



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 14, 2022

Day 10

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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Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 14, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King, 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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture has a visitor today.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a special guest, hon. Laura Ross, Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women Office for the government of Saskatchewan, who sits in your gallery. I had the privilege of working with the hon. Minister Ross and other ministers across the whole country recently, endorsing the national action plan to end gender-based violence. Earlier today we discussed further actions that Saskatchewan and Alberta can jointly take to advance women's success in our respective provinces. Please extend our warm welcome to our special guest, Minister Ross.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, some of you have expressed some concern around the timing of introduction of visitors or guests. Those are two separate categories inside our Routine. As such, the rules are different.

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, it is my incredible pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two incredible grade 6 classes from Baturyn. There are over 70 guests here joining us today with their teachers and some grown-ups that are here to support them. I please ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the chief government whip has guests.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very excited to introduce East elementary school from Leduc and the classes here today from grades 4 to 6 and their teachers as well. Welcome to the Assembly. Will you all rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you my colleagues from the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. We have council chair Dominic Shaw, vice-chair Shino Nakane, and members Earl Thiessen and Katie Suvanto. Please identify yourselves in the gallery and accept the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Are there other guests? The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has risen.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of my constituents from the great riding of Airdrie-East, Mr. Lucas Daley and Mr. Jason Schuler. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock has a statement to make.

Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the strong economic policies implemented by Alberta's government, our economy is rapidly evolving and diversifying beyond our core industries of agriculture, energy, and forestry. New industries and opportunities are emerging, and rural Alberta deserves a strong plan for economic development that reflects the needs of the people who live and work there.

Over the past year the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation hosted 23 engagement sessions with over 370 rural stakeholders. Using the feedback we received from these engagements, the minister built the economic development in rural Alberta plan. Several themes were brought up that will guide the plan's strategic actions, including critical infrastructure, red tape reduction, workforce strategies, rural investment attraction, tourism, and business supports. Rural Alberta represents 18 per cent of our population while accounting for 41 per cent of Alberta's private and public investment. The significant impact of rural communities in our province means that getting it right is essential, and that is only possible by recognizing the importance of grassroots inclusion in the policy-making process.

Telecommunication networks are vital to attracting rural investment, and strategic direction 1 in the plan will ensure all of Alberta has broadband service availability by 2026, ending the digital divide and enabling rural businesses to compete in an interconnected global economy. The plan will establish new targets for the Alberta agrifood investment and growth strategy, and the plan also encourages continued collaboration with our partners in the nine regional economic development alliances. Each REDA will receive an investment of \$125,000 from the Alberta government in the new year.

Our United Conservative government represents nearly every rural community in Alberta, and we will continue ensuring they have the tools and resources to compete and succeed.

Economic Development

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, just the last hour the Leader of the Official Opposition and soon-to-be Premier of Alberta unveiled our new competitiveness jobs and investment strategy. It's a broad-ranging plan that'll create 47,000 new jobs and attract \$20 billion in new investment.

It includes the introduction of a new Alberta's Future tax credit, which will position our great province as a destination of choice for new and emerging sectors, like critical minerals and advanced manufacturing, and strengthen existing sectors, like agriculture, forestry, life sciences, and tourism. We're also introducing a regulatory fast pass, a Nexus-type pass for business that will ensure our upstanding Alberta companies can get their projects approved faster.

We're also supercharging the Alberta petrochemical incentive program, which our government launched and the current government

kept because it's working so well. We'll expand to new areas with this program, including eligible feedstock, new end products, and we'll bring back partial upgrading.

We'll also consult broadly with our Indigenous partners on expanding the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, something we think this government actually got right, but the key is consultation with First Nations, and we take that responsibility seriously.

Oh, and for the record there will absolutely be an Alberta investor tax credit, a digital media tax credit with an NDP government in place. Additionally, we'll introduce an Alberta venture fund, which gives Albertans the opportunity to invest in companies in their own backyard, giving Alberta start-ups and scale-ups a shot in the arm.

Mr. Speaker, these measures are just part of the economic plan we're building at albertasfuture.ca. We're putting rural broadband in every community, expanding affordable child care, supporting postsecondary, and putting a new campus in downtown Calgary. Our postsecondary institutions are major economic drivers that will grow the talent pipeline to help address labour shortages. We're unlocking our potential in hydrogen, geothermal, bitumen beyond combustion, and supercharging Alberta's rural economies. Alberta's NDP opposition is excited for 2023, when we'll implement this plan. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has the call.

Chestermere-Strathmore Constituency Update

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been an honour to serve you in this House as a minister, a private member, and as an opposition member. I'd like to share some of the many accomplishments in the riding of Chestermere-Strathmore and Rocky View and to thank the partners, colleagues, and friends who have worked so hard to see these projects through.

In March the Wheatland County Food Bank was awarded \$300,000, and in May the Carseland fire hall celebrated their grand opening. Changes were made to improve local EMS services, adding paramedic staff and expanding 24-hour service in Chestermere and adding core-flex shifts in Wheatland county to avoid burnout; and multiple playground grants plus stabilization grants during COVID-19 for nonprofits and community organizations. We modernized Indus school, originally built in 1952. Carseland expanded their school and developed Speargrass park. Chestermere recreation fixed their roof, and Springbank recreation upgraded their facility. Bears paw Lions Club enhanced their facility and a new emergency services building, school, and baseball diamonds all in the hamlet of Langdon.

We attracted new businesses, creating thousands of jobs, with state-of-the-art facilities such as Phyto Organix in Strathmore and Canadian Gypsum and De Havilland in Wheatland county. We expanded broadband, and the Canada Infrastructure Bank made a historical \$850 million joint investment with us by increasing irrigation lands to southern Alberta by more than 200,000 acres. This is small by comparison to the thousands of hours spent by folks building our communities, a direct result of the tenacious advocacy and passion in the ridings that I represented.

It has truly been the greatest honour of my life to represent you and work on behalf of the people of Alberta. A huge thank you to our constituency staff, who are on the front lines, and thank you to all of the ministers and the ministries and colleagues of the past eight years. Jacinda Ardern, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, said: I really rebel against the idea that politics has to be a place full of ego where we are constantly focused on scoring points against

each other. Yes, we need a robust democracy, but you can be strong and you can be kind.

Thank you to all of you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is next.

1:40 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville Constituency Update

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Things are really looking up in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Over the past couple of years my constituency has seen billions of dollars' worth of investment, creating good-paying jobs and sustaining our communities. We have some of Alberta's largest and highest profile investments over the past few years, investments like Dow Chemical's \$10 billion net-zero polyethylene and ethylene derivatives facility. Dow also plans a \$298 million expansion to its existing ethylene plant.

My constituency is home to projects like Suncor and ATCO's joint venture to build a hydrogen production facility. There is also Shell Canada's Quest carbon capture and storage facility, which has already captured and stored 6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, as well as the Enel Green Power Grizzly Bear Creek wind farm, which will be able to power over 73,000 households, and the ATCO Future Fuel renewable natural gas facility that will produce gas to heat the county of Two Hills. And, of course, Air Products' \$1.6 billion blue hydrogen complex will make Alberta a world leader in hydrogen. Inca is investing \$72 million in a hemp processing facility in Vegreville, making good use of a \$400,000 grant from the government of Alberta. We also partnered to invest in Vegreville's agrifood industrial park project. I'm pleased that Rocky Mountain Hemp has also made my constituency their home.

Alberta's economy is on a roll. We lead the country in job creation, and our economy is rapidly diversifying into new and emerging sectors. We also continue to lead the world in Alberta's traditional sectors of energy and agriculture. This year we have led the country in Q2 interprovincial migration. I know that my constituents are recognizing the low-tax, pro-growth policies of our government. They can see clearly the record investment in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and we have just begun.

Chinese Community

Ms Pancholi: Alberta is fortunate to have a large and vibrant Chinese community, especially in my riding of Edmonton-Whitemud. Chinese immigrants came to Canada over a century ago to help build the Canadian Pacific railway, which was critical to the development of western Canada. However, these Chinese immigrants were exploited. They were not paid fairly, and they suffered under terrible working conditions. These workers and their families deserve our immense gratitude and our apologies for their treatment.

Today Chinese Albertans are many things, including engineers, physicians, entrepreneurs, front-line health care workers, service industry workers, and so much more. Chinese Canadians have helped build the Alberta we know today and play a key role in shaping Alberta's social, economic, and cultural landscape.

In my conversations with members of the Chinese community they shared with me their vision for a strong, prosperous, and inclusive Alberta. They're worried about the fragile state of our health care system. Students are feeling burdened with increasing tuition costs all while worrying about cuts to seniors' benefits for their grandparents.

Anti-Asian hate, unfortunately, has been on the rise since the pandemic. Surveys indicate that we each have Chinese neighbours, friends, and colleagues who do not feel safe and like they belong.

As leaders this is a problem that we must address. It's why the Alberta NDP's antiracism proposal on albertasfuture.ca includes strengthening hate crime legislation, developing an antiracism curriculum that teaches about Chinese Albertans, collecting race-based data, and reducing barriers to access support programs.

Pandemic-related increases in business closures, community disorder, and anti-Asian racism have also harmed the historic communities of Chinatown in Edmonton and Calgary. Government must provide funding and support for Chinatown revitalization.

Chinese Albertans want to feel safe. They care about their families, they care about quality health care, they worry about having a strong education and postsecondary system, and, of course, they want a stable economy. I'm looking forward to our continued engagement with Chinese Albertans as we work together to build a better future.

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

Affordable Housing

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With my history of working in residential construction, it is perhaps no surprise that I consider housing as a vital pillar of the Alberta advantage. Housing ranks as the second-largest expense off the paycheques of most Albertans, with 30 per cent of the income being a benchmark for affordability.

We speak often of the importance of affordable housing and the protection of the most vulnerable, and I am grateful for the recent allocation of \$55 million by our government in support of this sector. However, we must put a renewed focus on housing affordability writ large with particular attention to workforce housing for low- to middle-income households, who, quite frankly, rarely get the hand up that they need to achieve housing stability at various stages of their lives. The challenges we face in a growing economy range from ensuring a steady, predictable, and balanced land supply to the ever-escalating burden on renters and buyers of a multitude of municipal and other jurisdictional fees, taxes, and levies which always – and I repeat: always – get passed on to the tenant or owner.

Mr. Speaker, through a deeper understanding of the housing continuum it is now time for us to focus not only on housing affordability but choice and suitability and meeting the needs of Albertans but also to consider we can move towards empowering all Albertans to aspire to a dream home at each stage of life, whether that be the comfort of a safe, warm, and welcoming roof over their heads, their first studio or one-bedroom apartment, urban or suburban condo or townhome, or that single-family home with a swing set in the backyard, not to mention the perfect downsizer for the retiring Albertan looking to free up equity to live a better active ager life.

The choices of housing tenure range from social or subsidized rental, near or near market rental, rent to own or shared equity through to attainable, assisted, or market ownership or even the demographic shift from many retirees moving back through the continuum. It is now time for a deliberate drive towards more innovative housing models with nimble and comprehensive plans to protect our people, our economy, and to nurture the dreams and ambitions of Albertans for generations to come.

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

NDP Government Record

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The UCP have been cleaning up the mess the NDP made during their time in government. I'm not sure the NDP leader even likes Albertans as she has called us: embarrassing cousins. Those her party disagrees with, they call

sewer rats. Her solution to high energy costs, which she herself caused with the carbon tax, is to, quote, take the bus. I'm sure that goes over big where no bus service exists. The NDP showed a lack of support for parental choice in education and want extremist groups like Extinction Rebellion in the classroom. Their disastrous health policies drove up wait times and created backlogs for surgeries, putting our system in a constant state of disarray even before a pandemic.

Rather than supporting treatment for people afflicted with addiction, they choose supervised injection sites as the main course of action. They even defended the misuse of funds at one location. Under the NDP these sites were clustered together in areas where a particular group of people had to deal with all of the crime and disorder, unfairly.

The NDP leader constantly sided with the Trudeau government with his hostility towards Alberta. She helped Trudeau cancel the Northern Gateway and Energy East pipelines and did not support the Keystone XL. Now they expect Albertans to believe they are for the economy after driving out 180,000 jobs and over \$100 billion in investment. A former NDP minister once told Albertans to go to B.C. and find work.

Mr. Speaker, our UCP government has attracted the largest investments Alberta has ever seen. We're putting more money into both health care and education than at any other time in Alberta history. Our recovery program for addiction is becoming famous for its success in helping those suffering from addiction.

We are seeing massive levels of economic diversification, including in financial services, high tech, film and television, hydrogen, agriculture, irrigation, and more. The contrast is stark, Mr. Speaker. In May Albertans can choose to go back to the dark days of the NDP or choose to support our UCP government building a better economy, health care, and quality of life.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 206, Insurance (Private Essential Vehicle Premium) Amendment Act, 2022. The bill will be sponsored by yours truly, the MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care System

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans need the right health care in the right place at the right time, but today Albertans are waiting longer than ever. They're waiting in overwhelmed emergency rooms, sitting next to their sick children. They're waiting for an ambulance to arrive, unsure if one is even on the way. They're waiting for a family doctor to move back to Alberta because they already watched them move away once.

Bill 201 would have set standards in health care. It would have included standards for shorter wait times. Instead of passing it, why did the Premier choose to leave Albertans waiting yet again?

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

1:50

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the members opposite are forgetting that there are multiple parts of their bill, and they put one part of their bill that would have shut down publicly

funded chartered surgical centres, which are now performing 20 per cent of all publicly funded surgeries in our province. If we had voted to endorse that, we actually would have reduced the capacity for our ability to cut surgical wait times rather than increased it. I have no problem supporting measures on EMS, on surgical wait times, and on operating rooms, and we're going to continue to work on that.

Ms Hoffman: Under this Premier sick children are waiting for health care in a trailer outside of their hospital. Mr. Speaker, the health care system is in chaos, and front-line health care workers are exhausted. Since the UCP formed government, the number of health care workers quitting has gone up. Workers are now more than twice as likely to quit within their first year. More staff are working overtime. More staff are getting sick, and staff vacancies are through the roof. The representatives of more than 120,000 front-line health care workers asked for a meeting with the Minister of Health months ago to address this crisis. To the Premier: since your minister refuses to meet, will you?

Ms Smith: Yes, I'd be happy to. In fact, before we announced that Dr. John Cowell was taking over as the official administrator, we made sure to have one-on-one calls with the head of the HSAA, with the head of AUPE, and with the nurses' union so that they understood that as we're making decisions, we would need their help and support in making sure that we got it right and that if there were any issues along the way, we could troubleshoot them so that we could make course corrections as we go along. That relationship is working very well. We're going to continue to work together to make sure that we're addressing the front-line issues, and I have asked as well, as part of our measures, to make sure that we're measuring measures of workplace satisfaction.

Ms Hoffman: Calling Heather Smith to tell her you're firing the board is not working with her in a meeting, like she's requested, to address the health care worker crisis, Premier.

The Premier claims that the front-line staff crisis is manufactured and that health care staffing is their creation, the issue that they're facing. But the truth is much more simple, Mr. Speaker. The UCP's bad decisions and their repeated attacks on health care workers have caused chaos. Alberta needs more health care workers, including nurses, at the front lines, and that includes Alberta trainers. To the Premier: instead of jacking up tuition on University of Calgary nursing students 8 per cent this year and 10 per cent last year, will you reverse it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS had made a decision to bar unvaccinated workers from being able to work in the system, which was a decision we reversed – which is a decision we reversed. When I mentioned that that was creating unnecessary shortages, that's what I was referring to. I'm pleased to see that everybody has been invited back in to the system. That allows for us to increase capacity on the front line. That's the important part, that we've got to create a welcoming environment for workers from around the country and around the world to come to this province, and that's what we're going to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for the second set of questions.

Ms Hoffman: And the Premier is hiking up tuition for nursing students at the University of Calgary.

Affordability Plan

Ms Hoffman: Speaking of affordability, let's talk about the UCP's plan for inflation. The package put forward by the UCP government deliberately excludes more than 2 million Albertans. That's 2 million people who are stressed, who could use some relief, but they'll not be getting a single bit of help from the UCP. Mr. Speaker, those same nursing students who are seeing their tuition go up, unless they have children, won't get a dime from the UCP. Why isn't the UCP giving a penny to postsecondary students in need?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, as we have seen issues identified where we have additional pressure points like postsecondary, like student loan costs, like tuition, I've asked our Affordability and Utilities minister to take a closer look at it. We have only come forward with an initial package on affordability, and we intend to develop more initiatives, so we will certainly have a look at that one. But this is just the beginning. We also have support for all Albertans through gasoline and diesel tax rebates, through electricity rebates, and through price protection on natural gas. That's going to help everybody.

