



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 6, 2023

Day 13

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Barnes
Bilous
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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Carson
Dang
Fir
Gottfried
Long
Sabir
Smith, Mark
Yao
Yaseen

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Smith

Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Ceci
Dach
Hunter
Loyola
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Panda
Rehn
Shepherd
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper

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Fir
Goehring
Gray
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Lovely
Nielsen
Nixon, Jason
Panda
Rehn
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Gottfried

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Allard
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Deol
Ganley
Loyola
Nixon, Jason
Rehn
Renaud
Yao

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips

Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

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Panda
Renaud
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Stephan
Toor
Yaseen

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Aheer
Dach
Ganley
Getson
Issik
Nielsen
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Sigurdson, R.J.
Singh
Turton

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 6, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, I invite you to remain standing. As is our custom, we pay tribute to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met.

Mr. Melvin P.J. "Mike" Cardinal July 17, 1941, to January 12, 2023

The Speaker: Mike Cardinal was elected as the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche on March 20, 1989. He subsequently won three elections in Athabasca-Wabasca and one in Athabasca-Redwater, serving five consecutive terms before retiring in 2008.

Mr. Cardinal was the first status Indian to be appointed to cabinet in Alberta. He served as the minister of family and social services from 1992 to 1996, associate minister of forestry from 1999 to 2000, minister of resource development from 2000 to 2001, minister of sustainable resource development from 2001 to 2004, minister of human resources and employment from 2004 to 2006. During his 19 years of service he also chaired the Northern Alberta Development Council from 1997 to 2000.

Mr. Cardinal worked in the forestry industry for over 10 years before moving into the public sector. With an early career in the civil service focused on housing and career counselling, Mr. Cardinal entered public life serving as a member and chair of the Northland school board and as town councillor for Slave Lake. He continued his extensive community involvement on many boards and associations such as the Calling Lake Community Association and the Métis Association of Alberta. Mr. Cardinal said that one of the reasons he got into politics was to find how to improve the lifestyle of northern Alberta and Indigenous communities. With his dedication, he worked tirelessly for his constituents and the people of Alberta.

Mr. Cardinal passed away on January 12 at the age of 81. In a moment of silent prayer and reflection I ask you to remember Mr. Cardinal as each of you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

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

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Member for Edmonton Strathcona's 15th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call upon the Clerk to call for the daily Routine, I want to take a moment to recognize that March 3, 2023, marked the 15th anniversary of the first election of the hon. the Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is the first member of the 30th Legislature to reach this milestone. It may also interest you that of the 956 members ever elected to the Assembly, only 104 of them have ever served over 15 years, and as of today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has served 5,481 days in this Assembly. I invite her to the dais to receive her recognition. [Standing ovation]

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration and respect there is gratitude to the members of families who have shared the burden of public office and public service. Today I'd like to welcome members of the Cardinal family who are present in the gallery. I will call each of you by name. Please remain standing until the remainder of the family has been introduced, and we will express our gratitude to you: son Michael Cardinal; daughter Marieka Cardinal; granddaughters Aliyah Cardinal-Mobley and Evelyn Horstemeier Cardinal; grandson River Horstemeier Cardinal; brother Irvin Cardinal; sister Clarice Cardinal; brother-in-law Clarence Cardinal; sister Linda Gladue; and brother Larry Cardinal. Hon. members, the Cardinal family.

Members, also seated in the Speaker's gallery today is a skilled young singer-songwriter from northern Alberta who led the Assembly in our national anthem just moments ago. Ms Berlyn Broadhead is an 18-year-old country singer from the constituency of Lesser Slave Lake who's been nominated for five Alberta country music awards. Thank you, Berlyn, for leading us.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has a school group.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce two grade 6 classes from l'école Greenview school, the French immersion – bonjour, mes amis – and the English class. I had a chance to chat with them as well as their many adult helpers. They had great questions, including: have you ever voted against Bill 1, and why? Welcome, and enjoy your time at the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a school group.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also had a group of grade 6 students, from Elmwood school in the beautiful riding of Edmonton-Riverview. They're here with their teacher, Lori-anne Bond. I, too, met with them previously, and they had lots of great questions as well. Could they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 25 grade

6 students of Michael A. Kostek school from my beautiful constituency of Edmonton-South West, led by their teacher, Jennifer Hill, as well as a parent escort that has just joined them. May I ask you all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 33 grades 4 to 6 students from l'école escuela Holy Child school here in my constituency, just a couple of blocks away, so they had a short trip. It is a multilingual school, so I'd like to say to them bienvenu, bienvenido, and welcome, and please accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the other members someone that is close to me, and that is my daughter. If I could ask Amira to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members assembled Diane Richard, who works in the Lethbridge-West constituency office, along with her partner, Shaun Campbell, and her parents, Linda and Marc Richard, in town from Ponoka. I'm so pleased they could come to visit the people's House here this afternoon, and I invite them to rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Rehn: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you it is my distinct pleasure to welcome one of my constituents, Jodi Broadhead, who is the owner of Apex Well Servicing and Avid Energy Services in Lesser Slave Lake, to this esteemed House. Jodi's daughter delivered a beautiful rendition of our national anthem to us today. Please join me in extending a traditional warm welcome to her from our House.

The Speaker: Are there others? Was the Minister of Finance rising for an introduction?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you the mother of one of our staff members from the Premier's office. It's Janet Crnković, and she's visiting from Vancouver today. It's her first time in the Legislature. Welcome, Janet, and please stand for a warm welcome in this Legislature.

Members' Statements

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

Budget 2023

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Tuesday the Minister of Finance tabled Budget 2023. It is a good-news budget. I would even say that it's a great-news budget. It is a plan that, if passed, would secure Alberta's future by achieving the priorities of Albertans while ensuring our government lives within its means. Fiscal responsibility matters. It matters for Albertans, their families, and their communities.

Over the past four years our relentless focus on investment attraction, job creation, and diversification has secured our position as the economic engine of Canada. Budget 2023 continues the positive fiscal trajectory with yet another balanced budget, the second year in a row – two years – and a forecasted surplus of \$2.4 billion in 2023 and 2024 and projected surpluses for future years.

But what will this budget mean for you and I, Mr. Speaker? For our constituents, our job creators, and all Albertans it means we are securing the health and education of Albertans by increasing access to family doctors, surgeries, and emergency services by making sure our children and grandchildren have the education system they need to reach their full potential. A new fiscal framework means the next generation is not encumbered with a debt they did not incur. Budget 2023 is securing Alberta's future, a bright future for our children, grandchildren, and communities across the province.

Budget 2023 is a good lesson for the members opposite who are sitting here today. It's worth repeating: fiscal responsibility matters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Health Care System

Ms Hoffman: If the current Premier follows the law, the election will begin in 56 days, and we want every Albertan to know that Alberta's NDP will get you the health care you need where you need it, close to home.

The present government wants Albertans to forget the last four years and how much worse the UCP has made health care, but Albertans remember that the UCP chased nurses, doctors, and allied health professionals out of the province immediately after the last election. The Health minister even yelled at a doctor in his driveway. The UCP kicked 40,000 Albertans off the seniors' drug plan. They cancelled the much-needed Edmonton and north zone lab, a lab that would have been a game changer for timely health treatments. The UCP cancelled the child and adolescent mental health centre, saying that there wasn't a mental health crisis. What a slap in the face to every parent desperate for a therapist or teacher needing a student assessment or teenager fighting to make it through the day.

The UCP pushed privatization and chased nurses, anesthesiologists, and surgeons out of public hospitals. You'd better believe that Albertans remember the cruel and hurtful words of the current Premier suggesting that it was their fault if they got stage 4 cancer. The UCP even tried to take insulin pumps away from children with type 1 diabetes, and then there's the current Premier's ongoing plan to make everyday Albertans pay out of pocket to see their family doctor. We just can't trust her with our health care.

The good news is that we have a chance to vote for a government that will protect and improve public health care and ensure that you never have to pay to see your doctor. Albertans can vote for a Premier who cares about them and their family. We can vote for a Premier who believes in public health care, and she actually wants it to serve us all well. We can choose a stable, competent, caring leader. We can elect a government with a plan to ensure that 1 million more Albertans can have a family doctor and a health home. This spring we can stand for an Alberta that works for us all, one with better health care and much better leadership. This spring we can elect Alberta's NDP.

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

Joan Snyder

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in recognition of the life of an amazing woman, a business leader, and a visionary

philanthropist. Her name was Joan Snyder. Joan was a business leader who had a special place in her heart for the University of Calgary and their women's hockey programs. She leaves behind an amazing legacy and an outstanding gift to the University of Calgary.

This amazing donation of 67 and a half million dollars will boost research, student learning, and athletics at the university; \$30 million of the gift went to establish the Joan Snyder program of excellence in kinesiology. It will be used to help change the landscape of chronic and infectious disease research, sports science, and women's hockey. Another \$35 million went to the Cumming School of Medicine's Snyder institute for chronic diseases. This gift will sustain the institute in perpetuity and spark new discoveries. The last of it went to the Joan Snyder program of excellence in women's hockey fund for the benefit of the Dinos women's hockey team. She had actually previously donated \$500,000 to benefit the team back in 2011.

I hope all of my colleagues in this Chamber share the same sentiment and thank this woman and her family for the gift and her legacy she left behind to build a better future for us and our grandchildren.

The Rolling Barrage PTSD Awareness Ride

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about a cause that is very close to my heart, The Rolling Barrage, founded in 2017 by Scott Carey, a Canadian veteran dedicated to addressing an issue that many shy away from. For the past five years, after receiving an invite from Carola Singer, the wife of a veteran and firefighter, I've had the honour of engaging with this amazing organization, which conducts a coast-to-coast motorcycle ride to raise awareness for PTSD in veterans and front-line workers and to combat the stigma associated with it.

As the parliamentary secretary of EMS, the son of a nurse, a paramedic, and veteran, I am acutely aware of the critical role our veterans and first responders play in protecting our communities. The sad reality is that these individuals are at a far higher risk of the impacts to their mental health. The Rolling Barrage aims to assist recovery by raising awareness about the impacts of PTSD through encouraging an open and honest conversation about mental wellness. By doing so, the ultimate goal is to remove the stigma that is associated with mental health issues and create a positive culture of support.

As a supporter and rider for the past five years I have seen first-hand the incredible impact The Rolling Barrage is having on individuals and the communities it visits, but the work is far from done, and there is still much more that we can do to support our first responders and veterans who are struggling with mental health challenges. That is why I'm so proud to continue to support The Rolling Barrage and its mission to raise awareness for PTSD and mental wellness.

I would urge all members of the House to join me in supporting this important cause. By working together, we can create a brighter future for our first responders, veterans, and all those who are struggling with mental health challenges.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Emergency Medical Services

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last week this Premier had the gall to get up and claim that there is no crisis in health care. "Everything's

fixed," she said. "Dr. Cowell says so." But today we are learning that's just not true, as if we didn't already know. What's actually happening is that paramedics are being directed to dump critically ill patients off at the ER even if there's nobody there ready to care for them. This is dishonest and dangerous, and it puts lives at risk. To the Premier: is dumping people in hallways her version of fixing our health care crisis?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the member opposite on 15 years in the Legislature. But she continues to spew information that is unverified, untrue, and irresponsible. The e-mail in question – we'll make sure that we get proper information out, but we have been very clear from the beginning. That's part of the reason why we have delayed rolling out targets, not directives, on what the acceptable drop-off time is at hospital. The target is 45 minutes. That's the target across the entire country, and we're going to be striving to achieve that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the e-mail itself says, "I just found out this information yesterday . . . so I don't have all the details [and] solutions as to how we are [possibly] going to proceed with this in a safe manner." That is really a very good question. Today the Premier claimed she would magically find hundreds of nurses to fill in these spots, yet we know there are 3,400 vacancies in nursing today alone. How is the Premier going to implement this ridiculous plan safely?

Ms Smith: Well, there's no magic involved, just the good work of Dr. John Cowell and Mauro Chies, who is our CEO, going out, doing recruitment, and being methodical in putting out the call for resumés. They are systematically hiring 114 full-time equivalents. As we know, there's lots of part-time and casual staff, so it'll probably be more people than 114, but as they get rolled out at our 16 acute-care facilities, we will have off-load teams that are able to accept patients as they're being dropped off by paramedics.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, there are 3,400 vacancies right now, and this is scheduled to start in nine days. Now, meanwhile, this government has starved health care funding going on four years. The budget from last week is still \$1.4 billion short, accounting for population and inflation. Today we have more than 30 communities with bed closures. Expectant parents are driving hours for their babies to be delivered. Emergency rooms with random shutdowns, including the most recent last night in Airdrie. No urgent care. None. To the Premier: what is it about hospitals with giant flashing closed signs . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: I wish the member opposite would calm down and stop giving information out that is incorrect. At the Airdrie urgent care centre last night, I'm told, they did find a doctor, and it was not closed down. Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing in health care is that we are restoring some calm because it has been under stress for the last two and a half years. The calm, stable leadership of Dr. Cowell and Mauro Chies is allowing us to attract more workers back into the system so that we can meet some of these issues of service.

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the only person that is calm about health care is the guy who gets to take a limo up to Edmonton for a

meeting. Everybody else just sees this Premier gaslighting them, and it is not creating calm.

Budget 2023 and Capital Funding

Ms Notley: Meanwhile, the people of Calgary also feel let down. They feel that they have been completely insulted as a result of this government putting not one single cent in this last budget into downtown revitalization. When asked why the province snubbed Calgary, the Chamber president said simply: ask the Premier. So, Premier, why the snub?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no snub of Calgary. In fact, let me take this opportunity to talk about the investments that we're making in Calgary: \$541 million over three years for the Calgary LRT, \$429 million for Deerfoot Trail, \$282 million for the Springbank off-stream reservoir, \$166 million for the Calgary cancer centre, \$134 million to complete the Calgary ring road, \$59 million over three years for the Glenbow Museum revitalization – that's downtown; I know you guys don't spend time downtown, so you might not know that that's downtown – \$15 million over three years in the Repsol sport centre . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Nothing for the Calgary downtown revitalization strategy, yet lots of money to hire more political staff to write weird answers.

Here's another fact. This September another 8,000 kids are going to walk through the doors of the public school system in Calgary; 8,000 new students. Yet how many new schools are we building? One. Just one. Mr. Speaker, there are 21 Calgary MLAs over there. Half of them are in cabinet. They all failed. To the Premier: if it's not new schools, what's her solution for class sizes that are too big? Double-decker desks?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure where the Official Opposition gets their information from. We're building 58 schools, over \$300 million, 11 of which of them are in Calgary. We have got 11 projects, and as the opposition knows . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The Premier.

Ms Smith: . . . there are stages that you go through for the type of development that you have. I can tell you that both the Calgary board of education and the Calgary Catholic board have given us accolades for the amount of investment that we're giving because we followed their capital plan.

Ms Notley: One and a half real projects and a whole bunch of pretend ones, Mr. Speaker. That's all they got.

Now, we come up to Edmonton, and we know one of the biggest pressures residents are feeling is health care. The city badly needs a new hospital on the south side to address the rapid expansion of suburban communities. Families live there, all of them needing hospital care, yet once again the UCP government has failed to deliver. No plan to get shovels in the ground for the new south Edmonton hospital: four years of inaction, and now more of the same. To the Premier. I am one hundred per cent committed to building that hospital. Why isn't she?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we are one hundred and ten per cent committed to building that project, and we've demonstrated it with the \$634 million over three years that we have budgeted to put in there. I mean, as the opposition likes to point out, it takes a long

time to build these hospitals. The cancer centre: I think it took 12 years to end up building. We are committed to building this hospital. We have already begun the work on the site. I know more misinformation was given out last week in the Legislature. The site work has already begun. We're going to be servicing the site, we're going to do the design, and we're going to get it done. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for her third set of questions.

Ms Notley: The site work is not done. I would urge the Premier to drive by there sometime.

Affordability Plan and Energy Company Liability

Ms Notley: Now let's talk a bit about affordability. Despite sending out taxpayer-funded campaign leaflets touting their so-called affordability plan, these programs all start expiring right after the polls close in July. I've seen jugs of milk last longer. No more affordability cheques, no more gas tax relief, no more rebates, and Albertans will have to start paying off their deferred electricity bills. To the Premier: why do big, profitable corporations get permanent annual handouts while families are forced to pay more?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we wanted to make sure that the affordability payments actually didn't have an implication on the election, which is why that they go on after election day is over, which is May 29. May 29 is when election day is over. The payments will go until June 30, and we've said that we'll continue to look and hear from our constituents . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: We'll ask Albertans whether or not we continue to have the pressures. As we all know, leading into a winter season, when you have higher electricity charges, higher home heating bills, higher costs of gasoline and diesel: that's why we've targeted . . .

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

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason the Premier can't afford a long-term solution for Alberta families is the fact that the money is already spoken for. She wants to hand up to \$20 billion to her irresponsible friends who don't want to clean up after themselves. Every single oil and gas economist has called R-star a bad deal for taxpayers. Even the environment minister said that it violates the polluter-pay principle. Why won't the Premier commit today that no version of this backwards idea in any form will ever be forced onto the backs of Alberta taxpayers?

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the leader opposite – she seemed to like this type of approach when her boss Justin Trudeau gave a billion dollars for site rehabilitation. She kind of likes it when her boss Justin Trudeau proposes a 300 per cent increase in the carbon tax, which she implemented when she was on this side. If she was worried about affordability, she would go and talk to Jagmeet Singh, who is in partnership with her boss Justin Trudeau, and say: do not increase the taxes on Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only person this Premier is standing up on behalf of is her boss, the very companies who stand

to benefit from this giveaway, who are funding her re-election – they're paying for her ads during the hockey game, for heaven's sake – just as affordability programs for families and the Premier's \$20 billion handout to her funders will start to kick in. This is exactly the kind of corrupt, cynical politics she used to rail against; now it's her bread and butter. Why won't she reverse this program and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there is no program. All there is is an intention to make energy companies live up to their obligations under the law. For a number of years energy companies have been allowed to have liabilities passed forward year after year, decade after decade. We are searching for a broad range of approaches so that we can clear up what is now a \$30 billion liability. It didn't get addressed when they were in government a few years ago. We're going to address it now that we are in government, and one of the ways that we're doing that is that we are demanding that 3 per cent of liabilities have to be cleaned up every year.

