



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 6, 2023

Day 5

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 6, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, as it is our custom, we pay tribute to former members of this Assembly who've passed away since we last met.

Mr. Kenneth Frank Lemke

The Speaker: Ken Lemke served as the Progressive Conservative member for Stony Plain from 2012 to 2015 and was appointed the deputy government whip in 2014. Mr. Lemke attended school in Bawlf and went on to study at the University of Lethbridge. He then worked in real estate before entering public life.

In 1995 Mr. Lemke was elected to the Stony Plain town council, where he served for 16 consecutive years, including serving as the mayor from 2007 to 2012. Moving into provincial politics, he brought experience and success in regional collaboration, as demonstrated by his years in local government.

Mr. Lemke's commitment to his community is evident through the numerous associations to which he contributed, including the Stony Plain library board, the TransAlta Tri Leisure Centre, and the capital region board. Mr. Lemke received the Queen Elizabeth II diamond jubilee in 2012.

He passed away on July 14, 2023, at the age of 72. In a moment of silent prayer or reflection I ask you each to remember Mr. Ken Lemke as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Janet Layton and her daughter Molly Layton. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we all know and owe a deep debt of gratitude to the family members of those who have served this Assembly. Today we pay tribute to former member Ken Lemke, and it's an honour to introduce members of Ken's family who are joining us in the Speaker's gallery today. I ask each of you, as I call your name, to rise and be recognized. It's my pleasure to introduce

Mr. Lemke's son Garrett; daughter-in-law Marissa; and grandson Griffin Lemke; Ken's daughter, Andrea Cote; son-in-law, Michael; grandsons Luca, Theo; and granddaughter Evaline; the former member's brother Richard; sister-in-law Jean; and nephew Kevin Lemke. And last, but certainly not least, it is an incredible debt of gratitude that we all owe to Ken's wife, Gail Lemke. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

It's also my pleasure to introduce two dignitaries joining us in the Speaker's gallery today. First, we have the former member Arno Doerksen, who also happens to be the reeve of Newell county. Joining Mr. Doerksen today is Matt Fenske, the chief administrative officer of the county of Newell. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I'd also like to introduce to all members of the Assembly two individuals who joined us today, singing our national anthem. Molly Layton was born and raised in Calgary. Her love of music began with the music with your baby program, and she hasn't looked back since. Although born in the U.K., her mother, Janet Layton, has called Alberta home for over 30 years. She lives to sing and cannot remember a time when she wasn't singing. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you 24 teachers from across the province who are here for the Alberta Teachers Institute on Parliamentary Democracy. This three-day, intensive program development opportunity offers teachers the chance to explore the legislative process. During their time here they'll develop strategies for teaching parliamentary democracy in the classroom and helping students become active citizens. I ask all of the teachers participating in this year's program to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. the Minister of Children's Services has an introduction.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three guests from the Kara Family Resource Centre: Stasia Quillian, Maria Vicente, and Maresa James. Kara does great work in our community with kids and families, and I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. It's my honour to introduce to you my fantastic constituent Kate Quinn, an incredible community builder. Many will know her for her decades-long career serving our communities as the executive director of CEASE, the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation. Though she is now retired from that role, she's still doing so, so much. Please rise and warmly welcome Kate to the Legislature.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members assembled my second cousin Levi Lawton, a thoughtful citizen and advocate who lives in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, but he's my second cousin, so I get to introduce him. We thank him for all he does for communities large and small here in Alberta. Levi, please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests: Bob McKeon, Sara McKeon, and Kathleen Quinn. They are joining me from Newman Theological College in Edmonton, and I'd like them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I am pleased to rise today to introduce Tayler Wood, who is sitting in the gallery. Tayler is a passionate educator who works at Drayton Valley community outreach school. She has helped me tremendously in my journey to this esteemed Chamber through countless hours of volunteering. I'm so grateful for her support and would like to ask the House to please welcome her.

1:40

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ms Wei Haimin, a renowned Beijing opera superstar from Taiwan, who is visiting Alberta as part of her world tour. Also with her are Peggy Yu, president of the Edmonton Beijing Opera Association, and Allie Wang. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has an introduction.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce both to you and through you a good friend of mine Daniel Gray, who is now seated in the gallery. Daniel Gray is the son of Member of Parliament Tracy Gray. He's a small-business owner, an active participant in politics. He's from Kelowna but now calls Alberta home. I'd like to invite him to rise and have this Assembly give him a warm welcome.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the mayor of Coaldale, Jack Van Rijn; councillors Bill Chapman, Dale Pickering, Jordan Sailer; the CAO, Kalen Hastings; and the Coaldale manager of government relations, Jonathan Wensveen. Please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has an introduction.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Emerald Nnani. Emerald played for Alberta's 15U basketball team this summer at the nationals, held in Calgary, and does a tremendous job representing our province on that basketball floor and in her community. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly grade 9 students of St. Cecilia junior high school. St. Cecilia junior high school is one of the 30 schools in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. I ask the students, educators, and support staff to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of community and social services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Marjorie Bencz, the executive director of Edmonton's Food Bank; Melissa From, the president and CEO of the Calgary Food Bank; Shawna Bissell, the executive director of Food Banks Alberta; as well as the reeve of Clearwater county, Michelle Swanson; and the deputy reeve, my favourite, Genny. Stand up, everybody. That's a lot. I ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you members of the council of Mackenzie county. Lisa

Wardley and Josh Knelsen are both here. They are, in technical terms, in rural parlance, total beauties, and we want to give them a warm welcome here, the traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce both to you and through you members of Wheatland county council – I congratulate them for all the incredible investment they, along with their pro-growth policy, have brought to our province – Tom Ikert, Scott Klassen, Donna Biggar, and Shannon Laprise. I invite you to rise and the Assembly to give them a warm welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas has a statement to make.

Federal Carbon Tax

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today because Albertans care about protecting our environment, but they also care that we are here to protect their jobs and their pocketbooks. The federal government, in its flawed environmental activism, imposed a punitive carbon tax that did not at all reduce emissions but, rather, sent costs for everyday goods and services soaring. It was, in fact, the opposition leader and members across the aisle from us who rolled that tax out happily here in Alberta.

With ongoing affordability challenges the tax further raised the cost of living, buildings, food, fuel, energy, and more, Mr. Speaker. Because of NDP-Liberal mismanagement, coupled with ideological delusions, affordability has been sacrificed for punitive, top-down environmental pipe dreams. The carbon tax, again, never reduced emissions, as was its stated goal. Instead, it has been used to divide Canadians. The carbon tax has been a resounding failure, and Canadians now realize that they've been taken for a ride.

Now we hear the federal government, supported by their NDP friends across the aisle, saying that the carbon tax just wasn't enough to reduce emissions. They are now seeking to impose an oil and gas emissions cap, Mr. Speaker, which would devastate our economy, kill jobs, bankrupt numerous municipalities and First Nations communities right across our province, and once again send costs soaring for everyday working people across Alberta. Provinces across Canada are now demanding exemptions and/or scrapping this tax altogether.

The Saskatchewan NDP, Mr. Speaker, just next door, supported their government's motion to stop collecting the carbon tax from natural gas if the NDP-Liberal coalition doesn't offer an exemption. Just moments ago the federal NDP supported the federal Conservatives' motion to alleviate affordability concerns with the carbon tax for all Canadians. But, of course, and unfortunately so, just as our NDP counterparts here in Alberta did just last week, they rejected our motion, refusing to recognize affordability concerns as they decided to remain loyal to their masters in Ottawa.

Alberta joins the vast majority of Canadians in calling for an end to the failed carbon tax and the Ottawa-knows-best national policies that burden families and businesses with high costs and the great risk of unreliable energy. Our government, again, is happy for Canadians in Atlantic Canada for the break that they will be receiving from carbon tax on home heating oil, but we are extremely disappointed, Mr. Speaker, that Canadians in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and other provinces who heat their homes with natural gas have been ignored. And then to be told that it's because we vote differently here on the

prairies: how disrespectful is that? Our own representatives, Minister Randy Boissonnault and MP George Chahal, have been largely missing in action on this file, or they're singing the Prime Minister's praises, a Prime Minister whose support is, quite frankly, in free fall as he's largely responsible for the affordability crisis that we are seeing in Canada today.

Less than one month ago the federal environment minister publicly refused to consider Alberta's fair and reasonable request for flexibility from the federal electricity regulations for our natural gas driven system. Now, Mr. Speaker, they've admitted that regional carve-outs are necessary to bring down costs, costs that have been driven up, again, by the carbon tax. It's time for Ottawa to amend their dangerous draft electricity regulations as well to accommodate Alberta's unique system. It's time to end provincial and regional discrimination in the name of partisanship, ideology, and, quite frankly, for fear of losing votes. This is absolutely not how Confederation is supposed to work.

The federal carbon tax is a ridiculous policy that seeks to punish Canadians who don't vote Liberal. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's own Liberal MP, Minister Randy Boissonnault, has been actively working against Albertans' economic interests and financial well-being. His own colleague in eastern Canada, the Liberal Rural Economic Development minister, has said that if we want to be heard, we just need to vote differently. In fact, she said that we on the prairies need to vote Liberal.

Let's set the record straight. We are onside with everyday Albertans. Albertans firmly oppose a carbon tax. Alberta has four MPs, one of whom is a minister, that are part of the NDP-Liberal coalition government, and all four have spouted threats, division and absolved themselves from any and all responsibility on this issue. By Randy Boissonnault's own colleague's admission, Mr. Speaker, the minister is practically useless in cabinet and a nonexistent voice when it comes to defending his constituents and fighting for their affordability concerns.

Mr. Speaker, Minister Boissonnault stated that the federal Liberals are simply being responsive and flexible to a region of the country that simply does not have alternatives. Well, Minister Boissonnault, as an Albertan you should know that Alberta also does not have alternatives. We have struggled with affordability just as much as the votes in the east. We don't have heating oil here, Minister Boissonnault; we do have and are proud to produce clean natural gas, which is lower emitting, less expensive, and Minister Boissonnault should know that.

On October 27 I sent a letter, Mr. Speaker, to Minister Guilbeault demanding that Alberta receive the same equal treatment as other Canadians since it seems that the minister as a cabinet minister and the other Liberal-NDP Alberta MPs do not have the ear of the Prime Minister or of cabinet. Are they fighting for Albertans and the Prime Minister just isn't listening to them? Or are they all just Liberal actors that will fold for ideology and power over the very real concerns of their constituents, concerns about paying bills, heating their homes, and keeping the lights on in the middle of the winter? Minister Boissonnault and company are either terrible representatives on behalf of Albertans, or they actually, actively believe in their activist agenda and their government's failed ideological ambitions that raise the cost of everything from gas to groceries to utilities. Either way, Albertans deserve better.

1:50

While Albertans struggle to pay their bills, the NDP-Liberal MPs who are responsible and complicit for the affordability crisis that we are seeing today are now saying that the concerns raised by their provinces are simply more important than those in the prairies. Our government will not stand by and watch as the federal government

unilaterally decides that one part of Canada with one type of home heating is worthy of a carbon tax break while those living elsewhere in our country using another type of home heating do not.

Mr. Speaker, Randy Boissonnault, George Chahal, and their NDP friends across the aisle need to put politics aside and demand an end to this Ottawa-knows-best approach. We need to put an end to radical environmentalist policies that hurt families, hurt businesses, hurt our economy while not at all reducing emissions. We need to start putting common sense ahead of ideology if we ever want to actually reduce emissions while keeping Albertans' money in their wallets, where it belongs.

Having carved out an exemption for Atlantic Canada, Mr. Speaker, the only fair approach is for Ottawa to give Albertans and all other Canadians the same support. We can absolutely steward our environment, reduce emissions, invest in innovation and technology while keeping life affordable and energy reliable.

Minister Boissonnault, if you are listening, as we were all watching the vote on the Conservatives' motion to choose affordability over ideology and a completely useless carbon tax, as we saw the federal NDP support it as well, we are disappointed that you continue to stand with your ranks. You could not put ideology aside and listen to the people that you are elected to represent. Again, we continue to urge the federal government to provide exemptions for all Canadians or to axe the tax entirely. We ask you this and once again the members opposite, to stand for Albertans and not for Liberal-NDP votes. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 7(3.1) "a member of the Official Opposition for a period of no longer than 3 minutes" will be able to respond to a ministerial statement.

Ms Ganley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we sure just heard a lot of political rhetoric, but this shouldn't be about political rhetoric. It shouldn't be about scoring points. It should be about Albertans. It should be about the families who are struggling right now.

Last week we offered the UCP an opportunity, an opportunity to send a message that both sides of the House here in Alberta stand against the federal government's decision on home heating oil, that Albertans need help with their costs just as much as anyone in this country. The UCP chose to ignore that opportunity and instead wanted to play nasty, partisan games.

Mr. Speaker, we hear every day from families who are struggling to make ends meet. They're skipping meals. They're piling on credit card debt. They're taking out a second or even a third mortgage. The motion we put forward last week called for a carbon tax exemption for home heating. Such an exemption would save families money on their utility bills, and it couldn't come at a better time.

The costs of electricity bills have quadrupled since this UCP government took office. That's right: quadrupled. I have heard from families staring down bills of \$600 or \$700 to keep their house warm and the lights on. We could have started lowering those costs, but this government said no.

The cost-of-living crisis isn't the only thing the government chooses to ignore. Climate change is a generational problem. The UCP has done nothing to address this pressing issue. Many of their members refuse to acknowledge that it even is an issue. I can't help but think about the future of my own daughter, who was forced to spend so many days inside this summer because of the smoke. I often think about the impact that climate change will have by the time she's in high school or when she chooses to start a family of her own.

We must act together to lower emissions and to protect communities from the threat of wildfires, flooding, and more, but

we also believe that what's good for one part of the country is good for another part of the country. That's why we want a carbon tax exemption on all home heating. Mr. Speaker, climate change is a generational problem. The cost-of-living crisis is one of the biggest concerns of the people that we are supposed to represent in this place. Albertans deserve a government that leads. Instead, they have the UCP, focused exclusively on playing partisan politics.

We should have a clear, united message to Ottawa. We could have sent them a clear message on our position in this House. We should have sent that message, but the UCP chose not to, and frankly that's shameful. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, no matter what the UCP says, we know their plan for Albertans' pensions is nothing but an unpolished script missing key information, a script that even the UCP cannot manage to stick to. Even the former Deputy Premier doesn't believe this plan is worth pursuing, predicting that it is unlikely there will even be a referendum. To the Minister of Finance: if your own cabinet doesn't back this plan, why won't you just back down and withdraw all efforts to gamble away Albertans' pensions?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear. There's no need for inflammatory language like that, attempting to scare any Albertans. What we're doing is what good governments should do. You have a piece of policy. You talk about it in the public sphere. You're committed to engaging and consulting and having that conversation with Albertans and having the conversation with the federal government and the other Finance ministers across the country, which we did on Friday. What did they say? They said this. They said: "We love Alberta. We want you to stay. We appreciate you. We know it's your right to do this. We'll work through it with you."

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government's pension plan has so many holes, it's sinking faster than the *Titanic*. Now, the Finance minister himself admitted that this cake is not yet baked, so it's clear they can't make predictions about costs and benefits to Albertans, yet this UCP government continues to spend millions of public dollars selling an incomplete, inaccurate, and risky plan. Will the minister pull this misinformation off the airwaves, apologize to Albertans, and show a semblance of integrity and correct the record?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it was clear from our FPT on Friday that there was complete agreement from the federal minister and the provincial ministers that this is any province's right to consider, that this has always been in the legislation, in the CPP act, that this was part of how everyone agreed to join in the first place. They agree that this is our conversation to have as a province. [interjection] Very true. The information may change. They have agreed to go and involve the chief actuary and get an opinion on the formula that is in their act. I look forward, if there's new information, to bringing it to Albertans.

Ms Notley: The information now is false, so stop spreading it.

Now, until now there's been nothing but confusion about the question and the consequences of this UCP's half-baked plan. Last week the government introduced legislation that failed to provide clear details on a referendum, failed to protect the independence and security of pension fund investment, and failed to guarantee future benefit levels. This is a mess, a big, giant mess. Again to the minister: why won't you withdraw the legislation, stop spreading misinformation to Albertans with their money, and stop gambling with their pension? [interjections]

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:59.

Mr. Horner: Well, a lot there, Mr. Speaker. I would just say that what we learned at the FPT, in full agreement: this is Albertans' right to consider. It was agreed by all of the other Premiers.

What we did was – we've always done this consultation, this engagement with Albertans with the best information we had. The Morneau Shepell report showed us, through their interpretation, what the asset withdrawal would be. That's where we based a lot of the information that we've had in the consultation, where it says words like "up to." It could be up to \$1,425 per employee, per business, per year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:00

Medical Laboratory Services

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this weekend we all learned a new word: disaggregation. Turns out it's another word for boondoggle. We know that because we've seen it play out already. Last December the UCP disaggregated community lab service delivery. Within a month patients in Calgary were waiting up to six weeks for an appointment, creating painful delays for important treatment. For the record will the Minister of Health acknowledge that this was a boondoggle and apologize to Albertans for causing them such incredible pain and suffering through her mismanagement?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. It's unfortunate that the pain and suffering comes from the other side. They have to listen to those questions.

Mr. Speaker, the actual fact is that, on lab capacity, we've added an additional 2,000 weekly lab appointments that are now available through the Calgary southeast lab. We have an additional 500 weekly appointments becoming available later this fall once the expansion of the community labs in Calgary southwest and in Airdrie are complete. Since September APL has reduced wait times to walk-in and scheduled appointments. The current overall average wait time in the area is 28.8 minutes.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this isn't just about how quickly they can clean up their mess; it's also about their overall inability to properly handle an essential health service, with real consequences for Albertans who needed timely medical testing. We heard countless stories of the harm this government caused, including delayed cancer diagnosis, monitoring of severe health conditions, patients forgoing tests altogether because they couldn't get an appointment. Why won't this government focus on helping Albertans instead of

those endless and unnecessary efforts to reorganize and privatize our health care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, nothing could be further from the truth. Anyone, any Albertan who has gone to a hospital or to a clinic and had to endure the long wait times and not had access and not had quality care knows that we need to do something differently. In fact, think about what's going on right now. The average Albertan cannot get in to see a family physician when they need to. [interjections]

The Speaker: Whoa. Whoa. The minister has the call.

Member LaGrange: What's happening right now is not working, so, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to improving the system.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what needs to be done differently is that this UCP government has to be kept as far away as possible from our health care system. You know, the Premier talks about disaggregation, but all Albertans hear is boondoggle and chaos. After this lab fiasco this government must know that they have zero credibility with Albertans. We asked the Auditor General to investigate how much this fiasco has cost Albertans, and he agreed to do just that. So why won't the minister agree to wait and see how much this mess cost Albertans before she goes off to try and create a new one?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The members opposite would want to see us continue with the poor service that we're receiving right now. We need to give Albertans hope, and it's coming. I am excited. I'm excited about what we are bringing forward that will actually refocus the system, empower the workforce. I've gone across this province. I've heard from Albertans. I've heard from the workforce. They're wanting change. We're going to give it to them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has a question.

Renewable Energy Project Approvals

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, the UCP government's ban on renewables risks Alberta's economic future. This government did no consultations and disregarded the impact this ban would have on a growing industry in our province. This government gave us a few versions of their story. Once it was the AUC that requested this ban, then it was the AESO, and then it was RMA, but we know, through the AUC memo on June 29, that it was the Premier and her government who asked for this ban. Will the Premier admit that the disastrous moratorium on renewables was her idea?

Mr. Neudorf: This, the NDP's smoking gun, is that my office requested a brief to address an enormous problem left behind by the NDP for asking about getting an inquiry on how to solve the problem. They left an industry without adequate regulations, without legislation, and then we acted quickly to solve the problem left over by the NDP. We're working for Albertans. We're going to provide them affordable and reliable electricity. That's the job we were elected to do.

Ms Al-Guneid: Well, Mr. Speaker, according to the AUC 30 days after the election the minister was planning the ban on renewables. The Premier hid this wildly unpopular plan from voters during the election. Even worse, she's still hiding the ICF report on net-zero electricity in Alberta, a report that Albertans paid for. The Premier needs to understand that leading is about stability and trust and not

surprising investors and businesses with big-government meddling. I will give the Premier and her ministers a chance today.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't the minister on this file before the election. We had no preplanning. After the election we found out from the AESO and from the AUC that the problem was with the NDP ... [interjections]

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

Mr. Neudorf: ... and a publicly released report saying that there are critical and urgent problems with the reliability of our grid. We got to work providing affordable, reliable electricity for all Albertans. That's what we were elected to do, and that's what we're going to do.

Ms Al-Guneid: Speaking of planning, days after the ban was announced, the minister asked for a summary of renewables in Alberta. This is more proof that this government made a decision to stop renewables without understanding the impacts, which is why I'm putting forward a motion today to get our renewables industry back on track and securing investor certainty against devastating UCP decisions like this in the future. Will the Premier support this motion to ensure Alberta continues to lead in renewables and growing critical economic sectors? Better yet, will she end the renewables moratorium today?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason why we asked for that information is to dispel the myths and misinformation the NDP kept putting out about the AESO list, which is not subject to the pause. They continue to make up numbers; they continue to blur the facts. We asked the AUC for their numbers to get the truth out to all Albertans. Again, we are here to fix the problems left behind by the NDP, providing Alberta with affordable and reliable electricity. We're here to do the work of a responsible government and serve Albertans.

Physician Recruitment and Retention

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, it has been one year and 16 days since the Premier announced that she would fix health care within 90 days. It has been 160 days since the UCP took office, and this government has done nothing yet to fix health care. Instead, they are focusing on gambling away Alberta's pensions. Why has there been such a massive delay in addressing the health care crisis? Is it incompetence or indifference?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are tackling health care. In fact, we have seen some positive changes since we had the official administrator come in. But, you know, more needs to be done. The members opposite would like to continue doing what we're doing. It's not working. I believe there is a definition of insanity when you continue to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results. We're not going to do the same thing over and over again. We are looking to change things for the better.

Dr. Metz: Dr. Paul Parks, the head of the Alberta Medical Association, stated that frustration is in fact growing among doctors over increasing burnout and unrealistic funding models. He also shared concerns that Alberta is falling behind in retaining exhausted and overstretched doctors and in attracting health care workers to our province. Why is the government dragging its feet instead of

instead of providing support for physicians and thousands of Albertans who are suffering without a family doctor?

2:10

Member LaGrange: Well, I'm happy to tell the member opposite that I have a very good relationship with Dr. Parks. Dr. Parks is in fact meeting on a regular basis with me. In fact, we signed an MOU together just recently. I quote: "This MOU is an express commitment to real stabilization and investment into family medicine and rural generalists with a firm deadline of the next provincial budget. We will work collaboratively with Minister LaGrange for meaningful action to ensure the viability of family medicine and rural practices right across our province. Our family medicine specialists are the foundation of primary care."

The Speaker: I might just remind the minister that the use of proper names under any circumstance would be inappropriate.

Dr. Metz: The government's information, when it comes to physicians in this province, is more political spin than helpful information. Dr. Parks stated that the minister has not been telling, and I quote, the whole story when it comes to doctors in Alberta. Doctors are also deeply concerned about the lack of information on the organization of our fragile health system. Will the Minister of Health actually tell the whole story, or will we just continue to get political spin instead of getting to work?

Member LaGrange: Well, I'm happy to give statistics, Mr. Speaker, again, over and over again. According to the latest data from the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta at the end of September 2023 there were 11,608 physicians registered in Alberta. This reflects an increase of 348 from the last quarter and an increase of 262 from the same period in 2022. Compared to the same period last year, this represents an increase of 109 family physicians, specialists, and nonspecialists. Billing data shows that 5,470 family physicians provided service to Albertans in '22-23.

Agency, Board, and Commission Executive Compensation

Member Kayande: On May 17, 2015, the Leader of the Opposition at the time called on the Alberta NDP government, barely a week old, to review high salaries at Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions. That member, now the energy minister, raised concerns about people expensing lavish meals to the taxpayers, including two bottles of wine costing over \$140 each. The energy minister demanded action be taken about salaries that were triple those of the Premier and climbed by over \$100,000 a year. Is this really the system the energy minister wants us to return to?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, what the member there is talking about is RABCCA, and what our intention is in this fall session: to repeal the RABCCA and move to the next stage of a flexible compensation framework kind of modelled after B.C. They're seen as the gold standard in this regard. This is for non-union public-sector employees. This is about 30,000 Albertans in all sectors. I know that every MLA in this House understands the recruitment and retention challenges that RABCCA has caused. That's what we're going to fix this fall.

Member Kayande: Given that this is the same government that threatened the pay of health care workers and even said that it was reasonable to propose cutting nurses' pay by 4 per cent during a pandemic and given that this is the same government that proposed repealing the legislation that finally, after four decades, brought

sanity to the \$400,000, \$500,000, \$600,000 pay packages, can the Finance minister explain why he is in such a rush to get the Premier's friends back on the gravy train? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I've always believed there's no monopoly on good ideas, and if the opposition ever found one, I'd listen to it. I take you back to *Hansard* of March 15 in estimates, where the Member for Lethbridge-West was having a back-and-forth conversation with the then Finance minister of the day, encouraging them to get to the flexible compensation plan quickly because she was hearing about all the challenges it was causing in her riding with the postsecondary institutions, with non-union AHS workers, with AFSC employees. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Kayande: Given that once upon a time the Premier was opposed to the entitled former Conservative government and given that the Premier once called these folks "the most expensive people on the government payroll" and given that she now cheers on the Finance minister working to relike the salaries of her friends, will the Finance minister tell Albertans why he's returning to the days of pork-barrelling while regular Albertans struggle to pay the rent?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is moving towards a more flexible compensation framework that will look in a vertical way at each of these public organizations, which is very much needed because what we're seeing right now is a loss of good people, part of the reason we lost 20 per cent of our Crown prosecutors, causing all kinds of issues within the system. We know that small schools, especially with big research files, are not able to keep and retain these people, and this comes right down into the front-line, non-union health workers. We need to make sure that we do this right. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Investment Incentives and Job Creation

Mr. Wright: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the economy and job-creation engine of Canada and plays an important role in Canada's economic prosperity. A strong economy means that more Albertans can count on good paycheques to feed their families and build a better life here in this great province. Alberta continues to lead Canada in employment and economic growth, and it's evident in the Alberta October employment data. To the hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: can you tell this House more about October's employment numbers and what this means to our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations to the member on what I believe is his first question in this House. October's employment numbers tell a very exciting story about the state of Alberta's economy. We added nearly 38,000 jobs last month, with most of this growth fuelled by full-time jobs, with Alberta once again leading Canada in employment growth. Almost 84,000 more people have been working in Alberta over the first 10 months of 2023 than over the same period in 2022. Strong employment means our economy has the workforce needed to continue Alberta's impressive momentum.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a few weeks ago I attended an announcement with this minister, the Premier, and a few others in new job creations in manufacturing within my constituency and given that in October manufacturing jobs rose significantly in Alberta and further given that this investment alone will create hundreds of new jobs in the Medicine Hat region, can the minister discuss this announcement and others like it and how they're contributing to the growth of Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member mentioned, last month I joined him and the Premier in Medicine Hat at the announcement of S3 Group's first Alberta location. This exciting announcement will bring over 100 full-time jobs to Medicine Hat. Overall, Alberta's manufacturing sector gained 4,700 jobs in October, which is more than a 14 per cent increase over last year. As we continue to diversify our economy, we're pleased to see this growth in key sectors, and we're proud to support job creators like S3 Group as they set up shop in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that we know that attracting good jobs creates investment crucial to continuing the trajectory of our economic growth and given that on this side of the House we understand that creating a favourable environment for potential investors is of the utmost importance, can the same minister talk about how he's going to go about attracting new investment in this province?

Mr. Jones: I want to send a clear message to investors that Alberta is open for business. We have the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada and among the lowest combined rates in North America. If passed, Bill 1 would further protect our low-tax, business-friendly environment. Our investment and growth fund, or IGF, is also helping to attract job-creating investments, and a recent \$12.4 million investment into 2,000 new apprenticeship seats will help to ensure that the economy has the skilled workforce it needs. Alberta is calling; job-creating investors are answering, as are the skilled workers that are the backbone of our economy.

Electric Power Prices

Ms Ganley: Under this UCP government Albertans are struggling to keep the lights on and buy groceries. This summer electricity prices hit a record high, and they remain elevated. As the UCP correctly points out in their latest multimillion-dollar ad campaign: nobody wants their power bill to quadruple. Unfortunately, that's exactly what has happened under the UCP. This government has had four years. Electricity prices have quadrupled. Minister, what's the plan, or do you even have one?

Mr. Neudorf: To set the record straight, we've had four months. We're doing the work that the NDP failed to do when they were in power. We're bringing on . . . [interjections]

2:20

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're doing the work the NDP failed to do when they were in government. We are looking at the industry. We are making sure that we can provide reliable and affordable electricity. We're bringing on baseload power, more of it coming on as we speak, hopefully by the end of the year, more by next September. All of this extra baseload generation is going to be

bringing our prices down to what they were before the NDP were in power. This is what we're going to do, and we're going to do the work of a responsible . . .

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

Ms Ganley: Given that economists at the U of C have concluded that the reason for the rise in power prices is due to a lack of supply and competition, contrary to the UCP's made up excuses, and given that our government had a plan to bring on more supply that would lower prices, which, unfortunately, the UCP cancelled, and that the Premier recently admitted that that decision made by the UCP . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Ganley: . . . is what's driving prices, my question is a simple one. This government has done plenty to drive up power costs. Are you ever going to do anything to lower them?

Mr. Neudorf: We are. That's the exact work that we are doing. That's why we asked the AUC to look into what they're looking to. It's also why we asked the Alberta Electric System Operator to look into the structure of the market, because if what the NDP was claiming, that more renewables bidding in at zero would bring lower prices, we'd be seeing lower prices. We didn't. The market is broken. We're about to fix it. We've asked the Market Surveillance Administrator to look into market behaviour. So we're correcting all the mistakes that the NDP left behind.

Ms Ganley: Given that it was the UCP government that reversed the decision and decided to move away from the capacity market and given that this government has driven up their power bills by adding \$200 million in debt with their deferral scheme, they've banned renewables, which would have attracted billions in investment and created thousands of jobs, and they've sat back and watched the market become more concentrated while cancelling market reforms that would lower costs, when will this government start listening to Alberta families and finally do something about power bills?

Mr. Neudorf: We are listening to Albertans, and that's why we're doing the work. The NDP left Albertans paying \$93 million a year for 14 years to not generate electricity by coal. Not only that; when they started changing the taxing on the system, they got into all kinds of legal troubles. They had to actually sue the energy industry to try to get those people to come back and generate contracts, costing Albertans \$2 billion. We haven't even added the legal fees. Mr. Speaker, the NDP has cost Albertans billions and billions of dollars on electricity. We're about to fix that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, this government might not agree, but the eastern slopes are not an opportunity for megacorporations to make a buck. The eastern slopes are home to Alberta's wildlife, including species at risk: the grizzlies, the bull trout, and the westslope cutthroat trout. Grizzly bears use the valley in the eastern slopes as a corridor to move without coming in the way of humans. Seriously, does the minister not take human-bear safety into consideration? Does the minister not understand the dangers of mining in the eastern slopes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no surprise that the NDP are coming to the table now after four years when they were in government. All of these issues were ongoing, and frankly the NDP did nothing about it. Now, Alberta's government right now is keeping strong restrictions in place for coal mining. We're making sure that people are safe. We're making sure that we take care of our environment. That's something that the NDP never did. But let's be clear. We have to provide certainty to our industries and at the same time make sure that Albertans' pristine environment stays a pristine environment.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, given that, say, years from now, long after reclamation efforts are done, the animals will struggle to readapt to their migration patterns and their calving routes due to the interruption of the intergenerational knowledge systems and given that a number of encounters between Albertans and displaced grizzlies are already rising, a phenomenon the minister calls exceptionally rare, how can the minister ignore such a significant threat to Alberta's wildlife and to Albertans?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I just don't know where the NDP are going on this file. First of all, they talked about coal. Now they're talking about bears. But what really they should focus on is what kind of mess they left behind with Grassy Mountain. You know, Grassy Mountain has been a disaster. It's got a tailings pond. It's got an old coal mine. What did they do while they were in power about Grassy Mountain? It's older than I am, and I'm old. This government is taking real action to clean up Grassy Mountain and all of the other environmental disasters the NDP left behind.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Well, Mr. Speaker, we care far more about bears and the only clean drinking water source in that area. Given that the coal reserves we know of are in this critical habitat of threatened endangered trout, that are protected under the Species at Risk Act, which will inevitably be destroyed due to mining extraction, is this minister unaware of this? Is this an obvious threat to clean drinking water and the species, or is this a move out of "let's pretend it's not happening" from the government's playbook?

The Speaker: Pretty clear example of a preamble. I think we'll note that for future use.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, my difficulty on this file is that the NDP has absolutely no credibility on coal or the environment or our industry. In B.C. the NDP is plundering Elk Valley near Fernie, B.C. We're not going to take any examples or samples from them as far as what a proper government could do. Right now the Vancouver port is the number one port in North America for exporting coal, and it's not just metallurgical coal. Even the NDP Premier in B.C. understood the difference. It's about brown thermal coal, things that don't help the environment. We're taking no lessons whatsoever from the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Life Lease Housing

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it has come to my attention, through various conversations with my constituents, that there's an evolving problem regarding seniors receiving their money back from life lease contracts. Given that the mandate letter states, "Undertaking an analysis of life-lease protections, including a jurisdictional scan of other provinces, and bringing forward recommendations to

ensure appropriate protections are in place for Albertans," to the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: is the minister currently hearing from Albertans on these life lease issues?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

The Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for the question. I believe that is her first question in this House, so I'd like to thank her for that.

Mr. Speaker, we have recently completed three rounds of roundtables with life lease holders. We have heard from over 150 Albertans, both the residents as well as their family members. We're also engaging with both developers and other stakeholders. You may recall that in my mandate letter it actually says to bring forward life lease protections. We're listening to Albertans, and we're going to take action.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is creating problems, not only for seniors but also for family members in estate management, and given that there are more than 100 individuals from across central Alberta currently in queue waiting to receive back their money from life lease contracts, to the minister: can you inform the Assembly of the current status of the situation?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A life lease is not a rental agreement, and as such it's not covered under the residential tenancy dispute resolution service. But I can tell you that a consumer investigation unit has opened an investigation into these complaints that we have received. As it is an open investigation, I am unable to comment any further on the actual investigation. I will say this: we're listening to Albertans, and we will take action.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you for that answer, Minister. Given that we know seniors and their well-being are a high priority for this government and given that Alberta is the only province in Canada without life lease legislation and given the growing population of the seniors in our province, to the same minister: do you have a plan to put safeguards in place for seniors seeking life leases?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. I am engaging with members on both sides of the Assembly whose constituents have been affected by the life lease payout problem. This way I can assess what additional protections are needed so our government can put forward measures to protect life lease holders. Alberta's seniors worked hard all of their life, and they deserve better than this. I will have more to say on this matter in the near future.

2:30

School Class Sizes

Ms Chapman: Mr. Speaker, I am the proud mother of three children attending public schools in Calgary, and every day Alberta parents like my partner and I send our kids to school expecting that they are supported and get a quality education. That's what our kids, our future leaders, deserve. But class sizes have shot up under this government's watch, and we hear from parents every day whose kids are falling through the cracks. Can the Minister of Education

please inform this House how much class sizes have grown since the UCP took office?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we have been working through the Alberta Is Calling campaign to encourage individuals from across the country and across the world to make Alberta home. We've been working hard over the past four years to make Alberta that place of hope and opportunity once again, and it's clear that our efforts have been very successful. That, of course, presents some challenges to our schools and to our school divisions. We're working very carefully to make sure that we are moving projects forward. In the last four years 98 projects have moved forward, and we're looking to continue that effort.

Ms Chapman: Mr. Speaker, given that I didn't hear an answer there – and that's because the UCP cut off public reporting of class sizes – given that rather than fixing the problems facing Alberta schools ...

Mr. Nixon: Preamble.

Ms Chapman: ... this government decided to bury their head in the sand and given that we teach kids to admit their mistakes and take steps to fix them, will this government admit it was a mistake to cancel class size reporting and restore it today? Albertans deserve to know the state of their neighbourhood schools.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I will never apologize for making Alberta a destination of choice and making it a place of hope and opportunity that people want to come to and raise their families in. When we talk about class sizes, there are two things that we need to do: we need to build more schools, and we need to hire more teachers and educational support staff. That's precisely what we're doing. My mandate letter from the Premier directs me to significantly expand schools in our growing communities. We are working to hire over 3,000 additional educational support staff in our schools, and we'll get the job done.

Ms Chapman: Mr. Speaker, given that the Alberta NDP is listening to parents and their concerns and given that Alberta funds students at the lowest rate in all of Canada and given that we have heard from Albertans that some classes have 40 or even 50 kids crammed into them and given that I intend to introduce a bill in this House which will reintroduce class size and complexity reporting to strengthen standards, will the minister commit to properly engaging with Albertans about my legislation, or will he continue to sit back and play politics with public education?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry the member opposite finds investing additional funding to our education system as playing politics. I want to see the very best for our kids across the province, and we're committed to doing precisely that. That's why we've invested \$126 million over the next three years to hire additional educational support staff, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and others. That's why over the last four years we approved 98 school projects. That's why, as well, we'll be significantly expanding schools in our growing communities, to help make sure we can keep up with the growing demand in our schools. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East is the only one with the call.

School Construction in Airdrie

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta is once again the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Especially in my constituency of Airdrie-East, we've seen first-hand the growth and prosperity that comes with a low-tax and low-regulatory environment. Alberta is calling. But growth brings its own challenges, and families in Airdrie are worried that there are not enough schools. Can the Minister of Education please share what investment in Airdrie's education has happened over the last four years?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for her very important question. I know she's an incredibly fierce advocate for her community, and let me commend as well the city of Airdrie and the surrounding community for their incredible efforts in making the city of Airdrie a destination of choice in Alberta and across Canada. There are a number of projects that are under way. I know that in the last few years the Calgary Catholic school division received modernization funding for the St. Martin De Porres high school in Airdrie as well. Other projects have received approval, and we're continuing to work with our incredible MLAs to make sure we get these projects done. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP only announced one school project in Airdrie in the four years that they were government and given that that certainly didn't meet the needs of my constituents in Airdrie or any Albertan, for that matter, and given that we clearly just heard from the Minister of Education that we've had significant improvements under our Conservative government, can the Minister of Infrastructure please update my constituents on the progress of school projects in Airdrie?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane I, too, recognize the need in our region, and I'm proud to say that we are investing in several schools in Airdrie, Cochrane, and the Calgary area. For Airdrie these projects include a new K to 8 school, a FrancoSud secondary as well as a new 9 to 12 high school. Furthermore, planning is under way for elementary schools in Cochrane and in Chestermere, with the Bow Valley high school expansion beginning construction next spring. Upon completion these will serve over 5,000 new students, and we look forward to delivering on these projects and much more.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister, so much. I and my constituents are very grateful for the progress on these projects.

Given that Airdrie is one of the fastest growing cities in all of Canada most of the time and given that even with these recent efforts from our government, which is a vast improvement from the last, there is no doubt there is still work to be done, could the Minister of Education please share what our government's plans are to build even more schools in the great, growing constituency of Airdrie-East?

Mr. Nicolaides: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. As I noted, the city of Airdrie is one of the fastest growing cities across the entire country, and they should be very proud of the efforts that they've taken to

make that happen. As I mentioned a moment ago, the Premier has directed me to significantly expand the number of schools in our growing communities. I think we can all agree the city of Airdrie is on that list in terms of a growing community. I've also spoken at length with the school division, and I know that they have a number of projects that are priorities for the city of Airdrie. Their top two projects, if memory serves me correctly, are for the city of Airdrie itself, and we'll be working with them to move that forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park is next.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Municipal Affairs spoke to Alberta's mid-size city mayors. He let them know that work on the local government fiscal framework is under way and the mayors can expect to, and I quote, be unhappy with the final funding formula. This is not a negotiation. The province has all the money and all the power, and local governments are desperately waiting to know how to build and maintain the critical infrastructure their communities need after the years of UCP cuts and downloading costs. Municipalities use funding to create jobs and maintain economic infrastructure. Why is this UCP government shortchanging them again?

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start out by thanking the hon. member for quoting me accurately. I did say that. Here's the thing. Any municipality that gets money from the province and says that it's enough isn't doing their job right. I understand that no matter how much money they got, they're not going to be happy. I acknowledge that. But I also said that they also know that they were challenged to tell us what the formula would be, and they were unable to do it, so they know that we have to do it. That's what I said. I said that if I did my job right – and I hope I did; we'll find out – everybody would be about equally unhappy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Kasawski: Given that if the government was a true partner with municipalities, it would not charge unreasonably high lending rates to its municipal partners and given that the excessive provincial lending rate the province charges municipalities to borrow money to finance projects is functionally just another tax increase, can this government commit to restoring the preferential lending rate to municipalities that was in place before 2019, or is the UCP more interested in raising Albertans' taxes after promising not to?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, changes were made to the loans program to municipalities under our government. This was done to really highlight the actual cost to the provincial government of borrowing and going out to the capital markets. It's about a half per cent to three-quarters of a per cent higher than our prime rate. I have told the department to bring that back, and we will look at it to make sure it's as tight as possible but reflecting the actual cost to the province. I think that's warranted because of the increase in interest rates we've seen over the last year.

2:40

Mr. Kasawski: Given that Alberta municipalities earn over \$28 million a year from existing renewable energy generators and given that this government has banned development of new renewable energy generation, thus starving municipalities of the opportunity

to develop new sources of revenue, will this minister explain to the town of Strathmore how they are expected to pay for the replacement of its failing, 100-year-old wooden drainage pipes and build a new recreation centre for the families moving there while this government attacks their local revenue with no warning or consultation?

The Speaker: I struggled to connect the dots between the first, the second, and the third question. The second supplemental ought to support the first, and I'm not sure that it did, but the hon. minister can answer if he chooses to do so.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. We were all new here once, so I think you're wise to cut the gentleman some slack, and I'm with you on that. Let me just say this. We work closely with municipalities on a regular basis, and we hear what their concerns are, and many times we can make changes at their behest. In fact, the local government fiscal framework, which is coming up, is an example of government saying yes. They asked for their revenues to go up and down with the provincial government at the same percentage. That's what we're getting. That's what we're delivering. They asked, we said yes, and we're happy about that.

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

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said that she was going to fix the health care system in 90 days, and that was over one year ago. The government also announced they would build the south Edmonton hospital – that was six years ago – and still not one shovel has been put in the ground. The UCP has officially become the party of broken promises. To the minister: why is it that a government committed to fixing health care refuses to fund and build a hospital the city of Edmonton desperately needs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure has risen.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be back, and I must say that it's nice to see you back in the helm again, directing traffic. I do hope that you've been able to locate the culprit responsible for inviting protesters into this place to disrupt the long-standing traditions of the House. This member purposely caused a security breach, risking the safety of our members and our guests.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Guthrie: This is a serious matter, and it requires explanation from the NDP, with consequences to follow. Mr. Speaker, we're still waiting for that explanation.

Mr. Deol: Given that Edmontonians are driving as far as one hour to access the care they need in the city they are living in and given that this project has not only been pushed off years – it has now been pushed to the third priority for the hospital builds on the UCP list – and given that the UCP campaigned on this issue, but building the hospital wasn't even a part of the minister's mandate letter from the Premier, will the minister explain to Edmontonians why this project is not a priority for this government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to building infrastructure. We have over \$23 billion in capital allocated over the next three years, \$5.8 billion of that

directed through the Department of Infrastructure. Why? To meet the needs of Albertans, unlike the NDP, who despise our resource sector so much that they hijack this place, risking the safety of our members to display their disdain for the hard-working people of this province. A proper apology would be a good first step.

Mr. Deol: Given no answer to the question again and given that Edmontonians have been navigating a crumbling health care system for years and given that the problem cannot be fixed without an increase in capacity and given that the last hospital to be built in Edmonton was 35 years ago, when Edmonton's population was half the size it is today, will the minister admit that there is a dire need for the south Edmonton hospital to be built but this government is simply too lazy to put in the real work to fix this crisis?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, you know, when this session was approaching, I wondered if the NDP would have changed. Perhaps, just perhaps, they would want to work more collaboratively, but, sadly, as we found out last week, working collaboratively is not in their vocabulary.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a huge thank you to the Sergeant-at-Arms for their quick and decisive action. They deserve our gratitude for the risks that they take each and every day. Thank you to all of them for their service. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Tax Policies and Economic Development

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it is well known that this government has consistently championed the cause of keeping taxes low and relieving the financial burden on hard-working Albertans. As a result, Albertans have enjoyed one of the lowest taxation environments in this country. Could the Minister of Finance provide insight into the government's specific initiatives to maintain low taxes for all Albertans, including the amazing people of Lesser Slave Lake?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the proof is in the pudding. Albertans elected our government because of our track record of keeping taxes low, balancing the budget, and maintaining a business-friendly, pro-growth environment that benefits small business and families. Under our leadership Alberta has the lowest overall taxes in the country. In fact, it's also lower than 44 U.S. states. Alberta's low-tax environment is a major reason why we're seeing record numbers of people from other provinces and countries from around the world choosing to make Alberta their home. We will continue to build a prosperous future for Albertans by focusing on supporting growth and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given that it is clear the UCP government remains dedicated to keeping taxes affordable for all our citizens, could the same minister elaborate on how these efforts to control taxes align with the government's broader economic strategy, particularly in terms of fostering growth, job creation, and attracting investment, which has been a hallmark of the UCP's approach to governance?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, when the NDP formed government, they brought in the largest tax increase in Alberta's history, and I so enjoy seeing it crumble across the country right now. We cut taxes by 50 per cent for businesses to uphold our world-leading economy.

Companies like De Havilland, Air Products, Amazon Web Services, S3 Group, Jobber, and more chose Alberta to set up shop. Last week we introduced Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023, that, if passed, would ensure corporate and personal income taxes stay low. This will create certainty and maintain an environment where businesses can compete and grow.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the answer. Given that the UCP government has consistently pursued a policy of low taxes, thus emphasizing the importance of economic competitiveness and individual financial well-being, can the Minister of Finance provide examples of how low taxes have directly benefited Alberta's economy and its citizens?

The Speaker: Hon. members, I missed a point of order that was called by the hon. Official Opposition Deputy House Leader at 2:42. My apologies.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has generated more corporate tax revenue, with our 50 per cent lower tax rate, than the NDP. We're forecasting bringing in \$900 million more this year in corporate tax revenue than we did in our budget. That's incredible. It speaks to our fiscal framework and good governance. Again, attracting groups like Amazon, Jobber, and De Havilland will continue to make Alberta the premier destination for businesses, resulting in job creation by the thousands.

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

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m.

Members' Statements

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

Federal Climate Policies

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the ineptitude of the NDP-Liberal syndicate revealed itself when Edmonton Centre Liberal MP, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development, and Disability Inclusion of Canada, Randy Boissonnault, told Albertans they should buy heat pumps to replace natural gas if they're unhappy with the carbon tax pause on home heating oils. I almost fell over when I read this.

2:50

The federal minister's statement speaks volumes about what Alberta is up against, both in Ottawa and in this Chamber. We are dealing with energy illiteracy and a strange unwillingness to learn. We are dealing with members who don't know the difference between natural gas and their own hot air. Installing heat pumps to replace natural gas would leave hospitals, schools, businesses, and homes out in the cold. Alberta would cease to function. Modern heat pumps don't work well when it gets really cold. They really can't handle minus 25 degrees or colder. Mr. Speaker, as you know, it gets colder than minus 25 here in Alberta.

Equally concerning is the Liberals' attempts to create discord in Canada using energy policy as a lever. Mr. Speaker, we know many of our friends in eastern Canada now have a break on the carbon tax on high emissions home heating fuel, and we are happy for them, knowing there will be less energy poverty this winter, but punishing people who use low-emitting natural gas to heat their homes is not the answer. The federal carbon tax, supported by the opposition, is an insult to Canadians struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. There is no love for Alberta coming out of Ottawa under the Liberals and the NDP, just energy illiteracy and empty ideas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Phillips: Albertans have said loud and clear that they want the UCP to keep their hands off their retirement. I am hearing it from my own constituents and especially UCP constituents. I've heard from Debbie and Don in Camrose. Don is a former PC. He's read the entire government report. He cares about his retirement. He writes to me with references to the CPP legislation and a firm understanding of what's at stake. Don, like the majority of Albertans, is not impressed.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I'm even hearing it from members of the UCP cabinet, including the minister of affordability and MLA for Lethbridge-East, who is running around saying that there won't actually be a referendum. Albertans don't trust this Premier, who hid her plan to gamble with the CPP until after the election. Albertans don't trust the UCP MLAs who promised to protect the CPP during the election and then turned around to enable the Premier's bad idea, members like the agriculture minister, who, when asked if he would defend the CPP, said, quote: yes, absolutely. So much for that.

Albertans also don't trust the numbers coming from the UCP, numbers that have been dismissed by economists, experts, business groups, national and local, large and small. Albertans don't trust the \$8 million ad campaign, paid for with their money, that they're being subjected to, and they don't trust the sham of a consultation that doesn't even let them say they want to stay in the CPP. The only people who seem to not be listening are the Premier and the Finance minister. Rather than Albertans' wishes, the Finance minister is saying that he's relying on his high-level feelings to make a decision, whatever that means.

Now, Albertans have paid their entire lives into the CPP. It's their forgone income. It belongs to no politician, especially this Premier. If the Minister of Finance and Premier are serious about actually listening to Albertans, they will drop this entire Alberta pension plan, apologize to Albertans for the chaos and worry that it has caused. But until that happens, Albertans know they can only rely on Alberta's NDP to stand up for our retirement security.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Dr. Bob McKeon

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured that my esteemed guest, Dr. Robert McKeon, joins us in the gallery today. Dr. McKeon is a remarkable individual, a man who has truly been a guiding light in the realm of Christian leadership. This past October Dr. Bob McKeon, a distinguished professor and now professor emeritus at Newman Theological College, received the prestigious 2023 Kevin Carr Christian leadership award. Dr. McKeon received a bachelor of theology and a master of theology from Newman Theological College before completing a PhD in the

social teachings of Canadian bishops at the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Dr. McKeon's duty in the realm of Christian leadership is nothing short of inspiring. For over 40 years Dr. McKeon guided his students, fellow staff, and strangers towards living lives of virtue and purpose. His biblical, church, and theological teachings helped to enrich faith, helping individuals to see beyond the theoretical to apply their teachings into action.

Outside of academia Dr. McKeon puts his faith into compassionate practice within his community. For years he has worked to improve the quality of those struggling on the margins of our society. Throughout his life he has been a strong advocate for housing, food security, community engagement, and social justice transformation. Dr. McKeon was instrumental in working with others to create the Edmonton Gleaners Association, known today as Edmonton's Food Bank. He also helped in the creation of the inner-city housing society, known today as the Right at Home Housing Society, as well as the Boyle McCauley health centre, known as the radius health and healing society. These are only a few of the incredible projects he has been a part of that have reformed the legacies of many Edmonton communities to showcase compassion and empathy for all.

Dr. McKeon, your life's work and commitment to leadership at the Newman college and the city of Edmonton are a gift for us all.

Thank you.

United Conservative Party Policies

Member Irwin: Housing, pensions, health care, schools: when I talk to my constituents, these are the issues that are top of mind for them, and my NDP MLA colleagues across the province are saying that they're hearing exactly the same.

You'd think that UCP MLAs would be hearing similar issues, so when their party gathered this weekend to talk party policy, you'd expect they'd be laser focused on the issues that matter to Albertans. At a time when costs are skyrocketing, you'd think they'd put forth policy to address the housing crisis, to tackle rising insurance rates, the cost of tuition, power, heating bills, and so on. But, no, we saw none of that. Instead, we saw Take Back Alberta and other extremists push through a range of policies that do everything from attack the most vulnerable in our society to policies that make conspiracy theories come to life. Wow.

The Premier might say, as she already has: oh, that's just the party; I need to govern for all Albertans. Well, we say: prove it, Premier. She needs to do more than just try to distance herself from her extremist party members. In fact, she could tell Albertans that she rejects the antiscience voices in her party. She could tell Albertans that she refuses to attack queer and trans kids in our schools. She could tell Albertans that she won't shut down supervised consumption sites, services proven to actually save lives, at a time when we are seeing record numbers of deaths from drug poisonings. She could tell Albertans that diversity, equity, and inclusion are actually good things and she won't attack postsecondary institutions that uphold these policies.

Finally, she could tell Albertans that she's here to represent us all and to take serious action on the real issues that our communities are facing. She could tell us all these things, but I don't think she will, though I'd love to be proven wrong.

Food Banks

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, nobody should ever be left wondering where their next meal will come from. Over the past few years the price of groceries has risen to new levels, and with the

ongoing affordability crisis the demand for food banks has increased. Thankfully, the increase in food bank usage across our province is lower than the national average. Regardless, Alberta's government recognized the importance of ensuring all Albertans have secure access to food. We have food banks in communities all across our province, from our biggest cities to the smallest communities. They distribute food hampers throughout local communities and collaborate with community food depots and their meal programs, ensuring that people receive healthy, nutritious food.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is supporting food banks. Just today the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services was at Edmonton's Food Bank to announce \$10 million for food banks across our province. This funding will help those organizations increase their efforts to help Albertans access nutritious food, and it's part of the commitment to provide ongoing funding to food banks to ensure families can put food on their tables.

With the holiday season fast approaching, I would like to urge all Albertans to keep their local food banks in mind, whether to donate their time, food, or money.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Opioid-related Deaths

Member Eremenko: Mr. Speaker, 1,262: that is the number of lives lost to Alberta's drug poisoning crisis in 2023, and that is only to the end of August. Alberta's rate of death from drug poisoning in 2023 is six people – six people – dying every day. These are not just statistics. They represent lives. Behind these figures are fathers, brothers, daughters, mothers, and friends. These lives are not just entries on a chart. They are missing from dinner tables tonight, leaving an empty seat at the workplace, at Christmas, at birthdays.

We find ourselves in a drug poisoning crisis of unprecedented magnitude, and the writing on the wall is clear. The current trajectory is devastating, and it's a result of this government's policies. Their approach is not working. Calgary is witnessing one of its deadliest years on record. The loss of 458 lives to drug poisoning in the first eight months of this year brings us dangerously close to surpassing the catastrophic record of 503 deaths from 2021. EMS has seen record calls to respond to drug-related events, and front-line service providers are seeing a spike in drug poisonings, each of which could be avoided with evidence-based, proven harm-reduction measures.

3:00

Now the UCP has doubled down on their rhetoric and policies that, frankly, are failing Albertans. It's time to acknowledge the human toll of these decisions, a toll that is proving fatal. In this moment of crisis the lives affected, the families torn apart, and the communities left reeling must be at the forefront of our actions. Albertans deserve more than just words. They deserve effective solutions, genuine support, and a government that prioritizes saving human lives so they can access treatment when they are ready.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 7

Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 7, the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023.

The Alberta government delegates self-governing responsibilities for certain professions and occupations to professional regulatory organizations. Currently we have an entity, the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta, or APEGA, that operates at arm's length from government with a mandate to be self-governing. We have given them direction to interpret and apply the act and to do so independent of us. Even though APEGA governs the engineering profession independent of government, it is still responsible to government through the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act and is still subject to government policy direction in that legislation.

Our legislation today restricts the use of the term "engineer" so that only those who are professional engineers and registered with APEGA can use the title "engineer." The amendments to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act will meet the needs of industry while not compromising public safety. This change will make it allowable for the term "software engineer" to be used broadly for a variety of purposes while protecting the health, safety, and economic interests of Albertans. It will also help ensure continued sector growth, bringing economic diversification for the benefit of all Albertans.

I move first reading of Bill 7, Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Grande Prairie.

Bill 203

Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 203, Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act.

The purpose of this bill is to establish an Alberta foreign credentials advisory committee tasked with advocating for a more efficient system to assess and recognize foreign credentials, with the aim to position Alberta as a leader in Canada, improving provincial attractiveness to skilled workers, address expected labour shortages, and foster a more prosperous and inclusive workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to discussing this bill with my colleagues and encourage all members in this House to support Bill 203.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. Do you have a tabling?

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In case any Albertans took the Minister of Finance seriously when he recently said on national TV that he was, quote, deadly serious, unquote, about encouraging Albertans to switch from natural gas to oil for home heating, I table five copies of an article titled the process and risks of heating with oil, which highlights the folly of the minister's embarrassing, failed attempt at humour on national TV.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has a tabling.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of a piece of correspondence from Don and Debbie out of Camrose expressing their very detailed concerns on the future of the Alberta pension plan and their own CPP.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert on a tabling.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of the report from Edmonton's Food Bank entitled *Fighting Hunger in Edmonton: 2023 Beyond Food Revisited Client Survey*.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. McIver, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Special Areas Act the Special Areas Trust Account financial statements, dated December 31, 2022; on behalf of hon. Mr. Ellis, Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, the Law Enforcement Review Board 2022 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 1:59 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At 1:59 the Leader of the Official Opposition was asking questions about the damage caused by the UCP government to our health care system, and the Minister of Forestry and Parks, the Member for Central Peace-Notley, could be clearly heard to yell loudly: tell the truth.

First off, there's no questioning the accuracy of the Leader of the Official Opposition's line of questioning. It is a fact, with many news stories and, in fact, government releases, that this government did privatize community lab services, did oversee disastrous consequences, and did have to undo those changes in an absolute mishandling of this essential element of our health care system.

Secondly, to yell, "Tell the truth" at another member falls clearly under the many, many rulings that have been made in this House around calling a member a liar or accusing another member of lying. You yourself have specifically ruled on this language on March 21, 2022, where, if I may quote you, you said, "if attributed directly to an individual inside the Assembly, [it] is definitely unparliamentary," and again on November 29, 2021, which I would, Mr. Speaker, like to quote for you. You said at the time:

I do know that "tell the truth" in an off-the-record, off-*Hansard* comment has been ruled upon on numerous occasions. I think members of the 29th Legislature will remember very well Speaker Wanner ruling against the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, who may or may not have had a little bit of a habit of saying the same heckle.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important that this behaviour is ruled out of order today given that you yourself know that this member has been known for this repeated unparliamentary behaviour. I think a clear ruling seems necessary to ensure he governs himself accordingly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did not hear the remark. I think it would be unfair to suggest that because the Member for Central Peace-Notley, an hon. member in this Chamber and a member of good standing, had said something similar in the past would mean that that's exactly what he said today. I did not hear the remark, as I had previously said. But if he had said something to the effect of "You've lied" or "You are lying" or "Tell the truth," I suspect that there could be a point of order there, but I don't have

the benefit of the Blues with any record of that. I don't know if you heard it, Mr. Speaker, but I would say that at this point in time, without proof, it would be very hard to rule that this is a point of order.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I appreciate the Opposition House Leader pointing to those very solid rulings from the chair that took place in the past. I may have on those particular dates also referred to page 624, chapter 13 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. It says, "In dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner, and intention of the Member speaking." It continues to say, "the Speaker has also ruled that if the Chair did not hear the offensive . . . phrase," or that the phrase or offensive language was not in the record of debates, "the Chair cannot be expected to rule in the absence of a reliable record." I did check with *Hansard* and have the benefit of the Blues, and neither I nor them heard the remarks. Having said that, if the hon. minister did say such a thing, it would be deemed unparliamentary and ruled a point of order. However, on this particular occasion I have no ability to rule on such a thing, so this is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

3:10

At 2:32 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regarding the previous point I suspect you will have an opportunity to rule again as we continue in this House. At 2:32 the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services began yelling "preamble" multiple times while the new Member for Calgary-Beddington was asking her question. The Member for Calgary-Beddington clearly began both first and second supplementals with the word "given." I know that you appreciate a good heckle, Mr. Speaker, but given the minister did the same thing multiple times to members of the Official Opposition who were asking their very first questions in this Chamber, rather than engaging in the debate within this House, he is at best attempting to confuse new members and at worst attempting to intimidate.

Mr. Speaker, that minister and all members should leave running the House to yourself, in my opinion. I think this should be ruled a point of order. I think that we should put a stop to behaviour that is intended purely to confuse and adds nothing to the debate versus good heckles. I hope that the minister, who has previously been a Government House Leader and knows the business of this House, will not yell "preamble" when someone has begun without a preamble in their very first question in this place.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the Opposition House Leader was giving her remarks – just searching through standing orders looking for the part or the standing order that says that you can't heckle other members. I don't find it, especially under 23(h), (i), or (j). It certainly doesn't rise to that threshold.

What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that to suggest that the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and the minister of community and social services would attempt to intimidate a member in this Chamber is wildly inaccurate. I don't believe that this rises to the threshold of a point of order, and I

would say that it's a matter of debate. If the members opposite have a problem with a good heckle, then maybe they should stop heckling themselves. But in this Chamber there is a custom to heckle, and I don't see that being a problem, and I definitely don't see how this would be a point of order.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. Hon. members, I did hear the hon. the minister of community and social services engage in such activity. The challenge before the Assembly here is that members of the opposition also, when they felt the Speaker wasn't interjecting when the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat was asking his question, which happened to, I believe, be his very first question inside the Assembly, also was heckled with the concern that members of the opposition might have that he, in fact, used a preamble as well – very difficult for me to rule on one side of the Assembly for the exact same offence on the other side of the Assembly. I consider this to not be a point of order.

However, I would encourage members to be respectful, particularly with respect to members who are just freshly arrived in this Assembly. We want to ensure that they have free and uninhibited access to ask their questions, but that does take some personal responsibility from all members. It's not just the Speaker to assist with decorum. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:42 the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing it. I know sometimes things get missed when members get really excited about question period and answers, so thank you for recognizing it. I rise pursuant to 23(h), (i), and (j), that prohibit members from making allegations against other members, imputing false motives, and using insulting language. At 2:42 the Member for Edmonton-Meadows was asking a question about the south Edmonton hospital, a project that is important to his constituents, and instead of answering the question in any way, the Minister of Infrastructure rose up and said something to the effect that this member has purposefully invited a protester and something on those lines. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but the language used was very disrespectful, especially after there was an apology offered. In this Chamber, whenever there is an apology offered, I guess the matter is considered dealt with, concluded. You have said that many times, but I don't know if the minister didn't hear that apology or if he just didn't want to answer the question, but certainly he did use the language that was insulting. It did impute motive that the member has purposefully invited a protester. That was directed at the member and not at the government. It was directed at the member asking the question. I think the minister clearly crossed the line, and that kind of language, that kind of behaviour should be ruled out of order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This obviously would be on the Blues. I don't have the benefit of them, but I did listen to the question, I listened to the answer, and I do not recall the hon. Minister of Infrastructure specifically pointing out a member on the opposite side who had invited that protester. For the benefit of those watching at home and, of course, all members, know that when the throne speech happens in this Chamber, members are given the

opportunity to invite constituents and other stakeholders to listen to that throne speech. It's the same on our side as it is on their side, which would mean that someone on that side of the House invited that protester.

Now, like all members of this Chamber, we are very concerned about the health and the safety of members here. We are concerned about this building, and the Minister of Infrastructure is also very concerned about this building. So while I appreciate that the chief opposition whip did in fact apologize – I fully acknowledge – I also have not heard from any member on that side who invited the protester. It is a very serious concern every member in this House should share, and if someone on that side of the House invited that protester, they should make it clear and rise and apologize to this side of the House and to all members, security staff, to people at the table, everyone who was in this Chamber at that exact moment who was put at risk.

While I understand that the member opposite is concerned he didn't get an answer to the question from the Member for Edmonton-Meadows, which, as an aside, the members opposite, when they were in government, should know as they practised this many times, they don't always give an answer to the question they were asked.

But back to the main point. I find it disappointing and inappropriate that no one on that side of the House has stood up yet, taken responsibility, and apologized. Mr. Speaker, this is not a point of order. It is a matter of debate, and I expect better from members on that side.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

I am prepared to rule. Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues. At 2:42 the hon. Minister of Infrastructure was answering a question, and he said the following:

I do hope that you've been able to locate the culprit responsible for inviting protesters into this place to disrupt the long-standing traditions of the House. This member purposely caused a security breach, risking the safety of our members and our guests . . . This is a serious matter, and it requires explanation from the NDP, with consequences to follow.

I do find it difficult to determine that the hon. the Minister of Infrastructure was speaking to any other member as a result of his usage of the words "this member." It certainly would imply that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows was the individual who invited this protester, and unless the hon. Minister of Infrastructure has irrefutable proof that that is the case, of which I'm certain he doesn't, it certainly would appear that he made an accusation that that member invited the protester, which I do agree was wildly inappropriate and more than a little disappointing to the Speaker, but in this case this is an allegation specifically against that member. The hon. the minister can withdraw and apologize.

3:20

Mr. Guthrie: Actually, in the statement that you made, Mr. Speaker, the initial reference there is that I hope you were able to find the culprit. So this is referring to the culprit, not to the specific member. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

I'm not sure if members know how this works, and I appreciate their excitement with respect to the minister's response – I, too, am excited – particularly from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Perhaps he knows.

In this case, the Speaker has made a ruling that it certainly sounds – whether you did or you didn't, it sounded like you implied that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows invited the protester. The easiest and the best course of action for all members of the Assembly

is for the minister to rise to his feet, apologize and withdraw, and we all get to move on with our days.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Edmonton-Meadows feels that I inappropriately centred him out, I would apologize for that. [interjections]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I also will note that, to the best of my knowledge, the hon. the Speaker has never questioned the quality of an apology from members of the Assembly, so I expect you and other members to do the same.

I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 201

Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-North East has the call.

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I introduced the private member's Bill 201, which will ban Albertans from having to pay out of pocket to see a family doctor. It is a very simple, straightforward, and common-sense bill. It is an important bill that will ensure that the health care system is there for Albertans whenever they need it and wherever they need it.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, I come from a health care family, and both of my parents have served in the health care sector for more than 30 years. My mother is a retired lab technician, and my father is currently serving as a pharmacist. They both have served at the front lines, just like millions of health care workers across the globe. They have served during the pandemic as well, and the pandemic has clearly shown how important health care is for every single citizen, health care workers, and our society.

There are so many constituents in Calgary-North East who I meet on a regular basis and who do not have access to family doctors. They are already struggling to pay rent, buy groceries, pay their mortgages, put food on their tables, and they have clearly told me over and over that the last thing they need is privatized health care. In fact, in the current election my constituents have voted against privatized health care.

Madam Speaker, the Premier has repeatedly mused about introducing a private health care system. In June 2021 she wrote a policy paper, and in that very paper she wrote about introducing user fees, redefining universality. She wrote, and I quote: this is a good way to get Albertans paying user fees and copays. End quote. In June 2021 she said, and I quote: but does a regular checkup to your doctor really have to be something that is covered 100 per cent by the government? End quote. The Premier has made similar comments at various other occasions. This is unacceptable, and Albertans do not trust this Premier and this UCP government when it comes to their health care.

Madam Speaker, the Premier and the UCP government have been relentless in their goal to tear down our public health care system. They began by starting a war with doctors during the height of the

COVID-19 pandemic and wanted them to take a wage cut. The UCP was forced to walk that one back, but the lack of respect this government has for health care workers, the system they support, and the Albertans who need their care has indeed caused chaos throughout our health care system and heartbreaking challenges for those who work in it and the regular Albertans who depend on it.

Now the Premier has claimed to Albertans that she wants to fix our health care system. Her actions or lack of action clearly prove otherwise. The Premier promised Albertans that she would fix health care in 90 days, and before becoming Premier, she said that the province could no longer afford to entirely pay for social programs like health care and wanted to see a shift towards private individuals, employers, and insurance companies. At the same time, she also mused about health care spending accounts and has now charged the Minister of Technology and Innovation with the task of exploring "the feasibility of creating an Alberta health spending account." This move is simply a scheme to get Albertans used to the idea of paying for more of their health care out of their own pocket. The UCP is not focused on ensuring Albertans have access to care when and where they need it. What they are focused on is their drive to dismantle the health care system. They are focused on giving billions of dollars to the already wealthy corporations. Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve better.

Albertans deserve a public health care system that is respected, supported, and there for them whenever they need it and wherever they need it. I want all Albertans to know that we will always be steadfast in our support for health care workers, Alberta's public health care system, and the rights of all Albertans to have access to the care they need when and where they need it. On this side of the Assembly the Alberta NDP absolutely rejects the privatization of our health care system. We believe Albertans deserve equal access to care regardless of their income.

Albertans know that they cannot trust this Premier and this UCP government with their health care. She continues to threaten Albertans' fundamental right to health care and has even mused that Albertans should have to pay a deductible to have a major surgery. She has written a policy paper about making Albertans pay out of pocket to see a family doctor. She has spoken openly about creating a payment relationship between Albertans and their doctors. She doesn't even blink an eye when she makes those offensive declarations. Madam Speaker, no Albertan – no Albertan – should ever have to pay to see a family doctor.

3:30

This summer a medical clinic in Calgary informed its patients that they would be introducing a plan to charge fees for faster access to family doctors. Patients who didn't come up with thousands of dollars in fees would go to the back of the line. We all know that under the UCP the line to see the doctor gets longer every single day. That move by the Calgary clinic undermined the very values of public health care, and public outcry forced the clinic to halt the plan. But that doesn't mean we won't see something like that tried again, especially with a UCP government that is hell bent on dismantling the public health care system.

The Alberta NDP will oppose any measure that forces Albertans to pay to see a family doctor. Madam Speaker, this bill would add a purpose clause to clarify that the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act is consistent with the Canada Health Act. The bill would also prohibit . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Your time's up, hon. member. Just to clarify, you're moving second reading of Bill 201 for the record?

Member Brar: I'm moving second reading of Bill 201.

The Deputy Speaker: Perfect. Thank you. Wonderful.

Are there other members wishing to speak to Bill 201? The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to sincerely thank the people of Red Deer-North for once again giving me the honour and the opportunity to speak in the Legislative Assembly. Today I will be speaking on Bill 201, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023, brought forward by the members opposite.

Madam Speaker, our health care system faces serious issues that require serious solutions. Albertans face long wait times in surgery, a lack of family physicians and clinic availability, and in many communities basic services are not available. Our front-line health care staff face burnout, demanding conditions, and lack of support. Our health care system needs to be refocused so that our health care resources are better allocated to those who need it, to our front-line staff and to our patients. Alberta's government knows this. We understand the gravity of the situation and are committed to addressing them with a sense of urgency and purpose.

The members opposite's Bill 201 does none of this. Bill 201 does not change how resources are allocated. It does not help front-line staff or get patients better services. Instead, Bill 201 introduces vague, redundant language into the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act that the members opposite claim will ensure that Albertans don't pay out of pocket to access health care services and aims to ensure health care delivery is in line with the Canada Health Act. News flash, Madam Speaker: Alberta's health care system is fully compliant with the Canada Health Act. In fact, Alberta Health submits annual reports to Health Canada to ensure our system is compliant with the Canada Health Act and its agreed-upon principles.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's government knows that when Albertans need medical services, they should receive them and not worry about making a choice between health care and their wallet. Our commitment to publicly funded health care is unwavering. We've said this so many times already, but I'm happy to repeat it over and over and over again. We've made a public health guarantee to all Albertans, assuring them that we are fully dedicated to preserving and strengthening Alberta's publicly funded health care system. Alberta's government has consistently maintained that Albertans will never have to pay out of pocket for insured health services, including visits to their family doctors. I know the members opposite don't want to hear this, but I'm going to say it.

Furthermore, it is why I directed Alberta Health to investigate any rumours that clinics are charging fees for services that are insured or offering accelerated access to a family physician at the expense of other patients needing to wait longer. Madam Speaker, I ordered those investigations. If my department receives information that an Albertan is being charged for insured health services, they will investigate to determine if services are in violation of the rules. If any noncompliance is found, appropriate actions will be taken.

Madam Speaker, what Bill 201 amounts to is a duplication of what already exists. This piece of legislation would not result in any significant change in the way our publicly funded health care system currently operates. We have a clear expectation that physicians in Alberta will adhere to the law, including the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act and the Canada Health Act. As previously emphasized, our government has made an unequivocal public health guarantee to Albertans. We are fully dedicated to preserving and strengthening Alberta's publicly funded health care system. This commitment remains unwavering. I don't know how many times I need to repeat it, but I'm happy to do it. Let me

reiterate. No Albertan will ever have to pay out of pocket for insured health services such as seeing a family doctor or a hospital visit. This fundamental principle remains unchanged. Access fees or charging fees to access insured services is prohibited in Alberta.

For those who may choose to contravene the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act or the Canada Health Act, there are consequences, real consequences. If my department receives information that an Albertan is being charged for insured health services, they investigate to determine if services are in violation of the rules. If any noncompliance is found, appropriate actions are taken, as happened this summer in the case that the member opposite highlighted.

This is exactly, as I said, what happened. Alberta's government became aware that the Marda Loop clinic in Calgary was advertising services that were covered by the provincial health care insurance plan. Our government immediately – and I do mean immediately – investigated and took all appropriate steps to ensure compliance with current legislation. Madam Speaker, we do not need a bill to address something that is already being done, to define actions that we are already taking. The direction from the Canada Health Act is clear: “protect, promote and restore the physical and mental well-being of residents of Canada and to facilitate reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers.” We will enforce it as we have in the past, and we will continue to do so in the future.

With that, Madam Speaker, I want to say that I do not support this bill. Bill 201 is a redundant piece of legislation. Our government will always be and continues to be focused on improving health care outcomes for all Albertans. Our health care system is the lifeblood of our society. It embodies our collective commitment to ensuring the well-being of every Albertan. It is a fundamental promise that in times of need our citizens can access the care they require without the burden of financial worries or obstacles. We are very proud of that. It is a pledge to uphold the principles of equity, accessibility, and quality that underpin our health care system.

Our health care system faces so many challenges, challenges that require sincere solutions. These issues are not exclusive to any political ideology; they affect us all. Albertans face long wait times for surgical procedures, a shortage of family physicians, limited clinical availability, and, in many of our communities, an unmet need for essential health care services. The current situation is unacceptable, and I will not just stand idly by and watch. The current situation also remains unfair to our dedicated front-line health care staff, the heroes of our health care system. They are experiencing severe burnout, demanding work conditions, and a lack of support. They deserve better and so do our patients.

Our health care system is in dire need of restructuring so that our resources are better allocated to those who need them most, our front-line staff and our patients. With Alberta's population expected to continue to grow, it is imperative that our health care infrastructure can meet the increasing demands. By re-evaluating and modernizing our health care system, we can ensure that it remains sustainable in the long run, capable of meeting the needs of future generations of Albertans.

3:40

In conclusion, our government takes our publicly funded health care system very seriously. Instead of throwing more redundancies at it, like the members opposite, we are making real change, change for the better. Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to vote against this unnecessary motion. As I've indicated, we have a system in place that is working.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 201, introduced by my colleague from Calgary-North East, and I want to thank him sincerely for bringing this bill forward and his advocacy for access to health care in Alberta.

Now, I appreciate the minister's remarks and her observations regarding the bill and the health care system in general. I quite agree with the minister that these are serious issues that require serious solutions. Indeed, she listed a number of challenges we are facing in the province – wait times for surgeries, lack of access to primary care, lack of access to basic services in many communities, the fact that health care workers are indeed exhausted, severe burnout under extreme stress, demanding workloads – all of which have gotten worse while that minister has sat in this government. Every single one of those factors, Madam Speaker, has worsened under the UCP.

They are responsible for presiding over perhaps the largest degradation of our health care system we have seen in decades and not just because we went through the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic, which indeed wreaked havoc on health care systems across Canada and around the world. This is a government which chose to actively attack and undermine our health care system in the midst of that pandemic and indeed most specifically primary care and family doctors.

So when this government talks about better allocated resources to support the front lines, I do have to wonder, Madam Speaker, if she's referring to the \$75 million they spent on children's Tylenol, that has been neither effective, most of which will never arrive, and most of which will never be used. Was that effective allocation of our health care resources, that could have been going to support front-line health care workers?

Or how about the millions of dollars that we have lost on the DynaLife fiasco, this government's decision that it needed to upend and uproot the entire community lab service and system, which was operating well? The minister spoke at length about not changing systems that are working. This government, Madam Speaker, as they oppose a sensible amendment in this private member's bill, upended the entirety of the community lab system at an unknown level of cost.

We are grateful that the Auditor General is currently doing a full investigation into that so that we will have that number for Albertans so they can understand just how many resources this government wasted and failed to allocate to the front lines even as it contemplates, now indeed is moving towards another significant disruption of the entirety of the health care system, which I can assure you is going to further exhaust and burn out our front-line health care workers. And speaking of redundancies, Madam Speaker, how many new health boards is this government going to create, how much more bureaucracy in the name of political ideology over supporting front-line health care workers?

Now, in regard to the bill specifically, we are talking here about primary care. Indeed, as the minister noted, we have a severe lack of access to primary care in this province. We have entire sectors of the province – the Bow Valley, the city of Red Deer – where there are no doctors accepting new patients. In Lethbridge I know that the government has bragged at length about the new doctors it has recruited there. I can tell you that when I talk to people on the ground, they are not seeing it. No sooner does a new doctor open its doors than their panel is full and people are left scrambling. It's like trying to get tickets to see Taylor Swift. The fact is that these challenges continue, and that is the reason why this bill is important.

What we have is a situation where this government's incompetence, its aggression and ill will towards physicians, has created this situation of severe scarcity. It was in the midst of that we saw the Marda Loop

clinic step up and say: we're going to charge a membership fee in order for you to be able to see your family doctor. This was for patients already seeing family doctors there: you will need to pay this membership fee, or you'll go to the back of the line. Now, that is, admittedly, an extreme situation, Madam Speaker. That is the first time we have seen that occur in the province of Alberta.

It is this government that created the landscape in which it would, this government which spent two years fighting with family doctors. After tearing up the master agreement in 2020, they forced through changes that specifically targeted and deeply undermined primary care. Did you know, Madam Speaker, that this government saved over \$200 million on the backs of family doctors by underpaying them, compared to every other jurisdiction in Canada, to provide virtual care to Albertans in the midst of a pandemic while going out of their way to sign a contract with Telus, a corporation, to provide generic walk-in medicine with doctors who did not even have access to a patient's records? Wasted money.

Speaking of resources again that could have been allocated to the front line, Madam Speaker, this government instead threw it away to doctors who more often than not just told people they should go to the emergency room. So when this government goes on and talks about, you know, the Minister of Health standing here and talking about how much they always have been and will be dedicated to preserving and strengthening Alberta's public health care system, actions speak louder than words.

We have yet to see that from this government, which is why I think it is fair to have skepticism about the minister's claims that all is well and good and we can simply trust her that this government is going to stand up for public health care and ensure we do not see more situations like not just what the Marda Loop clinic proposed but others like, say, the former Copeman clinics, which are now owned by, interestingly enough, Telus, which also charges membership fees for access to services.

Now, some of those services do include publicly insured services, but because they mix and mingle them with some uninsured services, we get this sort of grey area. What Bill 201 sets out to do is to clear up that grey area. The minister talked about vague language. This language is quite clear, Madam Speaker. Indeed, part of the intent of this bill is to provide specific language so that we understand what an access fee is. There is a whole section here that lays that out clearly for us. Section 11 has three clear points describing precisely what an access fee is. It goes on with section (1.1) to clarify as well the manner in which it could be potentially paid. This is not vague, Madam Speaker. This is a specific clarification.

Now, I understand that this government is putting forward all kinds of denials that they will ever move in the direction of Albertans having to pay out of pocket for an insured health care service. I think they probably recognize just how toxic such a move would be. But we do have an abundant record, as my colleague from Calgary-North East laid out, of the Premier advocating consistently over decades for that very scenario, much as this Premier advocated for many decades for an Alberta pension plan, didn't talk about it during the election, certainly leaves it out of any major speech where she'd actually have to face Albertans on the subject but is certainly putting millions of Albertans' dollars into trying to make that a reality, against the express will of a large majority of Albertans.

Again, the minister can make her claims, the Premier can make her claims about the fact that she's been on the road to Damascus and she has seen the light. But Albertans have good reason to question and to doubt if they can trust this government, who has already sort of pulled its own weight amounts to almost a bait and switch on things like an Alberta pension plan, on something as fundamental as our public health care system.

I think it is incredibly important that we have our legislation be as clear as possible in the defence of that principle, which the minister claims she espouses and claims her government espouses and stands up for. If they do, in fact, this does no harm to pass this legislation and make that abundantly clear. They have the option to stand and put that on the record today. The fact that they refuse to do so: well, I guess that's just one more thing to add to the list in terms of Albertans looking at this government and questioning just how committed they are.

3:50

Now, of course, with this government's intended agenda and their plans to restructure the whole of our health care system, I know we are going to have abundant opportunities to get further into their record and to debate the damage they have done and the chaos that they have created and that they are going to create an abundance more. But for today I will simply say that I'm happy to stand in support of Bill 201, and I will be voting aye.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 201? Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to speak to the importance of Bill 201 and tell you why I will definitely be supporting this bill. Access to health care is really quite a mess right now, and allowing fees to simply allow a person to access medically insured services will only create more access problems for the rest of the population.

Let's think about who's going to be excluded from access if we allow extra-billing to access these services. Well, most Albertans would not be able to afford paying several thousand dollars per year per family member to have access to a physician or clinic. People with chronic disease, the elderly, probably anyone who's renting as they're also paying high rents at this time, new Albertans, immigrants, everyone who has a low income is going to be pretty much excluded from paying these access fees for medically insured services. I don't imagine that AISH payments are going to increase to allow these people on AISH to have access to a family doctor. People with chronic diseases already pay an enormous extra price for their health in all sorts of ways, extra things that are costed to them. Families already have additional struggles just to look after their children, work, all of the things that go along with day-to-day work. And marginalized communities are often burdened with no pay if they take time off work to see a physician and extra transportation challenges. So this is going to be compounding the challenges of the people who really need health care.

We also know that access to primary care is critical because it's the gateway to all care. Early treatment is critical to prevent permanent consequences and sometimes even to allow cure or to save lives. Screening is generally done by family physicians. Screening rates are already low amongst marginalized communities. Reducing the opportunity for people in these populations to even have access to a family doctor who will facilitate the screening will make them even further disproportionately disadvantaged. The current lack of family physicians is of course creating a market for many medical practices to bring in fees for access. This not only highlights the need for this bill, but we need to be very clear that this is not allowed, and we need to do this now.

This need also highlights the worsening situation in primary care, that it would even be thought of by physicians who are struggling to keep the lights on. We need action to increase access. It should be noted that a consequence of not having access to family doctors increases the burden on the rest of the health care system. More

people will end up in emergency, more people end up with a late diagnosis, which not only hurts them but costs the system more, and many people who are in the care of a specialist will end up getting more and more of their care from a specialist for things that aren't even within the scope of a specialist. I can speak to that personally. When my patients with multiple sclerosis lose their family doctor, they're getting inferior care from me for their high blood pressure because that's not what I'm meant to do. It also lengthens the wait time for any patients to see a specialist because we're tied up providing primary care.

We simply cannot afford to delay fixing primary health care. The cost to our health care system in all of these delays and shifting care to the wrong providers is causing long-standing damage and increasing the eventual cost to our system. We need to make it equitable for all people to have this crappy access to care, but at least let's see what we can do to make it fair for everyone and know that the pressure is on and we need to improve this access in general.

I wonder what would happen in a rural community if all of the physicians decided that in that practice they were going to start charging for access to care. People would have to travel very long distances if they couldn't afford this care. We just need to step it up. I support Bill 201 so that we can know that we're not depending on the discretion of someone to look into these clinics and that the clinics know that this isn't allowed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks to the member. I'm not sure if those following along at home – this is private member Monday, and for folks to get a private member's bill, it's kind of a big deal. It's like getting the hunting draw here for getting your moose tag. So congratulations to the member for getting your bill, being new to the House, right out of the hopper. Honestly, sir, with your intent I know it's coming from the heart in the right place.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but this is a great reminder to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Getson: I apologize, Madam Speaker. I did want to make that personal connection and take that time, so thank you for that.

Madam Speaker, however, given all those items, I unfortunately am going to have to speak against this bill. I know the member's intent was pure, and I understand some of the issues with the health care system, but as the minister had said earlier also, there's a bit of redundancy in the system here. I prepared a couple of notes. Usually I don't, but I want to make sure we get this right for the record and the folks understand why.

Our government is committed to working to ensure that Albertans receive equal and efficient health care. Clinics that charge for uninsured services that are not deemed medically necessary are not unprecedented and do not violate the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, but the extent to which the clinics and physicians may be delivering insured services or limited access to the insured services for a membership fee is of interest to Alberta Health.

The Minister of Health has directed Alberta Health to begin a thorough review of the issue. So, again, Madam Speaker, there were some issues. The minister was on it right away, ordered a review to make sure that we can get that sorted out. Alberta Health is investigating the clinic in question to ensure that they will comply with all the legislation, again, making sure that the outliers and potential bad actors in that case stick to the act and make sure they are in compliance.

Our government remains fully committed to the principles found in the Canada Health Act, so one hundred per cent, Madam Speaker, the Canada Health Act: we want to uphold that. I think that's what everyone wants to do here. Our government expects physicians to follow the laws, which include the AHCA, and we are committed to taking the appropriate steps to make sure the clinics and physicians remain compliant.

If the services related to the fees are not considered medically necessary or are not covered by the Alberta health care insurance plan or the schedule of medical benefits, the clinic is not in violation of the AHCA. Alberta Health audits billing invoices for insured health care services to ensure that any primary clinic doesn't simultaneously work inside and outside of the Canada Health Act. So, again, if they choose to do one or the other, they have to make sure that they stay within the lines when they're colouring. Let me repeat that again. Alberta Health audits billing invoices for insured health care services to ensure any primary care clinic doesn't simultaneously work inside and outside the Canada Health Act.

Outside of the hospitals and other publicly funded settings some health providers such as nurse practitioners, physiotherapists, psychologists, and chiropractors can directly charge the patient for the services. Again, this is 100 per cent compliant with our act and the Canada Health Act.

4:00

The audit and compliance assurance unit of Alberta Health, which includes data analysis, auditors, and clinical advisers, monitors and reviews the Alberta Health practitioners' claims for benefits to assess compliance with the AHCA. Alberta Health submits annual reports to Health Canada regarding the health care system, including these types of clinics. Health Canada has not identified any issues with the operations of these clinics. Again, we're submitting the audits to Health Canada. They have not identified any of the issues. Alberta Health audits billing invoices for insured health care services to ensure any primary care clinic doesn't simultaneously work inside and out – we've said that before. I'll say it again; it's worth repeating: we want to make sure they're colouring within the lines.

I want to assure you that Alberta Health and the government of Alberta are committed to maintaining a publicly funded health care system that provides all Albertans with timely access to insured services. Again, I think that's what we in the Chamber here are in violent agreement with. We want to make sure that we have a robust, strong public health care system. We also want to make sure that folks can get those timely services when needed. Where we get sometimes caught up and crosstreaded is on the mechanisms of how we achieve those goals, but we ultimately want that. We have to make sure we have that. It's a beautiful system, and we want to make sure it functions properly.

Independently owned and operated facilities, including physicians' offices, chartered surgical facilities, continuing care and home-care providers, have played a role in the delivery of health services in Alberta for many years, so this is nothing new. While the government will continue to leverage such partnerships to improve patients' access to medical services that reduce wait times, we will remain committed to maintaining a publicly funded health care system that provides all Albertans, regardless of their ability to pay, with timely access to insured services.

That's one of the big benefits that we have, being Canadian and having a robust economy and making sure that we have a health care system where folks, regardless of socioeconomic status, can get the health care that they deserve. The issue that we're having is the backlog; obviously, we can all agree to that. We want to make sure that that big system, that we throw about 42 per cent of our

overall budget into, actually is effective with that. That's what we're working on.

The Alberta health care insurance plan will continue to provide all eligible Albertans and residents with full coverage for medically necessary and physician services. The government of Alberta remains firmly committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act: worth repeating again. The government of Alberta expects that physicians will follow the law, including the AHCA, and is committed to take the appropriate steps to make sure that clinics and physicians remain compliant; again, taking care of the outliers – it's really clear for everybody – making sure we have the service.

Clinics that charge for uninsured services not deemed medically necessary are not unprecedented and do not violate the AHCA, but the extent to which the clinics and physicians may be delivering insured services or limiting access to insured services for membership fees are of interest to Alberta Health. The Minister of Health has directed, again, Health to begin a thorough review of the issue.

If services related to fees are not considered medically necessary or not covered by the Alberta health care insurance plan or scheduled medical benefits, the clinic is not in violation of the AHCA. Facilities contracted to provide publicly funded medical services do so in a manner consistent with provincial legislation and the Canada Health Act and the requirements of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. So, Madam Speaker, in essence, you have a bunch of different groups that have the rules and the boundaries put into place: the Canada Health Act, our act, the College of Physicians & Surgeons. It's audited, it's gone through, and when folks go outside of it, we take care of it. Again, the member's intent is full well of what's in place; however, it's redundant on the policies.

One thing I will speak a little partisan on in this regard. In God's country during the campaign we talked about fixing the health care system. Now, some of the conversation I heard today was on a given timeline of, you know, 90 days or less or something along those lines. This has been a big problem for a while. Madam Speaker, you've heard me speak in the House a number of times about how much of a strain there was on our system. When COVID came along, we put the pressure to it, and it started popping leaks all over the place.

Now, we haven't seen a ton of that improve. There have been some subtle changes that have taken place, and we've seen a modicum of improvements, but this is, quite honestly, a big, calcified, cash-hungry monster. It's unwieldy, it's big, and you have to tear into it, and you have to make sure that you have substantial changes, again respecting that, in making those changes, there might be a few bumps and bruises along the way here while you start getting those process improvements. But everything along the lines here that we're talking about today still ensures that we will have the ability for folks to get the services and the public health care when they need it and when they deserve it, because, quite frankly, Albertans have paid and contributed into this for a long time.

We need to have a robust economy and to make sure that it still keeps moving forward, and we're looking forward to some very constructive input on how we keep moving forward together on that. I know the minister has been working diligently and is, you know, waiting there with – we're all waiting with trepid anticipation to see when these changes will be coming out. My hope, my optimism is that we don't just keep poking around the edges of this thing, that we all have the intestinal fortitude to tear into this thing, to look at it objectively, at the problems, to not be fixated on any partisan issues, because, again, at the end of the day, I want to make sure that my kids have a system when they need it. I want to make

sure that my family members – they’ve been paying into it for years – when they need it can access it. We want to give them that assurance. Right now there are a lot of folks that aren’t getting the benefits and the bang for the buck from the system they’ve paid into for so many years.

With that, Madam Speaker, I humbly submit, with regrets, honestly, to the hon. member across the aisle – I know your heart is in the right place. I love where you’re coming from, but unfortunately I’m going to have to vote against this motion. I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just another reminder: while all your comments seem so sincere, please direct them through the chair and not directly to other members, as nice and as kind as they might be.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [some applause] Thank you. It is my pleasure to rise and speak at second reading to Bill 201, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023. First of all, I would like to thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-North East for bringing this legislation forward. I just have a few things to say about it.

One of the things I wanted to say is that this actually reminded me of an article I read. Some of you might recognize writer David Climenhaga. He’s actually a constituent of mine, so naturally, if you’re watching, David, I read your articles, and they are usually terrific. This one actually stuck out, so I went back and found it. It was dated March 24. Madam Speaker, I will table this article tomorrow after question period.

The title of it, weirdly enough, is *You Can Never Believe Anything until It’s Been Officially Denied: The UCP Just Denied It Wants to Privatize Health Care*. And that’s how they roll. I mean, I think we all were in here earlier. We heard the Minister of Health stand up and say, like she normally does: I reject the premise of that; that’s all incorrect; y’all are wrong; you heard wrong; you thought wrong; it is wrong. Albertans are smart. They don’t fall for that stuff, just like they don’t fall for the goofy public health care guarantees that UCP Premier after Premier seem to trot out with the great big Sharpies and sign with flourish to say: “See? We promise health care will stay public.” Well, Albertans are smarter than that, and they have come to learn that what this government says is not exactly what they do.

In this particular article – and, again, I will table it tomorrow; this was written in March – it talks about some of the history that the leader of the UCP has had around this area of privatizing health care. Now, we didn’t make this up. We didn’t decide that we wanted to stand up in this place and make stuff up about your leader, about the Premier, about what her designs are for public health care here in Alberta. We didn’t make it up. It’s all on the record. It is all there. You can deny, nod your head, point your fingers as much as you want. It is true. It is fact.

Here’s an example. In June 2021 it was in a nonacademic paper for the University of Calgary public-private propaganda partnership – try to say that fast – the so-called School of Public Policy, wherein she asserted that we can no longer afford universal social programs that are a hundred per cent funded by taxpayers. But it didn’t stop there, Madam Speaker. She went on. She talked about: “I mean, do we really have to cover visits to see the doctor? Is that something, really, Alberta taxpayers should be on the hook for?” That is the Premier of Alberta, her own words. We didn’t make it up. We don’t agree with it. These folks on the other side like to say: yeah, it didn’t

happen; it didn’t happen; I didn’t read it, la, la, la; I didn’t see it. But it happened, and she said it, and it’s fact.

This piece of legislation is trying to do the right thing, to bring in some guardrails so that, actually, Albertans aren’t on the hook, because we know on this side that Albertans are struggling. Just the week before we got to this place, I decided to make some notes, because I had a feeling what was coming, on some of the stories that we should share in this place with members on the other side who want to tell us that, you know, essentially, we don’t know what we’re talking about, that they would never do this, that they’re protecting it, that it’s all good. They signed this great, big cardboard guarantee; what else do you need?

4:10

But we know that there are problems out there, and people are really, really, really struggling. Just this week – and, again, I changed their names and slight details because I have not asked their permission to do this – I heard from Alana. Alana has worked for the same hospital for 17 years. Seventeen years. She makes a good living. She told me how much she makes; she makes a pretty good living. She’s a pharmacist assistant at a hospital. As you can imagine, she is busy. What she told me is that someone like her can’t even afford her rent and has to occasionally stop on her way home at the St. Albert Food Bank because she can’t make ends meet. Then she went on to say that the little extras that are charged in hospital or the little extras that are charged for notes or for labs or copays here: people cannot afford that. Instead, they’re going without, just like she sometimes chooses to do without some of the things she needs to be able to buy food.

That leads me to another one: Bob. He came into my office. It was really strange; it was actually the next day after Alana. He actually walked in and told me about something he had been charged by the hospital. Now, his wife, who’s very sick and is waiting for a long-term care bed in St. Albert, was in the hospital in St. Albert waiting for that long-term care bed in St. Albert, but she couldn’t get one right away because there aren’t enough beds. Now, we can get into a whole debate on why there aren’t enough beds and spaces, and this government can take responsibility for that, over the last four years their complete failure to meet a need that was continuing to grow and escalate. In any event, she was stuck there for two weeks, and she was charged a per diem rate for every single day that she was stuck there. Now, that’s not the first time I’ve heard that. There are fees that are charged for people waiting, through no fault of their own, in the hospital for a placement in long-term care because they are so ill and incapable of going home. They need a placement. That’s just one example of a copay or of an additional charge for public health care.

Now, this government is set on not only doing those things, allowing those policies to happen; they’d rather fire boards and reorganize and organize and then reorganize and then have lots of boards and then one board than look at the actual problem. We saw that problem getting worse during COVID, Madam Speaker, and it doesn’t seem to be much better these days. What I hear from constituents is that they cannot find a family doctor when they need one. They are waiting years for surgeries that will make their life better, not to mention lab tests that are important and in some cases cancer treatment.

Those are just two examples of people. Let me give you one more. Now, this government likes to think: “Well, what? It’s just a little bit.” That was their explanation when they deindexed AISH. Now, they like to say: well, we reindexed it. Well, yes, you did but after four years – after people lost income for four years, they sunk further into poverty – yes, right before an election, with oil at over

\$100 a barrel. Yeah. Sure. Then they reindexed the benefits. But they let people suffer through a pandemic and for four years.

I met a couple. One is an AISH recipient, and one was on income support. Now, they live together. They rent a place together, and they're having the same problems making ends meet. So God forbid – God forbid – that they have to pay for health care more than they do now. Actually, this government has already made it more difficult because they've changed the health benefits on AISH. So now instead of, you know, getting your teeth cleaned maybe twice a year, you might get it once a year. Major dental has changed. All of those little cuts, the nickel and diming that this government does: that's what they do.

So this couple on AISH – now, because they actually were honest and told the government or the staff in AISH that they actually are in an interdependent relationship, one of them lost their benefits. Did you know, Madam Speaker, that if two people are on AISH and live together and explain that they have an interdependent relationship – I mean, it's a romantic relationship, boyfriend and girlfriend, whatever it is – they're penalized for their income? Now, if you have two AISH recipients who are not in a romantic relationship, just friends and roommates: not a problem. But if it's the other way, it's a problem. That's an old rule that this government still has not changed. So when they tell you that there are no problems in these systems, systems like social services, like AISH, like income support, don't believe them. Don't believe them at all.

So when they tell you that this piece of legislation is irrelevant, we don't need it, what that screams to me, Madam Speaker, is that this is very relevant and this is very much needed. When they are standing up and saying, "No; we don't need this; it's all good; it's protected; we signed a health care guarantee, for goodness' sake, in a Sharpie," this legislation is very much needed. So it is my pleasure to stand in this place and to support my colleague who is bringing forward this piece of legislation because, like he said when he introduced this piece of legislation, it will ensure that no Albertan has to pay out of pocket to access health care services in Alberta.

Now, if this government, if the members over here believe that, then what is the problem in voting for this? If you believe your legislation is already done, everyone is already secure and safe, what is the problem? A little bit of redundancy to make people feel safe and secure: that's not a problem. Other than that... [interjection] Well, have you looked at the legislation?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms Renaud: Other than that, Madam Speaker, I would suggest that this is just being cautious. There are so many constituents – I know that I hear from them all the time. I hear by phone, by e-mail. They walk in. I see them at the store. I see them wherever, and their concerns are the same. Well, first is always CPP. They are livid that this is happening. Second is health care. Second is always health care. It's always about protecting public health care. Now, when we tell them that, yes, we have a private member bringing in this legislation that will add that extra piece to keep it safe so that no Albertan will ever have to pay out of pocket for health care services, that makes them happy. I can't imagine any Albertan saying, "No; this is a bad idea," except for these Albertans over here.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the House for the opportunity to address this crucial matter today. We are gathered here to discuss the NDP's proposed Bill 201, the Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023. For several reasons that I will soon explain, I strongly believe this bill should be voted down.

First and foremost, let me emphasize the fact that Albertans have never been asked to pay out of pocket for insured health services, and this principle remains unchanged. This UCP government believes that a person's health should never be determined by the size of their wallet. Our publicly funded health care system is a source of pride for all Albertans. It is a testament to our shared values of compassion and solidarity, and it underscores our belief that health care is a fundamental right, not a privilege. Our dedication to maintaining this cornerstone of our society is not just a matter of policy; it's a reflection of who we are as a province. We believe in taking care of our neighbours, supporting our friends, and providing a safety net for the most vulnerable among us. This government understands that good health is the foundation upon which a prosperous and vibrant society is built.

The Alberta Health Care Insurance Act and the Canada Health Act clearly outline the framework of our health care system, and it is our expectation that physicians in Alberta adhere to these laws. Rest assured that insured health services such as seeing a family doctor or visiting a hospital will remain free of charge. We understand the importance of maintaining accessibility and affordability of health care for all residents of Alberta. The provision of insured health services, including essential medical care provided by family doctors and hospital visits, free of charge is a vital aspect of our health care system. This commitment helps to alleviate financial barriers and ensures that individuals and families can seek medical attention when needed without worrying about the burden of health care costs. We've made a public health guarantee to Albertans, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to the province's publicly funded health care system. Our government has been unequivocal on this matter. Albertans will never bear the financial burden of insured health services, including visits to their family doctors.

However, it is important to know that there's still a space for publicly funded, privately operated medical centres here in Alberta. Independently owned and operated health care facilities such as physicians' offices, chartered surgical facilities, continuing care and home-care providers have been integral to the delivery of health care services in Alberta for an extended period. These partnerships, vital for expanding the health care system's capacity, embody a model where services are privately administered yet publicly funded.

For example, AHS collaborates with CSFs to offer publicly funded surgical procedures. AHS allows clinical guidelines to prioritize patients in need of surgery and determines which individuals are best suited to receive surgeries in CSFs. Similarly, AHS oversees the selection of physicians who provide services in CSFs, mirroring the process within AHS-owned facilities. These partnerships with private providers are indispensable for the efficient functioning of our publicly funded health care system. It allows all Albertans to access medically necessary services from these providers without incurring any out-of-pocket fees, ensuring equitable access to essential health care services for our residents.

4:20

Moreover, this government is taking huge steps to improve health care accessibility in the province. For example, our government will soon establish a compensation model allowing Albertans to access primary care services from nurse practitioners free of charge. This initiative addresses a long-standing gap in our health care system that the previous NDP, regrettably, ignored despite calls from the Nurse Practitioner Association. The establishment of a new compensation model for nurse practitioners is a significant and exciting development for Alberta. This model will empower nurse practitioners to practise autonomously, opening clinics, taking on

patients, and providing services that reflect their full extent of education, skills, and scope of practice.

This will undoubtedly add much-needed capacity to community settings and help more Albertans access the health care they require, especially in places like Lesser Slave Lake. Nurse practitioners play a crucial role in delivering high-quality and patient-centred health care services. By offering this new compensation model, we aim to not only make health care more accessible but also to expand the range of health care professionals available to our residents. This approach will help alleviate the strain on our health care system, reduce wait times, and provide patients with a broader spectrum of care options. We take immense pride in the work our government is doing to strengthen primary care in Alberta.

In addition to the fantastic work that our government is doing to broaden the scope of nurse practitioners, we are also developing a comprehensive primary health care workforce strategy for diverse team-based care. We are committed to developing a strategic plan that ensures our primary care workforce is equipped to meet the diverse and evolving health care needs of our population. This strategy will address the recruitment and retention of health care professionals, including physicians, nurse practitioners, and other allied health care providers. By fostering a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to care, we aim to enhance the quality of primary care services offered to all Albertans.

Our government is committed to creating a health care workforce that is both diverse and highly skilled, ensuring that Albertans have access to the best possible care. We recognize the invaluable contributions of internationally educated nurses and are taking concrete steps to support them in their journey to certification and employment in Alberta's health care sector. In the town of Wainwright, for example, a first-of-its-kind undergraduate nursing degree program is allowing students to learn and work in rural Alberta, and through Portage College there's a new LPN-to-RN bridging program that will operate in northern Alberta.

Moreover, the retention of nurses and physicians has also been top of mind for this government. Our commitment to enhancing health care access and workforce development in Alberta is resolute. We are taking significant steps to achieve this by expanding the capacity of Alberta's bridging programs for internationally educated nurses and making education more accessible. Madam Speaker, over the next three years we are significantly increasing the number of educational seats available for nurses and health care aides by 3,919. This expansion will ensure that our health care workforce is well equipped to meet the growing demand for quality care. Additionally, Advanced Education is proudly investing \$11 million in nurse bridging programs. This investment will result in an additional 1,221 spaces at postsecondary institutions, providing internationally educated nurses with the opportunity to complete the necessary programs for certification in Alberta. By doing so, we are not only addressing workforce shortages but also facilitating the seamless integration of skilled health care professionals into our health care system.

All of this is to say that this government strongly supports a robust and publicly funded health care system. We believe in the value of partnerships that expand capacity and improve accessibility while maintaining the principles of universal health care. Madam Speaker, our commitment to providing all Albertans with high-quality medical services without financial barriers remains unwavering, and we are dedicated to continuously improving and strengthening our health care system to ensure the well-being of our residents, both now and for generations to come.

I firmly believe that Bill 201, the Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023, is completely unnecessary and redundant due to our government's firm commitment to

publicly funded health care and the strides we are making to improve it. We are dedicated to strengthening and improving health care access in Alberta without burdening our citizens with additional fees. I strongly urge members of the House to vote against this bill and stand firmly in support of our current publicly funded health care system.

Thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 201? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak in favour of Bill 201, the Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023. I want to thank my friend from Calgary-North East for bringing forward this much-needed bill.

In my remarks today I want to highlight why I believe that Alberta needs this legislation. One, it importantly removes the discretion that currently exists for the minister to make enforcement decisions with regard to access fees that are being charged by physicians' clinics, and two, it clarifies the principle of universality by clearly outlining what an access fee is. I think that those two things are incredibly important and incredibly well needed and, if implemented, Madam Speaker, would put the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar's minds at ease when it comes to the problem of affordability. The last thing they need right now is additional fees to go see a doctor that they're not being charged right now.

Now, Madam Speaker, when it comes to this bill removing the discretion of the minister to launch these investigations, I refer to section 3 of the bill, which strikes out "the Minister may" and substitutes "the Minister must" issue warning letters and undertake investigations with regard to clinics that are charging fees. Why is it important to remove the discretion of the minister in these cases? I wouldn't have an issue if we had a minister or a UCP caucus whose views on health care were ones that I could trust, but I do not trust the UCP to make sound decisions with their own discretion around health care policy in any way, shape, or form.

For example, the Health minister herself only a month ago was asked whether or not she would take the COVID vaccine. When she was asked that, she outright refused to take the COVID vaccine, stating that she was a healthy person. Not only does that fundamentally misunderstand the purpose of vaccines, because vaccines are not only designed to protect ourselves from infectious diseases but also to protect those around us from infectious diseases—I don't know. Maybe the Minister of Health is only surrounded by people who are also healthy and not susceptible to infectious diseases, but I highly doubt it.

Not only does she misunderstand the important role in protecting public health that vaccines play; she is the Minister of Health overseeing a health care system that is burdened by COVID cases right now. She stopped publicly reporting the cases. In fact, it's fallen upon investigative journalists to find out the true number of COVID cases that are being treated in our hospitals right now. I don't trust a minister who lacks the fundamental understanding of public health and what it takes to protect her own health care system that she is in charge of to make the right decision when it comes to enforcing access fees and those kinds of things in clinics.

Madam Speaker, it's not just the health care minister who has questionable views when it comes to health care policy. In April of this year we found out that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod believes that heart attack patients are the ones to be blamed for having heart attacks. She's on record saying that if only they weren't overweight or had diabetes, they wouldn't have had heart attacks in the first place.

4:30

Now, Madam Speaker, these are not the kinds of people that I want to have discretion when it comes to enforcing fees the clinics may be charging. That's why I think it's important to have this bill. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright a couple of years ago claimed that a student on a bus in his constituency was asphyxiated by wearing a surgical mask, that the mask physically prevented the oxygen from reaching his lungs. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of physics, much less health care, that doesn't give me any confidence whatsoever that members of the UCP should be trusted with discretion when it comes to allowing clinics to charge fees.

I wish I could end there, but then we come to the Premier. Now, we've heard at length from members on our side about the Premier's views on whether or not Albertans should be charged to see their doctor, but that only scratches the surface. That's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to her other absolutely out-to-lunch views on health care in particular. One, during the COVID pandemic she said that well, you know, we really should maybe look at whether or not Ivermectin can be used to treat COVID. She said that on her radio program. She said that she wasn't interested in getting the Moderna or the Pfizer vaccines and in fact publicly proclaimed that she flew to Arizona to get the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which was not allowed in Canada at the time and has since had its licence revoked by Health Canada. It's no longer available.

She said that that was the only vaccine that people could trust, this one that is no longer even allowed to be used here by Health Canada. She said that if you have stage 4 cancer, that's your fault. You know, just for good measure, Madam Speaker, I think a lot of people here in the Chamber have seen the article that she wrote in the *Calgary Herald* in the '90s saying: "Gosh darn it. Those doctors are really out to lunch. Smoking is actually good for your health."

Madam Speaker, these are the kind of people who are making decisions on behalf of the health care system, and they cannot be trusted with health care policy in any shape or form. That's why it's important that this Legislature adopt my friend from Calgary-North East's Bill 201 to remove discretion. If this bill were passed, it doesn't matter what kind of crazy wackadoo views on health care they personally hold. The minister would have to investigate this.

Now, the minister got up in response to Bill 201 and said: don't worry; the matter is under an investigation. Well, I ask the Chamber: where are the results? The investigation was launched in July. Here it is November. We still don't have anything, Madam Speaker, and I guess we're just supposed to take her word for it that some answers will be forthcoming. How can we trust a minister who intentionally covers up health care data when it comes to COVID and a whole bunch of other things to be forthcoming with the release of an investigation into whether or not the Marda Loop clinic was improperly charging fees to its patients?

I want to move on now to this issue of universality, and I thank the Member for Calgary-North East for including section 2 of this bill, which states that the purpose of this act is to align the Alberta health insurance act with the Canada Health Act, which includes the pillar of universality. Madam Speaker, allowing doctors to charge fees to visit their clinics undermines this pillar of universality. That means that health care resources will no longer be available to those who need them and will only be available to those who can afford to pay. We clearly heard the ministers admit that they are not funding the system enough to provide adequate resources to get everyone a family doctor. But what's the answer? The answer that they've allowed to happen is for doctors to charge fees so that that's the allocation system that's now been adopted in

Alberta, that those who have the most money are now the ones who get to see the doctors.

The minister denies that that actually prevents somebody from seeing a doctor, but that's not the case. Doctors could make their decisions on which patients to see on any number of criteria, but this government has forced them to use money because they have failed to fund primary clinics to an adequate degree.

And, you know, it's really shameful, but I think it's indicative of the Conservative mindset because to a Conservative, Madam Speaker, a human's worth is equivalent only to their financial net worth and nothing more. Here on the NDP side of the House we know that a human being has a right to health care regardless of the size of their wallet, and we will fight to defend it every day. I'm really proud of my friend from Calgary-North East.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. Well, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar continues to show people that no one can shovel it like he can.

With that said, Madam Speaker, I do rise today with conviction . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall with a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise pursuant to 23(j), that says, "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder;" and also (h), "makes allegations against another Member." Not that we have expected any better from the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, but I think that was clearly language that was disrespectful towards the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who spoke with passion, who spoke with facts, and outlined things that support his case for Bill 201. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo clearly used the language that is insulting, that is abusive, and that is against good parliamentary practices in this House and should be ruled out for it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is not a point of order. It's a matter of debate in its essence, in itself. As far as the language that's being used, there are some colloquialisms once you get out of the big city lights that are actually used interchangeably back and forth, and as far as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar not having any inflammatory language throughout his career, I'm pointing out to the individual that's been punted out of this place and had to apologize more than any other member in history. So if there is any point of order, I don't see it. It was very much within the terms and the context of what we've spoken here many times, and the member opposite obviously knows that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I think perhaps when debating a point of order against a member, attempting to insult them when making your point is not certainly helpful in this case. However, I think this is our good first reminder of the afternoon to all choose better language in this House as to not inflame one another, to bring up the level of decorum and debate in this House, which our constituents expect from us. Given that, I don't find a

point of order. This is a matter of debate, but this is a warning to all members moving forward to do better.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Debate Continued

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I rise today with conviction to speak against Bill 201, the misguided Alberta health care insurance amendment act. Make no mistake, our government believes passionately in protecting public health care. We will vigorously defend the principles of the Canada Health Act while pursuing innovation that opens doors for patients.

Let us have an honest debate. This bill is not about upholding accessibility as the members across the way explain. We cannot stand idle while their ideological agenda jeopardizes the viability of our entire public health care system. That is what this bill risks, and its proponents are not being straight with Albertans about the ramifications.

Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that passionately defends public health care and public resources, one that pursues every avenue to improve access and outcomes for patients, one that empowers doctors to innovate, not threatens their livelihoods. Albertans deserve truth, not distortion. They deserve genuine solutions, not posturing. They deserve a positive vision, not division. Our citizens deserve hope for the future, not fearmongering; they deserve political courage, not pandering; and they deserve their government's full, utmost commitment to protecting their vital services.

4:40

Madam Speaker, this bill fails on all accounts. But together we can deliver health care that lives up to Albertans' hopes. We can unite around solutions that expand access within the Canada Health Act. We must reject conflict and opportunism. We must move forward with pragmatism, compassion, and trust in our shared principles. Most importantly, this bill ignores the fundamental structure of Canada's health system. The Canada Health Act sets out the criteria all provinces must meet to receive federal funding. Banning extra-billing of patients violates the act and would put billions of dollars for Alberta Health Services at risk.

This province has no authority to unilaterally change federal law regarding the public health insurance system. Let me be clear, Madam Speaker. Our government strongly supports the principles of the Canada Health Act. All residents must have access to medically necessary care without personal financial barriers. We will not play politics with Albertans' health funding.

The member who sponsored this bill knows it has no chance of passing. This is political theatre that wastes the Assembly's time and needlessly worries patients about their future care. There are many areas where we can have thoughtful discussions to strengthen our health system. How do we reduce wait times? How do we better support seniors? How do we increase efficiency without compromising quality? This bill provides no meaningful solutions. It distorts complex policy issues into the false choice between public universality and private tiering. It vilifies physicians who support patient choice and stokes fear about two-tier access. It ignores practical realities, fiscal consequences, and the clear jurisdictional limits on provincial policy-making.

Madam Speaker, let me summarize. This government will always uphold the Canada Health Act and the integrity of our public health insurance system. We will not endanger Albertans' health funding to pursue ideological restrictions on private payment. There are many avenues to improve care while respecting the act, but this bill is not one. That's why we'll move the following amendment, given

that the government already has the necessary tools to ensure compliance with the Canada Health Act and maintain a publicly funded health care system in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry; just wait until I have a copy of the amendment, please. I'd like to read it, and then I'll let you proceed when I'm ready.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment RA1.

Hon. member, please proceed to read it into the record.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. Notice of amendment, Bill 201, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 201, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 201, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government already has the tools necessary to ensure compliance with the Canada Health Act and maintain a publicly funded health care system in Alberta.

While we may disagree on policy approaches, I know that all members of this Assembly share the goal of improving health care for Albertans. My hope is that we can move forward in the spirit of unity on this critical issue. There is tremendous potential in this province. Alberta is blessed with ingenuity, diversity, and a pioneering attitude. When we come together across political divides, we can achieve anything. Our government believes deeply in the promise of this province. That is why we are focused on creating jobs, growing the economy, and building prosperity that reaches every corner of Alberta.

Health care is essential to that vision. When all Albertans can access the care they need, they can more fully participate in our communities and economy. By improving primary care and virtual services, we're empowering citizens to live healthier, more productive lives. An empowered population is the engine of prosperity. Our progress on health care helps drive Alberta forward as a place of possibility for all people.

Madam Speaker, the bill proposed today does not reflect that spirit of unity and shared purpose. It seeks to divide, not bring us together. It fails to grasp that pragmatic steps already under way will achieve its aims more meaningfully. We have a historic opportunity to strengthen health care through co-operation, not conflict; through listening, not rhetoric. I ask the member to join us in that endeavour, and I ask all Albertans to believe in the promise of this province. Know that your government is working to help everyone contribute their talents. Together we can build an Alberta that is healthy, inclusive, and thriving beyond the highest aspirations. We are united by a shared faith in this land of opportunity, and the best is yet to come.

Madam Speaker, our government has already taken significant action to improve primary health care and access for Albertans without putting federal funding at risk. For example, we are creating a primary health care division within Alberta Health to provide dedicated leadership. We're allocating \$57 million over three years to support family doctors and nurse practitioners in managing more patients. We're also working with the Alberta Medical Association to transition physician compensation towards a model that enables doctors to spend more time with each patient, and we are reducing administrative burdens so physicians get paid even if the patient lacks proof of insurance. Furthermore, we're expanding virtual health care, virtual mental health services, and enabling nurse

practitioners to open up their own clinics. These pragmatic steps will increase Albertans' access to the care that they need.

In addition, Madam Speaker, we are taking action to specifically address gaps in Indigenous health care. We have established an Indigenous health division and funded \$20 million for Indigenous communities to design primary care facilities. We will also create an Indigenous patients' complaint investigator and elders roster to address racism in health care, and we are investing in Indigenous patient navigators to support the Indigenous peoples through their care journey.

This government is already implementing meaningful solutions to strengthen the primary care access and outcomes for all Albertans, including Indigenous peoples. We are doing this while upholding the Canada Health Act and protecting our federal funding. The bill proposed by the member opposite completely ignores the progress we are already making. It falsely claims that private payment bans are the only way to improve accessibility. Madam Speaker, I outlined previously why this bill is misguided and risks undermining Alberta's public health care system. Banning private options contradicts patient choice and physician autonomy. There is no evidence that bans improve access while they could penalize the province billions under the Canada Health Act.

This bill provides no concrete solutions, only ideology that distorts complex policy issues. It unfairly vilifies doctors and stokes fears about two-tier care. It ignores economic realities, legal frameworks, and the pragmatic improvements our government is already advancing. Instead of joining these efforts, the member sponsoring this bill chose political theatre that wastes Assembly time and misleads Albertans. We should be working together to build on the progress that is under way, not sowing division with your reckless proposals.

Madam Speaker, let me reiterate clearly. This government will defend principles of the Canada Health Act while pursuing practical innovation. We will safeguard Albertans' health care funding, and we will continue implementing thoughtful solutions to strengthen primary care access and outcomes across this province. For those reasons, I continue urging all members to join me in rejecting Bill 201. Let us continue to keep building a patient-centred, sustainable public health care system that meets the needs of all Albertans now and into the future.

Madam Speaker, thank you so much for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the reasoned amendment.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise more on a concern in the sense of the hon. member opposite has been around this place for a significant amount of time. I think we were both elected maybe in the same year, 2015-ish, so I know that he's been around for a long time. Similarly, so have I. Monday afternoons have always been considered an opportunity for private members to bring forward pieces of legislation and/or motions in regard to issues that they believe are things that the government should be taking seriously and also in the fact that it relates to issues that their constituents have brought forward to them. The hon. member has brought forward a piece of legislation, Bill 201, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023, clearly because he has been hearing from his constituents and many Albertans across this province about the importance of ensuring that our health care stays public.

4:50

Now, the reason that I stand and I bring up the fact that the member opposite has been here since 2015 is that there is also practice in this place that when a private member brings a bill forward, the government

doesn't amend it, doesn't try to stop the bill from coming forward, and, in fact, allows this place and allows private members to have the opportunity to be able to advocate on behalf. Monday afternoons are the only time in this place when private members have a voice. The only time in this place. [interjection] There are no interventions on Monday afternoons either, hon. members.

Again, first day for many members: I appreciate that. But here's the thing. private members get their name drawn maybe once in their careers – maybe once – so what has happened is that we've had a member who has had an opportunity to have their name drawn to draft a bill on behalf of Albertans. They're not part of the government. And now we have seen the government try to stop their ability to advocate for Albertans, to stop them from being able to have a bill with their name on it as a private member presented in this place, to be appropriately debated on in this place.

What the government has tried to do by using a private member . . . [interjections] The hon. whip needs to stop talking. Again, the government likes to heckle and likes to shut down debate in this place when they do not like to hear . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, I know the government does not like to be told or educated around how this place is supposed to function, but what I will be clear about is that the tactic that this government has chosen to use to stop the debate on this piece of legislation, to stop the people of Alberta's voices being heard by private members – again, this used to be a place where the government and the opposition would work in collaboration, where they would notify the opposition when an amendment was coming forward so that we could work in collaboration. Instead, what we have seen this government try to do is to stop debate on a piece of legislation presented by a private member, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

It's disrespectful to this place. It is disrespectful to all members of this House. It doesn't matter if you're an opposition member or a government member. As a private member all members that are not in cabinet have a right to represent their constituents, to introduce pieces of legislation on behalf of their constituents – that includes motions – and it is not the place of another member to try to stop that from occurring in this place. You may not agree with what this bill says. You may want to debate what this bill says, but what this amendment does is stop debate. It stops this hon. member's voice from being heard and the people of Alberta's voices from being heard. That's not how we do this in this place. Monday afternoons are to be respectful to all members.

Again, I'm extremely disappointed to hear that an hon. member would put forward an amendment to a piece of legislation that is about public health care. It's absolutely important that public health care be valued in this province. We've heard the rhetoric, and I continue to hear the member opposite with the rhetoric, who likes to try to shut down the voices of people in this place because they don't necessarily want to agree with public health care. We've heard them talk about having people pay for services that people can't afford. We've heard members opposite talk about the fact that they don't believe in vaccinations and making it harder to have those conversations and have that accessibility.

Mr. Getson: Come on. That's pretty divisive. Why are you trying to cause that disorder?

[The Speaker in the chair]

Ms Sweet: The hon. member continues to speak. Trust me; the hon. member that likes to speak across the way has been very open about their particular views in regard to public health care.

But what I will say is that it just clearly speaks to the fact – and we’ve seen these games before. We’ve seen the government try to create committees where they shut down private members’ business. We’ve seen the government try to make it almost impossible. In fact, there’s been other pieces prior to this most recent election where private members couldn’t even get their bills into this place to be debated. That’s how distrustful this government is about hearing from Albertans. They don’t want to hear the facts. They don’t want to hear that the opposition has good ideas, good pieces of legislation. They don’t want to debate them because that would mean they’d have to be held accountable.

This piece of legislation holds this government accountable to public health care. It actually shouldn’t be something that you would see the government being so divisive about, trying to shut down debate on. It’s pretty simple. It’s about public health care. It’s about making sure that nobody has to pay to access public health care, yet the government is trying to use every trick in the book to shut it down so that Alberta’s voices aren’t being heard and so that they do not have to be held accountable.

I would think that every private member in this place should be concerned about these tactics. I take this place seriously. I believe in the institution of this place, and I support Monday afternoons in private members’ business. It is the only time in this place where private members actually get to have a voice, where they get to have their own pieces of legislation heard, and where they get to have their own motions introduced on behalf of the members in this place. Again, I’ve been elected since 2015, and my name’s been drawn once. I’ve had one opportunity in eight years of being able to present a piece of legislation, and with how Monday afternoons work, I was never able to get that piece of legislation passed. There are now quite a variety – there are 38 – of us on the opposition side plus a whole bunch of private members on their side, too.

The other opportunity of being able to get a piece of legislation passed is a privilege, and it is a serious opportunity that all members in this place should honour. I think it is time that the government starts working with the opposition, that the government starts being open and transparent and stops playing games with private members’ business when it comes to their pieces of legislation, to their bills, and allows private members to use their elected voices on behalf of their constituents to bring forward issues and have them debated in this House.

Enough with amendments where things should not be read again. Enough with trying to create committees where people aren’t even able to get their pieces of legislation introduced. It is shameful what this government continues to try to do to shut down the voices of the opposition, to not have Albertans’ voices heard, to not be able to advocate the way that we have been truly elected to do in this place. It is time that they stop. It is time that they start working with the opposition, communicate when they have ideas around amendments or different opportunities like that, and get to a place where they start listening to the voices of Albertans and stop trying to play games with the opposition to stop those voices from being heard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, I agree with some of what the member opposite had said. The part that I agree with is that Monday is private members’ business. What I do agree with is that the member opposite – and I said it in my speech rebutting his really well-intended bill – was right. It was very rare. It’s almost like getting a moose tag to get that draw on it. My concern is here, to set the record straight, is the member opposite who just finished sitting down, who was a former minister herself, I believe, or House leader or something . . .

Ms Sweet: No.

Mr. Getson: Oh, you never were? Oh, my apologies. I thought you had reached a higher level in your organization.

What she has done before is they have actually put amendments towards private members’ business when I was here last time and am still a private member at this point, and I hold that in high regard. The concern is, Mr. Speaker, and I’m not sure if you share the same sentiments, but understanding that some of these are . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, but the time for consideration of this item of business has concluded. Next week on Monday afternoon the remaining 22 minutes allotted for debate will take place.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Renewable Energy Projects Approvals

501. Ms Al-Guneid moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to provide certainty to individuals and businesses investing in Alberta by introducing a bill, the purpose of which is to prevent disruptions to investment as occurred when the government imposed a moratorium on authorizations for renewable energy projects in August 2023, and that, if enacted, would prohibit the government from suspending or pausing an application, assessment, or approval for a proposed project on the basis that the government is reviewing existing projects, applications, assessments, or approval processes.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m bringing a motion today to ensure Alberta continues to be an attractive jurisdiction for investors and new projects that will create jobs now and for the future. Governments must always be able to review and improve regulations as new science and data come to light, now and into the future. However, Albertans and companies investing in Alberta who are doing so in good faith based on the existing laws should not be subject to a government changing the rules on a political whim without consultation or warning.

Measured government behaviour used to be taken for granted in Alberta until the heavy-handed government intervention we witnessed this summer, which abruptly shut down all new investment in a rapidly growing industry in Alberta because this government was caught unprepared to manage a multibillion-dollar industry taking root right here in Alberta. Imposing a moratorium without prior warning or consultation with Alberta’s renewable energy developers has tarnished Alberta’s reputation and sent a terrible message about our province as an investment destination. This abrupt action has not only impacted our reputation within the electricity industry, but it could transcend to other nascent industries looking to invest in Alberta such as hydrogen, carbon capture and storage, or even geothermal energy, which is also, bizarrely, included in this ban.

Interestingly, we have now learned that on June 29, 2023, the government asked the Alberta Utilities Commission to draft terms of reference for an inquiry on wind and solar development on agricultural lands as well as the reclamation requirements for wind and solar projects. What is truly surprising about this memo is the date. Mr. Speaker, June 29 was less than a month after the Alberta provincial election of May 31, 2023. My question is: why was the AUC inquiry and the potential of a moratorium the first order of

government business right after the election, when the members opposite did not even campaign . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Al-Guneid: My question is: why was the AUC inquiry and the potential of a moratorium the first order of government business right after the election, when the members opposite did not even campaign on overhauling renewables? Since the government has been contemplating this review since June 2023 if not earlier, why did the government not consult with the industry in advance? Investment decisions were made by companies over the summer without any knowledge that the government intended to rip the rug right out from under them.

Mr. Speaker, I spent 15 years in the energy sector, in renewables, oil and gas, the oil sands, in Canada and abroad. I have worked for global energy companies and environmental not-for-profits. I have never seen this heavy-handed government intervention in any industry. I would like to emphasize that governments can and should look for continuous improvements to our entire regulatory regime and even change regulations as appropriate, but before changes are made, they have at least applied best practices in consultations with experts, industry, and public service, and if they do so, the review of regulations should never shut out billions of dollars of investment without warning. Such hasty government intervention in a thriving industry has serious ramifications.

I have now talked about the impact on Alberta's reputation as an investment destination. The other impact is actually on Albertans' power prices. When the government halts renewables, it is also halting new energy supply from entering the market. Not only are renewables low cost and low emission; it is well known that increasing competition in the market is key to addressing the affordability crisis that this government has presided over in Alberta. While increased competition in the market is expected to finally bring some price relief in the coming year, it is cruel that the government chose to hit the brakes on more low-cost supplies for months and months, risking a return to the record power prices from this past summer. Limiting new investments risks higher electricity costs, higher emissions, and higher uncertainty for anyone who was thinking about investing in Alberta.

The third impact, Mr. Speaker, of this self-defeating moratorium is on jobs in Alberta. I would like fellow members to think about this. According to the Canadian Renewable Energy Association a 100-megawatt wind facility equals \$175 million in project development and more than 300 jobs. A 100-megawatt solar PV facility includes \$125 million in investment with approximately 200 full-time jobs in construction. In fact, the impact of the UCP moratorium on renewables is forecast to risk \$33 billion in investment and 24,000 jobs.

Mr. Speaker and fellow members, businesses choose Alberta because it expects governments not to change the rules without consulting. Businesses want to invest in our province and do not want to get caught in surprise government meddling that puts jobs at risk. Policies put in place by the Alberta NDP government, many of which were kept intact by this government, have attracted over \$5 billion of investments in our province since 2019. We are the envy of other jurisdictions. Alberta has been leading the country in renewables, with 75 per cent of Canada's utility-scale wind and solar capacity growth in 2022 right here in Alberta. This exponential growth has exceeded everyone's expectations. Why would any government claiming to be pro business actively meddle in the market that attracts global investment from succeeding?

Mr. Speaker, the world is transitioning towards a low-carbon energy future, with a goal of reaching net zero by 2050, a goal I

think we and the members of the government all share. In order to achieve this, all credible plans have decarbonizing the electricity sector as the first major step, as affordable and mature technologies are widely available, including here in Alberta. The low-emissions electricity grid then becomes the cornerstone for other aspects of the energy transition and is necessary to attract businesses and to create new jobs.

We need a government that creates long-term policies that signal to Albertans and investors that it is ready and planning for the future economy. Alberta needs to be part of this global energy transition or risk being left behind. To keep this province open for business while conducting regulatory reviews on electricity generation, we need a guarantee that investors and industries will not see another hasty ban. That is what this motion will do. It will send a message to investors that the members of this Assembly want to provide that sense of stability. Mr. Speaker, I encourage every member of this House to support this motion today for the sake of the province's prosperity and economic future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has moved Motion Other than Government Motion 501. Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has risen.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This clause was put in place so that Alberta's government could improve the investment environment for renewable energy projects, full stop. It is no surprise that the opposition does not understand that. As we speak, there are over 40,000 megawatts of total generation in various stages of the regulatory process through to construction. This would triple the current total generation capacity of our grid, from 19,000 megawatts to 60,000 megawatts. The bulk of these new projects are wind and solar, which represents a massive and outsized portion of Canada's future renewable generation capacity. The members opposite need to seriously consider what 40,000 megawatts' worth of new transmission infrastructure would do to the affordability of electricity in this province.

Since the pause was put in place in August, this number has only grown by nearly 8,800 megawatts. We are laying the groundwork to ensure investor confidence for years to come, so companies looking to build here can design their projects to align with their needs and grid. They will better understand where and what they can build. They will know the studies they need, the insurance required, and the steps for end of project life reclamation. This amount of investment is a boon to our province's economy and a critical ingredient on our path to a carbon-neutral grid by 2050.

Alberta's government embraces this growing and essential sector within our economy, but we have the responsibility to do our due diligence and ensure that we have a strong and fair regulatory environment that can be relied on for decades to come. With this amount of investment and planned construction we need to ensure that the grid can support this growth. It is our responsibility to both those investing in renewable energy projects and to the people of Alberta that we address these issues early and effectively. Alberta's government has put this pause in place so that we can address these problems for good, and this will ensure that, going forward, Alberta continues to be the best place on the continent for renewable electricity development.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP accuses our government of scaring away investment, a laughable statement when we recall their mismanagement of all aspects of Alberta's economy, especially our essential electricity grid. So allow me to explain to the members opposite why we put this pause in place and how it will work to

secure the confidence of all Albertans and how it will ensure Alberta maintains its position as a global leader in renewable energy projects.

Our first concern is reliability. Our objective is to ensure that all Albertans can rely on the electricity they need to live their lives. This is why we have pushed back against Ottawa's demand that we have a carbon-neutral grid by 2035. Wind and solar are wonderful producers of clean electricity, but they are not reliable, and this is due to intermittency. While we have about 4,800 megawatts of wind and solar generation capacity, they never operate at 100 per cent of their capacity. In fact, they operate at a fraction of that. Sometimes the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow.

On the 10 coldest days of last winter wind power ranged from 1 to 16 per cent of total generation capacity on those days. Solar was even more inefficient. Generation from solar on those days varied from zero to 2 per cent of total generation. Three hundred and sixty-five days a year this province relies on natural gas to produce its electricity. Relying too heavily on these intermittent forms of generation could mean that in the future Albertan families who come home and flip on a light switch are still left in the dark, and this is completely unacceptable. We must ensure that Albertans do not suffer from rolling blackouts because of the short-sighted overreliance on intermittent renewable energy projects that the opposition is advocating for.

We need reliable baseload power. This is essential. For a grid to be reliable, a solid mix of intermittent renewables and baseload power will ensure that Albertans have a consistent supply to fulfill their electricity needs. Our electricity demand is growing rapidly and will continue to increase as time goes on. Our project welcomes more investment in renewable projects. It grows our economy, creates jobs, and helps us reduce our emissions. We also need to make sure that we have a plan to support the grid with more baseload power. This pause is giving our government and independent regulators the time and focus they need to prepare for this future, a future that will be even more welcoming to renewable investment and will be reliable for Albertans.

There are some other problems that arise as renewable construction continues to increase. One prime example of this is end of project life reclamation. Currently our province's regulatory framework lacks sufficient rules surrounding the reclamation of renewable generation projects when they reach end of life. Projects and land are sold, companies go under, and this leaves local governments, residents, and landowners burdened with a price tag that can range into the millions of dollars. The opposition would allow problems like this to be ignored, but our government . . . [interjections]

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

Ms de Jonge: But our government is responsible, Mr. Speaker, and we will ensure that Albertans aren't unfairly saddled with the huge potential costs of reclamation. Pausing the approval of new renewable projects allows us to work alongside industry and regulators so that we can develop a framework to ensure this will not happen.

Land-use concerns are another issue that must be addressed. Our province is an economic hub, Mr. Speaker. We aren't just the energy hub of this country or the best place for renewable developments but also one of the country's most bountiful and important agricultural producers. The land area required for the generation of tens of thousands of megawatts via wind and solar is huge, and the conditions that are favourable for renewable generation are also favourable for growing crops. This province's population could potentially double in the coming decades. With that level of population growth we need to have strong rules in place

so that we can protect the long-term stability of all sectors of our economy. We need enough electricity to supply our growing province and enough agricultural land to feed it as well. This is another one of the many reasons Alberta's government has paused the approval of new renewable projects.

Most Albertans understand this. There's broad support among Albertans, particularly those in rural areas, for this pause. They understand that there are issues that need to be resolved. Many of our rural residents have been inundated by renewable developments popping up near their homes, and some have experienced the consequences of not having a strong regulatory framework in place. Pausing approvals gives independent regulators the time they need to work on these issues and the focus they need. Albertans understand how prudent this is. A recent Angus Reid poll highlighted the fact that the majority of rural Albertans are in favour of the pause.

The opposition here fails to recognize the work that needs to be done. In their view, this decision was made from malice and contempt for renewables. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. Our government loves the investment renewable developers bring here. They employ Albertans, they participate in our economy, and they play a part in expanding the electrical capacity we will need in the future. Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed but not at all surprised by the rhetoric coming from members opposite on this pause. They don't understand why it is necessary to set our province up for the future. And this is the least surprising part. Their unfortunate tenure in government has shown us that they are more than willing to drive away investment out of contempt, malice, and just plain incompetence. This pause is necessary for securing the carbon-neutral future of this province, for guaranteeing regulatory consistency for many years to come. The opposition, instead of supporting this necessary pause, chose to irresponsibly divide Albertans again.

When this pause concludes in only a few short months, right before construction season, Alberta will have reinforced its position as an amazing place to build renewable projects. And as our government has shown time and again, we will work tirelessly to ensure that Alberta is the most prosperous province in the country. I ask Albertans who they would rather trust: our government, that has a proven track record of growing the economy, bringing in high-paying jobs, and securing investor confidence, or the opposition, that blew up the long-term viability of our grid in just a few short years. Mr. Speaker, the choice is obvious.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? [interjections] Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the call.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to rise in this House and speak in favour of the motion. The ban on renewables here in Alberta brought in by this UCP government is bad. It's bad for the economy. It's bad for electricity prices. It's bad for investment in the entire province because it makes us a backwards legal jurisdiction.

5:20

In addition to that, it's fairly transparent that the UCP didn't know what they were doing when they brought this in because we've heard what? "Oh, it was the AUC that asked for it; oh, no, no, no, wait, it was the AESO; wait, it was RMA," all of whom have flatly denied asking for the ban. In fact, that's clear in the letters they originally wrote. A government that has to keep coming up with different explanations every time one of their explanations is exposed is a government that knows it's not doing a very good job.

Why is this bad for our economy? Well, it prevents investment. We had the fastest growing renewables sector in the country. It is estimated that this will cost \$33 billion in investment and 24,000 jobs. Those are good jobs, Mr. Speaker. Those are excellent jobs that can help build a provincial economy for the future. Those are jobs that allow for our children to go to university here and continue to live here in Alberta. They are jobs that not only grow our economy but allow people to see their future here in this province. That is, at the end of the day, what we should all want.

It's bad for electricity prices. Despite the UCP's attempts at rhetoric and bizarre, constantly shifting explanations, economists have been clear. People who understand the power sector – though I appreciate the attempt of the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore to explain to me both how laws work and how the electricity grid works, you know, the cause of this according to economists is economic withholding. Essentially, what's happening is that our system is designed in such a way that the more that centralized incumbents have power, the more they can drive those prices up by being offline at certain points and causing peaks to peak higher. This is perfectly legal in our system, a system, I might add, that was designed by Conservatives, which we actually did in fact attempt to change and which they changed back. In fact, the Premier herself, quite contrary to what the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore had to say, has admitted that that was a wrong decision, that that is what's driving power prices. It is on the record. I would encourage that member to listen to her own leader.

In addition, you know, there's been a lot of talk about baseload. I think it's worth noting that baseload is a bit of an antiquated concept. It's kind of from the '90s. What we're actually looking at here is essentially the ability to deal with peaks or what we like to call "dispatchable power"; that is to say, capacity, again, a thing we tried to build into the system. Now, the UCP doesn't have to move to a capacity market. There are ways to do this. There are other ways, including essentially contracting for capacity in an energy-only market. There are a lot of options. There are a lot of options open to the UCP to solve this problem. They didn't pick any of them. Instead, they decided to attack renewables because they don't like them.

It's also worth noting that what this does is not just drive away investment in this sector; it drives away investment in many sectors. Why? Because people who are investing look for mature legal jurisdictions where the rules don't change on a whim. That is not what Alberta is under the UCP. It is a jurisdiction in which the rules are changed with no notice, with no conversation.

No, this is not the normal way, Mr. Speaker, in which business is conducted. In fact, regulations are reviewed all the time. When we were in government, I served for four years as the Attorney General. The Attorney General chairs a committee. It's called the Legislative Review Committee. It reviews things like legislation and regulations. Do you know what happens all the time, every day, week over week? The government reviews regulation. And do you know what they do, Mr. Speaker? They do it without shutting down all investment. It is completely possible.

In fact, the UCP's own previous minister of energy reviewed how it is that we deal with reclamation of oil and gas wells without shutting down the sector. The UCP could have dealt with how we deal with reclamation of solar panels, of wind turbines, of geothermal without shutting down the sector. That was absolutely not necessary. Any attempt to suggest anything to the contrary is, well, something I can't say in this place.

I think there are a lot of reasons that this is clearly and transparently bad. It's based on a misunderstanding of how regulation works, how government works, how the electricity system works. You know, the difficulty here is essentially that . . .

An Hon. Member: You don't understand the legislation.

Ms Ganley: Ah, yes, that's the difficulty, that I don't understand how legislation works. That's definitely the difficulty. Thank you, members opposite, for that. You can always count on the UCP to pivot from an intellectual debate to just nasty personal insults, can't you?

Essentially, what we have here is a bad decision by a government that didn't think it through, that has driven away investment, that has sent negative signals to the market, that is scaring away investment as we speak, that is driving up the cost of power which, incidentally, Mr. Speaker, has quadrupled under the UCP, and they can't even get straight why they made the decision. They can't decide who asked for it because no one asked for it. In fact, after their multiple attempts to blame different other parties for this, we've now seen that it was they themselves that came up with it because they don't like renewables.

While I appreciate the attempt to engage on this issue, I think, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear. Yes, there is a need for dispatchable power on the grid. The UCP has multiple ways of bringing that in, and I'd be happy to educate the member with respect to those things.

In particular, the UCP brought in a bill to allow storage on the grid. They brought it in in 2021. They let it die on the Order Paper. They brought it in again in 2022. They passed the bill, but they still haven't proclaimed it, Mr. Speaker. Why have they not proclaimed it? Why have they not done the hard work to allow storage to participate in our grid? Well, because they don't like renewables and they don't want them to participate in the grid and they don't want to allow the opportunity for that dispatchable power.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear that this decision is all ideology, and I would encourage all members to vote in favour of this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion Other than Government Motion 501. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I appreciate the members opposite trying to carry the water for their colleagues, I feel I need to remind them of how their government approached this sector when they were in office. Their short time in government has caused many of the problems driving up electricity prices today. One of their first actions in government was to expedite the exit of coal without proper consultation or due diligence. They had a misguided view of the future, one where an entire electrical grid supplying the homes of more than 4 million Albertans could be run alone on intermittent wind and solar, but they did not do anything to evolve the transmission infrastructure, improve baseload power, meet demand, or change regulations to support those ideological dreams. This decision drove electricity prices through the roof.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the opposition did no consultation, did not do the necessary preparation to ensure the electricity grid remained affordable or reliable for Albertans, and were more than happy to throw the Albertan investors under the bus on a whim. That's not how our government operates. We are doing the hard work the NDP refused to do, and we are improving the province's investment climate and lives for all Albertans.

The NDP's early exit from coal left Alberta in the lurch with a lack of baseload power, subjecting all ratepayers to unacceptable price spikes and even energy alerts. If this isn't enough, Mr. Speaker, the NDP's climate plan burdened every good and service in this province with a carbon tax, making everything more expensive, electricity especially. This only encouraged their friend and ally Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to put in their own carbon tax, that is now set to grow to \$170 per tonne. The NDP has stood by and applauded this every step

of the way and refused to stand up against Ottawa when we called a motion to push the federal government to kill the carbon tax last week.

This NDP motion says that our government is harming Alberta's investment climate. What an absurd statement to be making considering their record in government and the fact that the number of projects in the queue has gone up since the pause was implemented. Mr. Speaker, during their time in office the NDP made these terrible decisions driven by simple and misguided ideology, but their awful record on the electricity file is amplified even more when we understand how much damage they did through the sheer lack of understanding and incompetence. When they introduced their climate plan, they broke the terms of long-standing power purchase agreements. Consequently, Albertan taxpayers are on the hook for billions of dollars, money which could have been spent on far more prudent projects or even used to reduce the enormous tax burden the NDP imposed on this province.

5:30

Every year we spend almost \$100 million just to pay for those broken contracts, and we will have to continue to pay until 2030. What was the NDP's response to this mass termination of contracts? They spent even more taxpayers' money to sue the private investors whose contracts the government broke. Mr. Speaker, put all these different decisions in a line and imagine you were a business intent on investing in this province. You would have to be crazy to put your money here with the NDP in charge: assets banned, harsh taxes levied, your company sued, all by a party which now claims to be championing investors and their interests.

This on its own is bad enough, but, Mr. Speaker, this isn't even everything the NDP did to hamstring our electrical grid while they were in government. They made wild accusations on top of their bans, taxes, and lawsuits, being sued, in return, for defamation. How in any way did their government think a boondoggle like this, drawn out over multiple years, could improve investor climate?

Mr. Speaker, even now, as the NDP grumbles in discontent across the aisle, they have no viable vision for the future of our province's electrical grid. They stand opposed to nuclear energy development, which will potentially play a key role in our transition towards carbon neutrality. Where wind and solar are unpredictable and intermittent, nuclear power is the exact opposite, but still the NDP doesn't support it. Can the people of Alberta really trust the opposition's word on anything to do with our electrical grid? They have proven they are only capable of making it worse while in government and oppose one of the primary ways we'll be able to achieve the emissions reduction target, via nuclear energy.

Our government is focused on ensuring stability and industrial confidence in the long term, taking the legitimate concerns of Albertans into account while doing so. We are making prudent decisions, consulting with experts, stakeholders, regulators, and everyday Albertans alike as we diligently move towards an environment which will continue to be among the best places in the world to invest in renewable energy. We understand the real underlying problems in our regulations, our market, and the policies, and we are working to correct all of them.

Enter the conversation about renewables. They have unique and new characteristics that are not contemplated in our electrical regulations or our grid. The AESO's long-term outlook several years ago saw the construction of 1,000 megawatts of electricity 20 years in the future. That was eclipsed in the first year with a tsunami of 32,000 more megawatts of new projects in the queue, which has only grown since we put the pause on. How are we going to handle this possible additional generation? Yes, you're right; economic withholding is a part of the problem within our market. We have

said this, and that's why we have instructed the MSA to look into economic and market behaviour.

The challenge that we face right now, the whole point to the members opposite, is that we have the largest number of renewables in Alberta's grid ever. They bid into our grid at zero dollars, so why are the prices the highest in Alberta's history? It's because our market cannot manage this system, and adding more fuel to the fire won't put it out. The pause does not equal a moratorium; projects can still apply and proceed. The average approval time given to us by the AUC is six months. Nothing is at this time cancelled.

We are doing the work that the NDP should have done when they changed the characteristics of our generation in our province. We are doing the work in three steps. One, we have asked the AUC to look at long-standing issues of land use, reclamation, views, and other things, which they are doing. Two, we have asked the AESO to look at the market structure so we can handle the intermittency of generation by renewables. Three, we have asked the MSA to look at economic behaviour.

This is what a responsible government does, and I would ask all members who want to truly correct the underlying problems in our electric system to not support this motion, which would not change any of the current circumstances and only hamstring future governments if corrections are needed in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills has the call.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been a lot of firsts in the last couple of weeks. This is the first time that I am rising to speak to a motion or a bill. Most of the heckling is likely to come from the member right behind me.

I'm happy to speak in support of this motion. Mr. Speaker, we've heard quite a bit about the economic benefits that accrue to the renewable projects that have been stalled by this ban on renewables. We've seen reports that say that there are upwards of 118 projects, 24,000 full-time job years at risk. But this is not all that is at risk. When we're talking about those 24,000 full-time job years, we're talking actually only about the direct economic impacts of these projects. We're talking about the employment that is directly related to the projects themselves. This is not making any mention of the indirect economic impact or the induced economic impacts. With those indirect economic impacts, we need to be thinking also about those jobs that are coming from the services and supplies that are being accessed by the companies implementing the projects themselves.

I think it's important, when we think about these things, that we're considering that with these projects, the benefits are accruing to our rural municipalities and to our rural constituencies. We're talking about these projects happening in places like Vulcan, where hotels, restaurants, grocery stores are all receiving benefits from the hundreds of people that are landing in these places to conduct this work. Mr. Speaker, as these indirect impacts fall on these communities – hiring people in grocery stores, hiring people in hotels, hiring people in restaurants – those people, in turn, will be spending their wages and income also in those communities and creating further ripple effects within those rural economies. I don't think we should be discounting what this means for these rural communities. We're talking about providing these good-paying jobs to rural Albertans, and it surprises me that this government which is open for business, this government that wants to create jobs for Albertans, is implementing a ban on renewables that is doing the exact opposite. It's doing the exact opposite of creating

these jobs, in fact creating uncertainty for people who are in this area.

Mr. Speaker, we have now, as has been acknowledged, a long track record of Alberta leading the country in renewable installations. This has led to people pursuing a career in this area. They pursued educational pursuits specifically targeting jobs in renewables. Now we've created uncertainty for people who have invested years of their life, thousands of dollars in tuition to be able to do this work, and now they're being left holding the bag, not sure whether or not their job is going to come back in six months or in a year. That isn't fair to the people who are pursuing these jobs. It's not fair to the youth in rural communities who are looking to fulfill these jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I think we also need to talk about these rural communities, the property taxes that rural municipalities were hoping to achieve from these projects. We've seen from some studies that upwards of \$263 million of property tax is on the table for these projects; \$263 million goes a long way for building the necessary infrastructure for these communities, for building and maintaining roads, for building and maintaining recreational facilities. We need to think about the negative impact that we're having on these rural communities through this ban on renewables. I think that if we are going to consider the economic impacts on rural communities, the jobs that are being created in rural communities, it makes sense that we would want to not put all of this up in the air and that we should vote in support of this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion Other than Government Motion 501. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright has the call.

5:40

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to an issue that is critical to the future of our great province. Earlier this year our government instituted a pause on renewable energy development, in effect until February 29, 2024. In response, over the past weeks and days we've heard a great deal of misinformation being shared by the NDP and their allies, including a number of members opposite today. Of course, this has culminated in the motion that we see before us today, nongovernment Motion 501. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this ill-advised and counterproductive motion and to share my reasons for opposing it. And despite what I know about the members opposite, I can only hope that in doing so, I may convince at least a few of them to do the right thing and vote against this motion.

The pause on renewables development was instituted on August 3 by the government of Alberta in response to a large and growing number of concerns that we heard from municipalities, landowners, and, of course, everyday Albertans. The primary concern expressed by these Albertans and addressed by our government is that our regulatory framework and surrounding processes no longer adequately governed renewable projects. Development in the renewable energy space has increased to a rapid pace due to the pro-investment policies of our government, and our regulatory framework is no longer able to keep up. In my own experience, I have had a number of my constituents in Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright reach out to me asking for us to take action on this issue. And while the opposition continues to insist that this pause is aimed at ending renewable development, just the opposite is true. By pausing approvals while the Alberta Utilities Commission performs their inquiry, we will be setting Alberta's renewable sector up for long-term, sustained success and growth, with a clear and comprehensive

regulatory framework that will allow stability and predictability while also protecting the interests of everyday Albertans.

The motion in front of us today has stated the purpose: "to prevent disruptions to investment as occurred when the government imposed a moratorium on authorizations for renewable energy projects in August 2023." So let me ask: what disruptions are the members opposite referring to?

The fact of the matter is this, Mr. Speaker. The number of renewable projects that have applied for connection through the Alberta Electric System Operator, after the pause in question began, has actually increased significantly. In fact, since the pause was put into place, 74 different wind and solar projects have applied for connection through AESO. This is enough to account for almost 8,800 megawatts of power. Given that Alberta's entire grid at present is just shy of 20,000 megawatts, I think even the members opposite can understand how substantial this amount of application is. Clearly, the companies that are actually investing in renewable energy and making a real difference don't share the ill-informed opinions of the opposition, who continue to claim that the pause is bad for renewable energy.

I would also like to remind the members opposite that no projects have been cancelled as a result of the renewable pause. All previously approved projects will continue to go ahead. Additionally, the AUC will even continue to process projects in the queue and new applications while this pause is in effect, but approvals will only resume after February 29, 2024.

However, Mr. Speaker, there has also been much debate today and in recent weeks regarding the role of renewables in our electrical grid. Some of the members opposite would, no doubt, like to see an entire grid moving to wind and solar. In fact, the Trudeau-NDP alliance is hoping to force such a future on Albertans by requiring a net-zero grid by 2035. Let me tell you that not only would that be a colossal mistake, but quite frankly it would be next to impossible. Wind and solar meanwhile are incredibly dependent on weather conditions, which, particularly here in Alberta, can be frustratingly unreliable. Perhaps the members across the aisle could enlighten us as to how they propose generating solar power on a typical Alberta winter day and how they would have us rely on wind power on the days where there is no wind.

These shortcomings are why the government of Alberta has built a grid reliant on natural gas that uses whatever renewable power it can generate on any given day but isn't dependent on it. And notwithstanding the incredible unreliability of an electrical grid solely powered by wind and solar, the cost of building such a system and connecting each wind and solar farm to the grid would be astronomical, costs that would burden every Albertan while also decimating the reliability of electricity.

Mr. Speaker, the Trudeau-NDP alliance can keep trying to force unrealistic and unreliable changes on our electrical system, and the members opposite can keep spreading fear and dividing Albertans, but on this side of the aisle the government of Alberta will continue to take measured and practical steps to protect the electrical grid. We are committed to ensuring that renewable development happens in a productive, predictable, and positive way. With this pause on renewables we will make sure the companies have a stable and comprehensive regulatory framework to work within while protecting the rights and interests of all Albertans. I know my constituents want me to vote in opposition to this motion, and I urge my fellow colleagues, on all sides of the Assembly, to do the same. Listen to your constituents, and vote against nongovernment Motion 501. Vote no.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen. At some personal risk I might just quickly note that I see the hon. members of the Mountain View county council have arrived in the Speaker's gallery. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Hon. member, I provided you a small piece of advice that wasn't quite correct. You actually have approximately nine minutes prior to the moving for closure.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of this motion. This is also my first time speaking in the House for a motion in debate. When the renewable moratorium was put in place, I had a number of Indigenous business owners that approached me in concern about what this will look like going forward. This was concerning, to say the least. My assurance to them was that we would ensure that this government was held accountable to not let it go beyond the Premier's suggestions, that it would only be a seven-month pause.

At this rate we have to take her word that the UCP government will only leave this moratorium for seven months and no longer. Sadly, we just don't know how good the Premier's words are, when she or her adviser referred to renewable energy such as solar and wind technology as experiments. The Premier has clearly shown that she is only interested in doubling down on only one source of energy. Not surprising because she has a clear history of lobbying for oil and gas, which we must all be reminded of, and it is quite clear that the lobbying has not stopped with her new role as Premier of Alberta.

What this motion intends to do, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure those industries that have flourished since the NDP government implemented in 2015 a target of 30 per cent renewable generation by 2030 following the phase-out of coal power and the subsequent uptake of renewable energy since. Before this moratorium Alberta was leading the country in renewable energy, and we were on our way to eliminating combustion of coal for power next year. Now the government's own sources have indicated that 13 projects have been affected by this moratorium. Meanwhile external stakeholders like the Pembina Institute have identified that up to 118 projects were put at risk.

Many Indigenous communities also undertook developments in renewable energy projects in this province. Some, like my great First Nation, Alexander, had their project approved well before this moratorium was put in place. Similarly, the Métis Crossing solar farm, thankfully, also made the cut. But the following Indigenous projects have sadly been affected by this moratorium: Chiniki solar by the Chiniki First Nation; Archer Piikani solar by the Piikani Nation; Ermineskin Cree Nation solar by the nation of the same name; PBC Paul Band solar by the Paul First Nation.

Mr. Speaker, this is \$295 million of investment that is being wasted away, money that was acquired by First Nations through partnerships and by playing by the old boys' club rules. Not only is \$295 million in investment lost because of this government's short-sighted ideological games, but so are 245 jobs that could have gone to hard-working First Nations people, who deserve a good-paying job in an industry that does not ravage our land or poison our people. I ask the members across seriously to consider the benefits this motion would provide to Indigenous nations, who deserve to also benefit from the wealth of this great province in energy production that does not ravage our lands, waters, or air.

5:50

For Indigenous nations, we recognize our responsibility to this land. We honour it every day. This is in line with our legal principles, which include our treaties with the land and those that live on it,

including the winged ones, the four-legged, and those that swim. Unfortunately, this government created this misguided moratorium, which has caused losses for Indigenous nations, but all of these ministers are so quick to jump in for a photo op or a feel-good story or even thank themselves for giving our struggling nations money, which is a moral imperative, might I add, and not just an opportunity for the minister to pat himself on the back.

It is for these reasons that I stand today in support of this motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are approximately five minutes remaining if anyone else would like to provide additional questions or comments.

You're going to have the opportunity to close debate. I'd just like to give the opportunity, perhaps to the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, who has risen. There are approximately four minutes remaining.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to address a matter of utmost significance to our province's future and stability of Alberta's electricity grid. As we debate on Motion 501, presented by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, it's crucial that we recall some historic decisions that have shaped our present energy landscape. Today's discussion is not merely about a pause; it's about a series of decisions and their cumulative impact on our province.

A hasty exit from coal. In 2015 the NDP accelerated Alberta's exit from coal. This pivotal decision was made without due diligence, consultation, or a thorough assessment of its ramifications on our energy grid. Their decision led to a dramatic spike in energy costs. Our grid, which was not ready to meet the new demands, now faces the repercussions of this hasty transition. Our lack of baseload power leaves us not only vulnerable to future price surges but also jeopardizes the reliability of our energy supply.

Unforeseen carbon tax. The NDP's climate action plan, without any pre-election commitment, burdened our province with a carbon tax. This move paved the way for federal imposition of a carbon tax championed by Justin Trudeau. As this tax spirals toward \$170 per tonne, Alberta consumers face a skyrocketing electricity crisis, causing significant distress to household budgets and our economy at large.

Breaking of power purchasing agreements. The NDP's climate action plan also led to the cancellation of long-standing power purchasing agreements. This rash decision has left Albertan ratepayers grappling with almost \$2 billion in liabilities. Their abrupt changes to emission taxation resulted in a massive PPA termination. Instead of fostering a collaborative business environment, the NDP chose confrontation, employing government funds to litigate against Alberta's private companies. Such actions undoubtedly shattered investors' confidence. Even Calgary's mayor at the time, Nenshi, an NDP endorser, revealed that the government had erred grievously regarding the PPAs.

Misleading Albertans. Using taxpayer money, the NDP launched an advertising campaign which many perceived as a means to misinform Albertans about their actions, particularly concerning the breach of clause 4.3(j) of PPA contracts. Public funds should serve the public good, not be used to deflect criticism or distort facts.

Defamation lawsuits. Further complicating matters, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora faced a defamation lawsuit, which was funded using taxpayer dollars, over the spread of misinformation on PPAs. Such episodes not only erode trust in our institution but also misallocate precious, publicly funded resources.

Failure to address the core issues. Instead of rectifying structural problems behind the rising energy prices, the NDP exacerbate them. Their approach was like placing a Band-Aid over a huge gaping wound; it concealed the problem without providing any real remedy.

A flawed vision for Alberta's grid. The NDP's vision for Alberta's grid appears to be heavily reliant on intermittent wind and solar energy sources supplemented by . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of Motion Other than Government Motion 501 to close debate, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the members opposite learned a few new things today like the impact on rural communities and the local economy in small towns and rural communities. I hope they learned about the impact on Indigenous businesses and the lost opportunity to advance economic reconciliation in this province. I hope they learned about actual solutions from my colleague like storage and provincial interties.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to close debate on my motion calling for the Assembly to affirm its support for preventing disruptions and maintaining Alberta as an attractive jurisdiction to do business. I would like to emphasize again that governments can and should look for continuous improvements to our entire regulatory regime and even change regulations as appropriate but that before abrupt changes are made, they have at least applied best practices in consultations with experts, industry, and public service and that if they do so, they review regulations without shutting out billions of dollars of investment without warning.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is at a crossroads in its history. We have the opportunity of a lifetime to diversify our economy while advancing Alberta's energy industry, or we can let others decide our future for us. The choice is obvious. We cannot have our government scaring away low-carbon jobs that want to come to Alberta. As I mentioned, I spent 15 years in the energy sector, in renewables and oil sands and oil and gas, in Canada and around the world. Throughout my career I've never seen this big-government intervention in any industry and without consultation or warning.

Mr. Speaker, we must choose to continue being leaders in energy, creating long-term policies that signal to Albertans and investors that it is ready and planning for the future economy. Alberta needs to be a part of this global energy transition or risk being left behind. We should not face the reality before us today, where business leaders are saying, quote: we do have growth plans in Alberta, but I cannot justify them right now, and we will spend our time and effort elsewhere. Energy incumbents are also turning their attention away from Alberta to Saskatchewan and the United States.

We have this motion today to ensure that Alberta is open for business while the government improves regulations. It is not too late for the

government to do the right thing and walk back this moratorium and consider this as a learning and a growth opportunity. Alberta's prosperity and economic future are too important to risk.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:58 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Loyola
Arcand-Paul	Ganley	Metz
Batten	Goehring	Pancholi
Boparai	Gray	Phillips
Brar	Haji	Renaud
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hayter	Sabir
Ceci	Hoffman	Schmidt
Chapman	Hoyle	Shepherd
Dach	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Irwin	Sweet
Eggen	Kasawski	Tejada
Ellingson	Kayande	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

Amery	Jean	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz
Bouchard	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Sinclair
de Jonge	Lovely	Singh
Dreeshen	Lunty	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fir	Nally	Wiebe
Getson	Neudorf	Williams
Glubish	Nicolaides	Wilson
Guthrie	Nixon	Wright, J.
Horner	Petrovic	Yao
Hunter	Rowswell	Yaseen

Totals: For – 36 Against – 45

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:17 p.m.]

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