Ms Hoffman: Among those 2 million, how about Rick, Mr. Speaker? Rick is in his forties. He doesn't have kids. He doesn't drive. He works hard just to pay his rent, buy a bus pass, and put groceries on the table. He's feeling the impact of a 40-year-high inflation hike, just like everyone else. To the Premier: why isn't Rick getting a dime in Bill 2? Why did the UCP leave half of Albertans empty handed?

Ms Smith: You know, if the members opposite were so concerned about the cost of everything going up, I don't know why they didn't call out their federal leader, Jagmeet Singh, when he signed on to a 300 per cent increase in the carbon tax, which increases the cost of everything; in particular, groceries, the price that we're paying at the pump. If you increase the cost of the fuel tax, it's going to be built into everything that we're paying for. I would think that they would have more credibility on this issue if they advocated at the federal level, as we have, for suspension of that carbon tax rather than asking for it to be increased threefold. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, it'd be one thing if these cheques were actually arriving with some urgency, but instead the UCP government is making families jump through hoops to apply. This means hundreds of thousands of Albertans logging on to a government website, hoping it doesn't crash, and in the past that hasn't worked out so well. Why do corporations get a no-jobs corporate handout of \$4.7 billion, no strings attached, while families have to deal with red tape just to maybe, hopefully, a few months before the election, get a little bit of relief?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think we saw from the federal program for CERB that the portal access actually works very well, and we have the expertise that we're developing at the provincial level to use our provincial portals for the same thing. I'm looking forward to working with the Minister of Technology and Innovation and watching what he develops with the Minister of Affordability and Utilities. That's the approach we're going to take, and as we start developing this expertise, we'll be able to apply it to more things. This is the important part of us being able to do these programs, being able to have the flexibility to provide the support when it's needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has a question.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, in 2017 the NDP government responded to the needs of Edmontonians by announcing the creation of a new south Edmonton hospital to meet the needs of a growing city. It's also clear that, with our health care under so much stress, this hospital would be critical. However, despite the clear need, the UCP government has delayed this project time and time again. Even yesterday the Infrastructure minister couldn't answer simple questions about the hospital, questions like: when will the project start? How long will it take? And what will it cost? Since the Infrastructure minister doesn't know, maybe the Premier can answer. What year will the south Edmonton hospital open?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure and the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to answer this question. Of course, the NDP, as is their wont – and now it's a huge spending with no plan. We have gone back to do a functional development so we know what we're building. We have to know what we want to solve. We have to know what we want to treat before we can build that. Unlike the NDP, we're doing the work first to create a functional plan so we know what to build. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Loyola: Every day in this House the Premier and the Health minister talk about how focused they are on building capacity in health care, capacity that a south Edmonton hospital would provide. Our government would have opened it by 2026. The Kenney government delayed it to 2030. And now this government has taken the start date off the website, leaving many Albertans worried that this project is about to be cancelled. Can the Premier confirm, with a yes or a no, whether the south Edmonton hospital is still going to be built, and on what date will construction formally start?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2022-2025 capital plan is providing \$370 million over three years for this project. We continue to build a plan so we know what service we are providing. Without that plan we can build a huge building, but to serve what? We need a plan first. Once we have that, we'll move ahead. We will start the building. We are committing to all Albertans and all Edmontonians to do this right by planning first. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Loyola: In addition to the long delays the UCP have subjected to this project, they also plan to return to the failed model of P3s to build it. We know that the P3 model doesn't make sense. In fact, that was a direct quote from former Conservative Infrastructure minister Wayne Drysdale when he shut down the approach for building schools in 2014 since it increased costs and caused huge delays. Can the Premier tell us why her government continues to use this broken model to build schools and hospitals? Is she really going to make the same mistakes of the past and harm the health care and education provided to Albertans in the process?

2:00

Mr. Neudorf: In fact, I would ask the member opposite to do his homework. The last bundle of schools I actually took apart, I took them out of a P3. We're going to a direct design/bid/build process.

We will however continue to use P3s, public-private partnerships, where they're warranted, where they make business sense, where they save Albertans money, and where they will serve the needs of that project on a case-by-case basis best. Again, we are doing the work behind the scenes that the former government failed to do. They didn't do their homework. They didn't build a plan. They don't understand contracts. We're doing all that work for Albertans to save them money. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is next.

Alberta Sovereignty Act and Indigenous Rights

Mr. Feehan: Yesterday in question period, while defending her complete failure to consult with Indigenous people regarding the sovereignty act, the Premier ignorantly compared First Nations' struggles against oppression and their fight for their rights to her government's bloated feud with Ottawa: "They have fought a battle over the last number of years to get sovereignty respected and to extract themselves from the paternalistic Indian Act. We get treated the exact same way by Ottawa." Does the Premier understand the harm her comments create when she minimizes the abuse of First Nations that they have faced throughout Canada's history and that they're still fighting now?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that was certainly not the intention of my comments, and if it was taken that way, I absolutely apologize for that . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: My intention was to demonstrate that the process that our First Nations have gone through to develop sovereignty over their own affairs and extract themselves from the Indian Act is the process that we are following in going through and asserting our rights under the Constitution. I take inspiration from what the First Nations have done, and I'm looking forward to continue engaging and consulting with them.

Mr. Feehan: Indigenous people within Alberta and across the province have faced genocide through abuse in residential schools, the pass system, the '60s scoop, and countless community members who are murdered and missing. Indigenous people are still tirelessly fighting so that their culture, language, and existence remain. To compare her fights with Ottawa over issues like fertilizer policy is a complete failure of understanding of the atrocities Indigenous people have suffered. A simple question: will the Premier apologize for this comment?

Ms Smith: As I said, if my comments were misconstrued, I absolutely apologize for it. My intention was to demonstrate that we have a common problem with Ottawa. Ottawa, I think, unfortunately, treats First Nations with disrespect, and they also treat provinces with disrespect. What we need to do is to go back to the original intention of the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and make sure that Ottawa is respecting both First Nations sovereignty rights as well as our rights under the Constitution.

Mr. Feehan: Just hours ago Treaty 6 chiefs stated:

It was clear from our discussions that Premier Smith does not understand Treaty or our inherent rights nor does she respect them . . . The Premier will not dictate how we will be consulted – we point her once again to the duty to consult to learn more about how to engage and work with us appropriately.

To the Premier. The sovereignty act is another bill forced on First Nations without consultation that is attacking their sovereignty and their inherent and treaty rights. What will it take for her to listen, apologize, and withdraw Bill 1?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we won't be withdrawing Bill 1. I am speaking regularly with the chiefs to point them to section 2(c) of the act that we've put forward, that expressly states that nothing in the act is going to impact their treaty or Aboriginal rights. That is what section 35 is all about. I respect the Charter. I respect the Constitution. I respect that we have a nation-to-nation relationship with First Nations, and I'm looking forward to identifying those areas that we can work with in partnership. Every time I speak with a new nation, I identify areas that we can work with together. I'm looking forward to doing that more. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Record levels of interprovincial migration, a balanced budget, skyrocketing levels of venture capital investment: it's all great news for Alberta. It means our province is a magnet for ambitious Canadians. It has an optimistic future and more minds and money to drive innovation. Every Albertan and member of our Legislature should take pride in the last few years of economic reinvigoration. However, some regions of our province have yet to reach their full economic potential. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: how is Alberta's government ensuring our province's economic prosperity benefits rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I was happy and pleased today to be joined by the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development, representation from one of Alberta's regional economic development alliances, and the presidents of both RMA and Alberta Municipalities to announce a new five-year economic development in rural Alberta plan. The plan provides a co-ordinated and strategic approach to support economic growth and create jobs in rural Alberta. The plan outlines clear priorities to achieve maximum benefit for rural communities as Alberta's economy grows. I think this is important to everyone in this House, because when rural Alberta thrives, all of Alberta thrives.

The Speaker: The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that centralized planning is the worst approach to governance and fails the needs of rural businesses, Indigenous communities, and small towns and given that the new two solitudes in Canada is the rural-urban divide, which means that city bureaucrats are necessarily urban biased and unconscious of those outside of their immediate circle, and given the importance of including the input of people impacted by government policies, to the same minister: how were rural businesses and communities included in the drafting of the economic development in rural Alberta plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it was very important to us to make sure that this consultation was very thorough. We all saw what's happened when you don't consult rural Alberta, like in the Bill 6 circumstance. I'd say that over the last 18 months we had

23 virtual engagement sessions with over 370 rural Alberta businesses and communities, collected over 3,500 individual comments and thoughts, had an online survey with over a thousand responses. This included ag producers, municipalities, economic development agencies, the Indigenous community, postsecs, not-for-profits. We tried to make it as thorough as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that good work. Given the extensive level of consultation that went into ensuring that the economic development in rural Alberta plan addresses the concerns of small rural businesses and not urban bureaucrats and given that Alberta's government includes a caucus, cabinet, and Premier with deep personal understandings of life in rural communities and given that Alberta's low taxes, budget surpluses, and educated workforce mean that our province is once again open for business, again to the minister: what initiatives does the economic development in rural Alberta plan support to drive investment and diversification in rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan supports these ongoing initiatives, these important initiatives: the investment and growth fund's rural stream, Alberta's broadband strategy, Travel Alberta's rural tourism initiatives, the forest jobs action plan, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, just to name a few. Also, to make it clear, there are five strategic directions: economic development enabling infrastructure, rural business supports and entrepreneurship, skills development, promotion and marketing of rural tourism, and rural economic development capacity building.

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

Edmonton Downtown Revitalization

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton's downtown needs help as businesses and communities struggle to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, which saw thousands of workers leave their offices here while the number of our friends and neighbours living houseless doubled and social disorder increased. Business and community leaders have stepped up to advocate. The city of Edmonton has been taking action, but for too long they've lacked provincial support. To begin in March of this year, the government committed \$5 million to help with downtown revitalization, but 10 months later, despite a \$13 billion surplus, it is yet to be paid. To the Minister of Finance: when will you release the \$5 million you promised?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we're working with the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, we're working with all Alberta municipalities on revitalizing our economies, both locally and right across the province. The best thing we can do as a government is ensure that we have the most competitive business environment possible, that will attract investment, create opportunities. Our plan is working.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that business and community leaders in our downtown have spent years struggling to get the attention of this government – but that's been a challenge as they've been mired in their own internal drama and multiple cabinet shuffles, leaving conversations and consultations on hold or forced to restart – and given, indeed, that this government has yet to even release the report from the Edmonton Metro Region Economic Recovery Working Group and given that the UCP has now simply struck yet

another task force, one with no representation from our businesses or communities or any consultation with council, why doesn't this government simply step up and act now on recommendations already out from their own working group, city council, the Downtown Recovery Coalition, so many others?

2:10

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is on fire. We created almost 25 per cent of the jobs for the entire country over the last year. But let's talk about downtowns. Let's talk about plans. This is an NDP plan. Like all their plans, it's a plan to ask other people to come forward with a plan. That's not a plan. We have a plan to create jobs and to create wealth for Albertans, and that plan is working.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this government continues to rail against Ottawa, complaining of heavy-handed paternalism, a lack of consultation, a failure to understand the unique culture of their province but given that their new task force doesn't include anyone who lives or operates a business in our downtown or anyone with lived experience – instead, we have a collection of newly minted Calgary ministers, two suburban councillors who don't actually represent council, and a handful of bureaucrats – and given that the Municipal Affairs minister claimed she wants to work with all stakeholders on this, will this government recognize its own hypocrisy and add someone who actually lives in and loves this community?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. We have brought together key cabinet ministers, emergency responders, first responders, city officials, Indigenous leaders, and health system experts to quickly implement over \$63 million worth of initiatives in Edmonton. Our task force does include two Edmonton city councillors. We have also invited . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The hon. the minister has the call.

Mr. Milliken: We have also invited the city manager as well as the Edmonton fire chief, and we hope that they will be allowed to come. I would ask that Mayor Sohi and the rest of the individuals on that side of the House stop playing politics and get to work with the rest of us. [interjections]

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

Mental Health and Addiction Services

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, a recent Canadian Mental Health Association report, from October, found that Albertans, more than those in any other province, are feeling stressed, angry, lonely, and depressed. We know that the pandemic has had a massive impact on the health of Albertans, which is why our caucus has proposed giving Albertans five free counselling sessions to ensure that they're able to better care for their mental health. Why hasn't the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction supported our simple policy, that could help so many?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we have been actively working with regard to the general mental health of individuals in Alberta. Our government was elected to increase access for Albertans and ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to pursue recovery from their mental health challenges. That's why we've

invested over \$58 million for mental health and addiction in response to the pandemic, including \$25 million for community-based organizations. This is on top of the more than a billion dollars that we spend every year on mental health and addiction care and services. We are committed to supporting Albertans in their active recovery and moving forward with treatment.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that despite the claims of the UCP that they are supporting recovery, they continue to put up barriers to people struggling with addictions, given that this government made it impossible for those seeking pharmaceutical alternatives to toxic street drugs to access these from their primary care providers and instead forces them to go to AHS facilities, which for many is time-consuming or even impossible for those living in rural areas, and given that this could force people back to the streets and result in more overdoses, why won't the minister reverse this decision and ensure that there are no barriers to those seeking to overcome their addictions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The evidence is clear. When high-risk opioid narcotics are widely available, many are traded or illegally sold, and addiction and overdose rates increase. That's why we have taken steps to protect Albertans and their communities from high-risk opioid narcotics while still providing care to those who need it. We will continue to support Albertans in their pursuit of recovery. When it comes to reducing barriers, it's us who got rid of user fees. Under them, even if they were accessing publicly funded recovery services, often individuals had to pay \$40 a day, something addicts likely will not have. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the recovery system only works if vulnerable Albertans awaiting treatment services don't die while waiting and given that while this government brags about the treatment beds they've created, I hear from front-line workers that they are unable to access beds to support their clients, why is the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction putting up barriers for those seeking treatment? How many lives will these decisions negatively impact? How many lives will be lost?

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are proud of the work that we are doing on this file. We have gone from looking to increase funding for spaces for 4,000 – we actually did 8,000, so it's 19,000 now to 27,000. In fact, it was the NDP who left beds unfunded. What happened from that? By leaving treatment beds unfunded, the NDP forced a backup into detox, into shelters, thereby onto the streets and into tents. Essentially, the policies of the NDP with regard to this file leave communities in crisis. We've seen it in L.A., we see it in the downtown east side of Vancouver, we've seen it across the west coast. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Calgary Ring Road Completion

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The southwest Calgary ring road project is a huge win for Calgary and Alberta. The truth is that we can no longer run our north-south trade route through the middle of our city. It has benefits for those in my constituency, who no longer are limited to one way in or out of our neighbourhoods. Today a trip to West Hills

takes seven minutes compared to the previous 25 minutes. We're now looking forward to the west leg being completed, which will allow us to get to WinSport in 15 minutes. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: when can we see the entirety of the southwest Calgary ring road, including the west leg, open for traffic?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The construction of the final three phases of the west Calgary ring road will be completed in 2024. That's totalling five new kilometres of road, five kilometres of upgrade to the Trans-Canada highway, and six new interchanges. But under NDP social procurement policies that give control to big union bosses, provincial construction projects like the west Calgary ring road would have seen huge delays and cost overruns, but the NDP already did a pilot in Alberta, so they know this. It failed. But Gil McGowan must be pretty persistent when he's not accosting accredited members of the legislative press gallery.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that traffic on the ring road is growing every day as we see the project near the finish line and given that more traffic often means more noise from the roadway and given that my constituency borders the ever-growing traffic on the southwest Calgary ring road, what is the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors doing to ensure that the noise from the ring road does not spill over into the communities that I represent?

Mr. Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has been a champion for neighbourhoods in her constituency like Cedarbrae and Woodbine, but we are planning to build a sound wall in Budget 2023. Hopefully, the NDP will support it, but I wouldn't be too optimistic about the NDP voting in favour of the budget, especially when it supports Calgary, because everybody knows that the NDP cares more about their big union bosses and Gil McGowan than Alberta families and Alberta workers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that noise attenuation would be a significant relief for the communities that I represent and given that my constituents and I are advocating for the noise from the southwest ring road to be addressed before it further impacts our quality of life and given that this has been an issue for quite some time now, to the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: when can we expect to see shovels in the ground and the overdue noise attenuation built?

Mr. Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, hopefully, we'll see shovels in the ground this spring in Calgary-Glenmore to mitigate this traffic noise.

But there's been a lot of noise from what the NDP just did in B.C. The NDP kicked out Indigenous workers who were building the Cowichan district hospital just because they didn't hold the right NDP-approved union membership. NDP union wars are shameful. They do not belong in Alberta, and I wonder if the NDP MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford mentions to chiefs in Alberta how the NDP puts union politics over Indigenous rights.

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

Municipal Property Taxes in Mountain Communities

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Banff is looking at a potential 10.2 per cent increase in taxes. The town of Canmore is looking at a 12.3 per cent jump. These increases can be tracked back to the actions and decisions of this UCP government and the Finance minister. Canmore Mayor Sean Krausert stated publicly, and I quote: Canmore, like all municipalities, has suffered from provincial downloading in one form or another. End quote. What will it take the Finance minister to stop hammering Alberta mountain communities with higher costs and higher taxes?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're working with all municipalities to ensure that Alberta is not only prosperous today but prosperous tomorrow. We inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite: spending completely out of control, \$10 billion higher than comparator provinces on a per capita basis. We brought responsible fiscal management, at the same time positioned Alberta's economy for competitiveness, investment attraction, and growth. We're leading the nation in investment attraction.

Ms Sweet: Given the fact that passing the expectation on to municipalities and saying that they're overspending when their budgets have been cut by the provincial government is just another example of this minister bucking all of his actions and expecting Albertans to just accept it and given that Banff and Canmore are discussing adding a specific line about the cost of provincial downloading on to their provincial tax bills and given that on top of piling on taxes to residents, the UCP has also repeatedly moved to silence the voices of local leaders and strip away their powers, is the minister trying to suffocate municipalities in order to cover up their hiking costs on every Albertan?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that's a ridiculous question. We're making key strategic infrastructure investments right across the province. During the difficult days of COVID and the energy price crash we increased our capital spending envelope to municipalities so they could build critical infrastructure and, more importantly, put tens of thousands of Albertans to work. We're bringing responsible fiscal management, management that ensures sustainable programming – sustainable programming – for Albertans in the future.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the councillor for Canmore said what we're all thinking – the province has a \$15 billion surplus, yet they're forced to increase their taxes – and given that Albertans are facing an affordability crisis not seen in a lifetime and given that our mountain communities already face additional costs that aren't funded due to an influx of tourists using municipal infrastructure, can the minister explain to the UCP MLA for Banff-Kananaskis why this government clearly doesn't care about her constituents?

Mr. Toews: Again, Mr. Speaker, that's a ridiculous question. It's due to our responsible fiscal management that Alberta was able to deliver the largest affordability package of any province in the country, \$2.8 billion over three years. We made key investments in the Nordic ski area in the Banff-Kananaskis region. We will continue to bring responsible fiscal management so we can build key infrastructure for Albertans in the future.

Nonprofit Organization Funding

Ms Goehring: While no industry emerged unscathed, nonprofits were particularly underresourced throughout the pandemic. Now, as the sector begins to recover, nonprofits continue to struggle. Nonprofits fill critical needs, employ nearly 300,000 Albertans, contribute \$5.5 billion to the economy and another \$5 billion in volunteer labour. Analysis by the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations shows instability. Many Alberta nonprofits are in crisis. They are calling for an urgent, one-time injection of \$30 million, only .2 per cent of the government surplus, in immediate aid. Will the minister rise in this House and commit to the more than reasonable request?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Mr. Speaker, thank you to that member for the question and her concern for the not-for-profit sector. I do share that concern, and it's why I was so happy to see our Premier put that into my mandate letter, to make sure that we're looking at addressing wage challenges for our social sector, make sure that we are helping our social sector to be able to get through this. We rely on our not-for-profits, especially during hard times. I will continue to work with our not-for-profit leaders, with my colleague the Minister of Culture to make sure that we're supporting not-for-profits and working with them.

Ms Goehring: Given that many organizations are facing higher demand, 74 per cent reporting an increase in need and lack of supports for programs with complex needs, and given that 41 per cent identified significant reduction of capacity to provide services and given that the current affordability crisis has major impacts for this sector, with 88 per cent citing inflation as a massive concern, forcing downsizing and layoffs, while funding agreements are not keeping pace with population growth and inflation, with a \$13 billion surplus and not-for-profits crying out for help before they cease to exist altogether, is providing some emergency funding really too much to ask?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the hon. member continuing to raise this question. I echo with my colleague the minister of housing and social services: we are on top of this, not only his ministry but mine. With the Ministry of Culture last year we increased \$20 million for the community facility enhancement program. We're on top of this, helping Albertans recover.

Ms Goehring: Unfortunately, it seems that this government doesn't actually listen to the experts in this sector, who serve important roles in their very own backyards. Given that government private member's Bill 202 is only beneficial to charitable organizations and given that the majority of nonprofits do not have charitable status to accept donations and issue tax receipts and given that this is a poor measure to compensate for grant funding not keeping up with inflation, will the minister take the experts seriously, listen to their concerns, and move forward with their incredibly reasonable asks?

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for her question, her advocacy. I'm actually glad that she brought up the hon. Member for Peace River's bill, Bill 202, because I know that that will have a significant impact for not-for-profits. It'll give our community, it'll give Albertans a meaningful way to be able to engage in the solutions. At the end of the day,

that's a big part of what we need here. We need to make sure that all Albertans are involved with it, so I thank that hon. member for bringing that forward. We are taking real action, though, and one of the most recent things we've done is that we actually put \$20 million into food banks to help address some of these issues.

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

Provincial Debt and Fiscal Policies

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be part of this government that has held the line on spending, in line with other provinces. This has allowed our government to fully benefit from the recent surge in energy prices, which has given us the largest surplus in Alberta's history, a projected \$12.3 billion for the 2022-23 fiscal year. To the Minister of Finance: how does our spending record compare to the NDP on sustainable recovery spending increases?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that important question. I've mentioned more than once in this House that our government inherited a fiscal train wreck from the NDP. We were spending over \$10 billion more than comparator provinces on a per capita basis. I'm pleased to say that we've brought our spending under control. We're now comparable on a per capita basis with other provinces. More than that, our revenues are going up because of higher energy prices and higher tax revenues due to a booming economy.

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the answer from the minister. Given the fiscal restraint that has allowed government to fully benefit from the recent boom in energy prices and to attain the largest surplus in the province's history, the government has been able to use the surplus to make the largest debt repayment in Alberta history, a startling \$13.4 billion. Again to the minister: how much of the annual interest payments has this debt repayment allowed Alberta to save by not having to raise tax and pass on additional debt to our children?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Our government continues to build a prosperous economic future for all Albertans, and paying down debt is a key priority. We are paying down \$13.4 billion in debt this year, debt that is maturing this year. If we had to go to capital markets today, with increased cost of capital, increased interest rates we would be paying about \$600 million more per year in debt-service costs if we had not paid off the \$13.4 billion. Fiscal responsibility matters.

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

Ms Pon: That's impressive. Mr. Speaker, thank you. Thank you again to the minister. Given that the fiscal restraint shown by this UCP government over the lack of restraint of the previous NDP government is crystal clear with their figures, can the Minister of Finance share with this House how important this saving is for the Alberta government to be able to provide significant financial relief to Albertans during this inflationary crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are in an inflationary time, and that's putting pressure on all Alberta households. Responsible fiscal management and a growing economy have allowed, again, this government to respond to this crisis, this challenge with the most programming of any province across the country: \$2.8 billion of relief both in tax reductions and direct support. Again, we will continue to bring responsible fiscal management to the province so that governments in the future can respond appropriately to challenges.

2:30 Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Yesterday the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I sent a letter to the presidents of postsecondary institutions inviting proposals for a new downtown Calgary campus. Calgary's downtown vacancy rate is still at about 30 per cent. Mr. Speaker, downtown campuses are awesome. They spur, on the average, the creation of more start-ups, more licensing deals, more inventions, and more investment in the downtown. This is a plan that would support downtown Calgary, postsecondary institutions, and Calgary in general. Will the Advanced Education minister rise and endorse this vital project that we're proposing?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to chat with the member and get a better understanding. You know, I watched the press conference, and I left scratching my head. I didn't hear details about a budget. I didn't hear any details about timelines. I think my colleague mentioned it earlier: it seemed as though it was a plan to develop a plan. I'm not sure I can stand and get behind it without any real details, but I'd love to find out more as to what they have in store, because from the press conference it was clear that this was just scribbled together on the back of a cocktail napkin on their way down to Edmonton. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly lend the Advanced Education minister a hand if that's what he wants.

Given that the UCP is still imposing additional, unnecessary billions of dollars of debt on Albertans pursuing postsecondary through unprecedented funding cuts and skyrocketing tuition and given that this means that students are requiring loans and have to take on a significantly larger burden and given as well that the government hasn't even included the majority of students in their inflation relief legislation, why is the Minister of Advanced Education doing nothing to help students with the cost of living? Please answer.

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As per the mandate letter from the Premier, of course, the Premier has asked for us to take a look as it relates to affordability, and I know that that's a consistent theme across all ministries. My team and I are speaking very closely with student leaders to get a better understanding of some of their challenges and get a better understanding as to whether the government may be able to provide assistance to work with students. So we're looking at those options, and we'll bring forward some thoughtful plans in the future.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this government's inflation act missed more than 2 million Albertans, including almost all of the postsecondary students in this province, and given as well that the Alberta New Democrats do have a plan for capping

postsecondary tuition increases, ending the UCP surcharge on student loans, bringing students and research into the downtown core, ensuring stable, predictable funding for institutions, making postsecondary career training more accessible, and so, so much more, my last question is simple. Does the minister want my help so that we can put together what's best for students?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Albertans are struggling under high inflation and the related escalated cost of living, and that includes our students. We've been meeting together and discussing options to support them as we move forward, and that's exactly what we'll do. Right now they're benefiting from cheaper fuel to get to and from school. They're benefiting from lower electricity prices and natural gas price protection, and students will benefit from the targeted relief that our government is releasing early next year.

Racism Prevention

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a rich province, rich in diversity and multiculturalism, but racism continues to find a home on our streets, in our schools, workplaces, in our media, and in this very building. It is the duty of every Albertan, especially those in positions of power, to stamp out racism in all its forms. To do otherwise is morally bankrupt. Can the minister of multiculturalism explain what tangible action this government is taking to address racism in Alberta? Please be specific. Albertans are looking to us to lead.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for that question. First of all, I'd like to thank the former associate minister of multiculturalism, the hon. Member for Calgary-North, for his groundbreaking work on the antiracism action plan. In fact, this plan is on our website, and it outlines a number of recommendations in a forward plan that is designed to tackle racism.

Mr. Deol: Given that racism has been on the rise in Alberta and given that the Calgary and Edmonton gurdwaras were the target of hate crimes last year and given that only a few months ago a racist representation of Sikh culture was included in a rural Alberta rodeo parade and given that a 24-year-old Sikh man was murdered last week in Edmonton, newcomers are scared, racism is on the rise, and minorities are facing daily instances of racism in their lives, will the Premier stand in this Chamber today and condemn racism in all its forms?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are tragic and unacceptable acts. Obviously, I do condemn all acts of racism all across the province and in our nation. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen increases in anti-Semitism, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian hate, which was addressed earlier here today. I am very personally invested as a minister, as an MLA, as an individual to ensure that we tackle racism so that every single Albertan feels included, welcomed, and is able to actualize their potential in every realm of life.

Mr. Deol: Given that a third-party advertiser that calls itself Alberta first recently released a television ad that is undeniably racist and given that the ad is black and white but colours only the turban of a federal political leader and given that this is a clearly visual dog whistle on racism and given that fighting racism is the duty of every person in this House, including the Premier, will someone on that

side stand and for the record condemn this racist ad and tell the people behind it to pull it off the air?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, as I had mentioned before, I categorically condemn all acts of racism everywhere in the province and in the country as well. I have had the benefit of talking to the antiracism council members as a council and as members individually, and again we are going to be bringing forward further initiatives on this matter to make sure that, again, everybody feels safe and included and welcomed in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As an MLA who represents rural Albertans, my constituents are pleading for more stable health care. Currently emergency rooms in rural communities are being left inaccessible due to doctor shortages and closures. Because of these closures, rural Albertans are being left without critical emergency care. To the Minister of Health: what is this government doing to improve and stabilize emergency room accessibility in our rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question and advocacy on this file. We've had numerous conversations in this regard. You know, bringing down emergency room wait times across the province is one of our top priorities and, in fact, one of the main reasons why we appointed an AHS administrator. We have tasked Dr. Cowell to reduce ER delays by bringing in additional staff to improve on-site patient care and management and by transferring an increased number of patients from hospital beds into more appropriate care settings. In order to measure the success of these initiatives, we will track the time it takes from the moment a patient enters the ER to when they receive the appropriate level of care.

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the incredible strain that the pandemic has had on our doctors, our nurses, and support staff over the past two years and given that, with the lack of staff in rural regions, many Alberta families are struggling to access the health care services that they require, can the minister explain to Albertans and this House what the government is doing to bring more doctors and health care workers to our rural hospitals, thus improving access to health care for these communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this very important question. We fully understand that there is a challenge across the entire country in health human resources and here in Alberta, and it's particularly acute in rural Alberta, which actually is impacting our level of service. We are moving forward with a number of initiatives, including training more nurses and allied health professionals across the entire province. We are leveraging our immigration system, welcoming more doctors. We have more doctors and more nurses than ever in the province, and we're going to continue to do this work until we can get all the

staffing we need to be able to provide the services, particularly in rural areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has announced \$3.5 billion in health-related capital funding over the next three years and given that a significant portion of this amount is dedicated to upgrading facilities in Red Deer, Calgary, and Edmonton and given that those upgrades will improve the quality of service and life for residents in those regions, again to the Minister of Health. These urban centres are receiving significant support for health care upgrades, but what is this government doing to help improve health care services and facilities for rural Albertans?

2:40

Mr. Copping: Thanks once again to the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, you know, we are investing significantly in health care infrastructure, \$3.5 billion in Budget 2022, and that is across the entire province. One component of that is focusing on renovations in rural hospitals. This year's budget provides \$45 million over three years to modernize and improve our rural health facilities across the province. Now, the rural health facilities revitalization program supports upgrades and renovations in hospitals, emergency departments, pharmacies, EMS stations, ambulance garages, medical laboratories, and other facilities, and we'll continue to invest.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has a tabling.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings that I'll quickly make, tabling documents I referenced earlier this week in debate, one being a CTV News article titled Ralph Bucks 14 Years Later, which I referenced in arguing that the population of Alberta will not be bought with their own money again as they seemed to be back in the Ralph bucks era.

Secondly, a tabling with respect to an article that I cited from CBC, Need for Speed: UCP MLA Wants to See 120 km/h Speed Limit, where I argued that it was difficult to determine whether or not the UCP members were in favour of higher speed limits because there seems to be some debate in their caucus about whether they are injurious.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, a statement from the Treaty 6 chiefs regarding their meeting with Premier Danielle Smith, in which they indicate, "It was clear from our discussions that Premier Smith does not understand Treaty or our inherent rights nor does she respect them."

Thank you.

The Speaker: I appreciate that the hon. member may have been quoting from a letter, but it would still be inappropriate to use the proper name in the Assembly.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading

Bill 4

Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again for the support of the Assembly on Bill 4, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. As members know, it is a straightforward bill that proposes repealing section 40.2 of the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. This section allows the government to terminate compensation-related agreements such as the one we have with the Alberta Medical Association.

Repealing this legislation is part of our commitment in the new agreement with the AMA. Mr. Speaker, this commitment is not only to the Alberta Medical Association but to physicians throughout our province. I want physicians to know that we are moving forward together. With this agreement, we are partners, and they have my commitment that I will work collaboratively with the association and its members to continue building an environment of partnership and of innovation.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

To physicians I say that you have faced a tremendous amount of responsibility and strain throughout the past few challenging years. It's affected many personally and professionally as you have given all your support to patients. Your hard work and dedication to Albertans is greatly appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, our partnership with physicians is reflected in the concrete actions we're taking to address the challenges facing our health care system, because those actions reflect the very issues that have been brought forward by physicians in our conversations. These actions will result in improvements to the health system overall and improvements for individual physicians as we work together as partners to implement the new agreement.

This agreement adds an estimated \$750 million to stabilize the health care system, including \$260 million in targeted funding to address current pressures. This includes recruitment and retention programs so more Albertans can access family doctors, and it provides more stability for practice viability. It is an agreement that focuses on partnership, stability, and innovation. It targets areas of concern and provides the necessary supports to help ensure Albertans get the health care that they need. To quote from former president of the AMA Dr. Vesta Michelle Warren, with whom I sat at the bargaining table and then proudly shared a podium with in September, when we announced the ratification of the agreement:

This agreement is good for physicians, patients and the health-care system. It will allow physicians to contribute to decision-making and provide expertise on what matters for patients. It provides increases in line with other settlements, valuable programs, business cost support, fair processes for working together on compensation or other matters and ways to resolve disputes. The agreement will help stabilize physician practices that are struggling with rising costs. Stability is critical to retain and attract physicians. There is hard work ahead, but we look forward to rebuilding the relationship with government and seeking solutions through collaboration.

Mr. Speaker, there is indeed hard work ahead, but I'm looking forward to continued collaboration with the current president of the AMA, Dr. Rinaldi, and the rest of her team to tackle this work together with physicians as our partners in the weeks and months ahead. This bill is about working with physicians to improve

Alberta's health care system. It's about stability, which is absolutely critical during these challenging times, and it's about keeping our promises and our commitments.

I once again thank all members of the Assembly for supporting Bill 4. With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on third reading of the Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 5

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 5, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2), that makes changes to six pieces of legislation. However, I do find this session that this government has for the most part prioritized legislation that will not help this government address issues facing our communities, our province.

Frankly, when I talk to individuals and groups in my riding, I think the top-of-mind issue for them is affordability, cost of living. UCP policies certainly have contributed to that as well. The other thing that we'll talk about is health care. That is top of mind for many of my constituents. We are now seeing an increase and surge in respiratory illnesses, and now our hospitals are again really stretched. Here we have another bill that is not focused on what Albertans want this government to focus on. Earlier they also introduced a piece of legislation, the sovereignty act, that will drive away investment, will drive away jobs, and has created huge chaos and uncertainty in our economy.

2:50

This bill makes a number of changes. For the most part, it will be helpful if the minister would clarify some of these issues. For instance, this bill makes amendments to the Referendum Act and what it does. In the technical briefing they said that they're clarifying that constitutional referendums will only be brought before the Legislature and that all other referendums cabinet can decide behind closed doors. They're creating a two-tier process. If a referendum relates to constitutional issues, only then will it be brought before this Assembly, and on all other issues, on all other matters of public importance, the cabinet is giving themselves the right to decide that without any input from this Legislature.

As much as I'm not a big fan of governing through referendums, this Legislature should be the governing body. This elected government should be the governing body. We have seen fallout from referendums like Brexit and in other places as well. I do believe that whenever a question is put before the public to weigh in, this Legislature should have a right to weigh in on that matter. Generally speaking, referendums are done on matters of public importance, where we want to know where the public stands on a certain issue, so I think as public representatives we do have a right to weigh in on those matters. I think we will be bringing forward an

amendment later on to change that. I don't think that cabinet should be the only body that decides a referendum.

This is the kind of pattern we are seeing from this government. That's exactly what they did with their sovereignty act, and they didn't consult anyone. They tried to consolidate powers within the cabinet, and as a result earlier we saw a call from Treaty 6 chiefs about that piece of legislation as well, that they were not consulted so that bill should be withdrawn. And the same thing here. There is nothing to suggest that the government consulted on these changes that they're making to the Referendum Act.

This bill will also make some changes to the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act, and that's a pretty straightforward change. That change will bring Alberta legislation in line with other provinces and will allow for the expedited enforcement of child and spousal support orders from other provinces and vice versa. That's a good change, and we can certainly support that change.

Another change is to the Provincial Court Act, which will change the financial limit that the Provincial Court can deal with. Currently it stands at \$50,000, but now through this change cabinet is giving itself flexibility that they could raise it to, I believe, \$200,000. I think a question that we have is: if Alberta is already in line with other jurisdictions, other provinces, in fact if Alberta is at the higher end of the bracket, why does cabinet feel that this was necessary, and was there any consultation done with courts, the Provincial Court, the Court of King's Bench? Was there any work done on how it will impact their caseloads, how it will impact the Provincial Court work? Do we have enough judges there? Are we just trying to push more and more Albertans towards Provincial Court because the King's Bench would need involvement of legal representation and Provincial Court has relatively simpler processes? I think we need to understand why cabinet thinks that they need this power to raise that civil court limit to \$200,000. Again, who is asking for it, and are there any plans that they will be using it fairly soon?

We do know that because of the pandemic and because of this government's policies our courts are struggling. Because of Jordan's principle there are now time limits that cases have to be dealt with in a certain time frame, in 18 months for summary offences and 30 months for indictable offences. So that has also put pressure on the court system. At the same time, this government has cut the Justice department budget every single year. Every single year they have cut the Justice department budget. When they became government, they started promising that they will hire 50 prosecutors. That didn't happen up until now. If they have hired some, now there are so many more vacancies that have not been filled. So adding more casework, more caseload on Provincial Courts: if that's their plan to address delays, they should say so.

Another thing that has really caused delays, caused concern for many Albertans is that this government has also cut legal aid funding. They have made deep cuts to legal aid funding. Mr. Chair, when we became government in 2015, the total legal aid funding at that time was \$64 million. In 2018 we entered into a governance agreement with Legal Aid Alberta and promised to increase it in four instalments by \$70 million. We delivered the first instalment, making the legal aid funding \$104 million. In the last three years this government has cut that funding, making it \$82 million.

3:00

As we speak, there are many organizations representing defence lawyers, family lawyers. They have started job action, and they are not accepting legal aid certificates. That means there will be more delays when it comes to bail hearings. There will be more delays in criminal matters, in family law matters, in custody matters, and Albertans will not be fairly represented. Our court system is already under pressure, and just adding this limit, raising this limit to

\$200,000, I don't think will make any difference in our court system. If we want to see our court system improve, we need real action from this government. We need more prosecutors. We need more resources in the justice system. We need more resources for legal aid. Changing that limit won't help us address any of that.

Then there are some other changes to the Trustee Act, which we were briefed that it will just remove the need for a trust to be transferred to the courts when there is no trustee. It clarifies that property can go directly to the new trustee. I think that's a good thing. There was some assurance provided that in that process the trust won't fail.

Then there are some changes made to the Sale of Goods Act. It removes the need to keep a record of the vehicle and registration that deliver the grain to the elevator and changes "track buyer" to "grain dealer". I think we didn't hear any concerns with respect to these changes. My friend and colleague, our critic for agriculture, the MLA for Edmonton-Manning, who has done amazing work on her file, has also reached out to stakeholders, but we didn't hear any concerns. We would like to hear from the government who they have consulted and if they could explain the rationale for that. I think that in general we think that it's a good change.

As I said, these are the changes. They're fairly straightforward, but at the same time I think this government needs to focus on real issues that are facing our economy, that are facing our society. They need to do something tangible to address the cost-of-living crisis, the inflationary crisis, and when they come up with plans, they need to make sure that all Albertans who need those supports, need that help are able to access that help. What we saw from this government is that they left more than 2 million Albertans out of that support.

Similarly, making changes to the Referendum Act further erodes the role of this Legislature. What we have seen from this government is that it's a pattern of behaviour, that they have done many things to curtail the role of this Legislature and to erode our democracy. On many occasions they have brought forward closure motions just to shut down the debate. They brought the sovereignty act, at one point giving themselves the powers called Henry VIII powers so that, again, they could limit the role of the Legislature.

In this legislation as well, with respect to changes to the Referendum Act, what they are doing is that they are again limiting the role of this Legislature by eliminating the need for this government to bring referendums on questions other than constitutional questions to this Legislature. I think as a member of this Legislature and as a representative of the people of this province – we think that whenever this government feels that there is a need, that they need to govern through referendum, they should come to this Legislature. It shouldn't be just the cabinet playing politics with referendums. There should be some accountability through this House.

So those changes certainly are not good. They're not good for our democracy. They're not good for our province. As I indicated, we will consider amending those to make sure that government brings back all questions of importance, whether constitutional or not, to this House.

The other thing, as I raised some questions – it would be helpful if the minister would share with us who they have consulted on all of these changes. We also know that when it comes to consultation, this government's record is very poor. They do not consult. They claim to consult, but they do not. That's what they claim with respect to the sovereignty act. That's what they claim with respect to Bill 6, that we will be debating later today. But when we talk to stakeholders, when we talk to Albertans, then we find out that they did not consult. That's the reason that the Treaty 6 chiefs issued a statement today saying that they were not consulted on the sovereignty act and on many other issues that pertain to their treaty rights, that has the potential to . . .

The Deputy Chair: Other members wishing to add comments or ask questions? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 5, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2). Now, I have a few questions pertaining to the bill. I appreciate the fact that it amends, I believe, six pieces of legislation. I'll go through them one at a time just to make it as logical as possible.

You know, I appreciate on the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act that it is, for the most part, from what I can see, bringing Alberta legislation in line with other provinces. I do appreciate that it will allow for expedited enforcement of child and spousal support orders from other provinces through, really, modernizing a piece of legislation by allowing easier use and transmission of documents. I appreciate that sections 5, 24 remove the need for sworn documents, sections 6, 24, and 25 remove the need for certified documents or at least provide some flexibility for that certification, which I think is important, and sections 10, 30, 39, 44 allow for electronic or telephone transmission of documents. I appreciate there that we're modernizing this to allow for electronic transmission of documents in today's day and age. This seems to make the most sense.

3:10

I can't help but think about the fact that most doctors' offices still use fax machines to fax requisitions, et cetera, around. My hope is that we will look at modernizing that system. There is an example of a constituent of mine, that I discovered while door-knocking ahead of the 2015 election, who went to see a specialist to get a diagnosis – oh, no. Sorry. She had a cancer diagnosis, went to see a specialist. The requisition was via fax, and the challenge, Mr. Chair, is that the requisition ended up in a pile of papers for the specialist. The specialist was on holidays for a couple of months and then couldn't get back to the paperwork or didn't realize it was there. The worst possible thing you can think of happened, and that is that she died. She died because she couldn't get treatment because of an antiquated system that we use in our health care system, which is, you know, the use of fax machines. It was very, very tragic. I had met with her while she was waiting for treatment and then was in touch with the family when she passed several weeks later. Of course, I advocated on her behalf. My office tried to do what we could. But the point of this story is that I can support pieces of legislation that make sense to modernize, especially the use of documentation.

We know how busy our court systems are, so that's appreciated. I mean, in section 17 of this piece of legislation – amending, again, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act – rose the need for statutory certified copies. Again, I think that will help improve as well. So for the first piece of legislation that this bill amends, I can get behind that, Mr. Chair.

The next piece is the Legislative Assembly Act. I appreciate that this will bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions. That's looking, I believe, at enhancing security for personnel in this building. Again, you know, it makes sense that we bring our legislation in line with other provinces.

This bill does touch on another bill that we'll be debating this afternoon, Mr. Chair. There's clarification in changes to the Police Act, which we'll be debating later this afternoon, for increased civilian oversight of law enforcement personnel. I think that's very important, that we have civilian oversight. When I speak to Bill 6, I will start my comments thanking the men and women that serve our communities around the province, that risk their lives day in and day out to keep us safe. There are incredible people who join

the service, as I said. When I speak to Bill 6, I'll tell a couple of stories about some of the men and women that I've gotten to know in my riding, and I would argue that out of EPS, the finest work is in northeast Edmonton. Of course, I'm quite biased because I've gotten to know many of them. We'll talk more about that when we get there.

The next piece of legislation, the third piece, that this act amends is the Provincial Court Act. I think the rationale behind this change: the government has outlined that it will give cabinet more flexibility, but the concern that the opposition has identified with this change – and, again, when we talk about potential unintended consequences, it could lead to an increase in claims through the lower courts, so that is a bit of a flag.

The other thing that it does, Mr. Chair, is that it increases the maximum decision under civil courts from \$50,000 to \$200,000. Now, I know my colleague our Justice critic has spoken about this already, but I think it's important to highlight this. As I said at the start of my speaking this afternoon, there are a few questions that I have. This increasing the level fourfold, from \$50,000 to \$200,000, again, a 400 per cent increase, is significant. Now, the second highest – so that would put Alberta at the highest level at \$200,000. I think the existing highest level in the country is \$85,000, so Alberta would jump over that by another \$115,000.

You know, a number of things, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure why cabinet feels the need to quadruple the \$50,000 cap on civil court rulings that Alberta currently has today, why it needs to jump to \$200,000. Now, I'm not saying that I'm necessarily opposed to that decision. I just would like a little more rationale behind that decision and that increase. My hope, quite frankly, because we are in Committee of the Whole, is that a member from Executive Council will respond to some of the questions that the opposition has been raising. This is definitely part of our bill debate process, where I very much appreciate going back and forth with ministers. We've seen that openness or willingness to answer questions in the past on other pieces of legislation, and I've seen this especially in my tenure or time in this Chamber. My hope is that we will get some answers.

The other question I have is: if the cap is raised to \$200,000, would that not lead to increased cases being brought through the civil courts? If that's the case, Mr. Chair, what plans does the government have to support the lower courts in increasing their capacity? Again, if this cap being raised to \$200,000 has a snowball effect or a knock-on effect, has the government planned for this? Have they accounted for it? I would imagine that Executive Council would've thought this through, that this is likely one of the consequences that would stem from increasing the cap from \$50,000 to \$200,000. If they haven't thought of that, well, I mean, that's – you know, happy that the opposition has identified that. So the logical question is: well, then, how do we support the lower courts to be able to deal with this increased caseload and workload?

The next question is a simple one: when does cabinet expect that they're going to amend the regulation on the cap? Is this an urgent issue? Is this one of the top priorities for government? I don't want to diminish the importance of this change, but I do know that when I talk to my constituents and when I talk to Albertans in general, you know, on issues that are urgent or pressing, this isn't one of the issues that is raised to me. Again, I'm not trying to diminish the value of this change, but when I think about urgent and pressing issues, I think about our health care system and the strain that it's under. I think about the number of kids who can't get in to see doctors within a reasonable time frame. There are a number of hospitals that have brought in temporary trailers to act as waiting rooms. That's unheard of in my lifetime. I've spent getting close to five decades on this planet and lived in Alberta my whole life and have not heard of that in the past.

3:20

When I think about, you know, urgency and what should be a priority and top of mind for government, I think about affordability. I think about – every Albertan at every door that I’ve knocked on for the last couple of months raises the issue of inflation, rising costs, whether it’s gasoline at the pumps, whether it’s paying for food in the grocery store, and I’ve heard time and time again stories of families that have completely changed their diet because they simply cannot afford to eat the way they did. Mr. Chair, we’re not talking about families going out and buying steak and lobster dinners often or even from time to time. We’re talking about some basic, staple food. Costs have risen so much so that they just simply can’t afford it.

I appreciate that we are debating Bill 2, that deals with the government’s approach to addressing rising costs and inflation. Of course, you know, the opposition has some difference of opinion in how to best address that. I can say that I supported Bill 2 in its second reading because I think that there are some initiatives in there that will help families, but when we look at issues that are most pressing for Albertans, from what I’ve heard on the doorsteps, it’s rising costs and it’s the crisis in health care.

You know, to come back to this bill, Mr. Chair, when does cabinet expect that they’re going to amend the regulation on this cap? I would appreciate getting an answer to that throughout Committee of the Whole.

The next section I’m going to talk about here is the Referendum Act and that within this piece of legislation makes it clear that nonconstitutional referendums do not require a motion by the Assembly prior to them being ordered. Of course, constitutional referendums will require the passage of a motion by the Legislative Assembly prior to being ordered.

I appreciate the comments that my colleague gave just around, you know, the use of referendums and when we use them. I think there definitely is a time and a place for a referendum. I do think, and I’m sure you have as well, Mr. Chair, that when we go and speak to grade 6 classes who study provincial government in the grade 6 curriculum, we talk about the difference between direct democracy and representative democracy. You know, of course, direct democracy many, many years ago was the common style of governance. However, today I can’t even imagine a country like Canada trying to implement direct democracy, where we’re going to the citizens every time we want to make a decision. Naturally, our representative democracy, I think, has served, for the most part, our citizens quite well. Having said that, there are times when governments have chosen to go to a referendum, to its citizens to enable them within a four-year term to have a say on a specific issue.

