



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 7, 2023

Day 14

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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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
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Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Yao
Yaseen

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Yao

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Aheer
Dach
Ganley
Getson
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Nielsen
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Singh
Turton

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 7, 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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, this morning I had the privilege to meet with a very special guest who now joins us in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome the consul general of Japan, Mr. Watabe; his wife, Mrs. Watabe; Mr. Wakasugi, the consul, economics, consulate of Japan; and the honorary consul general of Japan in Edmonton, Dr. Bilash. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a school to introduce.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Legislature some of the smartest and hardest working school students in the entire province of Alberta, those being the students from Clara Tyner elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. I ask them, if they're in the galleries, to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, students from Garneau school, situated in the fabulous riding of Edmonton-Strathcona. Many of them have already written letters to my office and to others this year advocating for specific changes to make their school an even better place, and I'm sure that they're learning lots about advocacy while they're here this week. Please rise, students from Garneau, and 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 of this House an amazing school from the best riding in this province. That's Morinville-St. Albert. It's the grade 6 kids from Lois E. Hole elementary school. Please rise and receive the welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

Budget 2023 and Calgary

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, as a proud Calgarian I know that this province's largest city is a wonderful place to live, full of ambitious, forward-looking people. But I also know that they've faced some tough times recently. Today our schools are bursting at the seams, and our downtown office vacancy rate stands at 32.6 per cent. Here's what troubles me: 21 UCP MLAs represent Calgary constituencies, nearly half of the Premier's cabinet are from Calgary, but with 8,000 new students expected this fall, how many Calgary schools does this government plan to build? One. And with a budget swelled by massive royalty revenues, what have they found for Calgary's downtown? Nothing whatsoever. Zero dollars. An insult.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is a betrayal of Calgary, but the truth is that we already know that this Premier doesn't care about Calgary. In fact, her Finance minister is on record saying that the UCP government should do nothing to support Calgary's downtown. No, what really troubles me is this: silence, silence from Calgary UCP MLAs while this Premier speculates about moves that will effectively cancel the green line, silence from Calgary's entire UCP caucus while the Premier does nothing to address our desperate need for schools, and silence from the UCP cabinet ministers in Calgary while the Premier neglects Calgary's downtown. Did they not notice, or do they just not care?

I'm glad to say that Alberta's NDP caucus does have an ambitious plan to build schools in our city and to support Calgary's downtown. Our plan is freely available on albertasfuture.ca. That's a plan we'll offer to Calgarians in just a few short weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Child and Youth Mental Health Supports

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I was pleased to join the Premier, the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, and the Minister of Technology and Innovation for an announcement to partner with CASA Mental Health to significantly expand youth mental health supports. CASA Mental Health is an important organization within the Sherwood Park community, and they are leaders in delivering child and youth centred mental health services. They have the experience, expertise, and passion needed to truly make a difference in the lives of children, youth, and their families.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, Budget 2023 will provide record-level funding to the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction. This includes a proposed \$92 million over three years for CASA Mental Health to provide critical mental health supports for children and youth. This proposed investment would allow for CASA Mental Health to expand four programs, helping more than 700 additional young Albertans every year and making a monumental impact on the lives of children from right across our province.

Mr. Speaker, everyone in Alberta, including our children and youth, deserves the opportunity to access mental health supports and treatment, pursue recovery, and live a healthy life. We know that with the right support and care recovery is possible for everyone. I am pleased that Alberta's government has identified Sherwood Park's CASA Mental Health as a leader in this field, and I am extremely confident that the work they do will play an important role as our government continues to build a recovery-oriented system of care, where everyone struggling with mental health is supported in their pursuit of recovery.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm seeing two in one. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park has a statement to make.

Alberta-Japan Relations

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to recognize and celebrate Alberta-Japan relations. The relationship is strong and will only grow stronger. Formally, diplomatic relations between Canada and Japan began in 1929, and a Japanese consulate has been in Alberta since 1967. The Alberta government's oldest international office is in Tokyo and opened in 1970. As well, Alberta has had a vibrant sister province relationship with Hokkaido since 1980, and many Alberta municipalities have sister city relations with Japanese municipalities.

Beyond formal ties, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta-Japan relationship is robust, with many Alberta educational institutions having relations with Japanese institutions, including the U of A, the U of C, and the U of L as well as secondary schools. As well, thousands of Albertans are of Japanese ancestry. Economically Japan is Alberta's third-largest trading partner, with energy, agriculture, and forestry products being the top commodities. Culturally Alberta and Hokkaido's associations maintain close ties.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta-Japan relationship prospers due to durable foundations, shared interests and values. On energy and food security we are perfect partners, Alberta as a supplier of reliable, high-quality products and Japan as a market and investor in these important sectors. Make no mistake: both Alberta and Japan have condemned Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine, which has made energy and food security even more salient for Japan. Alberta can and should be Japan's reliable provider of these products.

Alberta and Japan are both open societies, too, committed to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as well as a stable world order that includes a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Japan have had relations for more than a century. It is a relationship built on shared interests, values, and friendship. I look forward to the next 100 years of this beautiful relationship.

[Remarks in Japanese]

Health Care System

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government and Premier are desperate to convince Albertans that there is no crisis in health care. They are desperate to convince Albertans that somehow they have solved the crisis that took them four years to create in just 90 days. But I have some sad news for the members opposite: there is a crisis in health care, and while you try to spin it, Albertans are living with it.

Albertans are living with the consequences of calling for an ambulance, only to be told that either they don't need one or that one isn't coming. They are faced with spending days sitting in ER rooms waiting for medical attention. Albertans are faced with long waits for cancer treatment, with people waiting months in fear and pain just to see the oncologist. These are just some of the experiences Albertans are living with, and while the Premier might not accept them, the Albertans experiencing them deserve to be listened to.

1:40

But while the Premier plans to unfurl the mission accomplished banner rather than hearing what Albertans are experiencing, our caucus heard Albertans, did the work, and put forward a real solution, a real plan for 1 million Albertans to get access to a family doctor and a family health team. We're ready to get moving on this

right away and start hiring family health team members into existing clinics. Albertans will soon get to choose a government with a real plan to get their family the care they need, when they need it, right near home.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North has risen.

Support for Türkiye and Syria

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several weeks multiple earthquakes and tremors have devastated parts of Türkiye and Syria. To date these earthquakes have resulted in the loss of more than 50,000 lives, and the number is growing as recovery efforts continue. Complete city blocks have been levelled, and key infrastructure has been rendered useless. As the people of Türkiye and Syria try to move on from this devastating tragedy, they find themselves in a humanitarian crisis. People are without food, water, medical supplies, hygiene products, and other essentials that are needed to recover from natural disasters such as this one.

The people of Türkiye and Syria, Mr. Speaker, need our help. I am proud to see that our government has stepped up and responded to the urgent need for humanitarian aid in Türkiye and Syria. Yesterday a joint news release was sent out notifying the public that Alberta's government will be matching donations to the Red Cross of up to \$1 million to help the people of Türkiye and Syria. Albertans are caring and giving people. We rally to help our neighbours down the street or complete strangers on the other side of the globe. Albertans rallied together when Calgary and other communities flooded in 2013. We rallied when flood waters washed through a third of Pakistan in 2022. We rallied when fire ripped through Fort McMurray and surrounding areas in 2016, and we answered the call for help when a deadly explosion occurred in a port in Beirut in 2020.

It is in our blood to help, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are very giving and caring people, with huge compassion for others. I encourage all Albertans to help the people of Türkiye and Syria by donating to the Canadian Red Cross. Please visit redcross.ca to donate generously.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Canada Pension Plan

Ms Phillips: The UCP Finance minister recently told the news media there will be a referendum about gambling away Albertans' retirement savings in 2024. Well, I've got news for him: there's a little event between then and now; it's called an election. That's when Albertans get to vote on the UCP scheme to gamble with your CPP pension. All those contributions made to your pension since your first jobs as teenagers are at stake on May 29, 2023. Will that money, that is yours, still be there for you, or will it be gambled and wasted by an untrustworthy Premier?

On May 29 it'll be Albertans, not the UCP Premier, that will decide whether they can count on the money they saved in CPP contributions to help them retire in dignity. On May 29 it'll be Alberta employers that decide whether they want to pay higher premiums to bankroll the Premier's separatist fever dreams. On May 29 it'll be Alberta's seniors who decide whether they want to hand over the management of their monthly CPP cheque to a Premier whose lapses in judgment are well known, including that time she looked straight into a camera just a few months ago and argued that we should all pay to see a family doctor.

Albertans do not trust the UCP to mess around with their CPP, yet the Premier presses on. She said that some of our CPP could be used to pay for her UCP police force or for a new UCP tax

collection agency so that we can all file our taxes twice. Let me be crystal clear for Albertans: the Alberta NDP will defend your retirement security. Your retirement savings are yours. They don't belong to any politician. Albertans can count on the Alberta NDP to protect their CPP.

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

UCP and NDP Government Records

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the UCP's first of many terms in government nears its end, a balanced 2023 budget is evidence of this government's success on behalf of Albertans. In the wake of unprecedented global events Alberta has emerged in an extremely strong position. Our economy is flourishing. We have more than replaced the 183,000 jobs driven out of Alberta by the NDP when they were in government. Diversification is real under the UCP government, with several sectors blossoming, including IT, film and television, agricultural processing, and aeronautics. Calgary is now attracting talent from across Canada and beyond to a diverse and thriving job-creating environment. The NDP once had a minister advise Albertans to go to B.C. to find a job.

Our government and our budget exemplify the strong position Alberta is in right now. Allocations to support those still struggling and incentives to bring even more business and investment to our province are included. While the NDP pays lip service to struggling Alberta families, it was they who did more than anyone to cause the problems. They partnered with Justin Trudeau to crush our largest industry and drive out a hundred billion dollars in investment. They helped Trudeau kill Energy East and Northern Gateway, which could now be providing responsible energy to Europe rather than our allies being held hostage by Putin's war machine.

Campaign NDP talks about making life affordable for Albertans. They want us to forget that government NDP raised electricity costs from 3 cents to somehow bragging about 6.8 cents, and now it's over 10. Albertans know this UCP government has helped replace the jobs lost, bring back the industries crushed, and brought responsible money management back to Alberta. Albertans know that staying warm in the winter is not a bad thing, as the NDP made it seem. They know that driving to work to support their family is a contribution to Alberta and Canada, not an assault on the environment. This government encourages expansion of transit but will not tell rural Albertans to take a bus that doesn't exist.

Albertans will not be fooled. After four years of the NDP making life worse, they have a very stark choice, with a government that cares about them and their families.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies as chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This is the appropriate number of copies for the 2022 annual report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and with this, I'd also like to pass on my thanks to all the staff who supported the Public Accounts Committee for the last four years and all the various deputy chairs, including the hon. members for Livingstone-Macleod, Calgary-Fish Creek, and Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship I'm pleased to present on behalf of the committee the appropriate number of copies of the committee's report on a presentation by southern Alberta alternative energy partnership and Energy Futures Lab on February 2, 2023.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, sponsored by the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Bill 8 Alberta Firearms Act

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 8, being the Alberta Firearms Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time is now 1:50, and that makes it Oral Question Period. The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has the call.

Budget 2023 and Calgary Sexual Assault Services Funding

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it is all of our jobs to make sure that Calgary's economic future is secure. Revitalizing the downtown is a top priority, and my team has put forward a bold plan taking the best ideas from the mayor, the Chamber, and many others. The UCP, however, seems to have stopped opening their mail. Yesterday the Premier said that she didn't receive a priority list from the mayor for the downtown, but the mayor says that she sent it in November. To the Premier: on what date did she receive that list, when did she first read it, and why did she make that unfounded claim yesterday?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

1:50

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The letter wasn't brought to my attention, but it was forwarded to the Minister of Finance, and I'm pleased to see that many of the items that were recommended by the city of Calgary were included in our budget such as increased funding for FCSS; \$541 million for LRT projects, including an amount that will allow us to extend the line to the airport; \$282 million for the Springbank off-stream reservoir project; \$15 million for the Repsol sport centre; \$59.2 million for the Glenbow Museum revitalization; and, of course, year-over-year increase in MSI funding that will take it up to \$258.6 million by '25-26. I'm delighted to work more with the mayor.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, more than half of the items they keep listing for Calgary are projects that we started, so one party in this Assembly has Calgary's interests in mind.

Now, yesterday the Premier also claimed that Alberta sexual assault centres refused – her word – a \$4.2 million investment, a strange story. Later we learned they didn't actually refuse it; they just didn't think it was enough. Now, while this budget has \$30 million for a war room, can the Premier please tell us why it was her who actually refused to fully fund supports for survivors of sexual assault, not them refusing to take the money?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the \$17.1 million this year is going to be spent on sexual assault centres. That's a 25 per cent increase over the past five years. Now, our government did offer \$4.2 million in additional funding, which was not accepted by the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. If they've changed their mind, we'd be more than happy to have them contact our minister of social services so that we can cut the cheque and we can get started on making sure that services are given to the women as they need them.

Ms Notley: Doubling down, I guess.

You know, in one press conference yesterday the Premier intentionally provided inaccurate information to Albertans twice. That's a light day for her. She did receive a priority list from Calgary, and she declined to support the downtown. Advocates for survivors of sexual assault did not refuse funding; rather, she walked away when they told her it wasn't enough. Will the Premier admit that her statements yesterday were not accurate, that her statement today was not accurate, apologize to this House, and then reverse both of those decisions?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we stand ready to give the \$4.2 million to the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. If they'd like to contact the minister, we'd be happy to cut the cheque for them.

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

Emergency Medical Services

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we discussed an e-mail about an off-loading policy for paramedics in ERs, one that staff described as unsafe. Today the Parkland Institute released a report with descriptions from paramedics describing the hardship it causes. "I've seen nurses that I've known for years cry because they don't know what they're gonna do . . . People have died in the waiting rooms . . . They need somebody to be there taking care of them." So to the Premier: is moral injury the new mandate in EMS? Yes or no?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're delighted the Parkland Institute is catching up with us four months after the fact when we already began the process of making changes back on November 17. We knew that the issues were as acute as had been described because of the great work that the MLA for Highwood had done, going all over this province, talking to front-line workers, developing 98 recommendations for how we needed to implement and make change. We've released both of the reports publicly, and we've begun the process of making sure that we have more efficient off-load. As a result of that, we expect by the end of March that we're going to be reaching the 45-minute drop-off target.

Ms Notley: Every time she answers this question, her answer changes, and it's so confusing because the front-line staff are clearly under the impression that what's going to happen is that they're going to be mandated to do this, and they believe that all across Calgary. Now, it's my job to be their voice in this House.

She claims it's not a mandate; it's a target, but maybe it isn't a target. She claims she's hiring hundreds of nurses, all in just eight days. These folks deserve clarity. Will the Premier commit that there will be no changes to off-loading until every single nurse she claims she can hire in eight days is hired, trained, and on-site in the ER?

Ms Smith: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's incumbent in this Chamber for all of us to give true information to the public so that they are not made fearful by misinformation and false allegations. I'm quite happy to say that I have had a conversation with Dr. John Cowell, and the e-mail in question is patently untrue. It is irresponsible of the Leader of the Opposition to continue pretending it is true. There are 114 full-time equivalent nursing staff being hired as we speak who'll be stationed in all 16 of our acute-care hospitals. There will never be a case of a person being dropped off without care.

Ms Notley: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? Dr. Cowell's so-called solutions are never always what they claim to be. For instance, AHS recently touted funding for 19 new ambulances. However, in a recent media story Calgary-area paramedics told us that staff are actually being told to park the old ambulances and then take out the new ones. "On paper, we can say every day the new ambulances were staffed, but they're actively dropping [trucks] . . . off the board." Can the Premier please explain how Dr. Cowell asking staff to switch trucks somehow puts more trucks onto the road?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are going to judge the performance of the system by their experience in it. Last January we had over a thousand incidents in Edmonton where we were on the red alert, where there were not ambulances available. This year, after all the reforms that we have so far made, that was down to about 80. That's a 90 per cent reduction, and we had similar success in Calgary. Year over year the number of red alerts are down 60 per cent. That is a sign of a system that is working, because we're empowering paramedics on the front line so that they can treat on-site and also make sure that we have effective drop-off.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View is next.

Energy Company Liability

Ms Ganley: Twenty billion dollars: it's roughly the entire health care budget, also the amount that this Premier plans to give away to companies to clean up their own liabilities. Yesterday I visited Airdrie and Red Deer. Residents in these cities are facing ER closures, ambulance shortages, and can't get the medical care they deserve. Why is this Premier more focused on giving away billions of dollars of Albertans' money instead of addressing the real issues facing the people of this province?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, that information is just, quite frankly, false. Our Energy minister is consulting on a number of different initiatives for us to address the outstanding liability to clean up inactive well sites. We know that that amount has now gone up to \$30 billion, and it's why our government took action. The members opposite didn't take action when they were in the position. We are now cleaning up every single year \$740 million – \$740 million – in existing liability that comes out of the companies' own profits.

Ms Ganley: I'd love to know when the people of Alberta are going to see these other projects.

The Premier claims that her giveaway is only a pilot program worth \$100 million, likely a down payment on the \$20 billion, but coincidentally that's the same amount Calgary requested in the budget to support its struggling downtown. But they got nothing. Meanwhile Calgary has the highest office vacancy rate in the country, and the number of head offices has gone down under the UCP. Why is this Premier ignoring Calgary while giving billions of dollars to her friends?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the members opposite have any credibility when they're talking about hollowing out the downtown office core in Calgary. We had 13 consecutive quarters where people left this province, and their Energy minister at the time said that their job-creation plan was: go get a job in British Columbia. We only had \$30 million worth of venture capital investment; we're up to \$729 million a year. And a lot of those head offices and those expansions are happening where? In Calgary. An 8 per cent corporate income tax is to credit for that.

Ms Ganley: Let's talk about credibility, Mr. Speaker. This Premier tries to claim that her \$20 billion giveaway is just a pilot project and that no decisions have been made until after the election. But the organizers for this scam: one of them runs a third-party attack ad on the NDP, another one campaigned for the Premier during her leadership contest and now works in her office, and the third is the Premier herself. Why is the Premier hiding the details of her giveaway? Is it because she knows it makes Tory land look like Disneyland?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I will not hide the fact that I believe it's a priority for this government to clean up the \$30 billion of liability that have been created over the years because of inactive wells, and we are going to take every measure to make sure that we do it. We have \$740 million being cleaned up this year, and part of the reason companies have the ability to do that is because we reduced the corporate income tax rate down to 8 per cent. They increased it: 12 per cent. So when they're talking about caring about Calgary, I can tell you that's no way to attract businesses into downtown Calgary. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:00 Budget 2023 and Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, imagine the mayor of Lethbridge's surprise last week when he told the media that he thought there was a page missing from the budget. People in Lethbridge could not believe our city got nothing in the budget. My question is simple. To the Premier: why is there \$20 billion for friends and insiders but nothing for families in Lethbridge?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is hilarious to hear this from the member opposite when, in fact, if she had looked at the budget, she'd realize that just capital spending alone, just this budget: \$70.6 million on top of previous years' \$165 million of just capital spending, not to mention that just yesterday I had the honour of spending the day with the minister of seniors and community services announcing \$355 million in programming for the disability and homeless sector. More than proud to stand up for Lethbridge, more than proud to stand up for our government.

Thank you.

Ms Phillips: Well, the budget has no details for expansion of cardiology services in Lethbridge. The project has been on AHS's radar since 2018, when we committed to it. Several years later, with advocacy from physicians and the city council, Lethbridge still got nothing. One cannot find a family doctor accepting new patients, and there's no plan to address that either. Why is the Premier ignoring access to health care, any kind of health care, really, from primary care to advanced cardiac care? Is it because she would just rather that we pay to see a doctor?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Neudorf: Again thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the member opposite had done her homework, she'd realize that Alberta Health Services south zone didn't even put the cath lab on the capital list until 2022, let alone that it was never put on the priority list, so the Minister of Health never received that. Hard to fund a project that was never asked for in the first place. I'd like to see – what did that member do when she had four years in government to invest in health care in Lethbridge? Absolutely nothing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. members will come to order.

Ms Phillips: I guess we'll have to see what kind of documents actually exist for that.

The city and county of Lethbridge identified a number of critical investments in water and waste water, the replacement of highway 3 bridge, new investments in housing, yet nothing. Let's see: nothing for infrastructure despite having the Infrastructure minister in the city, nothing for health care despite having one of the worst health care crises in the province, nothing for housing despite homelessness doubling since 2019. To the Deputy Premier and the Infrastructure minister. He does realize that it's his job to be the voice for Lethbridge in government, not to just seal-clap for government talking points in Lethbridge. He does realize that, right?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, if they'd done their homework, they'd realize that capital investment in this budget: \$70.6 million, new projects, new schools, new gymnasium for a school, but she couldn't get that gym done in 20 years. We authored \$25 million additional spending for health care, surgical initiatives, the renal dialysis program, which was a priority put forward by the Alberta Health Services south zone. On top of that, more infrastructure, the agrifood tax credit, which will be a huge benefit to the south as that's where we not only grow food but we process it and ship it all over the world. More than happy with this budget.

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

Child and Youth Mental Health Supports

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CASA Mental Health is a vital part of the Edmonton region and a leader in delivering youth mental health services across the province, and that is why I was pleased to see our government partner with them to expand mental health treatment for youth across Alberta. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: could you please inform the House about the government's partnership with CASA Mental Health and the impact that this announcement has on families here in this region?

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member, of course, for that very important question. You know, every person in Alberta certainly deserves the opportunity to access mental health supports, access and pursue recovery, and live a happy and healthy life. If passed, Budget 2023 will invest \$92 million over three years to provide critical mental health supports for children and youth across Alberta in partnership with CASA Mental Health. This is an enormous investment in children's mental health, and on this side of the House we support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for his answer. Given that CASA House is based in Sherwood Park and has proven results providing youth mental health services and given that no child should go without the help and support they need to live healthy and happy lives regardless of where they live in the province and given that Alberta's government is dramatically expanding services to support more young Albertans in their pursuit of recovery, can the minister please elaborate on the government's plan to expand CASA House programming to other cities here in Alberta?

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member again for the question. As part of the \$92 million investment into CASA Mental Health, \$25 million is going to go towards capital projects in Fort McMurray and in Calgary to expand CASA House services to those cities. CASA House is a live-in program for youth, for grades 7 to 12, where their parents and caregivers can activate and participate in treatment. It's all-inclusive, and it's something that CASA is very proud of, the work that they have been doing in expansion to help more young Albertans with complex mental health needs. It's something that's very important on this side of the House.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Budget 2023 includes record-level investments for the newly established Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction and given that provincial funding for this ministry has more than doubled since the members opposite were in power and given that the \$92 million investment to expand CASA Mental Health services will make life-changing impacts on young Albertans right across the province, can the minister please inform this House how yesterday's announcement fits into the province's recovery-oriented system of care?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. You know, of course, this is unprecedented, the amount of money that we're spending to support children with mental health issues, Mr. Speaker. The funding alongside this record-setting \$275 million investment to the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction builds on an ongoing effort to remove barriers and make high-quality mental health care accessible to everyone. On this side of House it's about ensuring that we have mental health supports that are accessible and affordable for all Albertans.

Thank you.

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: The Premier's recent claim that our health care system is not in crisis was an insult to every health care worker in our province who's been mistreated and unsupported by this government, and they were quick to say so. Dr. Neeja Bakshi said: "I woke up to [over] 120% capacity for internal medicine for the 18th month in a row and [that's] dangerously close to saying we can no longer safely admit patients – but sure. It's no longer in crisis." She says: "Morale is very, very low . . . The front liners can tell [this Premier], that things have not changed, things are exactly the same." To her: who should Albertans trust, the workers on the front lines saving lives or a Premier desperate to save her job?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We know that we have challenges in health care. That's why I am so pleased that part of this budget, Budget 2023 – we are investing nearly another billion dollars, the record amount ever, to be able to expand capacity within our health care system and hire more people to support the delivery of health care services. We are making progress in getting the times down. I was very pleased to be standing with Dr. Cowell and our Premier to make the announcement of the 90-day report, getting wait times down in terms of EMS, emergency departments, and I'll talk more about that in a second.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, given that regarding wait times, Mr. Speaker – Sheila Ethier is a nurse advocating for her husband, who has stage 4 lung cancer. She's on a mission to get Brian treated as quickly as possible, but given that Sheila has worked the phones daily since his diagnosis but recently sent us a note saying that they're resigned to the wait, that there's nothing they can do about the backlog in Edmonton and Calgary due to the severe staff shortages caused in good part by the UCP, will the Premier or this minister apologize to Sheila and Brian and all Albertans who are waiting for treatment for their failure to be truthful about what Albertans are experiencing in our health care system?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to all Albertans who are sitting on the wait list and many of them who are waiting in pain. There are levels of uncertainty. This is a problem in Alberta. This is a problem, quite frankly, across the entire country and most of the First World. COVID demonstrated the cracks that already existed in our system. Unfortunately, patients were waiting far too long even under the previous government, but we are taking action to address that. You know, very pleased, again, that as part of the 90-day report our surgery wait-list is coming down. In November it was 39,246, and as of January 2023: 35,595 waiting at a time. That is still too high, but we are making investments to be able to get that number . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this government hammered on the cracks until they split wide open and given that in her president's letter to Alberta Medical Association members on March 3 Dr. Rinaldi wrote:

It's . . . important to note the crisis is far from over. Members are seeing unchanged pressures in the ER and ER closures continue at various rural sites. In my own practice, I have noticed no change in the lengthy wait to see a specialist and many Albertans are still unable to find a family physician.

Given that there are dozens of hospitals partially closed due to staff shortages, will this Premier, this minister take some responsibility,

admit they were wrong, acknowledge the very real crisis in health care in Alberta?

2:10

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I noted, there are challenges in our health care system. As part of Budget 2022 we allocated an additional \$600 million in that budget year; \$1.8 billion over three years; this budget year, as I already indicated, nearly an addition billion dollars on top of that. We know we have challenges in our system, and we are addressing them. Again, very pleased, as part of the 90-day report, that the trend lines are heading in the right direction in terms of surgery wait-lists, EMS wait times, and ED wait times, but I recognize we need to do more. We have a plan to do it, and we're delivering on that plan.

Child Care Cost-control Framework

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, last month the UCP quietly released their cost-control framework for child care, but when asked about it at a press conference, not one of the three UCP ministers there wanted to or could answer questions about it. Why? Because they don't want Alberta parents to know that under their plan parents won't ever be paying only \$10 a day for child care. Parents will be paying extra fees for, quote, enhanced services. What's an enhanced service? Well, food – snacks and meals – language and inclusion supports, a puppet performance, an art class, things that should be part of every early childhood program. Will the minister admit he wants to nickel and dime Alberta parents at the expense of their kids' early learning?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I am incredibly proud about the progress that we made with respect to the cost-control framework, and we're working diligently with our federal counterparts to make sure that parents in this province have the choice of what type of daycare they want to provide for their children. This cost-control framework program will allow all daycare operators to flourish in this province while keeping daycare in this province affordable for all parents as well.

Thank you.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the UCP's plan means children of parents who can't afford to pay these so-called extras will be left out of meals, field trips, activities, which is heartbreaking and callous, and given that for-profit and nonprofit child care operators are all saying that this goes against everything they know about early childhood education and that it isn't even practical to separate kids from each other because of staffing requirements, how does the minister plan to implement this framework in April since he hasn't consulted with operators or been up front with parents? Or is he waiting until after the election so we have to clean up his mess for him?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, we're doing exactly that. We're taking our time to get this right, unlike the failed program of the NDP, the \$25-a-day pilot program, which was an incredible failure. We're taking the opportunity to get it right by consulting and engaging with all stakeholders in this province, including our daycare providers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Pancholi: Given that working parents using out of school care are currently paying more for one to two hours of child care than some parents using full-day child care and given that since Budget 2023 doesn't include even a dollar more from the province for child care, the UCP is continuing to exclude these parents from affordable child

care and given that the Alberta NDP has been clear that we will include out of school care – we will not ask parents to pay more for quality child care, and we will consult and value all operators and educators. Three UCP ministers have failed Alberta families on child care, but Albertans will get to make a different choice soon. Is the minister ready to admit that the NDP is the party to make affordable quality child care ...

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

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the mere thought of an NDP government with respect to our daycare providers in this province strikes fear in all of our providers. Their failed program was proof positive that they cannot manage the daycare program in this province. This government is providing affordable daycare. This government is providing a sustainable daycare model for our providers in this province, and we'll continue to do so into the next election and beyond. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore is next.

Budget 2023 and Calgary

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a Calgarian and the owner of a family business in downtown Calgary for 32 years, I've seen downtown Calgary both struggle and grow. Today Calgary is coming back as investments pour back into the city. In fact, according to a recent Avison Young report vacancy rates in downtown Calgary are dropping for the first time in years. To the Minister of Finance: why was the situation in downtown Calgary so dire under the previous government, and what is this government doing to turn things around?

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

Ms Schulz: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We'll take a walk down memory lane to when the NDP jacked up the business tax, refused to defend our energy industry, emptied out the downtown core, chased 183,000 jobs out of Alberta, and then told Albertans to go to B.C. if they wanted a job. We have taken many steps to diversify our economy, encourage investment, and create jobs. We accelerated the job-creation tax cut. We implemented the innovation employment grant. We created Invest Alberta. We recapitalized the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. We've cut almost 30 per cent of red tape. We're investing additional funds to Alberta ...

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government has restored the Alberta advantage and has just introduced our second balanced budget in a row and given that Alberta's economy is strong and leading the nation in economic growth, meaning that we can invest in projects that matter to Calgary families, can the Minister of Municipal Affairs explain what the 2023 budget for Calgary projects is and how those projects will help our beloved city continue to grow and prosper?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, the long list of capital investments in Calgary is so long that I can never seem to make it through the entire list. We are investing nearly \$3 billion in capital investments in three years. So what I'm going to start with is the new projects and initiatives in this year's budget: \$59 million

for the University of Calgary vet med expansion, \$41 million for SAIT John Ware redevelopment, \$38 million for the office of the Chief Medical Examiner that's in Calgary, \$22 million for a new interchange at Stoney Trail and Airport Trail N.E., \$20 million towards the Repsol sport centre, \$5 million for the Calgary Stampede Foundation . . .

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Calgary's downtown economy is growing and diversifying, with industries like film and television, technology, and the arts all booming, and given that the members across the aisle, particularly the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, seem to have a preoccupation with festivals as a component of downtown vitality, can the Minister of Culture tell us what the single largest festival in Alberta is and what impact it has on downtown Calgary's economy?

Mr. Luan: Thank you, hon. member, for that great question. Unlike the NDP, who don't even know how to read the budget – let me tell you this. In Budget 2023 we invest \$5.8 million to the Calgary Stampede. That will yield \$540 million in economic impact for Calgary alone. Mr. Speaker, we have 1.2 million people participating in the Calgary Stampede. We're not done yet. The Glenbow Museum: a \$40 million investment for the grand opening, targeted for 2025. I'm looking forward to . . .

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Mr. Dach: The budget tabled by the UCP last week was their fifth budget, and for the fifth time in a row the UCP have failed to deliver the critically needed south Edmonton hospital. The only thing they manage to do time and time again is delay this vitally needed hospital, that would serve growing communities in south Edmonton. Instead of a hospital under construction, Alberta families have an empty field. Why does this government refuse to build the south Edmonton hospital?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This budget has \$630 million for that very hospital.

I'd like to point out the fact that in 2017, while the NDP were in government, they did a very high-level, pathetic, superficial needs assessment. They did no business case, they did no clinical service plan, they did no functional plan and then just picked a number out of the sky and put that towards the hospital. Very difficult to build anything without a plan. Maybe they should go back and learn to do that work before they announce big, grandiose numbers.

Mr. Dach: Empty fields, empty promises.

Given that after four years and five budgets the best the UCP could muster is talking about how they're planning and doing site work, which anybody who's actually been to the site knows is not true, and given that the Infrastructure minister was unable to answer the question about when construction would start on this hospital when asked before the budget, let's try again. Can the Infrastructure minister tell this House on what date construction of the south Edmonton hospital will actually begin?

Mr. Neudorf: On the date that we finally fix the mess that the NDP left us. It's interesting that the NDP, when they picked the site for the south Edmonton hospital, picked a piece of land under which an active pipeline is. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it's very

difficult to negotiate how you build a hospital on top of an active pipeline. It's really great that they left us another mess with no business case, no clinical service plan, no functional plan, and just a number picked out of the sky. Once we fix all of their problems, we'll actually start.

2:20

Mr. Dach: More empty fields, more empty promises, Mr. Speaker.

Given that our government ended decades of Conservative flip-flopping to get the Calgary cancer centre built but given that the UCP made it their mission to delay the south Edmonton hospital as long as possible, showing that when it comes to the health of the Edmonton region and the surrounding area, this government simply doesn't care, can the minister state categorically on the record what date the south Edmonton hospital will open? Or, like the rest of the province, is he waiting for an NDP government to come back into office to get the project built?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will start this project. We have started this project, but we're still fixing their messes. Not only did they pick a site with an active pipeline underneath it; they had no plan, no business case, and no clinical services planned. We are working on building that, we have dedicated money for that, and when we figure out the best way to meet those services and the needs of people in Edmonton, we can start designing this. We want to build this, we've set money aside for it, and we're continuing to move in the right direction even though they didn't do any of that in their four years in government.

Support for Ukrainian Refugees

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, roughly 20,000 Ukrainian refugees have come to Alberta in the last year. I'm proud to be from a country that has opened its doors to help Ukrainians. That's also a reason I'm so deeply disappointed to hear that the UCP is forcing Ukrainian refugees to jump through unnecessary hoops and verify their assets before qualifying for provincial aid. Timely access to financial aid for refugees is crucial, and this government is making it harder than need be. To the minister: does this government seriously think that Ukrainian refugees can phone their banks to verify their assets, assets that may have already been destroyed?

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that question. Certainly, we want to make sure that Ukrainian evacuees that are in Alberta are getting the support that they need. That's why we've recently announced the expansion of the income support program, got rid of the six-month deadline, to make sure that people could access the supports. So if people are still falling through the cracks and not getting that support, I'd love to work with the member as well as the community, as we have been, and our great parliamentary secretary for Ukrainian supports to make sure that we're meeting the needs. I look forward to talking more afterwards.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many Ukrainians cannot access financial aid because of the asset verification requirement, an issue the government, I've been told, has been made aware of multiple times yet has still not addressed, and given

that the government has a duty to ensure refugees have the support they need to live in dignity, how can Ukrainian refugees trust the government has their best interests at heart when Ukrainian refugees are living in this province right now without access to vital financial support because of this bad policy?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for bringing this to my attention. It has been my direction – of course, we can't use assets that are locked up in Ukraine against individuals that have had to evacuate to Alberta. That is not our policy. If that is what's happening on the front line, I will get that fixed. I want to make sure that people who have had to evacuate their country because of this unjust, terrible war get the appropriate supports here in Alberta. I think we all can agree that that is of utmost importance, and I'm so thankful for that member bringing it to my attention. I will get on this right away to make sure that we deal with this shortsightedness.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Ukrainian refugees have endured trauma, left and lost loved ones, and are now faced with the immense challenge of resettling in a new and unfamiliar place, we need to make the situation as easy as possible for them. So I will hold the minister to his words. I appreciate his willingness to work with us and the Ukrainian organizations that are helping refugees settle and would urge the minister to act with diligence and speed.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for his advocacy on this issue. He certainly has my commitment and the commitment of this government to make sure that all Ukrainians that end up in Alberta are getting the support, that they know this is a warm and welcoming place for them to be able to land. Of course, working across this government, we're going to do that. Thank you again for bringing this to my attention. That's my commitment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has a question.

Crop Insurance

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A quiet drama has been unfolding in the ag file outside of this Chamber, and I wanted to bring the question right here to the Legislature. The other day, listening to 630 CHED, I heard a member of the opposition, the critic for agriculture, claiming that when we look at crop insurance premiums, they're going to be going up by 60 per cent. Now, that's a big number, and it ran a shock down my spine. I wanted to hear the truth in this Chamber and give the minister an opportunity. Is the NDP right? Is it going up 60 per cent, Minister?

Mr. Horner: Of course, they're not right, no. I can assure everyone in this House that crop insurance premiums are definitely not increasing by 60 per cent. You would think, if the members opposite were confused by the fiscal plan or the budget, they would ask a question of me, my ministry, the department, or maybe AFSC as opposed to calling a press conference to spread misinformation and attempt to incite panic. The programs in our business risk management suite should never be politicized; they're too important to the ag community. More questions, fewer memes. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that that's embarrassing for the members opposite and given that farmers are working hard to keep up with the challenge of rising costs, never mind the Trudeau and NDP carbon tax that is continuing to drive up costs for farmers, and given that insurance coverage needs to be adjusted to the market conditions, what growth coverage should Albertan farmers expect in this year, 2023?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The crop insurance coverage in Alberta has increased substantially over the last two years, by an order of magnitude. We've seen the aggregated coverage double, from \$4.8 billion to almost \$10 billion. Now, much of that increase we saw last year. We will still see increases in this year, with year-over-year changes in hard red spring wheat at 17 per cent, feed barley at 9 per cent, canola at 12 per cent, yellow field peas at 2 to 3 per cent. The increase in premiums to individuals in this year will align closely with the change in the value of the specific crops they're growing.

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the clarity of the answer here in the people's Chamber so that farmers can hear the honest truth.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite, including the Leader of the Opposition, have social media accounts with memes propagating this sort of misinformation, given that not one question came to this Chamber or to the minister's office and given the importance of focusing on the truth in this Chamber if nowhere else, could the minister please let us know what he is doing . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Williams: . . . to address the misinformation and speak to the honest truth about what Alberta farmers can expect from this government? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

A point of order is noted at 2:27.

The minister.

Mr. Horner: Yeah. It feels a little like Groundhog Day in here. I told the NDP critic last year that you can't just bust out your crayons and mess with this formula. The formula is set; it's the same formula that was here under the NDP. It's part of an agreement between the federal government and the provinces. The funds that move are statutory. The formula encompasses your area rate, your historical yield data, the premium rate, your level of coverage, and your crop type. I would suggest that the next time you feel like bebopping outside of the Anthony Henday, you know what the heck you're talking about.

Digital Media Tax Credit Policy

Ms Goehring: In the UCP's first budget the Finance minister declared economic diversification to be a luxury and proceeded to cut several tax credits, including the interactive digital media tax credit. As a result, Alberta lost jobs as companies hired out of province. One tech CEO said that he moved his company to Calgary because of the tax credit, and if he had known that the rug would have been pulled out like this, he never would have moved to

Alberta. The tech sector has been asking for the digital media tax credit to be reinstated for three and a half years, but the UCP keeps letting them down. Minister, where's the tax credit?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. Yes, it is true. The Premier did ask me to look into bringing forward a proposal on what a tax credit for the digital media space could look like, and we are continuing that important work. The key thing here is, though, that we need to find a balance between representing the interests of all Albertans and Alberta taxpayers and the interests of the digital media industry. If we're going to introduce a program that's going to cost tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of dollars over the long term, we owe it to Albertans to make sure that we've done our homework on the economic analysis and the cost benefit. That's exactly what we're going to do, and it's going to take a little time.

Ms Goehring: Given that in November the minister said that a digital media tax credit was, quote, a priority and given that in her mandate letter the Premier asked the Minister of Tech and Innovation to develop a tax credit proposal for the video game, digital media industry to be competitive with Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, attract investment, and create jobs and given that the tax credit wasn't in the budget, why has this minister failed to deliver on this?

2:30

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to remind the members opposite that I have an obligation to all Albertans and to Alberta taxpayers to make sure that whatever programs I recommend that our government proceed with are a responsible use of taxpayer dollars. I am still committed to following up on the Premier's direction to explore proposals for a digital media tax credit, but we've got to do it in a responsible way that respects all Albertans, as I said, finding that balance between the needs and priorities of all Albertans and the needs and priorities of the digital...

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Given that one tech CEO whose company started in Alberta thanks to the digital media tax credit said that he was getting ready to reinvest in the province with the expectation that the tax credit was coming back and given that this snub in the budget means that those investment plans and jobs will die in Alberta and thrive in other provinces and given that B.C. just extended their digital media tax credit for another five years, why is this government okay with losing Alberta jobs to other provinces?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we remain committed to exploring policy proposals for a digital media tax credit, but we have to do it in a responsible and sustainable way that relies on good, sound economic analysis. We need to do a proper cost-benefit analysis of this. Other provinces that have these programs have a PST, which is a major economic disadvantage to their entire economy, but that's partly how they fund these. We do not have a PST, and we're proud of not having a PST. That is why we are taking a little bit more of a cautious approach as we are evaluating...

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert is next.

Food Bank Funding

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, food banks are struggling to keep up with demand. It's gotten so bad that they're actually cutting the size of food hampers here in Edmonton, saving some of the amount that they give families. The cost of living and the price of food are too high, and this government has done very little to address this problem. The UCP's inaction has hurt nonprofits and the hard-working people of this province. They deserve better. This UCP government announced that \$20 million would be going out the door to help food banks in Alberta, yet the two biggest food banks, that are feeder food banks – they're huge – in Edmonton and Calgary, only got a combined about half a million dollars. Why is that, Minister?

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm proud to be able to stand up today and say that this government has put money behind food banks, which has not happened before in Alberta's history, because we know how important food security is. We were happy to be able to partner with not-for-profits across this province and not only support food banks but also support community and cultural organizations across the province because they have great reach into our communities. They know where the need is. They can help meet that need, and we can usually leverage our limited dollars with their great volunteer and community support. We are committed to addressing food scarcity and promoting food security.

Ms Renaud: Given that food banks serve a significant portion of Alberta's population, with the province's biggest food bank serving over 30,000 visitors a month, and given that government's so-called support for food banks has only provided Alberta's food banks enough money to cover one month of food supply in these biggest food banks, will the minister admit that this government is not and has never really been invested in supporting people in this province? Over the last four years you made poverty worse. Now we're close to an election, and it's: money, money, money for you; here, we're going to fix this problem. You made the problem worse. Explain how you're going to fix it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I just might provide some caution to the member that making an accusation like, "You made the problem worse," and not speaking through the chair are certainly not likely to create an environment where decorum is moving in the right direction.

The hon. the minister.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has demonstrated a serious commitment to addressing challenges within our community, not just food scarcity issues, through our historic investment into food banks but also partnering with not-for-profits across the board. We've increased funding for homeless supports. We've increased funding for mental health and addictions supports.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: We've increased money for affordable housing, significant increases for affordable housing. Our affordability minister has done fantastic work expanding supports as well. We are very committed to helping our most vulnerable. We indexed AISH,

seniors' benefits, and other supports as well. Mr. Speaker, we're committed to addressing these issues.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:35.

Ms Renaud: Given that we've seen four years of cuts that have made poverty worse in this province – we've seen it all over the place, four years of cuts, Mr. Speaker – and given that this minister now is standing up and trying to boast about helping the food banks when actually this government created the problem and given that many people in this province were ineligible for the affordability payments despite the fact that they desperately needed support, it's clear that the government actions lack any substance, so will this government stand up today and admit that they actually missed the point, that they only really got money to a tiny fraction of the population?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of what we've been able to do to help care for our most vulnerable in our community. I'm committed to continuing to work with our not-for-profit sector to make sure that we are addressing these needs, these great needs, that are in our community. During the last election when I was going door to door, there was a lot of hurt door to door, a lot of people who had lost their jobs, talking to people in their mid-50s who weren't ready to retire but were worried about how they were going to survive and talking to parents whose kids were leaving the province because they couldn't find work here in Alberta. Now as I'm door-knocking in my constituency, my constituents are working. That's how we're addressing the challenges in our community.

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

Immigration Nominations and Settlement Supports

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Strategic immigration is key to any jurisdiction's success. Immigration helps economies to grow. When newcomers move to Alberta's communities, they spend their money in Alberta and help continue Alberta's economic momentum. Immigrants bring new skills and talents with them, and when they arrive in Alberta, they help our province fill any labour shortage. To the minister of immigration: was Alberta able to receive an increase in immigration nominations, and if so, what were the new nomination numbers?

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. After my conversation with the federal minister of immigration, Minister Sean Fraser, we were able to secure an increase in nomination certificates for Alberta. The Alberta advantage immigration program will be able to award 9,750 nominations in 2023. This is a significant increase from our 2022 number of 6,500, and we expect to receive more than 10,000 nominations in 2024 and almost 11,000 nominations in 2025. This is ...

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta has received a substantial increase to nomination numbers and given that Alberta's government has made it a top priority to increase immigration to our province and given that this government has stated that Alberta is facing a labour shortage in

key sectors, to the same minister: what key sectors are facing labour shortages, and what is the Alberta government's plan to address these labour shortages using immigration?

Thank you.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is currently facing labour shortages in technology, tourism, service industries, health care, and more. AAIP will help us attract and retain skilled newcomers that bring skills and talents that will help fill these labour shortages. I am working closely with the Ministry of Health to create a stream within AAIP that will attract needed health care workers to the province. We are also working hard to ensure that Alberta streamlines the process of foreign credential recognition to help get all newcomers into the jobs that they are qualified for. AAIP also has a rural immigration stream that will help with rejuvenating rural economies.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta will be welcoming a large number of immigrants in the coming years and given that through the economic focus of the Alberta advantage immigration program our province will be able to nominate newcomers with skills needed to fill labour shortages and given that many newcomers will find themselves in our province, where they will be faced with language barriers, can the minister of immigration tell the members and Albertans how this government will support newcomers settling in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we are going to attract newcomers to the province, it is paramount that we set them up for success. We are fighting racism to ensure newcomers feel safe and welcome in Alberta's communities. We are prioritizing newcomers with close family connections in the province to ensure that they have family support systems. We are supporting language and settlement services to help newcomers learn English and settle into their communities, yet – yet – Alberta still needs more help from the federal government to support these newcomers. I've called on the federal government to ensure they provide funding to help with these settlement services.

2:40

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

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Madu, Deputy Premier and Minister of Skilled Trades and Professions, pursuant to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta annual report 2021.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:27 the hon. the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We rise under 23(h), (i), and (j) but specifically around the practices of this Chamber around the use of terms like "lying" and "misinformation."

The Member for Peace River was speaking and, through his question, both question 1, supplemental 1, and supplemental 2, repeatedly accused the opposition, the Leader of the Official Opposition of lying and spreading misinformation, ironically, about a topic where on page 70 of the fiscal plan it is printed, “The increase in 2023-24 is due mainly to: \$99 million for a 60% rise in agriculture insurance premium rates necessary to replenish the crop insurance fund” in black and white. This was the item under debate. He then accused the opposition of misinformation and lying and of creating memes to that effect. He also accused the opposition of being unable to confirm information or ask questions when the 60 per cent increase and the cause for it and the direct impact of it were confirmed during technical briefings with the government’s officials.

This is a point of order, and it speaks against your rulings, Mr. Speaker, including rulings made on June 7, 2021, and others around the use of “lying” and “misinformation.”

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don’t have the benefit of the Blues, so I would not be able to confirm what was or was not said by the hon. Member for Peace River and the government deputy whip. It is a long-standing tradition in this House that we do not identify specific members and use the words “lying” or “misleading.” If that was in fact the case, it would be unparliamentary and would require an apology and a withdrawal.

But I do not have the benefit of the Blues, I did not hear the remark, so I leave it in your capable hands, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and what I can confirm – and I might just note to the Opposition House Leader that it’s almost like you are continuing debate in a dispute of the facts on: was it or wasn’t it? That’s what we do here on a general basis, and points of order are not to be used for such things.

With respect to the Blues: “Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the clarity of the answer here.” It sounds like a bit of a preamble; I might just provide some caution. The member goes on to say: “Given, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite, including the Leader of the Opposition, have social media accounts with memes propagating this sort of misinformation.” While I can appreciate that it does get close to the line of “misled” or “lying” – it certainly didn’t use either of those terms today in the Chamber – I also will point the hon. Opposition House Leader to the majority of those decisions; there was a period of time that led up to those decisions where I referenced previous cases.

I anticipate that it’s going to be a very robust month of debate here in the Assembly, and I provide caution to all members, including to the Member for Peace River, but this is not a point of order at this point in time. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, at 2:35 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Gestures

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order under 23(j). Though it doesn’t explicitly say here, I suspect, to “uses abusive

or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder” I would add in there gestures. At the time noted for the point of order, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud clearly gave me the middle finger in the middle of this Chamber. There is precedent for this in the Chamber before, on a member on our side of the House. That was pointed out, and that member apologized. I believe that such actions and decorum are not worthy of this Chamber and certainly don’t represent the good people of Alberta, that we represent. I would encourage the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to apologize for that gesture and refrain from using that kind of activity and making those kinds of gestures in this Chamber going forward.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Apologies, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud sits behind me, I am not aware of any gestures that may have been done in this House, so I cannot weigh in on this particular point of order.

The Speaker: I will accept the member’s argument on its merits. I can speak specifically to situations in the past where this accusation, allegation, and activity has taken place in the Assembly. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood of the day certainly had used an inappropriate gesture, including the middle finger, directed at members of the opposition at that time. While the member denied it at the time, members of the Assembly came to believe that it was true, with some confirmation by the Sergeant-at-Arms, and that member subsequently apologized. I hope that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud will be reflective. If she did use those sorts of gestures, she ought to apologize to this Assembly; if she didn’t, I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Orders of the Day, Ordres du jour. And I can assure members that those orders will continue in committee.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2023-24 main estimates schedule the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30. The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for the consideration of main estimates. This afternoon at 3:30 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 Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations in the Grassland Room. Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Technology and Innovation in the Grassland Room, starting at 8; the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Health in the Rocky Mountain Room, starting at 9; and the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Transportation and Economic Corridors in the Grassland Room; starting at 10:15.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 pm.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:48 p.m.]

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