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this is about doing the bidding of her donors and nothing else.

Kearl Oil Sands Project Tailings Leak

Ms Notley: Now, last May it was discovered that runoff from the Kearl project was seeping into surrounding muskegs and waterways. At the time Albertans living nearby were given one notice describing discoloured water; that's it. The seepage continued for months, and it was later determined that the levels of arsenic and other pollutants exceeded safe thresholds. Proper monitoring, protecting public safety, and public notice, Mr. Speaker, are among the most basic of government responsibilities in these situations; the UCP failed on all of them. Premier, who will you hold responsible for this travesty?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I hold Imperial Oil responsible. Under the law they are required to communicate to stakeholders. I think they fell short in this case, and I pressed them to not only make sure that the Official Opposition was briefed but also our federal environment minister so that misinformation was not going to continue to get into the media, because the misinformation that was in the media left a lot of people fearful that their drinking water had been polluted. There were no leaks that went into our tributaries, it did not go into our river system, and people need to know that their drinking water is safe.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, she doesn't know that. The investigation is still ongoing.

Between July and November the government had clear evidence that the seepage of arsenic and other pollutants was unsafe, yet no one picked up the phone to notify those Indigenous leaders or their communities about what was happening on their treaty lands. The regulator is now claiming it was up to the company. A pretty sorry excuse; same for the Premier. This is grossly irresponsible. This government knew about it and did nothing. Why is this government so disrespectful of their obligations to honour treaty rights?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there's no justification for any spill, and that is the reason why the Energy Regulator issued its emergency order, and that is the reason why Imperial Oil has been working

diligently to clean it up. If you actually look at the press release today, the 5.3 million litre spill is almost completely . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford would like to ask a question, perhaps he can get in line and do so, but until then we'll hear from the Premier.

Ms Smith: The 5.3 million litre spill which happened recently is almost completely cleaned up, and they will be having Indigenous leaders on the property over the next two days to demonstrate that cleanup. In addition, they are still working on doing the work to make sure that the additional seepage they found last year is going to be cleaned up.

Ms Notley: Nine months, Mr. Speaker, and this government kept the community in the dark. Shameful.

Now, in addition, they also broke their legal obligation to notify the Northwest Territories. In fact, the environment minister from the Northwest Territories said that he was in multiple meetings with this environment minister and was told nothing, further damaging our reputation and our credibility all across the country. To the Premier: how can Albertans or anyone else trust you on anything if you can't even follow the most basic law, the most basic rules, the most basic job of government?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, because I know that the opposition leader has been briefed on this, I also know that she is overstating what actually occurred here. The water did not seep into tributaries. We have testing to confirm that. It did not get into the water system and into the river, so it did not impact drinking water. Our obligation is that when it gets into the tributaries, we do have to make sure that anyone downstream of that leak does get impacted. This has identified an area, so we should have done the extra diligence to make sure that everyone knew it was safe.

Balanced Budgets

Mr. Williams: Well, Mr. Speaker, this year's budget is a testament to the perseverance of Albertans in the face of adversity. With unparalleled world-wide events affecting our country and our province, Alberta has come out on the other side stronger than ever before. The economic stewardship of this Conservative government and this Minister of Finance has led us to introduce again a second balanced budget, and we expect more in the out-years to come. Now, my question to the Minister of Finance. Please tell us, for the information of this House, especially the members opposite: if this government were to continue on the same spending that the NDP would have spent, would we have a balanced budget?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no, and here's why. The NDP increased per capita spending in real dollar terms by \$300 per person over their term. We made it a goal of this government to bring down our spending to align with other provinces. Mission accomplished. We're running a \$2.4 billion surplus. They would run a \$4 billion deficit. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the members opposite appreciate the question, as I do.

Now, given that the members opposite are stable and reliable at running deficits and our government is stable and reliable at good fiscal management, could the minister please inform our House, Albertans, and especially members opposite what the cost is to not

balancing the budget, not just in dollars and cents but the human cost to families, to Albertans, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's so much value to bringing responsible fiscal management back to the province. Strong fiscal management is attractive to investors – it attracts investment, it grows the economy, and it creates jobs and career opportunities – but surplus budgets ultimately result in the ability to pay down debt. The debt we paid down last year, over \$14 billion, is saving Albertans \$560 million in debt-service costs this next year alone, equivalent to 4,100 teachers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know even the members opposite are happy to hear that answer, as we all are in this House.

Now, given that difficult events have shaken the world economy in the past and given the irresponsible position that the NDP government left our government in when we came into power in 2019 and given the diligent work that we have done to pursue two balanced budgets in a row through the difficulties of a pandemic and world-wide oil price crashes, can the minister please let this House know what decisions he made in the past that he made now and will make in the future to continue having balanced budgets in this province?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, during the dark days, during the pandemic, during the time of the energy price crash, and during the time of the related global recession we set three fiscal anchors. We would keep our net debt to GDP ratio below 30 per cent. Mission accomplished. We're below 10. We would align our per capita spending with that of other provinces. Mission accomplished. We've aligned this year. We would bring a balanced budget. We did that last year and this year right through the fiscal plan. Mission accomplished. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order.

2:10 Calgary LRT Green Line Funding

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Don Braid reports that the Premier is upset with his latest column, pointing out how the MLAs and ministers in the UCP who claimed to be representing Calgary were silent as Calgary and its priorities were ignored in the recent budget. This is the latest from a government that has seemingly dedicated itself to ignoring Alberta's largest city. Since they are apparently unable to identify a single Calgary priority, let me give them one. Will the Premier rise and commit to supporting the full vision of the green line LRT?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have been clear and transparent in Budget '23 around our capital plan, the fact that this government supports LRT expansion in both Calgary and Edmonton. We've been clear and transparent. Moreover, this government has... [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Okay.

Mr. Toews: This government has been focused on creating the most competitive business environment, attracting investment, creating jobs, bringing this province back to fiscal responsibility with a balanced budget.

Member Ceci: Zero for Calgary downtown is an insult. Given that this UCP government has made it clear that the needs of Calgarians

are not important to them, like when the Premier refused to let the people of Calgary-Elbow vote for their representative and now the laughable claim that not a single minister in this government actually knows what Calgary priorities are, and given that the green line is a critical project to get Calgarians to work, to school, to home, and to families, can the Premier please rise in this House and commit that despite her repeated failings of Calgary and Calgarians the future of the green line LRT will be supported and, importantly, funded?

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

Mr. Dreeschen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the opposition would actually read the budget, they would see that in the capital plan there is funding for the green line. The Calgary green line is actually in the budget, so that's just something that – there's a \$541 million commitment from the province. There's \$674 million from the federal government. This province has committed \$1.53 billion for the Calgary green line, a huge win for all of Calgary. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Ceci: Only one phase, Mr. Speaker.

Given the importance of the projects like the green line to Calgary, given that Calgarians rightly don't trust this government and given the repeated failures to support Calgary when it comes to health, education, affordability, infrastructure, and more and given that the Alberta NDP is committed to serving the needs of Calgary – the future of the green line will be safe under an Alberta NDP government – can the Premier make the same claim?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, we want to talk about Calgary. I can tell you what Calgarians cared about in 2019. It was making sure that we had a pro-growth, free-market, growth-focused government in the Legislature pushing forward for things that mattered most to them. We have a tale of two governments now. Here's their track record: they hiked up the corporate income tax, emptied out the downtown, chased away 183,000 jobs from our province. Now, the member opposite is also known as the worst Finance minister in Alberta's... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite increased the debt by \$51 billion. Now, we are not going to take lessons from them. We're not going to write blank cheques with Albertans' hard-earned taxpayer dollars. We will work with the...

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

Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me try. Calgary is an economic driver for all of Alberta, yet Budget 2022 allocated just \$5 million to revitalize Calgary's downtown, a figure so small that the CEO of the Calgary Chamber of commerce couldn't believe it. Worse, Budget 2023 allocates nothing whatsoever for downtown revitalization. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why does this government continue to neglect the needs of our largest city?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the top-of-mind issues for Calgarians are absolutely economic growth, jobs and

opportunity, health care, education, affordability. That is why this fiscal plan commits nearly \$3 billion to infrastructure in Calgary. Please, let me read this list for the members opposite. I hope that they stay quiet enough to actually hear these investments. Mr. Speaker, they are: \$541 million over three years for LRT projects, \$429.7 million for Deerfoot Trail, \$166 million for the Calgary cancer centre, \$134.2 million for the ring road, \$84.7 million for . . .

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

Mr. Sabir: Given that this Premier prioritized an extra \$3 million in this budget for her own office and given that this Premier wants to hand out \$20 billion in royalty credits to her friends and insiders and given the desperate need for revitalization of the Calgary downtown core, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs again: does she agree with the CEO of Calgary Chamber, who says that zero dollars for Calgary downtown revitalization is an insult?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I do just want to highlight a few other capital investments that we're making: \$57.1 million to support continuing care modernization – I can tell you that that matters to seniors right across our city – \$9.5 million to Telus Spark. The list goes on and on. But, again, we can't just write blank cheques. Albertans wanted to see a balanced budget; there have been no specific asks. I know that the members opposite maybe didn't work this way when they were in government, but I am committed to working with the city, with our postsecondary institutions, with our business community to bring business back . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Finance minister once said that the UCP government should do nothing to address office vacancies in Calgary's downtown and given that the Calgary downtown office vacancy rate now sits at 32.6 per cent, nearly double the national average, and given that the Alberta NDP caucus has put forward specific proposals to address downtown vacancies and downtown revitalization, to the Minister of . . . [interjections]

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

Now, this is a new experience for you to be interrupted like this, but when I call order, you can stop, and then I'll give you the chance to re-ask your question once the House has come to order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will she admit that this government has no plan to strengthen Calgary's downtown and never had any intention of creating one?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I find it very rich that the members opposite would actually talk about Calgary's economy because when they were in business, they jacked up taxes on everything that moved, added regulatory burden, joined Justin Trudeau in getting in the way of energy projects. That sent billions of dollars of capital out of the province, tens of thousands of lost jobs, and emptied out the buildings in downtown Calgary. We're turning that around. The economy is booming. Office buildings are filling up. We're bringing relief.

Affordability Plan

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that the cost of living has increased due to poor fiscal policies of the federal government. NDP-Liberal carbon taxes have increased the cost of everything. Struggling to keep the lights on is not just a common phrase but a reality for many Albertans. Our government remains committed to

easing this burden by strengthening our economy, creating jobs, and providing financial relief and support to those most in need. Can the Minister of Affordability and Utilities tell the House how the affordability action plan is working to address the financial struggles faced by Albertans?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy has recovered strongly, but many Albertans continue to struggle under inflationary pressures. Because of our strong fiscal position and balanced budget we've been able to provide substantial relief. Through our affordability action plan we are providing an estimated \$900 per household in broad-based relief alone and additional targeted support for families with children, seniors, and vulnerable Albertans. Broad-based support includes our fuel tax relief, electricity rebates, utility price protection, and more. We will continue to assess . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order.

An Hon. Member: Good question.

The Speaker: It was a good question. If I could hear the answer, it would be even better.

Mr. Jones: As I was saying, we will continue to assess inflation and cost of living and provide support to Albertans that is appropriate.

Thank you.

2:20

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the newly introduced affordability payments are only accessible to seniors, families with children with a combined income less than \$180,000, and Albertans receiving core benefits such as AISH, PDD, or income support and given that we know inflation is top of mind for many Albertans, can the same minister explain why our government chose to target these specific groups as recipients of affordability payments?

Ms Hoffman: And leave half of Albertans out.

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the minister of affordability.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We wanted to ensure that all low- and middle-income Alberta families receive targeted affordability supports because families with children face higher fuel, energy, and food costs as a portion of their total expenditures. We selected an income threshold that was consistent with other family supports, including the federal-provincial child care agreement, and at this threshold roughly 80 per cent of Alberta families, including all low- and middle-income Alberta families, are receiving targeted affordability supports. The top 20 per cent highest earning families are excluded, unlike other provinces. We also know that seniors and vulnerable Albertans are on lower incomes, often fixed, so we wanted to make sure they got those benefits as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for his ministry's excellent work in implementing this program. Given the clear need for this program within our province

and given the anticipation and excitement the announcement of this program has caused, can the same minister tell the House how many individuals have accessed this program and what other savings Alberta households have seen as a result of the affordability action plan?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of today over 1.1 million Albertans have successfully enrolled and received affordability payments, including over half a million Alberta children. I'm pleased to report that our affordability action plan is working. Albertans are seeing significant cost reductions and savings, and inflation has eased more in our province than every other province in Canada. Albertans will save between \$200 and \$400 just on gas and diesel from January to June from the fuel tax relief. Nearly 2 million Albertans are receiving up to \$500 in electricity rebates until April 2023, and we're saving families between \$450 and around \$600 per month in child care.

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

Child Care Access and Affordability

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I often hear from families in my riding about the rising cost of living. Recently constituents again are raising concerns about the struggles parents are having with finding child care. Some daycares are asking families to pay a nonrefundable fee of up to \$700 in order to be placed on a wait-list. Now, families are already paying more for basics like groceries and gasoline under this government, and of course that's due to rising inflation, but they don't need additional barriers when it comes to trying to provide for their children. Can the Minister of Children's Services please explain why these operators are allowed to charge excessive wait-list fees and why families are being left in the dark about decisions?

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's not entirely accurate. We have been working very closely with our daycare providers to find a delicate balance that allows for affordable daycare in this province to remain affordable, and that's exactly why we've been monitoring the prices in this province. We've been imposing a number of different restrictions on daycare operators to ensure that daycare fees in this province remain affordable. I'm pleased to announce that daycare in this province has decreased down to an average of \$22 per day, and we're slated to get to a \$15-per-day daycare fee in this year.

Thank you.

Mr. Dang: Given that this minister knows very well that families have to sign up on five or six lists sometimes, which means that there's a predatory wait-list fee, and given that this government claims to be focused on affordability, given that families in my riding are struggling to pay the bills while this minister is out campaigning instead, will the Minister of Children's Services create a formal policy preventing child care operators from charging these predatory, nonrefundable wait-list fees to Alberta families?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, we've been working with all daycare providers in this province, whether they're not-for-profit or are private operators, to ensure that they have a viable and sustainable and long-term commitment in this province. What we've done is that we've introduced, or we've been

able to release, 1,600 new spaces very recently. We have a number more that are coming through the channel. We're reviewing them quickly for eligibility, and I'm pleased to say that you'll see a number of new daycare spaces available right away.

Mr. Dang: Given that nothing the minister has said today does a thing for families in my constituency and given that this government is willing to give away millions of dollars in corporate handouts to oil companies and given that this government is not supporting a child care program that actually works for parents, who, when they return to the workforce, we know provide hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity, what is this government doing to ensure that child care providers are adopting ethical practices and not taking advantage of Alberta families?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I find it funny that the hon. member talks about daycare operators in this province as though they're their enemies, and that's exactly what they did when they introduced their failed pilot program back when they were in government. We do not choose between winners and losers in this province when it comes to operators. We will not waver when it comes to protecting all operators in this province, and we'll continue to respect parental choice and make it accessible for all.

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

Kearl Oil Sands Project Tailings Leak

(continued)

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start this question by expressing my support for the people of the Athabasca Chipewyan and Mikisew Cree First Nations and Fort Chip Métis as they deal with the impact of the spill and discovery of a leak from an Imperial Oil facility onto their territory that went on for months without the local communities being adequately informed. This is unacceptable, a violation of the treaty rights of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation that could have long-lasting impacts to the land and the health of the people who rely on it to live. Why did the Minister of Energy fail to inform First Nations and Métis of this threat to their health?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Safety and environmental protection are always the number one priority. Always. Protecting our waterways and our environment, our wildlife always comes first. We've been assured by both the Alberta Energy Regulator and Imperial that no drainage fluid, no water, no substance reached the tributaries. Nothing went into the waterways. It's being remediated and cleaned up. That said, communication needed to be better, and it will be.

Mr. Feehan: Given that leaving this community in the dark about a leak like the one at Kearl put people's lives and livelihoods at risk and chief and council are requesting its members to throw out the fish and wildlife that were caught since May 2022 and given that while the Minister of Indigenous Relations has found time to tweet about the budget but no time to tweet about the failure of health and safety, given that our caucus has been working with the people and leadership of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nations to offer them our support, has anyone on that side of the House done the same? Have they finally picked up the phone almost a year late?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was very clearly an obligation and responsibility of the project, of Imperial, to have notified those First Nations. That said, we are looking at improving and enhancing some of the processes and procedures within the Alberta Energy Regulator to make compliance orders align with environmental protection orders, which require communications plans and require notification. Clearly, there needs to be a better communications plan.

Mr. Feehan: Given that this crisis requires the government to take action to address the health and environmental concerns and as well to honour the rights of the community impacted and given that the affected communities were not informed for months about this leak, meaning that it could take a long time before we know the full impacts, and given that the municipality of Wood Buffalo has stopped drawing water from Lake Athabasca, meaning there is a limited supply of drinking water, what steps is anyone on that side of the House taking to get accountability for the people affected and the communities who were failed by this government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's an ongoing investigation by the Alberta Energy Regulator. We've been briefed, as has the opposition, that no substances released reached the drinking water, no substances reached the waterways. Our water system is intact. They were briefed on that themselves, but don't let the facts get in the way of a good story with the NDP.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Reid: As a rural Albertan and as the MLA for Livingstone-Macleod I am all too familiar with the need to improve rural health care for constituencies like my own. Rural farmers and families are the backbone of this province, and they deserve an EMS system that responds quickly to every emergency, no matter the time or place. To the Minister of Health: please tell the House what the government has been doing to improve EMS wait times and to ensure that rural Albertans get the help they need when they call 911.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As noted by the hon. member, each minute is critical in responding to a 911 call. As part of Alberta's health action plan we are constantly fine-tuning our efforts to improve times. In communities over 3,000 residents, as we noted in the 90-day report last week, we reduced the response time by more than two minutes. That's a 10 per cent improvement. In rural communities under 3,000 we've seen a response that's nearly as significant. In remote communities we've seen another 10 per cent improvement, chopping 10 minutes off the response time. We'll continue to work at it till we get it down even more.

2:30

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

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the demand for health care services in many constituencies, including mine, has outpaced supply and given that the government of Alberta remains committed to ensuring that rural Albertans and their families stop

experiencing doctor shortages and long surgical wait times, can the same minister explain to this House what programs and strategies they have in place to attract physicians and health care workers to rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. As part of our strategy to attract health care workers, we are using training, using international graduates, both nurses and doctors, and we are actually having success at this point in time. AHS has recruited 28 physicians to rural Alberta and added 278 more registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and health care aides since November. In addition, EMS has added 39 front-line staff, including paramedics and emergency communications officers, over the last three months in rural areas, and we're going to continue to add staff.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, thank you and to the minister, through you. Given that the RESIDE program commenced in 2021 to give more family doctors the opportunity to start their careers in rural Alberta and given that in 2022 the Ministry of Advanced Education created over 2,400 new seats in nursing, health care aide, and paramedicine programs at postsecondary institutions across our province, can the Minister of Advanced Education explain what their ministry is doing to help regional postsecondary institutions in delivering medical education to improve health care services in rural Alberta?

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member said, you know, in the last budget we allocated approximately \$30 million to create 2,400 new spaces – that's in nursing; that's in paramedicine and health care aides – and we're continuing that in this budget. In fact, this budget contains \$95 million to support growing our health care capacity. That will allow us to create 2,500 additional spaces, again, in high-demand programs, in health care, in nursing, and in other areas. As well, as the Minister of Health mentioned, we're also working to support internationally educated nurses to support that capacity.

School Construction

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, education is a path to a better life. It's the foundation upon which our society is built, and it brings growth, opportunity, security, and prosperity to Alberta families. Every child deserves to learn at a comfortable, safe school with well-supported teachers who are teaching a future-focused curriculum. However, the current government has failed on all accounts. Why don't they care about growth, security, and prosperity for the next generation of Albertans? Why have they failed Alberta students and families so much?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, a ludicrous statement from the member opposite. In fact, when I started as Minister of Education, we had a budget of \$8.223 billion. Right now we're at \$8.8 billion for the upcoming school year, and \$1.8 billion over three years is what we're investing in operating capital. School board reserves have never been this high. We started at \$268 million in 2019; they're now over \$400 million. I could go on and on, and I can't wait to school the NDP tomorrow.

Ms Hoffman: Given that public, Catholic, and francophone student enrolment for Calgary and the surrounding area is at record rates and given that the current Premier, Education minister, and the

entire UCP government have failed families needing public, Catholic, and francophone schools, it's embarrassing that the minister is pumping her own tires over there while only funding the construction for one new school for the entire city of Calgary. Why has the UCP failed the Calgary families of Redstone, Rangeview, Walden, Carrington, Saddle Ridge, Cornerstone, Shaw? The west end needs a high school.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again the member opposite has not done her homework. During our time we have announced 106 schools: 58 in Budget 2023, 48 previously. Do you know what the NDP did during their time? Forty-seven schools. Forty-seven. In Calgary alone the NDP announced 11 schools. We've already announced 18 schools in Calgary alone. I could go on and on. I can't wait to school them in estimates tomorrow. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Hoffman: They like announcements, but they only funded one, Mr. Speaker.

Given that I could have kept going – the list of communities that the UCP is ignoring in Calgary is long, and it's growing – and given that this year alone Calgary Catholic and public schools have 8,000 new students and given that the UCP's fake pre-election budget only funds one construction of a school, that's 900 students, it's clear that Calgary families are being left behind by the UCP. So where does the minister want to bus the 7,100 students who have chosen public, Catholic, and francophone education? Let me guess: private schools?

Member LaGrange: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite doesn't even recognize or know that private schools only get 70 per cent funding and no dollars for capital, which is not what she wrote in a letter recently.

I'm going to quote Laura Hack, the CBE chair.

On behalf of CBE students and their families, we thank the Government of Alberta for the capital plan announcement. These extraordinary and timely investments in infrastructure are vital to support student learning opportunities within our system.

Calgary Catholic, the Calgary board of trustees, is grateful for the capital projects announced in the Calgary Catholic school division, which includes full funding for a K to 9 school in Nolan to serve these rapidly growing . . .

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

Energy Company Liability

Member Irwin: Lately I've door-knocked in Red Deer, Camrose, Beaumont, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, all over Edmonton and Calgary, and I can tell you that Albertans everywhere tell me they're furious about this UCP government's plans to give billions away to profitable oil and gas corporations to clean up the messes that they're already legally obligated to deal with. Governing is about priorities, and this government has their priorities all wrong. How can the Premier possibly look Albertans in the eyes at a time when so many are struggling? How can she justify giving taxpayer dollars away to her corporate cronies?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Companies are required to meet an annual, mandatory closure spend quota; \$700 million is earmarked for this work just this year alone, and I'm pleased to report that 15,000 wells were cleaned up last year. The Minister of

Energy and his department are currently exploring an additional liability management incentive program, but it's a program that's still under development, and it requires further engagement and consultation with affected groups like Indigenous, industry, financial institutions, landowners, and municipalities. We look forward to releasing additional information in the near future.

Member Irwin: Given that \$20 billion is not pocket change – let's put that into perspective – \$20 billion is over \$13,000 that could be given to each and every Albertan; \$20 billion that could fund 23 new hospitals; four-year tuition for over 900,000 students; the maintenance of Alberta parks for 232 years. Need I go on? We can see who this Premier's priority is, and it sure isn't Albertans. Will the Premier start listening to Albertans and not to the people who paid for her leadership campaign? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, no decisions have been made. There was simply consultation on an additional liability incentive program that's under way. This \$20 billion number confuses me; it's not in the budget. Perhaps it's the \$20 billion of investment that the NDP chased out of Alberta in a couple of years. Perhaps it's \$20 billion that they took from our children and grandchildren and put in our debt for them to repay. I think the NDP are in unfamiliar territory – it's called a surplus – and they're uncomfortable. So I recommend that the members opposite support our energy industry, as we do, and we'll make sure they fulfill their legal . . .

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

Member Irwin: Given that this \$20 billion giveaway is a huge insult to the most vulnerable Albertans and that this government continues to talk a big game about standing up for domestic and sexual violence survivors, can the Premier tell me how she can give billions to her friends and insiders yet refuse to give mere millions to the organizations doing the vitally important work to support survivors? How can she possibly justify the fact that survivors face months-long, even year-long wait-lists to get any sort of supports while her pals can just say the word and get billions? Unbelievable.

Mr. Luan: This government has stood firmly. We condemn all forms of violence and hatred. There is no room for such in our province. Mr. Speaker, all Albertans, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, should feel safe and welcome in this province.

Agri-processing Investment Tax Credit

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, the NDP attacked agriculture producers with their infamous Bill 6. Our government recently introduced the Alberta agri-processing investment tax credit, which provides a 12 per cent nonrefundable tax credit to entities that invest \$10 million or more in Alberta's agriculture processing industry. Food manufacturing is a foundational industry in Lacombe-Ponoka and all of Alberta, and encouraging the expansion will bring further prosperity. My question for the ag minister: how significant is the food manufacturing industry within Alberta's economy?

2:40

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Happy to talk about something as positive

as this agri-processing tax credit. I think it's going to have a great impact for the province. We believe that it will bring in 35 per cent incremental investment. You know, this has so many great, cascading impacts from jobs to communities to doing more with the food closer to home. We're all worried about our food and where it comes from. And you're right, sir: the NDP is still spreading misinformation regarding agriculture as early as last Friday. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is the only one with the call.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given the already substantial economic contribution of the food manufacturing industry to Alberta and given the increasing demand for food across the world, which is only going to expand, and given Alberta's strong position to incorporate and embrace further growth in this industry, to the same minister: please tell the House how many jobs and how much economic growth this industry is projected to create for Albertans in coming years under this tax credit.

Mr. Horner: In 2021 agrifood industries employed 58,000 Albertans, with 36,000 in primary agriculture, 22,400 in food and beverage manufacturing industries. We set targets for the agrifood investment and growth strategy to create 2,000 jobs and attract \$1.4 billion in new investment. We hit those targets at the midway point of the term. I can tell you that the targets, going forward, will be exponentially higher. We're talking 9,000 jobs and \$5 billion in investment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the projected growth of this industry, as just spoken about, and given its potential to create good, strong jobs for rural Albertans in particular and given the recent introduction of the agri-processing investment tax credit, can the minister tell us who should apply for it, how they should apply, and what are the parameters for them to qualify for this agrifood tax credit?

Mr. Horner: Well, first off, the bill has to be passed, so I'm hopeful that we can get that done this coming month. But companies are already reaching out to our department to ask about details, and those will be coming. A lot of excitement about what this can mean for the province. Companies are already telling us that this will be a difference maker and that it will be what lands them here in Alberta.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a statement to make.

Hearing Loss and Primary Health Care

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. World Hearing Day is held on March 3 every year to raise awareness on how to prevent hearing loss and promote ear and hearing care. Research shows that untreated hearing loss is a risk factor that contributes to isolation,

loneliness, depression, and cognitive decline. The Alberta seniors population is growing at the fastest rate of any demographic. With age our hearing may decline. Ensuring that seniors have access to assessment and treatment is essential. By making ear and hearing health part of primary care, hearing loss may be detected early and treatment can be provided.

Primary care providers support the day-to-day health needs of Albertans through every stage of life and are best placed to refer patients for hearing tests. Audiologists and speech and language health professionals have specialized training to assess and treat a broad range of hearing and balance disorders and play an important role in primary care teams.

The Alberta NDP knows the importance of primary care, and that is why we created the proposal for Family Health Teams: A Plan for Modernizing Primary Care. We conducted a review of existing team-based care models in Alberta and other jurisdictions and found that they increased access, quality, and continuity of care. They decreased administrative burden and allowed doctors, nurses, and allied professionals to focus on caring for patients. At a time when our acute-care system is overwhelmed, investing in preventative services is needed. Sadly, the UCP government has instead cut funding, and 300 speech and language pathologists lost their jobs just before the pandemic began.

Since the UCP was elected, the number of speech and language pathologists and audiologists has decreased, which means more Albertans are not able to access these preventative services. This is one of the many reasons acute care is overwhelmed. The UCP has made several decisions that have created ongoing chaos in health care. Albertans can find information about hearing and hearing loss on MyHealth Alberta, and an audiologist can be found by calling Health Link at 811.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a statement.

Recover Inc.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon is a microcosm of the entrepreneurial spirit that is Alberta today. I want to bring to the attention of this Legislature a company called Recover that speaks to our modern, environmentally responsible oil industry. Recover is working to advance the western economic corridor, and the western economic corridor was established to create jobs and attract investment through economic diversification in partnership with the county of Brazeau.

Recover is an Alberta-based clean tech company that has developed a solvent extraction technology that recycles oil-based drilling fluid used to drill modern horizontal wells in North America. When using this drilling fluid, the energy industry creates oil-based drilling waste, and despite using this fluid for over 40 years and investing hundreds of millions of dollars, industry had not yet found a viable method of recycling the waste stream until now. Recover has developed a solvent extraction technology to recover the hydrocarbons and recycle them back to the industry for continued reuse. Beyond the creation of a new recycled product, they have avoided biodegradation emissions, and they have reduced environmental liability of the waste going into class 2 landfills. Recover is also providing immediate cost savings for the operators that are using their technology.

The concept of Recover began in 2008. By 2018 the Lodgepole facility was completed and was turned over to a full-time operation in November of 2021. Since that time Recover has accepted more than 40,000 tonnes of oil-based drilling waste, recycled more than 40,000 barrels of hydrocarbons, and avoided up to 68,000 tonnes of

GHG emissions. Recover is the perfect example of how Alberta's oil industry develops and uses cutting-edge technology to generate wealth while addressing the need to be environmentally responsible.

Provincial Fiscal Policies and Corporations

Mr. Barnes: I rise today to share some thoughts from the conservative heartland, concerns that are not being reflected by this government's budget. You see, Alberta's government has a dirty little secret. Despite all the talking points and press releases this government has been steadily veering into the realm of Ontario-style corporate welfare. We have been pumping billions of taxpayer dollars into risky investments, subsidies, and other forms of corporate welfare. In fact, I've been told by government partisans, folks with little real-world business experience, that this is the way the world works and that Alberta needs to get in the game.

This is exactly what various Ontario governments have been preaching for more than a decade now. How has this worked out? The price of electricity in Ontario has doubled. Most manufacturers not dependent on the government have fled, and this year Ontario will receive \$421 million in equalization. Ontario's failures are taking down the national economy as well. The OECD predicts the wage growth in Canada will be dead last amongst its 40 member states for the next four decades. Simply put, Ontario is not how the world works best.

There is a much better alternative. In fact, it was tried and proven here in Alberta under Premier Ralph Klein and led to the creation of the Alberta advantage: the lowest unemployment in the country, the fastest growth, and complete elimination of provincial debt. The government got out of the business of being in business. They reduced subsidies and corporate welfare and focused on broad-based tax relief for both families and businesses. That is the proven path to success, and, Mr. Speaker, it made Alberta exceptional.

Friends, we can do it again. We can drastically raise the basic personal exemption on income taxes and give working folks a fighting chance. We can eliminate the small-business taxes and level the playing field so Main Street can compete with Bay Street. We can create an economy where families can get ahead, where success is based on what you know, not who you know. We have done it before, and we're good at it. We can make Alberta the most free and prosperous place in North America.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 8, the Alberta Firearms Act, sponsored by the Minister of Justice.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? Seeing none – oh, the Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of screenshots of e-mails sent from a hospital concerned about the change in EMS policy and the potential impact to patient care.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an e-mail written by a unit manager at the Foothills medical

centre emergency department stating that starting March 15, critically ill patients will now be off-loaded by paramedics in 45 minutes or less, regardless of whether there are available health care workers on-site at the hospital to take over their care. They state this comes as a big shock. They're not sure how their unit will be able to manage this, but it has been mandated by government.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act Alberta College of Paramedics 2021-22 annual report, College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta annual report 2021-2022, College of Dental Technologists of Alberta 2021 annual report.

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 203

Traffic Safety (Excessive Speeding Penalties) Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned December 12: Mr. Feehan speaking]

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise this afternoon, getting a chance to speak to more private members' business, something we don't get a whole lot of time to do in this Legislature. While we said it'd be nice if we, you know, maybe had a few more hours with which to debate private members' bills, especially if we actually got an opportunity to debate some of the opposition private members' bills – unfortunately, we haven't seen a whole lot of that, but thankfully there's more than just opposition MLAs in the House. We've got some government-side MLAs bringing forward private members' bills, so at least we'll get a chance to talk about those.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Of course, specifically, this afternoon we do get the opportunity in which to discuss Bill 203, Traffic Safety (Excessive Speeding Penalties) Amendment Act, 2022. You know, maybe I'll go out on a limb here a little bit, Madam Speaker, that I don't think there's any member of this House that has served, currently serves, or will serve in the future that doesn't think that road safety is an issue. I think there are always ways to make our roads safer, always ways to ensure that speed is left in check, and that when drivers are, shall we say, going a little bit off the rails, there are mechanisms in place with which we can deal with those situations.

Now, obviously, it's been a little bit of time since we first started to be able to debate Bill 203, so it's probably, you know, a little bit prudent to talk about some of the things that are going on here, some of which were talking about how fines are going to be dealt with with regard to excessive speed. Some of the suggestions that this makes – as we know, private members can't make any specific kind of money requests and whatnot, which, of course, this doesn't necessarily do, but at the very least it gives us the opportunity to talk about these sorts of things.

One of the things I'm always interested in hearing about – and I do realize that private members don't have the same resources that are available to them that, for instance, the government has available to them around consultation. But has the member been able to suss out, with his communications with different organizations and whatnot, around some of the changes being proposed in Bill 203 even as far as: can they even be implemented effectively? I've always said that, you know, we can come up with all the ideas, but if the individuals can't actually implement those, then they're really quite useless.

One of the things that, I guess, stood out a little bit about the bill is around stunting. It seems to be a little bit broad around what stunting is, and I believe it's British Columbia that has done a little bit more work around that. You know, perhaps once we get into committee, we'll get the opportunity to hear some further answers to questions that we'll be posing along the way here, but I'm wondering if there was any inspiration that was gained from there, because kind of comparing the two, it seems a little lacking here. I think there was an opportunity, maybe, for some duplication of the language that was a little bit more robust around stunting.

Going back to around some of the consultation end of things, I know that dealing with traffic safety can be complicated – there are a lot of variables involved – but what kind of feedback did the Member for Calgary-Falconridge get around what they heard from municipalities? You know, did they get any feedback from Calgary or Edmonton or Red Deer, Grande Prairie, things like that? I have a feeling that, you know, if the member had placed some calls, I'm sure there would have been a very big willingness to share some of that information that could be used in drafting some of the legislation. I'm wondering what's, kind of, been heard around that. Was there any contact made with the Rural Municipalities association, Alberta Municipalities association? What was the feedback there?

I think another critical stakeholder that we could have reached out to, of course: maybe some of the chiefs of police. I know there are certainly some inside routes that maybe the member could have gained access to, you know, be able to get in touch with chiefs of police, but that's another discussion entirely and not related to Bill 203 here.

Another question I'm kind of curious about, flipping through some of the language here. We've seen a threshold that was set at 80 kilometres or less instead of less than 80 kilometres. I guess, how did we land at that point? Was it just arbitrary, or was there some kind of feedback that we were hearing that, you know, the problem starts at 80 kilometres an hour, and that was what informed some of the language that's in there?

I know that currently there are provisions right now that the police do have access to around dealing with things like careless driving, street racing, again, one of the things that I had alluded to earlier in my remarks. You know, what kinds of things was the member hearing around why we need to take a more aggressive approach or a different approach other than what we have right now and making speed limit changes on highways and freeways? I certainly hear from my neighbourhood here in Edmonton plenty of street racing, I can hear going on off in the distance right in the municipalities themselves, which, again, ties back to maybe: what did you hear from some of the major municipalities, and how could that inform provincial legislation? Essentially, you know, what was the inspiration to bring this bill before us to look at this? Was there some kind of public feedback that the member was hearing about? Or it could have been from colleagues as well which prompted this type of legislation coming forward.

3:00

You know, all the other provisions in this section of the act, 88 and on, are not subject to the review provision in section 35 for the

seizure or immobilization of a motor vehicle. I'm curious why the member chose to allow this new seizure provision to be subject to review. Again, I realize that we'll get a better opportunity to discuss this in Committee of the Whole, when we're able to go back and forth. I'm just trying to pose some of these questions now for the member to get the opportunity to be a little bit prepared to try to get some of these answers when we move along there.

What other inspiration were you able to garner from other jurisdictions, not only around this seizure but other aspects? Again, I made reference earlier around the definition of stunting. What B.C. offers: you know, pretty reasonable language there. Could we have implemented some of that in this bill, and maybe why did the member choose not to do such a thing?

I should refer back, because I know that in the Second Session of this Legislature there was another private member's bill that would have increased the maximum speed on highways to 120 kilometres an hour on nonurban highways. Of course, if this was adopted, transition fines, seizures would be possibly more likely, so what kind of connection is there?

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Traffic Safety (Excessive Speeding Penalties) Amendment Act, 2022. I'd also like to thank the Member for Calgary-Falconridge for bringing this important safety-focused bill forward. Also, thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Decore for his comments and what sounds like some fairly positive views of this bill.

I believe this private member's bill is a very thoughtful and well-reasoned and well-considered initiative, and I strongly support any move that makes our roads and our province safer for all. I'm hopeful that this bill will be unanimously supported in this Legislature. The safety of Albertans should be top of mind for all of us, Madam Speaker.

Bill 203, as was referenced, proposes that all drivers caught speeding with more than 40 kilometres per hour over the limit in a speed zone of 80 kilometres per hour or less face the same penalties as those given for stunting. Quite frankly, as we see people speeding around, the intent that they have actually is stunting. It just happens to be with their foot a little harder on the pedal. This bill also proposes a change to increase the penalties for stunting to an automatic seven-day licence suspension, a fine of up to \$5,000, and a possible seven-day impound of vehicles. I think these are pretty strong measures and will act in the way that they are meant.

If passed, this bill would help to impose some of the strongest penalties and indeed deterrents, which I think is the approach we are taking here across North America – we've heard reference to some of the other initiatives in British Columbia and Ontario – but the real objective here is to aim to curb street racing, stunting, excessive speeding, and other dangerous driving habits, particularly within residential areas across the province, in urban, suburban, light commercial, and retail settings, where speed limits are typically below the 80 kilometres referenced, and to do so in a deterrent through fines, penalties, and the other measures that were referenced as well, seizures and other opportunities.

Madam Speaker, this bill would act as a material deterrent for reckless drivers, who by their actions endanger the lives of Albertans, by punishing those who continue to flaunt existing laws despite the obvious risks, dangers, and consequences. These people are flaunting existing laws, and we obviously hope that they will pay attention to the higher deterrent level that's brought in here. I wish we had made this change long ago; we could have had this

conversation. Again, I thank the Member for Calgary-Falconridge for championing this, and I know it's an issue in his community, as he has referenced in some of his previous comments on this particular bill.

I'm proud to say that our province now has some of the lowest road fatality rates in Canada, but it's not good enough, Madam Speaker. Even though we have a high degree of responsible drivers across this province – and I know many of us spend hours and hours, sometimes too many, on the highways – this lower fatality rate is something we can improve upon and must work to reduce. Remember that every fatality in this province is someone's child or grandchild, sibling, parent or grandparent, and we must do all that we can do to ensure that we create deterrents for this reckless and deadly driving behaviour. Those types of behaviours on our highways and roads are not okay, and such reckless actions must be stopped, and strong deterrents as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Falconridge are indeed key to us moving forward with this.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to share some relevant statistics that highlight the impact on the lives of Albertans of the current irresponsible operations of what I think are vehicular weapons used in an egregious manner. Between 2015 and 2019 76 per cent of injury collisions and 85 per cent of property collisions occurred in urban areas, in areas typically where those speed limits are 80 kilometres or lower.

According to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police 40 per cent of speeding drivers were between the ages of 16 and 24. Yes, they are new drivers, which means that they may not have the skills, but also there seems to be a little bit of testing of the limits in those age groups. Also, that age group is most likely to be a casualty in a collision, and 80 per cent of young adult passengers who were killed in a car crash were being driven by a similar-aged individual. That is what we hear all too often, that passengers in vehicles being driven irresponsibly become unwitting and innocent victims of this.

In 2019 22.3 per cent of fatal collisions involved drivers travelling at unsafe speeds, again referencing this deterrent, and out of 132,000 collisions, 120,000, or approximately 90 per cent, involved property damage; 11,700 nonfatal injuries; and fully 215 – yes, 215 in 2019 alone – led to fatalities. Again, that's somebody's child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent.

Madam Speaker, this is why it's imperative, indeed our responsibility, I believe, in this House to pass this bill. Our youth and young adults are the most impacted by dangerous behaviour such as racing, stunting, speeding, and other bad driving habits, both inside and outside of the vehicles involved, some inside and unwittingly becoming a part of that and some being struck, obviously, on our roads and highways. We need to do everything in our power to protect our younger generations, and we will achieve this by holding the irresponsible drivers amongst them accountable for their actions and putting clear penalties in place as a deterrent to this behaviour.

With this bill we have an opportunity to make our roads safer – again, I'll reiterate that: safer – for all Albertans: children, youth, young adults, families, the drivers, passengers, pedestrians, and workers that we all have the honour of serving in this Legislature and who all, Madam Speaker, have the right to return home to their loved ones safely each and every day.

These increased penalties were suggested by the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, right from the highest level, with the intent to save lives, so this bill should not be taken lightly when the intent of it is recommended by those that, sadly, bear witness to carnage on our streets.

In fact, I think this bill is long overdue. Other provinces have strengthened, as referenced by the Member for Edmonton-Decore, the regulations surrounding unsafe driving habits, one example

being the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act, which was passed in 2021.

Further, this bill would demonstrate that this Legislature and the government of Alberta are prepared to take joint and strong action to protect young drivers, families, and vulnerable road users by introducing new, impactful, life-saving, and property-protecting legislation. It's not just lives and it's not just injuries but a lot of property damage, whether that's the vehicles themselves or that in many cases we've seen vehicles go off the roads, strike houses, and there's been not only damage, but in some cases there's been injury associated with that.

Madam Speaker, the safety of all Albertans is a priority for us in this Legislature. We should take that seriously, and we're committed to making our province safer and life better for all Albertans, and this is an opportunity for us to exercise this by voting for this bill.

Through this bill I'm confident that we can reduce the rate of accidents. I think that's one of our objectives here. Again, in addition, this bill will increase awareness of responsible driving habits, setting new standards of driving behaviour and acting, as we referenced, as a deterrent. The clear intent and value of this bill is to effectively strengthen the consequences for irresponsible, law-breaking drivers in Alberta. It is a minority, Madam Speaker – a minority – but that irresponsible behaviour must be dealt with, and we need to remind them of their accountability for their actions.

3:10

The results of adherence to this new law may have the added impact of reminding them of the importance of not only their own safety but also that of the many innocent people impacted by their reckless and lawless actions and that we support in this Legislature being tough on such deadly crimes.

Madam Speaker, I fully support the letter and intent of this bill, and I urge all members of this Chamber to join in common cause in the timely passage of Bill 203, the excessive speeding penalties act. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 203 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join in debate on this Bill 203. I thank the previous speaker for some of those comments – they echo what I would like to share briefly with you all – as well as my colleague from Edmonton-Decore, who addressed this bill just prior to the previous speaker.

I wish that I was in the House for the introduction of this bill by the mover, Calgary-Falconridge, but I wasn't, and I, unfortunately, didn't take the opportunity to see the . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'll take this opportunity to remind you that we don't talk about presence or absence, even if it's yourself, in this Chamber.

Member Ceci: All right.

I wished I would have had the opportunity to review *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, to find out what at the time the Member for Calgary-Falconridge, when they introduced the bill, was saying. I bet there would have been some personal reflections about why this is important, because I know that, regrettably, in our home city of Calgary there have been, with far too many young people, injuries on the streets of Calgary and, regrettably, also with emergency service personnel, particularly police, who have been involved with stops of individuals on streets who have taken off and caused a loss of life.

Like the previous speaker, I do think that our roadways, where they are 80 kilometres an hour and under, or what he described as in urban areas, are the scenes of many of these stunting infractions, infractions that, regrettably, as I said, take the life of people who may not be thinking clearly about what they should be doing in the vehicle. You know, driving is a privilege in this country – it's not a right that you can drive – but if you abuse that privilege and drive at excessive speeds, speeds that call into question your judgment and speeds that, unfortunately, can have negative impacts on people in the car and on themselves as the driver as well as people outside of the vehicle, then that privilege should be suspended, and we should find ways to ensure that the legislation appropriately deals with this situation.

The way Bill 203 is talking about dealing with that, as has been mentioned earlier, is around taking the licence away, increasing the fine for that individual who was operating the vehicle. Those are two methods of increasing the current penalties that are put in place. We need to do those things because not everybody takes their responsibility in a vehicle the way they should. You know, the thing that I'm aware of that my constituents are concerned about, of course, is when speeds change on roadways and they aren't paying enough attention to the whole situation. I can remember that there are areas, in not exactly my riding but adjacent to it, where people have complained a great deal about the change from 70 kilometres to 50 kilometres, that it seems quite sudden to them. Many people, unfortunately, get tickets because they're – they used to get tickets. Once they have gotten them, they don't anymore because they're paying greater attention. But they worry and they've expressed a concern to me about situations like that, where they feel they're being unfairly targeted.

I hear people in those situations, but I don't typically show them a great deal of empathy because they have to be aware of their surroundings, what they're doing at all times when they're in, as a colleague across the way called it, a weapon that potentially could be harmful to many people if the cars and vehicles aren't operated appropriately.

The issue that my colleague and I would like to bring up and repeat and may have been brought up before is around the issue of stunting and the robustness in this bill of that definition. My concern, our concern, is that if it's not a robust, complete, comprehensive definition in the legislation as proposed, then there can be some muddiness in terms of its application. We believe there can be a better definition of stunting, a more robust definition so that problematic behaviour can be properly understood by law enforcement officers and legislated or in the courts the decision will be clear that a stunt occurred in that place.

I'm glad to hear that the Association of Chiefs of Police was part of the feedback with regard to the recommendation of changing this bill and improving it because, unfortunately, very often officers in their forces are putting their lives on the line in many cases. We know of situations where officers have been, regrettably, injured or struck down by vehicles that were stunting or trying to evade capture. The bill before us – I'll just open it up again – does have a definition of "Immediate roadside sanction: stunting." It goes on to explain how that sanction can be meted out when a stunt occurs.

When I look at the Motor Vehicle Act in the province of B.C. that is in place now, the definition of stunt is explained there. There is (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), so that's six different criteria under which a stunt can be seen to occur, and any of those six criteria, if they are, I guess, broken – not broken. If they occur, they can be the subject of action by police personnel with regard to the driver of that vehicle. I think that's something that I and my colleagues would like to see considered in this bill and will be the source of an amendment coming forward in the future when we get to that point.

The additional consultation – and I think certainly the chiefs of police are known experts in this regard, but it would have been useful to know if additional consultation took place and what the outcome of that was. As I said, I didn't have the benefit of reading *Hansard* on the original proposal of this bill, and it very well may have been in that. I can do that subsequent to this debate.

3:20

I think the only other thing that I wanted to address: I just agree with the focus of this bill being around the safety of people, not only the person who is driving but all of those who potentially could be impacted. We certainly need to have the privilege of being on the roadways a safe one for all drivers, and if some are not following that, their actions need to be corrected with things like this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 203 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on Bill 203, brought forward by our colleague from Calgary-Falconridge. Thank you to that member for this.

Madam Speaker, it's an unfortunate fact that every day across Canada, including Alberta, of course, people tragically lose their lives as a result of unsafe driving. Sometimes, of course, those who perish do so as a result of their own unsafe driving, and at other times they are the victims of other people's poor decisions. I'm sure it could be a different reason for every particular case, but I'm sure that sometimes people are just not thinking; sometimes they're being reckless; sometimes, I'm sure, they might have gotten a new vehicle and want to see what it will do. Of course, as we all know, that's not what these public streets and roads are for.

This heartbreaking reality is something that we as elected officials should think about. Vehicle stunting is defined, as I understand it, as a criminal act that does not only endanger drivers but other Albertans who may be on the roadways or near the roadways. They could be walking; they could be cycling; they could be doing any number of things. But the fact is that lives are put in danger due to this behaviour.

We need to protect the people of the province from what are needless, preventable traffic collisions. I won't call them accidents because I believe that any time someone is stunting, it's not an accident; it's a bad decision. In this place, this Legislative Assembly, we have an opportunity to act, and that is why my esteemed colleague from Calgary-Falconridge brought forward Bill 203, which proposes, obviously, to strengthen the penalties for stunting in Alberta. That would be that reckless drivers are more thoroughly deterred than they are now from endangering themselves and others and they are deterred with more severe punishments than are currently in place.

Alberta, as I understand it, is in this regard lagging behind other provinces when it comes to pursuing more severe penalties for vehicle stunting. Other provinces have previously strengthened their laws and penalties around these crimes. This is an opportunity for us to follow up and make stunting a crime that has stronger deterrents in the future than it has up till now. If passed, Bill 203 would increase the maximum fine for stunting to \$5,000 and introduce a seven-day licence suspension for anybody caught stunting. Now, I can tell you that there would be the option of a seven-day discretionary impound to be decided by law enforcement on a case-by-case basis.

Now, Madam Speaker, this is a deterrent that is strong. I know from my time – I've done a couple of tours now as transportation minister during my time here – that a seven-day suspension of a

licence and the potential taking away of one's car is a strong deterrent. In fact, even when changes were made a couple of years ago to have more of the impaired driving offences go through administrative penalties rather than criminal penalties, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and other organizations were very much in favour of that. You might say: well, why would an organization like Mothers Against Drunk Driving want to go a penalty route that's not criminal? Well, the fact is this. It's not about making criminals out of people; it's about people being incented not to do the dangerous thing in the first place.

There's something about human beings. Many times, Madam Speaker, people like instant gratification and they dislike the opposite of gratification, instant penalties. There's something, I suppose – I don't know; I'm guessing to some degree, but I don't think I'm probably completely wrong – that makes people think that if they do something terrible but they get back home with their own vehicle that night, they can have time to think about it and maybe do better or get away with it or something. There's something about that immediacy of arriving home and having to explain to those that you live with and love that you no longer are in possession of a driver's licence that is a strong deterrent.

You might in this case maybe not be in possession of your vehicle either. That's assuming that you were stunting and didn't crash it. Now, if you crashed it, of course, you may not have your vehicle anyways, but even if your vehicle is in great condition and law enforcement caught up with you, the fact that you don't get to present yourself at home with a driver's licence and a vehicle is a strong deterrent. I expect that's why the author of the bill has included that in there, because they're trying to take this particular offence very seriously.

These things really happened. There have been high-profile incidents in both Calgary and Edmonton. Both cities, by the nature of them being large cities, are oftentimes, particularly in the summer, plagued with stunting and street racing, and that creates avoidable collisions. At the beginning of September an Albertan was killed in a single-vehicle crash that authorities believe to have been the result of a street race. More recently, in October, two vehicles crashed on the High Level Bridge in Edmonton here, two vehicles which were believed to be involved in a street race.

The saddest thing, again, about the crashes like these is that they are one hundred per cent avoidable. They cannot reasonably be described as accidents. They are the result of bad decisions, irresponsible decisions by people with driver's licences that ought to know better, probably do know better, have just made a bad choice, and those choices can have such serious consequences, which is why we're here today talking about this now as making greater penalties for those serious consequences.

One of our priorities here as elected officials is ensuring the safety of Albertans, and this bill could improve that safety across our province. I'm proud to say that despite incidents like we're talking about here, as mentioned by my colleague on this side of the House, Alberta has the lowest road fatality rate of any province in Canada. Most Albertans are committed to road safety, and they know that acting responsibly is good for not only them but those they love and those they have never even met before. Everybody is safer when people make good decisions.

It's important that people that make those bad decisions are held accountable. These licence suspensions, the discretionary impounding of vehicles: it is hoped, and I believe it will be somewhat the case, that that will be a strong deterrent. It's not only a strong deterrent from the fact you won't have a driver's licence, but of course there's a social stigma about not having your driver's licence and being found guilty of really a dangerous and reckless act, really demonstrating a lack of care

for other people's lives and livelihoods. The deterrence is important, Madam Speaker. Increased fines will help with the deterrence.

As said before here – I think the member across asked a question. It was a good question. He said: were the chiefs of police consulted? My notes here say that they were, that this was actually requested by the Association of Chiefs of Police. That is what I've come to believe and understand. So there's an answer to what I thought was a pretty reasonable and good question.

3:30

And, of course, who better to consult, as the hon. member across said, than those that dedicate their lives to keeping the rest of us safe, those that put themselves in harm's way, and those that, unfortunately, have to see first-hand the terrible, terrible results of bad behaviour, that have to show up at the crashes, that have to see people in pain or dying and sometimes have to go to a home of a victim and explain and announce to that victim's loved ones that the person doesn't live anymore? Not just not live there anymore but doesn't live at all anymore. I just can't think of a worse way to make a living than having to do that sometimes, and of course . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and join in debate for the first time in this session of the Legislature to debate Bill 203, the Traffic Safety (Excessive Speeding Penalties) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Certainly, questions around speeding and bad behaviour with vehicles are something that fairly regularly cross my desk as the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre. Here in downtown there are some tempting locales, shall we say, for folks to engage in some of the kinds of behaviours that are being talked about in this bill. Of course, we have the River Valley Road, which runs just below us here at the Legislature, a nice, long, gently curving stretch of road along the river valley. It leads up to Groat Road, another nice, curving, canyonesque road, which is just outside my constituency but certainly not far from the windows of some of my constituents. And, of course, on the other side here we have 104th Avenue, which again is a multilane, nice, long stretch of road where, unfortunately, on weekends and late at night there are some drivers who like to use that as a bit of a speedway.

So it's not unusual for me to receive correspondence from my constituents raising concerns about noise late at night from street racing and other activities like that here in Edmonton-City Centre, and of course it was referenced by one of the other members earlier: the crash on the High Level Bridge. Certainly, it's not that unusual to hear of or see the pictures in the newspaper or hear on the radio of somebody who has had a crash either with another vehicle or run into a telephone pole or jumped the barrier on one of those roads. Certainly, I recognize the damage that a vehicle can do, and, you know, as has been noted by some of the other members, this isn't just about protecting other vehicles on the road; this is also protecting cyclists, pedestrians.

Mr. Speaker, I spent many years as an avid commuter cyclist. I admittedly don't cycle commute nearly as much now as I used to. I used to ride right through the winter. I did that for many years, indeed during my first term as an MLA. It's one of the things you can do, I guess, when you live in a downtown constituency and with the excellent bike network that has been built here by the city of Edmonton in the downtown and the other trails that are available. But, certainly, I spent a lot of time riding in other parts of the city, too, before that network was built, and, I can tell you, if you want

to come to understand what the power and the weight of a vehicle actually is, you know, and what speed is actually like, being on a bicycle in the middle of a roadway as vehicles are zipping past you educates you on that fairly quickly. So, certainly, I came to have a healthy respect for the impact that a vehicle can have and the damage it can do, and, you know, whether on the seat of my bike or behind the wheel of my car, I have seen poor behaviour by drivers.

Admittedly, Mr. Speaker, I'm not completely innocent myself. I've had my share of tickets as I've made my way from Calgary to Edmonton and back. At times here in the city I've gotten my own share of photoradar. But, certainly, what we are talking about in this bill are not the kinds of general tickets or occasional bad behaviour that I think we all as drivers have at times endured though I will admit that my father, during his time, was an adamant respecter of speed limits. My father in his entire life never once got a speeding ticket. He was absolutely scrupulous about obeying the speed limit. Not all of us have that level of patience and integrity.

But all that to say that, certainly, what has been brought forward here by the Member for Calgary-Falconridge does resonate with me. For the reasons I've noted, I think it's reasonable to have appropriate penalties to encourage people to engage in better behaviour on our roads and have penalties that indeed reflect the potential damage that can be inflicted by choosing to engage in some of these behaviours, behaviours, again, Mr. Speaker, that we are talking about here that are beyond the pale, and indeed I think that's what we should be focusing to ensure that this bill does, that it focuses on those extreme behaviours.

Now, one of the concerns that has been raised is that we do not have a clear definition here of stunting, so I think it is important that we consider that, and I understand that one of my colleagues may be considering bringing forward an amendment to that effect just to provide clarity. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we recognize the great importance of law enforcement and the need to give them some discretion in how they do their work and to trust judgment, but at the same time we want to ensure that when we are imposing significant new penalties, we are very clear about the behaviours that may be encompassed within that.

As has been noted, there is B.C. legislation which is similar and which does talk about stunting. It talks about the occasions where, you know,

- (a) causing any or all of the motor vehicle's tires to lift from the road surface;
- (b) causing the motor vehicle to lose traction while turning the motor vehicle;

so intentional skids,

(c) driving . . . in a manner to cause the motor vehicle to spin; so your doughnuts, which I understand people were fond of doing in parking lots and that sort of thing as teenagers. I never did have that occasion. I was perhaps not quite that daring.

- (d) driving the motor vehicle in a lane intended for oncoming traffic for longer than necessary to pass another vehicle;

Certainly, I've seen that kind of behaviour. Indeed, we do have difficulties at times with people deciding that they don't want to drive around for a block, so they take a shortcut through the local bike lane.

- (e) slowing or stopping the . . . vehicle in a manner that prevents other . . . vehicles from passing or in a manner that blocks or impedes other motor vehicles;
- (f) without justification, driving as close as possible to another motor vehicle, a pedestrian, or a fixed object.

Certainly, again, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry to say, at times as a cyclist I did experience that behaviour, where drivers, frustrated that they were temporarily behind a vehicle that did not move as quickly as them, would literally drive right up behind my back tire.

Indeed, I know cyclists who have had vehicles tap them from behind, whether at a stop sign or in motion.

I think those are all very appropriate things that would be included, perhaps pieces that could be considered, then, in coming up with our own definition for an Alberta piece of legislation as to what is considered to be stunting.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, I'm certainly in support of addressing issues with excessive speed. I know for myself, you know, I've made that trip up and down the highway between Edmonton and Calgary increasingly often as there seems to be something coming up on the horizon which seems to require more presence in the city of Calgary. Certainly, I continue to see quite regularly on those trips that there are at least one or two vehicles that feel the need to be driving 20 or 30 or 40 kilometres an hour faster than the remainder of the traffic, and we know the serious damage that can do. We've had members of this Legislature who have lost their lives on that highway.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So, certainly, I'm in support of having an additional and appropriate penalty in place for drivers, whether or not they are engaging in stunting activities, if they are in fact driving over the maximum speed limit, and in this case it is about driving 40 kilometres or more over a posted speed limit that is 80 kilometres an hour or less.

Now, I certainly do appreciate the concerns that have been raised by some other members about the potential impacts that this could have in certain areas where you do have that rapid adjustment of a speed limit, so we need to be very careful, I think, with this legislation to ensure that we are not creating a situation that would create more opportunities for what is sometimes colloquially known as fishing in an area where, say, the speed limit on a roadway, highway drops quite suddenly from a higher limit to a lower limit and then a speed trap is set just right at that line, so somebody who doesn't quite slow down in time ends up paying a fine.

3:40

Certainly, that's not the kind of behaviour that we want to incent, and we know that kind of behaviour does little to actually address the real issues around speeding. Indeed, during our time in government we worked to try to put some limits on how photoradar in particular was being used in that respect, so I think it would be worth some conversation – and perhaps we'll have that opportunity during Committee of the Whole – to look at how we can ensure that this piece of legislation would not add additional opportunities for that sort of revenue raising, shall we say.

There could be the opportunity here, I guess, for some more consultation and consideration to ensure we are covering all of the sorts of activities that might fall under stunting or that are concerns. You know, certainly . . .

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Every day across the country people tragically lose their lives as a consequence of unsafe driving. Sometimes those who perish as a result of their own unsafe driving are some drivers testing the limits of their vehicles in attempts to impress their friends. This heartbreaking reality is something that we as elected officials should do more to prevent. Vehicle stunting is a criminal act that does not only endanger the drivers themselves but all other Albertans who use the roadways where these crimes are being committed.

In order to protect the people of this province from needless, preventable traffic accidents, we must act. Therefore, I am pleased to support the private member's Bill 203 introduced by the MLA for Calgary-Falconridge. This proposed bill would strengthen the penalties in place for stunting in Alberta so that would-be reckless drivers are more firmly deterred from endangering themselves and others while those who still violate the law are punished more severely. Alberta, quite frankly, is lagging behind other provinces when it comes to pursuing more severe penalties for vehicle stunting. Other provinces have rightfully strengthened their laws surrounding these crimes.

It is time for us to follow suit to help to prevent any more needless injuries or deaths. If passed, Bill 203 would increase the maximum fine for stunting to \$5,000 and introduce an automatic seven-day licence suspension for anybody caught stunting. Additionally, there would be the option of a seven-day impound to be decided by law enforcement on a case-by-case basis.

The time to implement these more severe penalties is now. In the past few months alone there have been high-profile accidents in both Calgary and Edmonton, the two cities plagued the most by stunting and city racing, that involved avoidable collisions. At the beginning of September an Albertan was killed in a single-vehicle crash that authorities believe to have been the result of a street race. Even more recently in October two vehicles crashed on the High Level Bridge here in Edmonton, both of which were involved in a street race. The saddest thing about crashes like these is that they are entirely avoidable. They're caused by drivers there, and our top priority as an elected official is ensuring the safety of Albertans. It is my conviction that passing this bill would greatly improve road safety in our province. I'm proud to say that despite incidents like I have previously mentioned, Alberta has the lowest road fatality rate of any province in Canada.

Most Albertans are committed to road safety as they know that acting responsibly on the road keeps us all safe. A notable exception to this rule involves those who stunt, race, and otherwise drive dangerously. It is so important that these people receive the punishments they deserve when they commit these crimes. Through mandatory licence suspensions and vehicle impounding drivers who commit these needless, dangerous acts will be prevented from doing so again in the immediate future. Their friends will hear about their fines and suspensions and will think twice before ever going 40 kilometres over the limit in the city.

Deterrence is extremely important, Madam Speaker. It is much better if we prevent drivers from doing this in the first place than it is to give them serious penalties. On top of this, the increased fines will further contribute to deterrence so that these drivers will not act as dangerously again after their licences and vehicles are returned to them.

As stated earlier, this bill would bring Alberta's penalties for stunting more into alignment with other provinces. Ontario's stunting penalties are similar to the changes proposed by the bill. Additionally, these increased penalties have been requested by the police chiefs' association. Those who have committed their lives to protecting Albertans in all areas of life, not just on the road, believe that increasing the severity of these penalties will improve road safety. When organizations like the police chiefs' association make requests like this, I as an elected official do not take it lightly.

When these drivers engage in stunting, they endanger themselves and others in their silly attempts to impress their friends or show off. Albertans can be severely injured or even killed. These drivers need to learn to respect the power they have when they get behind the wheel. Without more severe penalties for acts as dangerous as stunting and street racing, these drivers may continue to take these unnecessary risks. If a driver is caught stunting and receives the

penalties outlined in this bill, they will be far less likely to commit these same acts again.

Preventing the perpetration of criminal behaviour works to increase community safety and to prevent death or injury that may have occurred if the penalties were less severe. Taking every reasonable step we can to keep Albertans safe is our top priority, and these penalties will increase public safety. If these penalties were not seen as effective, then their implementation would not have been called for by the police chiefs' association. By ensuring that the penalties surrounding stunting are proportional to the crime, all Albertans will be made safer. This includes young drivers who may be tempted towards recklessness, other drivers who expect their fellow road users to behave safely, and the pedestrians who walk along our roadways.

3:50

The problem of stunting and street racing is particularly bad in and around my constituency. Calgary experiences a notably higher rate of these crimes, and my constituents deserve to be safer when using their communities' roadways. While a higher number of these crimes may be seen in my constituency, stunting is still a problem that can affect any community or roadway within this province.

Madam Speaker, I am asking my fellow members to consider my words thoughtfully. Our first duty to our constituents is to ensure their safety, and by passing this bill, we can make Alberta's roadways that much safer. I believe that the implementation of increased penalties for stunting is extremely prudent, and I would be surprised if any members in the House disagreed with the idea that stunting and street racing are dangerous crimes that may be addressed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Members, we have three minutes before I will ask for the mover to close debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With only three minutes, I will enter into debate very briefly on Bill 203, the Traffic Safety (Excessive Speeding Penalties) Amendment Act, 2022, and I'll be pleased to speak for a brief amount of time on this only because I know how much this has impacted Alberta families when lives have been lost due to excessive speeding, due to stunting behaviour. So often this impacts the young people involved, the age group typically impacted being 18 to 24, or innocent bystanders who are injured as a result of the excessive speeding, as a result of the behaviour that is unsafe.

We see headlines every now and then because it makes the news when someone is going 123 kilometres per hour in a 50 zone or someone is going excessively fast, whether it's on a highway or within our city streets. As some of my colleagues have talked about in this House, we all know where those streets are that tend to draw stunters, that tend to draw people speeding excessively. Just at the end of last year there were crashes on the High Level Bridge that were blamed on excessive speed.

So we know this is happening, and in this case Bill 203 seeks to limit this behaviour by putting in stronger penalties as a deterrent against these activities happening but also as a lesson that will hopefully spread through friends of those people who are fined when that does come to pass.

I am pleased to say that I will support Bill 203. However, we hope that at committee an amendment can be considered because the current Traffic Safety Act really only refers to the word "stunt" in two places, in section 115(2)(e) and (f). What we find is that when we look at comparable legislation in British Columbia, there's a

great deal more detail, and I think there's something to be said about being very explicit and capturing everything . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time has come for the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge for up to five minutes to close debate on second reading.

Mr. Toor: I'd like to stand to close the debate.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:54 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Jones	Schulz
Amery	Lovely	Shepherd
Ceci	Milliken	Sigurdson, L.
Dach	Nally	Singh
Getson	Nielsen	Smith, Mark
Glubish	Orr	Stephan
Gray	Pon	Toor
Horner	Reid	Turton
Hunter	Rowswell	van Dijken
Issik	Rutherford	Yao
Jean	Savage	

4:10

Totals: For – 32 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 203 read a second time]

Bill 204

Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased today to be able to rise and to speak to Bill 204, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022. In 2017 I had the pleasure of introducing in this Chamber Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act. This private member's bill was patterned on the Amber Alert system and would enable a notice to be issued when a senior citizen or other adult with cognitive impairment, a mental disorder, et cetera, had gone missing. The Assembly passed the bill, and it received royal assent; however, it was never proclaimed.

Before I move on to explain why it was not proclaimed, it's perhaps important for us to look at and just review for a second what an Amber Alert is and what this was based on. When I originally introduced private member's Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, it was an attempt to bring forward the benefits of an Amber Alert to seniors who had gone missing.

An Amber Alert is a message activated by police to alert the public when a child or an adult with a proven mental or physical disability is abducted and at risk of harm. Now, these alerts are broadcast on radio and TV stations and social media platforms, cellphones and other devices. This tool is used by police to solicit help from the public in finding the abducted individual, and an alert is issued if all four of the following criteria are met: a child or an adult with a proven mental or physical disability has been abducted,

the child or adult is in danger of serious harm or death, there is enough descriptive information to enable the public to identify the individual, and there is a reasonable expectation the abductee could be returned or the abductor could be apprehended. Now, in issuing an Amber Alert, the information permitted for dissemination includes descriptions of the suspect, abductees, vehicles, et cetera; abduction details, when, where, how the abduction happened; locations, the last possible location of the suspect or the abductee; and directions the suspect may be travelling. A silver alert would follow this pattern of an Amber Alert.

However, while private member's Bill 210 was passed, it was never proclaimed, and when the United Conservative Party became the government in 2019 and I was re-elected, I then went to the minister of seniors and asked why it had never been proclaimed. It took some time, and my question went from the ministry of seniors to eventually the Ministry of Justice, where finally it was explained to me that in drafting private member's Bill 210, there was a conflict between the Missing Persons Act and private member's Bill 210 regarding the release of private information that was concerning to the Ministry of Justice.

Under the current Missing Persons Act, section 7(3), the act authorizes police to,

for the purposes of furthering its investigation into the whereabouts of a missing person, release . . . the following information collected under [the Missing Persons] Act

through media release or posting on a website:

- the missing person's name;
- a physical description of the missing person;
- a photograph of the missing person;
- information about any medical conditions of the missing person that might cause imminent risk;
- pertinent vehicle information;
- the place that the missing person was last seen;
- the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the missing person.

In section 2.1(4) of the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017, it lists the same types of information for relief as section 7(3) of the Missing Persons Act; however, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017, also allowed police to use information collected independently of the Missing Persons Act. This could mean that police would be disclosing information that they did not collect under the Missing Persons Act and which is not subject to the retention rules or other provisions of the MPA. This oversight was concerning enough that private member's Bill 210 was never proclaimed and therefore was unable to help missing seniors.

When I was drawn for another private member's bill, this time private member's Bill 204, I was resolved to bring forward amendments that would address the concerns of the Ministry of Justice so that a silver alert would be able to help seniors that have gone missing in our province. I started by meeting with the ministry officials, trying to decide what was the best way forward. Some felt that rather than amending the Missing Persons Act, a stand-alone bill would be the best way forward. However, after much discussion and with the help of both sides both inside and outside of the Ministry of Justice, it was determined that we would be best off with some simple amendments within the Missing Persons Act that would best address the privacy concerns.

At the same time, I held many meetings with stakeholders across the province to determine if any other amendments would make for a better bill. I met with many stakeholders from the Calgary Police Service; the Edmonton Police Service; the Alzheimer Society; Carya Calgary and the Dementia Network; the seniors' council of Edmonton; Dr. Lili Liu; Alberta Seniors Communities and Housing

Association; Mr. Allan Rae, a senior with lived experience; the office of the Privacy Commissioner; and the Brenda Strafford Foundation. Based on their input, some additional amendments were added into private member's Bill 204, so Bill 204, should it be passed, will harmonize the Missing Persons Act and the silver alert amendment act and add some additional inputs that will make a senior alert an effective tool to help find seniors that have gone missing. To resolve some of the privacy and jurisdictional concerns that have been raised with the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017, Bill 204 will address the privacy issues and add a few additional suggestions brought forward by the stakeholders that we've talked to.

Section 2.1 of the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017, will need to be repealed by Bill 204 and integrated within the existing section 7 in the Missing Persons Act, and this will ensure that the same privacy rules will apply to police, whether they are issuing a media release or making a website post or activating a silver alert. To avoid any possibility of unintentionally constraining a police service, the new provisions being added to section 7 of the Missing Persons Act state that the power to issue a silver alert in no way limits or constrains a police service with respect to other missing persons. In other words, these powers will be additional and do not replace what already exists.

A proposed regulation-making power has been added to section 14 of the Missing Persons Act to ensure that if additional rules or processes are required for a broadcast agreement to function properly, the Lieutenant Governor in Council has the authority to put those in place.

There are some additions under definitions of seniors that give police, via the public safety ministry, the authority to issue silver alerts where there is an active investigation under the Missing Persons Act.

Finally, silver alerts are to be geospatially limited to lower the risk of alert fatigue. On the advice of stakeholders, a senior will be defined as someone who is 55 years or older in order to address the early onset of Alzheimer's.

In 2017 the original private member's Bill 210 addressed the very real problem of how we can best protect and reasonably act to protect a senior who has gone missing and is believed to be at risk. This Legislature understood at that time the need to provide police with the ability to have another tool in their belt when it comes to a missing person that is a senior. Private member's Bill 204 will address some of the pieces of this conversation that were missed and could have created some confusion regarding the private information that could be shared and now harmonizes a silver alert to the privacy of information expectations of the Missing Persons Act.

4:20

Madam Speaker, our seniors population is rapidly expanding in Alberta. In 2016 there were roughly 500,000 Albertans aged 65 and older. By 2031, as the tail end of the baby boomers reaches 65 years of age, Alberta's senior population is projected to be about 1 million people. This number will continue to grow, and by 2041 it is projected that 1 in 5 Albertans will be 65 years or older. Combine this reality with the understanding that a decline in cognitive functioning is associated with aging and that the risk of dementia doubles every five years after the age of 65, and we can now better understand why some of our seniors are at risk of going missing.

In Calgary the Alzheimer Society estimates that more than 13,000 Albertans are living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia in that city alone. For every person diagnosed with Alzheimer's or related dementia, 10 to 12 people are directly impacted. These would be family members, friends, caregivers. In

addition, the Alzheimer association indicates that 6 out of 10 people with dementia will wander at some point in time.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 204 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to join debate on Bill 204, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022. Certainly, like the member said, way back in 2017 this bill was brought forward, and it's a clear example – at that time the NDP was government, and I was the minister of seniors, and this is a clear example of a sitting government, the NDP at the time, working collaboratively with an opposition party, and certainly we worked with the member, and we did pass this bill back in 2017.

But, as the member explained, it never received proclamation, and that was due to the bill giving powers to the police that were not in accordance with the Missing Persons Act. So the bill had to go back to the UCP caucus and make sure that the drafting was corrected, and I understand now that this is what the hon. member has done, and this bill is now addressing those issues and making sure that it's in accordance with the Missing Persons Act. The UCP have done their homework, I guess, to make sure that this bill is appropriate. It's not contravening any other legislation, and it is now before the House again for members to debate and discuss.

Certainly, we in the New Democratic caucus here, now in opposition, as we did when we were government, support the silver alert bill. We think it's an important bill, that people who are aged – I guess it's 55-plus now. We've redefined what a senior is, and – guess what? – I'm a senior under that one. You know, usually our age is 65 for seniors, but this bill says 55. I'm 62, so I'm well within that range, and I can be supported if someone calls a silver alert out on me. I'm grateful for that.

Member Ceci: I'm dialing now.

Ms Sigurdson: You're dialing now. Oh, no. I may not be able to finish my debate part here.

Anyway, I guess I wouldn't mind just sharing another – besides being within the range of people who can have a silver alert put out on them, I think this would have been something my father would have benefited from, actually. My dad passed away last summer. He was 93 years old. In his later years he was diagnosed with dementia, and on more than one occasion he did come home with a police escort because he didn't know where he was and he'd lost his orientation. You know, it was usually fairly quickly, the same afternoon. Luckily, there was nothing that happened that was too egregious when Dad was confused and didn't know how to get back home.

Certainly, I think that this could support so many seniors to be well cared for, and if there is a time when they do get disoriented and don't know where they are, how to get home, those kinds of things, this legislation would indeed support them, support their communities to give them more resources to collaboratively work together to make sure that seniors in our community are safe.

Certainly, we know that currently in Alberta we have 700,000 seniors in our province. That's the fastest growing demographic, actually, in Alberta, and seniors are living longer, healthier lives than ever before. But certainly as we age, we may have cognitive decline. Sometimes we are, like my father, diagnosed with dementia, so having the supports in place for our ever-growing seniors population is extremely important. As I've said before, I stand in support of this bill and that we want to make sure that if people are out in the community and they get disoriented, don't

know where they are, there are supports around them so that they can be brought home safely.

You know, I guess a question I might have for the member bringing this forward is: how come it did take almost the whole mandate of the UCP government to bring it forward? It would have been good to have it come earlier; it was 2017 when it was first introduced, so this is several years later. I think this is legislation that could have supported seniors much earlier, so I do wonder about that.

I guess another question that I have, too, is that, sadly, under the UCP government so many services for seniors have been cut or not responded to, and we know that the very first thing in 2019 the Seniors Advocate office was cut. That was something that provided advocacy, support for seniors in our province, and the UCP – that was one of the first things they cut in 2019. You know, it is troubling that there are programs that have been cut. This would seem to be a significant delay in this legislation being brought forward even though it was supported by both sides of the House.

Of course, another egregious thing that the UCP cut right away was the income support program for seniors, the Alberta seniors' benefit. They deindexed it, and of course this was at a time when we had record inflation, lots of . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Just maybe a reminder to get back on the subject matter in the short time available to members, Bill 204.

Ms Sigurdson: This is certainly about services to seniors, and, you know, certainly this bill is providing safety for seniors to make sure that they are supported. But I would say that there is also a lot of connection with the Seniors Advocate office, that it provided safety and advocacy for seniors in many areas, and seniors could be supported, too, with income support programs that met inflation. So that was a significant support for them.

We know that many programs do receive government funding that support seniors, and, you know, the grants program was also slashed by more than \$2 million under the UCP government. This meant that seniors living in community – and we all know that that's such an important thing, that seniors age in community, and I think this silver alert bill does talk about supporting people to age in community. I guess, very similarly, the investment in grants to senior centres also is something else, so I feel that these are very similar, and these were cut also under the UCP watch.

We know that seniors in our province are absolutely making significant contributions to our province, to our society, and we're wanting them, for sure, to be as safe as possible, and that's why we in the NDP caucus certainly do support this bill, but we just see that there should be much more robust services around seniors. It feels like the UCP, immediately upon being elected, did actually roll back many programs that supported seniors. So, you know, I just stand in concern of that and wanting the UCP to go further down this road and reinstate the Seniors Advocate. You have now reinvested in indexing the Alberta seniors' benefit, so that's a very positive step forward.

4:30

I guess I have some questions for the member about this bill. What are the potential costs associated with the system, and how much time would be needed to assess those costs? With the existing Amber Alert system and sort of working together with the silver alert system, will there be enough support, enough infrastructure to work collaboratively and make sure that for everyone who has sort of the misfortune, really, of having to call for a silver or an Amber Alert, those programs are sufficiently resourced so that Albertans

can access them? Of course, this is always in a very timely manner. These are emergency situations, when someone doesn't return at perhaps the designated time that they told their loved ones. You know, emergency services people have to work very quickly, so do we have enough support? Certainly, we know that there are many challenges in our health system, our emergency system right now, so things are overwhelmed. We want to make sure that we have those resources and that support and investment in those programs is done.

There are also certainly concerns about older adults' right to self-determination and privacy . . .

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

Ms Pon: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. Thank you, all, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 204, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022, and I promise I will stay just on the topic here. We all have senior citizens in our life, and of course they are near and dear to us, and then those that we have lost far too soon. We have also all heard the sad stories about somebody's loved one wandering off from the facility, the care home, and then getting lost, and far too many have resulted in a senior being injured, particularly in this extremely cold weather and unfamiliar areas, that can easily result in frostbite setting in within a matter of minutes. In real-world scenarios there have been far too many cases of these seniors passing away and then not being found in a significant period of time, if at all.

This really breaks my heart, Madam Speaker. This is somebody's parent, grandparent, mother, father, sister, brother, husband, or wife. As recent as last week a missing 72-year-old senior not too far from my riding, Calgary-Beddington, in the Scenic Acres community was found dead after being reported missing five days prior. One can only guess that if there was a system in place to notify as many people as possible in the general public, this man could have been found and saved. Sadly, this is one of the so many sad stories where often seniors have accidentally found themselves in a state of danger.

This is why, Madam Speaker, I was pleased to hear about private member's Bill 204, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022, put forward by my colleague the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. If passed in this House, Bill 204 will make a key change to 2017's Bill 210, which also would have otherwise granted police powers in disclosing information and then not connecting in accordance with the Missing Persons Act. This wasn't the intent of the original bill, and Bill 204 acts to fix it. The silver alert system created by Bill 204 creates a comparable system to the highly efficient Amber Alert, a program to quickly issue an alert to the general public when senior citizens or other adults with a medical disorder go missing.

Like the amber system, that has saved countless children from dangers, harm, death, the silver alert would broadcast alerts on the radio and television stations and social media platforms and cellular phones and all the other devices, et cetera. So when the police supports the public safety authority, there will be an active investigation under the Missing Persons Act. This will also allow for police to ensure there were agreements, whether through broadcasting or through other means, to make sure the alerts are geographically limited when applicable to prevent Albertans not in the affected area from getting a notification that doesn't apply to them. Amongst other situations, this would apply to, particularly, a localized area where the senior went missing and is considered in danger.

Madam Speaker, this is just another example of the well-thought-out legislation that our UCP private members have brought forward

in the 30th Legislature, and I'm looking forward to what they bring to the table in the 31st, forming a majority United Conservative mandate in the coming spring election.

Madam Speaker, Bill 204, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022, follows the lead of the several jurisdictions that have already enacted similar legislation, including Manitoba, Ontario, and 37 U.S. states.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to support my colleague the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who I know feels very passionate about this particular issue. This is a common-sense solution to a very real problem that will no doubt save lives. Because of this, I strongly encourage all my colleagues, on both sides of this Chamber, to join me in supporting this bill as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak on private member's Bill 204, Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022. Bill 204 will discuss vulnerable seniors across Alberta who go missing. PMB 204 is built upon previous PMB 210, passed in 2017, but it was never proclaimed because of some discrepancies between PMB 210 and the Missing Persons Act regarding the privacy of information.

By building and amending the previous legislation, it's essential that we recognize that this bill is important for many seniors who live the awful experience of going missing and finding no help from others. We will vindicate loved ones – many have tragically lost their partners, parents, or grandparents – by giving first responders more tools to alert the public of missing seniors. It's never a great feeling to lose somebody and never find them again. This new amendment will clarify and allow first responders to finally alert the public of missing seniors.

I have a personal story to share as well. When my grandparents were still living, my grandfather woke up to find my grandmother missing from the house. She had not taken her coat or boots, and it was the middle of the night, and it was winter. He called the police, and they started a search for her. It was a very frightening time for our family. She had some health conditions, and my grandfather worried that she was disoriented. It was a few hours later that the police finally did find my grandmother at the city dump. She had wandered many miles without proper winter attire, but she was alive. That was the last day that she was at her home. A higher level of care was required for her. Thank goodness the police officers found her, but had a silver alert system been in place, there would have been many more eyes looking for her. Perhaps she would have been found much sooner, and the weather would not have taken such a toll on her.

Our family's story had a happy ending – thank goodness – but for many, there is not. Our population ages, and many wish to continue living in their own homes, but we must respond responsibly to take care of our vulnerable.

4:40

Madam Speaker, our seniors population is rapidly expanding in Alberta. In 2016 there were roughly 500,000 Albertans aged 65 and older. By 2031, as the tail end of the baby boomers reaches 65 years of age, Alberta's seniors population is projected to reach approximately 1 million people. This number will continue to grow. By 2041 it is projected that 1 in 5 Albertans will be 65 years or older.

A decline in cognitive function is associated with aging, and the risk of dementia doubles every five years after the age of 65. In Calgary the Alzheimer Society estimates that more than 50,000

Albertans are living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia in that city alone, and for every person diagnosed with Alzheimer's or related dementia, 10 to 12 people are directly impacted. These are family members, friends, and caregivers.

In addition, the Alzheimer's association indicated that 6 out of 10 people with dementia will wander at some point. This is frightening. When individuals walk away from their homes and get lost or go missing, it can lead to increased risk of injury or death. The quicker we are able to locate these vulnerable individuals and return them home safely, the more likely we are to avoid a tragic incident.

Bill 204 will seek to address this problem by building on the Amber Alert system, which is already in place. Amber Alert is a voluntary co-operative partnership between Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, participating radio and TV stations, police services, and the public.

The reasons vulnerable adults and seniors go missing generally differ from the circumstances that lead to missing children in Amber Alerts; hence, the approach has to be different to be effective. This silver alert system will provide a framework to enable police to send out a notice via local media when a senior citizen or adult with cognitive impairment, a mental health disorder, or a medical condition that may result in them being vulnerable goes missing. The goal is to begin the search locally unless there is evidence that the missing person is using some public or private transportation, which would necessitate a broader application of the broadcasts.

This legislation will save many lives by implementing this and using the already existing Amber Alert system to another good use. It's morally vital that we help senior Albertans that go missing. It never is great when our loved seniors disappear and we never see them again. We have seen other provinces trying to solve this issue of seniors going missing. However, our provincial approach could be proven easier to implement and a more cost-effective policy to be enforced and help law enforcement to find missing seniors, who we love so much.

Several provinces, including B.C., have partnerships with an American program called Project Lifesaver. With this program, enrolled seniors wear a small transmitter on the wrist or ankle that emits an individual frequency signal. If an enrolled client goes missing, first responders will use this frequency to locate that individual. However, the downside to this program is that the cost of the program, which includes an initial fee and a recurring monthly fee, is borne by the individual, which is why I think the silver alert program is a more sound option for providing safety to vulnerable adults. In addition, this bill makes safety procedures available to all Albertans using resources that are already in place.

In closing, passing this bill will allow for a province-wide system to be brought online, enabling vulnerable Albertans a great likelihood of returning home safely. But, again, this issue crosses political boundaries, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill, and I thank the member for bringing this forward.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think the testimony from the Member for Camrose, who just spoke on this important piece of legislation, demonstrates how important the legislation is and how close to home it is to not only members of this Legislature but to all Albertans who share the responsibility of caring for elderly parents or grandparents and loved ones who may be suffering from dementia who are 55 years of age and older, some

even younger. But for the most part, of course, this legislation looks to provide an alert for those who go missing at age 55 or older who may be suffering from the effects of dementia or other cognitive dysfunction.

All of us in this Legislature know somebody who does act in the role of a caregiver for someone who is over the age of 55, myself included. As a designated caregiver I look after my mother, who's about to turn 88, and certainly I think there's no one in the Legislature who doesn't have a significant connection with a family member or relative or friend who wouldn't be concerned enough to share the value of this legislation.

Now, of course, it was brought in 2017, not proclaimed, as the member who brought forward the bill explained. Of course, it now is before the House once again with some remedies to some incongruities that were in the former Bill 210. We, of course, on this side of the House are in support of this legislation.

As we know, seniors built this province, and I now am one. I'm fully of the age of 65. I know that individuals who preceded me in generations in my family would potentially have benefited from this legislation. I know the Member for Camrose spoke eloquently about how indeed she thought it may have been very beneficial to her grandmother if indeed the legislation had been in place when she went missing. Thankfully, there was a positive outcome in that situation, but as we all know, whenever we do hear about a senior going missing either from a residence or a seniors' lodge or nursing home, it quite often has very devastating results. Whether it's winter or summer, the person can get into difficulty very quickly. Particularly in wintertime it may result in the death of a senior who's gone missing from their residence or seniors' accommodation.

We would have wished that this legislation had come forward a little bit earlier in the mandate of this UCP government. Of course, they've had plenty of time to do it, and it may have indeed been a reflection of the lack of prioritization of seniors' issues on their legislative agenda. One would hope not, but I know that we've not seen a lot of rapid action in terms of supporting a seniors mandate. In fact, we've seen cuts to seniors' services, and this seems to be one other sort of dereliction of duty towards seniors, sort of dragging their feet in getting this piece of legislation before the House in its current form. The delay, I think, could have been avoided, and seniors deserved to have it here, before the House, earlier.

We will certainly support the legislation. I do have some questions about it, Madam Speaker. Of course, we all know that when an Amber Alert is called, it gets your attention very quickly. It's broadcast widely on cellphones, on television, radio, and multiple platforms of social media. People are very much aware that an Amber Alert has been called, and I'm not certain if indeed it's absolutely clear how much the addition of a silver alert will, let's say, be diluted in comparison to an Amber Alert.

The hope is, of course, that a silver alert won't be sort of a second class of alert, because life is in danger, whether it's an Amber Alert or a silver alert. The creation of a new level of alert to warn the public and engage the public and seek the public's assistance in helping to locate the missing person, in this case an individual over the age of 55 who may have some cognitive difficulties, may result in a less intense effort to find that individual. We're hoping that that's not the case, but we want to make sure that in the communications of this silver alert, the public receives the same sense of urgency that they do when an Amber Alert is broadcast.

4:50

Of course, as has been mentioned by other speakers, the silver alert would in all likelihood be more commonly a localized alert. We know that, with our media capacities, those localized alerts can

be focused in and around the area where the senior is known to have gone missing, so perhaps – and this is one question I have for the member as well who brought forward the piece of legislation – there can be some attempt made to collaborate with local agencies such as Neighbourhood Watch to engage individuals on the ground, once a silver alert is called, to assist in a localized ground search for that individual.

As others have mentioned, it is more likely with a silver alert that an automobile was not necessarily involved and that somebody may be on foot and gone missing from their home. In a larger number of cases, of course, there may be a situation where vehicles are involved and a wider silver alert call would have to be made, but there seem to be some opportunities for local collaboration in the search effort, because time is of the essence. If indeed a senior who has wandered from their place of residence, whether it be a seniors' lodge or their own home, is found quickly, of course, the results are going to be better than if the individual is missing for an extended period of time.

So that's a hope that I have, that there might be some effort to engage local neighbourhood and community groups such as Neighbourhood Watch to assist law enforcement efforts in locating those who have gone missing and given rise to a call for a silver alert.

Now, of course, we always want to make sure that the legislative efforts that are raised are costed out, and we're not sure exactly what the cost might be in relation to a silver alert compared to an Amber Alert. We don't know if there are any savings that can be achieved by somehow twinning the two systems. We're certainly hopeful that that will be the case, but we'd like to hear from the member about those possible savings and possible collaborations.

What about the rights, of course, of the older adult's self-determination and privacy as well? We know that the legislation was not proclaimed initially, when it was called Bill 210, in 2017 because there were some contradictions against the Missing Persons Act, and I'm just wondering if indeed adequate care has been taken to consider the older adult's rights to self-determination and privacy.

How much longer shall we have to wait, though, to get this in place? Is it going to be something that the government is able to implement in fairly short order, or are there other considerations that will have to be investigated in order to make sure that the bill can actually get proclaimed this time without having to be delayed once again and brought back because things were discovered that could have been changed before the actual bill was passed? Hopefully, the bases have been covered, and we'll see it pass.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise this afternoon in support of Bill 204, as I did back in 2017 for Bill 210, which, unfortunately, tripped at the finish line, literally at the finish line. It was unfortunate that we as a Legislature weren't able to catch some of that conflicting language that prevented it from being proclaimed. Hopefully, the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has gotten some solid assurances that the language is solid, that we're not in conflict with anything else that, again, could prevent a very good idea from going forward with regard to a silver alert.

I guess, you know, just a couple of questions that I have in the brief time that I do have available here to me. I'm wondering. Hopefully, once we get into Committee of the Whole, perhaps the member might be able to provide us with some insight on if there were any discussions with the red tape reduction minister. I know there's been a very firm commitment from the government around reducing red tape and wanting to look at one

in, kind of one out if we are bringing in some regulations, to make sure that this is all airtight. Will there potentially be any holdups because of that? One of the things that I've alluded to with other pieces of legislation that require regulations: will there now be a rush to try to eliminate something else in order to be able to, I guess, provide that balance, hit some kind of target, quota, or whatever? Hopefully, we'll get a chance to maybe hear some comments on that or even from the red tape minister around that.

Like my friend from Edmonton-McClung had mentioned about potential costs to the system, you know, the last thing I want to see is, again, a very good idea start to get pared back because somebody thinks that, well, maybe it's costing a little too much. I'd hate to see a price being placed on something like this and preventing it from moving forward in a fulsome way, which kind of ties a little bit into what the member was talking about, about impacting the current system. You know, is it going to be fully integrated with the Amber Alert system? Are they kind of just going in parallel? Are the two separate? If it is in conjunction with it, will the government ensure that the resources are available, with the extra volume that comes with placing these calls, to make sure they're done quickly and efficiently so that we can get that alert out as fast as possible?

It's kind of timely because I know that in north Edmonton over the last couple of months I've seen, you know, Facebook alerts around a couple of residents from north Edmonton that, unfortunately, have gone missing. Thankfully, they came to good conclusions, but maybe the system could have helped had we had the chance to see it in action. Hopefully, the timeline – I would certainly never presume the decision of this Chamber – is going in a positive direction, and we can get this passed. What will we see as the finish line, where we flip the switch and it's up and running? Hopefully, there are not several years before that's available. Maybe the member will get a chance in Committee of the Whole to chat a little bit about what the government might see around that.

Otherwise, you know, I am definitely fully in support of this legislation. I do want to see it moving forward in an expeditious manner, but at the same time I do want to see some assurances from maybe some of the ministers around their commitment to making sure that this bill will get over the finish line, that it will be implemented, and that we won't be taking any shortcuts or coming up with any excuses for paring it back or shortcutting or anything of that nature, because, again, like I said, it would be a failed opportunity if we've missed something and then have this lost again.

You know, again, private members don't get a lot of time to be able to bring forward what I've seen is some pretty good legislation in a lot of private members' business. I'd certainly like to see more robust discussion around every private member's bill. At the very least, I think this is a good piece of legislation that we'll get a chance to move forward, and I'm looking forward to seeing some of the answers that I've asked about around costs, around impacts to the current system, any kind of, I guess, pitfalls that might be coming.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Two clocks now strike 5 o'clock. We will conclude the business on this for today.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Seniors' Services and Benefits

503. Ms Sigurdson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government

- (a) to consider taking immediate action to reduce costs to seniors related to medical benefits, long-term care, continuing care, home care, assisted living, drivers' licence medical exams, and other basic essentials that have increased dramatically since 2019; and
- (b) to create an independent office of the Seniors Advocate, the mandate of which would include
 - (i) helping seniors navigate provincial public services,
 - (ii) providing policy and affordability recommendations related to seniors to the government, and
 - (iii) conducting reviews on providers of services to seniors to ensure seniors' needs are met.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join debate on Motion 503. It's about seniors' affordability and the Seniors Advocate. This motion is, I think – even the previous bill, actually, the silver alert bill: I think, when I was speaking, I touched on, really, some egregious things that have happened under the UCP watch. It's just more and more burden put on seniors, and this motion actually goes some direction in supporting seniors. We know that seniors created, you know, built this province, and they deserve to age in dignity in our province of Alberta. There are 700,000 seniors in our province, and as I said before, it's the largest growing demographic in our population.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

But, sadly, it seems to be not a very important group of people to the UCP government. As the latter part of this motion indicates, we're asking for a Seniors Advocate to be created, and that's because one of the very first things the UCP did when they came into government was to terminate the Seniors Advocate office and fire Dr. Sheree Kwong See, who was the Seniors Advocate. Really, supports for seniors in terms of that kind of advocacy disappeared.

Despite, in this Chamber, in estimates, in other public opportunities, you know, having asked the minister at the time about this position and about the Seniors Advocate and who was going to be supporting seniors in this regard – she continually assured me that there's still a Seniors Advocate; it was just housed within the Health Advocate's office. Yet when I would ask at estimates, a point of order would be called on me because I wasn't supposed to ask about the Seniors Advocate, and when I spoke about it in Health estimates, they said: well, there's nothing about the Seniors Advocate; you have to ask the seniors minister. Clearly, there was some misinformation shared by the minister.

We know that certainly there are other aspects to the Health Advocate. There's the mental health advocate, which is also housed there, and there's the patient advocate. You know, those are clear, and they're designated within the Health ministry. Nothing – nothing – about the Seniors Advocate. We know, certainly, that seniors do have concerns about the health system, and they do need help navigating it. The Health Advocate is expected to support them with that, but that was, like, not even a third of the focus and the needs of Alberta seniors. Certainly, from the annual reports from Dr. Kwong See we knew that financial issues and social services were the others, more than two-thirds. Obviously, nothing is being done to support seniors regarding that, and that certainly disturbs

me, especially because it was suggested that indeed there would be those supports in place. But they weren't, so again that was misinformation shared.

You know, we've just been through a global pandemic, and according to the Ryerson institute we had the largest number of outbreaks in our continuing care system of any province in Canada. Just about 1,300 seniors died in continuing care. If this isn't a time for an advocate to speak out to support seniors regarding the issues in our continuing care system, I don't know what time is. Obviously, many, many seniors suffered greatly during that time. Many seniors lost their lives, and there was no one to speak up for them. If the Health Advocate was indeed the champion for seniors, I'm surprised that she didn't speak up.

But that's the interesting thing about the Health Advocate: the Health Advocate was appointed; it wasn't an open competition at all. It was appointed by the Health minister, who actually interfered with the process to have a legitimate candidate, through a competitive process, come forward. Janice Harrington was appointed to that position, and she was the previous executive director of the Conservative Party. It was a completely partisan appointment, so certainly she wasn't going to speak up in support of seniors, in support of people who had experienced difficulties in the health system, hold the ministers to account for some of the very egregious things that went on during the pandemic or other times during the mandate of this government. You can see how the UCP has just set this up so that, really, seniors aren't important to them and they are not looking after their best interests.

That's why an independent advocate, an office that's independent, would absolutely support some rigour and some oversight and some challenge. We know that those checks and balances are part of a good democracy. It's very sad that the UCP would choose to terminate that entire office and take away that voice, because certainly I met often with Dr. Sheree Kwong See, who was a professor at the University of Alberta, and when we hired her, she had 30 years of research focused on seniors and had done extraordinary work and certainly is very well regarded in the seniors field.

So you can just see the difference, the clear difference, and sort of the neglect, lack of care, cavaliness, perhaps even arrogance, Mr. Speaker, I would say, of the UCP government in, you know, how they treat seniors and how little regard they have for the candidate that would be in that role. I don't know. I know that many Albertans that I've spoken to are quite disturbed by that and want an independent office of the advocate. If the NDP is elected in this spring election, we have committed to creating an independent office of seniors, and you can rest assured that we will have a very well-qualified candidate in that position. It won't be a partisan person like the UCP has chosen.

Besides that, this motion also talks about other ways that the UCP has forgotten seniors and put more burden on them in terms of costs. We know that continuing care and medical benefits have all gone up for seniors under the UCP government, \$44.6 million for new annual costs for continuing care under their watch. The recent budget is increasing accommodation rates in June by 2.3 per cent. It's interesting because it's June, and when is the election? The election is at the end of May, so it feels, you know, a little bit of a deception on the part of the UCP government that they do this immediately after the election. Certainly, I'll be speaking about this and will continue to speak in this House about that so that Albertans will know that this is a clear plan and it is in this most recent budget.

5:10

We know that 2.3 per cent will be the increase in June, and that comes on the heels of a 5.5 per cent increase layered on in the fall

of last year. These are the continuing care accommodation rates, so those are going up for seniors. Of course, they're doing this all based on an Ernst & Young report that the UCP commissioned, and the report recommended a \$44.6 million increase for annual costs of continuing care. They also recommended for home care an increase of \$35.9 million. The UCP is not making this hidden, but this report that they have commissioned has encouraged them to increase all the costs to seniors, who often are on low fixed income and don't have a lot of resources to be able to access. It is certainly a concern on this side of the House.

We also know that seniors in continuing care will be paying increased fees for medication, and that's another burden because a lot of times when we age, we certainly are taking more medication, and seniors often take, you know, more than one type of medication. Another increase by the UCP is the driver's licence medical exams. This used to be all covered by the government. At 75 it's mandatory: you must have a medical exam in order to be a driver in our province. Then you must also have that same medical exam when you're 80 and then every two years after that. This used to be covered, but it's no longer covered.

The Acting Speaker: Other members wishing to speak to the motion? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure, and thank you for the opportunity to talk about private member's Motion 503. Thank you to the member across the Chamber for your passion and dedication to Alberta's seniors. Improving life for Albertans is the shared goal for all the members of the Legislature regardless of political stripe. We must make sure that we do not mistake the duplications of a service for the expansions of a service and not when every tax dollar must serve Albertans.

Alberta's government recently appointed Catherine Douglas as the new health and mental health advocate. The advocate will help guide Albertans through the appropriate channels to resolve the issues and then provide the information and education so that they become advocates for their own health journey and for those that they care for. Seniors are a growing segment of the population in Alberta – that's mentioned many times in the Legislature – and quite often in need of the advocate's service. It's true. Aging Albertans are also more likely to access the health care system in general. One could say that the new advocate is already in place as a resource to help them.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to highlight all of the work Alberta's government is doing to help those who make up 15 per cent of those who use the health care system in 2021 and 2022. When a government provides the service that meets the needs, both on a daily basis and where the needs are more pressing – many people accessing the system have unique and complex needs and require a more hands-on approach. That's why the offices of the Alberta health and mental health advocate are there to assist all Albertans, especially seniors with any concerns on how to navigate the system, that can be daunting and confusing to some.

When I was the former minister of housing, I waited for a year before I terminated – not terminate, though; a switch to combine two offices, the Seniors Advocate and the Health Advocate, together. So I just want to make it clear that cutting and termination are incorrect. In effect, then, with this office, the health and seniors advocate office combined, the staff from seniors and housing brought to the new office covered it to make sure that the senior issue will be appropriately managed. The current mental health advocate is already doing the work of the Seniors Advocate. I do, you know, regularly – and my staff have been checking with the Health ministry and asking how things are going, and most of

the time when seniors have an issue, an inquiry, they are health related. We actually provide a service, a one stop for seniors instead of going to a Seniors Advocate and then they end up referred to a different ministry. This government is focused on efficiency and serving our seniors appropriately.

As a part of expanding and strengthening the role of the offices of Alberta Health and the mental health advocate, in a collaboration, in a partnership with the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services, how will we be there to assist them in resolving their health system related concerns and help them direct their questions to any non health related government body?

We also know that seniors are facing increasing costs at these times, and we want to help to mitigate those financial pressures. Here are the facts, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of ongoing programs that support seniors, especially low-income ones, with health costs. All seniors are eligible for coverage for seniors programs, which is to provide premium-free coverage for things like prescription drugs and home nursing care. There are more than about 680,000 seniors enrolling in this program.

Low-income seniors: let's talk about how we can help them. Also, they are eligible for up to \$5,000 every year toward their basic dental service and up to \$230 every three years for the purchase of prescription eyeglasses. To help with the rising costs of living – it is a concern, so the government is providing financial relief to Albertan residents in designated supportive living and in long-term care from November 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023. To support seniors, Alberta's government is investing \$11 million to help fight inflationary increases around accommodation costs.

Another notable point is about the coverage for seniors programs. Assistance is available for low-income seniors for health and daily living expenses through the special needs assistance for seniors program. Funding is provided for the copayments, amount paid above the average of \$45 per month for a single senior or seniors in a couple where one individual is under the age of 65 and \$90 per month for seniors in couples where both individuals are age 65 or older.

The Alberta government is also making sure to consider those on a fixed income when offering affordability supports. Seniors amount to 1 million Albertans who are receiving six \$100 affordability payments, and we also increased the seniors' benefit by 6 per cent.

Along with all other Albertans, seniors are many of whom who live on a fixed income and also are benefiting from additional actions this government took to help overcome the inflation crisis. The electricity rebates, the province offering tax relief in natural gas and electricity, the price protections: these are all actions we took to relieve the financial pressures that face our province. We passed private passenger vehicle insurance rates and increased it through to the end of this year. We made changes to personal income tax that will help to keep more money in the pockets of Albertans. Our government also increased funding for low-income transit pass programs to make sure that those who are most in need are not left behind.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has put their words into actions when it comes to supporting seniors in the province. As the former minister of seniors and housing I went through, covering almost all Albertans, and I talked to thousands and thousands of seniors myself. I was a seniors advocate.

5:20

We will continue to make sure that vulnerable – in fact, I forgot to add one thing. For all the rural areas: they were so excited to see me. They told me that they hadn't seen the minister for seniors for years or had never seen a minister before. I was just so happy to

learn that and to have the support of the seniors from the rural areas. Thank you, everyone, for that comment. This government is always for you.

We will continue to make sure that vulnerable Albertans are supported in every way possible. They need a more streamlined process with less red tape to help navigate the health system. We want to do things more efficiently, not wasting taxpayer dollars. We already have the patient's advocate, so adding a secondary office would only serve to create an additional backlog for people in need. I'm also very pleased to share that the new Mental Health Patient Advocate and the team of professionals, their office is extremely qualified.

I believe it is the best for Albertans to know that they only have to go to one office for the information, assistance they need. We're there. This government is always there for our seniors. Seniors are the strength of Alberta. That's why I will not support this motion.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I certainly will be supporting this motion and with good reason, because an independent Seniors Advocate is needed more than ever, and that's apparent in the current government's treatment of seniors since their election in 2019. Now, after the UCP removed the Seniors Advocate and rolled that responsibility to the Health Advocate, a partisan appointment that was direct from the executive of the UCP, one would be remiss if one doesn't question whether, in fact, that role was independent. Seniors certainly would be right in questioning whether or not that independent role had been negated by rolling the responsibility into the Health Advocate's portfolio.

Previous to that, of course, we recognized the importance of seniors when we were in government by establishing the Seniors Advocate office, and that's what we wanted to say to seniors. We wanted clearly to let seniors in this province know that they matter, they were important, they are critically important to the province, and they deserve to have a direct channel to government.

What happens, of course, as one may know as one becomes a senior and is maybe not any longer in the workforce, is that their visibility diminishes. A person with grey hair becomes invisible to many facets of society, and we didn't want them to become invisible to their government. We wanted to ensure that they knew that they mattered, and to do so, we demonstrated that by providing the Seniors Advocate position and office. Of course, when the UCP took office, that was eliminated and rolled into the Health Advocate's portfolio, thus diminishing the significance of seniors to the current government, and it's surely a reflection of what they've done to seniors since they formed government.

Former Conservative governments, Mr. Speaker, used to brag about how they showered the seniors in this province with benefits through Alberta seniors' benefits, you know, that in decades past they were developing and increasing, but now this current UCP government, the current rendition of conservatism in this province, firehoses our seniors with extra costs, extra burdens, some of which have been documented here.

Mr. Speaker, I really do stand in support of this motion because a Seniors Advocate is more necessary than ever, and this motion urges the government to do what it failed to do or to undo what it did and to actually create once again an office of the Seniors Advocate. The mandate, of course, would help seniors navigate provincial public services and would provide public policy and affordability recommendations related to seniors and to the government, and it would conduct reviews on providers of services to seniors to ensure seniors' needs are met. That's something that's

indeed a laudable goal to have in this province, and it's something that we recognize, and it behooves me to comprehend why any government would want to dispense with the Seniors Advocate office, as the UCP did early in their reign. It only begs the question: was it done because they wished to avoid the criticism that might come from a Seniors Advocate once they engaged in the raft of extra cost burdens that they were placing upon seniors during the mandate that now is almost four years of cost increases to our seniors?

I will never forget, Mr. Speaker, talking to seniors on the doorstep who now discover that after age 75 they're responsible for paying for their driver's exam medical. There were some very, very volatile seniors at the doorstep talking to me about that. They were really not happy with it, and it's a big cost. It's, you know, 85 to 150 bucks, in some cases on a biannual basis, after you turn 75. This is just one example of some significant costs that the UCP government has inflicted upon seniors, adding fees and/or reducing coverage for seniors in health care.

The new fees for home care alone are burdens not only to seniors but to their families because, Mr. Speaker, quite often, of course, seniors' income is insufficient to cover the cost of home care, and there was a \$35.9 million increase in new costs to seniors as a result of this UCP government's policy – that's evidenced by the Ernst & Young report on Alberta Health Services, which included recommendations to add costs on seniors in continuing care – \$35.9 million in new costs onto seniors. Yet the government has seen fit to find ways of shovelling billions, like \$20 billion, over to oil companies to clean up wells that they are already responsible for cleaning themselves. But, no, seniors have to fork out another \$35.9 million to pay for their own lodging, and of course that means that their siblings, their younger family members are probably going to be the ones carrying the can because that senior doesn't have the adequate income to cover some of those extra costs.

Mr. Speaker, the evidence is in. It's very, very clear this government has no desire to court the favour of seniors in Alberta. In fact, they've given up on seniors. They have dispensed with that voting bloc and have taken them for granted. They do so at their own peril, because I know that not only when I'm at the doors talking about the driver's medical – and this isn't something I'd had to bring up. Believe me; that's brought up spontaneously by seniors who have just suffered the driver's medical. You run into one at the door who has had an anniversary date and has had to go and get the driver's medical, and they've had to fork out 85 to 150 bucks for it, 85 to 150 bucks they don't have extra right now – they let you know about it. That's just one example. The changes to the medical exams are certainly a sore point with seniors, and the government doesn't seem to be listening.

The Seniors Advocate program that the government has shifted over into the Health Advocate portfolio is something that seniors are going to sorely miss, Mr. Speaker. The role of the Seniors Advocate is something that granted the respect due to our seniors because it recognized them as full participants in our society. Without that recognition, by rolling it into the Health Advocate's portfolio, the government has gone backwards and is disrespecting our Alberta seniors by saying: "You don't matter. You're something that is a secondary category to us. We expect you to vote for us. We think you're going to do it regardless, and we're going to keep hacking away at your bank account by making sure we add costs onto seniors that otherwise would've been covered by the government."

5:30

The role of the advocate is to help navigate casework, and we've all seen this, Mr. Speaker, where you get seniors calling into our

MLA constituency offices absolutely confounded with government programs and services, forms and applications, and believe me: it's not just because they're seniors. Seniors are from every walk of life. They are complex forms, and they're reflective of many other departments, not only those programs which affect seniors. Seniors in particular should not be denied or not be able to access programs and services they are deserving of, those which still remain available to them not cut by the UCP, because they have difficulty with the complexity of the application process. That we see every week in our offices, and indeed the programs and services that seniors are able to access should be something they get without having to go to a family lawyer to understand a process.

The Seniors Advocate is there – or would've been there under our government; no longer there because of the UCP taking it away. That's one of the big roles of the Seniors Advocate, not necessarily to bang on a counter demanding better services; just to make sure seniors can advocate and navigate to get the services they already have.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I'd like, with your approval, to move to one-minute bells.

The Acting Speaker: All right. So we're looking for unanimous consent to move to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-City Centre – or Edmonton-City Centre. You said you've been spending a lot of time in Calgary. I thought maybe you're running.

Mr. Shepherd: Indeed, Mr. Speaker. I've been visiting Calgary a fair amount. I haven't yet decided to move there, but I appreciate the thought.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion today, you know, advocating for the creation of an independent Seniors Advocate. I want to talk for a little bit about why that's important, an independent Seniors Advocate. Now, some of my colleagues have already made reference to the process by which this government appointed the first combined Health Advocate, mental advocate, Seniors Advocate, and it was not a very good process, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, just as part of this, I want to note that the former minister of seniors spoke of this being a process of efficiency, making this better, making it more convenient for seniors to be able to access their services all in a one-stop shop. Mr. Speaker, you know, in a CBC article talking about how this government went about appointing the Seniors Advocate and Health Advocate and mental health advocate all combined in one office, it noted that in mid-September of 2019 there was a draft ready of the posting for the position, but the department was concerned that "combining health and mental health roles could draw out the process and make it difficult to find a suitable candidate."

That's just two offices, Mr. Speaker, and then they added on a third, making it difficult, in the eyes of the public service, to find a suitable candidate, somebody that could meet all of that criteria. Well, the government found a convenient way around that: they just found someone who wasn't qualified for any of the three. What happened was that as the public servants were doing their due diligence, the traditional processes that had been followed by ministers for years in making these appointments – they did their

work and they had the process laid out and they had the job posting ready to go. Then suddenly the then Minister of Health, now the Minister of Justice, came to the department and said: wait a minute; just put that on hold; I'm going to have a little chat with the deputy minister.

When they came out of that chat, lo and behold, they cancelled that job posting because they didn't need it anymore because they were going to appoint the former executive director of the United Conservative Party, someone who did not have any qualifications in regard to seniors, in regard to health, or in regard to mental health. That is what the former minister of seniors considers to be convenient, helpful for seniors, a good use of taxpayer dollars, Mr. Speaker.

Lori Williams, a political scientist at Mount Royal University – here's what she had to say about that appointment.

Not only to cut short that process or to set it aside, but to instead appoint someone who is an active and rather passionate partisan makes it look like this advocacy position is really nothing more than an arm of the government doing the government's bidding.

Mr. Speaker, I find it difficult to take the former minister of seniors and indeed any of these government members at their word when they say that this was about doing something better for seniors when this process – and let's be clear. We have seen this government repeat this sort of thing over and over again. Speaking of the former minister of seniors referring to good use of taxpayer dollars, certainly the embarrassment of a war room that spent a million dollars a year: that was not a good use of taxpayer dollars but also had a partisan appointment at its head, a former candidate for the United Conservative Party. Some of the Premier's recent appointments, the COVID-19 review, her former mentor, supporter Mr. Preston Manning getting a cool \$250 million a year – or \$250,000. Pardon me; \$250,000. Sorry. My apologies. For a moment there I was thinking back to, you know, the discussion of the carbon tax in the 2019 campaign. It's \$250,000 for the supporter and former mentor, or current mentor, of the Premier.

Really, we don't have a government, Mr. Speaker, that is concerned, really, about taxpayer dollars. They are more than happy to make use of them in all kinds of ways that are politically convenient and beneficial for them. Really, this is why, to return to what I was saying about the importance of an independent Seniors Advocate, when we have demonstrations of a government, like, unfortunately, many Conservative governments before, that fall into that pattern of entitlement and arrogance and cronyism, it is incredibly important that we have some protections built in.

When something is as important as a Seniors Advocate, setting that up as an independent office, that would be required, then, to go through the proper procedure of going before a legislative committee and going through due diligence of a proper job posting and process of hiring and then be brought before this House for a vote, removes the sort of situation that we have had under this government.

Now, of course, that former advocate is no longer in that role, and there has been a newer appointment. Indeed, I would note that with that newer appointment this government does seem to have learned a lesson. They did appoint somebody that does actually seem to have some of that expertise and to the best of my knowledge has not formerly even been a member of the United Conservative Party, let alone the executive director.

That said, this is an important role. I believe it is one that goes beyond simply being done off the side of a desk by someone who is wearing three hats. You know, the former minister of seniors, the MLA for Calgary-Beddington, talked about and seemed to want to brag about everything this government has done for affordability for seniors. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I represent a number of

seniors here in Edmonton-City Centre, and there are a number of them that wrote to me about the fact that they are cut out of this government's utility rebate program because they happen to live in an apartment or a condominium in a building where those utilities are handled jointly as opposed to individual billing. This government has never addressed that issue. Those are many seniors, some of whom are indeed lower income, who do not get part of that utility rebate because this government couldn't be bothered to do the work and find a way.

The MLA for Calgary-Beddington talked about: well, you know, hey, we're giving seniors more money back because we reindexed income tax. Mr. Speaker, that member voted in favour of deindexing income tax and raising income tax for seniors for multiple years in the midst of a pandemic. So this government can try to applaud itself on one hand, but the fact is that this government, as my colleagues have noted, raised costs for seniors over the last few years.

5:40

I've certainly had seniors reach out to my office when they pushed a number of those seniors' dependants and partners off the seniors drug benefit program, again raising costs for those seniors. I had seniors reach out to me with real concerns when this government moved to make changes to the insulin pump therapy program, which would have forced some of those seniors potentially to have to pay out of pocket for a technology that's incredibly important for them in maintaining health, particularly in their later years.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is no high horse for this government to climb on. What we have here from the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview is, I think, an important step forward, not only giving seniors back their own separate advocate – and, I can tell you that many, many seniors in my constituency have written to me calling for just that. They want their advocate back. They want to have that lone voice that is there for them. Much as we have a disability advocate – and let's be clear. Probably many people who write in with concerns with the disability advocate are also talking about health care, but that doesn't mean that we tell them to go and talk to the Health Advocate.

Seniors want to have representation in their voice. Not only is it important to bring that voice back but to do it in a way where that advocate is empowered to act independently, to look into serious issues that come up that affect seniors, and indeed is protected from the kinds of partisanship we saw from the government in their earlier appointment for the advocate in this position. So I will be happy, Mr. Speaker, to vote in support of this motion, and I will be happy, should we have the opportunity to form government, to vote in favour of the legislation that will in fact take this step and form a new independent office of the Seniors Advocate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Motions Other than Government Motions. Is there anyone? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to provide some comments around Motion 503, a motion that I am very happy to also support. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-City Centre bringing us down a little bit of history of why this motion has now come forward and how we have an advocate for seniors that – the voice has been watered down. The reason I say that: it kind of reminds me of back in the days when I used to work for Lucerne ice cream.

The plant was situated in between two of the Macdonalds Consolidated warehouses. The decision, of course, was made, you

know, long before I was ever there, to bargain at the same time because of the location. Now, having participated in a couple of different negotiating sessions, one of the things I noticed during that time – and do I think anybody was doing it on purpose? No. It was just simply a reality that when you had all these warehouses and all these employees and the ice cream plant with 30, it was very, very difficult to get our points of what we needed to see changed or added or deleted from a contract based on everything else that was going along.

I lost count of the number of times that I would tell the negotiator from the other side: “You know, that’s great language. That’s going to work in the warehouse where they’re picking orders, but I don’t pick orders at ice cream. I palletize it, and then we put it onto a truck. End of story.” I’d eventually have the negotiator from the company saying: “Oh, yeah. I guess you’re right. Maybe we need to do something different for you guys.” You think?

The whole purpose of bringing forward the Seniors Advocate was to provide that voice for seniors, specifically for seniors’ issues. I get it. Health issues affect seniors. I get it. But there are so many other things.

You know, like my friend from Edmonton-City Centre who has had a lot of contact with seniors, because of some of the organizations that I have in Edmonton-Decore, I have a significant interaction with seniors in north Edmonton, not just in my own riding of Edmonton-Decore but from others across north Edmonton, and I did not hear one senior tell me over the course of my years that we need to come up with a way to water down voices for seniors. If anything, it’s been the opposite. We need a stronger voice for seniors. We need a clearer voice for seniors.

Like my friend from Edmonton-City Centre said, now we’ve got somebody who’s wearing three hats, and that is simply getting watered down. I’m not going to reiterate the whole point that he made around the partisanship appointment.

You know, it also kind of reminds me of Sobeys coming in and taking over Canada Safeway. They never did like the Safeway brand. They were always competing. And – surprise, surprise – over the course of the time I’ve seen the Safeway stores disappearing or becoming FreshCo.

They’re trying to get rid – so, you know, how do you go about it? Well, you simply water down the whole situation, and that’s what we have; hence, why we’re here with Motion 503, to try to bring the voices of seniors, the ones that built the province – we’re all benefiting from that, every single person in this House – and bringing those voices to the forefront because not only do they deserve it; they have earned it. We have done them a disservice back in 2019 by removing that specific voice and rolling it in with the Health Advocate and then adding another thing and, as my friend from Edmonton-City Centre said, made it almost impossible to find somebody with all those qualifications.

Perhaps that was actually the intention, just as I was alluding to with Safeway and FreshCo stores. You create a situation so that you can just simply say: “Well, this whole process isn’t working. We can’t possibly find anybody; we’ll just appoint someone.” Now all of a sudden we have an opportunity to start making partisan appointments in a position that should not be. It should be a stand-alone office that reports to the people of Alberta, presents a report, just like we have with other offices.

I get it, all the red tape reduction and everything like that, but at what point do you start making reductions to the disadvantage of people? That’s exactly what occurred in 2019, trying to be more efficient: oh, a one-stop shop. It’s done a disservice to our seniors.

You know, I must admit, Mr. Speaker, I was a little frustrated listening to the former minister of seniors patting herself on the back and the government on the back for all the work that they’ve

done for seniors. If everything has been so rosy, why, when I’m talking with seniors or they’re coming to my office, are they showing me how their lives have gotten more difficult? Their insurance costs have gone up, their property taxes have gone up, their utilities have gone up, making life more difficult. But now they’re on a fixed income at the same time.

5:50

As was mentioned earlier, you know, making changes so that going to get an exam for the driver’s licence – that’s one of the biggest things I hear. I’m so grateful we’ve gotten to a place where people are living longer, they’re able to stay at home longer, be independent, but having a vehicle: that is really, really true independence. I’ve heard a lot of stories – it breaks my heart – where, unfortunately, a doctor has to tell someone: it’s no longer safe for you to drive. It’s absolutely heartbreaking. But here we are telling people who aren’t in that situation: well, you have to pay for that. You’ve raised their costs so much that now \$85 or \$150 is now becoming a barrier, and a Seniors Advocate would have told you that very clearly.

Mr. Nally: They would’ve told us that the carbon tax is a bigger barrier.

Mr. Nielsen: I’m happy to see the minister of red tape get up and participate in this discussion rather than just chirping on the other side. Maybe you should start advocating for your seniors and stop having them pay to get their driver’s licence exams.

Mr. Nally: Join us in pushing back on the carbon tax.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, we need to have a Seniors Advocate despite the minister of red tape thinking he has all the answers and a bag of chips.

I’m voting in favour of Motion 503. The seniors of Edmonton-Decore deserve it, the seniors of north Edmonton deserve it, and I’m going to bet dollars to doughnuts that the seniors in Alberta deserve it. If not, well, maybe there’ll be a change, then, on May 29 and they’ll elect a government that will bring in a Seniors Advocate, that will make their voices a priority, that will say: you deserve to have a stand-alone voice to help advocate to make your lives better.

I certainly look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion Other than Government Motion 503. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has approximately three minutes.

Member Irwin: Oh, my goodness. Okay. Well, I better pack a lot into that three minutes.

You know, I did pause there for a minute because, as everyone in this Chamber is aware, there has been a whole heck of a lot of heckling from the other side yet a lack of willingness from said members, like the minister for red tape and Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, to name a few, to actually join debate. As my colleague from Edmonton-Decore so aptly stated, it would be nice, you know, if they are that concerned about seniors in their constituencies – that they’d stand up and speak for them.

I can tell you, speaking of seniors in other constituencies, I was actually door-knocking – I know the members opposite love when I tell door-knocking stories – in Red Deer just two weeks ago in a seniors’ complex, one with external entrances; we weren’t going indoors. I was a little concerned when they said that’s where we were going. I thought: okay; this will be interesting, a Red Deer seniors’ complex. I can tell you that it was really overwhelming, the support that we were getting, people who were identifying as long-time

conservatives expressing their concern about this government's plans for health care. [interjection] Again, for those folks watching at home, I'm being heckled relentlessly here by Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, so it would be nice if maybe he stood up and joined debate for once.

The point being that we are hearing from seniors all across this province who are fed up with this UCP government for so many reasons, but I can tell you – health care, long-term care, lack of affordability measures, as my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre so aptly pointed out. He's heard from seniors who are being left out of this government's affordability plans. I've heard from seniors as well. I've got a number of seniors' complexes in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I'm not kidding when I say that those seniors are absolutely, absolutely fed up with this government.

That's why I'm so proud to support my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview's motion, seniors affordability and Seniors Advocate. You know, she talked a little bit about the work that she did in government.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion other than government motion to close debate, I invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to do such now.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, of course, encourage all of the members in this Legislature to vote in support of Motion 503, seniors affordability and Seniors Advocate. Certainly, I've been very thankful to my colleagues on this side of the House for the thoughtful arguments and comments they've made and why indeed it is such a significant – why it is so important that seniors do have an advocate, because they are being absolutely left behind by this government.

I must say that I was kind of – incredulous, I think, is the most polite word I can give you for what the former minister of seniors and housing shared, the Member for Calgary-Beddington. She just repeated the same misinformation she has throughout, even though I demonstrated in my comments earlier that what she said was not accurate. She proclaimed very profoundly that she was the Seniors Advocate.

I just want to perhaps do some education here. Political science 101: in a constitutional democracy you have checks and balances. The fundamental elements of a constitutional democracy prevent the unconstrained exercise of power. That's meant to improve decision-making and ensure that mechanisms exist for preventing or penalizing unethical behaviour. It helps the public maintain confidence in the political system, and the government has a responsibility to uphold them. Checks and balances distribute power, preventing any one institution or individual from exercising undue control.

So the minister proclaiming that she is the Seniors Advocate, of course, puts all the power in the position of one, and that is completely against what a constitutional democracy says. This is poli-sci 101 for the minister, just to help her. She cannot be the Seniors Advocate. An independent office is meant to... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order.

Ms Sigurdson: An independent office, in this case the Seniors Advocate, actually oversees, maybe challenges, questions, helps make better decisions about what is in the best interests of seniors. So, you know, I just would like the now Member for Calgary-Beddington to perhaps do a little bit of her own homework so she understands what a constitutional democracy is. She cannot be the

Seniors Advocate. That flies in the face of what this role, this office is all about.

I guess just another thing that's completely obvious, I'm sure, to anybody who's watching today or anybody who knows anything: the public confidence is so important to having a good democratic process where people are engaged, they care about the institutions that govern them, there's high voter turnout, all those things. But the UCP doesn't seem to understand that the decisions that they make erode the public confidence, like the termination of this office, like appointing a partisan, Janice Harrington, to that position, someone who has absolutely no qualifications. It's disgusting. The UCP just is cavalier, and they don't seem to respect and understand this at all, and for me that is disturbing.

That is absolutely why this motion should be passed, because there's no respect on the other side. They don't see this as an important issue. They just think they can do what they want, when they want, and they cannot. So I do commend all members of this House to have some level of respect for this institution and actually vote in favour of a motion that's going to strengthen our democracy, not further erode it like the UCP does each time they make bad decision after bad decision. An independent office of the Seniors Advocate would go a long way to mitigate some of the things the UCP has done to denigrate – denigrate – this institution. I'm sorry that the former minister, the Member for Calgary-Beddington, is completely ignorant of this element...

Mr. Rutherford: Point of order.

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

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) this is language that is going to create disorder. It's been pretty borderline for the last few minutes, but to call another member ignorant, I think, absolutely requires an apology and a retraction.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was listening with great interest because it was obviously a lot of passion, and I don't believe that the member was calling another member ignorant but was talking about knowledge of a specific issue. That is what I was hearing as she kept reiterating democracy 101 and trying to make the point that a Seniors Advocate is critical for this province and for moving forward. But I leave it to your good judgment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

6:00

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. If I needed your help, I would ask for it.

I am of the opinion – and while it was difficult to know what the remainder of the sentence may have been, it is very apparent that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview said that the now Member for Calgary-Beddington is ignorant. It's possible she could have provided some clarifying statements about content. I would say that that language is always likely to create disorder, and as such she can apologize and withdraw.

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I apologize and withdraw.

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

There are 15 seconds remaining.

Debate Continued

Ms Sigurdson: I just want to ask again all my colleagues in the House to vote in favour of this motion. Of course, we want to support seniors in our province, and voting positively on this motion would go a long way to doing that.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6:02 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Irwin	Shepherd
Dach	Nielsen	Sigurdson, L.
Gray		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Lovely	Schulz
Amery	McIver	Singh
Ellis	Nally	Smith, Mark
Getson	Nicolaides	Stephan
Glubish	Orr	Toor

Horner
Hunter
Issik
Jean
Jones

Pon
Reid
Rowswell
Rutherford
Savage

Turton
van Dijken
Williams
Yao

Totals:

For – 7

Against – 29

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) and the 2023-24 main estimates schedule, the Assembly will stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

Legislative policy committees will convene this evening and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This evening the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Justice in the Grassland Room. Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Culture in Grassland.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:06 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