I appreciate that my colleague the Justice critic had mentioned in his comments that, you know, given the choice, he prefers that decisions are made, for the most part, through this Assembly. We are all elected to represent our constituents. But that’s a smaller change to the Referendum Act.

Two acts to go, Mr. Chair. One is the Sale of Goods Act, and that one, quite frankly, I’m still trying to sink my teeth into, just the changes that it’s made. My initial understanding of this is, really, under the Sale of Goods Act, making changes to the provincial act to align with the federal government and – I shouldn’t say “federal government” – federal legislation.

Section 25 specifically removes the need to keep a record of the vehicle and registration that delivered the grain to the elevator. Now, my interpretation and understanding of that: yes, it’s bringing it in line. You know, if this is going to make it more efficient and reduce an extra burden, then I’m in favour of it. If, again, industry

has said, “Listen, we don’t need this; once upon a time we did; today we don’t,” then I’m completely in support of that. A question I know other colleagues have asked is: who has the government consulted with? My hope is that the agricultural sector and some of the associations have weighed in on this, and if they haven’t, then, I mean, that’s a pretty big flag for me. My hope is that there was consultation and engagement with our agricultural sector on this change.

It also changes “track buyer” to “grain dealer.” Once again, you know, if it’s just cleaning up legislation, then that’s great. If there’s an additional benefit of reducing some red tape for our hard-working farmers, then I’m also in support of that.

Finally, Mr. Chair, the Trustee Act. Now, these changes: my understanding is that they address concerns that were raised under Bill 12 from our spring session. It makes changes to the new Trustee Act that removes the need for a trust to be transferred to the courts if there’s no trustee and clarifies that in these situations the trust remains intact until a new trustee is appointed. Again, if this provides a little bit more continuity and simplicity to a system and ensures that people aren’t being bounced around and having to go through a lengthy and complicated process, then, absolutely, I’m in support of this change.

Again, you know, Mr. Chair, I appreciate that this bill amends six different pieces of legislation, is looking to provide some clarification for some, bringing other pieces in line with federal legislation. I recognize that and the need for that, but I can’t help but think about the other pressing, urgent issues that the government should be working on, whether through legislation or through regulations or just programs and supports. Again, Albertans are struggling.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others with comments or questions? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It’s a privilege to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 5, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2). I have appreciated the points made by my colleagues so far this afternoon on this legislation and through the entirety of the discussion on this bill, and I, too, have some questions that I’m hopeful we can maybe have addressed as we continue through this debate.

I do think that there are some pieces, as the last speaker did, within this legislation that are removing red tape, that are going to streamline some of the process, and I think that is important. Of course, some changes to the Sale of Goods Act, which were previously described – the previous member, honestly, did quite a good job of going through the entirety of this legislation, so I likely won’t spend as much time on every piece as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but I do appreciate, again, some of the streamlining of pieces specific to the Sale of Goods Act, specific to the Trustee Act.

I do, however, have some questions that likely have been brought up so far. Again, hopefully, we can receive some answers. Just looking at the Provincial Court civil claims limit amendment act, as many speakers have already, I find this change interesting, looking at civil claims and the limit currently being \$50,000 and moving up to a maximum of \$200,000. The government is expressing that this is going to reduce pressures on courts and enable more Albertans to file small claims at the provincial level as per the alberta.ca website and the briefing on this Bill 5.

3:30

But I am a little hesitant surrounding this. You know, I would appreciate it if the government is willing to provide some more detail and some more context to what that might look like at a

higher court, if it's going to reduce some of the strains there, because we, I think, have all heard stories of the strain that is happening in our higher courts. I agree that anything we can do to alleviate some of that pressure is a valuable undertaking, but I don't think that this government has been very clear about how that is actually going to play out.

I mean, the fact is that, again, we've heard stories about the underfunding of legal aid and cuts that this government has previously made to the victims of crime fund. I mean, these are two essential portions of our justice system, and unfortunately this current government has continued to underfund these programs, even to the point of defence lawyers in our justice system going on strike. I think that while some of them have potentially come back to the table and maybe even come to some agreement, Mr. Chair – and maybe somebody would like to correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that as per an article from CBA *National*, the Canadian Bar Association's website, nationalmagazine.ca, they have brought forward that these concerns continue now and likely into the future.

We have some major problems within our justice system, so it is somewhat interesting to see the priorities that this government is putting forward, and I would be interested to hear if there's any expectation that some of those challenges are going to be alleviated. But, at the end of the day, when we talk about the importance of supporting justice within our legal system, the idea of the continued underfunding of legal aid is something that needs to be tackled, and it's something that this government has not been able to address up to this point. It's deeply concerning for social justice and just as a representative of my community and a citizen that wants to see everyone have equal representation under the law.

With that being said, just looking again at this idea of moving from \$50,000 to a maximum limit of \$200,000, I am interested, as the critic for Service Alberta, in how this might affect other pieces of legislation. Of course, this government previously made amendments to the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act with Bill 3 in previous times in the Legislature, and in that legislation or that amendment act it talks about the idea of this \$50,000 limit, which at the time was consistent with what is in the legislation right now in terms of being able to take this to civil court.

Now, with these changes, I'm just wondering if we might see changes to legislation like Bill 3 and, further, when we talk about, you know, tribunals within our province, looking at the residential tenancy dispute resolution service and, again, the tribunal opportunities there to keep these types of cases out of the court system, if we are going to be needing to look at adjustments there, if there's any thought from the minister for Service Alberta in regard to the limit of \$50,000 before no longer being able to use the residential tenancy dispute resolution service tribunal process, if that is going to change at all. I would hope to hear an answer on that, if there's any expectation or thought around the process of potentially increasing that as well.

Just looking at the idea of the changes around the Referendum Act – I think members have spoken at length on this piece from the opposition – and just looking at the amendments through Bill 5 regarding the Referendum Act with interest, you know, again, the alberta.ca website talks about clarifying the requirement to bring a resolution to the Legislature and that it only applies to constitutional questions. It's really, Mr. Chair, giving me flashbacks to Bill 1, which, of course, we weren't debating too, too long ago in this House, and the idea of this Legislature now deciding what is and isn't constitutional. Of course, at the time opposition members made it very clear that we as a provincial Legislature should not be making those decisions, that those should be decided by our higher courts.

But this government has given themselves the power, until it's potentially challenged and loses or wins – I, of course, can't try and foreshadow what might happen there or if it will happen. But this government has tried to give themselves the power to deem what is or isn't constitutional within the provincial Legislature and within our jurisdiction. So it's interesting to see these changes around the idea of, again, not having to bring forward the resolution to the Legislature around the idea of a specific referendum unless it's constitutional.

Further, we have a government that is now saying: we will decide what is and isn't constitutional. So I am interested to see what this government has in mind for the future, if we are going to see this play out and, you know, what pieces of legislation or federal jurisdiction this government might decide to try and, I guess, judge whether it be constitutional or whether it not be and if they try to put forward a referendum under this amendment even if it is clearly within the Constitution or regarding the Constitution, Mr. Chair.

There are definitely questions that I continue to have regarding this legislation. I think that, overall, there are some valuable changes that are happening here in terms of streamlining pieces, but there are questions that I'm left with. Hopefully, we will hear from the government regarding potentially specific changes around the current limit of \$50,000 going up to \$200,000, the idea that this is going to reduce pressure on the courts, if the government is going to be providing any additional supports to our lower courts, among other things.

You know, Mr. Chair, at the end of the day, as previous members have said, this isn't addressing many of the concerns that we have ongoing in Alberta regarding our health care crisis, regarding our inflation crisis and the many Albertans who find themselves struggling to make it day to day, again, faced with a government that is putting forward legislation that in many cases is not going to support them.

With that being said, Mr. Chair, I think I will take my seat and look forward to hearing more debate on Bill 5. I, again, see pieces within this legislation that I'm happy to support, but I do have questions in regard to other pieces.

With that, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 5, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2). You know, I've been listening to debate on this, and I have to agree that, unfortunately, this government has introduced yet again another piece of legislation that really does nothing to address the concerns that Albertans are being impacted by, things like health care in a collapsing system, to be quite honest, and lack of affordability, which is top of mind for so many. I've said it over and over, on behalf of my constituents and Albertans that reach out from across the province, that this isn't what Albertans were expecting when it came to legislation for this session. There's an affordability crisis, a health care crisis, and instead we're debating things that this government has prioritized. It hasn't prioritized Albertans.

I have a background, Mr. Chair, in working in the Provincial Court system, in family courts here in Edmonton. We worked with family and community services for Edmonton and area – St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Spruce Grove, Fort Saskatchewan, Wetaskiwin, Leduc – and I represented the director of Children's Services in Provincial Court. So I have first-hand knowledge of what it's like to work in the Provincial Court system, and I'm in regular contact with a lot of my former colleagues, whether they are clerks in the

court, lawyers both on the side of the Crown and on the side of defence, many who have over the years worked with legal aid, and many who are saying that they are no longer able to take new files.

3:40

The court system right now as we know it is really struggling. There are extensive wait times to get a matter before a trial. If you're doing a JDR or if you're doing mediation or any alternative to trial, those tend to be a little bit quicker, but when we look at what this legislation is proposing, we're looking at an increase in civil court, which is right now \$50,000. The government is proposing a quadrupled rate of \$200,000. To put that in context, the highest rate in the province is currently \$85,000. I'm confused why this government is taking its traditional King's court matters over \$50,000 and bringing them into civil court on the provincial side when we haven't seen the government infuse supports into the Provincial Court system. In essence, they're taking away from King's court and putting that burden onto the Provincial Court side without any increase of supports and resources, which simply does not make sense. We have legal aid lawyers pleading for supports and resources so that they can assist those that don't have the financial capacity to qualify for legal aid.

There are many impacts when we're looking at what this piece of legislation is going to do. For those of you that aren't quite familiar with what the Provincial Court currently handles, they handle the majority of criminal matters, regulatory offences, family and youth court, and traffic cases. That's a lot, so when we're looking at adding from \$50,000 to \$200,000, that is a significant jump in the types of matters that are now going to be brought forward to civilian court.

I question where this number came from. Who was consulted to do this? Does the Provincial Court believe that this is something that they can handle, the capacity, that increase? From what I'm hearing from those that are working in the Provincial Court system and those that have been experienced individuals that have had matters before the Provincial Court, it is not a process that is working well right now. They are struggling. We need more Crown prosecutors. We need more supports for victims. We need more supports for people that qualify for a reduced rate through Alberta legal aid.

We're just simply not seeing that. We're not seeing the government put those supports in, so why they're increasing matters being brought forward to the Provincial Court without increasing the amount of supports – it just doesn't make sense. It's going to have an impact. It's going to have a negative impact for those that deserve their right to have their matter brought before the courts in a reasonable amount of time. I question who put this number out there. It's not a number that we see anywhere else in the country. It's significantly higher, and it's going to have a major, major impact.

I know that when I was working in the court system, families relied heavily on duty counsel. There would be wait times of hours sometimes, waiting for an individual to be able to speak with duty counsel. They would come into family court – I was there representing the director of Children's Services; duty counsel was there to support families that didn't have representation yet – and just for a first appearance it was often hours of wait to have their matter simply brought forward to the judge and adjourned because they needed more time, more information, more resources. By the time some of these matters got to the point where both sides were represented by lawyers, trying to plan a court date was really difficult. There wasn't a lot of court time available. I don't know offhand what the current wait times are for court specifically, but I can imagine that it's not a quick turnaround. From when you walk in and you're expecting to have your matter heard in a trial, it is a

significant wait. That's not fair to families. These are matters where children oftentimes are removed from the family home, and they have a right to be put forward in a system that isn't bogged down with so many different matters before the court. So I'm curious how this government came to this decision to put these matters into Provincial Court.

There are pieces of this legislation that I think are good. It looks at, I believe, six different acts. I can say when I look at the part regarding the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act that this is a good thing. When we have the capacity to bring Alberta in line with other provinces and expedite enforcement of child and spousal support orders from other provinces, that is so important to those that rely on that support. To watch families be delayed in receiving those supports because of a court system that isn't flowing properly – this is great news for those families that heavily rely on this support. It's often the only type of financial support they are able to receive. Seeing that is a great step, and I am very excited that the children and spouses that are so reliant on this are going to have an expedited process in place.

When we look at the pieces and the sections that are being changed and allowed, it makes sense to look at how they're updating the capacity to allow for electronic and telephone transmission of documents or testimony. All of those different things are bringing the Alberta court system in line with so many other jurisdictions that already do that. I do caution, however, that when I was with Children's Services in the court system, we did some of that transitioning from original legal documents being commissioned and sworn to electronic versions, and it was quite a task to transition that system. That was just such a small section of the court process. That was only the Edmonton and area courts that were doing it. It was only family and Children's Services that was doing it, and it took quite a long time to transition in a way that all sides felt that it was effective. So I am expecting some bumps along the way, and I would hope that as part of this legislation they are giving those additional supports that are going to be required by the clerks that are filing, by the judges that are reviewing these documents. It's new, it's different, and it's something that requires some patience and some understanding as that process changes.

I know that there were some difficulties while we were doing it with Internet access. Some of the areas in the province didn't have reliable Internet, so it was sometimes quite difficult to get documents alternatively sworn in and presented before the courts because of the delays with capacity, being able to accept a fax or an e-mail. There are definitely some bumps in this process, and I hope that when the courts are coming forward and bringing forward some ideas and suggestions about what could help transition this process, this government is listening and providing the supports necessary to be able to implement these changes. Like I said, it's coming in line with so much of the country when it comes to electronic testimony, alternative ways to accept documents, but it's just simply not that easy. There are definitely some growing pains in that transition, and I hope that this government is listening to the workers that are doing it and providing support and patience necessary when it comes to that transition.

3:50

The other piece of this legislation that I think is somewhat concerning is the Referendum Act that's being impacted and allowing the government to make decisions outside of the Assembly regarding nonconstitutional referendums. I'm curious why this government wouldn't want to have the Assembly weigh in on that.

It doesn't sit well that we have a government that brought in a piece of legislation, Bill 1, their flagship bill, the sovereignty act, that is really going against so many. We've heard Treaty 6, 7, and

8 come out against it, we heard them come out and say they weren't consulted, and we saw it be pushed through. This gave sweeping capacity for the government to make decisions behind closed doors and without consultation.

Here we are with a piece of legislation, this bill, looking at the Referendum Act and saying that it doesn't require Assembly input. Again this government is giving themselves sweeping authority to make decisions for nonconstitutional referendums. I just question what the intention is behind that. Why not have the assembly weigh in? Why not bring it forward so that as a member that was elected to represent my community, I can bring it back to my community and talk to them about what is coming forward and what their concerns are?

That's what I was elected to do, Mr. Chair, to bring forward the voice of my constituents, those that I represent. Again, this government is taking away the voice of Albertans. It's not just the Assembly members' voices. It's not the elected officials. We're here to be the voice of those we represent. This piece of legislation under the Referendum Act is, once again, taking away the voice of Albertans.

I pride myself on my communication and consultation that I have with my community, and I pride myself on being able to share their personal stories and experiences and bring forward their questions on their behalf. That was what I was elected to do, and if this government is making changes to that, I'm curious why. Where did they see the voice of those that are elected in this? Why are they shying away from listening to Albertans and what Albertans want?

I think that we're in a place with this government where so many things are being brought forward that really don't address the needs and the wants of Albertans, and they're stepping further and further away from allowing Albertans to weigh in on that. It's frightening. It looks at the democracy that we have, and it is just another step of taking away the voice of so many that we represent.

Today I had the pleasure of having two grade 6 classes from Baturyn elementary, which is a wonderful school in my community. They came here, over 70 of them. They had their teachers with them and some grown-ups that came along, and the kids were excited to learn about what we do. It's one thing to read about it, but these kids were just super thrilled to be able to be in this space and to watch democracy and to watch what question period looked like. I had met with these two classes in September during Read In Week, and we had some questions and answers. At that point in the curriculum they hadn't really learned yet about political practice, so being able to explain to them when they were here put it in context for them.

This is a place where we want to encourage people to come and watch and listen and have their government being open and transparent to what is happening. Bill 5, that piece of legislation that speaks to the referendum, takes away the capacity for Albertans to have some sort of experience when it comes to the legislation that's being brought forward for a referendum, and that's concerning, Mr. Chair. I really don't know, you know, how to take that back to these students that are learning about the importance of having a voice, the importance of advocacy, the importance of what their government should be doing when we're debating a bill that says that it won't even make it to the Chamber floor. I just struggle with the disconnect between what this government sees their role as and what they see as the role of the members of this Assembly and the people that we all serve, Albertans, not being able to have voice in this place. I think that there's lots that could be done; however, not all of this piece of legislation is something that makes sense and that supports Albertans.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will stop my comments and continue to listen to debate. Yeah. I hope that government is really paying attention and

that when increasing the capacity, they're supporting the capacity in another way, if that makes sense.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to ask questions or add comments?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 7

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Looking for members with questions or comments. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for the opportunity to have a couple of comments on our miscellaneous statutes bill for this session. I mean, this is a common practice, that you do group some miscellaneous statutes together, agreed upon between the parties to package them so that we can help to expedite them through the Legislature. You know, again, always, when we exercise the miscellaneous statutes agreement, I like to say from the beginning that it's always important not to abuse this or conflate it as an omnibus type of legislation, where you group together a whole range of seemingly unrelated concepts and try to pass them together as what's called an omnibus bill. I believe and always have that omnibus legislation is dangerous and it's confusing and it doesn't help with the democratic process or for the public to understand the democratic process, too.

With that being said, I mean, certainly, this particular version of a miscellaneous statutes collection truly is sort of a random collection in some ways. You know, I must say, Mr. Chair, that it's all been made necessary because of the way that this new government, this new version of the UCP government, came back together again after voting out their leader and reassembling with a different cabinet and so forth. If it wasn't done in such a sort of haphazard and comically confusing sort of way – you see that built into this miscellaneous statutes act, where they literally, this UCP government, failed to cover off some of their essential duties as a government and needed to amend those things in this miscellaneous statutes act so that they could actually cover off what a government is meant to do here in the province of Alberta.

4:00

For example, there was no minister responsible for the labour code or occupational health and safety. There was confusion about other responsibilities in this cabinet, which is, I think, one of the biggest in history if not the biggest in history. As one gentleman from the *Calgary Sun* sort of comically described it, everybody is a VIP in this government, right? Maybe you can take on what I saw FIFA do when they were here in Edmonton and have a VVIP category or have a VVVIP, I suppose, category since everyone seems to have a title over there.

You know, this expansion to 27 ministers, two Deputy Premiers, 11 parliamentary secretaries is unprecedented, and quite frankly it has lent itself to the requirement to have so many miscellaneous statutes amendments so that they could literally retol and reorganize the government. I don't think it's a good way to run a cabinet or to run a

government, to run a railway, as they say, to do this. Albertans have taken notice that a government that otherwise likes to pride themselves on efficiency and making cuts and tough choices – I mean, a tough choice to make everybody a cabinet minister or something, some version of a VIP, is not really good cricket as far as I'm concerned. Yeah.

I mean, we see that this collection of miscellaneous statutes otherwise has a lot to do with the reallocation of duties and trying to cover off duties that were missed and clean up this and clean up that. I guess, reluctantly, we have to kind of go along with it because that's what the government is supposed to do. Here we are with the miscellaneous statutes trying to cover off what they forgot they were supposed to do, so let's do it now. We'll be glad to, as always, help the government out because that's what the Official Opposition is all about. You know, we're helpers, and we've got constructive criticism that can make life better not just for Albertans but for the UCP government as well. There you go.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to add comments or ask questions?

Seeing none, I'm ready to call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Also carried.

Hon. members, we're just moving right along today. This is fantastic.

Bill 6

Police Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Chair: Any members wishing to add comments, questions, or amendments to this bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 6. I do have an amendment to move, so I will let the pages distribute that. I will read that amendment into the record, and then I will deliver some remarks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Just give us a moment.

Hon. members, this is amendment A1. I'd ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to read it into the record, please.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall moves that Bill 6, Police Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 4, in the proposed section 1.1, by adding the following after clause (e):

(e.1) it is desirable that policing services be provided in a manner that recognizes the importance of intersectionality, anti-racism and trauma-informed practice as critical analytical frameworks for meeting the diverse needs of individuals and communities in Alberta.

In this bill the government enshrines some guiding principles, that policing in Alberta should be conducted in accordance with the principles that are enshrined in section 4 of the legislation. They want policing to make sure that they protect the safety and security of all persons, that they respect their fundamental rights listed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that they should co-operate with the members of the communities they serve. They ask that policing should take into account health-related situations affecting individuals' mental health,

and police should promote a culture of accountability and be transparent. These are all good principles, and I do agree with it.

What this clause will do: this clause will enshrine an additional principle in that list. The reason for that is that, as is stated, police should respond to the needs of Albertans and should reflect the diversity of Albertans. We do know that Albertans come from many different backgrounds, many different cultures, many different talents. We have a huge diversity in our province, and seeing things through the lens of intersectionality will give us a better understanding of who we are as a society, what the makeup is of our society. That will help us acknowledge our differences better, and that will also guide public policy responses that we formulate as a result of such analysis of intersectionality.

Why it's important lately in particular: we have seen tragedies in the United States which receive huge media attention, in particular the murder of George Floyd, and then we have seen tragedies here in Alberta as well, how a person from South Sudan was killed in Calgary. We have also heard concerns from our Indigenous communities. They certainly have long-standing grievances about policing in this province, and when we look at stats about representation of Indigenous communities, other person-of-colour communities in our justice system, we do know that Indigenous communities are overrepresented in our justice system. They're disproportionately incarcerated in our remand centres and penitentiaries.

4:10

This principle will make sure that we take into account intersectionality of gender, race, and all other relevant factors and try to understand our differences, try to understand a problem more holistically and come up with public policy responses in a much, much better way. Similarly, it will enshrine antiracism as a principle in the legislation. Again, we do know that Alberta is made up of people of many different backgrounds, and there have been concerns raised by person-of-colour communities, how they are treated by the law enforcement in this province and this country, and I think that having that enshrined as a principle will also help us make policing better in our province.

Earlier we also tried to bring forward a piece of legislation that would have asked this government to collect race-based data so that we can see the extent of these issues that exist in our system. Unfortunately, that bill didn't pass, but again, now with this legislation, we have that opportunity, that we have explicitly written in legislation that policing will be guided by the principles of antiracism.

Then it also enshrines that trauma-informed practice should be part of all delivery of public service. We do know that in particular our Indigenous communities have been through a lot. They have been through residential schools. There has been cultural genocide, the '60s scoop, and there are still impacts of that trauma that can be seen from generation to generation. We have enough evidence that such trauma that was endured by Indigenous communities, like, a few decades ago can still manifest itself in their current generations. So it's more important than ever before that when we know that such trauma can be seen in their generation today, we inform our policies, our services, be that police service, be that any other government program, with a lens that is trauma informed.

This principle, I think, will do a few things. One, it will send a strong message from the government of Alberta to Indigenous communities, to person-of-colour communities that the government recognizes their concerns, the government is listening to their concerns, and they're enshrining these key principles in the legislation that will guide policing in our province. The second thing is that this will also help us address the concern, gauge the concerns of systemic racism in our law enforcement. There are

those concerns. Those concerns need to be heard, and I think one way of doing that is that we guide our policing through the lens of intersectionality, antiracism, and trauma-informed practice. This will help us make our law enforcement better. This will help us instill trust and confidence of Albertans in our law enforcement, in particular those from Indigenous communities, those from person-of-colour communities.

I think it's a very common-sense, straightforward amendment, and we can all agree that police services exist to serve the people of Alberta. They should be trained in diversity; they should be trained in principles of intersectionality. They should realize that those differences exist and be able to tailor their response to the needs of Alberta society as it exists today.

These principles will serve as the cornerstone for our policing going forward and help us with community safety and address the concerns that Indigenous communities, that Black communities, person-of-colour communities, racialized communities have in relation to policing. We have shared this amendment in advance with the minister for the minister's consideration. I look forward to hearing from the government side what they think of this amendment.

Thank you, and with that, I will take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, we are on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Others looking to add to the debate? I see the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Look, when it comes to this amendment that has been proposed by the NDP, we encourage police services to include these principles in their diversity and inclusion plans or their community safety plans. Police services already have this as part of their HR practices, and these are principles that guide recruiting and employee expectations. The ministry does in fact also offer training for police services which would cover some of the points in this proposed amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to stand up and overwhelmingly support this particular amendment. I think that the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has stated explicitly why it's so important that this particular amendment be accepted by the government, by all members of the Legislature in making sure that it is incorporated into the Police Amendment Act, 2022.

I can't tell you the number of times that I hear from multiple communities, not just one in particular, that they do not feel that policing services in the province of Alberta are sensitive – I guess that's the best word I could use – to the issues being brought up in this particular amendment. So I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall when he brings this amendment that wants to focus on intersectionality, antiracism, and trauma-informed practice and including that in the framework.

Now, we have seen that in order to address these issues, you have to be intentional. You have to be intentional. That's all that we're asking. I know that it has been suggested, it has been encouraged, but if we bring it and we actually amend the piece of legislation before us, then this would include a level of intentionality that at the level of the Legislature we would like to be incorporated into the Police Amendment Act, 2022.

All we need to do is look at Alberta history. Why is it that Indigenous people are overrepresented in our justice system? It has to do with our track record of colonialism. Not only that, Mr. Chair, but you know the

greater injustice here, in my personal opinion, is the fact that it's not just Indigenous people that are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, but it's actually that a greater percentage of them are women when compared to the general population.

I can't remember the exact numbers off the top of my head right now, but I have quoted them in the Legislature before. They're as high as 30 per cent, if I'm not mistaken, in some cases, when Indigenous people only make up 3 per cent of the Canadian population. Now, you have to ask yourself: why is this the tendency?

4:20

Now, when you look at the legacy of colonialism in the province of Alberta and throughout Canada and throughout the world and how Indigenous people have been treated by policing structures and how they feel targeted by the policing services, it is – and this is where trauma-informed goes to, Mr. Chair. Trauma-informed. We cannot continue to expect this to change unless we're intentional about actually bringing trauma-informed perspectives into the understanding of policing and the relationship that exists between police and the communities that they are there to serve.

We need this intersectionality. We need the training in antiracism. We need the training in trauma-informed practice so that we can get this right. It's a huge injustice, that overrepresentation of Indigenous people in our prisons both at the provincial and the federal levels. It's something that I've called the Legislature's attention to before a number of times.

But, you know, I'll be honest with you, Mr. Chair. It's not surprising when we hear from Alberta chiefs of First Nations communities stating publicly that the Premier of the current government doesn't even understand the treaty relationship. This is not coming from my mouth; this is coming from one of the chiefs of the First Nations here in Alberta. If you don't even understand the treaty relationship that exists between nation to nation of Indigenous communities here, how can we expect you or people in general – and I'm not pointing any fingers – to then understand the trauma-informed practice as it relates to Indigenous people and the legacy of colonialism that exists here in the province of Alberta? You need to be intentional about this, right?

I see some shaking heads over here that just don't get it. It's very important. It's very important that we recognize, number one, that we're all treaty people and, on top of that, that there are specific calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission when it comes to the gross injustices that have occurred here in the province of Alberta and throughout Canada with a legacy of colonialism. How can we ever expect to get it right if we're not going to, number one, accept the truth of what has happened?

I mean, that's the whole intention between truth and reconciliation. First, you've got to accept the truth, the historical truth that occurred, the injustices that occurred. And only from being able to understand that can we then actually hope to get it right. That's why this amendment is so important specifically when it comes to Indigenous people but not only Indigenous people, Mr. Chair.

Over the last several months we know that Black hijabi Muslim women have been attacked here in the province of Alberta, specifically here in the city of Edmonton. In one of the very first cases, Mr. Chair, the woman that was attacked, when she went to go and report what had happened to her, felt grossly mistreated by the officer that was taking her report. This is common knowledge. It was actually reported. It was in the papers. Here we have an instance where someone from a racialized background is saying: I don't even feel comfortable reporting the gross injustice that happened to me, the hate crime that happened to me, the violation that happened to me to a police officer and trusting that the system, the policing service system, is going to be able to actually get this

right and actually be able to correct the injustice that occurred. So you see how important it is that this not be left to a voluntary: well, it's nice if it happens. No. We have to be intentional about it. That's why this amendment is so important.

You know, I would have liked to see the Minister of Justice get up and actually support this amendment instead of saying: oh, yeah, we encourage policing services to do this. This is an opportunity for all of us here in this Legislature to make sure that every Albertan feels that the policing services that are being provided in this province are going to respect them, are going to be able to help them feel that they are being listened to. The officers, whoever they may be – I'm not trying to point fingers at any one or another; that's not the point here – every officer will have the knowledge because we've been intentional about them receiving education when it comes to intersectionality, when it comes to antiracism, and when it comes to trauma-informed practice and having a historical perspective when it comes to injustices that have happened in the past.

I'm not trying to shame or blame anybody here. That's not what this is about, and I hope that the members on the other side of the House aren't misconstruing my statements as that being the case. That's not what this is about. This is about trying to build a better Alberta, Mr. Chair, where people, when they've had an injustice or a violation happen to them, feel comfortable enough to go to the services and the individuals represented by those institutions and that they'll actually be listened to and understood. That's what this is about.

The Black hijabi Muslim sisters who, unfortunately, had to go through all that trauma want the policing services and the individuals of those institutions, at bare minimum, to understand: okay; well, in living your life as a Black hijabi Muslim woman here in the province of Alberta, you are going to feel different. It's not the same when you have a whole – Mr. Chair, it's been well documented – industry creating more and more Islamophobia, taking misconceptions about Islam and reinforcing them and sharing them as propaganda through social media.

It's well known that here in Canada we have over 3,000 – I want to be careful with the words that I choose – if I'm not mistaken, White nationalist either websites or social media pages, from my understanding of the last report that I read. More than 3,000 of them take these misconceptions – in this particular case I'm talking about Islam – and then add fuel to the fire and go out there and try to misinform other Albertans about Islam.

4:30

And it doesn't happen just with Islam, Mr. Chair, as you well know. It happens with anti-Semitism. It happens with the Jewish community. We've seen all kinds of places of worship being attacked, and I will say that, you know, providing a grant for places of worship to put up security cameras or whatever they deem necessary in order to protect their places of worship was a good step on behalf of the government. But notice that we still have this incredible problem of people being attacked on the streets of this province, in cities, where a grant to a place of worship is not enough.

We need to put our priorities in line with this particular problem, and at the root of it is people feeling safe enough to go to the institutions that are supposed to be there to protect them and serve them and make them feel safe in their community and that the individuals who make up those institutions are going to be informed and at least, bare minimum, not necessarily understand what it's like for a Black hijabi Muslim sister but at least know that there's a difference between what she is experiencing on the streets of Alberta and someone who is not identifying the same way.

That's what this is about, Mr. Chair, to be able to understand that we need to be sensitive to the experiences of others. I get it, you know. Like, people talk about cancel culture: oh, you can't say this, and you can't say that. You know what? It's a sign of respect. It's me telling the rest of the world that I'm not going to use offensive language or sexist language or whatever the case may be because I respect other Albertans who identify in another way. That's all it is. Nothing difficult about it.

I believe that it's so important that – in this case we're talking about policing services, and I'm sure that you've heard me get up in this House before, Mr. Chair, through you to all the members here, and talk about how important it is that we be sensitive to this in all of our institutions, that we need to decolonize all our institutions, not just the policing services, but in this particular instance we're here talking about this amendment, which is being intentional about including antiracism, intersectionality, and trauma-informed practice to the policing service.

You know, if the members on the other side of the House could get up and give me an actual, concrete, rational argument about why this shouldn't be done, I would like to hear it. It doesn't seem like something that far of a stretch for us to actually include in legislation. I don't understand why you would be against something like this, why you would be against this amendment, and for the Minister of Justice, the individual himself, to get up and say, "Whoa, we're already asking them to voluntarily do this; it's up to them if they want to do it or not" is not enough. And guess what? It's not enough for Albertans. It's not enough for the Albertans in this province that feel unsafe walking through the streets of their cities and other municipalities throughout this province, and it's not fair, Mr. Chair.

Here's an opportunity for this Legislature to go above and beyond and make a change that will drastically make a difference, make a huge difference, for a lot of people, racialized people, Indigenous people. This will make a huge difference for them to feel more safe on our streets and in our communities.

I can't fathom why the members on the other side won't vote for this amendment. Like, has the level of partisanship come to that degree where – and we're talking about 30 per cent of the population. Last I checked, 30 per cent of the Alberta population, Mr. Chair, is ethnically diverse. Thirty per cent. We're talking about 30 per cent of Albertans that this would actually go to serve, and all it's doing is saying: look, institutions, be intentional about providing intersectionality, antiracism, and trauma-informed education to the individuals that make up your institution so that they can be better informed about how to help and serve the Alberta public, of which 30 per cent will be impacted, will feel safer, will feel listened to, will feel understood.

I challenge the members on the other side of the House. Get up and give me a good reason why this amendment shouldn't be passed in this House right now. I'm asking them. Legitimately, I'm asking: give me a good reason why. Or else the only thing that I can blame it on is the fact that we've gone so far down . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the floor.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment on Bill 6. I had the opportunity to speak to Bill 6, and as I indicated yesterday, I certainly have some aspects of Bill 6 that I wish to support. Hopefully, we'll see some of that move forward although I've also expressed my concerns, but it's nice to be able just to stand up and talk about something that I think would really improve the bill, help move things along, doesn't detract from any of the intentions that have been described by the minister.

I took a little bit of time to review *Hansard* records on this from yesterday and listen to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont as they talked about the bill and quite rightly talked about how important policing is and thanked the police officers in our system for the work that they do. I certainly agree with all of that. I don't think we're in an antagonistic place here.

I certainly have worked with police officers quite regularly in my career as a social worker with a specialization in the area of family violence. I worked with police officers in the child welfare system. I worked with police officers when I was at Catholic Social Services, our elder abuse program. I certainly found that when we worked together, we got great things done, and we dealt with some of the very darkest things that happen in society. You know, we had to deal with people that were abusing their children, abusing their elders. We had to do that from a place of clarity as to what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, but we also had to do that from a place of compassion, knowing that people who are in the position of becoming offenders are often there for very specific reasons in their own life, often related to their own experiences of trauma, often related to their own experiences of racism, often related to their own lack of receiving compassion throughout their lives. It means that at the time of the police intervention it's very important that that work be informed by an understanding of the circumstances.

4:40

There was a study done on one of the jails in the Edmonton area a little while ago now. I guess I've been out of the academic field for a while, so it's a bit of an aged study, but it was very interesting. What they did is they did an examination of everybody in the jail system and came back with the determination that upwards of 80 per cent of the people in jail demonstrated some level of involvement with FASD, fetal alcohol syndrome disorder. I think that's very telling, because what it tells us is that it wasn't simply an issue of people making bad choices and people, you know, who were committing acts out of greed or other kinds of self-indulgence but, rather, that people were committing many of these illegal acts because of their inability to act in an appropriate way, because of their inability to make good judgments because of the consequence of many of the negative things that had happened to them in their own lives. And the more we understand that, the more likely we are to be able to intervene and to make changes in the criminal's life and, hopefully, therefore in the lives of all the current and potential victims.

I think it's very important that we move policing in an appropriate direction. I certainly found, when I worked with the police officers, that they understood this. They weren't antagonistic to this notion that we can do it better and that we can do it better by understanding the social circumstance of the people we're dealing with and to construct interventions that are reflective of what we know about their circumstances, about their abilities, about their traumas and that having done that, we can reduce the amount of conflict that we have, not only in society but conflict with the policing services themselves when they're out on the street.

I certainly don't want to see police officers in the position where their lives are threatened or their well-being is under assault, so if we can find a way to intervene with people that isn't about, you know, having more firepower than the offender – because that always leads to a clash of firepower, and that means that the outcome is often one that's tragic, not only for the people who are the suspects or the criminals involved but far too often for the public servants that are involved. So I think it's very important that we think very seriously about this issue.

Now, I know that there's a bit of a trend in the United States, particularly, of sort of the militarization of police, you know, bigger weapons, even bringing in armoured cars and so on, and I think that's a terrible, tragic mistake. I think it's a failure to understand that you can resolve issues without always coming in with more weaponry and more focus on the violent aspect of the interaction.

I know that's true because as a social worker, when I was working for child welfare, I, you know, frequently went into people's homes as an individual, the sole person. The people in these homes were often people with significant records, often involvement with gangs, and I would go in without arms and without violence and sometimes have to apprehend and remove their children. All of this was done without any violence. All of this was done without getting to a place of forcing myself upon the family but just simply using the authority invested in me by the Legislature under the Child Welfare Act. It told me that we could work with people no matter how much they were in conflict with the law, that we could work with people in such a way that we could come to a better resolution even when we had to do things that they were unhappy with, like remove their children from their care.

This happens thousands of times every year by child welfare workers who engage people who would otherwise be considered somewhat dangerous in other circumstances very often, but the fact that we make the decision not to go in from a militaristic perspective but, rather, from a socially informed perspective: we are able to achieve, I think, better outcomes.

Now, we certainly think a lot needs to be done to work on those kinds of interventions so that we get better at them. It's something we're just learning about now in the history of intervention, and I think that, you know, we have to give some patience for policing services and their affiliated support workers, like social workers, to figure out how to move forward on this. One way we can do that is that we can put into this bill a request, as the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has indicated, that the services that are provided recognize the importance of some of the social things such as intersectionality, antiracism, and trauma-informed practice. This doesn't change the nature of the bill. It simply asks us to be supportive, to encourage police forces and their allies to think about ways that they can go about doing things to resist the Americanization and weaponization of the police forces and instead go to a set of interventions that are well informed, that are based on good science and good research, and that have outcomes that are more desirable both for the offenders and for the police services themselves.

I must say that I was disappointed earlier in the year when we made recommendations that race-based data be collected so that we could ensure that our institutions themselves are not causing some of the trauma that leads to negative outcomes. I was very disappointed that when we introduced that as a possibility here in the House, the government voted against it.

I'm asking them now not to go down that same route. This amendment does not change what it is that you're wanting to do. This amendment merely adds to it, gives it something more. It makes the bill itself more robust in its framing of the work that needs to be done in the community. I think it's a good chance for the government to say: "You know what? A reasonable amendment: let's go with it. Let's, you know, work co-operatively across the floor to create an outcome that will be desirable for everyone involved."

They could include, you know, some very specific directives like race-based data – I would certainly have liked to have seen that happen here – but given that they're not prepared to go that far, perhaps they're just prepared to go as far as this suggests, "that policing services be provided in a manner that recognizes... intersectionality, anti-racism and trauma-informed practice." It's not a directive. It's a suggestion. It's an establishment of a tone, of a manner of policing that we would like to see.

I think that if we do that, we will be able to reduce criminality in our society because we'll begin to intervene in ways that address the underlying issues that lead to criminality, and I think it's really important that we do that. It's quite easy for us to just sort of say, "Bad guys are bad guys," and therefore they should be punished. I think it's better for us as a society to say: these people have done bad things, but if we understand how it is that they arrived at the place where they've done bad things, then we can actually make the changes that are necessary.

Those changes may not even be with the individual. They may be with society. They may be with a society that is racist. They may be with a society that has too much alcohol being used inappropriately. They may be with a society that allows deep poverty amongst wealth. There are lots of social reasons why negative things happen in our society, and if we take responsibility for our part of it and then we assist and help members of our community to do that as well, we're likely to see some serious improvements in terms of the outcomes.

Hopefully, that means some desirable things for us, that means we have fewer people in jail and save a lot of money when we do that, we have fewer people committing crimes and we save a lot of money from that, we have fewer people ending up in hospitals from fights and conflicts and, you know, assaults and so on, and as a result we save a lot of money. There is a lot of money to be saved in policing if we do policing in a way that actually leads to reducing the underlying causes of criminality rather than putting more and more money into the notion that somehow we just have to be bigger, badder, more militaristic in our policing style. It's not necessary.

4:50

I certainly, as I said, have worked with many police officers who get this and who demonstrate exceptional skills in this area. They are quite able to enter into a situation and employ these social skills and come out with everybody being okay because they understood what it is that they're trying to do in their interventions. They didn't just go in saying: I'm in charge; I get to decide what happens, and if you resist me, I'm going to beat you up. They don't do that because they're skilled police officers. They are officers who understand that there are a number of ways to intervene: some of them accelerate the chaos, some of them increase the conflict, and others decrease the conflict and decrease the chaos.

So here it is. Here's a chance for us to say: look, we know some of the ways that we can decrease chaos in our society. We know that if we understand issues like intersectionality, if we understand issues like racism, if we understand issues like trauma, we can actually change our behaviour, we can change our social constructs, and we can change our interventions, and then in doing that, we can invite the citizens who are in conflict with the law to also change their circumstances so that they're less likely to find themselves in a place of conflict with the law. That seems like a pretty desirable outcome to me.

This amendment to the bill does it in a very nice way. It just simply invites the services to think about this and to create a circumstance where the opportunity to learn about this and to employ these kinds of effective skill sets will be done on a consistent basis and on a provincial-wide basis because every police service will have the same kind of mandate to do these kinds of things.

There's nothing terribly foreign about this to the police services I've worked with. Certainly, many of the police officers I've worked with can articulate these things much better than I can. They can tell you about how they have found ways to intervene that did not lead to violence. You know, when somebody is kidnapped in our society, for example, they don't always just bring in the guns; they bring in a negotiator. They bring in somebody who actually has learned the set of social skills that is likely to lead to the

kidnapping being resolved in a positive way, where neither the victim nor the perpetrator's lives are forfeited. The police officers know how to do this kind of work, and I think most of them would welcome doing this kind of work.

Unfortunately, there is a trend, I think, coming largely from the States going in the opposite direction, and I think it's a good chance for us to say: "Not here. Not in Alberta. We don't want to move in that particular direction. We want to move in a positive, progressive direction. We want to create a society in which everyone is treated responsibly and respectfully by the services that we have." In the same way that we would ask that of health care or social services, we could ask that of policing, and I expect that we will be very happy with the outcome if we indeed see police services being set up around this kind of agenda rather than an agenda of power and control over citizens, which is not a very productive agenda.

I don't think that our police services are asking for that – I'm worried about the trend I see from the States – but I think that we need to be really clear where we stand on this, and we stand in a place that says: all citizens are worth recovering; all citizens are worth inviting back into the fold, no matter what kind of activities they've been engaged in. We can do that by having intervention services that are focused on the structural reasons why people are outside of the fold, the drivers that have pulled them out of being good citizens.

I'll finish my comments by saying that I appreciate the government bringing forward this bill. Although I've had some concerns about it, I see some potential here. I certainly like the emphasis on citizen involvement and citizen review, some of the changes to ASIRT, and so on. I think that this amendment fits right into that, is really consistent with that, and will allow us to feel like we've had a fulsome discussion of what it is that we want to see in our police forces and will invite a new pattern in society that is citizen based and positive outcome based. It's not about control. It's not about the containment of people. It's about inviting people to become participants in our society in a positive way.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has risen.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I rise today to speak on this amendment. I want to commend the members opposite for raising these issues. I think that everyone in this Chamber would agree that antiracism, trauma-informed practice, understanding the diversity of the people of Alberta are incredibly important.

I know that I've been personally blessed to be able to work on a number of issues in my time as an elected official. I've worked with the missing and murdered indigenous women joint working group, where indeed we undertook lengthy conversation, lengthy research, in-depth thought, and debate to produce the joint working group report. We had an emphasis throughout all of our discussions certainly on antiracism but definitely on trauma-informed practices.

We also see that – I see, at any rate – across our province police forces are changing. They have been changing for years. The police services that came in front of us, in fact, for the joint working group: we had Aboriginal police forces, we had city police forces, we had RCMP come before us to have conversations on how policing is done. Antiracism, trauma-informed practices, looking at desegregated data are certainly also important. I will say this. I have seen a great deal of change in policing. I look to Police Chief McFee, for instance, and the work that he's done in the city of Edmonton, and I don't think there's anybody in this Chamber who could say that Chief McFee and his police force don't understand these concepts.

I recognize the sentiment behind this amendment and why it was brought forth, but frankly I think that this amendment – at this point our police forces have this in their minds at all times, in my view. I think they work every day with these values as a premise to their work. I'm not sure that we need an amendment. Although I understand the sentiment and I appreciate the sentiment, I'm not sure that this amendment is necessary for this legislation.

I just want to say that I appreciate our police officers out there who are doing good work every day to make sure that diversity and inclusion are part of their everyday work, making sure that trauma-informed practice is occurring every single day and that antiracism is something that we all take seriously and our police forces take seriously. I think that that goes without saying. Our police forces understand antiracism, and they undertake it every day.

I would say that while the sentiment behind it is commendable, I think that this amendment is extraneous to what we're trying to get done with this bill today. I think the bill proceeds nicely without any amendments, and I'll just leave it at that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

5:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment regarding Bill 6, the Police Amendment Act, 2022. I want it read into the record what we're asking, especially after the previous speaker and their comments. I just can't believe some of the things that come out of this Chamber. I mean, those comments were so tone deaf to what is happening in our province in regard to the treatment of Albertans. To say, you know, "This amendment is wonderful, but I'm not going to do it" just throws in the face of so many individuals their experience.

Mr. Chair, what we're proposing, what we're asking this Assembly to do is that the Police Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 4, in the proposed section 1.1, by adding the following after clause (e):

(e.1) it is desirable that policing services be provided in a manner that recognizes the importance of intersectionality, anti-racism and trauma-informed practice as critical analytical frameworks for meeting the diverse needs of individuals and communities in Alberta.

This is essential when it comes to an expectation of the police force and those that they serve that is representative of Albertans. We have a very, very diverse province. We have experiences that we have all heard first-hand, that we've witnessed in the news. We've heard heartbreaking stories of racism, of systemic racism, not just from individual officers but from the system itself. To ask that this be included but to have members of government say, "Yes, this is important, and it's already done" completely minimizes the experiences that so many in Alberta are experiencing.

We have a society that needs to do better, needs to come from a place of understanding, and when we're asking for an amendment to include these strong needs – intersectionality, antiracism, trauma-informed practice – I think those are key guiding principles that should be enshrined in the Police Act. It would enhance what this government is trying to do in Bill 6. I think that standing up and saying, "Yes, it's important, but we're not going to support it" tells a really strong story to those that are experiencing trauma, that it's not important enough to put it in writing, to make it part of the guiding principles.

That, to me, Mr. Chair, is very telling. When we have the responsibility in this Chamber to make sure that we are putting forward legislation that takes into account the human experience of so many, we need to take action and do something that not only

acknowledges that experience but puts real language to what the expectation is.

I've worked alongside police for most of my career in social work, whether I was working in the school system, working in group care, working in Children's Services as a family support worker. We relied heavily on the support of the police. Sometimes it was in awful circumstances where we needed police assistance to come in and to help. I can tell you that there is so much work that can be done. So many officers that I've spoken to when working with Children's Services have expressed a desire to understand and to learn more. But if that isn't an expectation or training for police, how can that come into place? You have to have legislation that supports this as part of the practice. You can't sit in this Chamber and say that it's already happening. We're talking to Albertans. We hear those horrific stories of mistreatment. To say that it's done in recruiting is enough – that's not enough.

I have sat in training sessions with EPS in Children's Services to go through sexual assault training and to assist with police members in understanding how to take a disclosure of sexual assault from a child. The interest of those members – they had to personally sign up for that. So often they had shared that they wished that that was something that was just part of their job. This gives the government an opportunity to highlight the importance and to take action in supporting our police in getting the critical analytical framework that they need to properly and effectively and compassionately support Albertans.

You do what you know until you know better. This is a wonderful opportunity to provide some very specific language that enhances the guiding principles of our Police Amendment Act. I think that encouraging their members to vote it down is a detriment to what they're claiming this act is intended to do.

I think that when we talk about antiracism and trauma-informed practice, it's essential that those serving Albertans, the first responders, have an understanding of what those individuals' experiences are. To show up at a call with that deep understanding of what it means to have trauma-informed practice is so essential. I know through social work over the years that as we learned better, we did better. We come from a place of truly wanting to serve and help, but if you don't have all the tools necessary, perhaps you're not able to do your best work.

I'm just baffled that this government sits here and says: "It's already done. It's good enough the way it is. We don't need to put that language in there." Well, that's the whole purpose of opening up the act, to be able to listen to the true life experiences of Albertans and to make sure that they are part of that act and that we have guiding principles that really meet the needs of individuals and communities in the province of Alberta.

With that, Mr. Chair, I hope that everybody in the Chamber supports this amendment. It doesn't take away anything. It adds incredible support and value to what this piece of legislation is intending to do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has the floor.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment on Bill 6. I appreciate the comments that my colleagues have made so far on this. I think, you know, first and foremost, the Minister of Justice and, I believe, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore both spoke about: in their opinion, this amendment is not necessary. I strongly disagree. I mean, I'll start off by saying, first of all, that we're adding a guiding principle. There are other guiding principles that I think augment this bill: the fact that we're talking about acknowledging the history and culture

of Indigenous peoples. We're talking about the fact that "police services should strive to reflect the pluralistic character of society and the communities they serve," that they "should promote a culture of accountability." This is a guiding principle.

5:10

You know, earlier I listened to the Minister of Justice talk about the fact that police already do this. Well, if they do this, then let's codify it in legislation. Then there shouldn't be a resistance to it. This isn't adding more work. This isn't adding red tape. This is augmenting a guiding principle.

From my experiences, I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that there are some officers who are asking for this, who are looking for more training, you know, because they recognize that the communities that they serve are increasingly diverse.

Now, before I dive into this further, I do want to take a moment, as I foreshadowed earlier this afternoon, to recognize the outstanding work that our men and women do to serve and protect. I am firmly in the belief, Mr. Chair, that the men and women who serve in our police force in Edmonton's northeast are the best of the best. I was at an event a couple of months ago. It's the annual Fort Road AGM, so the Fort Road BIA, business improvement area. I've got to tell you that every year not only do our beat officers come to this event; we get all of the senior officers from the northeast division that attend.

This year being my final time to speak at this event as an MLA – it was back in October – I took, you know, an extra couple of moments to recognize the incredible contributions that EPS has made to improve the lives of so many constituents in my riding and the fact that the northeast division has a stellar reputation for building relationships with community members. They are active in the community. They turn up to every single community event, whether we're flipping pancakes or we're at the farmers' market or we're participating in a parade or we're doing a cleanup. EPS in the northeast are absolutely outstanding.

An example of that: one retired superintendent – a retired superintendent – showed up again this year because he is so committed to the community. Tom is his name, and I gave him a shout-out. One of the nicest human beings you will ever meet and a great leader and has accomplished so much for not only northeast but for all of Edmonton and Alberta. As well, Randy, one of our beat officers who's been in the northeast forever, got moved to another division but still showed up to show his support. We had, honestly, probably around 10 EPS officers that attended by choice – not because they had to – because they are so involved in the community and part of a community. I thank them. On behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly I thank them for their service because they truly do make our community a better place and do it from a place of humility and sincerity. You know, with that, Mr. Chair, they want to find ways to enhance the work that they're doing. They want to provide an even better level of service for the community.

This amendment that my colleague the Justice critic has put forward will augment the work that they're doing. All that this is asking – I mean, this isn't even requiring additional training. This is simply recognizing the importance of intersectionality, of antiracism, and of trauma-informed practices.

Every time I listen to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford speak about his experiences as a social worker, likewise my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, I learn something new about their perspective but also, you know, the incredible service that they gave to our city and their communities. The fact that trauma-informed practice means that the men and women who serve can do an even better job, if there's a way that we can through our day-to-day practice foster a culture and be able to work with people where they're at and ensure that we're serving

them in a way that not only benefits them but can also benefit our system, then I think it's a win-win.

Again, you know, honestly, Mr. Chair, I will be shocked if the government doesn't accept this. This is a guiding principle. We're not asking them to make sweeping changes to the bill. There are already four guiding principles. This is adding one more.

But if there's one thing I've learned in this place, Mr. Chair, it is that it is important, words written on the page, that things like guiding principles matter and should be in legislation. They should be codified because entities like our police services province-wide look to the legislation, what's in there. This could result in enhanced and augmented training. This could better inform the men and women who serve our province on how they interact and deal with Albertans. This can help them do a better job.

Mr. Chair, I'm a huge fan of continuous learning and of professional development. I think everyone in every position should have opportunities to grow and to improve. I think a rising tide lifts all boats. When individuals are given those opportunities, they're going to do better in their job. It doesn't matter if they move to a different job; they're improving their whole workplace no matter where they move. This amendment helps them do that.

You know, I can talk a little bit more broadly about the fact that one of the things I appreciate in this bill is the acknowledgement and recognition of civilian oversight and the role of civilians in participating. I think that's important. I can go back to my example of why northeast division for Edmonton police is so effective. Do you want to know why, Mr. Chair? Because of the relationships that they build in the community. I did a ride-along with two outstanding officers – this was probably a couple of years ago now – and I was so impressed with the relationships they had built with members of the community, and I mean all members. I mean, even people who have been in and out of incarceration still have good relationships with EPS and help inform them so that they can do a better job.

The role of Albertans and civilians is critical. We see that all the time, how police services rely on the relationships they have with Albertans, because they can't be everywhere. A bill that enhances civilian oversight and participation is positive. It's positive for this bill, and I think it's positive for our police.

5:20

I honestly believe, Mr. Chair, that if we had the ability – and we don't because of time – to survey the men and women who serve as to whether or not they would like to see this guiding principle included in the legislation, I'm confident that there would be an overwhelming majority who would say yes. If we had time to go out and survey them, then we would. But for Albertans watching at home, I mean, the bill was tabled a week ago, we're in Committee of the Whole, and it'll likely pass out of committee sometime today and this week, next week pass out of third, so there just isn't time for that.

But in the relationships that I have with our police, whether it's EPS, the Calgary Police Service, the RCMP, or others, they're looking for these types of signals that will enable them to sign up for more training. There is no downside to including this in the legislation. This is where I don't understand when members get up and say: no, we don't need this; most of them are already doing this. Okay. Well, that's fantastic if they are. That's great. But, then, let's codify it in legislation.

Mr. Chair, I've told the story in this place of probably the most disappointing day of mine as a Member of the Legislative Assembly in my 10-plus years in this place. It was back in my first term, between 2012 and 2015, when I was part of a four-person fourth party, and we tabled an amendment to enhance a bill. Members of government, the cabinet, stood up and said: this is a very reasonable amendment; this

makes sense; we see no reason why we can't do it. But they still voted against it, and we divided.

During the division I went across and I spoke to members of Executive Council and said, "If you stood up and said that the amendment was reasonable, why are you not accepting it?" And the answer, Mr. Chair, was, "Because it came from the NDP." I can tell you that that answer is what disgusts Albertans. They don't want to see partisan politics get in the way of good ideas. And you know what? The reality is that good ideas come from all sides of the Chamber. Nobody has a monopoly on good ideas, and for anybody who thinks they do, that's dangerous, and they won't put forward good ideas. The best CEOs surround themselves with really, really smart people who help them make those great decisions and come up with those great ideas.

So that day I will never forget, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Eggen: Was I there?

Mr. Bilous: You were in the Chamber. The Member for Edmonton-North West was in the Chamber. I served with him, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and the former Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

That was really disappointing, and that's why, you know, Mr. Chair, I will give credit where credit is due and always have. When I've been in opposition and the government has accepted amendments, I will give them kudos. I will give them the appreciation that they deserve. When we were government and I was the minister of economic development and trade, I adopted a number of amendments from the opposition. If they are good and they're going to strengthen or enhance a bill, then why wouldn't I? It is the most ridiculous answer in the world to not accept an amendment because of the party or the person who is moving it.

Albertans want to see good policy. Every time I talk to a business owner, whether it's a sole proprietor, a small-business owner, or an executive from a multinational, they just want to see good policy. Frankly, Mr. Chair, that's part of the success of the Westminster system. We have a multiparty system to be able to share ideas, to come up with the best solutions, the best approaches to tackling problems.

I'm of the position: let's encourage that; let's adopt that; at every opportunity let's accept good amendments. And to say, as the answer, that police are already doing this – great. So let's enshrine it in legislation. That's not a reason not to accept it. I've yet to hear a good reason for the government to not accept this amendment. This is augmenting the guiding principles.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will urge the government to do the right thing, to accept this reasonable amendment. Let's strengthen this bill, and let's do what we came here to do, which was to bring forward the best possible legislation to serve our constituents and Albertans and make our province a better place.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise again just for a few moments. I have really appreciated the debate on Bill 6 and, in particular, this amendment this evening and want to thank, well, all of the members of the opposition for speaking to this. I'm sorry if I leave anyone out here in particular, but I want to give my thanks to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie as well as the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. I'm going to end up naming everyone here, so I'm going to stop. I really appreciate, over my last seven, going on eight years in this House, the wisdom of those

members as well as the members for Edmonton-Castle Downs, Edmonton-Rutherford – okay; I think I've named most of them now – and everyone on this side in their own respect, whether they're a social worker, whether they've dealt with these issues in other ways.

I do just want to reinforce one more time the very important point that many members on this side of the House have made, just recognizing this amendment, again, just adding in the guiding principles. We see many guiding principles here, and they all seem very reasonable. I think they strengthen this legislation. I think that they're valuable to have included in this legislation.

I was disappointed, to say the least, to hear government members say: well, you know, our police services already do things like consider intersectionality, antiracism, and trauma-informed practice, so we don't think it's necessary to include it in this legislation. But then I would argue, Mr. Chair – and I would disagree with this point. It seems that the government is arguing that none of these guiding principles need to be in here, then, if they already recognize the history and cultures of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people in Alberta. I don't think that the government is arguing that they don't already do that, but they are including it in the guiding principles within this legislation because it is valuable to have it included and codified in legislation, as the previous member and many members of the opposition said before.

Very quickly, Mr. Chair, I think this is an incredibly important amendment. I think that it is a valuable addition to the guiding principles. I think that it's become very clear, the importance of considering intersectionality, whether we're talking about GBA plus policies when we're considering any government policy, especially in cases of police matters and the idea of antiracism.

The fact is that in this day and age, Mr. Chair, we need to be more than not racist. We need to take every opportunity we can to be antiracist, to call out racism, and to uplift communities who have traditionally been affected by racism. It's not enough to simply let people, you know, just live, I guess, to not call out racism. We need to celebrate and recognize the importance of their contributions, of diversity, of backgrounds, considering intersectionality, considering ethnicity, culture, and many other things.

With that, Mr. Chair, I look forward to hearing more and eventually voting on this, but I do appreciate the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for bringing this forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

5:30

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my privilege, actually, and my pleasure to rise in the House and have the opportunity to add my comments on this amendment to Bill 6, Police Amendment Act, 2022. I understand that there's not much time for me to say this, and I also really will say thank you to my colleague who put this amendment forward and many of my other colleagues who added their important comments and supported this amendment. I don't know exactly how much time I would have, how far I wanted to go, but this issue is very close to my heart, and I've been very passionate about this. I was looking for the opportunity in this House where I could just share my views and my learning and enrich the experience of this House, how both sides of the House can come together and then do better to address the issue of racism in this province and social equality and all those.

We have a history of racism in this country. The history is deep rooted in colonial rule. We all know that it goes back. Canada was,

I now understand, not very unique. I come from the very place that also was ruled by British colonial rule for over 200 years. What had happened: Canada was probably one of the very real places where the Indigenous people of that land faced genocide, and they were systematically attacked over 100 years, 120 years, 125 years, during the residential schools, how the children were snatched from the families. Canada probably is one of the rare places in the world where you will see the mass graves of those children are being recovered, you know, day to day. Canada is the only place, probably, where we call the graduates, the people from the schools, the survivors – not the graduates; survivors – the term coined because of the history and brutality and the options and the choices and lives existed for those very people.

We also know that Canada was built by immigrants. Immigrant communities have played a very important role in the development of Canada and this province, but unfortunately every immigrant or nationality did not experience actually the same thing as the majority of the immigrants coming from, probably, European countries. They were privileged to receive welcome and support and settlement help, including in Alberta. We see that happened from the early '90s to the mid-20s while Canada was openly accepting the immigrants from some parts of the world, mostly the White immigrants. Similarly, those immigrants from other places played a critical role. Chinese immigrants, from the late 1800s to early 1900s, played and worked hard to build the Canadian railways, but they were provided with the Chinese head tax in the 1920s, one of the worst things that could happen to them in Canada.

Similarly, Indians – united India, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, many countries. The immigrants from India: as British subjects they were under British rule. They served in the First World War for the British. They served in the Second World War for the British. But they had a very different experience coming here. Coming to Canada, what they experienced was that in restaurants, in stores, in public places Indians and dogs were not welcomed. This is what they faced. This is when their light and fight against racism started. Not only this. In 1908 the right to vote from Indians was taken back, snatched. They had to fight for another 40 years, until 1947, when they got it back.

There's a lot to talk about. We know that racism is not any government's policy in this country or any of the provinces. We also know that many of those colonial practices do still exist, not only in Canada. Canada has definitely the overt things – the people like me who come from different parts of the world can see what is happening – but in many of those countries where the British ruled, those practices still exist the way it was.

The bill we are discussing, the Police Amendment Act, is very important. We have discussed this in this House many times. As a multiculturalism critic I had the opportunity with the consultation of Albertans, the consultation we had for almost 10 months in this province. That was one of the main, actually, feedbacks that we got back, addressing the issue with the police force, law enforcement. This was one of the biggest ones, that, you know, the police force, law enforcement's force, comes in many cases, to the immigrant particularly or the racialized communities, as a substitute to the support for mental health, a substitute to the trauma-informed situations.

We have seen the recent case of what happened in Calgary with Latjor Tuel, the very gentleman, a hard-working individual, how he fell through the cracks and ended up in, you know, the police. I would not call this encounter that; he was killed. A number of those issues. I know the UCP members – the family came all the way from Calgary to speak with someone from the government, but no one was available. I had the opportunity to come out and listen to them and even received the memorandum not only for ourselves but for the government members.

This issue is very critical. What we are asking is the bare minimum. That is one of the demands. There are a number of those things we can do, but adding in the intersectionality just as a guiding principle: I think this is just a symbolic change. There's a lot more to do. If we don't seem to see that we cannot even, you know, come up to support this bare minimum thing, then this is a demonstration that we have a long way to go. Our legislators themselves need to learn a lot about our own society, what is happening, because what happened a hundred years ago – probably not in the same way, but we will see that practices still exist. We will see the disproportionality of those communities when it comes to law enforcement. We need to start it from somewhere, and this is the bare minimum and a very good proposal. I would call this a friendly amendment, that my colleague has actually proposed.

I would really like to see support coming from the government House members. They had a chance. I brought forward a motion not long ago, when the government announced the Police Act review, that the antiracism panel should be formed to go out, speak with racialized communities and minorities, Indigenous leaders, the Indigenous community, and come back and set up their report, but that was defeated. Now we have a chance to do it. I would really appreciate – I would like to see this – the government House members supporting this.

With that, I conclude my remarks, Mr. Chair, and I'll be happy to see that all the members of this House will support this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:40 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Loyola
Carson	Feehan	Sabir
Deol	Goehring	

Against the motion:

Allard	Luan	Rowswell
Amery	Madu	Sawhney
Copping	Milliken	Shandro
Dreeshen	Neudorf	Sigurdson, R.J.
Fir	Nixon, Jason	Smith, Mark
Gotfried	Nixon, Jeremy	Williams
Guthrie	Orr	Wilson
Issik	Pon	Yao
Jones	Rehn	Yaseen
Loewen		

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 28
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the main bill.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also rise to now move another amendment. I can read that into the record while it's being distributed.

The MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 6, Police Amendment Act, 2022, be amended as follows. In section 28 in the proposed section 42.2 by adding the following immediately after subsection (9):

(10) For greater certainty, a complaint may be filed with respect to a former police officer under this section if, at the time the subject matter of the complaint occurred, the former police officer was a police officer.

In section 29 in the proposed section 43 by adding the following immediately after subsection (9):

(10) For greater certainty, the chief executive officer of the Police Review Commission may not dismiss a complaint under this section with respect to a former police officer if

- (a) at the time the subject matter of the complaint occurred, the former police officer was a police officer, and
- (b) there is no other basis for dismissing the complaint.

Basically, this amendment . . .

The Deputy Chair: One moment.

Hon. members, this amendment will be known as amendment A2.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Basically, this amendment protects the jurisdiction of the police commission for the review of conduct of the police officer for conduct while employed as a police officer. This aligns the professional conduct review of police officers in line with the medical profession. This ensures that an individual cannot avoid justice by quitting, being fired, or moving to a different police force. It is important for accountability that the procedure is protected in alignment with other regulated professions and bodies.

With that, I urge all members of this House to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any others wishing to speak to amendment A2? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

And, hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt . . .

Mr. Eggen: Oh, no.

The Deputy Chair: . . . but the time for debate this afternoon has concluded. The House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30 p.m. The committee; sorry. The committee will resume at 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca