can't afford food. Given that the large grocers are reporting massive earnings increases, including Loblaws, that is reporting \$556 million in earnings and a 29 per cent increase from last year, Premier, will you support the motion?

Mr. Jones: We know that vulnerable Albertans and those on lower and often fixed incomes are being hit particularly hard by inflation and the increased cost of living. That's why we moved quickly to announce the indexing of core support programs that vulnerable Albertans rely on and the Alberta seniors' benefit. We also included all vulnerable Albertans and the vast majority of seniors on targeted inflation relief payments, which will provide \$600 over the next six months to help off-set the increased costs due to inflation.

Tax Policies

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, in 2018 United Conservative Party members passed a policy to restore a flat rate to provincial income taxes. Prior to this, from 2001 to 2015, our 10 per cent provincial flat tax provided a fair method of taxing income while, in turn, maintaining Alberta's position as the most free and prosperous province. To the Premier: do you agree that it's your government's duty to reflect democratically expressed wishes of UCP members to restore the Alberta advantage and continue to grow economic opportunities for all Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt that low taxes attract Canadians to the province of Alberta. I'm pleased to report that right now Alberta is leading the nation on net interprovincial

migration. That's a good sign for the province, a good sign for our economy. Tax review and tax reform should be ongoing. When the members opposite took office and led the government in 2015, they raised taxes on corporations and individuals, sent billions of dollars of investment packing along with thousands of Albertans.

Mr. Barnes: Given that the Alberta government's annual oil and gas royalties are now projected at \$28 billion and given that historically Alberta's flat tax increased our province's competitiveness and domestic investment and given that the flat tax also attracted hundreds of thousands of people through international and interprovincial migration and given that Albertans are looking to restore our status as the freest and most prosperous place to live, again to the Premier: when are you going to recognize that Albertans own the revenue from oil and gas resources and need more financial freedom and financial opportunity?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government does recognize that Albertans own the resource; that's reflected in our policy to suspend the fuel tax when energy prices rise. Our revenues as a province are not compromised. Albertans can benefit from an owned resource, but it's important to periodically review the appropriateness and efficiency of our revenue structure. I would suggest that time is coming near. Income taxes are a detriment, are a disincentive to productivity. They should be as low as possible.

Mr. Barnes: Given that implementing a flat tax results in less legal tax avoidance and better tax planning outcomes for Alberta families and given that UCP members as far back as 2018 have asked for a flat tax to be implemented to make Alberta the freest and most prosperous place in Canada and now given the Fraser Institute reports that Alberta has dropped from first to 47th place on the North American economic freedom index since the removal of our flat tax, again to the Premier: is there actually a plan to reduce taxes and give Albertans more financial freedom?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the questioning, the assertion of the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, and the importance of keeping taxes as low as possible. Again, on the record I'm in favour of a review of our revenue structure to ensure that it's most efficient, most appropriate. That time is coming very soon.

I want to tell the House a story. When the members opposite, the NDP, took office, they jacked up corporate income tax rates and collected less. Mr. Speaker, we dropped those corporate rates by one-third, and we're collecting billions more per year. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

WCB Cancer Coverage for Firefighters

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the firefighters who battled the 2016 Horse River wildfire in Fort McMurray are true Alberta heroes. Day after day they worked in Fort McMurray to protect homes and infrastructure, in many cases without the necessary protective equipment or access to showers. They did this work from evacuation to re-entry. Now these same heroes are fighting to receive coverage for injuries they sustained, including recent cancer diagnosis. Will the minister responsible for WCB please tell this Assembly if they support ensuring these heroes get the compensation they deserve?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a leader in the country on presumptive care under WCB. The NDP don't seem to understand how presumptive coverage currently works in Alberta. The firefighters that worked for us and continue to work for us to save Fort McMurray and other places on a day-to-day basis already qualify for presumptive coverage on job-related cancers and presumptive coverage on mental health. How it works is that it's a fast track. When we find the evidence that backs it up, we cover it, and that's what we're here for, to make sure that Albertans and Alberta firefighters and EMS have the coverage they need.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that I don't think the minister understands how latency period works, given that I don't think the minister is aware that there is a Leduc firefighter currently going through the appeal process because he fought in Fort McMurray, has cancer, and is now not able to get the coverage he needs and given that earlier I was proud to stand with the Leader of the Official Opposition at the Alberta Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association to commit to increasing presumptive cancer coverage and removing the latency period for firefighters who fought in the Horse River fires, does the minister support the commitment made by the Leader of the Official Opposition today?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's just like the NDP to promise things that have already been done and been done by this government. I'm proud of the work this government has done, but in this particular case if there's an issue, I would be happy to hear from the member in relation to that and sit down with her and talk about that, because clearly this is an issue that has to be based on evidence. It has to be based on what's best for the firefighters, for the emergency service personnel, and for the people of Alberta.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, given that it's incumbent on this minister to listen, Alberta does not have the most forward-thinking presumptive coverage anymore. It used to under the NDP; it doesn't under the UCP. Given university studies on 1,200 firefighters have shown chronic issues and given that without changes to presumptive coverage, removing those latency periods, firefighters not only will have to fight cancer; they will have to fight for health, will the minister of jobs join the NDP in committing to providing peace of mind to the Fort McMurray firefighters and all of the firefighters across Alberta who fought in that wildfire and help them now?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the member was listening, but if she has a particular case that she wants to talk to me about, a number of cases that she wants to talk about, I'm more than happy to. My office door is always open. But there is a balance. As we find more evidence that suggests that cancers are caused by this fire or other fires or other happenings on the job, we will cover those. It's evidence based, and it must be evidence based because that's in the best interest of firefighters and emergency personnel. It's also in the best interest of Albertans.

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project

Member Loyola: The new Premier has stated that she is, quote, open to revisiting construction of the Springbank dam. That dam is the solution to preventing another catastrophic flood in Calgary, when the last one caused \$5 billion in damages, killed five people, and resulted in the evacuation of 80,000 residents. It's absurd to suggest that such a complex project should go back to square one. To the Premier's new adjutant, the backbencher who is now Deputy Premier and Minister of Infrastructure: has the boss been briefed yet, and is she still in favour of revisiting the Springbank project?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the solution that we need for flood protection in Calgary is on the Bow River. I think that the ministers and the government did a good job of getting to the finish line, finally, on the Springbank dam. It might not have been my first option, but it's now at a point where it's too far gone to retract. I think the bigger issue now is: how do we make sure that we get greater flood protection on the Bow so that we can not only do water management and irrigation but also hydroelectric power and new recreation opportunities? That's what I'll be looking at.

Member Loyola: Given that it's impossible to know where this government stands – they say one thing one day, something else the next – and given that the Premier went on at length about how the Springbank dam was a missed opportunity and the wrong project to protect Calgary because she talked to someone on a radio show and given that flood protection is critical for the economic security of Calgary and downstream communities, can the Deputy Premier, the Premier's most trusted adviser, please explain exactly what his boss thinks is wrong with the Springbank project and why Calgary doesn't deserve flood protection right now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a little rich coming from the NDP, saying that it's impossible to know what this government is doing with Springbank. Construction is already under way. They're working on it right now. I'd encourage the member to actually go down to Calgary to see it with his own eyes. This is a very important project for the city of Calgary. We're committed to making sure that flood mitigation for the city of Calgary is in place so we will never see the repeat of a 2013 flood incident like we did around Calgary.

Member Loyola: Thanks for demonstrating you're not listening.

Given that the Springbank dam is a huge and complex project already under construction and given that this project was subject to both provincial and federal reviews over eight years, through three governments and given that this project was deemed essential and in the public interest, to the Premier's most essential ally, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Infrastructure: has he explained to his boss why she was wrong and why the project is essential to protect Calgary?

Mr. Dreeshen: I'll slow it down, Mr. Speaker. I will assure the member that I was listening to his question, but it's just a little absurd. There are about 3,700 acres near Calgary that are for the Springbank dam. All the money is committed to the Springbank dam. We are committed to building it. We are building it currently, right now. The fact that the member is again doing the classic NDP fear and smear to say that something isn't happening when it actually is, I would say: go there and see it with your own eyes.

Crime Rate in Northeast Calgary

Mr. Toor: Mr. Speaker, according to the data gathered by the city of Calgary, my constituents in Calgary-Falconridge have been suffering from a high crime rate when compared to the rest of the city. This problem extends throughout the rest of northeast Calgary as well. To the minister: what are the main factors that contribute to this high level of crime, and what steps are your department taking to ensure public safety at and around Calgary northeast?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for that question. You know, there are a number of contributing factors, of course, that people face when it comes to crime. I can tell you that substance use disorder is certainly one of those. Unfortunately, when you have an addiction, it makes people do things that they don't normally do. That's why this government has taken unprecedented action in helping people with substance use disorders. That includes the 8,000 spaces, and that includes no fees for people in order to get the help that they need. This government is taking action, and we're proud of the work that we're doing.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Minister. Given the high levels of crime that have impact on my constituents, it is clear that more people are being pushed towards committing criminal activity for a variety of reasons. For example, gun violence in Calgary is on the rise. In the first four months of 2020 alone there were 54 shootings in the city, and 26 happened in Calgary northeast. Can the minister explain why these kinds of criminal acts of gun violence are increasing in Calgary northeast?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to statistics from, actually, the Calgary Police Service, thefts, break and enters, and assaults are consistently the top three crimes committed, and this is a trend that is consistent actually in northeast Calgary. You know, we're going to continue to work with our law enforcement community. We're going to partner with them. We're going to ensure that communities are protected. We're going to make sure that they have the resources that they need. And we're diligently working to protect Albertans when it comes to public safety.

Thank you.

2:30

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you to the minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the factors that are behind this increase in crime and given the nature of the crimes that are being committed more and more and given that the negative economic conditions when combined with increased crimes make the lives of my constituents more difficult, to the same minister: what strategy is in place to ensure public safety and lower crime rates in northeast Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to that member for that question. You know, we've made significant steps to improve public safety. I can tell you that there's been a \$15 million increase over five years to ALERT to address organized crime, serious crimes, including gang violence, drug trafficking, child exploitation. We, of course, had the additional 8,000 addiction treatment spaces, which is a step forward to addressing people with substance use disorders, and also \$20 million over four years to expand drug treatment courts. These are just some of the steps that we're taking to help reduce crime within the city of Calgary.

Thank you.

Women's Issues

Member Irwin: A lot has happened lately in this province, and it's sure hard to follow all the wild things this UCP government has done. In fact, it's easy to forget, but the women of this province won't forget. They won't forget that it was only three months ago that the UCP awarded a prize to an explicitly racist and sexist essay. They won't forget that it's women who've been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and that it's women-dominated professions, like nursing and teaching, that have been attacked by the UCP time and time again. So to the Premier: why do you feel that the women of Alberta don't deserve a voice? Why was one of your first moves to eliminate the status of women ministry? Asking for 2 million or so Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that question. This government is committed to support women in this province. We're proud. Women in this province excel everywhere, including economic recovery. Despite that we don't have an associate minister for that, my ministry has the full mandate for that. On top of that, we have a leader in our caucus, the Hon. Fir, that is also the parliamentary secretary for status of women. We have a team working on this.

Member Irwin: Wow. Given that Alberta women were intrigued, to say the least, that it was this man who holds the position, the Minister of Culture, who represented all of us women at the meeting of status of women ministers in Nova Scotia last month and given that the priorities discussed at the meeting included addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ-plus people, a COVID-19 recovery plan, and women's leadership, can the minister outline the next steps his government will be taking to address these key issues related to women in Alberta? Please be very specific.

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, I was very proud to be the minister in charge of status of women attending the national conference. [interjections]

The Speaker: The member asked a question, which I could hear, and I'm hoping to be able to hear the answer.

The hon. the minister.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very proud to attend the national conference for the status of women. As one of the few male ministers let me tell you this. We have arrived to a best practices recognition that nowadays not only do we need women to help women; we need boys and men to defend women in our province. I was a very proud participant in that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Member Irwin: Given that historically one of the key roles of a status of women ministry is to ensure that sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination of all forms is addressed and that action plans are put into place and we as legislators have a role to call this out even when it's related to other politicians and given that Calgary city councillor Sean Chu has engaged in deeply troubling behaviour on multiple fronts and there is authority under the act to remove him from office, will the Minister of Culture today demand the removal of Sean Chu? And if he won't, will anyone over there stand up and do the right thing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I do want to say that violence of all kinds, especially violence against women and most especially sexual violence against a minor, is both unacceptable and against the law. These are exceptionally serious allegations. What I can tell this House is that the mayor has made a formal request to review this case, which, because of its nature, has been directed to the ministries of Justice and public safety. They will review the 1997 Calgary Police Commission's complaint file review to determine whether any further action should be taken.

Coutts Border Crossing Protester Conspiracy Charges

Mr. Sabir: Southern Alberta was held hostage earlier this year by an illegal blockade that cost our economy millions and disrupted Albertans' lives. The Member for Taber-Warner even went to that illegal blockade. For months these blockaders trained and stockpiled weapons and ammunition to fulfill an evil plot to murder members of law enforcement. Will the Premier join me today in publicly condemning that evil plot and thanking the RCMP for their work in ending it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. I will just say this, that any sort of illegal blockade is not accepted. It is something that should not and will not be tolerated. I can tell you that this government is committed to working with our local law enforcement officers to make sure that we keep the public safe.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this group had two pipe bombs, 36,000 rounds of ammunition, gas masks, and firearms for their plot to murder the members of the RCMP and given that these plotters made horrible claims and statements about how they believed that the members of the police should die, with one of the plotters being described as a hitman, will the Premier join me in condemning that illegal blockade and its violent nature?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure as the member knows, I mean, this is a matter that is currently before the courts right now in the Lethbridge area. I can tell you that we've been in contact with folks in the RCMP and the local municipalities in the Lethbridge area to make sure that they have the necessary resources and supports for our law enforcement community to make sure that justice is being served throughout the courts.

Mr. Sabir: Given that there have been groups advocating for the amnesty and forgiveness of those charged with violating public health orders during the pandemic, with the Premier being one of them, and given that the serious nature of the crime of those arrested, with explosives and firearms, plotting the murder of members of law enforcement, means they should not be included in any discussion of any amnesty, will the Premier join me today in condemning these plotters, those who supported their plans, and say unequivocally that they should face the full consequences of their actions?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite should take yes for an answer. We do not support criminal behaviour. I can tell you that those individuals have been charged. That is currently

going through the court process, and we will allow the courts to take place. This is a matter before the courts.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Health Care System

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to the Minister of Health on recently ratifying a four-year agreement with Alberta doctors. This will bring about improved comprehensive care, greater efficiency of the health care system, reduction in surgical wait times, and increased access to timely emergency medical services, among many other benefits to Albertans. To the Minister of Health. Please tell the House what other initiatives you will be implementing over the coming months to ensure a more sustainable, efficient, and stable public health care system right here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I am extremely proud of the Alberta Medical Association agreement that was reached, and it was reached with an overwhelming percentage of support on this agreement. This agreement provides doctors with stable and predictable funding while recognizing their dedicated service to Albertans. This agreement does help stabilize the health care system and will assist us to focus on other areas of concern, like attracting and retaining more doctors right here in Alberta. I'm looking forward to more announcements on how we will accomplish this in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that our government is dedicated to improving access to health care and increased efficiency and given that our government appointed an administrator to AHS to ensure this happens as swiftly as possible, can the Minister of Health please tell this House how this administrator is already improving the efficiency and stability of our health care system?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again to the hon. member for the question, Mr. Speaker. In November the Premier and I appointed a full-time administrator, Dr. John Cowell, replacing a part-time board, and asked him to focus on key issues facing Alberta Health Services. As the official administrator Dr. Cowell's efficient, effective, and decisive leadership will be focused on improving EMS response times, decreasing emergency room wait times, reducing surgical wait times, and developing long-term reforms through consultation with front-line workers and other key stakeholders to drive decision-making. I'll be looking forward to providing the results of that in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you. Given that demand for health care services in Alberta continues to grow and given that the creation of more IV therapy rooms would help provide better and more timely services for Albertans, can the Minister of Health please update the House on the status of the \$1.5 million IV therapy room investment in the Strathcona community hospital, and what is the estimated timeline of construction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite. His continued focus on representing his constituents is greatly appreciated. The current designated space in the Strathcona community hospital administered nearly 10,000 treatments in 2021 alone, so I'm happy to report to this House that the construction of a new dedicated space is set for early 2023, with an estimated completion date near the end of next year. The Strathcona Community Hospital Foundation is currently undergoing a campaign to raise \$250,000 to support this project. My understanding is that they're well on their way, and I look forward to it being open next year.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our committee chair and as deputy chair of the Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee I'm honoured to table the committee's final report recommending the appointment of Kevin Brezinski as both the Ombudsman and the Public Interest Commissioner for a five-year term commencing on December 30 of this year.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 12, sponsored by myself.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) concur in the report of the Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee, tabled on December 5, 2022, Sessional Paper 17/2022, and (b) recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Kevin Brezinski be appointed as Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a five-year term commencing on December 30, 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, do you have another motion to table?

Mr. Schow: Indeed, I do, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 13, sponsored by myself.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 1, Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-City Centre has a notice of motion.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time under Standing Order 42 I intend to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) acknowledge the adverse impact on families with children receiving pediatric respite health care services at the Rotary Flames House by pausing care in an attempt to meet the rising unmet patient needs at Alberta Children's hospital and (b) urge the government to immediately table an action plan that will in an expeditious

manner ensure that these pediatric respite health care services are fully resumed at the Rotary Flames House.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Bill 3

Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, which proposes to amend three different pieces of legislation under Justice and Service Alberta to abolish adverse possession.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Bill 4

Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, for first reading this afternoon.

First and foremost, I want to sincerely thank Alberta's physicians and all health care providers for the tremendous and tireless work that they're doing, particularly through the pandemic over the last two and a half years. Alberta's health care system is under unprecedented pressure, and I acknowledge the stress that physicians have been facing. I am confident that our new agreement with the Alberta Medical Association will stabilize the health system, target areas of concern, and support Albertans' health care needs. Part of this new agreement is the government's commitment to repeal section 40.2 of the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. This section of the act allows the government to terminate compensation-related agreements. If it passes, Bill 4 will repeal the government's ability to terminate its agreement with the Alberta Medical Association.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 4. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to table the requisite number of copies of the playbill from the very first running of a play at the Roxy Theatre, which has reopened. Thank goodness we were able to fund that project when we were in government. One of the things from the playbill that I think is of particular interest to members of this House is that Ian Jackson, who is usually the photographer who stands in that corner on important legislative days, is the production designer for the play. It's a gorgeous play. You should all take a chance to see it. There are six days left in the run.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an article written by Don Braid. The title of the article is Dictatorial, Unworkable Sovereignty Act May Be Worst Legislation in Alberta History. I think it's summarized well by its conclusion: "This bill is a complete mess that makes Alberta look ridiculous. It seriously

erodes Albertans' own democratic rights with little prospect of doing any good."

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a document from the *Globe and Mail* entitled Sovereignty Act Is a Silly Political Dare, Written in Crayon. The article goes on to wonder if the amendments will make the bill simply "bizarre and unconstitutional [rather than] bizarre, unconstitutional and outrageously undemocratic."

The Speaker: Are there others? Do you have a tabling?

Mr. van Dijken: Yes.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Upon returning home last weekend, I found in my mail a letter from the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association with concerns over food shortages caused from fertilizer emissions reductions. The Trudeau government has committed Canada to reduce its fertilizer emissions by 30 per cent. "Agriculture is the cornerstone of food security in Canada. And arbitrary reductions in emissions will come at the cost of reduced output of food and higher prices," which "could lead to extreme unintended consequences": not my words but words from the Western Canadian Wheat Growers. I would encourage all members to read and enjoy.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I do have six copies of the page biographies for the fall sitting 2022, the Fourth Session of the 30th Legislature.

Thank you.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the appropriate time the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre rose on a Standing Order 42. He has up to five minutes to speak to the motion.

2:50 Children's Hospice and Palliative Care in Calgary

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to SO 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a motion that is urgent and pressing and which I read under Notices of Motions. I'd like to acknowledge that pursuant to SO 42 I have provided the members of this Assembly with the appropriate number of copies, and I provided your office notice of my intention to move this motion as well as notified the government.

Mr. Speaker, it's our duty as representatives in this Assembly to address the urgent crisis in children's health care, which is now even worse because of the children's hospice, the Rotary Flames House, needing to pause some of its essential services. I can think of nothing more urgent or of no greater emergency that the province is facing at this moment compared to the state of children's health care. News broke about the Rotary Flames House on Friday, and I have been hearing from families about the impact of this since then. The hospice provides palliative care services for children with life-limiting illnesses. They also provide grief and bereavement support for parents and siblings. Rotary Flames House is an important place for families who are facing such difficult circumstances, and it's absolutely tragic that staff and services are being diverted as we near the holidays.

We should not be in a place where staff and resources are being pulled away from a children's hospice. This should be the most urgent matter not only of the Premier and the Health minister but of every single member in this Chamber. What are we doing here if we are not even providing children of this province with stable health care? The past president of the Canadian Medical Association, Katharine Smart, has said: this state of children's care shows the entirety of our health care system is on a knife's edge.

The Speaker: My apologies, Member. If we can just grab the copies – quickly pass them to the pages – they'll distribute. My apologies for the interruption.

Mr. Shepherd: No trouble, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Edward Les has been with the Alberta Children's hospital as an emergency physician since 2004 and says that he has never seen the situation this bad.

Last week the UCP refused to debate my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's emergency motion to address children's health following a shortage of pediatric medication and the building of a trailer to extend the size of the Alberta Children's hospital's waiting room. We were joined by a mother whose child has needed to spend significant amounts of time at the Edmonton Stollery due to needing two heart transplants, and she said that she has heard how playrooms are being used as patient rooms, elective surgeries are being cancelled, kids needing cardiac care are waiting for transfer, and teens needing ICU care are most likely going to adult care. I wondered then why the UCP did not see the urgency of this issue, and I was, frankly, angered when I heard about this pausing of services at the Rotary Flames House. Nothing is more important than children's health.

Yet the UCP are far more focused on an economically destructive sovereignty act or, as the Minister of Finance outlined today, spending time, dollars, and resources on forcing Albertans to accept policies they don't even want. I hope the UCP spent some time over the weekend thinking about what Albertans actually want and learning more about the children's health crisis and maybe speaking to some of these families who are impacted by it.

Columnist Don Braid wrote that the sovereignty act

is a complete mess that makes Alberta look ridiculous. It seriously erodes Albertans' own democratic rights with little prospect of doing any good.

The Premier and her cabinet should ditch [that act] and turn their full attention to the things that really need it – the children's health [care] crisis, for one.

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree with Mr. Braid more. I hope all of the members of this Chamber will agree with me on the need for this problem to be addressed and for this government to provide a clear plan of specific action on how service at the children's hospice and the Rotary Flames House will be fully resumed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 allots up to five minutes for a member of Executive Council to respond to the request. It seems to me that the Minister of Health is rising.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for raising this important issue. As I indicated last week, our government recognizes that there are challenges in our health care system, and we recognize there are challenges in our pediatric health care system. This is a challenge that is not unique to Alberta. As noted earlier today, you know, there are similar challenges being faced at SickKids hospitals across the entire country. The SickKids in Toronto recently ramped down surgery by 40 per cent. SickKids and others are redeploying staff internally, just like what we're doing in the Alberta Children's hospital in

Calgary. The CHEO in Hamilton has called nurses from the Red Cross, and the BC Children's hospital in Vancouver recently called a code orange, a disaster alert, to allow measures like reassigning staff as needed.

Mr. Speaker, we are taking action. It's a challenging time as we're going through the flu season. We have COVID, we have RSV, and that is why AHS made the difficult decision to be able to temporarily pause the Rotary Flames House respite care in Calgary to reassign some of those nurses and other staff to take care of very sick kids who are being admitted through emergency at the Alberta Children's hospital. Just to be clear, all other services at RFH are continuing, including the end-of-life care, bereavement support, and also the assist program. AHS is taking these steps for the same reasons as other children's hospitals across Canada, all struggling to cope.

But, Mr. Speaker, we do have a plan, and, as I indicated last week, we are implementing that plan. Now, that plan includes improving access across the entire system. We are spending a record \$22 billion on our Health budget this year, the highest level ever. COVID response and surgeries are on top of that, and we're adding another \$1.2 billion over the next two years.

Mr. Speaker, we are rebuilding our health care workforce. AHS is hiring people and expanding their workforce: 1,800 more RNs than before COVID, 300 more paramedics. We also have over a hundred more nurse practitioners working in Alberta today, and quite frankly we also have 400 more physicians when we look from December 31, 2019, to September 30 of this year.

We have new collective agreements with competitive pay for all the major staff groups. As I spoke about earlier, Mr. Speaker, we have a new AMA agreement, which actually provides stability, partnership, and innovation to attract and retain doctors. We have more internationally trained nurses and doctors working to get their licences and come into the province. We're investing for the long term, over \$30 million announced in May to add 2,600 seats in training programs for nurses, paramedics, and other allied health professionals.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are taking action. We're also adding capacity across the system from EMS to emergency to continuing care to improve the flow. We recently appointed an official administrator to focus specifically on the issues of access times in emergency departments, including in terms of the children's hospital. As an example of this, most recently at the Alberta Children's hospital we have added additional capacity for treatment. They've opened a new fast-track area for patients with less serious conditions, and they're working with staff in other areas on care times and to get the rest of the patients, to be able to build capacity through the entire system. The heated trailer at Alberta Children's hospital emergency department is a proactive step, and it will allow for a safe, warm place for patients who don't require immediate care to wait.

Mr. Speaker, we're doing all of this. We are taking action, and we will continue to take more action. I look forward to announcing more of what we're doing in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Speaker, at this time we do not need an emergency debate. We are focused on this issue. We've put the resources behind to solve this issue, and we will continue to work on this to be able to provide Albertans with the care they need when they need it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 is a request for unanimous consent to set aside the daily business of the Assembly to proceed immediately to the moved motion, in this case by the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre. It being a request for unanimous consent, I will ask only one question. Is there anyone opposed to providing unanimous consent? If so, indicate now.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 201

Public Health Care Delivery Standards Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Notwithstanding that very disappointing decision by the government members to downplay the significance of the crisis being felt here in Alberta and to negate the opportunity for all members to have a wide-ranging discussion about the nature of that emergency, I am pleased to be able to rise to speak at second reading to Bill 201, Public Health Care Delivery Standards Act, as it is, of course, quite timely in relation to the crisis that we were just discussing. I will say that it can be a crisis even if there are things going on in other provinces, strangely. It doesn't negate the level of crisis and emergency being experienced by the parents of young children here in Alberta, particularly when there is so much silence and lack of guidance coming from this government in both the public health and education sectors.

Anyway, there is a crisis across the province, and Bill 201 is designed – I'm very proud that it is our first bill as an opposition caucus – to address, to start the work of addressing this crisis and to establish standards so that Albertans can have clear expectations of their health care system and can have a line of sight to what is or isn't happening and to hold their elected representatives accountable. It requires the government to meet these standards and is guided by the principle of Albertans having a fundamental right to access public health care. Delivery standards, as described in the bill, would be established by the Health Quality Council of Alberta as a result of consultation with patients, health care providers, postsecondary institutions, Indigenous communities, and others.

3:00

To make my point on why this bill is needed and why I was motivated to write it, I just want to speak a little bit about the current state of health care, and I thank the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for trying so valiantly to give all members of this House the opportunity to engage in that conversation. When it comes to primary care, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Albertans do not have access to a family doctor or any primary care provider right now. Those who do have a doctor still find it too difficult to even access that doctor; they phone, and it still takes months in order to get an appointment. In fact, Angus Reid recently did polling that said that 30 per cent of Albertans who have a doctor still struggle with getting access to that doctor.

These problems in primary care are significantly worse now because of this UCP government's combative approach with doctors. Now, I know the UCP are trying to give themselves and the government is trying to give itself a pat on the back for the fact that they finally introduced a piece of legislation that theoretically will keep them from ever tearing up a master agreement with doctors again. But, of course, that's as easy as passing a new piece of legislation after the election, just like what happened last time, when they promised to respect everybody, respect public health care, and then one of the first things they did was that they passed legislation that allowed them to arbitrarily rip up the deal with doctors.

To be clear, you know, in case they aren't already aware, this particular bill is not restoring a whole bunch of trust amongst physicians. Nonetheless, the fact that that happened, that we have that very, very toxic history with the physicians in the province of Alberta, as generated by this government's behaviour towards them over the last three and a half years, has taken a challenge with accessing primary care and amped it up and elevated it considerably across the province, and Alberta families are paying the price.

Bill 201 names primary care as a place where the health delivery standards need to be named, identified, and then tracked. Public data on primary care right now is very limited in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and it is clear that there needs to be a plan in primary care to address the harm of the UCP's war on doctors. For instance, Ontario's Health Quality Council reports the percentage of patients who are attached to a primary care provider, and they also report the percentage of people who can get a day-of or next-day appointment with said primary care provider. This kind of reporting and accountability, that is being proposed by the Alberta Official Opposition NDP's first bill of this session, takes good ideas from other jurisdictions and puts them into place on behalf of the people of Alberta who are so desperately looking for improvements to their health care.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I'd also like to talk about another area that the bill would cover and address in terms of ensuring improvements. It would also ensure that we have greater reporting around standards and the meeting of standards within emergency departments and emergency care. Now, obviously, getting timely access to emergency care in and of itself is critically important for all Albertans. Even if you're not one of those people rushing off to the ER, I don't think there's a person in this room who doesn't know somebody who has had to rush to the ER at one point or another, and you are deeply grateful that that ER was there and the service was there when they needed it. But even and above that, the ER is kind of the canary in the coal mine. We are at this desperate state of affairs with respect to our emergency room health care provision, and it demonstrates other challenges that exist in this system as led by the UCP.

Now, I've already, of course, identified the challenge with respect to access to primary care, but we also have challenges with respect to mental health care, and really we do not have any kind of substantive efforts on the part of this government to expand public access. Rather, mental health care continues to reside primarily in the privately funded field, and as a result, most Albertans cannot access it when and where they need it. That's why our caucus has a proposal to remedy that problem.

It also shows where public preventative health is falling short. That's another thing that comes up in our ERs when we fail to get the job done. As I mentioned in question period today, Madam Speaker, we just saw, you know, the chief medical officer of health and her assistant or specialist in pediatric care speaking to the media for about an hour or more this morning, talking about the value of getting pediatric vaccines and also talking about the value of masking in certain areas, not mandating in any way, shape, or form but just giving good, solid public education. Meanwhile, what do we have here in Alberta? We have a voluntary chief medical officer of health, and we have a vaccine-hostile Premier, and we also, apparently, have the highest COVID infections in the country. This all comes together. Where do we see that manifesting itself? In the crisis in our emergency rooms right now.

Those are just some of the examples of where, in our ERs, you can see when other parts of the system are starting to fall apart. It shows up within the emergency room, and that's why we need to

bring into effect this bill, which would clarify not only the standards that need to be reported but also the accountability of the government for addressing and reducing wait times and increasing the ability of our health system to meet those standards.

What we know right now, as we've already talked about, is that the Alberta Children's hospital has had to add a temporary trailer to the hospital to extend the size of the waiting room. The minister talked about that as a good thing; I would argue that it's probably not. We know that staff from the Rotary Flames House, a pediatric hospice, had to be redeployed to the Alberta Children's hospital. You know, we know that respite patients have had to be discharged, which we know is deeply heartbreaking and destabilizing for families and very, very medically fragile children.

We know that emergency rooms all across the province are experiencing longer wait times. Many Albertans are waiting over 20 hours to get into the ER, sometimes lying on the floor while they do so. These pressures also mean that care sometimes has to take place in the hallway, in the ambulance bay, or in the parking lot. On April 25 we saw 14 ambulances waiting outside the hospital in Red Deer to off-load patients. Parking lot medicine is not acceptable, and this must be a call to action from this government. Madam Speaker, I remember raising these issues 18 months ago, and at that point the answer of the then Health minister was to tell us there was no problem. We cannot be in a situation where the depth and breadth of the emergency is exploding onto the front pages of our media before the government feels remotely compelled to do anything about it. It is clear that emergency rooms are not working and that the government needs to provide Albertans with a clear set of directions and actions on how they are going to react to this in the long term.

Albertans continue to reach out to me and my colleagues in the NDP about the state of emergency rooms each day. They want to see action. Health care workers in emergency departments are doing all they can right now, and my heart and my gratitude go out to them, but they actually need a government that will work with them so that they have the resources necessary to get the job done.

Now, emergency medical services is another area where we are looking for more detailed reporting in terms of the health care delivery standards that Albertans can rely on. I know all members of this Chamber know the current strain on EMS. This is another area where some data is tracked and reported, and it shows that the length in response times has increased, but there are actually also other crucial pieces of information which are not reported publicly as a standard way of doing business. The only reason we know about them and the only reason they are part of the public conversation on this is because it's been FOIPed by members of the opposition or journalists. That's not the way we should be managing these things. These include instances of red alerts, where no ambulances are available to respond to a call. Red alerts have increased by 10 times in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton from January 2019 to January of 2022. Ten times, Madam Speaker. No wonder the UCP wanted to keep that data away from the public, but that doesn't help Albertans, keeping it secret. Sooner or later we talk amongst ourselves, and we know our government needs to do better.

3:10

Instances of urgent disconnect, where call volumes are so high that the dispatcher cannot stay on the line, have also increased significantly from 2019 to 2022. In July 2019 they had 88 urgent disconnects, while in July 2021, Madam Speaker, 696; that is almost a 10-fold increase. This means that when someone has dialed 911 and is explaining an emergency, the call is just cut off with no explanation.

This means that we're seeing ambulances also spending more time out of their communities and being drawn into Edmonton and Calgary. I know that there are many MLAs in this room who are not necessarily members of our caucus but who are proud representatives of rural Alberta, and they must be hearing from their own citizens about the frustrations that this practice causes. Why aren't we having a more open and democratic conversation about that?

Surgeries. Pressures on the health system have led to significant delays in surgeries, and there, too, we need better reporting and better through lines of accountability. I know the UCP came up with their Alberta surgical initiative, which is, you know, their plan to increase the number of private surgical locations. At this point I think they're at about a 50 per cent increase. But the fact of the matter is that what we're really seeing from that online data is that more and more surgeries are not happening in the appropriate time frames. For instance, the percentage of cancer surgeries being done in target time frames has dropped by 10 per cent since the Alberta surgical initiative was formed, and through a FOIP we've learned that the UCP are missing surgery targets within the public system by 37,000 surgeries in one given year. Why did we have to FOIP that, Madam Speaker?

The delay is not inevitable, but at a time when you have a crisis in front-line health care providers and human resources, creating a whole second system and then pulling people out of one system to put them into another system is the exact opposite of effective. There is a straight line from the delay in essential surgeries to the lagging and private procurement practices of this government. They're expanding the private system while their mismanagement of health care is causing the public system to not be used to its full capacity. That's why Bill 201 also sets out principles of public health care, to guide both the setting of delivery standards as well as the funding of them.

Now, I've discussed how primary care, emergency rooms, emergency medical services, and surgeries could be impacted by this piece of legislation. These are places in the health system that the UCP have claimed are important to address, so I really hope they'll consider supporting this bill. Obviously, the bill is written – I have read it, just so you know. It is in fact written to ensure that additional areas can be tracked and can be added by the Health Quality Council based on consultations that they do under the authority given to them in this bill.

Now, expecting more can be done and better things can be done in our health care system: it's not adequate to just ask health care workers to do more with less. Both patients and the health care workforce should have a clear understanding of what expectations of the health system are and have confidence that the government is held accountable for providing them with the resources to do the job.

This bill would not only track the standards, but it would track the delivery of the standards and there would be a through line of accountability with respect to the appropriate amount of resources. This bill would also give the Health Quality Council of Alberta back a lot of the authority that this government took away from it when they were first elected. I think that that is valuable because I was here when the HQCA was first established, and I think that getting advice from independent, science-based experts is helpful, particularly in the area of health care.

As I conclude, I want to shift attention to the purposes and principles that are written out in this act. Section 2 lays out the principles of all Albertans having consistent, reliable, and timely access to high-quality public health care. They should have delivery standards that are independent, that are transparent, and hold the government to account to meet them. Albertans' lives and quality of life should not be unnecessarily put at risk due to a lack of

transparency, Madam Speaker. I do hope that all members in this House agree with these principles.

Section 6, as I said, specifically talks about ensuring that there are adequate resources. This is important, Madam Speaker, because when one looks at the health care budget under this UCP government and one pulls out the extra, discretionary, unpredictable – no one ever knows if it's coming or if it's not coming – money that came around COVID, the actual planned resources to our health care system, taking into account population and inflation, are about \$1.6 billion less than where they were in the 2018-2019 budget. So it's hardly surprising that we are finding that people are struggling to get the health care service that they need, and this is the kind of thing that the government, no matter which government, whether it's the UCP government, an NDP government, or some other party that's yet to be created, we should all be held accountable for those standards.

Voting in favour of this bill will show that the UCP is willing to be held accountable on health care. Voting against the bill shows that they are not willing to be held accountable to independently established standards and the responsibility for putting them in place that flows from it. Let me just say as well that voting to delay it or somehow defer their obligation to make a decision on it: well, that just shows that we're too close to an election and no one wants to be a hundred per cent clear on where they stand on these principles.

Nonetheless, I ask all members of this House to think about their communities. As of this morning there are partial and full hospital closures in communities including High Level, Fort Vermilion, Manning, Peace River, Grimshaw, Fairview, Spirit River, Beaverlodge, Grande Prairie, McLennan, Slave Lake, Boyle, Lac La Biche, Cold Lake, Whitecourt, Barrhead, Westlock, St. Paul, Two Hills, Rimbey, Rocky Mountain House, Daysland, Hardisty, Tofield, Wainwright, Consort, Sundre, Three Hills, Drumheller, Hanna, and Bassano. I sincerely hope that members who represent these communities reflect on where their priorities lie. The UCP is prioritizing a different piece of legislation with the job-killing sovereignty act. I would argue that this is not what Albertans want them to be spending their time on. They want them to be spending their time on the kinds of objectives that are outlined in this bill.

Finally, given the Premier's specific history of very recently writing and speaking in tremendous detail about her desire to privately fund massive elements of what is currently publicly funded in our health care system, I would argue that it behooves all members of the UCP to stand up and vote in favour of our bill, because right now the record is that which has been articulated by this caucus's current leader. Let me tell you that it is a record which disturbs and concerns hundreds of thousands of Albertans and which does not reflect the values that Albertans hold when it comes to the delivery of adequate, high-quality, publicly funded and publicly delivered health care, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in on the debate? The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition, who has tabled their plan to address health care in the form of this private member's bill. I thank you for your work on this. This is an important topic, and we need to discuss it.

The hon. member is quite right. Our health care system is facing real challenges, as it is in other provinces. Health care is under strain here, in the rest of the provinces in Canada, as it is around the world, due to the global health crisis over the past two and a half years. Unlike what is suggested by the opposition, that this is the result of policies of this government, in fact, Madam Speaker, that is not the

case. We see this across the country; we see this around the world. It's a result of the strains put on the system by the pandemic, some of that direct, that we've seen in terms of the use of resources over the last couple of years and continues to use resources in our system, and some is indirect in terms of the toll that it's taken on our health care professionals. I want to thank them for all that work. But to suggest that this is somehow the result of the policies taken by this government is absurd in the extreme. This is something that is affecting the entire First World and across the entire country, strains on emergency departments and EMS.

3:20

Madam Speaker, we are moving forward. We have put in place a plan, and we're executing on that plan. We're spending a record \$22 billion this year and increasing it by another \$600 million each year for the next two years. The government of Alberta is forecast to spend \$2 billion more this year than in 2018 according to the latest national data from CIHI, and that's net of COVID response funds, which represent another \$400 million plus that's going to be spent this year. This year's budget also includes a \$64 million increase for emergency medical services and a 6 per cent increase for continuing care, which is essential to increasing our capacity in our health care system overall. We're adding capacity across the entire health care system. That includes putting 19 new ambulances on the streets in Edmonton and Calgary as well as funding 1,500 new continuing care spaces and a million more hours of home care, to take just a few highlights of what we announced in Budget 2022.

In order to keep on adding capacity, we're building up our health care workforce, Madam Speaker. We have 1,800 more RNs and 300 more paramedics than in 2020, before COVID, and with this year's budget increase AHS is adding more than 1,000 front-line staff. We supported AHS in signing new collective agreements this year with all major groups and health care staff, including RNs, LPNs, paramedics, and other allied health professionals. Those agreements include competitive pay and benefits, and they're the foundation we need to build on, as we move forward, to enhance recruitment and retention. Of course, as mentioned earlier today, we've reached an agreement with the Alberta Medical Association.

We're sending a message that Alberta is the place to work in health care. It's still a great career in spite of the strains on the system, which has faced challenges over the past two and a half years and is still facing them now, and Alberta is the best place to build your health care career. Young people are judging that for themselves, and quite frankly, Madam Speaker, it's true. I was very pleased to read recently that the nursing program at U of A saw a 20 per cent increase in applications this past fall. Alberta historically has been the best place in Canada to work in health care, and we're working hard to keep it that way. Earlier this year our government announced over \$30 million to add new seats in our postsecondary training programs for nurses and other health professionals, and we're planning further increases, including more seats in our medical schools, that I look forward to announcing in the coming weeks.

We promised Albertans a stronger publicly funded health system, with better access to care. We stand by that promise, and we're making progress on delivering on it.

I just want to take a quick look at cancer care. We're doing more cancer care surgery than before the pandemic and giving patients better access than they had before. It's not as good as we want, but it's heading in the right direction. We're also moving forward with research and new treatments. AHS recently launched a new screening program for lung cancer using CT scans. It means more CTs, but we can do it because our overall CT volume is actually 20 per cent higher than it was in 2018-19, before the pandemic. Earlier

this year I was also very proud to enjoy the announcement of the stunning results we've seen with the CAR T-cell therapy. Of course, we're looking to take another huge step forward in terms of opening the Calgary cancer centre.

We're also making progress in diagnostic imaging, with more CT scans and MRIs than ever before, and in surgery, with more surgeries than before the pandemic and a shorter wait time for cataract surgery than any time since 2015. Madam Speaker, that is a direct result of leveraging chartered surgical facilities to be able to deliver the service.

But the reality is that our health care system remains under significant strain, and that's why I appointed an official administrator in AHS, to replace the part-time board with a full-time leader focused on driving improvements in access with the ability to move faster than we normally could. All of these are examples of action we're taking to address the challenges in the system.

Now I'd like to turn to Bill 201. Addressing the issues in the system takes money and planning and hard work, so I think the question is: how does this bill advance the work on these issues in any of these respects? In terms of money, I've already commented on our budget. Now, the opposition bill suggests that health care providers should be, quote, unquote, adequately funded to deliver services, but it doesn't say what that means. It doesn't actually suggest a dollar of additional funding beyond what we're providing. In fact, the bill acknowledges that health care funding is, quote, unquote, limited and finite, which seems to contradict the entire suggestion in the bill that the funding must be sufficient to meet access standards.

In terms of planning, the bill proposes a new set of access standards and public reporting of actual performance against those standards, but, Madam Speaker, we already have extensive and detailed standards for access for everything from time to see a doctor in emergency to the time to receive different surgeries to when an ambulance should be dispatched and when it should arrive. I appreciate the desire to report performance and measure it and assure Albertans that there are evidence-based standards that we need to meet. They exist, and we already report on them. In that respect it's not clear to me how the bill would advance this work.

The issue is not standards; the issue facing Alberta and every other province in Canada is the hard work that's supporting the system to cope with the strain of the pandemic and move forward. Again, we made Albertans a promise: a stronger publicly funded health system. More specifically, we promised Albertans that every Albertan who needed scheduled surgery would receive it within a clinically appropriate wait time. We don't need to define what that means; it's already out there. We already have evidence-based targets, and we're working towards them. What we need is a plan to get there. Bill 201 doesn't provide the plan, but that's what's important. We already have a plan, and we're acting on it.

The Alberta surgical initiative, as mentioned by the Leader of the Official Opposition, is part of that plan. The opposition bill seems to suggest, actually, as to the comments that she just made, that – you know what? – we are not going to fund chartered surgical facilities. Madam Speaker, that would eliminate a significant portion, approximately 20 per cent, of the surgeries we're doing right now. We've already had success with cataract surgeries in terms of being able to catch up in this regard, to get the wait times down in those surgeries, and we're doing more. If this is what this bill actually proposes, actually eliminating chartered surgical facilities, there's no way we can support it, besides which it is the wrong approach because the reality is that we can make a difference using chartered surgical facilities. It is public health care, it's publicly funded, and it's publicly administrated.

We need to keep doing the hard work to support our health system, Madam Speaker, and meet the challenges we faced, but I'm afraid I don't see, on this initial review of Bill 201, that it will actually improve substantially on that type of work. It talks about metrics, it talks about principles, but it doesn't actually talk about the plan, and that is actually what we need to be able to move forward on this basis. We have a plan, and we're working on it.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, at this time I wish to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 8(8) the Legislative Assembly defer further consideration of Bill 201, Public Health Care Delivery Standards Act, at second reading until December 21, 2022, or until the first day for consideration of private members' business after that date.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, having heard that motion – it is not debatable – we will vote.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:27 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Loewen	Schow
Copping	Long	Schulz
Ellis	Lovely	Singh
Fir	McIver	Smith, Mark
Glubish	Milliken	Toews
Hanson	Nally	Toor
Horner	Neudorf	Turton
Hunter	Nicolaides	van Dijken
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	Williams
Jean	Rutherford	Wilson
LaGrange	Savage	

Against the motion:

Dach	Gray	Notley
Deol	Irwin	Renaud
Ganley	Nielsen	Shepherd

Totals:	For – 32	Against – 9
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[Motion carried]

Bill 202

Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to move second reading of my private member's bill, Bill 202. It is the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022.

Madam Speaker, charity is the greatest amongst all virtues – I believe that – and it's the watchword of every Albertan and the watermark of our province since our conception. Charity is not just charity as a noun, as a place you give money; it is an act. It is something you do. Acts of charity are incredibly important to us and our society.

We, happily, have come to a spot now where we have institutionalized this, importantly, institutionalized it in these big, important charities that we know in our lives day to day, in our

faith communities, in the United Way, in the Cancer Foundation, in the Kidney Foundation, in the Calgary and Edmonton chambers of voluntary organizations, and, underneath those and amongst those, thousands upon thousands of others, that are registered charities with the Canada Revenue Agency.

That brings up the second part of the institutionalization. It's an institution for us to be able as a government and as a society say: we're going to incentivize this; we're going to do a paired giving, effectively, where we match the gift or more sometimes when it comes to charitable donations, because we know how important that is. We know how important the act of charity is itself on the soul and the virtue of that acting it out. But, importantly, in government, the lens through which we see it, without functioning charities we'd be at a couple of billion dollars less in services in this province. That's tough to put into numbers, but we all know those stories, Madam Speaker. Every single one of us on both sides of the aisle, no matter who we are, whether you're a giver or not, has received from a charity. You absolutely have or your family has. I encourage every member, as you rise to speak to this bill, to think of those stories and tell this Chamber and tell Albertans on the record those stories and ways that charities have affected your lives, have affected your family, have saved a life, perhaps, in your neighbourhood, in your community, and where you come from.

Madam Speaker, what I'm proposing to do in this private member's bill is not spend money but cut money. It's to cut taxes from Albertans, but we do it in a unique way. The way that it currently works with our set-up for nonrefundable charitable tax receipts is that the province and the federal government together will give a certain percentage amount of your dollar donation that you can get refunded if you're owing taxes at the end of the year according to how much you donated. Currently in Alberta that's 10 per cent of your first \$200 that at the end of the year gets refunded to you, and the federal government has it at 15 per cent. That makes it a combined 25 per cent.

The proposal of what the substance of what this bill is doing is effectively taking that Alberta portion and moving it from 10 up to 60 per cent, so a combined 75 per cent refund if you're owing taxes at the end of the year for your first \$200. The reason that that number was chosen is because if you look at other tax incentives for nonrefundable tax receipts that the province has on offer, the only other one that I know of that's comparable in any way would be the political tax refund for donating to political bodies, nominations, parties such as the ones that many of us represent here in the Chamber, all sorts of different activities politically. That refund is a 75 per cent refund for your first \$200.

I think, Madam Speaker, it's at least as fair to say that we should have as much interest in a successful, thriving charitable sector as we do in a thriving political sector in our society. It's good for us to be supporting people getting engaged in politics, making sure that this Chamber can continue to have very motivated members of all sorts of political beliefs advocating for it. The good news is that this issue, I believe, is nonpartisan. This issue is not something where it matters what side of the aisle you're on. Like I said before, every one of us has a charity that's touched our heart, that has saved a family member's life, that has made a difference and talked someone down from a ledge or provided support when they were in their most vulnerable, dire moments. Happily, we can support at least those first \$200 and incentivize them to the same degree that we do our politics.

If we look at the current state of the charitable sector across Canada, we can see that there's a decline in donations. Well, it's a little more complicated than that, Madam Speaker. There is a decline in Alberta, for example, over the last 10 years, from 2009 to 2019, in the number of households that are registering charitable

donations when they do their taxes. That decline is approximately 22 per cent; 22.1 per cent of households fewer now, at least in 2019, than in 2009 are registering charitable donations. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that the total dollar amount to charities has gone down. In fact, we've seen two things go up over these two years. The average dollar amount of donations has gone up over that same period of time, keeping many charities, not all of the organizations but many of the charitable organizations, close to whole. Also, we've seen the average age go up.

I was speaking to a relatively large charitable organization out of Calgary, the Calgary Cancer Foundation, and their average donor, I believe, is somewhere in their 70s as far as age. Now, this change has not come overnight. This change of the average age of donor and the total dollar amount and the drop in the number of households registering donations has not just happened over the last two years of the pandemic. Yes, the pandemic has made this more acute – that is without question – and charities can tell you it's been reflected in the way that they're trying to fund raise now, but it's been generational.

3:50

It's generational from before, where there was a generation that would give as an act of duty, responsibility immediately, and they'd been trained into it. I was not a part of that generation. Happily, since I started making my own income, talking to my parents and seeing what they did, it's something that has become part of a regular yearly activity with me and my wife and our household, to make sure that we're picking our charities and donating to those institutions we think are most important. But there are fewer and fewer of those who are my age, millennials, that are doing it. It's even less common in younger generations as they get into what used to be normal donating demographics, when you get into your early 20s and start having income that's appreciable after your education, when you're in the workforce. So we see this continuing on.

What happens to us as a society if those donations do dry up? What happens if that 22 per cent drop over a decade of number of households that are registering donations – what happens when that increases to 30, 40 per cent? What happens when the 78-year-old average age of donation for some of these charities is now 88 or 98? It becomes more and more difficult for them to continue to do the work that they do, and the consequences there cannot be clear enough, Madam Speaker.

I'm not just talking about dollars and cents. What these charities do is offer services that government doesn't – and if we did, we wouldn't do it as well, and that's not a contentious statement. All of these charities: many of them are supported by government as well, but they heavily, heavily rely on donations as part of their operational budget. That's a good thing. We should continue to support them, and anything we can do to do that would be great.

As a government we have a public interest. The common good is seeing charities thrive. It's so essential to our common life as Albertans to have these charities, the big names of the Stollery hospital, of course, and the Children's hospital but also the food bank that I visited in Peace River. I know that every one of us has been donating to it and visiting and talking about it, especially in the midst of this affordability crunch.

These charities offer services that otherwise Albertans wouldn't have, and those services are often dire. Those services are acts of charity and love. It's a different thing to actually go out and deliver the service than it is just to talk about it, to have government deliver it, to have somebody with the passion, like I met this weekend at the Peace River Salvation Army food bank; they care so deeply about those families. There are now 230 Christmas hampers, that has gone up at about 35 per cent from last year, that they deliver. It's so important to see those charities continue.

So to make that happen not just after COVID, which was difficult for families of all sorts, but particularly right now, this key moment where we see the affordability crunch happening – where average families have a variable-rate mortgage going up year over year, let's say a couple hundred dollars on their house; they have a couple of kids in that house, so they have grocery bills at \$300 or \$400 above what it was year over year; they have all sorts of difficulties when it comes to insurance prices going up; utility cost itself going up plus the distribution transmission taxing us, effectively, to a spot where we're paying more for the transmission than for the actual utility itself; all of this continuing on, add on top of it a carbon tax. Inflation is causing real harm.

That's why sound fiscal management really matters. That's why making life more affordable in practical ways really matters to Albertans, matters in what we do in this Chamber. The tax cut that's been proposed in this bill would be a real relief for families. The sooner we can get it passed, the better. There's a sense of urgency in this, Madam Speaker, that we get it as soon as absolutely possible so that these households, many of whom are donating or want to donate, know that they're going to get \$150 back per individual, maybe \$300 for a household, come tax season rather than just the \$50 each. That's a meaningful difference.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill. I would say in general that we're supportive of the bill. What it essentially does is that it changes a section of the tax code to make A 60 per cent. A is currently "the specified percentage for the year," which, as near as I can tell, remains at 10 per cent, as it was set in section 4 of the tax act in 2001. So it is a significant increase, obviously, on that point. Based on some analysis found on Twitter – so take that with a grain of salt – by Trevor Tombe, who is very good at this sort of thing, it would appear that, you know, a sort of rough estimate, assuming this doesn't impact behaviour directly: the cost of this would be about \$20 million. That's what we're looking at.

There are a lot of charities, and there are certainly a lot in my riding that I deal with regularly who do incredibly good work. I definitely agree with that. One of the concerns I have with what the member said when he was moving this bill was his talk about the need to increase the charitable tax donation to increase people donating because, you know, these charities provide services that wouldn't otherwise be available. I don't disagree on that point – they are services that wouldn't otherwise be available – but what I would like to point out is that some of the services that aren't available are not available because of decisions that that member and his colleagues made.

For instance, many of the people involved in the increased utilization of food banks are people who are on AISH. Now, this government has – well, they've suggested that they're going to reindex AISH; they haven't actually done it yet despite having supported it when we did it originally. But that will still leave people \$3,000 farther behind than they were at a time of rapidly increasing inflation.

I don't disagree with the policy in this bill. What I don't love about it is – we should support charities. We absolutely should. I don't think what we're doing in the bill is bad. What I don't love is the number of people who are having to go out and seek that charity who would otherwise have been entitled to government benefits. I guess I feel that people should be entitled to eat without having to rely on charity for that. I think that, you know, government has a role to play. I think that benefits like AISH and the Alberta seniors' benefit and the income support benefits – like, for instance, in the course of our

government we cut child poverty in half by changing the way the child tax benefit worked. Now, admittedly, that was work that was done at both the federal and provincial levels simultaneously, but that's a big change. I believe that children should be entitled to eat, and I don't think that that should necessarily be reliant on donations being made to a charity in order for that to happen.

I guess what I'm saying about this act is: yes, and? I'm saying that we are supportive of this act, but when we talk about the incredibly important work that charities do and have done for a long time, we do need to recognize that the member who is proposing the bill and his colleagues are, in part, responsible for the increased draw on those charities and responsible for the fact that people need to rely on that.

I would ask the members that while they contemplate the important changes being made in this bill, they also contemplate the importance of supporting Albertans generally. They are the government. They don't have to do this by indirect means; they can do it directly.

Mr. Williams: I'm not the government.

Ms Ganley: They are government private members, some of them. That is correct.

This could also be done directly. I think overall I would say the \$20 million, at a time when we see this much revenue coming into government, is not that big a shift. I think I'm sort of supportive of the intent of this bill. I think we'll probably support it. I do hope that it comes with some other measures that are specifically aimed at alleviating some of the underlying problems therein.

4:00

I think other than that, that's pretty much all I have to say about it, just that I think this can be a question of: yes, and. I think it can be a question of saying: yes, this support for charities is incredibly important, but also let us consider the impact that disproportionate inflation while wages, particularly in this province, are stagnating is having on Albertans. Let us consider the impact that deindexing tax brackets or deindexing AISH, seniors' benefits, child tax benefits, those sorts of benefits, had on Albertans, and let us also solve those problems.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today to Bill 202. I do want to say thanks to the Member for Peace River for bringing this forward. When I think back to when I first got involved in politics in 2008, I remember that I did campaign on this very thing. I remember thinking at the time and hearing the leader of the party at the time talk about this disparity between donating to a charity that may feed the hungry, take care of the homeless and the disparity between donating to organizations like that compared to donating to a politician. You know, the first \$200: you get 75 per cent back when donating to a politician, and of course when it comes to other charities, it's far less than that.

Again, this actually takes me back a long ways when it comes to really believing that this is a good thing. It's a good thing for Alberta, and I think this is one of the things that can make Alberta a better place. In fact, in the leadership race I did talk about this on numerous occasions as I travelled across Alberta. Again, it's great to see this opportunity come forward where the Member for Peace River has brought this forward for us here today. I appreciate that.

There are so many people in need, and there are many people that want to help out. This bill will give an opportunity for those to come together. When we look at how much difference this could make, there are a lot of people that might be willing to just give \$25. Well,

with this bill they could give \$100, and they'd get \$75 back. It'll be a \$25 net donation out of their pocket, but they'll help \$100 worth when it comes to the amount of difference it'll make to the people that they're donating to.

I think we have all received something or we know somebody that's received something. I know my family has. I often talk here about my grandson Ezra, who has cerebral palsy. His family for the first six months of his life was in a hospital, staying at Ronald McDonald House, another good charity that helped out. There was an organization close to home called Lila's Angels that helped the travel back and forth for the family, travelling from home to the hospital in Edmonton for those six months. I believe it was the Rainbow Society that gave him a wish, too.

When we look at the good work that these organizations do, I think it's incumbent on us to be able to help out where we can and help people donate and be able to have some money come back in the tax benefit for that. I know locally we have a group of people that put on a local golf tournament to raise money for different organizations. They do a hockey tournament in the wintertime. These are all good organizations that are doing their best to help the people of Alberta and help the people in need.

I think we have to realize, too, that a lot of these charities are very efficient with the work that they do for the people of Alberta. They leverage volunteer work so that they can get a lot done, and a lot of times these organizations are right in the community that they're trying to help or if not right in the community, they know the community that they serve very well.

I think taking this opportunity to give the people that donate to these organizations a good tax benefit, that's equal to what political donations are, is good for us, good for Alberta, and it will make a difference in the long run. We know this will be a net negative to the Alberta budget, but I think it will be a net positive to Albertans as we go forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I always appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House, speak to various pieces of legislation that are brought forward, especially when it comes to private members' business. As we know, private members don't get a whole lot of legislative calendar time to be able to bring their topics forward, so I'm always excited when we get a chance to talk about those. It seems, you know, that some members get even less time, especially if they seem to be sitting in the opposition caucus. I would have loved to provide some comments a little bit earlier around Bill 201, but that has sadly been pushed to the bottom of the list.

At least I get the opportunity to talk this afternoon about Bill 202, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) – I just wanted to highlight that, and I'll come back around for that – Amendment Act, 2022. We're proposing a change here to kind of up the claim amount for the first \$200 for somebody making a charitable donation. You know, quite frankly, I actually would have loved to have seen this change a lot sooner than this, but, hey, at least we're here. We get the opportunity now to talk about this.

I'm certainly supportive of moving this legislation forward. I think this is a good job, but I will have to highlight just a couple of things. I mean, we've certainly seen over the course of the 30th Legislature changes that the UCP government has made that do make life much more difficult for people, and they are then having to rely on all of these charities to be able to make ends meet. I mean, we've seen things like personal income taxes being raised. Insurance costs have definitely gone up for people. Utility costs are

another big-ticket item now on people's drain of their bank account. You know, fees to go to parks, things like that.

For a long time we saw members swearing up and down that no deindexing was occurring for people on AISH, yet of course now we're hearing that that's going to be changed. Well, if that's going to be changed, then that meant that it actually happened, which brings a whole other conversation that we won't be having today because we need to talk about private members' business and Bill 202 here specifically.

But when you have these kinds of pressures on people, forcing them to go to the charities for that, that means there are a lot of pressures put on these charities to try to help. We have unfortunately seen changes which have made things more difficult for charities to be able to provide those services. Quite honestly, it kind of feels like, you know, we're trying to put that even further on the backs of Albertans.

We've certainly seen a decline in charitable donations from Albertans. Perhaps, you know, I'm a little biased here. I think Albertans are some of the most giving of all Canadians in the country, but when you just simply don't have it to give, you might have to rethink some of those steps so that they're able to. Again, while I'm certainly in favour of more significant tax relief with those donations, perhaps we shouldn't have put all of these cost pressures on Albertans so they could have continued to donate in the ways that they used to. It's not because they didn't want to. I know that for a fact.

4:10

I think when we have an opportunity to – and I think that the member previous spoke to this. Maybe, you know, creating a little balance, or when we've seen donations go to political parties, maybe balancing that out a little bit: I'm certainly not against that kind of change. As I said, I would've loved to have seen that a little bit sooner, but at least we are here.

I did want to come back because I made a little highlight around the title of the bill, which made mention to other gifts. One of the things I'm curious about is, say, for instance, you know, a parent wanting to donate to their child's soccer club. I'm wondering if this might be captured under Bill 202, or is the government going to start to possibly, I think the famous line is, pick winners and losers out of this? I would be interested to know if something like that might be captured under Bill 202.

I wouldn't mind hearing from the Finance minister, actually, on this bill a little bit. As we all know, private members can't make money bills. They can suggest changes. Ultimately, there is probably a cost to the province. My understanding is that it's probably in the \$20 million range maybe, which, again, I have absolutely no issues with, especially since the government deems it necessary to do things like, well, I don't know, fund a war room that goes out and chases cartoon characters at the cost of \$30 million per year – so, you know, I think the money is there – or, I don't know, betting a billion dollars plus on an election south of the border. There's money that we could have provided to Albertans so they weren't necessarily having to put the pressures on the charities that they are.

My hope is that this incentive, you know, might work, but again, no matter how big the incentive is, if you just physically don't have the money to take out of your pocket and be able to give to that charity, that incentive just kind of sits there. So I'm hoping that this might be a little bit of a motivator for the government to act in some of the other areas in term of reversing some of these pressures that we've seen forcing people to go to charities. I would certainly be in favour of things such as that.

I know the government loves to go on at length about things like the gas tax on vehicles' fuel, which is all fine and dandy. Again,

I'm not necessarily against that, but if you've had to park your car because your insurance is too high, that doesn't do anything.

Mr. Nally: The carbon tax.

Mr. Nielsen: But it's still the same thing, Minister. When you can't drive your car because you can't afford your insurance, how are you going to take advantage of that? It doesn't matter about a carbon tax. You're not driving your vehicle, so you're not even getting the opportunity to take advantage of that. Again, we're talking about cost pressures here.

Again, you know, I don't want to sound like I'm against Bill 202 because I'm not. I'm fully ready to support it here in second reading. I want to see it go on, hopefully, maybe even quickly. I would love to see government and government-side caucus members maybe give that same consideration to Bill 201 because, again, I love talking about private members' business. We don't get enough of an opportunity to be able to do that. I mean – you know what they say – sometimes members will go their entire careers in this Legislature without being able to bring forth a private member's bill.

Certainly, the changes that I'm seeing here I'm not against. I would like to see those reciprocal changes, which I think will enhance this bill so that people can take advantage of it and maybe even reduce some of those pressures that are on the charities so that they can serve the clients that they need in as many ways that they possibly can.

I know there are a lot of people that want to also add their comments to this bill, so I won't take up too much time. I'll certainly be participating later on as the debate goes, but as of right at this moment I'm very much in favour of Bill 202 through second reading, and I hope we pass it fairly soon.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Good timing.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate being recognized here today to speak to this bill. I want to thank the hon. Member for Peace River for bringing forward this bill. I think it's a very well-thought-out bill. It's always difficult to be able to find good private members' bills, and I think this meets that litmus test.

One of the things that I wanted to talk about, Madam Speaker – and the reason why I'm in favour of this is because of a principle that I have, which is that decision-making closer to the problem versus farther away from it will net a good result versus having a decision being made so far away. We see that happen on a regular basis where decisions that are being made in Ottawa affect Alberta in an adverse way because they're so far away from, you know, the trenches where things are actually happening. The same thing happens even here when decisions are made so far away. I'm always in favour of local decision-making.

The same principle can be applied here for this bill because when we talk about trying to be able to fix some of our societal problems that we have, I really believe that those people who are dealing in the trenches with these problems have really 20/20 vision. They can see what the problems are a lot better than, say, a bureaucrat in Edmonton or in Ottawa.

You know, I was very impressed with an organization, the Mustard Seed. A couple of our members actually have their father, that started that organization. I was impressed with that organization because the president or CEO of that organization actually came from the streets. He knew what the problem was. He's got an amazing story, Madam Speaker, and it's awe inspiring when you think about what he was able to do in building up the Mustard Seed in Calgary and surrounding area. That's an example

of when you actually strengthen those charitable organizations that are in the trenches and give them that ability to lift people. That's when you really see success.

Really, what we should be in this room doing is looking for those greatest successes that we can have. I think that by giving people the ability to give to their charitable decision – giving more money back to them so they can give more to the charitable organizations of their choice is a good thing. It's only going to be able to help our society and build our society.

So that principle, the principle of allowing local decision-making to happen, allowing charities to be able to fix the problems: I think that's really where the success of this bill comes in. I think that the Member for Peace River has really got onto something here, that we can empower the people and the organizations within our society here, the compassionate people, that have the best interests and are so close to the issues in the province that they can know how to be able to actually inject small amounts of money to be able to have great effect and great outcomes. That's really, in my opinion, what this bill is going to do, and this is why I'm in favour of this bill.

Madam Speaker, again I thank the member for his thoughtful private member's bill that he's brought forward, and I hope that all people, all members of this Chamber will support Bill 202, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for St. Albert.

4:20

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 202, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022. First of all, let me just premise my brief comments by saying that I certainly do support any move that encourages donations like this. I think it's a good idea. I think, you know, a couple of people have said that it's probably long overdue, and I would agree with that, so I am ready to support this.

But I also want to clarify a couple of other comments. Certainly, not-for-profits, nonprofits, registered charities, societies: there are all different levels. They do terrific work. They do all kinds of work. They do – I'm thinking about the community that I represent – everything from, of course, food banks, so dealing with food insecurity, to affordable, accessible housing that they're trying to create. There's Stop Abuse in Families, so there are organizations that offer free counselling for people that are experiencing domestic violence. There are all kinds of charities.

There's one in particular that I want to make reference to, and it's the seniors association in St. Albert that's actually, really struggling for donations. I've heard members talking about: over the pandemic, you know, charities have felt a loss, and that loss has been of their regular donation levels. That certainly is true, and as a result they're having to cut services.

Now, for those of you that maybe know St. Albert, it's just outside of Edmonton, but people have to commute, so if you're reliant on public transportation, you're kind of out of luck. There is a commuter bus, and there is a bus, sort of a handibus, for people with disabilities and seniors, low-income folks that goes to a few stops in Edmonton, but other than that it's pretty tough. This organization, this seniors' group, is able to do that. They have drivers. They have volunteer drivers. They fund raise to reimburse for gas, for mileage, all of those things. And these are for really important appointments. You can imagine that seniors having to go to the Cross regularly for treatment or having to go to whatever other specialist they might have or even just to see friends: that's important. This is a real-time example of the loss of revenue in terms of fundraising.

But I really want to underline what my colleague said a little bit earlier: one thing that we cannot forget when we're talking about nonprofit societies and registered charities in Alberta is that what we've seen, a progression over, I would say – I don't know – the last 20 years even, is that there has been an erosion of the public service, an erosion of the ability of government to deliver very, very important services. Those have been privatized, and those have turned into charities, many of them. As a result, these charities more and more are being required to fund raise to meet their needs, their programming needs.

Maybe there are people in here that don't know that the vast majority of disability supports for children and for people that are over 18 are delivered by nonprofits and by registered charities. Now, what has happened over the last little while is that they have systematically had their funding reduced. Systematically had their funding reduced. Every year that things are increased to capture growth, that's a reduction, and it requires these charities to fund raise more and more.

Let me give you an example of the one charity that I did work at. Some of the fundraising goals were very, very simple. They were about, "Let's fund raise to offer rent supplement," because people couldn't afford rent, because a hundred per cent of the people that we supported there were AISH recipients. Of course, when you live on AISH, you don't have a lot of money. Organizations are fund raising to cover things like rent and utilities, common costs, auditor fees, insurance, all of these things, all of these really, really functional things.

Of course, I support a bill that's going to encourage donors, that's going to give donors a tax break, encouraging them to donate more. Of course, I support that. What I don't support is this government's systematic chipping away of supports that people require to survive. It is the role of government to meet those needs, and I'm talking specifically in this case about disability supports. This government systematically cut AISH, and I can tell you that probably close to a hundred per cent of the people that receive PDD supports are also on AISH, so they're making do with a lot less money over the last three years that they have. It's charities that work with them that have had to step up to provide assistance. Charities have stepped up to provide assistance: buying bus passes, supplementing groceries, helping with rent, all of those things.

While I do support this bill, Madam Speaker, it is really important to understand that while we can express thanks and appreciation and gratitude for the incredible nonprofit sector in Alberta, we have to recognize the incredible amount of pressure that we have continued to add to them when we don't fund essential services properly. Every time that we do that – we chip away, we don't recognize the growth, we don't fund the growth – we are adding more pressure to the nonprofit sector. Government members can stand up all they like and say: you know, we support nonprofits; they're essential. Yeah, I agree with that. They are essential. They are very, very important. This bill, hopefully, will make a big difference and will help. But the biggest problem, Madam Speaker, is that this government has failed to do its job, and that is to properly support all of the services, all of the programming that this nonprofit sector is involved in.

Now, let me just say one more thing about food banks because that seems to be the popular example that people are using today. Are food banks essential right now? Absolutely, a hundred per cent. They are so important right now. Even in the community of St. Albert, which is typically, you know, a little bit more well off than some other communities, they are struggling. They're breaking records. They can't keep up with demand. The pressure is huge. Now, yes, this government did stand up and announce I think it was \$20 million, but let's be clear: it was \$5 million a year. Let's be clear: there are six months till an election. Let's also be clear:

there's a matching component to that. So what sounded like a big, fancy announcement – "Oh, yeah, we're going to immediately support food banks" – well, is a little less than it sounded. What this government needs to do is recognize that food banks are in crisis and step up with the money right now that they need to function. It's a lot more than \$5 million, and they don't have the time to raise the money to match it. They need to be funded immediately.

I'm going to take my seat. I support this bill because I think it's important right now. Actually, I think it's always been important, but it's also important for us to recognize that it's not always the job of nonprofits and charities to do the work that this government, all of us were elected to do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I stand to support Bill 202, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act, 2022. I'm excited. This is an outstanding idea, and I'd like to give credit to my colleague for this great idea. It's also great to see the members opposite supporting this positive initiative, you know, and perhaps we can unite together to ensure speedy passage of something towards Christmas as well that will encourage and support Albertans that give to the many great charitable organizations. While we don't agree on everything, it's great to see that perhaps we can agree on something that is so positive in our community.

One of the reasons I'm really excited about this bill is that charitable support, I believe, is part of Alberta's culture and identity. I think it's something that we excel at. There's actually – I remember reading a StatsCan report in 2020 that reported that Alberta had the highest average donation in Canada. Out of all the provinces and territories in the country, in Alberta we reported the highest average donation. I think that speaks to the many great families and individuals in Alberta that we all have the honour to serve in this Legislature.

One of the things that Alberta has is that we actually have the most competitive tax support for Albertans currently when they donate over \$200 to registered charities, and combined with the federal rate Albertans who donate over \$200 actually get back, in terms of tax shelter, 50 cents on the dollar. When you think about that, that's a really powerful incentive and support that this government – and, you know, credit goes to previous Legislatures. I believe it was Premier Stelmach that actually, under his government, brought in the enhanced charitable tax credit for charitable donations to 21 per cent in Alberta. By far Alberta is the leader. It is the best jurisdiction in Canada supporting charitable support for over \$200.

But for donations up to \$200 perhaps there are Albertans that want to give but, perhaps based on their circumstances – perhaps they have lower income – are less able or less in a position to give as much as they would like to give. For these lower income Albertans, the current Alberta donation credit is 10 per cent. Combined with the federal rate, the donation credit is about 25 per cent, so it's actually about half of the rate.

4:30

That 25 per cent credit rate puts us in the middle. You know, we're kind of the middle. We're average, right? But, Madam Speaker, being average is not the Alberta way. Alberta is a meritocracy, and we are the best. This bill makes us the best. Bill 202 seeks to make us be the best, supporting Albertans, especially, in my perspective, those who perhaps have lower income, less able to give as much. It makes us the best in supporting them. This amendment increases the Alberta credit

from 10 per cent to 60 per cent, and combined with the federal rate, this will bring the charitable donation rate up to 75 per cent.

When you think about that, isn't that a wonderful thing, that if an individual of modest means says, "You know, I'd like to donate to a charity that I feel strongly about" and they donate \$200 to that charity, with this proposed bill they can get tax shelter that actually will return to them 75 cents on the dollar, 150 cents on the dollar reduced from Alberta taxes? I think that is a beautiful, wonderful thing.

The great thing about this rate selection, to me, is that the bill achieves parity with the provincial donation tax credit that we provide in Alberta. Currently, as we know, when an individual donates to the UCP Party or to the NDP Party, on the first \$200 of their donation they receive \$150 back, or 75 cents on the dollar. I think it's a wonderful, symbolic thing that we would elevate – while it's important for us to participate in our political institutions and in the political process by donating to political causes, there is much more to that. Being in Alberta, there are many great charitable organizations whose work is just as important, and some would argue more important. It's important to incent and encourage those Albertans by elevating the tax shelter that they get on charitable donations to 70 per cent.

Madam Speaker, just in closing, because I don't want to take too much time, this policy is to support charitable organizations. During these challenging times and indeed in the past couple of years our charitable organizations – many did great work. Many of these individuals who serve in charitable organizations serve out of love. There are many great charitable organizations where most of their workforce is volunteers who really are serving because they have a strong inward belief in the good work that the organization is doing and they want to love and serve their neighbours.

Just in closing, I really support Bill 202. I think it aligns well with the Alberta culture of excellence, being the best, a culture where Albertans are the most generous in the entire country in supporting our wonderful charitable organizations. I would encourage all members of this Legislature to join together in a common-good cause and support the speedy acceleration and process of this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A pleasure to rise to speak to the private member's bill this afternoon. I, too, will be voting in favour of this measure, but rather than a "Yes, and," I'll give it a "Yes, but," because I know that while charities will certainly be appreciating the extra dollars that will flow to them as a result of this – and I expect the uptake from Albertans will probably be to the maximum, which will impact the treasury to the tune of about 20 more million dollars as a result of this increase in the amount of the tax break on the first \$200 that are donated to charity – what it invites is a question as to the direction and movement towards a reliance on charity for things that governments typically have been expected to undertake themselves. I think other speakers have said the same thing that I'll repeat now, that it invites charities to fill gaps that are not being properly filled by government.

[Mr. Smith in the chair]

One example that I think is a prime example of that gap, that is now widely assumed to be something that is a part of the hardware of our charitable network, is food banks. Food banks not very long ago, Mr. Speaker, did not exist. In fact, the incidence of food banks, I think, is something that came up in the 1980s, and previous to that, of course, it was expected that government supports would allow

individuals to purchase food from that government support that would satisfy their family's needs. Yet now, of course, it's food bank reliance that our society and others world-wide are looking to to fill that need, and it really shouldn't be something that the government is relieved of, its responsibility to provide essential public services to its citizens.

I know that this bill purports to allow Albertans to express themselves, even at this time of year or whenever, to support the charities of their choice to a larger degree than they otherwise might have by having the incentive increased. However, I'm concerned about the direction, I guess, of the bill, where it looks to perhaps replace the government's responsibility to support its citizens, and that's something I really hope is not the intent of the underlying legislation.

Now, one thing that many people don't realize – and I think, Mr. Speaker, you as a former teacher will – is that the schools throughout the province, generally speaking, are actually identified as being charitable organizations. One can make a donation to a school and receive a tax receipt for it. I'm not certain if this type of a donation to a school will be covered by the act in its entirety. I'm not sure if the member contemplated Bill 202 covering those charitable donations, but in the title of the bill, where it states "Alberta Personal Income Tax (Charitable and Other Gifts) Amendment Act," I'm wondering if those other gifts would include gifts to schools throughout the province.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I know, in attending many of the parent-teacher council meetings, of course, that one of the major things that they do is attempt to raise money by various means, whether it be chocolate sales or a rummage sale of some kind or any type of thing to raise money. Of course, they are also able to solicit donations and issue tax receipts. So I'm wondering if indeed the member had this in mind when Bill 202 was being drafted, because it may be something that schools might benefit from if the public was more widely aware of the option to donate to schools. But I also in the same breath want to caution that we don't end up using this as sort of a voucher system for school funding by having individuals donate to their particular school in a more affluent neighbourhood to a larger degree than other parents might be able to do in less affluent neighbourhoods.

I know that in the scheme of things, Madam Speaker, this is a bill with good intent, and I intend to support it, but I certainly do not want to see the government being relieved of its responsibility to provide essential public services to populations in need.

With that, I'll end my remarks and listen for further comment from others.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I will ask the hon. Member for Peace River to close.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate every member's contribution and the ability for us to be able to be debating what is, I think, an important piece of private member's legislation that is impactful for average Albertans. Again, I encourage and I'm happy so far to hear the stories of all the different ways that charities have affected our lives as members and all the ways, if passing this bill were to come to fruition, that charities could continue with more sustainability, with more support from government.

I heard many of the concerns from the opposition, and I can tell you the intent is simply for – the only way for a private member to support charities in terms of the dollar amount is through increasing the nonrefundable tax credit, so that's why I've taken this route. Obviously,

there's nothing beyond a very sincere hope to see charities thrive in Alberta.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will close debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:41 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Long	Savage
Dach	Madu	Schow
Deol	McIver	Schulz
Fir	Milliken	Shepherd
Glubish	Nally	Singh
Gray	Neudorf	Smith, Mark
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Stephan
Hanson	Nielsen	Toews
Horner	Nixon, Jeremy	Toor
Hunter	Pitt	Turton
Irwin	Renaud	van Dijken
Issik	Rutherford	Williams
Jean		

Totals: For – 37 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 202 read a second time]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has the call.

Investigation of Grocery Prices

501. Ms Renaud moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to

- (a) immediately investigate the recent increases in grocery prices and lack of competition in the grocery market in Alberta and report its findings to the Assembly no later than January 15, 2023; and
- (b) amend the Consumer Protection Act to clarify that the practice of price gouging is unfair and as such is subject to investigation by Service Alberta's consumer investigations unit.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move Motion Other than Government Motion 501. As you know, Albertans are struggling. They're facing an affordability crisis not seen in 40 years, so I'm proud to stand here in support of making life more affordable for Alberta families. They've seen prices skyrocket on everything from gas prices, utilities, and housing, but nothing hits them on a more daily basis than just how expensive things have gotten at the grocery store.

October's consumer price index data was released, showing Canada's inflation rate at 6.8 per cent, a staggering number that will continue to hammer household budgets. Food prices have shot well above that, to 10.1 per cent, compared to a year ago. The numbers are even worse when looking at price increases on essential items; for example, margarine is up 40.4 per cent from last year, dry pasta has increased by 27.2 per cent, fresh fruit is up 8.9 per cent, fresh

vegetables are up 11 per cent, and coffee and tea has increased by 13.1 per cent.

5:00

While grocery prices continue to rise, everyone is still dealing with other inflationary pressures. The UCP is adding to inflation by forcing Albertans to pay more in income taxes, property taxes, utility fees, school fees, tuition, interest on student debt, and park fees.

On top of skyrocketing prices, wages in Alberta haven't kept pace with inflation. According to Statistics Canada data Alberta workers had the second-slowest wage growth in Canada. Because of the slow wage growth Albertans are now forced to use their savings or rely on credit cards just to afford groceries. We also know that the increased cost of food hurts those closest to poverty the most. Every dollar increase pushes more and more Albertans into food insecurity.

The consumer debt index showed that in April half of Albertans were just \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills at the end of the month, the highest level in the country. This is something everyone in this place should be alarmed about. That means that hundreds of thousands of Albertans won't afford a balanced diet or are worrying about running out of food before they have money to buy more. Some are going hungry, missing meals. Some may not eat for a few days, and certainly many have forgone important medications.

In fact, in a new Canada-wide survey released today, the majority of respondents said that they're using coupons or hunting for sales to cope with increasing food costs. Nearly 20 per cent were also reducing meal size or skipping meals altogether in order to save money. Now, keep in mind, there are people living in poverty that don't have access to vehicles to be able to drive around to get the best prices. In fact, they live in places where these things that I'm telling you about that have gone up aren't even available to them.

I've been hearing from food banks that are seeing an alarming increase in usage, and Alberta is seeing a 34 per cent increase in food bank usage year over year. Nearly 58,000 kids relied on the food bank in March 2022, and we know the issue is getting worse. Albertans living on income support, like AISH, are facing a crisis, a true crisis. They already were using the food bank to supplement; now they're dependent on it. They're also limited to visit numbers. Ever since the UCP deindexed income support, AISH recipients have watched the real dollar value fall month over month. That means that nutrient-rich food, like eggs, meat, dairy, is being replaced by low-cost, highly-produced items just so that they can fill their stomachs.

While Albertans struggle, large corporate grocers are reporting massive revenues. Loblaw's reported in Q3 earnings of \$556 million, up 29 per cent from last year. Over the last three quarters Loblaw's has spent over \$1 billion in stock buybacks to boost its own stock price and benefit stakeholders.

That's why I urge everyone in this House to support this motion, and I expect this House to take motion. The motion will urge the government to do two things. First, it will call on the government to investigate grocery store prices and see how the lack of competition in Alberta is inflating those prices and propose recommendations on increasing competitiveness in Alberta if needed. This will work alongside the Competition Bureau of Canada's study but provide local, Alberta-specific solutions. Alberta arguably has the least competitive grocery sector, with the lowest share of independent grocery retailers, and only two of the three large corporate grocers, who control the highest concentration of retailers in any province.

Second, we are calling for clarification within the Consumer Protection Act so Albertans can report grocers who appear to be price gouging. During COVID-19 the government expanded what

can be investigated for price gouging through the state of emergency. It's not clearly defined that concerned Albertans can contact the consumer investigations unit to investigate possible grocer price gouging without a state of emergency. Skyrocketing prices due to inflation – Albertans deserve to be certain that they aren't being taken advantage of and the price that they're paying is fair, not simply padding the profits of already profitable grocers. That's why I'm asking this House to support this motion.

Earlier today, during question period, Mr. Speaker, I heard the minister of service Alberta essentially say: you know we can't do that; doesn't the member know that's not something we can do? Well, I would suggest that if this government thinks they can change the Constitution of Canada with a bill, they can investigate price gouging. They can investigate the skyrocketing prices of groceries.

We know it's a crisis, a crisis that has been caused by a number of things. We know that. I'm not saying that it's all the fault of the government. There are a number of contributing factors. What I am saying is that our role here is to protect Albertans – to protect Albertans – and one of the most basic things Albertans need is nutritious food. So let's use every tool that we have in this place before putting up our hands and giving up. Let's use every tool in this place to ensure that every Albertan is getting fair value for their money and that there is no price gouging. And once we can reassure all Albertans that's the case, we will have done our job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion Other than Government Motion 501 is for debate. I see the hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction has risen.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for St. Albert for confirming what we've long suspected, that the NDP is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. The reason I say that is that I sat here listening intently, waiting for some empirical evidence, some research – even a well-thought-out argument would have sufficed – but instead we did not get that. It became abundantly clear that that entire caucus gets all of their information from Twitter and Facebook.

Mr. Speaker, I did something that the Member for St. Albert should have done. I did some research. Now, I will be tabling this with the Chamber, but it's a white paper by the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers. The average grocery retail margins are 2 per cent. I'm not suggesting that they don't have higher margin areas such as pharmaceutical, health, and beauty, because they do, but the food in the grocery store has razor-thin margins, to the point that the average grocer in this country has 2 per cent margins.

Now, Dalhousie University – and I'll be tabling this as well, Mr. Speaker – actually did a study to determine if grocery stores were price gouging. And you know what? They confirmed that there were a lot of reasons for the higher prices that we're seeing on shelves, and one of them was not gouging on behalf of the grocers. I'll be tabling that as well.

Now, I have to say that this motion – and please let me say that I am empathetic, as we all are on this side of the House, with any Albertan that is struggling with the higher cost of everything due to the inflation, to the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker, but I encourage the Member for St. Albert to use the time wisely. This particular motion: quite frankly, it's as ridiculous as it is redundant. Let me tell you why.

The first piece of the motion is to encourage the investigation of the recent increases in grocery prices and lack of competition in the grocery market. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's already happening. The Member for St. Albert should be aware that the Competition Bureau is doing that work now. In fact, they're accepting submissions up until December 16, and I would encourage the Member for St.

Albert, if she has an example of price gouging, to include that submission with the Competition Bureau. But redoing that work that is already going on is redundant, and we certainly don't support that on this side of the House.

Now, the second piece of that motion was to amend the Consumer Protection Act to clarify that the practice of price gouging is unfair. Well, Mr. Speaker, it already does that, and I will refer the Member for St. Albert to part 2, division 1, section 6(2)(d). It clearly shows that exactly what the Member for St. Albert is asking for is articulated in the act, and I would refer the member to read that accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy has recovered strongly, but we know that many Albertans are still struggling to heat their homes and feed their families. We know that many Albertans are concerned about the rising cost of groceries and many other goods and services due to increased costs and rising inflation. In fact, Canada's Food Price Report 2023, which I'll be tabling with the House, predicts that Canadian families will spend up to an average \$1,065 more on food next year than this year. But we also know that this is not an Alberta-specific problem. In fact, the inflation crisis is affecting all Canadians, no matter what province they live in.

This is a national problem that was created by the disastrous economic policies of the Liberal-NDP alliance in Ottawa. Since 2015 the federal government has brought in a number of fiscal policies that have contributed to high inflation and have resulted in higher borrowing costs for households. This is exactly why our government has been standing up to Ottawa since 2019, because only our government has the best interests of all Albertans in everything that we do.

5:10

If the NDP were really concerned with the high cost of groceries and continually rising inflation, they would call on their friends in Ottawa and they'd demand that they cancel the carbon tax. But do you know what we get from the NDP, Mr. Speaker? Crickets. When it comes to the carbon tax and their overlords in Ottawa, they say nothing. Instead, the NDP will support the more than tripling of the carbon tax between now and 2030, which will continue to add fuel to the inflation crisis, adding unnecessary costs to families heating their homes and driving to work.

Our government understands that the price of goods is reflective of national and international supply chains, which are part of a complex system that impacts all Canadians. The Member for St. Albert has proposed an unsophisticated solution to a very complex problem, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the grocery industry is one of the lowest margin sectors in the entire country. This industry is now facing a range of unusual inflationary forces, everything from extreme flooding in B.C. to drought in parts of western Canada. We're seeing COVID-19 supply chains, labour disruptions that are impacting the port, and let's not forget the geopolitical events in Europe, particularly the war in Ukraine.

Mr. Speaker, Ukraine is the world's largest producer of sunflower oil. They are the fourth-largest exporter of corn. Of course it's going to have an impact on what people are paying on the shelf. Let's not blame the retailers. Many of these grocery stores are good community citizens which give back to the communities they serve.

It's unfortunate that the Member for St. Albert doesn't actually live in St. Albert because if she did, she would know that these local grocers live in the communities, Mr. Speaker. Their children play hockey in the local arenas. They get their coffee from the local Tim Hortons. They contribute to the food banks, and they donate to children's charities. Let me just say that these local grocers deserve better than to be vilified by the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I say this motion is ridiculous and redundant. You know, two years ago these grocery workers were

essential workers that we relied on to get food on the shelves during COVID-19, and now they have the audacity to vilify these same people. Shame on them. Shame on the Member for St. Albert.

The Competition Bureau is one of Canada's most prominent watchdog groups, with a proven track record of investigating anticompetitive practices that serve to push up prices for consumers, including things like deceptive marketing, price-fixing, and even outright fraud. The bureau is examining how governments could act to combat grocery price increases by way of greater competition in this industry and expects to publish the results of the study in a public report, which will include recommendations to government authorities as appropriate.

I would also like to point out that the Competition Bureau will look at this complex issue over an eight-month period, Mr. Speaker, whereas the opposition motion is calling for a report back in as little as less than a month's time. That's clearly not enough time to look at this complex issue. We look forward to the completion of the Competition Bureau's review and taking appropriate action as required.

As you see, Mr. Speaker, this NDP motion is about nothing more than window dressing and scoring cheap political points. I say to the NDP and to the Member for St. Albert: shame on you for wasting valuable legislative time in the middle of an affordability crisis. While the NDP continue to waste this House's valuable time, Albertans can count on our government to deliver affordability measures for all Albertans. [interjections] Listen, they're lighting their hair on fire right now. They're so upset by the truth. They can't handle what they're hearing right now. Well, you know what? I would encourage the members: put your cellphones down. Stop looking at your shoes and look up here because this is a serious matter that is on Albertans' minds. Albertans deserve better than to have our legislators waste their time like this.

We know that Alberta cannot solve this inflation crisis on our own, but due to our strong fiscal position and balanced budget we can offer substantial relief to Albertans, and that's exactly what we plan on doing, Mr. Speaker. In fact, our government has taken a number of affordability measures totalling \$2.4 billion. That's how we're going to have Albertans' backs, by stepping up with \$2.4 billion worth of supports, not with ridiculous, redundant motions.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this motion, and the reason I will be supporting this motion is that I'm not against these activities. We're doing them now. It's redundant. We don't need to put the motion forward. It's a waste of legislative time. But I am not against doing these activities. As I said, we're doing them right now, and for that reason I will be supporting the motion.

But, Mr. Speaker, I can't say loud and clear enough that the Member for St. Albert is wasting legislative time on redundant motions when we should be focusing on the real work at hand, which is having Albertans' backs during an affordability crisis. My message to the NDP and to the Member for St. Albert is to do better, to be better.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise in the House to speak on Motion Other than Government Motion 501, to speak in support of this motion and also to, you know, share the feedback and concern from my own constituents in the riding. Albertans are struggling with inflation and the affordability crisis.

First of all, I just wanted to congratulate my colleague the Member for St. Albert for bringing this motion to the House and providing the members an opportunity to address this very issue that the majority of Albertans are struggling with and expecting

better from their elected representatives in the House. It was surprising to actually hear from the minister of affordability this afternoon when answering a question during the question period to his own caucus member and stating that, you know, addressing inflation and addressing the affordability issue is not actually the responsibility of any government. It is further saddening and sad, discouraging and shameful to hear what I just heard, actually, from the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction. That was a totally unreasonable and irresponsible speech I have ever heard during this very situation, the historic crisis that Albertans have been facing.

I'm just – I don't know. I'm trying to put together what I should call – I don't know where the minister actually lives. The minister said that my hon. colleague doesn't live in her own riding and doesn't know about issues in the riding. I wonder where the minister lives. Does he really live in this province? If he does, does he just go back to his constituents, or does he only have opportunity to speak with the corporate managers or the corporate owners?

I would just like to speak, for the sake of the record, about two corporations in this province. Loblaw's have reported quarter 3 earnings of \$556 million, over half a billion dollars. That is up 29 per cent from the last year, the same time from the last year. Similarly, the other company, Empire, reported earnings of \$187 million in their last reporting quarter. The number of people, Albertans, relying on the food banks in this province is unprecedentedly high, and 58,000 kids, only kids, are depending on the food banks these days to survive, in order to just, you know, get fed, not really having the food of their choice but just being able to survive and get fed. They are relying on food banks.

5:20

I was on a radio talk show last month. The stories people are sharing: the people who have been the donors for the food banks in the past many years ended up actually relying on the food banks for their survival. For the very first time in Alberta history they're calling out.

I'm not sure how many of the government caucus members actually have the opportunity or the responsibility as ordinary citizens, Albertans, of going home and helping their families with regular jobs, going to shop for groceries and help their family purchase food from the local stores. From the speech I was hearing from the minister, it doesn't seem like it. If he would win as a responsible family member, whatever – I don't know his family circumstances. It is not very hard to find out what is going on: the prices that you were paying, like, six months ago and the prices you are paying now and the prices you were paying last year and the prices you paid six months ago versus the prices you are paying now.

The consumer price index we discuss here is not even really affecting all Albertans equally because the average increase in the numbers of inflation we're discussing is usually averaged. Like, in some cases inflation has jumped the prices of the items and quality over 200 per cent, particularly with vegetables. The Member for Calgary-Falconridge – I don't know if he's aware. I know of his constituents going to stores and posting on Facebook the price gouging: a \$2 piece of cauliflower jumping to \$10.99. I've seen that sitting in Edmonton looking at that post.

There has been – I don't know – a lack of sensitivity in where the minister was coming from. It was very sad to see what kind of – and, you know, you can easily even figure it out, why, coming back to the House, the government put forward the very first bill as the sovereignty act, not anything else. They debated six months, during their leadership debate, all the issues related to the health crisis, education. Affordability was number top. One of their leadership contenders campaigned on indexing a lot of benefits they had

deindexed during these three and a half years, but all of a sudden, when they came back to the House, it seems like their agenda has been changed. There have been their constituents or stakeholders, and I'm surprised to understand: where do they live?

I've been on the radio stations. I've been meeting with stakeholders. Definitely, the profit margin of local businesses, local grocery stores, or the independent grocery-store owners has been going down as the rate of their rents, utility bills, and other inflation factors, their costs, have increased, and that has eroded their profits big time. But the bigger corporations, corporations like Loblaw's, corporations like Empire, have a capacity to manipulate the market. They don't. They don't have the same capacity.

In my concluding remarks – I won't take very long. I know many of my colleagues want to be on the record, want to speak in favour of this motion because this is very important, and this is very important to my constituents. Many Albertans actually are struggling with this historic crisis of inflation. Every member of the House should support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Motion Other than Government Motion 501: are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-City Centre.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, you know, Alberta's government is committed to making sure that when grocery shopping, Albertans receive fair and ethical treatment. Affordability is the primary challenge facing most on a daily basis, and too often soaring costs are forcing people into difficult decisions to make ends meet. Far too many people are now having to choose what daily essentials they can live without: people on fixed incomes such as families, seniors, Albertans with disabilities, and those out of work. These Albertans tend to be squeezed hardest and endure the lion's share of the hardship.

That's why we're supporting food banks with \$20 million in new funding over the next few years. This is the first time the government has funded food banks. That's why we launched our \$600 million electricity rebate program, that's why we reinstated indexing of financial benefits for Albertans with disabilities, seniors, and those out of work, and that's why we're making targeted payments for families for each child under 18, seniors 65 and up, and vulnerable Albertans with household incomes below \$180,000. We're serious about our commitment to deliver immediate cost-of-living inflation relief that will help people manage this economic storm, serious to the tune of \$2.4 billion.

Unfortunately, it would seem the opposition takes things less seriously given the grandstanding nature of this motion. I hope we can all agree that the root causes of global inflation extend far beyond the borders of our province, and while we will do everything we can to temper its effects, we are fresh out of magic wands to wave to make inflation disappear. However, Mr. Speaker, performing magic sounds a lot like what my colleague across the aisle is suggesting, that we investigate for barely more than a month and then – poof – we'll have all the answers and make prices come down, and it'll be the same everywhere.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a global problem, a serious global and national problem, not simply an Alberta problem with an Alberta solution. The grocery sector is concentrated in all parts of the country. Canadians generally buy their groceries from retail chains operated by one of three companies. The prices reflect national and international supply chains, comprising part of a complex system encompassing all Canadians.

The Competition Bureau of Canada already has an active study under way, and I think this is well known by most in this Chamber.

They're looking into the competitive dynamics of the industry and developing recommendations for governments to promote competition. It would be naive to think an Alberta-focused review would have value for a national, interconnected problem. The Competition Bureau is one of Canada's most prominent consumer watchdog groups. It's got a proven track record of investigating anticompetitive practices that push up prices. The bureau is spending eight months looking into this complex issue. Not a month but eight months.

It's flattering that the opposition thinks we might do the same in little more than a month, which is their called-for timeline, flattering and actually ridiculous. The bureau expects to publish its results in a public report which will include recommendations to government authorities. We are fully prepared to consider and potentially act on the bureau's findings, and we look forward to the release of the report.

The federal standing committee on agriculture is also now undertaking a similar study, yet the opposition thinks a third review is needed. Clearly, this is another example of the opposition playing political games with their federal counterparts. The federal NDP demanded Parliament investigate grocery prices earlier this year.

Conversely, we are taking serious and sincere approaches to making sure that Albertans have food on their tables, a roof over their heads, and money in their pockets. We refuse to play political reindeer games that are a waste of the trust invested in us by Alberta voters.

5:30

As to price gouging, that's covered by Alberta's Consumer Protection Act, and I think most in this Chamber know that. It's defined as individual businesses charging grossly excessive prices on individual grocery items. The consumer investigations unit is responsible for following up on consumer-reported claims. Anyone who suspects unfair practices, including pricing without explanation on grocery items that grossly exceeds the price of similar items, should contact the report a rip-off line.

Given that the Competition Bureau's market study is under way, the proposal to amend the Consumer Protection Act is wildly premature. The bureau's recommendations will likely include changes around consumer protections for all governments.

It's also worth noting, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition had four years to amend the definition of price gouging in the act and failed to do so. That suggests to me that their priorities are elsewhere and today's motion is little more than a political show.

Mr. Speaker, our government has the backs of Albertans at the grocery store, at the pumps, and when they are paying their utility bills. They are counting on their government, and they rightly expect us to address the challenges they are facing with our full attention and action.

This motion will do nothing that isn't already being done and done much more thoughtfully on a much larger scale. I hope that members of this House recognize how unnecessary this motion is.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. It's entertaining to hear members of this government stand and rail about wasting valuable legislative time. The number of times we have seen these members bring forward frivolous motions in this House to debate and yell and scream, to create political hay, both during the time they were in opposition and during the time that they are in government, using government

motions to do so, is countless. This is clearly the pot calling the kettle black.

Political games, Mr. Speaker? This government just introduced one of the worst written pieces of legislation, with incredibly far-reaching powers for cabinet, simply for the sole purpose of playing political games to generate an endless series of motions in the spring session, to rail against Ottawa and campaign against Justin Trudeau.

Mr. Speaker, this government has no grounds to make accusations to anyone else. This is a government that has proven it is entirely unserious in dealing with the real priorities of Albertans, as we just saw today, as they shut down debate on a bill proposed for a positive change in health care, more accountability and clear service standards to support Albertans. They voted against the emergency motion to debate children's health, a crisis in this province, and they voted to be able to close debate on their embarrassment of a sovereignty act.

Speaking of magic wands, Mr. Speaker, as noted by the member there that was just speaking, that's rich coming from a party sitting with a Premier who has repeatedly spread misinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19, about COVID vaccines.

Mr. Rutherford: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. the chief government whip.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to use 23(b)(i), speaks to a question other than what is under discussion. We are on Motion 501. I'm sure the member has plenty to say on affordability, maybe about grocery prices. There has been lots of debate so far. He seems to be wildly off topic.

Ms Gray: Simply to say, Mr. Speaker, that I don't believe this is a point of order. I believe we are maybe a minute and a half into the member's response, and he has been responding directly to arguments that we've heard in this Chamber during Motion 501. I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: More like two minutes, but it is noted.

I hesitate to rule on relevance at this point in time in the member's remarks. That said, I'm sure he's tying it to the motion that's before the Assembly.

Debate Continued

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will conclude my beginning remarks by noting that this Premier has also repeatedly offered incredibly simplistic and counterfactual claims about the crisis in our health care system and ridiculously embarrassing attempts at solutions. This government has no grounds to stand and complain about the opposition bringing this motion forward today, a motion that I'm happy to speak to now.

Now, we have heard some vigorous defence of grocery chains, large grocery corporations from the minister, the Member for Morinville-St. Albert. Interesting. Now, we do know, Mr. Speaker, factually what has happened with large grocery chains in Alberta in the not-so-distant past. Indeed, for at least 14 years large grocery chains, including Loblaws, Metro, Walmart, and Sobeys, all participated in an industry-wide arrangement to slowly and artificially jack up the price of bread, gouging customers billions of dollars. Now, the minister would be outraged to hear me say that and hear me accuse local grocers of gouging Albertans. That is not what I am doing. I am speaking of the large grocery chains, for

which indeed local owners may be franchisees, but those local owners, to the best of my understanding, are not setting the prices; they are taking the prices from their head office.

So let's be clear. We know on the record, factually, that large grocery chains in Canada conspired together to gouge consumers on the price of bread, again, costing billions of dollars. Indeed, that led to a class-action suit on behalf of Canadian consumers who bought packaged bread, and that class-action was against them, and indeed that was found in favour of them and that indeed led to the distribution of \$25 gift cards to many Canadians. So it's not out of the pale, Mr. Speaker, for these corporations to take advantage. That is the record. That is the historical record, and noting that and noting that it could indeed to some extent be the case now is not necessarily any impugment of the character of any individual grocery store owner.

Now, indeed, here in my constituency of Edmonton-City Centre, Mr. Speaker, we don't really have local grocery stores. Indeed, we've had a real paucity of grocery stores. It has been a challenge for our constituency for some time. I will say that I attended the opening of a Loblaw City Market at the Ice District just a few weeks ago. I was there because I was happy to see it, because the fact is that folks in Edmonton's downtown have been without a grocery store in the central part of our city for quite some time.

Now, the challenge, of course, Mr. Speaker, is that the kinds of grocery stores that we tend to get in the downtown and urban areas, or indeed even if they are the same in other places, often will have higher prices. If I go to a City Market here in Edmonton-City Centre, I may actually be able to find cheaper prices at another City Market in another part of the city or at a Superstore, which is the same chain but a different variation of, and that is because they know, to some extent, that they have a captive audience, as it were.

Folks are going to pay for convenience in being able to go to that grocery store here in their community, which is okay for individuals like myself, you know, who earn a good income. Indeed, sure, it is more convenient for me at times to go and pick up a few groceries at the City Market down the street from my house in the Brewery district than it is to drive further to the Superstore on Kingsway Avenue, but that is not necessarily true for folks who have less mobility, Mr. Speaker, that being seniors, that being many of the individuals who have a disability who also live here in Edmonton-City Centre and also have had considerably less income during some very difficult years because of decisions by this government.

Now, I've heard the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services heckle several times about the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. Now, the fact is that those constituents of mine who are on reduced income get a rebate on that carbon tax. They have not gotten a rebate and they are not getting made up all of the dollars that were taken away from them because this government chose to deindex AISH or income support or seniors' benefits. They won't get a single dollar of that back while this government spent hundreds of millions on their embarrassment of an energy war room and other government priorities that were, frankly, political games, political grandstanding. This government did that on their backs. So when we stand up today and talk about the price of groceries, it's in part because it really matters for these folks who lost income because of the decisions of this government.

5:40

This government wants to pat itself on the back about affordability. It talks about the utility rebate, which they do not offer to a significant number of my constituents who live in apartments and condos. Now, they said they intend to perhaps fix that with their new affordability bill. I'm certainly looking forward to that being the case. Their gas tax, Mr. Speaker, does not benefit the seniors, the students, the others,

many folks who have a disability in my constituency who do not drive. Again, I recognize that they are moving forward with providing an extra \$100 a month for each of those individuals – now, of course, not for students or for a number of other people who might work at a low-income job, at minimum wage. They are excluded from this because, frankly, this government doesn't see their votes being particularly valuable coming up in next May.

What I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that we will continue to stand up for affordability for Albertans on all fronts, we will continue to stand up for government support for individuals who need it, and we will continue to stand up for justice economically, in social areas, in all things that affect Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and close debate on Motion 501. Just a couple of things. Obviously, the minister for Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction is a little angry. Sadly, he accused me of wasting time, so what I would like to say is that there are many constituents of mine that have written to me, that have called, that have talked to me about grocery prices, not to mention that as a critic I deal with hundreds of people all the time, every week, that are letting me know that things aren't just bad or difficult; they're horrible. They're in crisis. So it is a problem.

You know, this was not an attempt to vilify grocers or anybody that worked for grocers. It's not an attempt at all. What it is is an attempt to do everything in our power – I understand that there's some federal work going on, but this is about here at home in Alberta. It's about doing everything that we can to ensure that Albertans are paying fair prices for groceries.

Now, certainly, the member was angry. He went on and on about, you know: we don't know anything. Yes, we understand that there are outside influences on the prices. We understand that climate change will continue to be a massive, massive problem. We understand that climate change will continue and will continue to impact all things groceries. We understand that. We understand that the war has certainly created a lot of cost pressures. We understand those things. We're not ridiculous. We read the news. I mean, we understand just like the member does. So to stand up and just mostly try to insult is a little bit disrespectful.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that this particular motion, which, oddly enough, it sounds like they're going to support, is not an attempt to say that the federal work is unimportant or won't do anything; it's an attempt, once more, to identify and understand the uniqueness of Alberta and the unique challenges that we're faced

with here in Alberta, not to just rely on the feds and on Ottawa. You know, it seems to me this government is pretty happy when they're saying those very things. Now, suddenly, it's the opposite: oh, just let the feds do it. I'm saying we need a plan here in Alberta. I'm also saying that it's kind of weird that they think that they can amend the Constitution of our country with a bill, yet they're unwilling to look at: are there tools, maybe that they're unaware of, or things we can amend to actually do the work properly here at home?

For all of these reasons – we have a crisis right now. People can't afford their food. They can't. So people that were struggling are in crisis now. Let's all support this motion and do everything we can to ensure Albertans are getting a fair price for very basic essentials like food. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:44 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Dach	Milliken	Savage
Deol	Nally	Shepherd
Glubish	Neudorf	Smith, Mark
Gray	Nielsen	Toor
Irwin	Renaud	Turton

6:00

Against the motion:

Amery	Loewen	Schow
Fir	Madu	Singh
Horner	McIver	Stephan
Hunter	Nicolaides	Toews
Issik	Nixon, Jeremy	van Dijken
Jean	Rutherford	Williams

Totals:	For – 15	Against – 18
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

The Speaker: I almost got called in to play there.

Hon. members, the time is now 6 o'clock, and the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:01 p.m.]

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