



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
Fourth Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, March 21, 2023

Day 22

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Fourth Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker  
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees  
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Hon. Leela Sharon, ECA, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Allard, Hon. Tracy L., ECA, Grande Prairie (UC)  
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC)  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)  
Bilous, Hon. Deron, ECA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Copping, Hon. Jason C., ECA, Calgary-Varsity (UC)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)  
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),  
Official Opposition Whip  
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC)  
Feehan, Hon. Richard, ECA, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)  
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)  
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)  
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),  
Official Opposition House Leader  
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)  
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)  
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)  
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)  
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy Whip  
Issik, Hon. Whitney, ECA, Calgary-Glenmore (UC)  
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche  
(UC)  
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)  
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)  
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Luan, Hon. Jason, ECA, Calgary-Foothills (UC)  
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, ECA, KC, Edmonton-South West (UC),  
Deputy Premier, Deputy Government House Leader  
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)  
Milliken, Hon. Nicholas, ECA, Calgary-Currie (UC)  
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)  
Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC),  
Deputy Premier

Nicolaides, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)  
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre  
(UC)  
Nixon, Hon. Jeremy P., ECA, Calgary-Klein (UC)  
Notley, Hon. Rachel, ECA, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),  
Leader of the Official Opposition  
Orr, Hon. Ronald, ECA, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)  
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
Panda, Hon. Prasad, ECA, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)  
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)  
Pon, Hon. Josephine, ECA, Calgary-Beddington (UC)  
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)  
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)  
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)  
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)  
Rutherford, Hon. Brad, ECA, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),  
Government Whip  
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Savage, Hon. Sonya, ECA, KC, Calgary-North West (UC)  
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North East (UC)  
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)  
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC),  
Government House Leader  
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)  
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, ECA, KC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)  
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)  
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)  
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)  
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),  
Premier  
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Toews, Hon. Travis, ECA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)  
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)  
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)  
Vacant, Calgary-Elbow  
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

## Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, KC, Clerk  
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk  
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary  
Counsel  
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and  
Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and  
Committees  
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary  
Programs  
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of  
*Alberta Hansard*

Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms  
Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms  
Lang Bawn, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

### **Executive Council**

Danielle Smith	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Kaycee Madu	Deputy Premier, Minister of Skilled Trades and Professions
Nathan Neudorf	Deputy Premier, Minister of Infrastructure
Mickey Amery	Minister of Children's Services
Jason Copping	Minister of Health
Devin Dreesen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Mike Ellis	Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Pete Guthrie	Minister of Energy
Nate Horner	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Brian Jean	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development
Matt Jones	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism
Jason Luan	Minister of Culture
Nicholas Milliken	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jeremy Nixon	Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services
Brad Rutherford	Minister without Portfolio
Sonya Savage	Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism
Joseph Schow	Minister without Portfolio
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Justice
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations

### **Parliamentary Secretaries**

Tracy Allard	Parliamentary Secretary for Civil Liberties
Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	Parliamentary Secretary for Ukrainian Refugee Settlement
Tanya Fir	Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridors
David Hanson	Parliamentary Secretary for Procurement Transformation
Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business
Miranda Rosin	Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism
R.J. Sigurdson	Parliamentary Secretary for EMS Reform
Devinder Toor	Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism
Glenn van Dijken	Parliamentary Secretary for Agrifood Development
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Muhammad Yaseen	Parliamentary Secretary for Community Outreach

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### **Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Orr

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Eggen  
Gotfried  
Gray  
Hunter  
Issik  
Phillips  
Pon

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Allard  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Barnes  
Bilous  
Carson  
Feehan  
McIver  
Rowswell  
Stephan  
Walker

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Lovely

Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

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

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Smith

Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Ceci  
Dach  
Hunter  
Loyola  
Orr  
Panda  
Rehn  
Shepherd  
Toor

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper

Deputy Chair: Mr. Williams

Deol  
Fir  
Goehring  
Gray  
McIver  
Pon  
Rowswell  
Sabir  
van Dijken

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills**

Chair: Mr. Williams

Deputy Chair: Ms Rosin

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

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Mr. Reid

Deputy Chair: Mr. Gotfried

Aheer  
Allard  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Deol  
Ganley  
Loyola  
Nixon, Jason  
Rehn  
Renaud  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Ms Phillips

Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Hunter  
Lovely  
Pancholi  
Panda  
Renaud  
Schmidt  
Singh  
Stephan  
Toor  
Yaseen

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Hanson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Feehan

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

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

### Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### Bill 9

#### Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate: Ms Hoffman]

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

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 9, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. I can tell you that this bill is less about red tape reduction and more about fixing the UCP errors. This is another piece of legislation that shows this government pushing ill-informed ideas, and it doesn't have the data to back that up.

When we're looking at this legislation – and I think I've said this to every piece of legislation that the red tape reduction ministry has entered – it just seems a little bit ridiculous that we have a minister assigned to something that every ministry should be responsible for doing. This is a piece of legislation that impacts agriculture and forestry, Municipal Affairs, multiculturalism, labour and immigration, service Alberta, seniors and housing, community and social services, red tape reduction, Infrastructure, Culture, and Justice.

Now, I've been through the legislation, and it's quite significant. There are areas of this legislation that do not have concerns, but, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the WCB portion of this legislation, we've watched in this House over and over as our incredible critic has brought up retroactive pay for firefighters. Now, this piece of legislation could have been an opportunity for this government to honour the heroes that so valiantly fought in the Fort McMurray wildfires. They could have gone back and introduced retroactive coverage, but they didn't.

I can say that on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we will always have the backs of our front-line heroes.

**Mr. Nally:** You had three years, and you did nothing for them.

**Ms Goehring:** We are very concerned that the minister responsible has got up in the House and talked rhetoric and talked about not anything related to retroactive pay. But what he hasn't committed to is providing that presumptive coverage that is retroactive, which is really concerning.

I was a member in the Legislature during the Fort McMurray fires.

**Mr. Nally:** That did nothing.

**Ms Goehring:** I had friends that fought in the fire, that had businesses there, that were working alongside so many front-line workers, desperate to keep homes, desperate to keep property. Then hearing the incredibly devastating stories of so many that fled the wildfires, and then to not honour and support those that stayed and fought the fires is unimaginable, Mr. Speaker. When we've continued to bring forward that this should be covered and it's not being acknowledged – and it's certainly not in this legislation – it is concerning.

Now, it has one minister responsible, the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction. I'm just curious. How much consultation happened with the other ministries that I named and with all of those that are impacted? Because when you're dealing with that many ministries, Mr. Speaker, putting forward a piece of legislation, that's a lot of consulting that needs to happen. I would love to hear from the member who's been chirping about what kind of consultation he had. Was it him who decided to say no to the Fort McMurray firefighters? Was it the minister responsible that said no? I'm just curious, when it comes to consulting, who said no, and why, when we've asked repeatedly for this coverage to be retroactive, this government hasn't done it. I really hope that when it comes time to hear from the members of government, we can hear some of the reasons why they've said no to the Fort McMurray wildfire heroes.

When it comes to this piece of legislation, there's another piece in here that's a bit concerning, and it's regarding income and employment supports. Now, what they're introducing, Mr. Speaker, is the ability to deny someone income support that has warrants. That gives an incredible disadvantage to people that may not know they have warrants, may have warrants so old that they thought they had been resolved, and now they're in a place where they can't access income support. That is very, very concerning. I can speak to a few people that I'm aware of who have struggled with mental health and addiction, who have received warrants for different instances, and I can tell you that with three of the cases that I'm thinking of, they're related to someone who has failed to appear in court. They're not for horrific crimes. When people are served and they fail to appear, a warrant is issued.

Now, when you're struggling, you don't have a home, when you're struggling with addictions because you can't access the adequate supports and services, I can tell you that getting to court is really difficult. Having these individuals come forward, connect with a support worker who can get them their ID, help them get on to income support and then have them denied because they have an outstanding warrant – to be clear, Mr. Speaker, a lot of those warrants are issued when someone fails to appear in court. They haven't been convicted, so to put this barrier to those on income and employment supports is a major, major concern.

This government will tell you that the reason is because it's regarding dangerous offenders, but that's not what this legislation does. It doesn't discriminate. It says: warrants. Period. There are so many individuals who have come in contact with the justice system, who have faced barrier after barrier after barrier and now are at a place to find support. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that sometimes it can take years for an individual to be able to have the capacity to reach out and connect with someone who can get them to the steps of income support. Once they're at that phase, you have this person who's able now, in a position, to apply for income support, and then to have them denied because of an outstanding warrant is ludicrous. It's going to be another barrier that for some is going to absolutely prevent them from progress and stability.

Now, the other thing that is concerning with this is that it will allow the minister to divulge information to assist in locating the individual. This gives the minister the authority to release private information of someone who has a warrant. Now, again, there's no definition of what that warrant needs to be for. It could be someone who failed to appear in court. That is very, very concerning and a significant overreach when it comes to people who have warrants looming. We should be providing supports and opportunities for individuals to access supports, not creating a space where this government is creating more and more barriers and closing doors to those that need actual support and are entitled to support.

7:40

There's a pattern that we see with this government. They talk about wanting to help and they talk about wanting to go through and reduce red tape, but at what cost? I fail to see how this is a red tape reduction. [interjection] Now the minister is chirping again, and I would welcome him when it's his time to speak to stand and share your views in this Chamber.

You know, it's concerning when so many individuals are reaching out asking for ways that they can access supports for their loved ones, trying to find a landlord that will rent to them because they've been unhoused for years and have no formal reference. Now, what would that look like, Mr. Speaker, if not only do they not have a formal reference but they don't have income support? This is another barrier that is creating more and more trauma to individuals instead of reducing red tape, as this bill suggests.

There's an incredible number of individuals in the province that are in a place where they need income support, and as a social worker I've worked with so many who are doing it because they simply need support. People that are accessing income support – it helps Albertans accessing food, shelter, personal items, medical, other benefits that are absolutely essential to their health and well-being. And this minister has put in that someone with a warrant, regardless of what that warrant is for, can be denied. That, to me, just doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker.

I know that – I would love to hear from the minister responsible for Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, not to talk about the key messaging that he's been told he should say and all about the things that red tape is going to do but talk about the human side and the human impact that these decisions and this legislation are making. How does he answer to those Fort McMurray firefighters? I would love to hear that. Talk to Albertans who are paying attention, watching what this government has done, turned their back on Albertans over and over and then put forward a piece of legislation that they all get up and praise each other over.

That's just two of the ministries in this omnibus legislation that have a direct impact on Albertans, people that are vulnerable and struggling and our Fort McMurray wildfire heroes. I would encourage, instead of chirping on the sidelines, to have him stand up in this Chamber and speak to the legislation and speak to the questions that this side of the House are asking on behalf of Albertans. It's something that I think they need to answer to. It's simply bad policy, Mr. Speaker.

It's not going to have an impact or deter people from committing crimes, if that's what they're going to stand up and talk about. It's not going to reduce crime. It's not going to do any of those things. It's simply going to create another barrier for an individual struggling to get ahead, to get those vital supports that I talked about like housing and food.

This winter I had a very dear friend whose brother and his significant other had been unhoused for about two and a half years. They both struggle with addictions, both from a car accident where they were prescribed medication, and both were living rough. They would try to access supports, try to access shelters, but there were so many barriers. Then they tried to access safe consumption sites, and again significant barriers. When it came time for them to find housing, they really struggled. I can tell you that this piece of legislation does absolutely nothing to help those individuals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 9. The hon. the Minister of Technology and Innovation.

**Mr. Glubish:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening intently as the member opposite was sharing her thoughts on this legislation,

especially as it relates to the part of the legislation that deals with income supports for those folks who have been accused of a prescribed offence. That is some language that she neglected to refer to. She was so materially inaccurate in her assertion about what this bill will do that I just felt compelled to stand up and correct the record.

For those watching at home, what is this about? At the end of the day, this is about dangerous offenders. Mr. Speaker, our government cares deeply about protecting our communities, protecting Albertans, and ensuring that our communities are safe. I think that is in keeping with what all Albertans want to see from their government.

Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, there is a time and a place to put something in legislation and a time and a place to put something in regulation. This legislation very clearly states that this restriction on access to income supports will only apply to those folks who are accused of a prescribed offence, and we have made it very clear that our intention is to in regulation clarify that that is going to be for dangerous offenders. The members opposite are trying to make it sound like every person who has ever had a minor brush-up with the law is all of a sudden going to lose access to income support. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This legislation is designed to protect Albertans from the most dangerous offenders. Mr. Speaker, we have a track record of making great progress in that regard. Many in this House will remember when we brought forward legislation to ensure that dangerous offenders and sex offenders could never change their names in Alberta and hide from their past and hide in our communities. Those were two very concrete steps that we took to make our communities safer. Well, I am proud of the work that the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction is taking to go even one step further, which is to make sure that those dangerous offenders in Alberta who are hiding from law enforcement cannot rely on income support to make it easier to hide in our communities and to avoid justice.

Mr. Speaker, I believe firmly that Albertans want justice and that they want safe communities, and this change in legislation, followed by the accompanying regulatory work that will follow it, will in fact make our communities safer. I can say that in good conscience, and I know that the constituents in my community will sleep better at night knowing that this is in place.

What the members opposite are doing is classic fearmongering. They apparently can think of nothing better to do than to scare Albertans with things that are not even accurate, and they don't care about the harm that those allegations they make might cause. They don't care about the fact that people will be afraid of the things that they are saying even though those things are not accurate, Mr. Speaker, and that is why I felt so compelled to stand up and to correct the record and to explain what exactly it is that this legislation will do and why our government feels so compelled to act on this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, this is about protecting Albertans, keeping our communities safe, protecting Alberta families. The members opposite should be ashamed of themselves for the way in which they have mischaracterized what this will do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to get up and address this bill, particularly after the statement we've just heard from the minister across, because what we just heard from the minister is wholly inaccurate. I will take the time to talk about why it is that we're really concerned about this.

7:50

You know, with these omnibus bills there's always a problem.

There are so many different things that are being put forward here that inevitably, of course, I support a variety of them. They're just minor changes, or they're decent changes that come from experience, and I support that kind of thing. But somehow the Conservatives always manage to find a way to slip in a poison pill, which just makes it impossible for me to support the bill overall, and this is it for me. This piece of the Income and Employment Supports Act is one that I just really cannot support, and I want to take people to a place so that they can understand a little bit about why it is that we are concerned in spite of what the minister said, and I'll go on to talk about why the minister is essentially wrong about what they have indicated.

What is happening in this particular bill, in this particular section, is essentially the criminalization of poverty. Many people in this House will know about the book written by Victor Hugo in 1862 called *Les Misérables*, and many people will know it, of course, through the Broadway play *Les Mis*, in which a man who is trying to feed his sister's six starving children steals a loaf of bread and is sentenced to jail for five years, ultimately spends 20 years, and is pursued even after by the police. The whole point of the writing of this novel by Victor Hugo over 160 years ago was to say that we cannot criminalize poverty, that it is an injustice, and that whenever somebody commits an offence, we must endeavour to right the wrongs, to invite that person back into civil society and give them the wherewithal and the abilities to integrate back into the society we want with the skills and the resources necessary to become a successful member of society. A hundred and sixty years ago it was identified that this was an injustice, to punish people continually for an offence, and that's essentially what this section of the bill does.

Now, I know the minister gets up and says: oh, this isn't going to be used on everybody. No. Nothing is used on everybody. And he says: you know, don't worry about it; it'll come out when we do the regulations, and that's when we'll talk about what those prescribed offences are. Our point is that he had the choice. He could have put in this bill what the prescribed offences are that this will be used against, and he chose not to do that. It would have been no problem at all to say: those people convicted of violent offences. It would have been no problem at all to say, "It is people that have used a weapon in their offences" or any number of other descriptors. They're all possible. It's quite easy to define terms in a bill like this. They chose not to do that because it allows them to stand up in the House and say, "We don't mean that" when, in fact, their intention is to do exactly that later on.

That's what we see here. We see that this is a bill that can be used against people that simply did not have the money to either pay their fines, which results in a warrant, or failed to attend court, which, again, results in a warrant. Both of those situations are situations that are extremely related to the issue of poverty, people that simply do not have the resources to arrive at court, people that simply do not have the money to pay their fines that they have.

I know, in working closely with the Indigenous community, that they're very concerned about these kinds of provisions, because whenever you put these kinds of provisions in, inevitably they're used against Indigenous people at a much greater rate than they are used against non-Indigenous people. They're very concerned about this, and this is why I say that this is a poison pill, and this is why I cannot support this. What they're saying is that you just opened a great, big, wide open door to go after poor Indigenous people.

Now, I heard the minister. The minister said that that's fearmongering. But I'm telling you that members of the Indigenous community are telling me that they are afraid, and I'm reporting that here in the House. They're afraid that, like so many other provisions that have happened in our legislation over the last 100-plus years, it is really legislation that is designed to go after their community.

They remind me that this government brought in what was known as Bill 1, which was the infrastructure protection act, which was to say that you weren't allowed to protest on public property such as Alberta highways. Then all of a sudden the Coutts border crossing happened. Did they use it against all those White folks down there? No, they did not. So the Indigenous community says: ah, what we're seeing here is a bill that was designed to pretend to look at protecting the people of the province of Alberta but was not used against one group of people but certainly was designed to be used against others. They say that they know within their community that that bill was designed to prevent Indigenous people from protesting when they want to protest infrastructure.

They say: here it is again. Here we have another situation where we're going to see a differential application, because the minister failed in his job to define in this act what a prescribed offence was. Now we're in the same position where Indigenous people across this province are saying: we are going to see this used repeatedly against Indigenous people who are living in poverty because they simply cannot afford to either attend court – they can't afford the cost of coming down from northern Alberta into Edmonton in order to arrive in court on time, and therefore they get a warrant against them for failure to appear – or people who just simply cannot afford to pay their fines. They know this is going to happen.

I just want to take us back to Victor Hugo. This is 160 years ago that in civil society we defined the notion that you should not criminalize poverty, that instead we need to use these opportunities to try to invite people back into the good society that we are trying to create for all citizens. That's what we should be doing. Instead, this government creates yet another bill where its tone is one of the retribution model, and that is that we create laws in order to punish those people who we don't like, those people who somehow make us feel uncomfortable, those people who somehow have violated our sense of what we'd like to have happen in society, without any understanding about why they committed those offences, why they do those things that make us feel uncomfortable, and how we can actually change the way we engage with those people so that they become part of society in a successful way, a justice-based model that Victor Hugo 160 years ago was asking for. It tells you how far back this government's thinking is. It's more than 160 years old. We've seen this time and time again, this notion that this government doesn't understand what it's like to come from a background of poverty, a background of trauma.

I can tell you that the Indigenous people certainly had that experience and tell me all the time that they know from that experience that they are going to have a disproportionate number of people to whom this legislation applies, and they think that that is just a continuation of the colonialist oppression that they've experienced over all the years that Canada has been in existence. They've asked us to take the time to stop and consult with them and say: is this going to be used in a way that is going to be terrible for your community, and if it is, then how do we go about changing it so it doesn't do that?

But no consultation has happened with the Indigenous community. I don't think this minister can give me a single example of going to one of the treaty organizations and saying: "We're going to slip this into the bill. Can the treaty organization tell me what they think about this section of the bill? And what are the concerns? How might we address those concerns before we actually write the bill so that it doesn't have a differential effect on Indigenous people?" They didn't do that. They failed to do their work. They failed to define it properly in the bill. Now they've set themselves up so that I have no choice but to vote against this bill.

I absolutely do not believe in the criminalization of poverty. I do believe that more Indigenous people are in jail because of the history of the treatment of Indigenous people, not because of bad

choices by individuals. It's the legacy of trauma, it's the legacy of poverty, it's the legacy of violence that has resulted in the situation where a lot of Indigenous people have indeed broken the law. They've broken the law because they had few options. They've broken the law because they had few resources. They've broken the law because they had so much trauma that they could not come to the place where they could make the decisions we would hope all Albertans would be able to make. And now we're going to punish them for that. We're going to punish them for acting out the legacy of the history of colonization and traumatic oppression that the Indigenous people have experienced here in this province.

8:00

Again, the same thing that we have argued time and time again in this House: if you simply go out and you have a consultation and you want to do this kind of thing, can you not work with the Indigenous community to actually look at: how can we make sure we can write this in such a way that it actually won't become a weapon against the Indigenous community?

Now, many in the Indigenous community will admit that there's a higher rate of acts such as violence perpetrated by Indigenous people than other people in the province, but they say that there's a reason why that is. What we should be doing is creating legislation that addresses that underlying reason, and if you do that, if you actually go after what's the cause of the trauma – how do the people respond to trauma? How do we get them to get to a place where they're no longer responding in this negative kind of way? Even if they admit, "Yeah, there are probably more Indigenous people that have committed certain types of violence than other groups of people," it's still not okay because of why they committed that violence.

Even if you say, "Oh, we're only going to use this in specific cases," I can guarantee you now, if you keep any race-based data on who this is used against, you're going to see an overrepresentation of Indigenous people, which is, again, why we on this side of the House asked for the collection of race-based data by this government. Again this government refused to do that, refused our bill that would have the police collect race-based data so we could see if indeed this kind of legislation ended up being imposed against Indigenous people in a disproportionate way. And I can absolutely guarantee you that it is going to be, and I can absolutely guarantee that the Indigenous people will feel it is yet another continuation of the colonization that they've experienced in this country for many years.

So I cannot in good faith support this bill even though there are other things in this bill that I'd be happy to have happen. I wish they would stop putting together these bills, this thing they've learned from the Americans, that put all these disconnected things together so that you can't oppose one piece without opposing the whole bill. Unfortunately, I'm in that position.

In my last minute I also want to say that I'm very disappointed on their stance with regard to the WCB. Their argument has simply been that it has not been a major issue because there have not been that many firefighters that have died so far, and they often cite the number of one. And my position is always: are you telling me that you agree with the principle but it hasn't affected enough people yet for you to care? I want to know: how many people have to die before you care? What's the number? Give me the number. It's not one, apparently. It's going to be more.

It's not a future-, forward-looking piece of legislation. It's saying that in the past it wouldn't have had that much effect. It certainly would have had an effect on that family, and it would have had an effect on all the other ones that right now are struggling through the process of working with a very difficult red tape process at WCB in order to get their benefits appropriately forwarded to them. I wish this government would take the chance to say: look, we don't want people

to be in that place, so we'll create the legislation to actually make it possible. We know they did it in Ontario, so they can certainly do it here.

Mr. Speaker, I've been very concerned about the approach this government has taken to the people of Alberta and the very deep lack of compassion for the experiences they have and the lack of desire to create structures that invite people to the greatest level of success and fulfillment of their desires as citizens of this province. I certainly wish they would change, and I am going to oppose this bill.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. the Deputy Premier, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to proposed changes in Bill 9, specifically the proposed changes to the Public Works Act. Working with the Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, Alberta Infrastructure has proposed an amendment to the Public Works Act that will expedite regulations and allow our government to respond to changes more quickly and more straightforwardly. We are actively listening to our industry partners, and we have heard their feedback. It's time for an update of the Public Works Act, which hasn't been updated since 2010. A lot has changed since 2010, including technology and process improvements within the construction industry. We also need to be agile and able to change with the times.

Section 34 of the Public Works Act currently states, "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations respecting any matters that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers necessary or advisable to carry out effectively the intent and purpose of this Act." Essentially, what that means is that we currently need to adopt or amend a Public Works Act regulation; an order in council is required, or, in different language, an order passed by cabinet. That can be a long process, especially when the whole purpose of amending a regulation is to provide clarity and streamline regulatory requirements. In the proposed change outlined in this legislation, the regulation-making authority will be updated from the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the minister responsible for the Public Works Act. It's a simple change. The proposed amendments to the act will make the government's regulation-making process faster and more agile. Any future changes to the act will be done in consultation with other ministries and partner organizations that would be impacted.

We're also working with the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, who's leading the consultation, on extending the rules of prompt payment to government of Alberta projects. To be clear, the proposed changes in Bill 9 do not consider any changes to the Prompt Payment and Construction Lien Act, but Alberta Infrastructure will continue to work with partner ministries as well as organizations and stakeholders within the industry to explore further opportunities to reduce red tape and streamline government processes. The change we are making here is in direct consultation with and in the best interests of our industry partners.

Over my past six months or so in this chair as Minister of Infrastructure I have been all across the province meeting with our construction industry partners, anything from a quick coffee chat to formal AGM events. I've heard loud and clear from industry that we cannot lead with government fixes and procedural corrections only. We need to foster and build relationships with our key partners. That means this is listening to feedback, taking a good look at how we currently do things and what works and what doesn't. In the end, we have the best regulatory environment in the world, and I do believe we're on our way there, but now we need to prioritize relationships between the government and industry.



This, Mr. Speaker, is a small, achievable change in the Public Works Act and is an excellent first step to fulfilling our commitments by listening to Alberta's construction industry and acting. I'm confident that the changes that we are proposing in Bill 9 will expedite the making of regulations and allow government to respond to changes more quickly, helping Alberta Infrastructure and industry partners to deliver public infrastructure safely, on time, and on budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 9, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. This is an omnibus bill, which, you know, we're pretty used to from the UCP government. I mean, there often used to be some decorum in that, not putting 15 pieces of legislation in one bill, but the UCP does this repeatedly. Certainly, if the NDP did that in government, they were often outraged and said: it was too much to have in one bill, and we need to debate these bills separately. Cavalierly, we get these bills all the time with this government. Certainly, they are having, I guess, no integrity in their concerns that they presented previously.

Yes, it's an omnibus bill, and, like my colleagues the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford, we're looking specifically at one piece of this legislation, the part that amends income support. It is about the criminalization of poverty, which is what this bill does, and my colleagues spoke very well about that. I know that the Minister of Technology and Innovation stood up and very forcefully indicated: no, no, no; it's not just about warrants; it's about violent offenders, and that's who this is about, and that's who we would deny income support to. But, gosh, you know, when I look in here, it doesn't say anything about violent offenders. On page 21 it says:

The Director must, subject to the regulations, refuse to provide income support and benefits to an applicant or recipient under Part 2, Division 1 when notified that

- (a) a warrant for the arrest of the applicant or recipient has been issued in respect of a prescribed offence, and
- (b) the warrant has not been executed.

Nothing about: these are warrants for violent offenders.

**8:10**

If indeed that was the intent of the government, then why is it not here? Warrants can be for, you know, not paying some kind of a fine. Warrants can be for jaywalking. There can be a whole diverse kind of warrant. If it is indeed for that, for the violent offenders, then why isn't it in the legislation? This gives the government a wide berth to do whatever they want with folks who happen to be poor, happen to be people who are receiving income support, so we can deny them that if they have a warrant of any kind. This is not specific at all, so it definitely is the criminalization of poverty.

But I just want to ask the government, like: why stop there? Why not people who are on the Alberta seniors' benefit? Or perhaps that's already included in here, and I haven't read all the subsections. That's income support. What about people on AISH? Why aren't they included in here? I mean, why don't you just go for it and take a whole bunch of people off if this is what you want? But why are you picking on this particular group of people? Can you help me know that? Or why do you deny other people other services the government gives? Why don't you take people

who need some kind of health support? They need to go to the hospital, but they have a warrant out. Well, they can't go to a hospital. Why are you picking on people on income support? Perhaps the minister responsible can explain that to us, because it does definitely, definitely look like it is focusing on people who are vulnerable.

The people who are on income support: they need food, they need shelter, and they often need personal items, sometimes medical and other benefits. Oftentimes they're supporting children. A lot of times they're women. As my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford talked about, a lot of times they are Indigenous people, and that's because of our legacy of colonization, something that, you know, we certainly don't want to continue. We want to empower people.

Income supports are meant to also provide some training, hopefully to support people to develop independence and self-sufficiency. So it doesn't make any sense that someone who's struggling – and he may have a warrant out – would be denied funding for food, shelter, clothing. These are the basics. It is unfair, and it's not very becoming of a government that repeatedly says: we care about our most vulnerable. I don't see that. I see barrier after barrier going up in front of people who are struggling in our province. I really challenge the government to make some sense of this, have the minister speak about this: why specifically are you saying this for people who are on income support? What's the rationale for that? You know, why not deny all public services to Albertans with warrants if that's what you want to do? Why are you picking on this group of people?

Then another section later on in this legislation, still on page 21, says, "The Minister responsible for Schedule 9 to the Government Organization Act is authorized to disclose information, including personal information, for the purposes of section 15.1." Personal information can be shared of these people. Well, usually there's a pretty high bar. Private information is not disclosed, and just because someone is on income support doesn't mean that their information should be shared with other authorities. Why is it that people who are poor all of a sudden don't have rights like the rest of us? I'm hoping the minister did his due diligence and talked with the Privacy Commissioner about this legislation and indeed that that was seen as following the rules regarding that, because in my, you know, reading of that, it seems like that should not be done. People need to be – their confidentiality needs to be respected. It is, again, just about taking away the rights of people who are poor.

I know the government does repeatedly say that they want to support vulnerable people in our society, but this legislation is showing us very clearly that it's not. Some of the rationale that was explained by the Minister of Technology and Innovation was that it was because, you know, we don't want to be supporting people who are violent offenders. Well, I agree with that, but why doesn't the legislation say that? It doesn't say that at all. It just says: someone with a warrant.

It's gone far beyond what the minister has indicated, and, you know, I just wonder why this particular program, this particular income support program, is being targeted for this type of disclosure and denial of services. I mean, it just absolutely seems abhorrent and unfair for people who are poor in our province.

Certainly, as a social worker for more than 30 years my job has been to take down those barriers, and having worked within government's programs and without, those were some of the biggest challenges, the uncaring government that did not want to really support people. They wanted to judge people who are poor,

judge people who maybe were victims of domestic violence, judge people who, you know, were newcomers and didn't always speak the language, and they had barriers to employment and therefore lived in poverty.

I've worked my life to make sure that people had access, but I see a government here who says one thing and does another. Certainly, we can see it very clearly with their decisions around the opioid crisis, our drug-poisoning crisis in our province. They make it harder and harder for people to even stay alive by the closing of supervised consumption sites, the reduction of harm reduction, and the moving of Edmonton's detox way out to Alberta Hospital, making it so hard for people to access that.

You know, despite some of the words of the government, that they want to support people to overcome these challenges, really, if you look closely, you see how they are actually impeding people from overcoming the challenges that are facing them. Certainly, it is disturbing to me to see a government target this particular program. As I said – and I'm, of course, facetious in my comments about: well, why don't we just not let people use the health system if they've got a warrant? Of course, not all people who use the health system are poor; some of them are, for sure.

I really ask the government to think about why they would leave out that very specific information, you know, about violent offenders and just put a general warrant: anyone with a warrant can be denied financial support. Why is that not clear? Perhaps, sadly, I'm right and my colleagues are correct, and this government really doesn't want to support the most vulnerable people, wants to make life harder for people who are vulnerable. That is a sad day, but it seems like we're at that sad day.

I think, with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll end my comments.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 9, which is the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. This is, again, an omnibus piece of legislation, that amends 15 pieces of legislation. I don't know whether it reduces red tape or not, but it certainly reduces debate in this House, curtails debate in this House. Many of the changes contained in it could be stand-alone pieces of legislation worth debating here over time.

For instance, this bill adds a new section in the WCB legislation to exempt firefighters engaged in the Fort McMurray fire from the latency period on presumptive cancers. We all know that the Fort McMurray fire was one of the worst natural disasters in Alberta's history, and many brave firefighters, first responders, put themselves in harm's way to save people in Fort McMurray, to save Fort McMurray, and they deserve to be recognized for that. They deserve to be compensated for the harm that resulted as a result of them engaging in fighting that fire.

8:20

Recently Ontario made that coverage retroactive to 1960. I think Alberta can certainly do that. No one who was engaged in that fire should have to fight WCB on how they got that cancer. They deserve better than this. We'll be introducing an amendment later on to make those changes retroactive. As it stands now, that change doesn't go far enough.

Another change in it is that the government is reversing a change allowing the provincial government to terminate agreements without cause with a minimum of 90 days' notice to the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton. This was initially implemented by this UCP government so they can get out of

green line work in Calgary. When they brought forward that change, many of us here were in this Legislature. The government was asked if they have consulted with anyone from the city of Calgary, any other city that was getting impacted, and there was no answer. They used their majority to ram through that change. Now all they're doing is that they're reversing their own bad decision, that was bad then and that we opposed then. It's a good change; the government should not have done it in the first place.

Another change that my colleagues talked about and the minister of Service Alberta and technology responded to as well:

The Director must, subject to the regulations, refuse to provide income support and benefits to an applicant or recipient under Part 2, Division 1 when notified that

- (a) a warrant for the arrest of the applicant or recipient has been issued in respect of a prescribed offence, and
- (b) the warrant has not been executed.

There are a number of problems with this provision. As my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford said, it perpetuates, legalizes poverty. Warrants can be issued for a number of reasons, and it may or may not be the case that the person who has a warrant is convicted. In our justice system the Charter of Rights and Freedoms upholds the presumption of innocence before somebody is convicted, so that may offend the Charter as well.

The second problem with that is that although the minister said that it will be only for prescribed dangerous offenders, there is nothing in this legislation that shows what those offences will be. The UCP is asking us and asking Albertans to trust them on this, and their record shows that they cannot be trusted, and they should not be trusted.

Those who are on income support: if you have twice the amount of what the income support is on a monthly basis, you don't qualify. Essentially, if you have \$1,050, you do not qualify for income support. That's how our income support program works. For those who are on income support, that support, that benefit gives them some money to be able to eat and, in some cases, be able to have some shelter. This provision is essentially cutting those individuals, the most poor among us, from that support as well. That's another cruel decision from this clueless government, and that cannot and should not be supported.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford said, it will target Indigenous communities, it will target person of colour communities because they are the ones who are among those who are among the poorest in this society. Without any information of what those prescribed offences will be, it's still a bad public policy. We should not be criminalizing, we should not be perpetuating poverty.

As was mentioned, the government passed Bill 1, Critical Infrastructure Defence Act. On the face of it, it was to protect our main infrastructure. It was brought forward by the government because the then Premier was offended by some youth making a TikTok on a railway line and Indigenous communities protesting in British Columbia. At that time Indigenous communities did share those concerns, that this bill would target them and nobody else. That turned out to be true because when Coutts was blockaded for 21 days, this government didn't mention that piece of legislation, but some from their caucus also visited the Coutts blockade.

Another change is to amend the Petty Trespass Act and the Trespass to Premises Act so that it can apply to federal government agents, again another change that no one is asking for, and even the government doesn't know what the rationale is for this. On March 1 the Government House Leader was at a presser downstairs – I was present there – and when asked about what's prompting this change, the Government House Leader

said, and I quote: we are seeing federal employees trespass onto private land in Alberta, and as a result of that, we don't think that that's appropriate. End quote. That's the Government House Leader on the morning of March 1, 2023. Later that afternoon the Justice department's spokesperson said this, and I quote: there have been no confirmed cases of trespass by federal government employees in Alberta. End quote. The Government House Leader is saying that the government is seeing federal employees trespassing on Alberta lands; the Justice department is saying that they have no evidence of such trespassing.

This change does nothing other than putting federal employees and their families at risk. It will jeopardize their safety. When the government has no evidence, when the government's own Justice department says that they have no evidence of anybody trespassing, they should not be passing this kind of legislation. Although there are a few things that we can put our support behind, there are these things that we cannot support, and for that reason I urge my colleagues and all members of this House to oppose this piece of legislation.

8:30

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate. The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction has waived closure of debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

### Bill 10 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

[Debate adjourned: Member Irwin speaking]

**The Speaker:** Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 10, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, here this evening for the first time, for myself anyhow. Just looking through this bill, which we just got, the biggest concern that the Official Opposition has generally and me specifically is that it enacts the creation of this Alberta fund, which is access to \$1.4 billion that the minister can use in any number of ways for one-time funding.

[Mr. Turton in the chair]

News flash, Mr. Speaker: of course, we are just on the cusp of an election, and the UCP government arms themselves with a \$1.4 billion one-time spending bill in this, Bill 10, and it seems like it's a fairly obvious opportunity for the government to try to buy their way into the next election. I think that Albertans have been observing this government engaged in this kind of activity already with this budget that they just put forward. It's a substantial budget, you know, and completely out of keeping with the language and the direction that this government has used over the last three and a half years, and then with an about-turn of quite a substantial budget that's just on the floor here now, and then plus another \$1.4 billion activated for one-time spending, presumably to try to cover whatever places the government desperately will try to look to buy the favour of Albertans.

I mean, this is wrong on a number of different fronts, Mr. Speaker, not the least of which is that we are entrusted to ensure that we spend money for the people of Alberta, that we save for the future for the people of Alberta, and to be stewards of both the land and the resources that we have here within our boundaries, and so

on. So this whole idea of rushing to election spending within a few weeks – right? – probably goes on the wrong side of all of those principles, all of those responsible things that this House and members of this House should observe: the idea of thoughtful spending and saving over time, the concept of ensuring that you are just and equal in the dispensation of those funds or the saving of those funds or the preservation of the resources that we have available to us. None of those things happened with this Bill 10; quite the opposite. It's like you're opening up the floodgates to just desperately try to cover off whatever the government thinks that they can deal with in the last, you know, few weeks before an election.

That is the main concern I think that we have with this bill. Of course, the regular questions do apply, Mr. Speaker, like "Who did you ask about this?" in order to say: "Yeah. You know, this is what we need. Albertans, this is what we need at this juncture in our history," to give the government access to more than a billion dollars to announce a month before an election. I mean, you'd have a hard time finding people that would concur with that judgment, I think. I really don't think that there was anything that resembled consultation on that. But you can always try, I suppose. I would ask the government who they did ask if they thought that that was such a good idea. And, really, to what end besides the naked attempt to buy people's votes before an election? That's really just so obvious.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, when I've been out talking to Albertans across the province, all over the place, really, this is the recurring theme that I hear from people. They will say some version of, like: "Do the UCP take us to be fools? Do they think that we are so easily bought? Do they think that we can't remember what happened in the last thousand days or more that suddenly is erased in the last 60 days before an election?" I mean, all of those things are just – people take offence to it. Of course, you don't have to even remind people, but it bears reminding that it's not the government's money either. It's the people of Alberta's money, in the first place. So trying to buy the favour of someone with their own money – right? – again, it feels bad. It feels dirty. And it doesn't concur with the best practices of democracy or of what common sense tells you is right or wrong, quite frankly.

Those are the things that I'm hearing. You know, that was before Bill 10 came out, so I mean Lord knows what they're going to think about now, right? That was just with the budget. Then, of course, this amendment act is clarifying some of the – just the depths to which this budget does head down that path.

I mean, there are other sections in here that I really don't have much of a problem with, right? But, you know, again, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Riverview described, you have these bills with many different facets to them, and dollars to doughnuts, there'll be one element in there that completely negates all the other things and makes it impossible to support that bill. In this case it's the Alberta fund, the \$1.4 billion one-time spending powers that this bill does give us.

The other sections that I do see here just offhand – I mean, the thing that jumps out at me is, you know, of course, with the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. I have sat on that board previously and presently. I did like to see that we have some provision to save money in the heritage trust fund. I believe it's \$750 million with this bill. This is what it was designed to do under a much more prudent and reasonable government that started the heritage trust fund concept. It's not just to save money for the future; it also helps to pay for budgets every single year. You get interest off that. You can use that interest to pay for

programs that we all benefit from. Of course, it does create a rainy-day fund. It has an added benefit, too, if you have really a lot of money, that you're not distorting the economy literally, not just provincially but even nationally, by just spending it all in some sort of way.

I mean, that said, you put \$750 million into the heritage trust fund on one hand, then you've got a \$1.4 billion thing that you can spend in eight weeks. That kind of negates that reasonable practice of saving for a rainy day and not distorting the economy on one hand and then, of course, building something even larger, which could do both of those things no problem, right?

8:40

These are the initial thoughts that I've had around Bill 10. I think we can be looking at it – of course, there's more than just me around here, so we can hear from other people – to see if the analysis proves correct, but you know it does have that glaring Alberta fund, section 9, in there that raises very large red flags for not just the Official Opposition but the general public, economists, and anyone who's concerned about the future of our province here.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will allow time for other people to speak, and I welcome them to participate in the debate. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

**Mr. Carson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening, which very well could be one of my last opportunities here in the Assembly. With that, speaking to Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, and much like the previous member, the Member for Edmonton-North West, I also have concerns with this legislation, primarily focused around the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act amendments within this piece of legislation.

Now, when we look at even the alberta.ca, the Alberta government's website recognizing some of the changes that are being proposed in here, specifically on this act, a few points down we see that this act will

set policies for the allocation of surplus cash with at least half going toward debt repayment.

I think that's fair, Mr. Speaker. Reading past that:

The rest would be allocated to a new Alberta Fund, which would be used only to fund additional contributions to the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund . . .

Fair. And beyond that,

additional debt repayment and one-time spending initiatives.

That is what the previous member spoke to, where I also have concerns, this idea of one-time spending initiatives.

I think that, again, we should be doing everything we can to be transparent and accountable with the dollars that we are spending across this province, especially when we see ourselves in an opportunity for surplus. Of course, this government has found themselves with a surplus, primarily, the majority of the reason being the price of oil. Again, that's fair. We should be considering how we are spending those funds.

But the fact is that there have been so many opportunities for this government to invest in stability in this province. Just thinking back to some of the decisions of this government, and there have been many, Mr. Speaker, that have affected primarily the lowest income Albertans, when we look at the decision of this government to deindex AISH early in their term, the decision to deindex personal income taxes, the decision to cut off beneficiaries of low-income seniors to receive benefits for medical coverage. I mean, the list is

long of the decisions that this government has made that have hurt vulnerable Albertans.

So now when we find ourselves in a situation where there are dollars left over, again, primarily because of the price of oil but also because of some of the decisions that this government has made to cut off benefits and supplies to low-income Albertans, we find ourselves in a situation with a surplus, and instead of potentially looking at how we can spend this in a more accountable and transparent way, whether it's looking at capital plans, whether it's looking at those benefits that have been decreased previously, unfortunately we see this government going down the path of one-time spending initiatives, starting April 1, right before an election, Mr. Speaker.

I think that we've heard previously, whether from this Premier or the previous Premier under the UCP, the importance of not spending government dollars during or close to an election cycle; unfortunately, we see this government going down that path with absolutely zero accountability for those dollars.

You know, I think back to some of the other decisions that this government has made, primarily looking at decisions of this Education minister around the complete lack of funding specific to Edmonton public school board, and of course that goes past just our Edmonton public school board; it goes to the Catholic school board in Edmonton, it goes to municipalities across the province and the school boards that have the important work of funding education across the province. Unfortunately, this government has done anything but support those initiatives of building new schools, of ensuring that there are dollars to put teachers in those classrooms.

Again, I think back to the rhetoric of the Education minister and, coming back to Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, this idea of one-time spending initiatives. Instead of ensuring that we are properly and adequately funding the dollars that should be designated more systematically to things like education, to things like health care, we continue to hear this rhetoric from the Education minister around how the NDP didn't fund schools in Edmonton nearly as close to how this current UCP government has done so. It would be completely laughable if it wasn't so sad for the residents in my community and communities across this province.

You know, just looking back to some of the accomplishments, Mr. Speaker – and I appreciate that there is quite a bit here, and I'll do my best to be quick. Just thinking back to our investments in education and to schools in Edmonton specific to the public school board, I mean, we saw the funding for Aleda Patterson, Alex Janvier, Garth Worthington, Dr. Anne Anderson, Thelma Chalifoux, Soraya Hafez, Jan Reimer, Kim Hung, Shauna May Seneca, Michael Phair, Donald Getty – I'm close; I promise – Svend Hansen, David Thomas King, Dr. Lila Fahlman, Hilwie Hamdon, Constable Daniel Woodall, Ivor Dent. These are all schools that were funded by our government. Some of them were modernizations; many of them were brand new schools. While I appreciate that some of these schools were finished under this UCP government – and they would love to take credit for that – in fact they were funded completely by our government.

When Albertans go to tally up how many schools – you know, we can look at my community. The minister I believe two years ago committed to one Catholic school to be built, and now that's set for '26-27. This UCP government hasn't even been able to build one school in my community in their entire term when we built at least two or three, possibly more, Mr. Speaker, not including the many other schools across west Edmonton that were built.

When we look at opportunities to invest in our community in a more systemic way, in a more accountable and transparent way, we

have mechanisms like our school boards, like our health authorities and municipalities that should be able to access this funding. Instead, this government is going to take it upon themselves to create a \$1.4 billion slush fund named the Alberta fund, Mr. Speaker, and spend that as they see fit right before an election. It's deeply concerning to me because there's no accountability here. Again, we don't know what criteria this government is planning to use. There are no assurances that it is going to be disbursed equally across the province or used on the communities with the most need out there. Instead, we are left to guess at what this money is going to be spent on. Again, when we look at the timeline for this, the lack of criteria, it sure seems like this government is going to use it as an opportunity to get themselves re-elected, and I don't think that that is how we should be spending Albertans' dollars across this province.

Now, we tie this into the millions and millions of dollars that this government is using to advertise their so-called affordability payments. Again, we see this government leaving so many Albertans out, with no accountability as to how this money is going to be spent. We see students across this province not being able to access any of this funding on top of previous decisions of this government to hike interest rates on tuition, increasing tuition to historic levels. There are so many reasons why this government should have been more accountable in how this money was going to be spent. I would say that in many ways this slush fund that the government is creating is on the backs of vulnerable Albertans who shouldn't have seen their benefits cut in the first place, who shouldn't have seen their tuition cut in the first place, who shouldn't have seen schools not being built. Now this government has found themselves in a surplus situation because of all those cuts that they've made, and they are going to be unaccountable in how they spend the money that has been left over.

As the previous member, the Member for Edmonton-North West, said, I think that there are pieces within this legislation that are reasonable and potentially tackling some of the more housekeeping issues that have been brought forward to them from stakeholders, and I can appreciate that, but the fact is that when you tie it in with this unaccountable slush fund, there's just no way that I could see myself supporting this.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity. I will take my seat.

8:50

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is next.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise this evening to speak to Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

Before I get into that, I just wanted to acknowledge what the previous speaker had mentioned, about this potentially being his last time speaking in the Chamber. I need to say how important it is that his voice has been part of this Assembly for eight years, and hearing the incredible advocacy that he does on behalf of Albertans is so impactful. I needed to start with that because that has been the voice on this side of the Chamber for the eight years that I've been elected. Knowing that that's what this side of the House represents, it's such an honour for me to work alongside these incredible individuals.

Earlier on this evening we heard from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who had also made reference to this perhaps being one of the last times speaking in the Chamber. I'm reminded, Mr. Speaker, of the countless hours of debate that have been held in this Chamber and the incredible, powerful stories of Albertans that we've heard from this side of the House and how their stories are what we're fighting for, individuals in Alberta. When we have a piece of legislation, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, that we're

debating here tonight, it's having that reminder that we're here for Albertans, that we're here to talk about people and how we can better their lives.

It's concerning, Mr. Speaker, when on this side of the House those are the stories that we're sharing, those are the values that we hold, and those are the policies that we want to see brought into place, that actually make a difference for Albertans who are struggling. Instead, we're in the Chamber tonight at 10 to 9 talking about a piece of legislation that essentially gives \$1.4 billion in slush funds for this government to buy votes. Now, that is such a huge contrast between what both parties are talking about.

I hear members on this side of the Chamber talking about wanting to make sure that we leave this place leaving Alberta a better place. I'm incredibly privileged to stand alongside these members that are sharing tonight and have shared for the last eight years that I've been elected. It gives me strength, Mr. Speaker, to speak about what matters. To have this piece of legislation before us tonight is quite frustrating when we know that this government isn't fooling Alberta when they're putting in a \$1.4 billion election campaign slush fund. Section 9 creates the Alberta fund; that's what this government is focusing on.

This government is focusing on trying to buy Albertans' votes. Last night, Mr. Speaker, we were in the Chamber. For those of you that weren't following along at home – maybe you were watching the Oilers game – we were debating the supplementary supply 2023-2024. Just like tonight's Bill 10, we were talking about ways that this government is campaigning on the public dime. We haven't heard from this government any sort of believable justification as to why this piece of legislation was brought forward and tonight why they believe that \$1.4 billion, that can be accessed on April 1, is in the best interests of Albertans right now as opposed to, you know, giving access to a slush fund to the Premier and the UCP.

It's concerning that that's what we're debating right now, Mr. Speaker. This is another piece of legislation, just like the piece of legislation, Bill 9, that we were speaking to right before this, that has more than one portfolio being impacted, and it's a little slip-in in the legislation that they're hoping people won't pay attention to. There are pieces of this legislation that make sense – the Children's Services piece, and Culture has some good things in there – but there are two major pieces of this that are quite concerning. I think that it creates some significant questions when we see a government giving themselves a slush fund and calling it the Alberta fund. That's quite, quite concerning.

This money that they're allocating could have been spent in so many other ways, Mr. Speaker. We're in a health care crisis despite what this government and the Premier continue to say isn't true. We've heard heartbreaking stories from all across the province of people that haven't been able to access a family doctor for years, people that are waiting incredible amounts of time for surgeries, hospitals that don't have physicians, ERs that are shut down. That's where this money should be spent. Instead, we see, under the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, them creating the Alberta fund, which is essentially a slush fund for them to buy votes, a \$1.4 billion slush fund.

It's clear what the priorities of this government are, Mr. Speaker. We have watched for four years as they've attacked doctors, as they fired educational workers, as they refused to listen to nurses and health care practitioners. Instead, they're making sure that their friends are taken care of, and this piece of legislation allows them to do just that. Effective April 1 they're able to use taxpayer money called the Alberta fund to fund one-time funding announcements. I fail to see how this is anything but desperation before a campaign.

It's certainly not helping Albertans. It's not helping the countless number of postsecondary students that I have reaching out to my

office, stressed. The cost of tuition has gone up under this government. The cost of living in general has gone up. This government brags about their affordability. Well, it doesn't impact postsecondary students. They have no access to that money. If they do not have a child, they don't get access to it. If they don't drive a car, they can't access that. When they're saying that it does impact, it absolutely does not.

This government should just simply be doing better, Mr. Speaker. When we look at section 9, it's hidden amongst quite a bit of legislation in here that they're changing and making adjustments to. But I would argue that \$1.4 billion for a slush fund is a desperate attempt from the Premier and the UCP to campaign on taxpayer dollars, and I think that Albertans know what this is about. They see the announcements with no funding behind them. They see these statements from the government that they're helping, that the health care crisis is over, but when you talk to Albertans, they know that that's not true.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will end my time. I encourage any member of the government to stand up and defend this \$1.4 billion slush fund.

**Mr. Stephan:** Surplus fund, not deficit.

**Ms Goehring:** They're chirping on the other side. I would encourage them, when it's their time to speak, to get up and defend this because, honestly, Mr. Speaker, I don't see any way possible that it can be defended.

With that, I will end my remarks. Thank you.

9:00

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie is next.

**Mrs. Allard:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and defend Bill 10 and talk about Bill 10 and the merits of Bill 10. I'm honoured to rise to discuss the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. We'll start with record spending in health care to province-wide affordability measures. Budget 2023 focuses on securing Alberta's future for generations to come, and I'm proud of that. By growing the economy, creating good-paying jobs – and I think that the Minister of Finance said today that there are 100,000 jobs waiting for people to come to Alberta to fill, and that's just the start; I'm proud of that – by strengthening education, by expanding health care, keeping communities safe, Budget 2023 addresses many of the most urgent needs we are hearing from every corner of our great province.

To effectively answer these calls and secure Alberta's future, Mr. Speaker, fiscal stability and responsibility must be upheld, clearly defined, and absolute. That's why I'm happy to support Bill 10. Albertans deserve stability and confidence in the fact that no matter what storms we face in the future, we will be as prepared as possible. As we've learned through this term, we can't predict the future. We don't know what's coming next, but we can do everything in our power to ensure Albertans are taken care of no matter what challenges may come their way. They deserve to know that our province's prosperity is not contingent on uniquely volatile revenue, revenue that's impacted by global markets and events beyond the government's control, no matter who that government is. That said, we need to focus on what is in our control; that is, our expense decisions and our ability to implement fiscal frameworks that provide flexibility for revenue swings while helping Alberta avoid past mistakes.

I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, for the record that earlier in the House today a member opposite talked about how the only reason we balanced the budget was because of oil revenue. I'd be the first person

to say that oil revenue certainly helped – there's no question – but that is not the only reason that we balanced the budget. We balanced the budget because we exercised a measure of fiscal discipline unknown in the four years before our office, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud that our Finance minister – I would argue the best Finance minister in Alberta's history – put in these fiscal rules. He put in these fiscal anchors at a time when it was extremely volatile and uncertain. At a time when we were paying other jurisdictions to take our oil, we still stayed the course. As a result, we balanced not one budget but two back-to-back budgets, setting a record and a trend that we hope will continue. That's what Bill 10 is all about: encouraging and setting guidelines for other governments, future governments, to be held to that same account for the benefit not of us but our future generations, which is why we're all here.

Ultimately, Albertans deserve to know that their future is secure and grounded in fiscal responsibility, preparedness, and stability, and that's what Bill 10 is about, Mr. Speaker. It proposes a new fiscal framework that will provide exactly that. The proposed framework would limit expense increases except where there are unexpected and uncontrollable circumstances, something like a global pandemic, which, hopefully, we won't see again for a very long time. Setting limits would allow the government to continue focusing on improving programs and services while ensuring that Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars are spent wisely.

Aside from certain defined exceptions – and I want to stress those words, “defined exceptions” – Bill 10 will require all future governments to balance the budget and use surpluses to first pay down debt and then save for the future. I think that's critical, Mr. Speaker. If past administrations had focused on paying down debt, we wouldn't be in the position we're in today, and I'm proud of the record of this government and the work that we've done to start turning that around. It would help guide fiscal decision-making by setting guardrails to achieve and maintain balanced budgets while providing a fair degree of flexibility to deal with revenue swings and unexpected pressures. I think that's reasonable. It would also guide the government's management of cash from future surpluses, with a primary focus on debt repayment, investing in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and providing opportunities for one-time spending initiatives.

Ultimately, Bill 10 would bring more stability to the financial outlook of Alberta's government and position our province for a bright future. As our Finance minister has said many times, Alberta's brightest days are ahead. I believe that, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that. I'm thrilled to say that. We've seen some great days in this province. In the 26 years I've lived in this province, there have been some tremendous, tremendous days, but our best days are still ahead. That gives me a tremendous amount of hope.

In addition to implementing a new fiscal framework to secure Alberta's future prosperity, Bill 10 also proposes several amendments that address numerous other concerns we've heard from Albertans. Bill 10, if passed, would implement measures from Budget 2023 to help build fiscal stability, attract investment – attract more investment, Mr. Speaker, because we're already actively attracting and successfully attracting investments – support children and families, cut more red tape, improve provincial funding mechanisms, and make life more affordable for students.

To start, Bill 10 proposes amendments to allow the heritage fund to retain all of its net income. That is remarkable, Mr. Speaker. Right now, as the legislation sits, it requires a portion of the heritage fund's net income to be kept in the fund to protect against inflation. However, any investment income not used for inflation-proofing of the fund must be transferred to general revenue. And this gets interesting. We are learning from the past to secure a brighter future for Albertans. Had we kept all of the previous earnings in the fund

from day one, instead of the \$18 billion that we currently have in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund – wait for it, Mr. Speaker – we would have nearly \$300 billion in the trust fund today. That is remarkable.

I'm sad that we didn't do that, that past administrations didn't do that, but we can't go back. We can't change what's already happened, but we can go forward. We can set the stage for future generations to enjoy what others didn't plan for. That's why we're putting in this bill. That's why we're proposing these fiscal anchors, these fiscal frameworks so that future administrations are held to a higher account on this. Imagine what we could have done through the pandemic if we had had that kind of money in the heritage savings trust fund. It would have been remarkable.

The list of benefits Bill 10 provides for Albertans today and in the future goes on, Mr. Speaker. I'm not done yet. Amendments to the personal income tax amendment act would enable changes to the charitable tax credit rating, an increase from 10 per cent at present to 60 per cent for the first \$200 of donations. This is scheduled to come into effect retroactively on January 1 of this year, and that's really great because Albertans, as we know, are very generous. They are very giving people, and I believe, if I have my stats correct, Albertans give more per capita than any other province. That's remarkable. Now we're giving them an even greater financial incentive to do so. Just imagine what we'll unlock in civil society as that occurs.

Bill 10 will cut red tape and save businesses around \$7 million a year – \$7 million, Mr. Speaker – in mailing costs by giving businesses the ability to provide reporting documents to their shareholders electronically instead of by mail. I don't want to rag on Canada Post too much, but I will tell you that I've had a lot of interesting mail show up very late. I think this is a great change, to get my documents when I need them, as I need them, instantly. And for a \$7 million saving, that's just, like, the icing on the cake.

Changes under Bill 10 will give credit unions the opportunity to provide financial services to residents of border communities and other new customers they cannot currently serve to generate even more revenue through more flexible regulations.

Bill 10 proposes amendments that would strengthen the leadership of Horse Racing Alberta by allowing more public and industry representation to manage daily operations and ensure that this vibrant part of rural communities continues to thrive, a vibrant part of my rural community of Grande Prairie.

Bill 10 also allows Alberta's government to follow through on our commitments to create accessible and affordable postsecondary education – I have three kids in postsecondary education, Mr. Speaker; I'm very happy about that – to create the right conditions for Alberta's agrifood sector to be globally competitive, which is a win for all Albertans; to alleviate the financial burdens for those building their forever families through adoption; and to give municipalities across the province the predictable and consistent funding they have long been asking for, and I can attest to that personally with my role in the ministry.

Mr. Speaker, for this and many other reasons, I support Bill 10 so that the concerns that we hear from Albertans can be addressed, so that we can continue to learn from our mistakes collectively as a province, so that instead of repeating what's already been done, we go forward with a brighter future for the next generation and the one after that and the one after that, so that we can effectively implement Budget 2023, and, most importantly, so that we can ensure Alberta's future will be prosperous and secure for generations to come. I know that's why I ran in 2019, and I'm sure that's why many in this House put the hours in to sit in this Chamber, because we want a brighter future for our kids and grandkids and their kids and their grandkids.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, but I'm happy to support Bill 10. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

9:10

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 10. I want to start my comments on Bill 10 by just reading a small quote from March 7, 2012. The quote was: you should not be able to use taxpayer dollars for blatant, partisan advertising in advance of an election. Something that I completely, fundamentally agree with, and perhaps the members on the other side should because the person who made that statement was a woman who – I was about to say her name, and I just realized I can't – is now Premier of this province.

Of course, she said that when she was on the other side of the House, and at the time the Conservative government was putting together about \$1.3 million for advertising campaigns just before the election. The now Premier, who was in opposition at the time, stood up in quite an indignant state to say how repugnant it was that this government at the time was using taxpayer dollars to advertise and to promote their political brand under the guise of government advertising.

Here we are a dozen years later, finding that this government is not only spending that small amount of money – the money that, back then, Wildrose House leader Rob Anderson referred to as using taxpayers' money as their own campaign piggy bank – but now, instead of just a \$1.3 million slush fund, this government has identified about \$6.6 million for “developing and implementing the Affordability Action Plan, including an advertising campaign to inform Albertans about affordability [initiatives],” which is advertising their government policy on the eve of an election.

We know what the now Premier thought about that when she was standing on this side of the floor. I would certainly love the Premier to stand up and explain why she was terribly wrong then or why she's terribly wrong now or why she is speaking one way on one day and another way on another day, which we find happening quite frequently with this particular Premier.

I'm very, very concerned that we are in this place of the government taking such a cynical view of Alberta taxpayers' dollars that they would use such significant amounts of money to create funds for their own purposes, that will benefit only them just before an election. The creation of this \$1.4 billion election campaign slush fund, called the Alberta fund, really is the epitome of cynicism by this government.

You know, I think they should hang their head in shame at the fact that they are supporting this kind of activity. They certainly would not when they were on the opposition side. They certainly would have agreed with their own Premier and called this a slush fund that is unacceptable. I think it's fascinating that the government can purport to say that they care about Albertans and that they care about how to spend Albertans' money, but when it comes time to their own good, to kind of getting what they want out of it, they certainly have a whole bunch of money available, and they're using that money just before an election in a way which I think is really undermining the democratic system that we have in this province. I think they should certainly have some shame about it.

I noticed that they don't have money for some other very important things that they could have spent money on. I noticed that they don't have money for a public lab to make sure that we have good resources here in this province for identifying responses to viruses and other health crises. They could have easily had one in this province, but this government said that we don't have the money for that kind of thing. In fact, not only did they not continue a public lab that had been started before they became the government, but they went to the site and they dug out the beginning cement work that was put in, the

foundation work that was being put in, and covered it up at the cost of over a million dollars. They were literally using money to cover up what they were taking away from Albertans. That just seems to be the pattern here in this government.

I noticed this government also did not have the money to keep 35,000 educational assistants in the schools when times got tough in this province, that they did not have the money to provide PUF funding for children who are five years of age who need extra supports in the schools so that they can overcome disabilities, overcome learning issues, and be successful at an early age, which we know is directly tied to success later in life. They didn't have the money for that. They didn't have the money for it earlier when they had the single-year greatest deficit budget ever introduced into this province, but they also don't have it now that they got lucky and got a whole bunch of extra money that they didn't count on from the increased price of oil.

I noticed they also didn't have money for reducing class sizes, for meeting some of the needs of some of the school boards across the province of Alberta who are seeking new schools because the population of this province is rising so rapidly that we have thousands and thousands of new students every year, more students than we've ever had before, and the number of schools are simply not keeping up to it. They didn't have money for that, but they certainly had \$1.4 billion to create a slush fund for themselves. [interjection]

I can see that the government members are laughing about this, because they know what a joke it is that they're pulling on all Albertans. They know that they got away with something here, and they're going to be able to use that money for personal purposes, which are really political purposes.

I noticed they didn't have money to go to the municipalities and say: look, you're struggling, we know, because of actions that we have taken over the years, by giving a tax holiday to some major corporations, by increasing RCMP officers and putting the taxes on you, putting the costs on you. And doing all kinds of other things for small municipalities, increasing the stress that small municipalities have trying to pay their bills. I was standing in front of the Legislature not that long ago with reeves and mayors from all across the province who were here to say that their governments are under extreme stress, and a large part of it is created because this government had made decisions that put more expenses onto them and took away some of their resources. Did they have money to fix any of that at this particular time? No, they didn't have money for that; they only had money for a slush fund.

I noticed they didn't have money to resolve the problem of massive increases in tuition that we've seen under this government for the last four years. We've seen programs at universities go up by as much as 30 per cent in terms of tuition costs during their tenure here in this House. Do they have money to fix any of that? No, they don't. They don't have money for the people of Alberta. They certainly have money for their own advertising so that they can satisfy their own desire to retain power. That's really what it's all about.

I noticed they don't have any money for the people who are living on AISH, whose income this government deindexed, who took thousands of dollars out of the pockets of the most poor people in this province, both poor and disabled people. They took money away from them for four years. Have they made any suggestion that perhaps they would give back the money to the people who live on AISH with this surplus that they had? No, they didn't do that. Not only did they take money away from them by deindexing AISH; they haven't supplied any increases. [interjections]

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

**Mr. Feehan:** Not only did they not deal with the fact that they had deindexed AISH payments over the years, but they have not taken this money and said: look, we owe you a couple of thousand dollars each, so perhaps we should give that back to you. They could have done that. They chose not to do that. They chose instead to give themselves money. They chose instead to create a slush fund that is really about them using government resources to talk about their program of governance and advertise to the people of the province of Alberta using the money of the people of the province of Alberta. This is something that should simply not be allowed, and in fact this Premier said that it should not be allowed. On March 7, 2012, this Premier said that that was not an acceptable behaviour on the part of the government, yet now here we have this Premier and this government doing exactly that.

**9:20**

You know, you couldn't write fiction about this because people would say: that's so unrealistic; no government would act with such malintent. Yet here we have a government that has indeed done exactly that, who have stood up at one time and said that this is wrong behaviour and stood up at another time and engaged in that very same behaviour. This is really unacceptable, and I think that this government should be ashamed to bring forward this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, Bill 10, at this time with this kind of behaviour engaged and embedded in it.

I would have loved to have seen an act that did more to correct the very many mistakes of this government, that resolved the problems this government created with affordability, for example, the fact that they took the cap off electricity rates and people started paying huge amounts more, some in the neighbourhood of 300 per cent more than they used to pay. Because they took the cap off insurance, people's insurance rates went up 20, 30, 40 per cent, and even after they somehow decided that a cap was okay after saying that it wasn't okay, they brought in a cap, and then they allowed a number of companies to increase their rates right away as the cap was coming in. We saw some companies increase their rates by 15 per cent. I mean, they didn't even protect people when they were bringing in the cap, which they originally opposed.

This government has made a lot of errors in the time that they've been in government, and I'm always happy when they fix those errors. I'm just, you know, really surprised that they are here with this huge amount of bonus money that came from the sheer chance of the price of oil going up dramatically from where it is now and then not using that money in a way to make life better for Albertans. I think they could have done that. They chose not to do that.

Here we are now talking about a bill where they have found money for themselves, for their own self-interest, but not money for the people that have been suffering with high rates of the cost of food, the cost of insurance, the cost of tuition, and how difficult it's been for so many people who live on very limited incomes. Seniors who have had money taken away from them for drug coverage, students in schools who have had money taken away from them for their educational assistants: the list of people who have had to suffer under this government rhetoric ...

**An Hon. Member:** Go away.

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. Unparliamentary comments on or off the record are unparliamentary.

**Mr. Feehan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a little leniency for this particular member because it is his last week being an MLA in this House, and I guess it's his last chance to take shots, knowing that he won't be standing here after May 29.



You know, I think I've made it very clear what I think about this act, and I certainly wish the government would take the opportunity to fix the problems that they've created in a way that was direct and honest in terms of the needs of Albertans and not the needs of their own political party.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has the call.

**Ms Issik:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm reasonably certain I'm not the only person in this Chamber who remembers a certain bumper sticker from years ago. It said something along the lines of: please, God, let there be another boom, and I promise not to . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Piss this one.

**Ms Issik:** Sh. Dot, dot, dot.

Why would somebody put that bumper sticker up? It's because our natural resource revenues are worth something. They're worth something not only to every individual in Alberta, every Albertan who is living now of all ages, but they're worth something for those who are yet to be born. The resources that are within the ground in the province of Alberta belong not just to us as Albertans today; they belong to future generations of Albertans as well. At some point this province – because it's a nonrenewable resource, oil and gas will at some point see those royalties eventually vanish. So we ought to be treating these royalty revenues with respect, with the respect that is due for those future generations and for the younger people in our province today.

I'm a bit disappointed, I'll say – and I use that word – I'm just using a nice word.

**Mr. Sabir:** Disappointed with the slush fund.

**Ms Issik:** I'm very disappointed to hear the opposition talking about slush funds. Clearly, they've been given their word of the day by their caucus bosses. They're out there with their anger words for the day, whipping it up so that tomorrow on Twitter they can, you know, have another good Twitter day. Good for them. This is a pretty serious matter, though. It's not to be taken lightly whatsoever.

What is this fund called the Alberta fund? What is that? Well, it's not a slush fund. It is the fund that represents fiscal responsibility and using funds properly when you have a surplus.

I'm sorry, but I door-knock a lot. I talk to constituents every day. I talk to them on the phone. I talk to them at meetings. I talk to them on their doorstep. They all tell me that they want our debt repaid. They all tell me they don't want to spend debt-financing charges instead of putting that money towards services. They all tell me that our heritage savings trust fund deserves to have funds put in it, not just taken out of it. They tell me that every day. They're very happy that a fiscal framework has been put into place, and they're very happy that there's some fiscal discipline.

Guess what? That money belongs to Albertans. It is not there to just spend willy-nilly on pet projects. It's outlined – and I don't know. Maybe instead of just rambling on about this, that, and the other thing that has little relevance to the conversation tonight on this bill, Bill 10, perhaps they could take a look at page 14 and onwards, where we talk about the fiscal framework. The fiscal framework not only talks about surplus funds, but it also talks about balanced budgets. There's a concept for the members opposite.

You know, let's talk about slush funds for a minute here. Does anybody remember the carbon tax?

**Mr. Getson:** Oh, yeah.

**Ms Issik:** Okay. I remember the carbon tax. I remember what it was supposed to be spent on. It was supposed to be spent to reduce emissions. What happened with that? Well, they used it as a money recycling program. That's number one. Number two, they had some programs where we had good people coming from Ontario, driving around in wrapped vans, replacing light bulbs and shower heads, light bulbs and shower heads that any of us could buy at Home Depot, by the way. [interjection] Yeah. That's how they spent it.

You know where the slush fund ended up? At the end of their term they had half a billion, almost, dollars laying around that they couldn't even figure out how to spend. They were really good at taking it out of people's pockets, not just families but every community centre, every hospital, every school, every not-for-profit agency, every women's shelter. Every single place that they could find a carbon tax to take, they took it. Then they couldn't figure out how to – there was a slush fund right there. But good thing that we had good folks from Ontario coming and changing light bulbs for us.

**9:30**

Let's go back to the fiscal framework. The first thing to recognize is how you get a balanced budget, and what are the guidelines for that?

The budget will only be permitted to be in deficit if:

- Revenue declines by \$1 billion or more from the prior-year third quarter . . . revenue forecast.

These are the exceptions that we get. Your revenue has to decline by more than a billion dollars.

- Revenue is expected to decline to an amount that is below the prior-year Q3 total expense forecast.

At year-end, a deficit is only allowed in the consolidated financial statements if:

- A deficit is forecast in the budget as permitted by the exceptions;
- Actual revenue has declined by \$500 million or more from the current year budget amount; or
- The budgeted, voted contingency is exceeded due to unanticipated costs beyond the government's control due to disasters or emergencies declared by Cabinet; expense increases required [by] the Alberta Petrochemicals Incentive Program (APIP); non-cash, non-recurring expense increases required under accounting standards; and/or expense increases by \$500 million or more for payments related to litigation or settlements not anticipated in the budget.

Okay; so there's your exceptions.

One of those exceptions is actually for APIP. And what does APIP do? It's an incentive program that brings businesses and large projects into this province that will generate revenue for years to come based on what? Feedstock of? That's right; nat gas. So, yep, we can put a big project in after a budget is done.

In-year expense growth

is to limit in-year adjusted operating expense increases to the budgeted and voted contingency except when increases are due to:

- Dedicated revenue-expense increases;

So these are expenses that are actually incurred to raise revenue.

- Non-recurring, non-cash expense variations required by accounting standards;
- Emergencies or disasters declared by Cabinet;
- Expenses under the [APIP] Program . . .
- Payments related to litigation.

Okay.

So if we end up with a surplus, then what? This is what these folks across the aisle are referring to as a slush fund. Let's see. What's that for? What's this slush fund for?

50 per cent of the available surplus cash must go to the repayment of debt maturing in that fiscal year with the remaining cash allocated to the new Alberta Fund. The Alberta Fund allows the government to set aside surplus cash while it decides the best use of this cash. There are three allowable uses of cash from the Alberta Fund.

Does that sound like a slush fund to you? Hmm.

- Debt repayment;

That's one.

- Additional deposits into the Heritage Fund;

That's two. Number three,

- One-time initiatives that do not lead to permanent increases in government spending.

Well, that sure sounds like a slush fund, doesn't it? Hmm. Wow.

And our in-year expenses. What are the guidelines for that? Four components, that we

- Require annual balanced budgets, with certain exceptions;

We've gone over the exceptions. We

- Limit year-over-year increases in operating expense to population growth and inflation;

Yes, folks, that's called fiscal discipline. It's long overdue in this province, and people have been begging for it.

- Limit in-year expense growth to a budgeted and voted contingency; and
- Set out policies for the allocation of surplus cash to repayment of maturing debt, saving for the future, or one-time initiatives that do not lead to permanent increases in government spending.

That's the fiscal framework. That is not a slush fund; that is responsible fiscal management of the people of Alberta's money, respecting the resources that belong to the people of Alberta and future generations of Albertans.

And I'm sorry that the debate tonight has just been disrespectful of those who are yet to be born and those who are young. Those resources belong to all Albertans. The revenue from those resources belongs to all Albertans, and it is required that we manage those responsibly, with discipline. Albertans want that. They tell me over and over again. So the side across can keep talking about their word of the day for their Twitter fodder, but I think Albertans deserve better than that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Hon. members, seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

### **Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** I would like to call the committee to order.

### **Bill 8 Alberta Firearms Act**

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

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

[The clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

I see the hon. government whip.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Yeah. Mr. Chair, I would like to rise and report progress on Bill 8.

**The Deputy Chair:** Sorry. Are you asking that we rise and report on Bill 8?

**Mr. Rutherford:** Yes.

**The Deputy Chair:** All right. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

**Mr. Long:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 8.

**The Acting Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report?

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Acting Speaker:** All those opposed? Carried.

### **Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)**

#### **Bill 11 Appropriation Act, 2023**

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Toews]

**The Acting Speaker:** Anyone wishing to add to debate tonight?  
Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

#### **9:40 Bill 12 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023**

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Toews]

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 12, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023?  
Seeing none, I'm prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. the Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems like a lot of great work has been done tonight in a very short period of time. I thank all members for their participation. At this time I move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:41 p.m.]





**Table of Contents**

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 9 Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023..... 695

Bill 10 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023 ..... 701

Bill 11 Appropriation Act, 2023..... 708

Bill 12 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023 ..... 708

Committee of the Whole

Bill 8 Alberta Firearms Act..... 708

*Alberta Hansard* is available online at [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca)

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](mailto:AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca)