



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 23, 2023

Day 12

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
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)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeschen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
Government Whip
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP),
Official Opposition Assistant Whip
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip

LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UC)
Notley, Hon. Rachel, ECA, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North West (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),
Premier
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

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

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

Executive Council

Danielle Smith	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Mike Ellis	Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Mickey Amery	Minister of Justice
Devin Dreesen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Pete Guthrie	Minister of Infrastructure
Nate Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Brian Jean	Minister of Energy and Minerals
Matt Jones	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Health
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry and Parks
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Advanced Education
Joseph Schow	Minister of Tourism and Sport
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Searle Turton	Minister of Children and Family Services
Dan Williams	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	Parliamentary Secretary for Settlement Services and Ukrainian Evacuees
Andrew Boitchenko	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Grant Hunter	Parliamentary Secretary for Agrifood Development
Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Boitchenko
Bouchard
Brar
Hunter
Kasawski
Kayande
Wiebe

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loyola
Boparai
Cyr
de Jonge
Elmeligi
Hoyle
Stephan
Wright, J.
Yao

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms. Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms. Goehring
Batten
Boitchenko
Long
Lunty
Metz
Petrovic
Singh
Tejada

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken
Chapman
Dyck
Eremenko
Hunter
Long
Renaud
Shepherd
Sinclair

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson
Eggen
Gray
Long
Phillips
Rowswell
Sabir
Singh
Yao

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms. Pitt
Deputy Chair: Mr. Stephan
Bouchard
Ceci
Deol
Dyck
Hayter
Petrovic
Sigurdson, L.
Wright, J.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Ms. Armstrong-Homeniuk
Arcand-Paul
Ceci
Cyr
Dach
Gray
Johnson
Stephan
Wiebe

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms. Pancholi
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk
de Jonge
Ganley
Haji
Lovely
Lunty
McDougall
Schmidt

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt
Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
Dyck
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 23, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, it being the last sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the King* by Ashley Stevenson. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious King,
Long live our noble King,
God save the King!
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the King!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a special guest and a friend of the province to introduce today. Seated in the Speaker's gallery is the consul general of Israel. She's visiting our beautiful province from Ontario, and I've had the pleasure of renewing our friendship this morning. We had the opportunity to discuss a number of issues facing the Jewish community here and abroad. I was dismayed to hear of the rise of anti-Semitism and violence against our Jewish friends. That this continues to be a major problem both here and abroad is absolutely unacceptable, whether it's happening in some faraway place or here on the steps of the Legislature. Albertans, regardless of their colour, creed deserve to live in peace and safety. The consul general is joined in the Speaker's gallery by the director of government relations and the director of economic affairs of the consul of Israel. Please welcome them to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, we are also joined in the galleries by a number of new staff of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. They are participating in a procedural orientation today. We all know that our work here inside the Assembly cannot be done without those who serve the Assembly. There are a number of them joining us today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park has a school to introduce.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the Assembly I am happy to introduce the students and staff from Pine Street elementary in Sherwood Park. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to the Assembly today Lita and Mark Bablitz. They are constituents of mine. Lita is actually an early childhood educator and a passionate member of our community. She's also living proof of the UCP's mismanagement of lab services in this province. I'm very proud to have them here in the Assembly. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a friend, Jaspreet Saggu, and his family: his wife, his two children, and his in-laws, who are visiting from India today. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you Barbara Bell, the director of FCSS in my hometown, Claresholm. Barbara oversees programs that strengthen family bonds and enhance community well-being. I ask that my friend Barb please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you Jonathan Butterworth, a long-time friend, and his daughter Myia. It's Myia's very first visit here to the Alberta Legislature. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

Member Hoyle: On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Ross family, mom Melanie and the rest of the family: Michael, Grayson, Nolan, Gavin. Please rise and receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you Sophie Holzman. I had the honour to meet with her recently to hear her story and experience in the pressure in our health care system and the loss of her husband, Stan. She's accompanied today by Mary Petovello and Alex Glowach. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you two of my constituents visiting the Legislature today, Dave and Joan Kimmel. Will you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you two members of my constituency of Edmonton-Riverview: Alex Sokolovski, who is a grade 6 student at McKernan school who has political aspirations, and his father, Valeri Sokolovski. He's a professor at the University of Alberta. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you two of my Calgary-Acadia constituents, one of which is one of my fantastic constituency assistants. Rogan, please stand with your mother, Allison, who's also a fellow registered nurse. Welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you Ghalia Aamer, an entrepreneur and innovator who convoked this week from the University of Alberta and is a first-year student at Columbia University Law School. She is the first Canadian recipient of the Tony Patiño fellowship. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you the Mary Hanley Catholic school grade 6 students, teachers, and staff in the beautiful riding of Edmonton-Meadows. I would request everyone to rise and receive the traditional and warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

Crisis in Gaza

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, on October 7 the world watched in horror as over 1,200 Jews were murdered by Hamas terrorists. As a result of this attack, we are in the midst of a terrible war between Israel and Hamas. Tragically, many Palestinian civilians have also been killed. Our hearts mourn the loss of so many innocent Israelis and Palestinians caught in the middle of this terrible war. We unequivocally condemn Hamas for the death and destruction they have unleashed on Palestinians and Israelis alike. We all pray that peace will return as quickly as possible to that troubled region of our world.

As Albertans we must stand on guard against hate of all kinds from entering our borders. Sadly, during these past weeks we've seen a distinct rise of anti-Semitism in Canada, including in Alberta. Although there can certainly be sincerely held differing views on what is the best course of action to reach long-lasting peace in the region, those debates and conversations should never devolve into hateful placards or hateful speech. Anti-Semitism is never justifiable, no more than Islamophobia or any other form of racism is ever justifiable. No matter our race, religion, or ethnicity we must stand against racism together.

To Alberta's Jewish community: we love you. You are safe here. You are inextricably woven into our culture and our people. Please know that for every voice you hear shouting hatred on a TV screen, there are tens of thousands of Albertans that stand behind you against that same hate. I ask every single Albertan: let us all take the time to reach out to members of the communities most affected by this war, Jewish and Palestinian alike, and be a voice of calm and kindness, of quiet dialogue and respectful understanding, of love and peace. Let us never allow the ugliness and division we see thousands of miles away to enter our communities here. It is not who we are. We are all Albertans. We welcome every culture and community as one of us, and when any of our communities are hurting, anxious, or unsure, we rally around them so they know that this is their home and that they will always be safe, valued, and welcomed here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to respond on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of Albertans hurting and grieving incredible loss. On October 7 more than 1,200 Israeli civilians were killed. Since then more than 14,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza. As members of this House may know, the Official Opposition has called for the immediate release of all hostages, for a ceasefire, and for the provision of adequate levels of humanitarian aid.

Last week members of the Official Opposition caucus met with leaders of the Calgary Jewish community as well as leaders of Palestine and Muslim communities. We're planning further discussions in Edmonton as well. In these meetings we heard that many of our fellow Albertans are in pain. They have lost loved ones in Gaza and Israel. They worry about the fate of civilians in the region, and they are experiencing a rise in hate the likes of which they have never experienced before. The escalation of anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, and Islamophobia is causing our community members to feel unsafe, to question whether or not they should wear their religious or cultural symbols, to be scared when entering places of worship, whether a mosque or a synagogue. This is unacceptable.

The Alberta NDP will always stand against hate, racism, and discrimination in all forms. But words are not enough. We're committed to further advocacy in our role as the Official Opposition. We believe in creating an environment where everyone is welcome and feels a sense of belonging, and we will continue to listen and to offer support as best we can to all people in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a statement to make.

Government Policies

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. While Albertans struggle to pay their rent, buy food, and generally make it to the next paycheque as the gravy train passes the sky palace to the Premier's office, an AISH recipient can't pay their power bill after their benefits were frozen for four years, a woman bundling her children up to flee domestic violence can't sleep the night in a fancy corporate suite, and a retiree can't buy food with the hope that this government won't lose a billion pension dollars betting on another presidential election.

Most Albertans think pulling out of CPP is a bad idea. Clearly, the UCP are not listening to most Albertans. The Premier might have even agreed that pulling out of CPP was a bad idea when she pulled it out of her own election platform. Our inbox is filled with stories of people just trying to get by after four years of a UCP government. The pain of living below the poverty line can't be solved with millions in misleading pension advertisements. The Premier likes to talk about energy, just not the hundred per cent increase to Alberta's electricity bills. After four years the UCP is unwilling to govern as they'd rather stomp their feet and point fingers.

A new report says that food bank use has reached all-time highs. Her minister says he's proud to fund food banks with roughly the same amount they're spending on pension ads. A recent Vital Signs report by the Edmonton Community Foundation says income supports are not good enough. That's an understatement. Buying a

healthy food basket would take about 50 per cent of what a person receives. But at least it's been a while since a member of the UCP caucus has accused people receiving supports of laying around and buying Cheetos.

Rural municipalities say community supports are chronically underfunded. We need to listen to them. There are entire cities where Albertans can't find a family doctor. Communities are faced with closed ERs because of staff shortages.

Albertans deserve better: a government focused on addressing the issues they are facing, not one focused on making life better for themselves and their friends. We deserve better. All of us deserve better than this.

Federal Fall Economic Statement

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, the federal government released its fall economic update this week. As Alberta shoulders a very high share of the national debt burden, I was hopeful that the statement would address the challenges we are facing as a nation, but I was left disappointed by the federal government again. Last year's statement promised a \$4.5 billion surplus by '27-28; instead, their forecast now is a deficit of \$24 billion. Not only this, but it is followed by another \$18 billion in deficit in '28-29, and there is still no path to balance. This is just further proof that budgets do not in fact balance themselves.

The federal economic statement offers very little as well for those struggling with high costs and affordability. It is particularly disappointing to see that the Liberal-NDP alliance has chosen not to extend its targeted carbon tax relief to include all forms of home heating here in Canada but have chosen to favour Liberal-voting ridings, the Liberal minister saying that if Canadians wanted help, they should have voted Liberal. Not only does this showcase the extreme bias, but they truly are not working for all Canadians. They have picked sides and are not representing Canadians right across our country. If they truly cared about struggling Canadians, they would cancel the carbon tax immediately or, at the very least, treat every Canadian equally.

The federal government's proven inability to control spending through their budget forecast and extreme favouritism are both threatening the prosperity of our country for future generations and the camaraderie we hold across provinces. Our government knows that Alberta is the economic engine of Canada and is the key to the success of Canada. I want to assure Albertans that we will continue to advocate for policies and actions that support the livelihoods of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Water Supply in Southern Alberta

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In southern Alberta the snowy peaks and glaciers of the eastern slopes and Rocky Mountains slowly release water over the spring and summer, feeding millions of people and animals across Alberta. The critical provision of clean and abundant water here was first formally recognized in the eastern slopes policy in 1977. Watershed management remains the highest priority, as defined in this government policy, with recreation and tourism benefits also being extremely important.

As glaciers and the winter snowpack shrink, climate change impacts are evident every day along the eastern slopes. Raging rivers are reduced to a trickle, and reservoirs are desperately low by September. Many agriculturalists struggle to water their livestock

and crops. There are no other sources of water for southern Alberta. How we manage the eastern slopes matters. Our government seems to have forgotten that. Rather than conserving water, they are allowing applications for coal mining exploration. This will not only pollute this precious water but use much of it, making less available for cows, fish, and people.

Rather than protecting the intact forests and the headwaters, the government supports logging these sensitive ecosystems. Logging practices on the eastern slopes could be designed to protect our communities from wildfire, drought, and flood, but it isn't planned that way. Rather than implementing sustainable, multi-use recreation plans for Albertans, the government fails to adequately manage motorized recreation that continues to wreak havoc on wetlands and wildlife habitat. Collaborative planning with diverse user groups could address these impacts, but the government refuses to implement the recommendations stemming from those groups.

We could pass the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. We could work with communities, First Nations, and forestry companies to enable sustainable forestry management practices, and we could create better trail-management plans. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, climate change doesn't care if we're ready; it's already here. And if we don't act now, we will foreclose on the options to ensure the water on the eastern slopes continues to flow.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last night the government held its last screened telephone town hall to sell their risky UCP pension. Their own panel chair, however, said it was, quote, critical to meet with Albertans in-person before finalizing any decision, and as a result he committed to hosting them in December of this year. But with only a week left to go, no in-person consultations have been announced for December, so to the Premier: will they be, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last of the online telephone town halls occurred. We've had an extraordinary number of people participate in them. I believe we're up to about 75,000, nearly 100,000 people who participated online. We're going to ask the chair of that committee, Jim Dinning, to give us his impressions of where we find ourselves. We know that we need to get more information. Two of the things that we've heard is that people want to know a little bit more about portability, and they want to wait for the Chief Actuary to give us a final number, so we'll see what his recommendations are.

Ms Notley: That sounds like a hedge to me and yet another broken promise. And when paired with the government spending 7 and a half million dollars on ads promoting fake facts and distributing a survey that failed to include the simple question on whether to stay in the CPP, it appears that every decision on this matter so far has lacked the necessary integrity. So to the Premier: how can Albertans possibly trust her with their most important lifelong investment with a record like that?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite during the campaign was untruthful with Albertans about what was happening with the pension discussion. They were the ones who were scaring seniors, saying that their pension would be gone, and that was not right. What we have had to do is overcome the misinformation, get people the appropriate information, have the discussion about what the benefits of an Alberta pension would be in terms of increased benefits, reduced premiums, give them the guarantee that it would be put to a referendum should they so choose and that all the assets would be put into the fund.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:52.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government was untruthful during the election, when they didn't talk about this issue at all.

Now, meanwhile the Alberta NDP has already started the government's job, and our first in-person town hall had nearly 500 people attend. On top of that, our pension survey did ask the question, and 37,000 unique responses came back. In both cases Albertans have overwhelmingly told us that they want to keep the CPP and they want you to take your hands off their pension. To the Premier: why won't you do that?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, during the campaign I said exactly the same thing that I said now, that we would release the report and we would see if Albertans want to go to a referendum. I did exactly what I said we were going to do. The report has now been released. People now know that we would be able to increase benefits, reduce premiums, and that we would have a substantial amount of money that would be transferred to us. But we want to hear more from Albertans about whether they want to go to a referendum. I'm looking forward to seeing what Jim Dinning comes back with in his recommendations, and we'll go from there. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader and the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has a question.

Ms Gray: Yesterday marked the end of the UCP's telephone town halls on gambling with Albertans' pensions, and clearly this government thinks that's enough. Five sessions of prescreened callers is all the people of Alberta get from this government. On this side of the House we've announced a number of in-person town halls. We will be going out and talking directly with Albertans about their retirement. So the last chance to the Premier: what are the dates and times for your in-person town halls, and where can people register? Why will you not face Albertans on this issue?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond. So far the five telephone town halls have been discussed; 76,825 Albertans have attended the pension plan telephone town halls. Almost 69,000 have listened by telephone. Almost 10,000 have listened online. In total there have been ... [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: In total there have been 3,745 individual comments, including questions, suggestions, and feedback, both online and on telephone. Almost 150 Albertans have had a chance to discuss their opinions live or hear their comments live during the town hall.

Ms Gray: The Minister of Finance really likes numbers. Here's a number, Mr. Speaker. On last night's telephone town hall 25 people actually got to have their say. Twenty-five. It's unacceptable. One of the UCP panelists has claimed that no Albertan had been opposed to leaving the CPP during the fair deal process, when, truthfully, the majority of the respondents opposed. It's in the Fair Deal Panel report. Another panelist told callers that the \$334 billion that this government is claiming will come to Alberta is likely not the actual number. Let's not forget that Jim Dinning told Albertans that he has no complaints with the CPP. Even their hand-picked panelists know this is a bad idea. When will they back away from this nonsense and leave CPP alone?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, like the Premier just said, what we've done is we released the report that was commissioned as that was a recommendation of the Fair Deal Panel. Who did we reach out to through the RFP? We got back Morneau Shepell, now LifeWorks, one of the most reputable firms across the country dealing with actuarial and pension analysis, to give us a report. It's their number that claims the \$334 billion. I've been clear with Albertans that if that number or any other information changes, so will the engagement with Albertans. I look forward to meeting with Mr. Dinning very soon and hearing what the initial feedback is.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, even with a survey that didn't ask the question, "Do you want to leave the CPP?" Albertans have been clear about their thoughts. Doug from Fort McMurray told the panel, and I quote: I wholly disagree with this. Roger from Red Deer wanted to know how Albertans could even have a conversation, when the government won't provide accurate numbers. These are the messages from Albertans. People are being ignored by this Premier. When will they start listening? When will they commit to consulting in person? Will they abandon this foolish Alberta pension plan and stop causing stress to Alberta seniors?

Mr. Horner: There's only one side of this House that's causing stress for Alberta seniors, and it's clear that it's on that side.

Mr. Speaker, I go back to what we're doing. We're engaging with Albertans on a conversation. We're getting a number from the Chief Actuary. The feds have made it clear that this is our right to consider as a province, as it is any province that joined the CPP in 1966. The reason this came from the Fair Deal Panel as a top recommendation is that it holds promise for the province, for every Alberta family, every Alberta business, the Alberta economy overall. It warrants fair consideration.

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

Water Quality Monitoring in the Oil Sands

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, the recent tailing ponds spill at Kearl oil sands project is incredibly concerning. This is the third major spill this year, yet what is more concerning is the energy minister's dismissal, stating that it was merely muddy waters. End quote. Previous spills have wreaked havoc on the Muskeg River. Indigenous communities have been experiencing serious health concerns due to contamination. To the Premier: why is this minister downplaying Albertan and Indigenous people's concerns downstream from this oil spill? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member for the question. I do want to point out that we have hundreds of water monitoring stations across the oil sands. We are aware of this incident, and the AER is working with the operator to address the culvert situation and ensure water safety. I do want to be clear. I know the members opposite aren't listening, but this was not a leak from a tailings pond, and the water that was released is not processed water from tailings. It is drainage from the surrounding landscape. Incidents like this are exactly why there's monitoring in place and why it's the AER's job to protect public safety and the environment.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: The energy minister visited the project after the most recent spill. He congratulated them on social media for their top-notch environmental standards. Then he permitted the third accidental release. The muddy water, quote, the minister is referring to contaminates the local ecosystems and biodiversity, and I highly doubt . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: I highly doubt that the minister would be saying such callous things if he were relying on the river for his drinking water and food source. How is the minister going to prevent a fourth leak?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I do want to point out that the members of the opposition creating fear and misinformation about drinking water is absolutely shameful. We continue to make sure that drinking water is safe for communities downstream. For months rigorous water testing has been conducted by the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and reviewed by Alberta officials. The review shows that the drinking water in the area remains safe. The quality of the drinking water in this area is as good or better than anywhere in the province, and we will absolutely continue to monitor that for the impacted community.

2:00

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: The repeated incidents involving the oil sands are alarming considering it's a hundred parts per million over the total suspended solids allowable, which affects the drinking water for the humans, the wildlife, and the Indigenous community. Albertans should be able to trust the minister to ensure that the AER is doing its job. By my count, both are failing. How can Albertans trust the government or believe that the minister is doing either? They have failed Albertans here. Is the minister or the AER to blame for this?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to be clear. The health, safety, and well-being of Albertans is our top priority, and as a government we have taken action to support responsible development and ensure water is safe for communities downstream through rigorous testing and monitoring. I can absolutely say that water testing conducted by the department since the spring shows that the drinking water in the area remains safe. We will absolutely continue to work with municipalities, with Indigenous communities, and with oil sands companies to address this issue. The Premier takes it as a top priority, and it is the number one priority in my mandate letter as well.

Electric Power Prices

Ms Ganley: Under the UCP government power prices have quadrupled and hit record highs; 24 per cent of households in

Alberta report that they've had to reduce or forgo essentials for at least one month to pay their energy bills. All this government has done so far is offer Band-Aid solutions and even more debt with their deferral scheme. Easy question to the minister: what is this government going to do to protect Albertans being forced to choose between keeping their lights on and food on the table? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It's great to see the power prices coming down. They're almost at half of what they were in August. This is because we're bringing on dispatchable baseload power provided by natural gas generators. We're going to have another 1,700 to 2,000 megawatts on by the end of this year and a further 2,000 brought on next year. We are continuing to fix the prices. We're continuing to fix the market. We're doing the work that the NDP failed to do when they brought in renewable energy.

Ms Ganley: The latest report from the Market Surveillance Administrator shows the spike in prices is due to a few companies controlling the market and charging massive markups for power. They even specifically reference TransAlta and Heartland for this behaviour. Now these two companies are about to merge, and they will control almost half of the dispatchable power in this province. Has the government even done any analysis on the impacts of this merger on people's power bills, and what is the minister going to do about it? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the member for that question. It is a vitally important question. We are watching it very closely. Of course, the government doesn't decide on business mergers – that is up to the regulators – but we are following it incredibly closely to make sure that we have all the market corrections in place so that this merger does not impact the overall market. The total is not near 50 per cent. It is, in fact, 29.4 per cent, and with all the power generation being brought on next year, it is expected to drop below 20 per cent of the market. We are watching it closely.

Ms Ganley: The Market Surveillance Administrator also concludes that solar generation is driving down prices while natural gas being intentionally taken offline is driving up prices, but still this government devotes their energy to trying to blame the renewables industry. Economic withholding, the intentional taking offline of power, is government policy, and it is what's driving up prices, and it's about to get worse. Mr. Speaker, people can't afford it. What is this government going to do about it?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great that we have also directed the Alberta Electric System Operator and the Market Surveillance Administrator to look into this issue, to provide feedback so that we can correct the market and make sure this activity doesn't happen again. Again, we are doing the work that the NDP failed to do by correcting the market, by correcting the system so that we can have affordable, dependable, and reliable power not just during the daytime, not just when it's windy but all the time, especially during winter. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Health System Reform

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, recently I spoke with Sophie Holzman at her home in St. Albert. In September she lost her husband, Stan, due to a postsurgical infection in his hip. He waited over six hours in a crowded ER, then four days for surgery to drain his infection, after being literally forgotten and then having it repeatedly delayed. Sophie says that if she'd known the true state of chaos in health care, she would have kept Stan at home, looked for care outside our province. She asked me to ask the Premier why this government is refusing to be honest with Albertans about the crisis in our health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My heart goes out to that family, and unfortunately there are too many families that are sharing similar stories. That's why we need to do something different. Obviously, what's been happening, what's been allowed to happen in our health care system is not working. That's why we are refocusing the health care system, going back to look at actually prioritizing patient needs, making sure that we are improving the system, strengthening the system, and, in fact, addressing these issues that are brought forward.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that Sophie doesn't blame the health care workers, who, she says, were under pressure and run off their feet, and given that she told me that they need more support, that the system needs to be fixed, and given that she said, "I blame the government for not improving the health care system" and suggested this government could be kind, respect health care workers so they want to stay instead of wanting to leave, to the Premier. Sophie is here today. What do you have to say to her?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to Sophie I say: we're working on it. In fact, we have more doctors in the province than we did when the members opposite were in power. In 2017 there were 4,838 doctors. Right now, in 2023, we have 5,470 doctors. We've added 3,900 nurses in the last year. We've added 255 doctors in the last four months alone, of which 109 are family physicians. But we know more needs to get done, and we also have to improve the quality of the health care. We are on that, and that's what we're working towards.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that Sophie describes this government's plan to reorganize our health care system as, quote, shuffling deck chairs on the *Titanic* and given that she's told me she's speaking out to support health care workers and warn others about the crisis this government denies and given that this government has lots of time and millions of dollars to focus on propaganda campaigns, contracts for its friends, bigger gifts for themselves, to the Premier: what real, tangible action are you going to take to ensure no other Albertan has to suffer the needless loss of a loved one like Sophie and her family have? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. In fact, yesterday I made an announcement on nurse practitioners as another valuable member of the health care profession that is going to add to the overall numbers in the workforce to reduce strain. The member opposite, the NDP Health critic himself, the Member for

Edmonton-City Centre, said, and I quote: I support the direction they're going in. He applauded the idea and the direction we're going in. Thank you to the member opposite for supporting the work we're doing.

Rocky Mountain House to Nordegg Rail Trail

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are starting to get out and enjoy the trails on Alberta's Crown land more and more each year, with this year being the busiest yet. The Rocky Mountain House to Nordegg rail trail has been 30 years in the making and is a multi-use trail built along the historic Canadian Northern Western Railway. To the Minister of Forestry and Parks: can you provide this House with an update on the status of this project?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. I was pleased to stand with the reeve and council members from Clearwater county and the surrounding area for the ribbon cutting of the beautiful Taunton Trestle and the historic Canadian Northern Western Railway trail. We commend Clearwater county for the concept to transform an abandoned rail line into a remarkable outdoor corridor. We invite Albertans and visitors alike to come and experience this historic trail, that leads to the Taunton Trestle and has a new multi-use trail leading to it.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given the rail trail will help build regional tourism along this historic route and given that there has been 25 per cent growth over the last two summers and given that this will allow Albertans and visitors alike to experience our world-class trail system for generations to come, can the minister kindly share with the House the primary objective of this project as it enters its next phase?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question. I'd be happy to share about the next phase of the project. We will link Sunset Creek to the Chambers Creek provincial recreation area and include a new parking area near the Taunton Trestle. The final phase will connect Chambers Creek provincial recreation area to the Rocky Mountain House area with 20 kilometres of upgraded trail. When complete, the trail will include a variety of amenities. This will complete this incredible, 109-kilometre trail upgrade and will serve as a great example of how we want our public land to be used.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Minister. Given that once this project is complete, the trail will include rest stops, picnic sites, and remote campsites and given that this will provide locals and tourists with opportunities to hike, mountain bike, cross-country ski, and snowshoe and given that this trail-improvement project will attract visitors from all over the province as well as our neighbours across the border in British Columbia, could the Minister of Tourism and Sport please emphasize the significance of projects like this for our province's tourism sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that hon. member for the question. His constituents are very well served by his time in this Chamber.

Alberta has a tremendous story to tell: the landscapes, the rich culture, and the deep history. This trail system will create new, year-round tourism opportunities for visitors from across Alberta, across the country, and across the world to come see. Whether it's mountain biking, snowshoeing, hiking, or any other outdoor recreation, all four seasons, year-round, I tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it's a great opportunity to share Alberta's story with the world, and I can't wait to see it myself.

Medical Laboratory Services

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, today we are joined in the Assembly by my constituent Lita Bablitz. I wish the reason she was here was so I could celebrate her commitment to early childhood education, her sharp wit, and her passion for helping community members in need. But, no, Lita is here today because she is living proof of the consequences of this government's mishandling of lab services. Lita was misdiagnosed by DynaLife with breast cancer, but she didn't find that out until after she had had a partial mastectomy. Lita wants the chance to share her story with the Minister of Health. She's here now. Will the minister agree to meet with her directly after question period?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to meet with her. I'm happy to meet with any Albertan who has a story to share on how we can improve the health care system. Obviously, there have been issues, and we are looking to address those issues. I'm very happy to meet with her.

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that Lita has made multiple attempts through AHS, Alberta Health, DynaLife, FOIP, and the Ombudsman's office to try to get access to her own medical records and is still being denied full access and given that she and I have written multiple times to the Minister of Health and to this current Minister of Health asking them to meet with her and that those letters have all gone unanswered and given that the UCP has already been forced to admit what a disastrous mistake it was to privatize lab services – and that mistake affected real people like Lita – I'll ask again: will the minister meet directly with Lita today after question period? Today, Minister.

Member LaGrange: I already said yes. I'm happy to meet with her. I know that my office is always responding; that is something that I've been very clear on. Every letter that we get, every e-mail, every contact that we have gets responded to. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to meet with this individual and hear her story. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Pancholi: Given that Lita and I will be looking forward to meeting with the Minister of Health right after question period outside in the rotunda and given that receiving an initial cancer diagnosis was understandably devastating for Lita, her husband, and her two boys and given that after the partial mastectomy, then being told she was misdiagnosed, she was also then denied postcancer operative care because she didn't have cancer and given that far too many Albertans know first-hand what a disaster the UCP's decision to privatize lab services has been, from long wait times, delayed diagnosis, and now misdiagnosis, will the Minister of Health apologize to Lita for what she's . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as someone who has had cancer herself – I've had cancer; I've had eye cancer – I know how

devastating it is, and my heart goes out to Lita and her family. I know what she's going through. I will gladly meet with her. It is the very reason that when we saw delays in lab services, we took immediate action. We have since made sure that the delays have been overcome, and I'm happy to report – I got an update today – that wait times have in fact improved right across the province. We're going to continue to improve the system. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Accessibility Initiatives

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. The Premier has been thinking about accessibility lately. She's working hard to make herself more accessible to lobbyists and for gifts. She's worked hard to make government contracts and jobs for friends and insiders. Albertans with disabilities, however, don't get . . .

An Hon. Member: Preamble.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Enough. The hon. member is asking her first question.

Please, go ahead from the top.

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. The Premier has been thinking about accessibility lately. She's working hard to make herself more accessible to lobbyists and for their gifts. She's worked hard to make government contracts and jobs available for friends and insiders. Albertans with disabilities, however, do not get very far with this government. After tabling bills to prepare to gamble away CPP and ensuring gifts to politicians are less transparent, when will this UCP government commit to finally catching up with the rest of Canada in answering the call from disability advocates and create provincial accessibility legislation?

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and I met with Rick Hansen a couple of weeks back to talk about accessibility and some of the important ideas that his organization has as well as to hear the things that have taken place elsewhere across the country. My department continues to take that information and work with disability groups across the province to look for ways that we can improve accessibility all across the province of Alberta.

I'm also happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that under this Premier's leadership we've increased funding to people with development disabilities by a little over \$100 million under this budget, including increasing wages for staff working with this important demographic.

Ms Renaud: Given that the government of Canada brought federal accessibility legislation into force in 2019 – it's 2023 now – and given that advocates like Barrier-Free Alberta have been calling for this game-changing legislation and given that Accessible Canada has done much of the work outlining how governments might legislatively identify, remove, and prevent barriers to important areas like the built environment, programs, services, communication, procurement, employment, and so much more, when will the Premier finally find time to focus on the issues that matter to constituents? Accessible legislation is needed now.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the NDP are struggling to listen. I don't think that's surprising anymore. I just said that the Premier has found significant time to meet with disabled organizations to be able to learn about accessibility issues. Our largest focus right now, when it comes to the people with developmental disability inside the file, is reducing the terrible wait-lists that were created under the NDP government, where they stopped investing in this important issue and caused countless people to suffer, waiting for services. I'm happy to report that we have reduced wait times significantly. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Renaud: Given that accessibility and accommodations for people with disabilities have been mandated in Ontario since the approval of the disabilities act in 2005, with our neighbouring provinces making great progress, and given that the UCP instead chose a route to deindex critical supports and eliminate oversight of things like how long it takes to apply for AISH, when will this government stop being one of the last jurisdictions in Canada and bring forward accessibility legislation? We're not talking about PDD.

Mr. Nixon: I'm also happy to talk about AISH, Mr. Speaker. I think you probably heard that this government indexed AISH. I think the member may not have heard that announcement. We also continue to invest in making sure that we reduce... [interjections]

Member Ceci: Oops. Sorry.

The Speaker: Wonderful apology. Appreciate it.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, you continue to watch the NDP, who are just so angry at Albertans for rejecting them as the government again, every time. I just want you to know that we continue to work tirelessly to reduce the wait times that were created by the NDP government's complete failure. [interjections]

The Speaker: Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Order. Order. Order. The member had her opportunity to ask the question; the minister has his opportunity to answer.

Mr. Nixon: The party of fear and smear and angry is still here, Mr. Speaker. Even if they change their name, they can't change their stripes.

We're going to continue to make sure we stand with people with disabilities all across our province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2023 estimated that Alberta's debt-servicing costs for the 2023-24 fiscal year would exceed \$2.8 billion. This is more than four times the annual operating budget of the Ministry of Justice. Can the Minister of Finance please share with this Assembly his plan to retire the debt as soon as possible so we can stop paying interest to overseas bankers and instead put these billions of dollars towards providing services that Albertans deserve?

2:20

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the very important question. I think it's one of the most important questions

that this House should always be asking. You're not wrong; debt-servicing costs were projected to be \$2.8 billion in Budget '23. At the mid-year update next week, that I'll present, you'll see that number has grown to over \$3.1 billion, an over \$300 million increase since the budget. This is one of the fastest growing line items over the last 15 years in this province, and it takes away the fiscal capacity to do all of these important things that people on both sides...

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

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Speaker, given that going into the 2015-16 fiscal year, there was \$12.98 billion of debt and given that by the 2019-20 fiscal year, the time when the NDP left government, that number had ballooned to over \$62 billion and given our government's commitment to prudent fiscal management, can the same minister please outline some of the steps he has taken to ensure Albertans aren't saddled with the consequences of irresponsible government spending?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To quote the former Finance minister, "They spent like gangsters" during their term in government. We're still feeling the repercussions, but the only way to pay down principal is to budget and actually land surpluses at the end of the year. That is the only way. You deal with the debt-servicing costs within the year, but to pay down principal, like we were able to do the last fiscal year, \$13.3 billion, you avoid these refinancing costs. Right now the province needs to refinance three years' worth of debt, \$26 billion, with the interest rates at double.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Mr. Speaker, given that this government's decision to lower corporate taxes has actually led to increased corporate tax revenues and given that a strong economy is key to providing Albertans with high-quality services without racking up debt, can the same minister please share with the Assembly how this government's approach to the economy brings great benefits to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what we saw in the fall federal economic statement from the federal government is that their corporate income tax is declining, almost \$14 billion from their budget. What we're seeing here is substantially different. Under the NDP's time, at a 12 per cent rate, you'd see something around \$3 billion in corporate income tax revenue. Last year we saw a historic high of \$8.2 billion. This year we're still extremely strong at around \$6.8 billion. That is what happens when you grow the pie, you bring in business, you grow the economy. That's what we're doing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Foreign Qualification and Credential Recognition

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, this government's obsession with renaming and reshuffling organizations isn't solving Alberta's real problems. They passed the Fair Registration Practices Act four years ago, and then they gave it a fresh coat of paint, calling it fairness for newcomers. Now they have a private member's bill doing essentially the same thing. What does the minister have to show for all the rebranding? Can he enlighten this House on when our

internationally trained professionals will finally start contributing to Alberta's economy?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for the question. We are very happy to have this private member's bill to establish a council to ensure that everybody in this province who comes here reaches full potential through proper credential recognition.

Mr. Haji: Given the government's track record of failing to boost fairness, transparency, and accountability in credentialing processes and given that they are calling in skilled workers only to hang up as soon as they answer, will the minister give us a definitive answer on when his government plans to fix their bizarre recruitment strategy and actually commit to helping the skilled newcomers looking to make Alberta their home?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Again, this government has done so much for newcomers in the last four years – and I'm so proud – including right from day one in 2019 through Bill 11, creating a legislation here, the Fair Registration Practices Act, for the newcomers in this province. Through that legislation we have seen an amazing improvement for the newcomers' credential recognition.

Mr. Haji: Given the critical state of our health care system teetering on the brink of collapse – it's a spectacle to witness the government's misled priorities – and given the chaos unfolding in our essential services, it's almost laughable that today there are no clear pathways or transparent processes for internationally trained newcomers. Given the stakes at hand, Minister, it's time for some straight answers. When will internationally trained newcomers be able to get work in their profession of choice? Their profession . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question again. We have established a number of ways to make sure that internationally trained people here in Alberta go through the system so quickly. That's why we created a special pathway for health care professions, for IT professions, and we are also working on the tourism and hospitality industry as well. So we are well set to make sure that everybody gets recognized here for their qualifications.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek, this MLA, the government of Alberta, and indeed probably all Albertans recognize that education is essential to the development and well-being of our society and will continue to be for generations to come. However, many of my constituents have shared with me their concerns about a shortage of teachers and teaching assistants in their schools. Can the Minister of Education please explain to this Assembly: what was the approved funding for the number of teachers and teaching assistants in Calgary schools, and what is our government doing to ensure these schools are meeting employment targets?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. We've recently increased funding to our education system to help ensure that we can hire additional teachers and educational assistants. Specifically, in Budget 2023 we've increased funding to education by over 5 per cent. With respect to Calgary schools in specific about \$2 billion goes to our school divisions in Calgary, to the Calgary board of education, and to Calgary Catholic school division to help them hire the staff that they need, and we'll continue working with them.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. I am pleased that increased resources have been provided to school boards. It is clear that this government is committed to improving educational opportunities for all Albertans. Given that this government has allocated funding for a number of teaching positions that remain vacant, can the same minister share what the government is doing to help increase the number of qualified teachers and assistants to fill these vacant but funded positions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question. I'm very happy to be able to stand and report to the Assembly today that as the new school year gets under way, we've collected some additional information from our four metro school divisions. Our four metro school divisions are reporting over 1,200 new teachers hired into the system, over 450 additional educational assistants hired into the system, and over 94 other certified staff. That's just our four metro school divisions. Of course, across the rest of the province those numbers will be higher, but we're continuing to work with them.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there has been a global trend of individuals choosing to leave the teaching profession and given an increase in classroom complexity, can the same minister please elaborate on some of the factors that increase classroom complexity, the impact on the number of people deciding to leave the teaching profession, and what the government of Alberta is doing to address this?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, we have heard very loud and clear from our school divisions that, of course, our classrooms are becoming increasingly complex. There's a higher proportion of students that require assistance that have English as an additional language, more students that have learning and other cognitive impairments and disabilities. To help assist, Budget '23 included \$126 million in new funding. We created the new classroom complexity grant that goes specifically to hire educational assistants, speech-language pathologists, psychologists, and others to help deal with these issues. [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's municipal governments are struggling after nearly five years of UCP government. Costs have been downloaded, their grant funding cut and delayed, and they've

been asked to do more with less. This impacts the residents they serve with reduced services or higher property taxes or both. As the mayor of Strathcona county told media at the recent RMA conference, funding has not kept up with the growing challenges and changing needs of municipalities. Can the minister explain why his government has failed to support municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. I have to report that our government spends a lot of time talking to municipalities, supporting them constantly. In fact, by the end of this year I will announce the new LGFF funding formula, which is an example of this government saying yes to municipalities. They wanted a funding formula that goes up and down with provincial revenues. This government said yes. I'm looking forward to announcing the way that that's going to be rolled out by the end of this year. We will continue to work with them.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you to the minister. Given that one of the major financial issues impacting municipalities is the huge unpaid property tax bills that are outstanding, \$268 million as of March, and given that the last time the minister was in this role his plan to address this, in his words, did not work and given that the problem results in cuts or higher property taxes, can the minister inform the House of the current amount of unpaid taxes municipalities are owed and explain what he is doing to address it now?

Mr. McIver: Well, I'm grateful for the question because we have very good news to report. The hon. member is right. Our first effort didn't do as well as we thought it did, but since then with the assistance of our energy minister we're making it harder for energy companies to apply for or transfer wells if they're behind in their property taxes, and it has made it get better. I will ask my staff to get as close as we can to the current number. I'll get it to the hon. member. It's a reasonable question. What I mostly have to report is that things are getting better due to our ongoing efforts.

Mr. Kasawski: That is good news, Minister, but given that the government has reduced its municipal grant funding by 50 per cent since the UCP were first elected and given that the municipalities are required to pass a motion in council to write off 50 per cent of the property taxes owed by the provincial government, why is the UCP government continuing to withhold revenue and download costs onto their municipal partners? Is that all Albertans can expect from this minister?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I would say that what we know now is that on the LGFF formula, where the revenue goes up and down with provincial revenue, next year the revenue to municipalities in the first year of LGFF will go up by about 14 per cent. Now, I wouldn't want to mislead the House, because what I just said is accurate. The next year it will probably go down a little bit as part of the formula that municipalities asked for, the number to go up and down with provincial revenue, but next year it will go up by 14 per cent.

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

Education Funding

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend I had the opportunity to speak with many educational support workers. I heard their worries, concerns, and frustrations: overcrowded classrooms, students with complex needs not receiving the support

or tools they need, dysregulated students in offices because one-to-one support isn't there. People are exhausted. There are simply not enough staff. Their working conditions are our kids' learning conditions. Can the minister explain when the 20,000 school support worker positions that were lost in 2020 will finally be fully funded by this government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned a moment ago, we have increased funding to education by over 5 per cent. That includes \$820 million in new funding to help address enrolment pressures that we're seeing in our school divisions. In addition, we have created the new classroom complexity grant. This new grant provides \$126 million in new funding over the course of the next few years to help hire educational assistants, speech-language pathologists, and other individuals to help ensure that our classrooms and our kids have the support that they need.

Ms Wright: Given that the government's own statistics say there are fewer EAs working in our schools this year than last and given that we know school funding hasn't kept up with growth or doesn't make up for three years of underfunding and given that that means school staff are often forced to look for a second or even third job and given that many feel the work that they are doing to support kids really doesn't matter to this government, what plans exactly does the minister have for showing these workers they are valued?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say definitively that the government of Alberta and this side of the House absolutely support our education staff: our teachers, our educational assistants, and other staff. We greatly value and respect their work, which is precisely why we're providing new investments to help hire additional staff. As I mentioned a moment ago, I'm proud to report that our four major school divisions have been very successful in hiring additional staff; 1,200 new teachers have joined our metro school divisions in the upcoming school year, including 450 educational assistants as well.

Ms Wright: Given that we know that school support staff earn on average around \$34,000 per year, with EAs earning even less at \$26,400, less than a living wage, and given that despite this these folks remain dedicated to students and they show up to work and do the very best they can for kids every single day and given that we know that an investment in these workers is an investment in our future and in our kids, will this minister make the necessary investments in these workers to ensure that education support workers aren't living in poverty?

Mr. Nicolaides: We absolutely will, as we have, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we've provided \$126 million in new funding specifically for educational assistants and other support staff in our schools. We've provided \$820 million in new funding to our school divisions to help deal with enrolment pressures. Our school divisions at the end of the day, of course, are the ones who directly hire and manage the staffing needs of their respective schools and their divisions. It's government's job to ensure that they have the support and resources that they need to do their job. We're committed to doing that, as I've demonstrated over the course of these questions.

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

Child Care Access and Affordability

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November of 2021 our government successfully negotiated and signed on to the federal-

provincial child care funding agreement, with a promise to reduce child care costs to an average of \$10 per day by 2026. Since then child care costs in the province have been reduced by more than half for parents, but more affordable child care costs have meant a historic increase in enrolment and more demand for spaces available. To the Minister of Children and Family Services: what is our government doing to create more child care spaces? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that great question and for being such a tireless advocate for her riding. The member is absolutely correct. Child care is so important to so many families right across the entire province. As part of my mandate I'm going to be starting up over 65,000 additional child care spaces right across the entire province. This is going to make a massive difference for families right across Alberta, and our cost-control framework discussions, which are happening right now with a wide breadth of stakeholders, are going to continue to allow us to be able to invest into the system. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government fought for the inclusion of private child care operators in the federal-provincial child care agreement in order to support our province's unique mixed-market system and given that more than 60 per cent of child care centres in the province are privately owned and operated and most Alberta families choose to use privately owned and operated facilities, can the minister please explain how our government is supporting private operators?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we will never apologize . . . [interjections]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Turton: . . . for the incredible work that our entrepreneurs and business owners do to provide incredible child care spaces for children right across the entire province. That's why I was very happy about our space creation grant that we just announced about a month or so ago. This is going to unlock over 22,000 additional child care spaces right across the entire province. Our private operators are integral parts of our child care system. We're not going to apologize for them, unlike the members opposite who excluded child care operators on the private side when they did their faulty system. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

2:40

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given the cost of everything, especially basic needs such as food, rent, and utilities, is rising and families across the province, including those in my own riding, are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet and given that some parents question whether they can afford to go back to work or take on more work to meet

the demands of their children, can the minister please explain how we are making child care more accessible and more affordable?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The steps that our government has made to save Albertan families have resulted in thousands of dollars of savings for parents right across the entire province. Our arrangement with the federal government has reduced child care fees by over 50 per cent. If the members opposite were actually concerned about affordability, they would talk to their party leader, Jagmeet Singh, and vote against the carbon tax. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

During the hon. minister's second response at 2:39 I did note a point of order, which I have indicated now.

In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Support for Families

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are seeing too much hate and contention. A root cause of these tragedies is fogs of lies blinding minds, resulting in great pain and sorrow. In a world in commotion there is hope in truth. The truth always prevails, and we are accountable to live according to it. We can love the truth and trust in it without reservation. Every man and woman is a love child of God. A correct understanding of this paramount truth is incompatible with hate.

An interconnected truth is that families are ordained of God. Family cultures establish and maintain our true principles, including love, forgiveness, and work; produce happiness; and are powerful defenses to hate and contention. Families are the building block of society and should be supported as a disintegration of families will bring about the disintegration of society. Schools keeping secrets from parents about children divide and undermine trust, yet in seeking to affirm and protect the sacred relationship of parent and child, some seek to frame these desires in a hateful way.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It is not right to contend and divide. The sacred relationship of parent and child should be protected and affirmed. All can be valued in seeking fairness for all. While no family or parent is perfect, the vast majority of parents love their children, are responsible to protect them, and should be trusted as we do our best. Let's support families in their sacred stewardships. We will be happier and better.

Thank you.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Member Tejada: For the past few months I've had the opportunity to connect with people in Calgary-Klein at community events, chats at small businesses, phone calls, social media messages, and e-mails, and the most asked question is: what could happen to their

CPP? The most frequent message my constituents want to relate to this government is: keep your hands off my CPP. Folks are understandably concerned about this UCP government's risky moves to take us out of the CPP. Albertans work hard and have a right to safe, secure, and stable retirement. The CPP has provided retirement security for so many already. It's a reliable and secure model that Canadians have come to depend on and trust. Everyone, that is, except for the UCP. It seems like a distant memory, but in the election, when trying to earn the votes of Albertans, the Premier herself said that there were no plans to touch pensions, and this was echoed by several of her ministers, often emphatically. Now, sadly, we find ourselves in a place where this government won't look Albertans in the eye. Instead of in-person town halls, they've only taken prescreened phone calls. They've done a survey that refuses to ask the question that Albertans are keen to answer, which is: do they support leaving the CPP? Adding insult to injury, Albertans are on the hook for a \$7.5 million advertising campaign. Fiscal responsibility, indeed.

While the UCP stirs up numbers that have no basis in fact and otherwise show us that their priorities aren't Albertans' priorities, the Alberta NDP wants to hear how you really feel about your pension. We want to meet you in person. We have a survey that asks the question that the UCP is afraid to. You can fill out the survey or sign up for a real consultation at albertasfuture.ca. I want Albertans to know, more than anything else, that on this side of the House we will fight to protect your retirement security and to stop this government from gambling away your pension.

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

Calgary-Beddington Constituency Priorities

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week was constituency week, and I hope that everyone enjoyed their time in their home ridings as much as I did. I spent quite a few hours doing outreach, talking and listening to people in Calgary-Beddington.

I was able to meet with a family doctor who lives in my riding. Her practice is holding steady for now, but there are cracks; one doc is retiring five years earlier than planned.

I spoke with a small-business owner. His business is doing really well. He lives comfortably, which hasn't always been the case for him. You know, he didn't want to talk about taxes. No. He wanted to talk about coal mining. His family works land that relies on water from the eastern slopes.

I talked to a new teacher. We talked about gaga ball and how awesome it is to watch kids have all those light-bulb, aha, I-get-it moments. We talked about how some classrooms just gel; you can have great years of easy connections and learning. Some years it's not so easy. I talked to some experienced teachers. They said that there are more and more of those not-so-easy years lately.

I talked to a health care worker. She used some interesting language to describe her thoughts on the AHS reshuffle: rearranging deck chairs on the *Titanic*. She wanted to know: "Where's the plan for new docs, new nurses? Where's the plan to retain the ones we've got?"

What didn't I hear about this week? Raising salaries for people on agencies, boards, and commissions; raising gift limit amounts for MLAs. You know, not a single person approached me looking for an Alberta pension plan. My constituents in Calgary-Beddington don't agree with this government's priorities. They don't want to leave the CPP. They don't want to line the pockets of your Conservative buddies. They want real action to address the cost-of-living crisis created by this government, and they deserve nothing less.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Bill 204

Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023.

The purpose of this bill is to protect the role of the provincial government and prevent federal overreach. Current circumstances have seen the federal government work directly with municipalities on the national urban parks initiative. If passed, this bill will ensure that no national urban park can be created in Albertans' backyard without their input.

I look forward to discussing this bill with members of this House.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park has a tabling.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite number of copies. Recently a 19-year-old in Sherwood Park overdosed and died from addiction. I'm tabling a letter from a constituent requesting financial help from the government so they can afford for their child to finish their addiction recovery in the New Westminster facility.

The Speaker: The Member for Banff-Kananaskis has a tabling.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of energy suggested that I google where Grassy Mountain mine is on the eastern slopes, and so I did. I'd like to table the requisite copies of maps that I pulled from the Alberta government website. One is of the eastern slopes boundary. One is from the eastern slopes policy. Another is from the Alberta Wilderness Association detailing the location of the mine on the eastern slopes.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Seeing none . . . [interjections] Oh, my apologies.

Mrs. Petrovic: Not that I'm short.

The Speaker: It had nothing to do with your stature.

The hon. the Member for Livingstone-MacLeod has a tabling.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and table the requisite five copies of the Leap Manifesto. The NDP socialist caucus is one of the main signatories. This document calls for an end to fossil fuels, higher corporate taxes, and a progressive carbon tax.

The Speaker: I'm sure the former Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake will be proud of you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, I do have a tabling pursuant to section 33(1) of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act. I'm tabling six copies of the annual report of the office of the Public Interest Commissioner, covering the period from April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

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. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Conflicts of Interest Act and the Legislative Assembly Act the Report of Selected Payments to the Members and Former Members of the Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly, for the year ended March 31, 2023.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations, pursuant to the Metis Settlements Act the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal 2022 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Jones, Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade, pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act the Northern Alberta Development Council 2022-23 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 1:53 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At 1:53 the Leader of the Official Opposition was in a debate with the Premier regarding, during the election, the commitment the UCP made that they were not going to debate the Alberta pension plan because it was not a significant election issue, and that matter of debate arose. Now, in this Chamber we've had a number of rulings about not being able to call someone a liar. So under 23(h), (i), and (j) – I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but I heard the Premier say: the member was “untruthful.” Now, you've said many times, Mr. Speaker, that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. That seems pretty direct to me. I believe that was directly calling the Leader of the Official Opposition a liar, which is unparliamentary, and I ask that the Premier apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rebut the member opposite's point of order. I believe this is a matter of debate. Certainly, a lot is said during election campaigns, and that has clearly funnelled its way into this Chamber. Whether what the member of the opposition believed the opposition said or didn't say during the campaign was or was not truthful I think is up for debate. I will say that Albertans decided for us who they believed was telling the truth, and I think that the voters got it right. I don't think that that's untruthful. The polls are pretty clear. I don't think this is a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Unfortunately for the Government House Leader, he cannot be more wrong because the hon. Premier said the following: “Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite during the campaign was untruthful with Albertans about what was happening with [their] pension.” Debate continued.

Unfortunately or fortunately, on June 3, 2021, I ruled, in which case: “Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows very well that what [he's] saying is absolutely untrue.” I proceeded to say: for that, this is a point of order, in which I'll encourage the member to withdraw and apologize.

Again, on the 24th of November a very similar point of order. I've provided lots of comments. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition went on to say that the government was untruthful, which, in her remarks wasn't a point of order.

But because the Premier made the allegation that the Leader of the Opposition was untruthful, it is a point of order, for which the Government House Leader can apologize.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still believe the voters got it right. But today I got it wrong. I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Excellent apology. Not that I judge apologies, but that was a good one. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At approximately 2:39 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: I most certainly did, Mr. Speaker. At the time you had mentioned, I believe that I heard the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud say to the hon. Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: you're a misogynist. This language is certainly unparliamentary for this Chamber. Now, I suspect that it didn't get picked up by the ambient microphones, and that's understandable, but I do believe it's really important to draw attention to this kind of language in the Chamber, which is routine for the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Whether it's the questions that member asked today in the Chamber that I felt were totally out of line or using introductions of guests to politicize an issue rather than introduce someone who's come from your constituency just to watch the daily proceedings, that member needs to improve her decorum in this Chamber, including picking better language when referring to someone across the aisle. Calling someone a misogynist I believe is wildly inappropriate, and that member should apologize.

The Speaker: The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government regularly uses Introduction of Guests to score political points, so I don't know why the Government House Leader is raising that in this particular item. As well, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud had a family with a serious medical concern with our health care system and was advocating on their behalf. That the Government House Leader would attempt to shame her for doing that work on behalf of an Alberta family, again, I do not see as relevant to this point of order debate, and I do not know why he's entered that in. I did not hear the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud heckle any such thing to the government. I do not have the Blues at my disposal in order to weigh in on this. I did not hear it. I do not think that it occurred, but I defer to your ruling.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. In this particular case I will say this. I appreciate that it is a Thursday; oftentimes the excitement and vigour of the debate reaches a peak on Thursday afternoon prior to members having the opportunity to return to their constituents. I would say that today was just that, and the farthest third of the Assembly from the Speaker was very, very animated, and I would encourage members that just because they're far away from the Speaker doesn't mean that their decorum should reflect that. I'm certain that inappropriate things were said from both sides of the Assembly. While I didn't hear the particular allegation, if she did say it, she should apologize. I also did not hear all of the remarks that were made by members on the opposite side of the House.

It is not possible, without an accurate record either in *Hansard*, the benefit of the Blues, or otherwise, for the Speaker to make a ruling on something he did or did not hear. In this case this is not a point of order, but I encourage all members to ensure they're using

parliamentary language at all times in the Assembly. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Lovely moved, seconded by Mr. Lundy, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LL.D., the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

11. Mr. Schow moved on behalf of Ms Smith:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(a) this is a debatable motion, Government Motion 11. Is there anyone wishing to provide questions, comments, or debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 3

Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to move third reading of Bill 3 in this Chamber, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023.

I'd like to first thank every single member that has voted, unanimously thus far, as I know, in consent at second reading and Committee of the Whole. Now we move on to the third stage of the debate of the legislation in third reading, which is debate on the details and final debate of the legislation as it stands after committee.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Although the legislation is technical, it is important that we look at the impacts of a high and continuous pharmaceutical-grade supply of opioids into our community and the crisis it creates in our lives, in our communities, to our health care system, to our province, and to our institutions that are meant to care for the most

vulnerable. We will not as a province allow a pharmaceutical company, those who work with those companies in marketing, distribution, wholesaling to continue to get away with false representations of the dangers of these deadly and addictive drugs that they push.

Mr. Speaker, we see it again here today that it's important for us to recognize the truth of what a continuous supply of opioids would do to our communities. If we go back and look at what caused our crisis in the late '90s and early 2000s, we can see the claims that they made about drugs like oxycodone 25 years ago. The pharmaceutical industry claimed: one, that their legally produced, clearly labelled opioids are going to be a low-risk medication; two, they claim that being concerned about the risk of opioids is fearmongering and a denial of, quote, the evidence; three, they claim that public health would benefit from an increased distribution and easy access to a supply of opioids; and, four, they claim that these drugs would be consistently taken as directed and only by the individuals to whom they were prescribed; i.e. there is no diversion.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that it was not the case, and that is why we are here on third reading of Bill 3 today. The damages instead were incredible and in so many ways immeasurable, the damages to our communities, to the lives lost, to the lives consumed, to the agony of addiction and the living hell that that captures an individual in, where because of an opioid addiction an individual chooses not to eat, not to sleep, instead losing up to a quarter of their body weight because the dopamine they get from addiction of that opioid is more compelling than the basic requirements of sleeping and eating to live. The grip that this addiction has on so many Albertans, some of whom, thank God – every day we must thank Him for their lives being saved through recovery, and some of whom we pray for their souls because they lost their life to this deadly disease.

The tragedy, Mr. Speaker, and the reason we must pursue this legislation is because the threat is not over. This is not merely a question of history. The reason that we have an obligation as legislators to move forward on this bill and this class-action lawsuit that we're participating in and the certification hearings that come up starting at the end of November and again in February is because we must set an expectation of what is an appropriate moral and proper response to a pharmaceutical company, an industry that works with these deadly drugs and the deadly disease of addiction.

Mr. Speaker, today we see this repeating again in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, with a so-called safe supply, where a high-powered, continuous stream of opioids, this time not twice as powerful as street heroin but five times as powerful as street heroin, is being pumped into our communities. It's being pumped not just through the drug companies but through the governments responsible for caring for the most vulnerable. And these governments are the ones saying that they have an obligation to care for the vulnerable while at the same time, to the addiction crisis, their response is to hand out approximately 18 million hydromorphone pills annually. That has depressed the price of hydromorphone, also known as Dilaudid, or Dilly, on the street, to the degree that it used to be sold for approximately \$15 a pill on the black market; now 15 cents a pill.

It is difficult to explain the consequences of what that means for public health and for the deadly disease of addiction coming forward. Mr. Speaker, unlike the claims that they made in the early 2000s and that we see again happening now, it is not that these high-powered, pharmaceutical-grade opioids are consistently being taken as directed to whom they were prescribed. The truth is they're being diverted, and they are likely being diverted en masse outside of that jurisdiction in Vancouver. Unfortunately, it's likely that they

have made their way into other communities in Alberta, into the parties seen on college campuses, into high schools, as they're told that Dillies are safe, as they're told that Dillies are part of a safe supply of drugs.

Mr. Speaker, creating more addicts does not address the addiction crisis happening in our country. Only recovery can do that, which is why this government has taken a different tack than we see in the Vancouver model. We have said that every single life has dignity in Alberta, and we believe every single one of these individuals deserves the right to recovery, and we're going to move forward continuously. We've built in our time over 10,240 new treatment spaces, that include detox and long-term treatment, in our province. We have distributed over 660,000 naloxone kits since we got into government. We have obviously continued to move forward with the recovery centres in the Alberta model, where we are building 11 recovery centres, four of which already are committed to be on Indigenous, First Nations, land, and of course we have two up and running. Those two, both of which I visited, in both of which I've spoken to the individuals in and they thanked me – and I had no role to play in this.

I thank those predecessors who went before me as the minister. I thank Premier Kenney and our current Premier for the work that they have done moving forward this model of recovery. The lives are being saved not because we hand drugs out to those who suffer from addiction but because we get them off the drugs, into recovery, into treatment, and living a second lease on life.

Mr. Speaker, we've eliminated the \$1,240 fee that the NDP left in an expectation to have addicts find this somehow in their need for treatment – the one thing that can save their life, the only thing that can save their life from addiction is treatment – and we removed that happily, trying to break down any barrier that any Albertan has in their path towards recovery and living again as a full member of their community and family and those who participate and volunteer and go to work and have a social and common life in their communities again.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is that if we don't move forward with this legislation and we don't move forward with this model, we see nothing but more and more carnage, pain, and harm coming to Albertans daily. It is a crisis in front of us and a mountain we must climb. I'm very grateful to see members of my team and members opposite supporting this legislation and, I hope and pray, supporting the Alberta recovery model, because too many lives depend that we move forward with this and don't look back towards a facilitation of drug addiction but, instead, a moving over and around the community so that we can come to recovery for every Albertan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Just to clarify, Minister, did you move third reading at the beginning of your speech?

Mr. Williams: I did at the beginning, yeah.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Good. Thank you.

Are there others wishing to speak? The Member for Taber-Warner has risen.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise in support of Bill 3, Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023. I could tell this House of or talk about the opioid manufacturers and wholesale distributors and marketing representatives misrepresenting the harmful effects and addictive nature of medication. I could talk about how the high rate of opioid prescriptions led to a significant increase of addiction and overdose rates. I could talk about the devastation in the numbers, the

statistics. But, instead, I want to talk about two individuals who were friends of mine.

3:10

I want to tell you about a childhood friend to both myself and my younger brother Dale. His name is Ron Smart. Ron had a ready smile, Mr. Speaker. He had an effervescent laugh that could light up the room. One day Ron, a good kid, decided that he was going to go and dabble, and he took a hit of acid that affected him, infected his mind at that age. Ron went from being one of the smartest kids I knew to being a drug-induced schizophrenic. He went from being able to have a life with a love of his children, family, travel, the things that we all enjoy and benefit from in a society as great as we have, to having to live in an institution. At one point, through not just depression but from the problems that he had with his mind, he jumped out of a window six storeys high and killed himself because he thought he could fly. That was the end of a childhood friend.

For myself and my younger brother and to this day, after many years, I still think about what Ron Smart's life would have been like if he hadn't done that. But, more importantly, I think about the important principle that's been presented in this House, and that is that no drugs are good. Drugs do not help. We need to help them get off, and we need to make sure that they don't even get on to it because, Mr. Speaker, if just one person – one person – my friend Ron Smart, could have one hit, do it one time, and have this happen to him? My message to all young people is to just don't do it.

I want to tell you about another person. I won't give a name, Mr. Speaker, but I will tell you of a person who had some health issues because of childbirth, because of giving birth to children, and was struggling with pain and some issues and went to the doctor and got prescribed 222s, which are codeine. They got addicted to codeine, because of the ability that they had at the time to be able to just prescribe more, and learned to use the system to the point where she was actually taking handfuls of 222s at a time. That was the addiction that she suffered from. Luckily, she got off that, but she became a drug-induced schizophrenic because of that as well. That was the diagnosis for her. Now, I will say that because of her relationship to God, she was able to actually get off and it was an okay situation. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it actually killed her. That actually killed her.

Now, it's interesting. I tell you those two stories because in our Canadian Bill of Rights it says this:

The Parliament of Canada, affirming that the Canadian Nation is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, the dignity and worth of the human person and the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions.

I want to restate what this point is, that it says, "the dignity and worth of the human person". This is the crux of this whole argument we're talking about, Mr. Speaker. I often hear terms used, "safe injection" or "compassionate care." It is about the individual person that our Constitution and our Bill of Rights seem to understand was so important. We need to get back to knowing that it's individuals. It's not numbers. It's not about us being able to decrease it by 10 per cent or 5 per cent or prolong the life of an individual; this is about having that person have dignity.

Mr. Speaker, this is why I think it's important for us to support this bill, to make sure that those unscrupulous individuals who made profit more important than an individual pay for what they did and pay for that type of mentality. This is why I'm in support of this bill, and I hope all members of this House will do the same.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction to close debate.

The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction has moved third reading of Bill 3, Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Bill 4 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Acting Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Yes. Mr. Speaker, indeed it is me. Yes. I've got to hobble up in here in this boot.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. I am pleased to move third reading of Bill 4, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. Bill 4 proposes legislative amendments that would help formalize a key part of Alberta's commitment to affordability, provide clarity around the collection and remittance of Alberta's tourism levy, and update a number of technical and administrative aspects of Alberta's tax system. Keeping our tax legislation up to date is essential to maintaining Alberta's low tax environment and minimizing red tape.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 would amend four pieces of legislation, including the Fuel Tax Act, the Tourism Levy Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, and the Alberta Corporate Tax Act. This includes extending the legislated provincial fuel tax pause to the end of this year, a decision we announced earlier this year. Extending the pause to the end of the year saves drivers an estimated \$530 million. I repeat: that's a lot of money, \$530 million. That's money that's staying in Albertans' pockets every time they fill up their vehicle.

If passed, Bill 4 will also align Alberta's tourism levy with administrative practices by repealing requirements for the collection and remittance of the tourism levy by online brokers such as Airbnb and Vrbo that were intended to come off effective July 1 of this year. In response to industry concerns our government is working with industry partners on how to best implement the requirement for online brokers to collect and remit tax on behalf of operators, a change we first announced in Budget 2022.

This legislation includes a framework to collect the tax with specific details to follow the regulation. This new framework would take effect on proclamation on a date to be later announced. Online brokers will only be required to collect and remit the levy on bookings made on their platforms after the changes take effect. For bookings made prior to this effective date, short-term rentals hosts continue to be required to collect and remit the tourism levy applicable to the rental of their property as they have been since April 1, 2021. Alberta's tax administrators have continued to work with the industry since July 1 to ensure all parties understand their current tourism levy obligations. Revenue from the tourism levy goes into the province's general revenue fund to support the programs and services that make Alberta such an attractive place to live, visit, raise a family, and for tourism.

If passed, Bill 4 will also make technical amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act and the Alberta Corporate Tax Act to reflect existing provincial policy and align with changes to the federal legislation. Mr. Speaker, we review and update Alberta's tax laws regularly to legislate new policies, correct deficiencies, and maintain consistency between provincial and federal tax laws. These types of changes are important for maintaining the integrity of our tax system in Alberta, and I encourage all members to support this bill today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that, I move third reading of Bill 4, Tax Statutes Amendment Act.

3:20

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 4? The Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Schow: I think I just said what I needed to say, Mr. Speaker, but with that I do encourage all members of this Chamber to support Bill 4. With that, I close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2 Alberta Pension Protection Act

[Debate adjourned November 21: Ms Hayter speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act it's called. In reality it really isn't about protecting anything; it's creating much risk for Albertans. Certainly, it's kind of a bill that has been brought to the Legislature by this government that no one asked for. It seems to be part of what the Premier's ongoing fight with the federal government is about. Even in the throne speech that we heard on October 30, she just talked about the, I guess, signature bill of this sitting, which is the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act, and she talks about that it's going to detail initiatives and legislation necessary to protect Albertans from unconstitutional practices.

Certainly, I'm very proud to be Canadian, and of course I'm proud to be Albertan. I've heard from I think hundreds of Albertans, constituents regarding this particular bill that's before us, Bill 2, that they do not want to leave the Canada pension plan. In fact, the Canada pension plan is a very reliable, stable fiscal tool that we have in this country that's been around for over five decades, that's supported Canadians to retire in dignity. It supports them to be able to know that they will have support in their retirement.

This move by the Premier and the government to put this really at risk for Albertans is concerning. I'm not only saying that; many Albertans have approached me and talked to me about that. As the critic for seniors it affects seniors, but of course it affects generations to come because if Alberta pulls out, then they will be impacted. This isn't a simple process. This is a process that will take years to implement. It doesn't make any sense that it's being done because we know we have a very stable situation as it is.

It's really important that the Premier, the UCP government listen to Albertans. Certainly, we in the opposition have been listening to Albertans, and we have had town halls, in-person town halls. My colleagues have spoken about that already, and we have several more coming up where we will spend time listening to Albertans. I mean, we know that there's been an online consultation process that the government has undertaken, but there are so few people who have an opportunity to actually speak. Really, it's not a fair consultation. People can't really be heard in those settings. We all know that in those kinds of processes there can be very rigorous vetting of who gets to actually speak anyway. Oftentimes, you know, I would say that the government has controlled the narrative so that people who do speak are generally people who are also supporting what they want to do.

I just want to go back a bit to sort of what I have heard from my constituents. One of the big things that I've heard is that they care

about other Canadians. They don't only care about themselves. They have relatives. They have friends all across this country, and, really, they see themselves as not wanting to, you know, create some jeopardy for the Canada pension plan. They want to continue with the process that we use right now for our national pension plan.

Myself I was born in Manitoba. I moved here when I was six, so I've certainly been an Albertan for many decades, but I have many relatives. I'm Icelandic heritage. There are lots of Icelanders in Winnipeg, in Gimli, where my father was born. Those are all people I care about. Alberta pulling out of the pension plan is not, I don't think, a good idea for the stability of the Canadian pension plan. Certainly, I have relatives in B.C., Saskatchewan, Ontario, so I have many people that I know, and my constituents say that, too. We know that that's a key issue with the Alberta pension plan suggestion, and we're still really kind of confused as to what that will really look like. We don't have any clear details about that.

How portable will that be? You know, certainly that's part of what we value as Canadian citizens, that we can go from province to province and receive supports like health care and other programs in other provinces. The Alberta pension plan is really specifically for Albertans, so that may cause us difficulties when we do retire because maybe we can't take it with us.

There are so many unanswered questions regarding the Alberta pension plan that, you know, it's really I think kind of unfair that the government is asking us to consider this when we don't really know how it's all going to come about.

Mr. Dach: Intervention, if I may?

Ms Sigurdson: Yes.

Mr. Dach: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask the Member for Edmonton-Riverview a couple of things about what she's heard in relation to the Canada pension plan being exited in favour of an Alberta pension plan during consultations she's had with her constituents in Edmonton-Riverview. I know that the member will be participating in a direct in-person town hall with regard to pensions on December 11 with four other MLAs, including myself, at the Westend Seniors Activity Centre. We anticipate, of course, a very large turnout, as has been the case with other pension town halls that have been held in person by New Democrat MLAs so far.

The member has directly questioned the need for the elimination of the Canada pension plan, and so far the government has given telephone town halls only and offered no opportunities for people to answer a direct question regarding whether or not they really want to get rid of the Canada pension plan. Our in-person town halls will certainly be dealing with that question directly.

Also, I'd like the member perhaps to comment on the survey that we've done on our side of the House, where 37,000 respondents overwhelmingly rejected the notion of getting rid of the Canada pension plan, saying that they're certainly not asking for it, and they fear that they're going to lose the benefits of a very solid, reputable pension.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much to the hon. member for the questions. Certainly, he has and I have and all members of this NDP caucus have heard from so many Albertans concerned about some of the things I've already talked about, just the instability of the Alberta pension plan, the lack of portability.

3:30

You know, when we're dealing with a much smaller population, with the workers contributing in a smaller amount compared with a national program – like, I think the CPP currently applies to a labour

force of about almost 16 million. That's 16 million workers. It's a huge plan whereas Alberta's pension plan would apply to a provincial labour force of 2.5 million. We know, in these large pension funds, that the larger the fund, the more stability, and there is less risk. It's about one-sixth as large as the Canada pension plan, the Alberta pension plan would be, based on our population and the workers in our province. We know that the CPP is a large, stable, secure contribution group, and it is much less risky than the Alberta pension plan that's being proposed by the UCP government. The more funds you have to invest, the less risk there is. They can diversify their investments. We know that it's much more secure if you have an opportunity to invest in different areas, because sometimes one area is up and another is down. When you have a larger pool of money and funds, then you can have a lower financial risk.

I've heard repeatedly from Albertans very concerned about this. As I've said already, you know, sometimes people, when they retire, do leave Alberta. They might go to B.C. They might go to another province in Canada. Just the uncertainty about what is going to happen when they move to another province: there's no clarity. I've heard nothing from the UCP regarding the portability, about how Albertans can be supported no matter where they are.

I just want to talk about a myth that's certainly being generated by some of the information the UCP puts forward. It's just saying that Albertans are subsidizing the Canada pension plan for the rest of the country, but it's not what's happening. Of course, if you have a higher income, then you have a higher contribution, but that is why it is important to understand how it actually works. It doesn't mean that we're subsidizing the rest of the provinces. It makes no sense at all.

Another, I think, significant issue on the Alberta pension plan: although the Premier has talked about it – certainly, pre-election she talked about it – during the election she was silent on this. I mean, you have to ask: why would that be if this is such a flagship legislation? It's Bill 2 of our First Session as a new constellation after the election. Why is it that she would not have been transparent about this during the election and not speak about that? It's because it's not popular. It's not what Albertans wanted. Sadly, she was able to fool Albertans to think that that wasn't a priority for her, but it's very clearly a priority. It's not Bill 1, but it's Bill 2. It's very close to being the top of the heap and what is important to the Premier and this UCP government. You would think a leader with integrity, with wanting to be honest and straightforward with where they want to go in their leadership, would have talked about this, but the Premier was silent on this during the election, and that disturbs me.

I think that's something that all of us, on both sides of the House, would agree with: we think that transparency is a value of a democracy. I've certainly heard repeatedly from my colleagues on the government side saying how important it is for us to be clear and open, have dialogues, that they care very much about democracy. Well, this just kind of flies in the face of that, I guess, because this is certainly a hidden aspect that, even though it is, like, a flagship bill, was not discussed at all by the Premier during the election. So, you know, I question how much they are actually caring about democracy and really wanting to fulfill on that and make sure that Albertans know what they're advocating for.

Besides, you know, it being, obviously, a risky business to pull Alberta out of the Canada pension plan and the lack of clarity regarding how it's going to work for Albertans, certainly we know that the government is using government money to advertise and promote this legislation and that the survey that they did really doesn't even ask the question: do you want to be in or do you want to be out of the Canada pension plan?

It's not an objective question. It's certainly leading, and – I don't know – from where I sit, it doesn't feel like a fair process, and Albertans are just being convinced through millions and millions of advertising dollars by the government, by their own money, really, the tax that they pay, that this is a good idea for Albertans. But Albertans, in my estimation, are pretty smart, and they can see that it is not a good idea.

Certainly, I've heard repeatedly from my constituents, other Albertans across the province, and will continue to because we are going to have in-person town halls to discuss this with Albertans and to really hear their concerns. We know that many groups have spoken out against this Alberta pension plan, and it's some people who sometimes people think would align more with a Conservative government. The Calgary Chamber of commerce, members of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Business Council of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business: all of these business leaders are saying that it's a bad idea. It's a bad idea; they don't want it to go ahead. Usually the UCP listens to these groups, and it's kind of interesting that they are ignoring them on this particular issue. You know, I really commend the members opposite to listen to Albertans in a sincere way and listen to these stakeholders, business stakeholders, who are expressing concern about the significant risk that this can create for Albertans.

It's really important. I think the government needs to take this seriously and decide to stop this legislation, because it is not in the best interests of Albertans, and it's not what Albertans want. You know, there's nobody telling me they want to pull out of the CPP. Albertans want to be part of the Canada pension plan, and they are happy that it's been a secure place for Albertans for decades.

So I commend all the members in this House to vote against this bill. It is not in the best interests of Albertans, and certainly that is the way I'll be voting. With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll step down.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Red Deer-South has risen.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in favour of Bill 2, Alberta Pension Protection Act. This is a super-duper bill, A1, one of the best I've ever seen since serving in this Legislature. There is a lot of misinformation and fearmongering that we've had to endure from the members opposite, unfortunately, about an Alberta pension plan. Why that's very unfortunate is that this undermines and works against what's actually in the best interests of Albertans. It's important. Our stewardship is to confront lies with the truth.

I want to talk about some truths. Probably a paramount truth, Mr. Speaker, is that an Alberta pension plan will create and produce a game-changing competitive advantage for all Alberta businesses and workers that will save billions of dollars each year for them, will improve affordability, our economic competitiveness, and position us to increase pension benefits for Alberta retirees. That is actually the truth.

3:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about some things a little bit more in detail. I don't know if I'll have enough time to go through everything – perhaps I will have the opportunity to speak on this later on – but I certainly want to talk about a few important things.

One of the things that seems to be in dispute is the asset transfer provision in the CPP. Now, just as kind of a little bit of a history lesson, when the CPP was formed, Ontario was actually concerned that they were going to have to subsidize the rest of the other provinces, and they actually insisted, as I understand it, on having this asset transfer provision in and a mechanism to withdraw from the CPP. I'm going to summarize the asset provision as follows: Albertans get their money back. If you boil it down, that's actually

what it is: Albertans can get their money back. Under this asset transfer provision Alberta is placed in the same position if, like Quebec, it chose to operate its own provincial pension plan from the outset. That is actually what the legislation says, and there's a lot of fearmongering and lying about that.

Here's another thing where we see a lot of fearmongering and lying, Mr. Speaker. As we all know here, Quebec has its own provincial pension plan, and there are portability rules that apply when workers move into or retire outside of Quebec. Alberta would have the same mechanisms; they can do the same. This is not rocket science. When the members opposite raise this as an issue, they are fearmongering and misrepresenting what's already been formed and created in terms of portability with the Quebec pension plan.

The other important thing is that LifeWorks, the independent professional actuarial company, one of the largest in the country, independent, used the CPP's own available numbers to arrive at an estimated asset transfer number of \$277 billion up to 2021. That is found in table B.1.a of the report. I would invite the members opposite to actually look at it, maybe try and understand it, instead of just fearmongering and just basically recycling their sound bites. LifeWorks extrapolated those results in 2021 to 2027 to arrive at an estimated \$338 billion asset transfer number.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what about the dissenters? Let's talk a little bit about them. Are we supposed to be surprised that some do not want an Alberta pension plan for Albertans? It really comes down to this: if Alberta saves billions every year with their own APP, Alberta businesses and workers are not having to provide billions to the rest of the country, and Albertans are in the position to provide more pension benefits to Alberta retirees. Watch the dissenters avoiding this truth. They always talk about risk and fearmongering, but they don't actually kind of confront the hard fact that Alberta businesses and workers stand to save billions of dollars each year and increase benefits to Alberta retirees.

That's why we're doing this. That is why it's a priority of this government. Alberta is a land of freedom and prosperity. We are the best, and with the storm clouds that are approaching, the macroeconomic storm clouds that are approaching – and I'm going to talk a little bit more about this – we have a stewardship and a duty to make sure that we position Alberta to enjoy the prosperity that we've enjoyed, to have that same prosperity for our children.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Quebec has said that one of his favourite things about Canada was equalization. Is that what it means to be a Canadian, to be preyed upon by parasitic politicians? Why does Alberta always have to subsidize the rest of the country? Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you this truth. If Quebec was Alberta, they would have separated long ago. We have been the rainmaker for this rigged partnership for decades – and that is the truth – in the amount of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Now, Mr. Speaker . . .

Mr. Getson: An intervention?

Mr. Stephan: Yes.

Mr. Getson: Thank you to the hon. member. Again, the act that we're bringing in here – we're talking about the Alberta pension plan and putting protective measures in place, for those that are following along at home, to ensure that any payments that they make will be lesser than or equal to, that any of the income they'd be getting off this would be greater than or equal to. So, again, putting up those guardrails.

I've been listening intently to the member. He's very passionate about this. He also comes from an area of expertise. I myself am not a tax lawyer. I myself am not an accountant, but maybe the

member could also advise what he did in his professional life and still does in his professional life versus his legislative role and why he can offer some of these insights that might help a lot of us here understand better the reports that have been presented and made public for a long time and why there shouldn't be a lot of the concerns being brought up from the opposition.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you for that question. Actually, I would like to address that. I was planning to address that a little bit later, but I'm going to address it now to provide some context. Mr. Speaker, I'm really excited to get back to some other things I want to say, but I want to talk about this.

In 2019, basically, Trudeau started jacking up CPP contribution rates, and he has really jacked them up. Since about 2019 Trudeau has actually jacked up CPP over 36 per cent, forcing Alberta businesses and workers to disproportionately pay for his tax increase because we are the rainmaker partner, frankly, in Canada. That's just the truth. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite: you know, they shriek and screech all the time about cost of living and affordability. Well, let's talk about inflation. Did you know that CPP costs exploded more than 7 per cent from last year, the year prior more than 11 per cent, and then 9 per cent in 2021? We have this out-of-control inflationary cost, and we talk about affordability.

Mr. Jones: Thank you for allowing the intervention. I just wanted the member to elaborate on what the tangible impacts of our net contributions to the pension plan mean for Albertans. In a year when we make a \$3 billion net contribution to CPP, that would mean approximately \$4,000 in benefit to our 750,000 seniors in one year. That's the potential. I think that alone is worthy of exploration. I think the member would agree and can talk about the tangible impacts it could make in the lives of Albertans, our seniors dealing with affordability challenges.

He was talking about the members opposite and how, you know, they oppose Alberta seeking fairness. I think there's kind of a trend there because they're fine with mechanisms that take things from Albertans and give them only a portion back; they set up a carbon tax which did just that. Even today – even today – they continue to support a federal carbon tax that takes resources from Albertans and gives them only a portion back, so I think I'd like the member to explore. Perhaps this is a trend from the members opposite. They're not really fighting for Albertans. They don't want Albertans to get all of their money back. They certainly don't want Albertans to repatriate those net contributions.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are weak and hypocritical. This is the truth. Under . . .

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: The opposition deputy House leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I have a lot of patience for the member opposite when he speaks in this House because it can be quite interesting to listen to. There's no doubting that piece, but under Standing Order 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," I think, very clearly, when the hon. member wants to start calling the opposition weak and going into that kind of rhetoric – it's fine to talk about the policy. He was doing really well up until about 30 seconds ago, and then it kind of slid downhill on that. So maybe we

could just refocus on the debate and stop worrying about personalizing the opposition's feelings.

3:50

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that this is a matter of debate. The strength or lack thereof or the hypocrisy present or otherwise is a question of debate for this Legislature. Here if nowhere else we should be questioning whether or not the NDP government was weak, whether it was hypocritical or not. If that conversation cannot be had here as a question of politics, then I don't know where it ought to be had. It is possible for politicians to be hypocritical. It is possible for governments to be weak. It is possible for them not to be. The member very clearly said "members opposite" and the NDP, not specifying any individual, so this is clearly within the standing orders, the rulings of previous Speakers, and a matter of debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any others?

I'm prepared to rule on the point of order. No standing order was quoted.

An Hon. Member: Yeah, it was.

The Acting Speaker: It was? I missed that. Sorry. My apologies.

With that, though, I will agree with the Deputy Government House Leader that this is a matter of debate and should be considered that. I will also caution everyone that the use of language in this House can create disorder, so use your words, choose your words carefully, and we will continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just elaborate on why they're weak. There's a lack of critical thought. All we hear from these members opposite is recycled sound bites, fearmongering, and not exercising or demonstrating faith in Albertans to perpetuate and leverage their ability to create economic prosperity for their families.

Now, Mr. Speaker, here's the hypocritical part, though. I think this is more concerning. As I mentioned, the members opposite: they shriek and they screech, you know, about affordability all the time. Well, if we had our own Alberta pension plan, we could reduce payroll taxes for Alberta workers and not in sort of an immaterial manner.

You know, the LifeWorks report, I mean, estimates it's up to \$1,400 a year for Alberta workers. Mr. Speaker, that is a very meaningful amount. If you think about the affordability measures our government took to support earlier this year Albertans going through some challenging times, those amounts cost Albertans billions of dollars, and the ceiling of those benefits did not exceed in most instances \$1,400.

This is a very material benefit, and the wonderful thing about this, Mr. Speaker, is that this is a perpetual advantage. It's not just one year to support Alberta workers; it supports them every single year. So it's very hypocritical for the members opposite to screech and yell and cry about affordability and then seek to undermine a very meaningful, powerful, game-changing impact that could help with that very thing.

I'll cede my time to my great friend who has a question.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, an intervention if I may.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. McDougall: I wanted to follow up on what the Member for Red Deer-South just indicated because it reflects the fact that members opposite don't seem to understand the difference between surplus and deficits and what that means to overall finances and the benefits and the costs that come from that.

So let's go back to look. You know, the member talked about the formula that was put into legislation by Ontario in case they decided at some point in time that it was in their financial best interest to leave the pension plan. What did that formula say? Money in, contributions in less benefit payments out, and what is the difference between those two numbers? You have a surplus or a deficit or a balance. In the case of Alberta, if you take out Alberta and you assume that there was a separate account for Alberta, what the report indicated is that there were large periods of time when Alberta was putting in a lot more money than it was taking out.

Mr. Stephan: Well, I appreciate that question about surpluses and deficits, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that the members opposite know very little about surpluses. In fact, they know zero about surpluses. They are fiscal imbeciles as it relates to surpluses. But they are very well acquainted with deficits. They were reckless and irresponsible in chasing away billions in investment. When they came to power, they described Alberta as an embarrassing cousin, see? And then they brought in a series of policies that undermined our legacy of being a land of freedom and prosperity, and for one of the first times ever we saw net migration out of Alberta. People would flee, unfortunately, the oppression that they were feeling.

Mr. Speaker, I want to kind of move back a little bit to the question here, the Alberta pension plan. It's important that we have an Alberta pension plan because Albertans are seeing a pattern of abuse and hostility from a joke of a Prime Minister who hates Alberta and has demonstrated that he will not hesitate to leverage the terms of a rigged partnership for his own selfish political gain. Trudeau and other politicians want to fearmonger about an APP, hiding and distorting the truth. But what moral authority does Trudeau have? They are a trillion-dollar-plus fiscal train wreck.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some argue that an APP could not match the investment returns of the CPP. Well, even if that is true, given the asset transfer that Albertans are entitled to and given that every year CPP contributions by Alberta businesses and workers exceed the benefits to Alberta retirees by billions, Albertans are in a very strong position to be much better off.

I want to comment about the groupthink. There seems to be an unprecedented religious orthodoxy for the CPP Investment Board, and that is not wise, Mr. Speaker. It's notable that if the CPP was simply invested in an S&P 500 index exchange-traded fund, the annualized return of this index would approximate or exceed CPP returns with strong ongoing liquidity. Moreover, the CPP Investment Board is very expensive, with the CPP Investment Board cost growing from \$4 million in 2000 to more than \$4 billion. Why aren't people talking about that? Employees have grown from five in 2000 to over 2,000 employees. The management expense being charged to Albertans' and Canadians' pension funds lacks oversight.

Mr. Speaker, it's also notable that more than 50 per cent of the CPP's investments are in private equity and private real estate, which are not subject to market rules. That means that there is uncertainty in the true value of CPP investments. Warren Buffett said that pension funds should avoid private equity because of a lack of transparency. We note that Norway's sovereign fund has no private equity. Higher risk private equity investments require higher coupon rates, which may distort overall investment performance, where CPP money managers collect multimillion-dollar fees and

bonuses in the short-to-medium term, where many of these investments reach maturity after they are gone in the long term.

There is a moral hazard that has grown inside the CPP Investment Board, but what is most disappointing is that the CPP Investment Board would seek to inject themselves into a determination that is Albertans' decision, when they have such a glaring conflict of interest, Mr. Speaker. A glaring conflict of interest. If Alberta is entitled to about 50 per cent of the CPP assets, it means potentially hundreds of millions in reduced fees for them to support their exploding fiefdom of thousands of employees.

4:00

This blatant conflict of interest – frankly, Mr. Leduc of the CPP Investment Board should be ashamed. He acted very unprofessionally. He should know better, actually, Mr. Speaker, but let's talk about Trudeau, the most incompetent, joke Prime Minister that we've ever had to endure. He said Alberta's withdrawal would weaken the pensions of millions of seniors and hard-working people in Alberta. You know what? That is false. We live in a rigged partnership with Trudeau and others who are addicted to handouts from Alberta families and businesses.

I look forward to talking about this more later on.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act. I can tell you that on this side of the House we've heard loud and clear that the only way to protect Albertans' pensions is to keep it in the CPP.

Listening to the previous member speak and saying that this bill is super-duper – well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I've heard this explained from countless numbers of Albertans with two words. It is unparliamentary to repeat it, but it is certainly not "super-duper." I can question this government about their capacity in getting information from Albertans. It was definitely something that wasn't talked about during the election. When it was brought forward in this House, we heard that they were doing consultations.

Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that November 14 was the very first in-person town hall, and it was hosted by the Alberta NDP. We had our caucus represented from our Leader of the Official Opposition, myself, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and the Member for Edmonton-Decore. The first in-person town hall was from the Official Opposition. Now, hearing from Albertans, there is an expectation that they be consulted with. When this government put out their survey, it doesn't ask a simple question: do you want to leave the CPP?

When we did our town hall, we had close to 500 people in attendance, and when we asked that question, two people put their hand up. That's it. When you ask Albertans very clearly, not in the loose language and the manipulated ways that they're doing their consultations, "Do you want to leave the CPP?" – no. That is what we're hearing from Albertans. When we hear the members opposite talk about concerns from the opposition – I'd like to give way to the hon. member for an intervention.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, hon. member, for accepting my intervention. First of all, thank you for outlining what you've heard from Albertans, but my question to you is: what in the legislation will actually ensure that Albertans' will is followed even if they vote against leaving the CPP in a referendum? Because nothing in the bill actually requires the government to adhere to the will of Albertans. Recently I had the opportunity to visit Glastonbury

Village, a seniors' home in my riding, and I met so many amazing, valiant Canadians, senior Canadians who have served our country well, including folks who have served in our military. Many folks in their 80s and 90s are simply perplexed. They could not understand why this government is focusing on the UCPP when we have, in fact, a pension system that is the envy of the world. They couldn't understand. Why fiddle with it if it isn't broken?

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the hon. member. That's an excellent point. That's definitely what we're hearing, and I find it very concerning that the government is not acknowledging that. We have a CPP that Albertans, Canadians are happy with.

I know that you had mentioned speaking with members of the military. As the liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces and veterans we've heard significant concern when it comes to them gambling with their pensions. I'm sure the government is well aware that those that are current, active serving members in the CAF don't get to decide where they're posted. If they are posted in B.C., they could be posted to Alberta. They don't have that option to say no; they'd come to Alberta, and there is significant concern about what that means for their pension. What happens if they are told through their employer to come here? What happens to their pension? They're paying into the CPP in every other province except Quebec. Quebec has an agreement that they get to pay in and receive the same benefits. Is Alberta going to offer that? It's very, very, very unsettling to our members of the Canadian Armed Forces, when it comes to their pension. They do not trust this government with their money. We hear it over and over and over again: "Just trust us. We're going to do the right thing." Well, we've seen time and again that that is not accurate, Mr. Speaker.

I know the previous member got up, saying: we keep hearing concerns from the opposition. To be clear, the opposition is being the voice of Albertans. We are speaking from the countless e-mails, the in-person town halls, the surveys that we've done. We are being inundated with constituents talking about concern of leaving the CPP. This isn't just us standing up talking about something. This is coming directly from those that we serve and represent not just in our ridings but from across the entire province, because the members of government aren't being accurate.

I would like to give way to the hon. member for an intervention.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs. Certainly, I can reflect and let everyone know that I have never seen so much response in my constituency office on one single topic as I have with this pension issue. This is coming from a broad spectrum of people. I mean, I know my constituents quite well, and I know which ones are Conservative or not. It's coming from everybody, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the members opposite are receiving that same kind of feedback. Indeed, I know in that caucus there are many people harbouring serious doubts about pursuing this Alberta pension plan as well. We just had an election a few months ago, and I know that there were MLAs out against the pension plan.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. You're absolutely right. We've heard from the very members of their own party talking about concerns, and it's very concerning.

When it comes to those that are working in Alberta but perhaps live in other parts of the country – we know that this is something significant for those that come to work here, specifically the Maritimes – what happens to those individuals? Do they get an option to pay into this pretend whatever they're calling it, or do they have an option to stay in the CPP? This is something that I've heard

quite significantly. There are so many individuals across the country that live and/or work in other provinces, may have worked their entire career in Alberta and retired to another province, or worked their entire career somewhere and came to Alberta. What happens to them? If they don't want to participate in this pension plan that this government is coming up with, are they eligible to not be a part of it? There are just so many questions that we are hearing from Albertans that this government has simply not addressed.

4:10

One thing that I would really like to see – and I know so many others have expressed this: is the government going to do an in-person town hall? Is the government going to listen to people first-hand to talk about what Albertans want to talk about, in real time, face to face, being accountable to the decisions that they're making?

I know that there's concern about the referendum question, that if it does go to referendum, what is the question going to be? Is it going to be similar to the survey that doesn't even ask: do you want to leave the CPP? Is it going to be misleading? Is it going to be vague and confusing? We have no guarantees when it comes to this government because what they campaigned on was not this, yet this is Bill 2, which is quite significant, Mr. Speaker.

I know that a lot of Albertans, like the previous member had said, that have identified as not being part of our party are very, very upset and concerned and don't feel listened to. The Alberta NDP has been very clear. You want to come to our town halls? Please come. We will listen. We will be your voice in the Legislature. We're going to attempt to make sure that this government hears what you're saying because we know that they're being included in the correspondence. We know that the Finance minister, the Premier, their own personal MLAs are being included, and so are we. Our critic on this file from Lethbridge-West and the Member for Calgary-Elbow have been doing a lot of work on this, and they're not the only ones who are hearing loud and clear that Albertans do not want this Alberta Pension Protection Act.

I know that when it comes down to some of the language that this government has been using, like the previous member alluding to separation, Albertans are Canadians, and so many are incredibly proud to be Canadian and identify as Canadian first and then Albertan. They're appalled at the conversations that are happening not just with wanting to pull out of the CPP and have this government gamble with it, but that whole talk of separation is alarming. The fact that these members get up and so freely talk about that, they're clearly not listening to what Albertans are asking. If they were, they would have withdrawn this bill. This is not something that Albertans are asking for. Bill 2, a piece of legislation that has such a significant impact, wasn't talked about in their campaign.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many things in this legislation that just sit back and talk about, basically, "Trust us," which, going back to the referendum, is quite concerning that they're not doing what typically other governments do when holding a referendum. They're letting their cabinet come up with the question and not have it viewed by Albertans to talk about what the referendum question is, and when we look at what the survey questions are – there are several – none of them are direct, none of them ask the question that is clear and to the point because if they did, they would hear loud and clear that Albertans do not want to leave the CPP.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, but I really hope that government is listening to Albertans and acknowledge that it's not just the opposition. It is on behalf of Albertans, that we are talking directly to Albertans, responding to their correspondence, listening and voicing their concerns, so I really hope, at the end of the day,

that this government pays attention to what Albertans are asking for and just withdraws this bill. They do not want to leave the CPP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the chance today to have some time to speak about the bill, to share some of my thoughts, concerns, and questions, and I've taken a bit of a different tack. I've looked primarily at the first part, part 1, referendum, and I was really, really curious to note what we have in this bill versus what other provinces and other jurisdictions have in their own referenda, in the bills that respect how they run their own referendums in their own provinces. One of the reasons why I did that was because I wanted to have a sense of maybe what was missing in this particular bill as opposed to what is actually there and also the fact that comparison can be absolutely enlightening when you're looking at what other folks have already done.

What I found out was that in British Columbia in 2011 they had a referendum on whether or not folks wanted to continue with the notion of the harmonized sales tax. That actually began with a select standing committee, and that committee was there because they have something called the Recall and Initiative Act, so they had already established a select standing committee. Then the government of the day decided that it actually wanted a referendum. That's how B.C.'s Bill 4 came to pass. That act specified, in that referendum act, that the government would decide the source of the subject to be voted on, the government would decide the date, and it also noted that authorized participants and financing rules would be determined by regulations, which, of course, were going to be established by the government. I note the word "government" there; not cabinet, not by an order in council but government. That means to me that all of that information came to the Assembly so that all the members of the Assembly could vote with the very best of intentions and all that information that they needed.

In addition to that, because they had already had some discussions within that Recall and Initiative Act, their Chief Electoral Officer at the time had already established what that question might be. I'm going to say that again: their Chief Electoral Officer, an independent officer of the House, that person who is absolutely nonpartisan, decided upon a super simple question. It essentially said: do you want to change? It was really, really simple; super easy to understand.

What they also did, Mr. Speaker, during that time was that they made a series of regulations that allowed for people in B.C. to really understand what was going on. One of the things that they did was not only just to determine kind of the nitty-gritty of that process, but they also wanted the folks in B.C. to understand that basic information, what exactly it was they were actually going to be looking at and voting on, so they appointed someone called the referendum funding decision-maker, who at the time was a QC, so a lawyer. That person was going to be able to point to specific organizations, one that represented the yes side and one that represented the no side, so that not only were folks given basic information about how a referendum has to proceed and all the processes, the procedure, that sort of thing, but folks were also given the chance to hear what people were saying, hear opinions from the no side and hear opinions from the yes side and opinions that also had their foundation in regulation, because there were things they could and could not do. There was money they could and could not spend.

This is one of the things that this particular bill doesn't do at all. There's no notion here that perhaps it's a good idea to have

information out there, not just information about how a referendum actually works for people who are going to be voting on a referendum but also what people are saying. We've talked about misinformation. We've talked about fearmongering. I would think that this sort of thing would stop misinformation, would stop fearmongering. It's curious that the folks opposite don't have that sort of portion in this particular bill.

Mr. Dach: Intervention?

Ms Wright: Oh, yes, Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, for accepting my intervention. Mr. Speaker, often our referendums are referred to as a political tool in the name of transparency and clarity to provide cover for governments who wish to move forward with a particular project that they see they have on their agenda. Oftentimes the tool itself is used to lead in the direction that the government wants things to go. Of course, there are many ways to manipulate a referendum. We've seen that historically in our country and others, and I think the member is making some good cases as to how it might be done in a way that's at least seen to be more fair by setting some guardrails and parameters about the nature of the referendum that a government might choose to operate under.

4:20

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Dach. Yeah, absolutely to that point. Exactly.

An Hon. Member: No proper names.

Ms Wright: Oh, I'm so sorry. To the member.

That idea, that things need to be done fairly and equitably, is extraordinarily important. I suspect this is why the folks in B.C. did exactly that when they had that person who was a QC act in that sort of very, very responsible manner.

In an earlier referendum they did something very, very similar as well, in conjunction with their 2009 general election. This time they actually established a completely separate act called the Electoral Reform Referendum 2009 Act. This is interesting because they found that their own Referendum Act didn't really apply, so they established a completely new act. That act said that whatever result they had would be binding on the government, but it also did, just like the one I mentioned previously, in 2011, establish that opponent and proponent groups would receive public funds so that those groups could, again, provide information about those two opposing sides to voters who would be voting on the referendum. Not only that; it had to do with how members would be elected. Would it be first past the post, or would it be what they called a single transferable vote electoral system, which had been proposed by a citizens' assembly on reform?

An absolutely lovely idea: make sure that both points of view are represented but, again, within some confines of regulations that the Assembly created. And not only that; I find it really interesting that they also decided to use public funds to make sure that all of these things were going to be provided to the voters of British Columbia. In addition to that, the regulations clarified how both groups would be selected and organized.

Ms Sweet: Thank you for allowing me to do the intervention, hon. member. I find it really interesting, as you're speaking about the fact that in other jurisdictions during referendums public dollar is being used to ensure that there's appropriate information on both sides of the question and then it's being done by an independent

third party. With the way that the legislation is drafted currently in Alberta, I think that is one of the biggest concerns that I have in how this next referendum question could potentially be developed, also the fact that under the legislation as it's written right now in Alberta, third parties are able to fund raise to create their ability to create that conversation. So you could have a variety of different groups fund raising during a referendum to try to influence the outcome of a vote. I think that's where, for me, the biggest concern comes about: you know, what happens to that money? Who's fund raising and what exactly are they doing with that information?

Ms Wright: Thank you, Member for Edmonton-Manning. I appreciate those comments. Indeed, I do believe, again, that that was the very intent of the folks in B.C. in both 2009 and 2011. They wanted to ensure that there was a framework by which people could figure out what it meant to vote yes and what it meant to vote no, but they also wanted to ensure that there weren't all these pools of money being poured into this organization or that organization to influence what a voter might think. What they did was something that I think was quite reasonable. They made sure that people would have access to public funds to publicly and transparently provide information to the voters of British Columbia.

In B.C. it was the government which established the process, not cabinet, and it's curious that in this bill it's cabinet that establishes the process, not the Assembly itself. In both instances those acts and regulations dealt with ensuring that the question was created not by cabinet or order in council but by that absolutely away-from-the-Legislature, away-from-cabinet, away-from-order-in-council independent third party so that the voters, in fact, could make sure that it was a question that was asked in the most responsible and reasonable manner. And I wonder why we're not having that here in Bill 2.

Interestingly enough, Prince Edward Island – so I'm going from west to east here – also had their own referendum in 2019, and they conducted a referendum also on electoral reform, which seems to be the word of the day, at the same time as their provincial election. Their act was entitled the Electoral System Referendum Act, and what's totally cool about it, makes my teacher heart feel good, is that the act includes so many details. In fact, they begin by noting what the purpose of the act is. They talk about how the process needs to be transparent and fair in order to obtain a clear expression of the will of Islanders. They talk about how the referendum question will enable the expression of a sovereign decision by Islanders as to their electoral future. They provide for the appointment of a referendum commissioner, who's an officer of the Legislative Assembly, so, again, that person who is that official person but who is apart from the Legislature.

I yield to the member.

Member Brar: Thank you to the hon. member. Mr. Speaker, I came as an international student in 2011, and there are millions of immigrants who come to Canada, find their home here in Alberta and in Canada. You know, the thing is that they come to Canada because they believe that Canada has a place for them. They believe in the Canadian health care system, they believe that their kids will

be able to get proper education in Canada, and they believe that their pensions will be secure when they get old. Unfortunately, on all three fronts we have seen that in Alberta we have a government that is privatizing health care, that is jacking up the education fees, and that is gambling with their pensions.

I held a press conference with small-business owners in my riding, in Calgary-North East. They have openly spoken against it, and I have heard from so many business leaders, so many business councils; they have openly spoken against it. That is why we need a government in Alberta that will listen to Albertans.

Ms Wright: Thank you very much to my colleague. To kind of just piggyback on what he just said and talking about those small-business owners, I too have been speaking to small-business owners in my riding. Just like the folks that he has been talking with, the small-business owners in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview are also very concerned about what this means, and they are not uniformly in favour of moving from the CPP to the APP.

What I'd like to do at this point is to read just a little bit of an excerpt from a couple of constituents who have contacted my office, in terms of what it is they're thinking. We have one who says:

I write to you today to express my deep concerns regarding the proposal for Alberta to develop a pension plan and remove current and future pension contributors and beneficiaries from the CPP. The Canada pension plan is the envy of the world, with CPP outperforming international peers on all fronts over the past two decades. The case for an Alberta pension plan is short sighted and rests on dubious assumptions, including the belief that Alberta could extract concessions from the rest of Canada. Establishing an Alberta pension plan would expose Albertans to unnecessary risk and instability. I encourage you to use your position to advocate for current and future Albertans to continue to enjoy the benefits of a pooled national pension plan and end the folly and associated cost of pursuing an APP. The motivation to establish an APP is entirely political and is built on fictional notions of perceived inequality.

Mr. Speaker, that's only one e-mail that I've received. I know many other colleagues of mine have hundreds of e-mails. I must say that for about every 10 e-mails there is perhaps a person asking a question, and my staff and I are very, very happy to answer their questions and to clarify some of those concerns and some of those worries that they might have.

Another person says:

I am your constituent, and I am writing to ask that you commit to keeping Alberta in the Canada pension plan. For most Albertans the CPP is their only source of retirement income. It's not worth the risk. According to pension experts pulling Alberta out of the Canada pension plan is pure spite, and there's nothing in it for us. The risks and added costs are potentially catastrophic. Albertans deserve to retire securely and with dignity, and our retirement savings should not be used for political posturing.

The Acting Speaker: Members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	321
Introduction of Visitors	321
Introduction of Guests	321
Ministerial Statements	
Crisis in Gaza	322
Members' Statements	
Government Policies	322
Federal Fall Economic Statement.....	323
Water Supply in Southern Alberta.....	323
Support for Families	331
Provincial Pension Plan Proposal	331
Calgary-Beddington Constituency Priorities	332
Oral Question Period	
Provincial Pension Plan Proposal	323
Water Quality Monitoring in the Oil Sands.....	324
Electric Power Prices.....	325
Health System Reform.....	326
Rocky Mountain House to Nordegg Rail Trail.....	326
Medical Laboratory Services.....	327
Accessibility Initiatives	327
Provincial Fiscal Policies.....	328
Foreign Qualification and Credential Recognition	328
Teacher Recruitment and Retention	329
Municipal Funding	329
Education Funding.....	330
Child Care Access and Affordability.....	330
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 204 Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023.....	332
Tabling Returns and Reports	332
Tablings to the Clerk	333
Orders of the Day	334
Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech	334
Government Motions	
Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne.....	334
Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 3 Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023	334
Bill 4 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023	336
Second Reading	
Bill 2 Alberta Pension Protection Act	336

Bill Status Report for the 31th Legislature - 1st Session (2023)

Activity to Thursday, November 23, 2023

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitzings.

Bill 1 — Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023 (Smith)

First Reading — 10 (*Oct. 30, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 57-58 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft.*), 96-97 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 145-47 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 147-54 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 2 — Alberta Pension Protection Act (Horner)

First Reading — 89-90 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 154-55 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 274-85 (*Nov. 21, 2023 aft.*), 336-43 (*Nov. 23, 2023 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 3 — Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023 (Williams)

First Reading — 22 (*Oct. 31, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 90-93 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft.*), 180-87 (*Nov. 8, 2023 aft.*), 272-73 (*Nov. 21, 2023 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 307-09 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 334-36 (*Nov. 23, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 4 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading — 55 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 159-63 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 155-56 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 187-90 (*Nov. 8, 2023 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 309-13 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 336 (*Nov. 23, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 5 — Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023 (Horner)

First Reading — 55-56 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 156-57 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 190-97 (*Nov. 8, 2023 aft.*), 265-72 (*Nov. 21, 2023 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 6 — Public Health Amendment Act, 2023 (Amery)

First Reading — 90 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 157-58 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 313-20 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 7 — Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 111 (*Nov. 6, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 158-59 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 273-74 (*Nov. 21, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 8 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023 (Amery)

First Reading — 209 (*Nov. 9, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 299-307 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 201 — Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023 (Brar)

First Reading — 90 *(Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed)*

Second Reading — 114-25 *(Nov. 6, 2023 aft.)*, 234-37 *(Nov. 20, 2023 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division; not proceeded with)*

Bill 202 — Education (Class Size and Composition) Amendment Act, 2023 (Chapman)

First Reading — 209 *(Nov. 9, 2023 aft., passed)*

Second Reading — 237-46 *(Nov. 20, 2023 aft., adjourned)*

Bill 203 — Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act (Dyck)

First Reading — 111 *(Nov. 6, 2023 aft., passed)*

Bill 204 — Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023 (Lunty)

First Reading — 332 *(Nov. 23, 2023 aft., passed)*

Bill Pr1 — St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023 (Sigurdson, L)

First Reading — 289 *(Nov. 22, 2023 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills)*

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca