



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 4, 2023

Day 17

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
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McDougall
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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 4, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

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

Mr. David John Russell
July 29, 1931, to August 17, 2023

The Speaker: David J. Russell was elected as the Progressive Conservative Member for Calgary Victoria Park on May 23, 1967. He then won five consecutive elections for Calgary-Elbow, serving 21 years before retiring in 1989. He was the Minister of Municipal Affairs from 1971 to '75, minister of environment from '75 to '79, minister of hospitals and medicare from 1979 to 1986, and the Minister of Advanced Education and Deputy Premier from 1986 to 1989.

After attending schools in Calgary, Mr. Russell graduated from the University of Manitoba with a bachelor of architecture and from Cornell University with a master of landscape architecture degree. He then established his own architect practice. Prior to serving in this Assembly, Mr. Russell was an alderman for the Calgary city council from 1960 to 1967. Mr. Russell's dedication to his community was exemplified by his service on many boards and associations, including the Calgary general hospital board, the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, the Calgary Zoological Society. He received a distinguished citizen award from Grant MacEwan College in 1989 and the Alberta centennial medal in 2005. Mr. Russell passed away on August 17, 2023, at the age of 92.

Quill

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's been nearly a thousand people who have served this Chamber, but there's only been one canine. It's with sadness that I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to Quill, the first service dog to sit with an elected official in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Chamber. Quill was a miniature poodle and was a hearing ear service dog to Heather Forsyth, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek from 1993 to 2015.

Quill's service to Ms Forsyth and the Legislature began on October 28, 2013. Quill's training included responding to different sounds such as doorbells, cellphones, alarm clocks, and Ms Forsyth's name. Quill demonstrated his ability in the Chamber by alerting Ms Forsyth when someone was trying to get her attention. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Ms Forsyth as she mourns the loss of not only her service dog but a loyal friend. We also thank the Lions Foundation of Canada for their important work training animals that not only enhance the lives of Canadians but in this case contributed uniquely to our democracy.

In a moment of silent prayer and reflection I ask you to remember Mr. Russell and Quill as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Corrina Pasarica. I invite you all to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker: The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated upon Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Iroquois, Blackfoot, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We also further acknowledge that the province of Alberta also exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, it's my pleasure to recognize a former member of the Assembly, a good friend of mine, near and dear to many, Mr. Richard Gottfried. Mr. Gottfried and I were both elected in 2015 and were members of the largest freshman class of MLAs since the first Legislature in 1906. An interesting factoid about Mr. Gottfried is that he was the first Progressive Conservative member to be elected to the opposition before government in nearly five decades. It was an honour to serve with him, and I ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, it's my pleasure to introduce our anthem singer for today, Corrina Pasarica. She has been the scheduler in Arts, Culture and Status of Women for the past year, and singing has been part of her life since she was young thanks to her mom and her dad's musical influence and passion. She is joined in the Speaker's gallery by her husband, Daniel, and her parents, Ruben and Gisela Labrentz. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, through you and to you to all the members of the Assembly we have 35 students from the wonderful school of Holy Family elementary-junior high. They're accompanied by their dedicated teacher, Ms Nicole Turko. I ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to all the members of the Assembly it's my pleasure to introduce the students and the staff from Lakeland Ridge school in Sherwood Park. I think

they're sitting on both sides of the gallery. If you could all stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Hoffman: It's my honour to introduce Laura, Geoff, Shannon, and Jo-Anne. They are all executive members of the Dovercourt Community League, and they are dedicated community builders facilitating strong intergenerational neighbourhood connections with events like the open skate at the rink, the seniors' social, and Dovercourt Helping Dovercourt. I ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce the leadership team of the county of Grande Prairie: Reeve Bob Marshall, Joulia Whittleton, Ryan Konowalyk, Carol Gabriel, Lesley Nielsen-Bjerke, and Jordan Tidey. Together they work tirelessly to advance our county's growth and prosperity. Please rise and join us in receiving the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you Sedona, Uyen, and Merv Weitz. Uyen and Merv's 10-year-old daughter Sedona is the next big name in golf and the Canadian reigning national champion. She's a great ambassador to the game of golf. But as good as she is in golf, she's an even better young lady; we are in the presence of greatness. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through to all the members of the Assembly Amrit Virdee. With a master's in journalism and a decade of experience she founded *Punjabi Post* in 2023 by herself to inspire women and girls as she addresses important social and political issues. I ask Amrit to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members someone many of us know well, former MLA Denise Woollard, who served the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek from May 2015 until April 2019. Denise served on many, many different legislative committees and as an MLA in Edmonton's southeast. Denise was known by many and found often doing outreach work at the Meadows rec centre. She is joined today by friends Nicole Bownes and Candice Averill. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Dianne Kohler from the Camrose Regional Exhibition, home of the BVJ, and also members of the heart and stroke group. My brother, sadly, passed away from a heart attack this summer, and I'm just so grateful for all the work that you do.

Thank you, everyone.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise today and welcome my daughter Sloane and her grade 6 class. Today I unofficially am abdicating from the UCP to support my daughter's love of Harry Potter and join House Gryffindor. Please rise and enjoy the warm welcome of all the muggles here today.

Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker and members of the Assembly, I'm honoured to introduce Carie Fargey-Scott, a dear friend and brave cancer survivor. After valiantly battling stage 3 cancer for 20 months, Carie is now cancer-free and preparing to return to work. Besides her remarkable resilience, she's known for her memorable

lemon meringue pies and her captivating singing with the Leduc Drama Society. Today she joins us before resuming her professional journey. I ask Carie to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Job Creation and Economic Development

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very excited to share the outstanding news of Alberta's strong employment landscape. The recent surge in job numbers, with nearly 8,900 new jobs, primarily full-time, created in November, is a positive indicator of the strength of Alberta's economy. Alberta's appeal continues to draw in more people, resulting in the staggering addition of 14,400 new workers into our labour force last month alone. Over the past year our province has seen an astonishing 4.1 per cent increase in employment, far outstripping the national average of 2.5 per cent.

This success owes to our government's unwavering commitment to fostering an investment-friendly climate. The recent decision by Dow Chemical to select Fort Saskatchewan as the site for its Path2Zero project stands as a shining example. This venture represents one of the most significant private-sector investments in Alberta's history. It's set to generate a substantial 6,000 jobs during peak construction and sustain 400 to 500 full-time positions upon reaching operational capacity.

These strong employment figures reflect the diversity of sectors propelling Alberta's economic engine. From growing industries in technology and innovation to our traditional sectors like energy and agriculture, our province showcases a dynamic blend of opportunities. It is clear that Alberta's economy is not only thriving but evolving, diversifying its portfolio to create sustainable long-term growth and prosperity for all Albertans.

The economic trajectory of our province is nothing short of exciting and promising. Alberta continues to generate a multitude of high-quality jobs while attracting substantial investments, solidifying its position as a hub of economic growth and opportunity. Let us remain resolute in our commitment to nurture and expand this prosperity, ensuring that Alberta remains a beacon of opportunity and growth to all.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, 150 years ago today the merchant ship *Mary Celeste* was discovered by the Canadian ship *Dei Gratia*, sailing abandoned near the Azores islands. The ship was empty. She was in dishevelled but seaworthy condition, under partial sail, and with her lifeboat missing. The personal items of the crew, including the navigation equipment of the captain, were still on board. The last recorded location of the ship in their log was in early November. It started one of the greatest maritime ghost stories of all time, but there is a special connection to what we're seeing from this UCP government.

For weeks now their pension consultation has been drifting, aimless, and seemingly abandoned by this government. Despite promises, there hasn't been a single in-person town hall, and the telephone town halls have only talked to 150 prescreened Albertans, and now silence. Like the *Mary Celeste*, this government's pension plan is adrift, floating aimlessly without purpose and without aim.

The government knows a vast majority of Albertans do not want to leave the CPP. They know that Albertans don't trust them to manage their pensions. They know that, despite their millions spent on propaganda, they can't trick Albertans into supporting their agenda to gamble away the pensions. They see the NDP town halls overflowing with concerned Albertans overwhelmingly opposed to being dragged out of the CPP. They see the responses, the calls, the texts, the e-mails. So, like the poor *Mary Celeste*, they drift, hoping that something will come along to find them, get them back on track and back on course.

But I have to tell my friends on the other side of this House that the only way they can avoid becoming ghosts is to abandon this plan, apologize for the fear and confusion that their arrogant attack on the CPP has created, try and rebuild the trust that they broke with Albertans and focus on plans that Albertans support and that will improve their lives. Leave the CPP alone. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Hon. members will know that there is a long-standing tradition of member statements: being able to make statements by members in an uninterrupted fashion. If there are additional interruptions, the member will be permitted to start from the beginning.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has a statement to make.

Federal Climate Plan

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another day, another costly announcement from the NDP-Liberal alliance in Ottawa. Last week Alberta's Energy Regulator proudly announced that our province has achieved its methane emission reduction target three years ahead of schedule, a momentous achievement, yet today, straight from COP 28, the federal government thanked us by shifting yet another of their climate goalposts, announcing a new, much higher, much more stringent methane target.

This announcement comes just weeks after painful layoffs at major energy companies, and while Canadians have grown used to attacks against productive, job-creating industries from the NDP-Liberal alliance in Ottawa, their pocketbooks have not. As all the ideological and environmental targets and programs do out of Ottawa, this will fall back on Canadians, who are already in the midst of an affordability crisis.

From Ottawa's costly carbon tax, which increases the price of every single good we depend on, to Ottawa's unconstitutional clean electricity regulation, which will hammer Alberta's electricity sector, irreparably harm our economy, and lead to potential power outages that will put lives in jeopardy; to the greening of building codes, which will only worsen Canada's growing housing crisis, because after eight years of doubling rents, doubling mortgage payments, and doubling down payments on homes, Canada's climate-zealous Minister Steven Guilbeault's thirst for suffering remains unquenched: all of these things are threatening to pile up and put middle-class families on the street.

As a government we're working hard to stand up to Ottawa for Albertans and make life more affordable, but it cannot be lost on anyone here, Mr. Speaker, that a membership purchase for the Alberta NDP is a membership purchase for the federal NDP, and it cannot be lost on anyone here that Jagmeet Singh is propping up Justin Trudeau's government. So it all begs the question: when will the Alberta NDP finally stand with Albertans and stop taking their marching orders from Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau's costly political alliance? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. Before I begin, I'd like to extend the well wishes and prayers of our entire caucus to the minister of community and social services and his family as they deal with the aftermath of a car accident and recovery.

Yesterday, December 3, was International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The global community has been marking this day since 1992. While it's important to mark the day and talk about our successes and highlight the lived experience of persons with disabilities, that is not enough. This one day every year must be the day that we remind ourselves of our commitments and genuinely evaluate our progress and plot our future. Let's go through a few Alberta highlights and lowlights.

1:50

As a matter of routine the Legislative Assembly of Alberta does not host a formal event in the rotunda marking IDPD, as we do for many other global events.

I'm very thankful we have ASL translation for question period, and we should be extending that service to all proceedings.

Alberta remains one of the only jurisdictions in Canada without accessibility legislation. The government of Alberta does not collect data on accessibility in a meaningful way, nor does it collect and share data on the accessibility of employment, communication, transportation, technology, and so much more. Accessibility is not a nice-to-have; it's a must-have.

Accessibility cannot be an afterthought. We have to plan for it, invest in it, protect it by enshrining it in law. Since 2019 Canada has had a federal accessibility act, which plans for an accessible Canada by 2040 by legislating process to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility within areas under federal jurisdiction. The feds have laid a path and established benchmarks. Alberta is one of the only jurisdictions in Canada without accessibility legislation, which means we have not even begun our journey to barrier free. That needs to change. We need accessibility legislation right now.

Happy International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last week we held two more in-person town halls, including one in St. Albert. It was standing room only to talk about pensions. Now, the St. Albert senior centre tried setting up in-person meetings with nearby UCP MLAs, but both cancelled. At our meeting, in response to a show of hands, over 90 per cent of the 400 people in the room voted to stay in the CPP. To the Finance minister: why is he so scared to show up in person and let Albertans tell him face to face what they want to do with their CPP?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take a quick opportunity to let the House know, you know, our thoughts and prayers on this side are certainly also with the minister of community and social services while he gets through this trying time with his family.

I am always pleased to hear that the opposition is active in engagement, as are we, on a topic that is very consequential, the

idea of it, to every Albertan, every Alberta family, every Alberta business. I'd like to circle back to how we got here, Mr. Speaker. We talk about affordability a lot. This has the potential to do great things for Alberta with their own contributions.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, on Friday we also met with over 200 Albertans in Red Deer. I'll give credit where it's due; the Member for Red Deer-South was there, too. Once again in response to a show of hands 85 per cent of people said they wanted to keep the CPP. To the Finance minister: has the Member for Red Deer-South had the opportunity to report back to him, and if so, doesn't that Finance minister think it's a little weird that the only in-person feedback he's collected is coming from the Official Opposition's in-person town hall?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think it's surprising and a little weird any time I get any information from the opposition outside one of the big ring roads in this province, but I will take it up with the Member for Red Deer-South. I would love to hear his feedback about how this is going for him. I encourage any member to talk to their constituents on any topic. What I can tell you about our engagement is that I am looking forward to having a meeting with the panel, with Mr. Dinning, very soon to talk about what they've learned, whatever feedback they have for us, and talk about next steps.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want the minister to meet with them.

Now, last Friday the Member for Red Deer-South even spoke, and in so doing, he kind of pulled the curtain back a bit. He argued that replacing the CPP with the UCP's plan would allow employers to reduce or even eliminate contributions to CPP. Obviously, a plan like that would either increase risk or transfer the cost of pension security from corporations to citizens or both. To the Finance minister: is this the real endgame, and if so, why won't he admit that to Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I've been clear. There is no endgame here other than having a conversation with Albertans about something that the federal government has made clear to me at FPT is totally the right of a province to consider. Knowing that, we'll continue with our engagement. The first round is complete. I look forward to meeting with the panel to talk about next steps. This is a complicated idea, admittedly, brought to us by the Fair Deal Panel. It has great potential and promise for Albertans. We look forward to having the conversation.

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, so do Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the National Payroll Institute recently sent a letter to all 40,000 of its members detailing how the UCP's plan to gamble away their pensions would seriously damage Alberta's economic stability. According to this letter 95 per cent of the institute's members are not convinced of the plan's benefits. They worry that the UCP's plan does nothing but increase costs, administrative burdens, and economic risk for business owners. Why would the minister continue pushing forward a plan that businesses don't even support?

Mr. Horner: I would encourage the National Payroll Institute or any other organization to submit to the panel. This is a live conversation, Mr. Speaker. When you're looking at what we're actually talking about, it's the net contributions of Albertans since

inception of the plan as it's changed, the investment income that is accrued through Albertans' net contributions. That's what makes this possible. We're talking about the chance to decrease contributions, potentially even with the capacity increase benefits. That's what we're talking about.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this UCP has previously decried interprovincial trade barriers and the fact that they can cost the Canadian economy at least \$80 billion a year. We agree. But in their letter the National Payroll Institute clearly outlines that the UCP's plan to gamble away Albertans' pensions would create a whole next level of interprovincial trade barriers, barriers that would just impact Albertans. To the minister: why would the UCP want to set up even more trade barriers for Albertans instead of making efforts to reduce them?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think what is clear is that Quebec has always had a Quebec pension plan. They didn't join in 1966. They have 39 agreements with the Quebec plan. There are 60 with the Canadian plan. I see no reason that we could not follow their lead, create our own agreements. Even if you're planning on retiring soon to a different province, I'm sure that we can make sure that we have the kind of mobility and portability that is required for any Albertan. Whether you work there or you work here, you take all the information and there's one cheque.

Ms Notley: The institute is not sure.

Now, they did also share research demonstrating how an increasingly complex payroll process will cost employers and the economy. They state that the UCP's pension scheme would have, and I quote, a disproportionate impact on small businesses and require, quote, a significant investment to reprogram systems and retrain staff. End quote. This could mean the difference between staying open or closing their doors. This government claims to be concerned about small businesses, but then why is the minister ignoring their pleas to just leave well enough alone?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I do hope they put a submission in if they're worried about technical implementation challenges that we may face if we're to do this. Sure; submit that. That sounds practical.

We're not anywhere near that yet. We're having a conversation with Albertans about: do you like this idea? What is important to you in this plan? Is it benefits? Is it contributions? Is it any number of things? That's what we're going to continue to find out, Mr. Speaker. Any group, please submit to albertapensionplan.ca and the panel.

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

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, working Albertans do not want the UCP gambling with their pensions. If the UCP were listening, they would have heard it by now. The numbers they are spending millions promoting aren't real, their consultation is a sham that has only talked to 150 people, and everyone from retirees to job creators is telling them what a disaster this pension gamble would be. How far is the Premier willing to take her agenda to gamble with Albertans' pensions before she takes out the earplugs and actually starts to listen to the working people of this province?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, no one is gambling anything. Back to what's actually happening: having an engagement in a consultation with Albertans that isn't meant to be over right now. You're racing towards a conclusion on that side of the House. The engagement was always intended to run until May of next year. There's lots of

time. I look forward to talking to Mr. Dinning and the rest of the panel about what they've heard so far, what questions are at large in the minds of Albertans, and then we can discuss next steps. But it's a live conversation, especially with the feds promising to involve the Chief Actuary. If the information changes, so will the conversation. [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Ip: The National Payroll Institute warned that the UCP plan to gamble away CPP could limit Albertans' work opportunities, out-of-province career growth, and retirement options. They warn that the added complexity of creating our own pension plan could result in higher costs for Albertans who work for out-of-province companies, and they say directly that, quote, establishing an Alberta pension plan is costly and risky for everyone concerned. Both businesses and workers are speaking out against this UCP government. Why isn't the Finance minister listening?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, any good-faith submissions from groups like the National Payroll Institute: we welcome them. Bring that information to albertapensionplan.ca, bring it to the panel. Let us go through it, and if they have sincere concerns, we can work through that. What I'd come back to is that any challenges or costs come back to the scale of what we're talking about. What the LifeWorks report showed was that there's the potential for \$5 billion, with a "b," annually between employers and employees, that would stay in Alberta, you know, to add to the economy for every family, for every business.

Mr. Ip: The National Payroll Institute makes clear the risks. Quote: an Alberta pension plan could negatively affect all pension recipients, including those in Alberta. The institute points to evidence in Quebec, which has its own pension plan, but people pay more and receive less. Albertans work their whole lives for their Canada pensions. It's their reward at the end of a long career. Why would this government have them pay more and receive less?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that couldn't be further from the truth. As Bill 2 states – that's on the floor in this Chamber right now – there are four basic principles with Bill 2 that we're going to ensure that, if it's this government or the next one, we'll have to follow to pursue this idea: referendum, the asset withdrawal has to be used for the set-up and operation of an APP, the benefits have to be the same or better, contributions have to be the same or less. That's the conversation with Albertans.

Member Brar: An Alberta pension plan could come at a great cost for employers. This is the warning from the National Payroll Institute, who in a letter to their members last week warned that this government's plans could create complexity for employers and payroll professionals. The institute reports that 95 per cent of its 40,000 members are not convinced the UCP pension gamble has any benefit to them. Can the Minister of Finance explain why, during a time of unaffordability and stress, he's pushing a plan that could put Albertans' paycheques at risk?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think I might have said this last week, but I think this government is in great shape if we're going to burn the first four questions on active, ongoing engagement. I know it's a little different than Bighorn, Bill 6, the carbon tax. Like, I know the way you guys did it during your term. During ours the engagement is ongoing, an impartial, nonpartisan panel led by a former Finance minister. Also, the first Alberta nominee on the

CPPIB board is also part of the panel having the conversation with Albertans.

Member Brar: The National Payroll Institute describes the Canada pension plan as one of the most well-governed, reliable, and secure pension plans in the world. In contrast, they know that the UCP's plan would make it harder for companies to grow or expand, reducing business competitiveness. They say that the high costs associated with the UCP's plan could discourage companies from expanding or investing in Alberta. Albertans deserve the truth when it comes to their retirement. Why has the government been hiding these risks from Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I do find it kind of interesting when national organizations are going to criticize Alberta's ability to attract investment or run businesses effectively. I think you just have to look to the feds' fall economic statement about what's happening in the rest of Canada and look at the mid-year update in Alberta. People continue to move here. They're voting with their feet. They want to be Albertans and part of what's happening in this province. We've heard the jobs numbers: more new people here in 11 of the last 12 months, a stark difference from when you guys were in power.

Member Brar: I have stood with small businesses worried about the impact the UCP's pension plan will have on them and their livelihoods. They feel blindsided since the UCP refused to campaign on this in the election and worry about the higher costs and risks that an APP brings. The National Payroll Institute has urged the government to consider the implications of exiting CPP carefully. Since the Finance minister isn't listening to Albertans, will he listen to the National Payroll Institute and end his government's pension gambles?

Mr. Horner: The National Payroll Institute out of Toronto: you bet. I think we all get where this is going.

Back to what we're talking about here, Mr. Speaker, no Albertans should be concerned. This is a live, active conversation that we're having out in the public in a transparent way. We've asked the feds to get involved. They've said: yes, we must. It's our legislation, and they're involving the Chief Actuary so that we can have this conversation in the most honest way possible and any other province could consider it as well. That's what we joined on to in 1966, and that's where we're at right now.

Medical Laboratory Services

Dr. Metz: This UCP government nearly collapsed medical services in Alberta with its move to privatization. Wait times skyrocketed, and there were serious concerns about inaccurate results. All of this came as a result of the incompetent management of this government. Taxpayers are on the hook for cleaning up the mess, but no one on that side of the House is being open with the numbers. Neither the Finance minister nor the Health minister have been able to tell us the true cost so far. Will either of them tell us how much of Albertans' money has been wasted?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were unacceptable timelines. We acted very quickly. We came to a resolution with the owners of DynaLife. It is still in transition. As soon as we have those numbers and are able to share them, we will of course share them. I've indicated publicly that I anticipate having those numbers in the spring. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Dr. Metz: Given that neither minister knows how much money will be wasted as a result of the UCP DynaLife fiasco or they won't say but given that surely the ministers know how much has been spent botching our lab services so far and given that DynaLife does not deserve a blank cheque nor a gift from taxpayers, can the Finance minister or Health minister tell us the exact amount of cash that DynaLife has received during this lab services disaster to date?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, when DynaLife won the contract to move forward with Calgary and south lab services, they were already operating in Edmonton and north and were doing a very good job for a number of decades. There was no indication that they could not do the subsequent Calgary and south. The members opposite . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite don't really want to hear an answer, because they're shouting so loudly. But at the end of the day, the services weren't being provided that Albertans need, and we acted quickly to make sure they were getting the services they need. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Dr. Metz: Given that Albertans have been paying the price for the DynaLife disaster for years and given that the crisis in our health care system continues and the lab service fiasco caused by the folks over there has made matters so much worse for Albertans and given that people want to know that DynaLife is not profiting from this disaster, has this government, at the very least, capped the amount of money DynaLife would receive, and can either minister tell this House what that total is? Just how much will we pay for this disaster?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated earlier, DynaLife was operating quite successfully in Edmonton and north for decades. There was no indication that they couldn't handle Calgary and south until it became a problem. There was a problem, we fixed it, and now services in southern Alberta and Calgary have improved significantly. In fact, they have come to the provincial average. So lab services are being provided. They're high quality. There was a problem; we fixed it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has the call.

2:10

Methane Emission Reduction

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to see Alberta hit its methane emissions reduction target three years ahead of schedule through an effective, provincial-led approach. But today I see once again the federal government announcing more unilateral methane emissions rules and targets that are unrealistic, costly, and threatening to Alberta's success. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: how is Alberta responding amidst these new top-down federal mandates?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to my colleague for the question. Today the federal government unilaterally announced a new set of unrealistic rules and targets. Once again they are ignoring

the needs of Canadians in the hopes of winning international headlines. Alberta is already a global leader when it comes to reducing methane emissions. We've reached our provincial target three years early, unlike Ottawa, which has never hit any of its emission targets. We will stand up for Alberta. Managing emissions from the oil and gas industry is our job, not Ottawa's, and we are getting that job done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that Alberta's track record is clear when it comes to methane emissions reductions and environmental stewardship and given that our approach has saved industry upwards of \$600 million, my question is simple. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: how will Alberta ensure that we continue to reduce methane emissions while keeping our economy growing?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to my colleague for the question. For years Alberta has done the hard work and achieved results when it comes to reducing methane emissions. Instead of punitive federal regulations, we are using a combination of regulations and market-based incentives and programs to get real results. Our government is just getting started. We have been hitting our methane emissions target, we have exceeded that target, and we will be seeking further feedback from the industry on the most effective ways to keep showing the world how it's done and how it's done best.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Given that this approach will require billions in upgrades and Ottawa has yet to provide virtually any financial support and given that Ottawa is only giving 60 days for input, less time than the recent federal electrical regulations, to the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: can you please tell the House how Alberta will negotiate on future climate targets with a federal government that operates in bad faith?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to my colleague for the question once again. We will stand up for Alberta, and we will do whatever it takes to protect our economy and our province. These new regulations will also cost tens of billions of dollars, yet Ottawa has provided virtually no financial support. That's not fair, and that's not right. We are calling on the federal government to stop punishing Alberta workers and businesses and step up to the plate. Enough is enough. We hope that Ottawa will listen to reason and stop putting ideology above common sense. If not, we will do whatever it takes to stand up for Albertans. That's what we do on this side of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore is next.

Halal Financing in Alberta

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Muslim community is one of the fastest growing communities in this province. Many members of the community are unable to access mortgages due to systemic barriers. For years they have been asking this government for alternative financing options that are compliant with their religious beliefs. Can the Minister of Finance and President of

Treasury Board tell the House if the government plans to implement the election commitment on halal financing in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, thank you. That's a great question. That is something that we're working on. It's taking quite a bit of time. It's obviously complicated, but we've reached out to the Muslim community. They're working with us in that regard to try to build this behind the scenes, something that could meet all of their needs. We're also working with the credit union system and conversations with ATB. Yeah. We're hopeful that in the reasonably near future we'll be able to have some kind of a product that will meet everybody's needs.

Mr. Haji: Given that the Premier made a promise in a town hall to the Muslim community on April 12 to introduce access to halal financing in Alberta and given that the Premier wrote a commitment letter on May 26 stating that "Under my government we will introduce Halal Financing... this initiative will enable Muslim families to access mortgages that are not based on interest," can the minister tell Albertans what, if any, work has been done on this critical matter so far? It's been eight months.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have a task force working behind the scenes, like I said, working with the credit union and other lending institutions to try to build this product. It's obviously complicated. If we could make it faster, we would, but I think it's important that you get it right before you consider bringing it forward in legislation, so we're trying to do that. There are complexities even within what different segments of the Muslim community need, so we're trying to work with all of the subjects to make sure we have something that works for everyone.

Mr. Haji: Given that this government made a promise to Muslim Albertans eight months ago to implement halal financing and given that since the election there has been no communication at all with Muslim groups or Muslim financial experts and given that failing to address the lack of mortgage accessibility prevents Muslim Albertans from becoming homeowners, I ask the minister again: when will this government make good on its commitment to Muslim Albertans?

Mr. Horner: As I said in my previous answers, I honestly can't give you a firm timeline, but I'm happy to work with that member offline and show you the work that has happened. I think it is ongoing, and like I said, it is admittedly complicated, but we don't want to make a mistake before we come to this House to legislate. We want to get it right. It's obviously complicated, and we want it, like I said, to work for every subsection of the Muslim community.

Filipino Community Concerns

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to the second-largest Filipino community in all of Canada. I was so honoured this past weekend to speak at the Alberta rural Filipino convention. While there, I heard concerns about the UCP decision to put a stop to the Filipino curriculum that our Alberta NDP government had begun building. To the Minister of Education: why did this government stop that vital work, and will you commit today to resuming that work?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to have a conversation with the community. I meet regularly with leaders from the community

on various different topics. Happy to have a conversation with them and explore additional steps that the government can take. Of course, as the member knows, we're in the middle of a process right now with respect to our curriculum. We're looking at updating all components of our curriculum, from math to English, science, and social studies. Of course, with that redevelopment and redesign there are unique opportunities there to make sure that we are improving the curriculum that we're delivering to our children.

Mr. Sabir: Given that so many members of the Filipino community work tirelessly as nurses and in other critical jobs in our hospitals and clinics each and every day and given that, like every worker in health care for the past four years, they are exhausted, overwhelmed, and short-staffed and don't see an end in sight for the chaos the UCP government has caused in our health care system, will the Minister of Health apologize to thousands of Filipino health workers for failing to support them and all of their colleagues on the front lines?

The Speaker: Generally speaking, just because we're asking a question about a group of people, that doesn't connect the first question to the additional supplementals. It's difficult to connect a question about curriculum education to a question about health care. If the minister would like to answer, she's welcome to do so, but I think it's important that the rules of order are also followed.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a very good relationship with the Filipino community. In fact, we signed an agreement, a memorandum of understanding, to get more health care nurses of Filipino descent here to work in our – and, of course, we're concerned about every health care worker that is out there. I want to take this opportunity to thank every health care worker that's out there, that has worked tirelessly for Albertans and continues to work tirelessly for Albertans. It's why we need to do a refocus, because, of course, our health care system has let many of our health care workers down.

Mr. Sabir: Given that at the same convention I also heard from so many that they are worried about the fate of their pension and given that the people in this incredible community contribute to our workforce and economy and given that the CPP is one of the best parts of being Canadian, will the Minister of Finance promise the Filipino community that he will scrap his government's scheme to gamble away their pensions? All they want from this government is hands off their CPP.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, from the Filipino community or every other community of Albertans the message is the same: ongoing, active conversation about an admittedly complicated scenario. We're working with the federal government. They've asked the Chief Actuary. If the information changes, so will our conversation with Albertans, but I think it's important that everyone has the most up-to-date information about the potential and promise this could have for the province, for Alberta families and Alberta businesses. And if that changes, so will the engagement style, but for right now we're just having the conversation the most honest way...

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

2:20

Real Estate Licensing Land Titles Registry

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Real Estate Council of Alberta, RECA, has recently proposed changes to how brokerages

and real estate agents file for licences. Currently there are four types of licences: real estate, mortgage brokerage, property management, and condo management. Given that proposed changes would add an additional category requiring a fifth distinct licence, potentially increasing costs and red tape, to the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: can you further explain this current proposal from RECA?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. It's my expectation that RECA will take the feedback that they receive from industry associations and licensees into account when determining whether or not to proceed with changes. Any changes to the rules require ministerial approval, and I can assure you that I will be paying close attention to any changes to ensure that RECA does not impose significant costs on licensees or add any unnecessary red tape for Albertans.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that this change would create multiple industry sectors with separate licences and given that this proposal could potentially increase licensing costs and given that this would make Alberta the first jurisdiction in North America to issue licences in this manner and given that 65 per cent of area realtors already hold licensing in more than one sector, to the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: how are you planning to consult on this issue?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that RECA is in the second phase of the third phase of their consultation, and they are carrying out due diligence by consulting with industry on proposed changes. I expect that the feedback that they bring forward will be based on the information that they receive from fellow licensees and other industry stakeholders. RECA told me and the licensees that the proposed changes would not result in any additional costs for Albertans, and I look forward to seeing that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that it was taking 84 days last year to get a land title registered in Alberta and given that real estate buyers were having to buy hundreds of millions of dollars in land title insurance, sending even more money down east to the Laurentian elite, and given that this problem has existed for over five years already, to the minister of service Alberta: what are you doing to fix the land title registry?

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I have a trigger warning for the NDP because I got some great news for everybody in this House. Thanks to the laserlike focus of our department, the enhanced process improvements, and the additional staff that we hired, it is mission accomplished . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: . . . at land titles. [some applause] Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. The 84-day backlog has been eliminated, and we're back to a standard of under 12 days. That's great news for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
A point of order is noted at 2:23.

Flying Canoe Festival Funding

Mr. Schmidt: The flying canoe festival is a free family-friendly celebration of French-Canadian, First Nations, and Métis culture and traditions. The festival is also a profound act of reconciliation, a creative, interactive, and educational event that puts local history front and centre for all ages. On November 9 the festival organizers received notice from Heritage Canada that their grant was cut in half, leaving them with a nearly \$50,000 budget shortfall to cover just three months before the festivity begins. Will the minister join me in my call to the federal government to restore the federal grant money that was cut?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of arts and culture.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage that organization to reach out to my office. This is a matter that I would be happy to review and discuss.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this is a tremendous opportunity for the minister to provide us with specifics and given that the flying canoe festival has enjoyed tremendous success since it started given that it draws over a hundred thousand visitors a year to Edmonton's river valley, all eager to share in the unique French-Canadian, Indigenous, and Métis cultural experience, but given that this has all been put at risk by a sudden cut from the federal government, what will the minister do specifically to save this festival?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of arts and culture.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a little bit rich hearing the members opposite talk about things the federal government is doing that they don't agree with. As I said before and I'll say again, on this side of the House we continue to stand up for Albertans.

Again, I would encourage that organization to reach out to my office so we can have a discussion on this matter.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister of culture can access emergency funding for these kinds of programs pretty easily, given that there's a cryptic line item in her budget called Other Initiatives that funds exactly these kinds of requests, and given that according to her own annual report that budget was overspent by \$12 million last year, can the minister find \$50,000 in the couch cushions of her office to save the flying canoe?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that Alberta's government has stepped up and that we do have a reconciliation grant that fits these types of projects. I'd be happy to work with them to see if what they're doing would fit under our grant program. We have a great program for cultural events such as this so that we can really work with our Indigenous groups to make sure that the culture is really enhanced in the province.

Support for Sports in Alberta

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, as someone who dedicated my younger years to the game of hockey, playing three years in the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League, I never shy away from a line brawl, donnybrook, or a little friendly competition. Today I had the pleasure of competing and losing in a putting competition against the next big name in golf, 10-year-old prodigy Sedona Weitz. Sedona is a great ambassador for the game of golf and is helping put Canada on the map as a top competitor on the world stage. So my question to the Minister of Tourism and Sport: what is our

government doing to support Alberta's next generation of talented athletes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader and minister of sport.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that hon. member for the question. Like him, earlier today I took lessons from Sedona. It should come as no surprise that my short game is not my strength.

But, Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to support youth sports in this province. We're committed to supporting Alberta's next generation of talented athletes like Sedona and so many others with things like supporting the Alberta Winter Games; the Alberta Summer Games; and sporting, physical activity, and recreation operation grants that we're very happy about and very proud about. Youth recreation and sporting is certainly important to us and important to the future of the province.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that sports mean so much more than two teams battling it out over three periods on the ice or having the lowest number of strokes after 18 holes and given that sports can be a fundamental building block in the upbringing of our children and given that everyone in this Chamber can agree that all children deserve the opportunity to play sports, to the Minister of Tourism and Sport: what is our government doing to ensure that every kid in Alberta can play sports?

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to that hon. member for the question. Sports do play an important role in the early stages of a child's life, and it teaches teamwork, it builds confidence, and it promotes healthy lifestyles that can last well into adulthood. Unfortunately, things like registration fees can make participation in sports difficult for some families. That's why we are proud to support and invest \$3 million in organizations like KidSport Alberta to subsidize registration fees for families. This will ensure that every kid has the opportunity to play sports throughout their childhood.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given the support that our government has given to such organizations as KidSport and given that this support will ensure that children across our province can chase their sporting dreams and given that the one thing that everyone who played sports while growing up can agree on is that there's nothing more awe inspiring than seeing their sports idols compete in person, to the Minister of Sport and Tourism: what is our government doing to help support sporting events in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. The world knows that Alberta has an outstanding reputation of hosting and attracting major international sporting events. I'm proud that our government is continuing to attract these new world-class sporting events. In 2023 we have supported several events such as the Calgary National Bank Challenger and the men's Pan-Am finals six volleyball championship right here in Edmonton. And the future looks great, with Edmonton being the host city for the Canadian Finals Rodeo from '24 to '26. The future of Alberta's tourism and sport is bright.

2:30

Emergency Shelter Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, winter in Edmonton is a given. We know it's coming; we know what it brings. Yet for years this government waited until the last minute before committing funding for winter shelter spaces, and usually it was not enough. Now, this year the UCP has committed to funding 1,700 winter shelter spaces, originally for October 1, then November 1, and now sometime in December. This uncertainty affects everyone: those in need, those who serve them, and all who live in our communities. Can the government provide a guarantee that all 1,700 spaces will be open before Christmas and operate 24/7?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, we've increased funding by 71 per cent this year, understanding that we need 24/7 emergency shelter. As the member stated, we're at 1,200 going to 1,700, and we're working intimately with partners in the Edmonton area to make sure that those shelter spaces are delivered. The truth is that we know we cannot have people living in open, public drug markets throughout winter, at any time of year, that are dangerous, run by gangs. We need to make sure that there are shelter spaces, that we get these people into the continuum of care, and that we deal with the crises that they're dealing with, whether it's mental health or addiction. They deserve recovery and out of this cycle.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that a shortage of quality 24/7 shelter spaces means those in need are forced to seek other spaces to keep warm and given that they're then more vulnerable to gangs and criminals, who prey on them, bringing violence and disorder to our communities, and given that the UCP's public safety task force was formed a year ago to address the issues of addiction, homelessness, and public safety but given that to date their only action has been to deploy provincial sheriffs to help patrol downtown and given that there have been no reports or updates on that committee's work, can the minister update us on how many times the committee has met since May's election and when they will take or recommend further action to address the root issues?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier and minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the member for the question. Certainly, the public safety task force was commenced in order to address some of the concerns that were, specifically, in downtown Edmonton and downtown Calgary. Yes, we have deployed sheriffs into downtown Edmonton, but I can tell you that we are working very closely with the Edmonton Police Service in regard to making sure that we do take care of vulnerable people. I can tell you the member is correct: these people are being preyed upon by organized crime; they are being preyed upon by gangs. That is something that we are not going to tolerate in this city, and on this side of the House we're going to do something about it.

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given that a shortage of quality shelter spaces is also directly linked to health issues like outbreaks of shigella and given that the last round of outbreaks saw 237 fall ill, 162 hospitalized, and given that the Royal Alex hospital is already at over 150 per cent capacity, with patients triple-bunked and getting care in hallways, and given that with the high rate of respiratory virus cases they don't have more space to properly isolate infectious patients, what additional supports or funding is the government providing to ensure shelters and service agencies are able to prevent or manage further outbreaks?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, we're working intimately with partners, including the city of Edmonton and local providers within the capital region, to increase by 500 spaces immediately, coming online in the next four weeks or so. We need to work closely to make sure we get this right. The truth is that there is a crisis when it comes to public safety not just for the wider community but for those living intermittently homeless as well. We will not let their safety be risked. We need to make sure that those spaces are there and also that they are protected, so we need to get them out of these public drug markets, run by gangs with threats of violence and rape, into a shelter system with the health care services they deserve. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Health, Education, and Social Supports

Member Irwin: This government's surplus could be truly transformational in the lives of Albertans. Classrooms are overflowing, hospitals are over capacity, countless Albertans are at risk of homelessness, mental health resources are out of reach for too many, more than six Albertans are dying daily from the drug-poisoning crisis, many fleeing sexual and domestic violence have nowhere to go, and more young people in care have died than ever before. I could go on. It doesn't have to be this way. I'm urging the Finance minister to convince his cabinet colleagues to start investing in the critical supports and services that Albertans need. Will he?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this government has invested in record numbers for 11 new recovery centres, two of which are already open. We know that the deadly disease of addiction is ravaging our communities, and recovery is the only way out of it. We know addiction ends in only one of two ways: tragically, death or, potentially, with a new lease on life in recovery. That's why we see the virtual opioid dependency program scaled up massively, with thousands of Albertans having access to immediate, same-day, life-saving, medical- and evidence-based treatment for those suffering from addiction. I could go on and on. I could talk about the increase that we're seeing around youth and prevention as well. The truth is that this government is investing ...

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

Member Irwin: Given that we've got a health care system in disarray and that, despite what the Premier and this Health minister say, what with their healthy immune systems and all, COVID isn't over and given that health care workers are overwhelmed – and so, too, are the hospitals they work in, with many running at over a hundred per cent capacity – yet this pressure could be alleviated now with this government's surplus through immediate funding of a south Edmonton hospital and a stand-alone Stollery hospital, will the Health minister offer a gift to all Albertans this holiday season by making the critical investments needed in our health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the members opposite ...

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: ... in 2018 the Health budget, the operating budget, was \$22.1 billion. Our budget right now is \$26.4 billion. That is a record investment, the '23-24 year: \$2 billion for our

primary health care system; \$243 million over three years to strengthen and modernize primary health care, the MAPS program; community care, continuing care, and home-care spending has increased by 15.3 per cent to \$4.3 billion, \$15 million over three years, and I could go on and on.

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

Member Irwin: Given that this UCP government has imposed deep cuts on our education system, resulting in ballooning class sizes, and that they could be using, again, the gift they've been given with their budget surplus to build much-needed schools and hire staff and given that this government already took a step backward with their decision to vote against our bill that would have helped the very students that they claim to serve, will the minister step up, do the right thing for teachers, education staff, students, parents, and commit that the education system, including enrolment, will be fully funded in his next budget?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that many of our school divisions are facing challenges. Of course, a lot of those challenges are due to the fact that a large number of people from across the country and around the world are choosing to make Alberta home. Once again, after many years of people fleeing the province, they are now starting to come back. Our economic prospects are strong; our financial prospects are strong. Furthermore, we will do the work that's necessary to ensure we continue to deliver a world-class education system. Just last week I announced \$30 million in additional funding to help those school divisions.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, EMS wait times have been a growing concern for all Canadians right across the country, including here in Alberta, over the years. As a former paramedic firefighter this is an issue that I have a keen interest in, not only for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo but right across the province, as we're all impacted by this, and the pivotal extra seconds to respond to emergency can mean the difference between life or death. Can the Minister of Health please explain what the government is doing to address the issue of emergency medical services wait times right across this majestic province of ours, that we call Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We know that we have more work to do to improve EMS response times across the province. Just last week I announced that we are working with paramedics and our EMS partners through a new standing committee to get direct feedback from our boots on the ground. As well, through our work to refocus the health care system, we will be setting clear performance indicators and mandatory reporting standards for EMS. I will provide an update on that work as it's ready. We're committed to this, and we're going to see that it happens, because Albertans deserve nothing less.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. It is given that one issue with emergency medical services wait times that I keep hearing about from Albertans comes from the perceived inefficiencies generated by the centralized emergency medical services dispatch model. It's given that there's

often a dependence on a dispatcher from Edmonton or Calgary or Peace River to have accurate knowledge of the areas where they are serving, in particular rural areas, where they might not be from. What is the government doing to increase the efficiency and reliability of the current centralized EMS dispatch model? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The Minister of Health.

2:40

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. We are committed to listening to regional perspectives and implementing innovative solutions to meet the needs of Albertans in rural and remote communities. There are many benefits to maintaining a central dispatch model, and we are committed to improving its efficiency while incorporating the recommendations outlined in the EMS dispatch review. We heard it loud and clear from the community, but we also have seen that it is a huge geographic area that the member is from, and therefore we've responded accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is given that a constituent recently made me aware of a 9-11 call – I'm sorry; a 911 call; we never say "9-11" because people will look for an 11 on the phone – where the centralized AHS dispatch sent a ground ambulance from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan. It is given that Fort Chipewyan is only accessible by ice road in the winter, by boat in the summer, and is only truly accessible year-round by an air ambulance. Time is life, and this oversight wasted crucial minutes that could have cost someone everything. What is the government doing to make EMS response better for my riding of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Last week I did announce that we will be creating a fourth dispatch centre in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. The regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is an isolated region, and it has very unique geography. It makes sense to add an additional dispatch centre in this area. The dispatch centre will follow the same standards, and it will be fully integrated into the provincial EMS dispatch model. We knew it was important to do this, and we're doing it.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the economic engine of Canada, with a young, skilled, and vibrant workforce in a diversifying economy, building strong, business-friendly policies that continue to attract job-creating investment. Our province has been leading Canada in economic growth, and this has resulted in increased migration to Alberta. This growth presents incredible opportunities for Alberta's progress as we continue to focus on

creating jobs, attracting record investment, and opening the doors for new workers here.

Thanks to our government's responsible fiscal management, Alberta's fiscal outlook continues to improve. Our economy remains strong, with continued growth projected over a three-year forecast. Alberta's overall GDP increased by 5.1 per cent in 2022 compared to 2021 and is expected to grow 2.8 per cent this year. Revenue for 2023-24 is forecast at \$74.3 billion, a \$3.7 billion increase from Budget 2023. Personal and corporate income tax revenue is forecast at \$21.8 billion, \$1.8 billion higher than budgeted. This increase in revenue will see the province generate a \$5.5 billion surplus, an increase of \$3.2 billion from the budget announcement in the spring. Our government's commitment to reduce the debt can also be proven as Alberta is one of the least indebted Canadian provinces as measured by net debt to GDP ratio. We will pay down a forecast of \$3.2 billion in debt this fiscal year.

Our government promises to keep working hard, and 2023-2024 will be our best year yet. Happy holidays.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Continuing Care

Ms Sigurdson: The facility-based continuing care review report was released back in May 2021. The UCP said at that time that they would adopt the recommendations and transform the system. Despite this commitment little has changed except a new bureaucracy is being created. I continue to hear from hundreds of Albertans about the substandard care their loved ones are receiving, so many heartbreaking stories that deny the dignity of seniors.

The key issue continues to be staffing. We know a highly skilled and dedicated workforce that has strong and trusted relationships with residents and their families is the goal. Even though we learned through the pandemic that the staffing model used in most facilities created precarious work and perpetuated the spread of COVID-19, this model remains in place. Part-time workers are struggling to get by. They are forced to work multiple jobs in different facilities or other low-wage jobs just to make ends meet. This in no way supports a stable workforce.

Seniors are supported best when their caregivers are consistent. The workers know the senior and thus have sensitivity to their particular needs. Tragically, the high turnover in the sector as well as the chronic understaffing means workers do not know who they are serving. This causes myriad problems in the care seniors are receiving. When family members speak up regarding their concerns, the excuse heard repeatedly is that they're short-staffed, so they cannot attend to the seniors' needs. Their needs are basic. Seniors need support with showering, toileting, eating, and mobility. A compassionate, caring worker is also a basic need.

To add insult to injury, when some families advocate, they're banned from the facility. Instead of responding compassionately, families are punished and not allowed to see their parent. This is not a solution. This causes further stress for seniors and their families. Seniors deserve so much better than what this UCP government is offering.

Notices of Motions

Member Irwin: I rise to give oral notice of Bill 205, Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023, sponsored by myself.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 14 there should be no evening sitting tonight.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 9

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

Mr. Schow: Oh, I sure do, Mr. Speaker. It's that time of year. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The chief government whip, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 1 the Public Interest Commissioner presented a proposed records retention schedule to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices for review and approval. On review the committee has approved the proposal through the making of this order under section 44.1(1) of the public interest disclosure act, also known as the whistle-blower act. As chair of this committee I'm pleased to rise and table these copies today to you.

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table communications from four Albertans concerned with long surgical wait times, limited surgical capacity, and fragmentation of the health care system. Allan has been waiting four years for shoulder and knee surgery, Gary went out of province at great expense because he could not function without the surgery he needed, Susan is worried about fragmentation of health care impacting management of her daughter's epilepsy, and Anne observed a sharply reduced access to eye surgery over the last few years. I have five copies to submit.

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 Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act the government of Alberta 2023-24 mid-year fiscal update and economic statement.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Nicolaides, Minister of Education, pursuant to the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act the College of Alberta School Superintendents 2022-23 annual report.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to points of order, I would just like to make note of Standing Order 13(7), that says, "subject to Standing Order 16 and 32(4)(b), after the Speaker's calling of Orders of the Day a Member may occupy another Member's unoccupied seat during the proceedings." During Oral Question Period over the last number of days there have been a number of members who have elected to sit in other seats. I'd just like to remind all members that they are to be in their seat until Orders of the Day is called.

That brings us to points of order, and at 2:23 the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose on a point of order because of the use of the term "trigger warning" by the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction. I note that this language has been used in the House before, and we have had discussion during debate about its appropriateness although I believe that it's the first time that a point of order is called. I'm rising pursuant to 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

A trigger warning generally is a caution made prior to sharing potentially disturbing content. That content might include some graphic reference to topics like assault, self-harm, violence, eating disorders, and so on, and this warning is used before topics are shared that could cause a posttraumatic stress disorder reaction. Unfortunately, we saw that used as a joke, drawing more stigma to mental illness. Making light of trigger warnings and mocking people who may have sensitivities is crass and an extremely damaging approach.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that it is beneath this Chamber and its hon. members. In the past members of the Official Opposition have even passed notes to talk to members of the government caucus, and the previous Finance minister even acknowledged and apologized for using that language and avoided using that language after that point. So I think on this side of the House we certainly recognize that the words "trigger warning" should not be used lightly, and it certainly felt offensive to this side of the House. This language certainly creates PTSD reactions, and it creates disorder in this House. There are real people who have suffered serious traumas, and those words are important to them, and they should not be used in a context that they are not appropriately related to. So I submit to you that it's a point of order. That language creates disorder, and it hurts actual people.

Thank you.

Mr. Schow: Well, it is rare that I rise in this Chamber at a loss for words. I think I'm there, but I will try to find them. In what was a very long argument on the point of order, I believe the point was that they are triggered by the word "triggered." I don't think the members opposite get to determine the severity of that word. I feel very strongly that if they're going to be triggered by the word "triggered," it sounds like a them problem. They may need to look inward because that is a choice, Mr. Speaker, to be triggered. I understand that there are certain things that can certainly be offensive, that they could be offensive . . .

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: PTSD is a choice: is that what you're saying?

Mr. Schow: If the member opposite has a submission she would like to make on this point of order, she is more than welcome to rise. It was just the other day that she was called on a point of order herself, Mr. Speaker.

But back to the argument at hand. I will try to be brief. This is not a point of order; this is certainly a matter of debate. I see no reason why the members on this side of the Chamber can't use the words "trigger warning," and if it is a problem for the members opposite, they should maybe grow some thicker skin. I certainly don't believe the language used after the words "trigger warning" was offensive or anything meant to cause disorder in this Chamber, so I really don't see how this is a point of order. I'd caution the member opposite to refrain from calling a point of order on this going forward.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I think the language that was used that created the point of order is well established. I might note that after some research by the table they don't have any history of a point of order being called on such language. While I think that there's been some conversation around the use of the words "trigger warning" in the past, I don't believe that there has ever been a point of order. I also know that there have been discussions around other language that is likely to create disorder. I would submit that words like "gaslighting," that have been used extensively by some members of the Chamber also from time to time, will create disorder. I do appreciate the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader's comments that mental health and addiction, issues around PTSD are important matters which members should consider when they use language in this Assembly.

I'm not of the opinion that saying the words "trigger warning" does rise to the level of a point of order, but as I have cautioned in the past, the context in which that language is used can and may in fact create disorder when by extension that then creates a point of order because of the disorder that it creates. I don't think that is the case today, but I do think it's important that we consider members in the Assembly in the language that we use. I think that goes on both sides of the aisle. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Point of order 2 by the Government House Leader has been withdrawn, and that brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 203

Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act

[Debate adjourned November 27: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. member has seven minutes remaining should she choose to use it.

There are 71 minutes remaining in the time allotted for second reading of Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism, the Member for Calgary-North.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so happy to rise today to speak in support of Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, moved by my hon. colleague and friend the MLA for Grande Prairie. I wish to extend a profound thank you to the hon. member for introducing this bill to help tackle a very serious ongoing issue for our province, which is foreign credential recognition.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In a world marked by increasing global mobility, our province stands as a place for opportunity for individuals from diverse corners of the globe. However, Madam Speaker, the journey of integrating foreign credentials into Alberta's workforce has often been riddled with challenges. As a government we are well aware of this issue and have been working towards addressing it. In 2019 we passed the Fair Registration Practices Act, Bill 11 at that time, to ensure that all qualified individuals applying to Alberta's regulatory bodies have access to equitable, timely, and streamlined

registration processes. The Fair Registration Practices Act also established the fairness for newcomers office, that works collaboratively with regulatory bodies across the province to ensure regulated professions' and trades' registration practices are transparent, objective, impartial, and procedurally fair.

Madam Speaker, we also have our international qualification assessment service, which plays a crucial role in recognizing education and training obtained outside of Canada. In this fiscal year, 2022-23, they successfully completed around 18,000 assessments, providing individuals with the acknowledgement they deserve, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

3:00

Bill 203 will play a pivotal role in shaping a future where good expertise and skills, regardless of their origin, are recognized and valued. At its core the purpose of Bill 203 is to establish the foreign credential advisory committee, a proactive advocate that will work to enhance the experiences of internationally trained individuals seeking to integrate into Alberta's workforce. By championing a more streamlined and efficient credential advisory system, the committee envisions a future where the talent and qualifications of newcomers are not hindered by red tape obstacles.

Madam Speaker, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act will help to continue to address the long-standing challenges faced by internationally trained individuals who come to our province. Many skilled immigrants often find their qualifications undervalued or, in some cases, perhaps not even recognized at all, hindering their ability to contribute fully to their chosen professions. This issue not only affects the individuals seeking to establish themselves in Alberta but also represents a loss for our province as valuable skills and expertise remain untapped. This legislation is a bridge that connects the valuable skills and expertise of newcomers with the needs of Alberta's workforce.

The creation of an advisory committee is like appointing expert guides who understand the intricacies of various international qualifications. These guides will work collaboratively with the regulatory bodies and the employers to create clearer pathways for newcomers, ensuring their skills are not only acknowledged but seamlessly integrated into our provincial workforce. The committee's responsibility is to streamline the acknowledgement of foreign credentials in Alberta by examining the existing legislation and regulatory frameworks, including those set by professional regulatory bodies that oversee the acknowledgement of foreign credential in Alberta, while assessing these procedures implemented in other Canadian jurisdictions to enhance the recognition of international qualifications, pinpointing successful aspects as well. By completing these evaluations, it allows the committee to provide recommendations to the minister, as outlined in section 7 of this legislation, which, according to the committee's perspective, would enhance Alberta's prosperity.

The committee's composition is carefully structured to offer a strategic perspective. Representatives from the Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism will speed up autocredentialing for workers with diverse backgrounds. The Ministry of Advanced Education will bring valuable insights from our educational institutions, complemented by the expertise of members from the Ministry of Health that will grasp the distinctive demands of the health care sectors. Additionally, Madam Speaker, representatives from the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade will contribute their expertise to address labour market shortages – as you know, it is a critical issue in this province – while members from the Ministry of Technology and Innovation will ensure that Alberta remains a dynamic hub for innovation.

Madam Speaker, we recognize the untapped potential in Alberta's diverse population, and we strive to create a system that facilitates rather than obstructs. This legislation is not a simple collection of clauses and paragraphs. It embodies our commitment to fairness, equity, and the recognition of immense talent that newcomers bring to our beautiful province.

Bill 203 will directly address an issue that affects the prosperity and inclusivity of our province. By recognizing and rectifying the challenges faced by internationally trained individuals in having their credentials acknowledged, the bill seeks to unlock a wealth of untapped talent in this province. Alberta is home to a diverse and skilled population. By ensuring fair recognition of foreign credentials, we not only honour the expertise and qualifications of newcomers but also position our province to be at the forefront of global talent integration.

The need to fix this problem is imperative for several reasons. Firstly, it aligns with Alberta's commitment to fairness and equality, ensuring that all residents, regardless of their origin, have equal opportunities to contribute their skills and expertise. Moreover, Madam Speaker, the economic implications cannot be overstated. By removing barriers to the recognition of international qualifications, we create a more efficient and dynamic workforce, ultimately driving economic growth and innovation. As Alberta competes globally for top talent, addressing these issues is not just a matter of inclusivity; it is a strategic move to secure our province's future prosperity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Madam Speaker, this proposed legislation signifies our unwavering commitment to fostering inclusivity, recognizing the immense talent of newcomers, and unlocking the untapped potential within our diverse population. This legislation will address the long-standing challenges faced by internationally trained individuals who choose Alberta as their new home. Bill 203 is a testament to our commitment to building a stronger, more vibrant Alberta where every individual, regardless of their origin, can contribute to our shared success. That is why I ask all members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak to Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. Let me assure you that Alberta's NDP is also committed to an inclusive province where all those coming here have the opportunity to pursue their dreams and utilize the skills that they have gained in their life to their fullest here in Alberta. When people have chosen to come to Canada and come to Alberta and they're coming here, we've committed to them a promise that they can really fulfill their lives and live a life that they've dreamed of, and it is upon us to make sure that they can do that.

Bill 203 introduces the creation of the foreign credential advisory committee, a new body with the specific mandate of facilitating the recognition of foreign credentials in Alberta. As the minister just mentioned, there was Bill 11, the Fair Registration Practices Act, introduced and passed in 2019. One might wonder why we haven't made more progress in the last four and a half years, but, you know, when you're unable to do, you strike another committee. The bill outlines the committee's mandate in reviewing existing legislation, that which the UCP already brought into place in 2019, evaluation of processes in other Canadian jurisdictions, and the formulation of recommendations to the minister. At the time of passing, Bill 11, the Fair Registration Practices Act, cited the need to intervene should professional bodies not be taking strong action to improve the accreditation process. I think we would have hoped that over the

last four years some of that work would have taken place. It was passed to ensure that the process was fair, fast, and transparent.

I'd like to note that in creating this committee to ensure that the legislation that's already in place, perhaps, is working – it's interesting that the UCP is proposing this committee, having just voted down a committee in Bill 202 to create an educational assessment committee, and their argument was that committees like these just aren't effective. It seems now that that committee wouldn't have been effective, but their committee will be effective. We'll certainly hope that that is the case.

3:10

Bill 11 created the ability for the minister to conduct performance audits and generate reports on progress in assessing foreign credentials. I did review a previous report. I noted that those reporting bodies – it wasn't the minister or the minister's staff that had conducted the audit, but it was a self-report that had been conducted by the regulatory bodies, the government staff acknowledging in those reports that they hadn't investigated the various responses noted in those reports, including the responses of "not applicable."

It includes in those reports an indicator 4 from Bill 11 providing "applicants with an interim registration decisions within six months." It was noted in the report that I looked at that 23 per cent of the regulatory bodies responded, "not applicable". One might ask why they're saying that reporting back within six months is not applicable, but that had not been investigated in that report.

Another question asks the regulatory bodies, again self-reporting, "Are they making their registration decisions in a reasonable time?" of course, based on their own determination of what is a reasonable time. Shockingly, the self-reporting of the regulators responded that, yes, they were reporting within a reasonable time. The regulators, though, also noted and responded "not applicable" for those suggesting that providing written communication on interim decisions and the right to appeal a decision was, again, not applicable and, again, not investigated by the minister's office.

The report says that the fairness for newcomers office will continue to work with regulatory bodies to meet the priorities of Bill 11. If that is the case and the fairness for newcomers office is working with the regulatory bodies to meet the priorities of Bill 11, again, we might question the need for this committee.

The report didn't ask regulators to report on how long their process takes or if they have targets to improve their process. The report doesn't mention fees involved for the assessments or any requirements for upgrading in Alberta or make any suggestions or recommendations on if challenges are being faced by submitters in paying assessment fees, how that might be overcome. The report didn't mention how many of the registered applicants that had assessments conducted had been approved and were now able to work in their area of expertise. All of these, we think, would be really important questions to ask and work that could be potentially already being done by the government without the need for a new committee.

I didn't hear the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism mention in his comments just now – he did say how many of the assessments had been conducted. I believe those numbers were just from the last year. But, again, he didn't talk about how many of them had been successful transitioning people into meaningful work.

The report doesn't discuss any gaps present with respect to the assessments not being approved or note any commonalities of gaps among applicants within certain professions or perhaps coming from certain countries. It noted only 10 intake countries there. One might wonder whether or not the minister's office is actually taking

these reports seriously in conducting their own investigation into credentialing practices. Could we not have already taken the opportunity to dig deeper into these reports and be taking action today on improving and accelerating credentialing?

Why today are we now putting forward a bill to create a committee to evaluate the legislation that's already there and look at the work that's being done across the country and other provinces? There's an office already in place. One might wonder whether or not that office has actually been given the guidance to do this work.

In the last four years why have we not been doing this work and making improvements to the system? Have we learned anything from our regulatory bodies? Are any of them best in class? Are any of them working to support others in achieving the same goals and outcomes?

Bill 203 doesn't impose any timelines for this committee. It does suggest that reports will come back. It talks about the composition of the committee, talking about expert advisers, but where will these expert advisers be drawn from? Will nongovernmental stakeholders be pulled in as advisers on this committee? What measures will be in place to ensure transparency? What mechanisms will there be to make sure that we're on track and that we are meeting our outcomes? Again, we've been at this work from at least 2019. We need to have answers to these questions.

Can the government provide details on the appointment process to ensure inclusivity and that we're including underrepresented communities? How will the committee co-ordinate with existing recognition processes and working with professional regulatory organizations, and how will we avoid duplication? The government should be rolling up their sleeves and doing the work that they committed to doing four years ago instead of striking another committee.

However, Alberta's NDP knows that more work needs to be done to ensure that skilled professionals coming to this province are able to work in the areas that they've been trained. They should have the opportunity to live a full life. We should be benefiting from the incredible skills that they bring here to fill gaps in our labour force. Alberta's NDP is committed to helping newcomer families find a better future in Alberta. We certainly hope that the government is committed to the same goal. We hope that this bill will get us there and move us forward on this very important issue.

Madam Speaker, thank you.

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

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to a bill that can really boost our province in a number of sectors. Bill 203, Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, offers a number of different advantages for our province such as streamlining credentialing to attract talent in sectors like health care so that we can bring in more professionals and reduce backlogs.

This groundbreaking legislation seeks to establish the Alberta foreign credential advisory committee, a pioneering effort that will set us apart nationally, Madam Speaker. This committee, a trailblazer in its category, is designed to champion a proposed measure to fortify a more efficient and streamlined credential advisory system. By being at the forefront of this initiative, Alberta gains a distinct edge over other provinces in attracting and acknowledging the expertise of skilled professionals.

The proposed committee is in a position to play a crucial role in elevating strain on sectors like health care by accelerating the credential process. In doing so, we anticipate an influx of qualified

professionals who will contribute to a reduction of backlogs within our health care system and fill more vacancies in other sectors.

The committee's mandate extends to a comprehensive review of the regulations governing the recognition of foreign credentials. It is a recommendation aimed to refine the existing process and address any shortcomings with a particular focus on professions facing current or anticipated labour shortages. This forward-looking approach demonstrates our government's commitment to proactively address the evolving needs of our workforce and ensuring the seamless integration of skilled individuals into our provincial workforce.

3:20

As an immigrant to this country myself, I have countless friends and family in Europe who want to move to Canada to apply their trade but are unable to do so because of the pile of paperwork and red tape that stands in their way. People from Ukraine phone me all the time asking me: Andrew, what can I do to bring myself and my family to Canada? These people want to contribute to our community. They want to bring their expertise, they want to bring their skills, and they want to come here to create a better life for themselves and their families. Bill 203 is a way we can make these aspirations a reality for those families.

By paving the way for a more efficient process, we extend a welcome hand to those who wish to make Alberta their home. It signals a commitment to fostering a more accessible pathway for talented individuals eager to contribute to our province's prosperity. Bill 203 presents a strategic opportunity for Alberta to lead the way in fostering a dynamic, responsive, and inclusive environment that not only attracts top-tier talent but also optimizes their integration into key sectors critical for the prosperity of our province.

Madam Speaker, as our economy continues to grow, so, too, must our workforce. There are a number of sectors that desperately need to attract new and talented professionals so they can continue to support our economy. In fact, the occupations I just mentioned are all forecasted to hit shortages of 3,000 workers by the year 2030. Those are a lot of jobs that need attention and swift action. This stark reality underscores the urgency of addressing the looming workforce gap and the importance of initiatives like Bill 203 mitigating these shortages.

As we navigate the intricate landscape of our evolving job market, it is imperative that we recognize the pivotal role played by skilled professionals in critical sectors such as health care. Bill 203, with its innovative approach and the establishment of the Alberta foreign credential advisory committee, is an important step towards securing our future workforce. By proactively streamlining the credential process for foreign professionals, we're not only attracting talent but also ensuring that our workforce is equipped to address the specific needs of professions facing shortages.

As we strive to meet the challenges of the coming decade, we need to rally behind initiatives like Bill 203, recognizing them as a catalyst for positive change that will not only fill job vacancies but also strengthen the foundation of our economy. The foresight embedded in this legislation aligns with our commitment to build a prosperous and resilient Alberta that is ready to face the workforce challenges of tomorrow. I urge all members to vote in favour of Bill 203. Come together to support efficiency, inclusivity, and a bright future for our province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 203. First of all, I want to recognize, obviously, the intention of this government to address the challenges that many of our newcomer professionals face when having their credentials recognized in this province. I want to share perhaps a story recently. I often speak to constituents who come to Canada with the expectation of a better life, often with lots of education and skill, but are relegated to jobs that do not allow them to fully realize their potential training and skill.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

In fact, just recently a constituent shared with me the very timely and expensive process to be licensed as an engineer. Certainly, while we should uphold the standards of industry in Canada, there is no question that there should be more expeditious ways and simpler ways towards credentialing, and that there are lost opportunities for many of the newcomers that come to this province.

Once again I want to recognize the positive intention of this government to take action, but I should also note that it doesn't go nearly far enough. Like many of the committees that this government has established, it is overly general and a bit nebulous, Mr. Speaker. Bill 203 addresses a real and serious issue, but it falls short of what's needed to improve Alberta's recognition of international training. When someone moves to Canada, getting their international training recognized is essential for facilitating a new life in this province and in this country.

While some Canadian accreditation bodies may have higher and more stringent standards than other jurisdictions, as we know, this is not always the case. We do know that in many cases there are comparable standards between Canada and some other jurisdictions, but even in those cases, Mr. Speaker, there are often delays in reciprocal recognition, or credit, or accreditation. So, you know, oftentimes for a newcomer to have their foreign credentials recognized can be simply a challenge.

First of all, there are some shortcomings, I would say, with this bill. Establishing a committee doesn't actually address what the needs are of many of the professionals that I speak to in my riding. A little bit later on I will get to that. But given that retraining can be expensive and many newcomers spend thousands upon thousands of dollars to move to Canada with their families, people are frankly more likely to abandon their profession, and this committee, while it's the right first step, I would say it doesn't quite address that ongoing concern, the very, very costly, expensive process for folks to have their credentials recognized in this province.

There's no question that Albertans, whether you arrived here yesterday or whether you've been here for generations, need stable, good-paying jobs that pay the monthly bills, and for many newcomers retraining to work in the professions they previously worked in becomes more difficult, and eventually it just stops being a priority at all. Not because folks don't have the fortitude or the perseverance to keep on going, but because of the overwhelming barriers that many newcomers face in getting their foreign credentials recognized, not to mention the expensive process, and so for many families that just becomes no longer possible. Mr. Speaker, I think all members of this House should aspire to ensuring a process that is streamlined, that becomes as easy as possible for newcomers so that many of them are able to work in their profession of choice and training.

Now, let me go on to Bill 203. While it, again, Mr. Speaker, highlights a serious issue, it doesn't quite deliver the meaningful change that we need. I think one of the significant shortcomings is that it doesn't address consultation in an adequate, holistic way.

While it establishes a committee, there is no clarity in what the membership will be comprised of, only that cabinet has control and cabinet can appoint whoever they want under this bill. Frankly, we need to take the politics out of it if we want to create meaningful change and to ensure that we do consultation correctly. This means that the bill should enumerate the various affected groups and stakeholder groups to ensure that they have a meaningful seat at the table. I certainly encourage my colleagues across the aisle to look at amending this bill so that we can guarantee that there is more inclusive committee membership. For example, we could look at a bill that pulls together accredited professionals who have gone through the experience of having their credentials recognized and have them work with professional accreditation bodies to streamline as well as to improve the process.

3:30

You know, again, although I recognize this government's positive intentions with this bill, I do think that a lot of that meaningful change needs to be safeguarded in the legislation itself. Giving cabinet, essentially, a blank cheque to appoint whoever they want without consideration for the makeup of the committee, I think, weakens this piece of legislation. It's incredibly important that we have representation from skilled professionals that are able to evaluate and compare standards in Alberta with standards in other jurisdictions. So rather than concentrating power within cabinet to appoint members, it actually makes more sense to look at an arm's-length approach from cabinet and to ensure that there is a separate body that is nonpartisan to appoint the makeup of this committee.

If Bill 203 passes, Mr. Speaker, it does risk creating some blind spots and potential biases as a result of limited consultation. For example, there is nothing stopping cabinet and particular ministers from appointing folks that are friendly to this particular government. Again, it eliminates that possibility of any sort of political interference and therefore, I think, weakens the credibility of this committee.

I also want to talk about the needs of many of the professionals that have come to our province from other jurisdictions and what I have heard from them. First of all, this bill, with the creation of a committee, doesn't go far enough in addressing some of the needs. What I have heard from employers is that there needs to be faster access for targeted skilled workers, and there needs to be streamlined access to information for all employers. I'm just going to refer back to what the Alberta NDP, what, you know, folks on this side of the House have proposed previously, that I think will actually be very helpful to many newcomers and professionals.

First of all, we have proposed previously to revamp the Alberta advantage immigration program and create faster access for target-skill workers. That's what we've been hearing from employers. Not only target-skill workers, but also that includes health care workers and international students educated in Alberta and Canada. What we've heard from employers as well is the need for more information, so we on this side of the House have proposed to create a streamlined dashboard to provide clear information to everyone.

You know, previously we've also proposed to establish a six-month credentialing and immigration task force that allows for a very targeted approach towards addressing some of the systemic problems that exist in our . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act.

The bill is intended to facilitate and improve processes around recognizing foreign credentials, especially for professions with current and anticipated labour shortages. Firstly, I would like to thank my constituents for electing me to represent their interests in this Chamber. I would also like to thank the Member for Grande Prairie for introducing this significant bill.

The purpose of Bill 203 is to create an Alberta foreign credential advisory committee, that would advocate for and make recommendations to create a more streamlined and efficient credential advisory system in Alberta. If passed, Bill 203 will establish a committee of 13 Albertan residents from five key parts of our government, from Health, Education, jobs, technology, and immigration. Members of this committee will be recommended for selection by five cabinet ministers led by the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism. A maximum of four seats will be allocated to the Immigration and Multiculturalism ministry, four seats to Advanced Education, three seats to Health, one seat to Technology and Innovation, and one seat to Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Speaker, this committee will be the first of its kind in Canada and would give Alberta an advantage over other provinces when it comes to attracting and recognizing the talents of skilled workers. The committee would be tasked with reviewing legislation governing recognition of foreign credentials in Alberta and evaluating similar processes in other jurisdictions. The diversity of the committee's membership will improve the streamlining process of foreign credential recognition while also bolstering various sectors that have run into recent labour shortages in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I've had many conversations with foreign professionals in my constituency and Alberta at large. One of the major concerns aired to me is that the current system of evaluating foreign credentials doesn't currently have the capacity to process all qualified foreign medical students in Alberta, and then there is also an additional barrier of paying medical exam fees of \$1,500 and upward. These barriers also apply to lawyers, lecturers, managers, IT professionals, and many other foreign professionals.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the great policies being implemented by our government, people are coming back to our province in record numbers to participate in the renowned Alberta advantage. Foreign professionals are ready to get into the system, but due to the red-tapism in the foreign credential evaluation system they're deemed ineligible for work because they don't have any recent experience as a physician or lawyer or lecturer. Due to the amount of time it's taken to get credentialed to work in Alberta, these foreign professionals are frustrated. They complete many years of education in Ghana, many years of experience, and relocate to Canada with lots of hopes and ambitions, only to find themselves working minimum wage jobs while supporting a family and trying to save for required exams or training.

Mr. Speaker, many international graduates have lost hope in our system. The current system is difficult on them. It's unfair. It's really hard to see them struggling, because they are a specialist back home in their country, yet they aren't given the opportunity to practise in their fields. It is even more frustrating when it is obvious that this foreign professional could help fill in the capacity problems which are currently in Alberta's health care system, education system, technology system, and so on. These foreign doctors are even willing to move to understaffed rural areas to help ease pressures on Alberta's doctors.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, in recent times several key sectors such as health care, construction, trades, home builders, education, and IT services have been experiencing labour shortages and are

even expected to worsen to about a 3,000 worker shortage by 2030. Bill 203 will address this issue by enhancing and improving the recognition of foreign credentials, especially for specific professions with the current and anticipated labour shortages. This legislation will help address labour shortages as it is designed broadly to speed up the process of recognizing education and professional credentials from outside Canada. Speeding up and improving the process by which we recognize foreign credentials will bring a lot of benefits to Alberta. It will make Alberta more attractive to skilled, seasoned, and experienced Albertans. The attraction of new talent thanks to a more accessible workforce can help to grow industries like tech, thus growing and diversifying our economy. It will also reduce red tape in credential recognition in main sectors like health care, which will help to remedy issues like medical wait times, the struggle to find family doctors, overcrowding in emergency rooms, and disrupted care in some rural areas.

The implementation of this bill will make Alberta more prosperous and more inclusive in terms of workforce. It will also help us maintain our young workforce. Mr. Speaker, Alberta can become an ideal destination for skilled and talented workers from around the world who are looking to put their talents and skills to use. Having doctors with diverse backgrounds would be an asset for Alberta, as these foreign medical professionals represent a largely untapped workforce of health professionals for the province. Having seasoned lawyers will help improve our justice system and reduce court wait time.

Mr. Speaker, stating that it will create confusion and delays for those trying to get their qualifications recognized: this is far from the truth. That statement contradicts the purpose of this bill. This bill aims to reduce the elongated processes and wait times that foreign professionals experience while waiting to be integrated into our workforce. In fact, our neighbours in Ontario had also recognized this key issue of under-recognition of foreign professionals and proposed a similar bill to establish a committee to review and improve on the rules that govern the recognition of foreign credentials in their province. We are also addressing this issue with the bill after thoroughly planning on the best way it will effectively fit the needs of our great province.

In conclusion, if passed, Bill 203 will establish a committee that will allow us to further our government's commitments towards cutting red tape and ensuring that Alberta is the best place in the world to successfully live, work in your foreign credentials without delay, raise a family happily. Mr. Speaker, I urge members on both sides of this Chamber to vote in favour of the Foreign Credential Advisory Act, as this bill is proof of the fact that this government is keeping our mandate of positioning Alberta as the leader of Canada, improving provincial attractiveness to skilled workers, addressing expected labour shortages, and fostering a more prosperous, inclusive workforce.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-North East has risen.

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to speak on this very important bill. Let me begin by acknowledging that Canada is a land of opportunities, and millions of immigrants come to Canada from all across the globe to build a better life in this country. They come here because they believe that Canada's system will support them. They believe that Canada's system will be there for them and they will be able to utilize their skills and their skills will be recognized and they will be able to work in the field in which they are trained. Unfortunately, they do

not find this when they actually land here and when they try to work in the field of their expertise.

I would like to share some personal experiences that I had with the people in my constituency, Calgary-North East. In 2012 I hired a cab to go to a doctor's clinic, and I met a very gentle person who was taking me to the doctor's clinic. After a few minutes we started a conversation about what he was doing and how he liked his job, and he brought up that he was a professional doctor back home. He told me that he came to Canada under a skilled workers program and that his credentials were recognized for immigration purposes, but when he tried to practise in Calgary, he was told that his credentials were not recognized.

He tried to get into the process of recognizing his credentials, and the process was too lengthy and it was too complicated. He was not able to get his credentials recognized. He also told me that he has two kids, and it was hard for him to start the study from scratch, and it was hard for him to work at the same time to put food on the table for his family.

After our conversation he dropped me at the doctor's clinic with a gentle smile and thanked me for my business, and as I left and as I got out of his car, I thought that he should be sitting in this clinic serving the patients because he had that expertise. He had that training. He has that skill to do the job, but unfortunately he was not able to do that just because of the complex process, just because of his credentials not being recognized. He was doing the job that he was not trained to do, and he was not able to do the job that he was trained to do.

Since we are talking about the establishment of the committee now that will hopefully help to recognize the credentials of many newcomers to Canada, it also shows a stark reflection of this government's failure to effectively address the barriers faced by newcomers in Alberta. In Alberta we also have a fairness for newcomers office, which can be efficiently used to get the job done, but the UCP wants to create another bureaucratic body, which raises serious concerns and questions about the government's ability to address the foreign credentials issue.

My colleague and the Member for Calgary-Beddington introduced Bill 202 to set up a committee to assess our education system. The UCP voted that bill down just because they felt that such committees never work, and now they are doing the exact same thing. Now, why is one of their own MLAs proposing to establish such a committee if they believe that such committees never work?

This shows that the UCP lack the vision to address this very important issue, and we need and Albertans deserve their government to act to recognize their credentials. Government should be held accountable, and when they are talking to establishing this committee, they are not being transparent, they are not being accountable, and it seems that they are trying to put their hand-picked people on that committee. So it is very important that the government should be held accountable, and they should come clean on this issue.

3:50

Government must also consult and include nongovernment stakeholders in this committee. We have not seen any such thing in this bill. I request all members of this Assembly to raise these questions and also work together to address this question of involving nongovernmental stakeholders so that they can have their input, they can share their concerns, they can share their opinions and experiences that they have heard from newcomers in Alberta and have their say in this committee.

Transparency is not something that the UCP likes. However, this matter impacts the lives of people. This committee must be

transparent, and the government must ensure that this committee will be subject to the scrutiny of the public. Also, the government must introduce transparency measures in this committee so that Albertans should know the progress of this committee. Albertans should be able to track that. Albertans should be able to see what this committee is actually doing, and that will build the trust of Albertans. It's not about any party politics; it is just about doing the right thing, and I hope that's what all members of the Assembly will agree to do as well.

Committees need resources. Without resources they cannot function properly. They cannot get the job done. This bill also is not clear about the kind and the type and the amount of resources that will be allocated to this committee. It is very important that we recognize that as well, and it is important that this government must come clear and must be transparent about the resources that this committee will have to function properly, that this committee can have access to those resources so that it can actually address the issues for which it is formed.

I also want to share another story from one of my constituents that I met yesterday in my office. I met with my constituent who lives in my riding in the community of Skyview. He belongs to Ethiopia, and he graduated in 2001 as a professional doctor. He worked as a general practitioner for five years and as a senior medical officer in a government job for another five years back in Ethiopia.

In 2013 he decided to immigrate to Canada along with his family, and he immigrated to Canada under the skilled worker program as a trained, professional medical doctor. He tried to get his credentials recognized, and in 2014 he completed the U.S. medical licence challenge exams and passed in all the three exams but could not get residency. From 2015 till 2019 he started and passed all medical exams in Canada and applied for residency two to three times a year but still couldn't get one. He also offered to work as a volunteer in various doctors' clinics, and he tried his luck in that as well. Unfortunately, he was not able to get through the entire process because he was facing financial hardship. His wife tried to get into the Bow Valley College nursing program. Since he was also trying to pass exams and she was also trying to get into college, that was hard for them.

This is the story of so many other people, and this is why it is important that we all work together.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is calling. We are seeing tremendous industrial growth, investment, economic diversification, and the expansion of our labour force. Alberta is the place to be, and recent statistics of increased employment and new job opportunities combined with our UCP's strong fiscal management and low taxation have made Alberta the best place in Canada to have a family, buy a home, start a new business, and live a successful life. Our government is devoted to ensuring that all Albertans have the opportunities and support they need to thrive and live good lives. This is why I rise today before the Assembly in support of private member's Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, a bill that, if passed, would decrease the red tape to get more boots on the ground in the sectors that need it most, thereby bolstering Alberta's economic potential.

Mr. Speaker, we have too many skilled workers working in jobs that do not align with their credentials. There is no reason that doctors with years of practice and equivalent accreditation should be working in entry-level jobs because they are not able to get a position in their field of expertise. As we continue to develop our

province and make it easier for immigration and migration populations to make Alberta their home, we need to create policies that make a smooth transition to effectively utilize skilled labourers' talents, and this is exactly what Bill 203 seeks to do.

The purpose of Bill 203 is to create an Alberta foreign credential advisory committee that will advocate for and make recommendations for a more streamlined and effective credential advisory system. The advisory committee would be the first of its kind in Canada and will give Alberta a significant advantage over other provinces by attracting and recognizing the talents of skilled workers. The committee would review the rules for foreign credentials recognition, provide recommendations on ways to improve Alberta's accreditation recognition. This is not just another piece of legislation but a means of aiding the lives and livelihoods of new Albertans.

As a province known for job opportunities and high quality of life, we need to ensure that this privilege extends to all individuals who are accredited to do skilled labour without creating ineffective policies that require them to unnecessarily redo their schooling process. This is an expense that restricts many Albertans, causing many to go into large amounts of debt to continue working in the fields that they love. This burden does not only fall on the person seeking their accreditation but also on their families and loved ones who rely on them.

Alberta is known as the land of the strong and free, and keeping with that, it is our goal that those who choose to make Alberta their home feel welcomed, respected, and valued for the unique contributions they bring. Moreover, Bill 203 is essential to address shortages of skilled workers in crucial areas like the veterinary medicine field. Throughout the Camrose constituency we are faced with a growing need of increased veterinary support. As agriculture is my constituency's largest economic driver, we need to ensure that our livestock farmers can easily access veterinary services where and when they need them.

By increasing the ease of access for accredited veterinarians to work in Alberta, we'll be more equipped to address issues as they arise, aiding farmers' ability to keep their livestock healthy. Farmers are already under enough stress and pressure as it is. With droughts, harsh winters, changing weather conditions, and market pressures the last thing we need is to limit their ability to care for their livestock. In addition, by creating ways to streamline the process for immigrant veterinarians to receive foreign credential recognition, we'll be able to alleviate the pressures faced by rural veterinarians so that they can better manage their patients' needs.

Outside of veterinarian medicine we are seeing shortages emerge in our population as our population grows. As Alberta continues to expand and welcome newcomers, Bill 203 can adapt our province to readily address these concerns and get more workers into their field of expertise. Our need for nurses, information technology specialists, graphic designers, teachers' assistants, health care professionals, and professional engineers continues to grow. These are professions that we interact with on a daily basis, and without addressing the shortage of their services within our communities, we inevitably will see significant changes to our lives, including increased wait times and inconvenience.

By streamlining the recognition of foreign credentials in Alberta, we can bolster these various sectors and aid in the growth and diversification of our provincial economy. This is why I strongly urge all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, to help recognize skilled labour, reduce red tape for individuals settling in Alberta, and address our labour shortage needs.

To the Member for Grande Prairie for bringing this forward: thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Approximately four minutes, five minutes left.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I will try to be really quick.

Recognizing foreign credentials is a long-standing and important issue to myself, many of my constituents, and many people across this province. When people migrate to Canada, to this province, as my colleague mentioned, they get points for their skills, for their education, for their degrees, but as soon as they land here, then those degrees don't mean much. Even after three-some years they become Canadian, they become Albertan, but somehow their credentials, their skills are systematically kept foreign so that they can't participate in the economy. That's fundamentally unfair. That's economic eviction of certain Canadians from this economy and its benefits.

4:00

What I want to say is that I will support this bill, but this bill does not do anything to change the status quo. In 2019, when government brought forward the Fair Registration Practices Act, they said that that will radically change everything and that's the first in Canada and that's the trail-blazing legislation and whatnot, but we didn't see anything change since then. The report that my colleague from Calgary-Foothills mentioned earlier doesn't provide any accountability that that limit of six months made any difference. Certain bodies were even allowed to write n/a in front of that, that it doesn't apply to them.

Now government is supporting a private member's bill that will help government create a committee that will then look at how credentials should be recognized. The bill will come into force three months after this bill is passed, so essentially government is trying to delay this as much as they can. They are still dithering on it instead of taking steps that many other jurisdictions have taken. Government talking points: like, seriously, they are saying that this committee is a trailblazer; another member said that it's first in kind in Canada. Come on, folks. Many people are doing better than Alberta.

The summer of 2022 I was door-knocking in my riding and met a doctor, met him in the office. He was a family physician from India. I tried whatever I could and couldn't get any result for him. He applied to Nova Scotia; he got in as a family physician in Nova Scotia. Later on he called me, and we talked. There were 11 applicants in Nova Scotia that were accepted that year; eight of them were those who were rejected by the province of Alberta. Out of 11, eight of them were rejected by the province. [interjections]

The minister of service Alberta is chirping. While his mandate is to reduce red tape, they are creating another committee that will look at how people's credentials should be recognized in this province. I think that it's unfair to those who migrated here in hopes of finding a better life, a better job. Since the minister of service Alberta didn't know that, he'd never had to go through that, he doesn't understand the struggles of those Albertans, he thinks that it's fine for him or respectful for him to keep chirping on something that he doesn't understand.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it is now time for the mover of the motion to close the debate.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm looking forward to talking about my Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, Bill 203. Thank you, everyone, for the debate. I do believe we have taken a significant step forward by enhancing the landscape of our

professional opportunity and economic development here in Alberta for Albertans and for newcomers here as well.

I do believe that this bill represents a crucial move by this government and myself to enable our province to more effectively and efficiently recognize the valuable skills and qualifications of professionals from other countries as they join us here in Alberta. As it was spoken of before, this is the first of its kind in Canada. Once again Alberta is the first and foremost desiring to welcome other people here. This is cutting edge, and everyone here knows that there is opportunity for us to continue along this vein, to continue to produce and bring the Alberta advantage to the world, to continue the Alberta Is Calling campaign, to continue to welcome people to Alberta to be able to have a great job and have a great life.

As well, I am very thankful to all members of the Legislature who have contributed their perspectives, their thoughts, and their insights in the second reading of this bill as we've had some thoughtful discussion and had some questions raised. These are all invaluable as we proceed to the next stage, the Committee of the Whole, and it's on this coming third stage that we'll delve deeper into the specifics of the bill, addressing concerns and redefining our approach to ensure the maximum benefits for Albertans. I am very eager to engage in this dialogue, to provide clarifications, and to consider the valuable feedback from my fellow members, and I just want to thank everyone for joining in the debate.

As it unfolds, let us all consider the far-reaching implications of this piece of legislation and think about how it aligns with the vision that we all share for a prosperous, growing, and forward-thinking Alberta. We have touched base with stakeholders, and interestingly our stakeholders love it. They have a desire to continue to see their workforce expand. They have a desire to welcome, as we heard today, their friends and family from other countries here to come and work in their chosen fields. They have a desire to come see their friends and family have success and join the Alberta advantage. This is what this bill is about. It's about welcoming newcomers and getting them to work so that we can quickly expand our workforce.

And we all know that Alberta is growing. This bill is an important piece for the future of Alberta as we welcome newcomers here to our great province. We've seen this last week a great economic outlook, and we as Albertans or Alberta have continued to shoulder the lion's share of Canada's growth. I am very excited that we are planning on continuing this great path to continue the Alberta advantage and the continual population growth for the future. These are key aspects, and we are holding our ground and expanding that here in Alberta. We have seen great opportunity for anybody wanting to join us.

Alberta is growing substantially in reputation across the globe as well with the launch of the Dow petrochemical investment. This is a multibillion-dollar investment. It showcases that we are a can-do province. It showcases that we can get projects done and that this is proof, once again, that we are wanting this type of investment on an international stage. As well, we also saw the recent job numbers, where we saw that a staggering 8,900 new jobs were created in Alberta this last month. This is substantive work. This is what this government and our previous government have been working on. This is significant work for the future, and I look forward to continuing to participate in that.

As we welcome people to this great, what I believe is the best, province in Canada, this bill builds upon the skill sets, upon the knowledge and the prior experiences of our skilled newcomer workforce that is joining us and is streamlining the skilled workforce credentialing process so people can get to work in their chosen skill sets and in their chosen training faster. We are for people joining us from across the globe, joining us to work within their skill sets here in Alberta and are welcoming those who desire

to build a future to consider Alberta as their home. This is what this bill is doing, creating the opportunity for them to join Alberta and join Albertans . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has moved second reading of Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

4:10

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

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm proud to stand to speak to and to move second reading of Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023.

This bill represents a commitment to protect the interests of Albertans. Bill 204 addresses a crucial issue that requires legislative attention due to recent acts and policies of the federal government. Its long-term impact will provide important protection to provincial jurisdiction.

The primary purpose of this legislation is to minimize the influence and unnecessary overreach from the federal government in provincial matters in relation to our precious green spaces and river valleys. Specifically, this legislation seeks to protect the role of the province in any interaction between an Alberta municipal council and the federal government regarding any proposed development of a national urban park in Alberta.

What happens to Albertans' green spaces is of paramount importance to all of us. While some proposed components described under the national urban parks initiative may have their benefits, it's critical for the province to have oversight in their creation and development. If passed, Bill 204 would ensure Albertans' voices are heard loud and clear in these conversations.

The proposed bill seeks to amend the Municipal Government Act under division 8, limits on municipal powers, section 70, disposal of land, and would give cabinet the ability to create new regulations that would outline specific requirements before municipalities and the federal government could create a national urban park in Alberta.

This addition to the MGA will enable a comprehensive approach designed to give regulatory powers to the provincial government for any interaction between a council and the federal government regarding any engagement, development, planning, or enactment of a national urban park.

Albertans elected our United Conservative government with a majority mandate to, among other things, protect Albertans from federal overreach and intrusion. That's exactly what this bill sets out to accomplish. Simply put, the federal government should not engage directly with municipal councils without an appropriate level of engagement and awareness by the provincial government when it comes to matters under provincial jurisdiction.

Madam Speaker, this federal government has not earned the trust or respect of Albertans as their actions and decisions have had serious negative consequences on our province. There is a documented and growing concern regarding the intent and actions of the Trudeau-led federal government towards our province, and these concerns are very valid.

Albertans have seen this federal cabinet's egregious overreach and policies negatively impact their families and livelihoods. From introducing the carbon tax, which is a tax on everything, to the labelling of all plastics as toxic, the introduction of Bill C-69, the

no-more-pipelines act, recently defeated in court, I might add, and the current effort to stall Bill C-234, which would directly benefit our hard-working farmers – and this isn't even to mention their absurd proposed electricity regulations that would literally leave Albertans cold and in the dark – this federal cabinet has continued to make decisions that make life harder for Albertans. Madam Speaker, this failing and out-of-touch Liberal government is no friends of Albertans, and our government will not cede control of our land and green spaces to Justin Trudeau and his cronies in Ottawa.

Having established what the primary purpose of this bill is, preventing federal overreach, it is equally important to establish what this bill is not. Bill 204 does not seek to implement unilateral provincial control over the best stewardship, conservation, or development plans for specific green spaces in urban areas in the province. These important decisions will continue to be considered by a multitude of stakeholders. However, under Bill 204 these decisions can no longer be made without formal and legislated provincial involvement.

Neither is the intent of the bill to be unduly directorial towards municipalities. Our message to them through this legislation is simple: work with us. No one is being pushed out of the conversation. Rather, we are ensuring the province will be counted in.

Finally, this bill will not unduly impact the important relationship between our province and our Indigenous partners. This crucial relationship will continue to be considered and respected.

It should be emphasized that this bill does not and cannot bar the federal government from engaging on or developing a national urban park. What the bill will do through the expected regulations is prescribe the terms in which a municipal council can engage with the federal government. These regulations, once developed, will address key issues while maintaining flexibility to encourage collaboration and partnership.

Madam Speaker, this bill's goal is to prevent federal overreach across the entire province from a desperate and lurching Liberal government, but this legislation is acutely required to address one area in our province in particular. In August Edmonton city council voted in favour of the planning and development of a national urban park in Edmonton's river valley. Going ahead with this development without the formal involvement of the provincial government would represent an unacceptable overreach by the federal government into provincial jurisdiction as currently the federal government has bypassed the province and is working directly with Edmonton city council on the creation and development of such a national urban park.

In fact, as recently as this past weekend a check on the city's website regarding this initiative listed the provincial government as interested observers under the project partners section. Well, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that this government has no interest in merely being an observer in this important process, nor will we sit back and watch a city council in Alberta sign over an important part of their city to Justin Trudeau. Municipal relations are the exclusive jurisdiction of the province. Despite this indisputable fact, the federal government has taken it on themselves to not only develop a national urban park initiative but to then reach out to municipalities directly. This bill will correct these improper actions and hinder this federal overreach.

As someone who has lived in and around Edmonton for most of my life, I inherently understand the importance and values of Edmonton's river valley. I've spent countless hours biking, running, walking, listening, and learning in this special area. I want to again emphasize that this bill is not about the specifics on the future of this amazing place or others like it across the province.

Conservation and development decisions will continue to be multidimensional and include all partners but particularly Indigenous communities, neighbours, and friends.

The measures proposed in this bill are not arbitrary. They are the result of careful consideration and a genuine desire to enhance the constitutional autonomy of our province and to make sure that Albertans are not unduly impacted by this overzealous federal government, who are more interested in scoring cheap political points than advocating for the interests of Albertans. This bill is considered for the long term and would be good policy regardless of the political party in power in Ottawa, but it is acutely needed now to address the overreach of the current one.

Madam Speaker, I fully expect that this legislation will enjoy great support from Albertans, including members of my constituency, Leduc-Beaumont, many of whom spend time in Edmonton's river valley with their family and friends. In fact, our government has already heard from several concerned citizens from Edmonton and the surrounding areas regarding this unnecessary federal power grab and the compliant role of Edmonton city council in allowing it to happen. It is my understanding that a citizen-led petition has already begun for people to voice their concerns regarding the national urban parks initiative.

In conclusion, the passage of this bill would be a commitment to protecting provincial jurisdiction and ensuring that Albertans will always be in control of their green spaces, urban areas, and river valleys. This bill is well intentioned, well measured, and would contribute to good public policy. This is why I encourage all members of this House to support it.

Thank you.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [Remarks in Cree] I'm grateful to be able to speak to this, and I want to give thanks and raise my hands to those who have spent many hours working with Indigenous groups, with community groups. Your time, your energy, and your love for the natural park and the beauty of our river valley are appreciated. It is noted that your work and commitment to the river valley are appreciated. Thank you for your work.

4:20

I'm speaking about pehonan, the gathering place. Historically we know this place, when the Dene would come and they'd bring their caribou and their cloudberry and the Anishinabe would bring their strawberries. Pehonan is the gathering place in the river valley. It's where we meet; it's where the commerce of this place was developed. You see, the trading that took place, the trade economy, is what has made amiskwaciwāskahikan and Edmonton the great place of commerce that it is, and that was done in our river valley.

That is the place and space where many of our ancestors are buried. There has been a monument that has been built to show where many of my relatives have been buried along the river valley. This is a sacred place, a beautiful place, where berries grow, where we go pick the saskatoons, where we go look for beavers – there aren't many left anymore in the river valley, but there are a few, especially down towards the Terwillegar dog park, where my dog likes to chase them – and there are many families in our beautiful river valley hiking, climbing, walking their dogs.

This is a place that needs to be respected and protected, and I'm thankful to the community groups who have worked alongside the Indigenous groups, the Treaty Six confederation, the Métis Nation of Alberta, who have already decided on how these lands will be protected. They have already made a long-standing investment in

doing this work. It is important that the partners – the city of Edmonton, the Confederacy of Treaty Six, the community representations – don't disregard their voice, that we empower them and lift them as the province, that we show we respect *wahkohtowin*.

We respect the relations of people. We respect the work that they've done. We don't want to replicate bureaucracy and waste people's time. We want to legitimize their time and efforts. We want to show that we care and that we respect their efforts and time that they've committed to doing this work, because they, alongside myself, believe that this is an important space worth protecting.

It also falls under the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples as well as the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action in that Indigenous people's voices matter when it comes to protecting our historic sites. These are sites where our families from generations have gone to pick medicines, the berries. We didn't come from other places; we don't have other homelands to go to. The river valley is our homeland; it is our place to go to. It is our connection and our duty to protect it.

So, you see, we oppose your position on this. In fact, we welcome and lift the relationship between the federal government, the city of Edmonton, the Confederacy of Treaty Six, the Métis Nation of Alberta, and the countless Edmontonians who have been working for decades on protecting this beautiful, sacred, incredible space. There are over 20 parks along this river valley, over 160 kilometres of different types of trees and plants, medicines. There's *yarrow*, there's wild sweetgrass, and there are wild turnips. There are so many incredible plants and species and biodiversity in the ecosystems that have to be protected. A national park recognition is what is absolutely necessary for this beautiful, sacred space.

It is my honour, it is my pleasure to share my position with you folks, and I look forward to my colleagues also sharing their position with each of you. Maybe you might hear some of the facts that resonate with your heartstrings as well. [Remarks in Cree], Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll just take this opportunity to remind the member to speak through the chair.

The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and good afternoon, everyone. As Minister of Forestry and Parks I'm privileged to work alongside many fine Albertans who care deeply for this province's parks, public lands, and diverse natural spaces. It's an honour to lead this ministry in their conservation, recreation, and stewardship initiatives, and it's work I take very seriously. I can't overstate how important it is to preserve Alberta's autonomy when it comes to our natural spaces for current and future generations of Albertans. That's why I'm proud to support the Member for Leduc-Beaumont's Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023.

In April of this year the federal government announced its national urban parks initiative, seeking to establish new national urban parks in a number of major Canadian cities, and Edmonton's river valley was identified as a potential location. Up to this point Alberta's government has participated in discussions surrounding the program as an observer. My department has been listening closely, examining the logistics and considering the potential repercussions, and we have some reservations about the program's implementation in the Edmonton river valley or anywhere in Alberta.

One of our chief concerns remains the lack of transparency and clarity on policies, governance models, and ownership. We understand that the program is still in early stages, but many of

these land-use issues create a lack of program coherence and raise concerns about the role Albertans and Edmontonians will play in the development process when they are primary users of these lands. The program proposal states that areas would be managed under a range of flexible governance models, including federally administered places, third-party administered places, and partnership models, but these models open the door to potential federal overreach that would undermine Albertans' autonomy when it comes to our province's parks, public lands, and outdoor spaces.

For instance, the national urban parks program says that federal funding is contingent upon a set of standards, conditions, and criteria, but the federal government fails to detail how it will gauge whether a national urban park is in compliance with these standards as well as what will occur if they determine land management policies and governance models to be insufficient. Will they step in on behalf of Albertans? If so, why should Albertans trust the federal government with outdoor spaces most familiar to those who use and appreciate them?

I want to assure Albertans that I support protecting our beautiful river valley so that Albertans, both now and in the years to come, will be able to connect to nature and improve one's mental health and wellness. Alberta's government has just added the Big Island provincial park to our parks system in conjunction with the city of Edmonton and local First Nations. Albertans do not need federal politicians telling them how to use their own backyard. We are already protecting our lands and encouraging people to get outdoors, and our province's existing conservation strategies preserve the Edmonton river valley for current and future generations of Albertans. After all, parks are for people, and the people using and safeguarding Edmonton's river valley are already doing this responsibly, respectfully, and with admiration for the land.

There are always concerns to be addressed, but we will continue to advocate for Albertans throughout the planning process, and I do not believe any land in Alberta, whether it be Crown lands or existing provincial parks, should be incorporated into the proposed national urban park boundaries. I firmly believe the best way to preserve Albertans' access to these natural spaces is to keep parks and public lands under the purview of the provincial government and municipalities. We are committed to working alongside provincial partners, the city of Edmonton, and other parties to preserve our historic Edmonton river valley and ensure ample opportunities for Albertans to experience the outdoors while contributing to the well-being of our environment.

Madam Speaker, this is why I'm speaking in favour of Bill 204 today. Bill 204 will safeguard our province and our citizens from federal overreach by protecting and defending Albertans' interests in national urban parks program discussions. This act will ensure that the creation and development of national urban parks will only proceed if Albertans' voices are heard loud and clear in those conversations. In its current form the national urban parks initiative is able to bypass the province entirely to work directly with municipalities on park planning and development.

It's important to keep in mind, though, that public lands are just that, for the public. They are for the benefit of all Albertans, not just those who live in close proximity. That's why it's vital that we ensure opportunity and representation for Albertans to have their voices heard in the planning and development process for new national urban parks within our province. Albertans elected our United Conservative government with a majority mandate to protect our interests as a province and make life better for Albertans. Part of that mandate is to protect Alberta families and communities from federal overreach and intrusion, and this bill helps accomplish that. Alberta's government recognizes and

appreciates the immense value of the Edmonton river valley, and we want to make sure Albertans are represented in any discussion concerning the national urban parks initiative as it moves forward.

I also want to reaffirm to all Albertans that we are committed to maintaining the beauty, accessibility, and sustainability of our parks, public lands, and outdoor spaces for all people. Our province provides countless opportunities for outdoor recreation, and any new developments must meet the same rigorous accessibility standards. We want to maintain Albertans' opportunities to recreate in their own province without additional red tape from the federal government.

4:30

Bill 204 will help us achieve all of these ends. If passed, it will amend the Municipal Government Act section 70 to ensure provincial participation and oversight in any national urban park development. The proposed legislation would also align with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs' mandate to protect the province's constitutional right to oversee governance of Alberta's municipalities without federal interference. It's critical that Alberta's government has the ability to properly manage provincial lands for a variety of environmental, economic, and social outcomes, and Bill 204 will ensure that Alberta's government will have a say in any land-use decisions that impact Albertans and their access to our province's outdoor spaces.

We are grateful that the Member for Leduc-Beaumont has introduced this important piece of legislation, and we are committed to ensuring Albertan voices are heard on issues that affect Alberta's public lands, parks, and outdoor spaces. Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for bringing this bill to the floor, if anything for giving us an opportunity to talk about parks and how awesome they are. I am opposed to the bill, but I like to talk about national parks and provincial parks all the time, so I'm happy to be here.

You know, there are several reasons why I'm opposed to this bill. The first one is that it's unnecessary. It's creating an additional layer of bureaucracy where one is not needed. In the National Parks Act, that all national parks, urban national parks included, are created under, section 6(1) says that

the Governor in Council may, by order, for the purpose of establishing or enlarging a park reserve, amend Schedule 2 by adding the name and a description of the reserve, or by altering the description of the reserve, if the Governor in Council is satisfied that the government of the province in which the lands to be included in the reserve are situated has agreed to their use for that purpose.

You see, Madam Speaker, the National Parks Act actually already requires approval of the province in order for a national park to be created.

The other thing I wanted to share with people of the House today is that the process to create a national park is not an easy one. It doesn't happen overnight. Parks Canada is not on some mad land grab to pull all these pieces of land from across Canada and incorporate them into the parks system. I have had the great privilege of working on various national park campaigns and provincial park campaigns, and one thing I can tell you for sure is that it takes a long time, decades sometimes, to create a new protected area, and through that time every single stakeholder with an interest in those lands is engaged in the conversation, whether that be private landowners, various stakeholder groups, environmental groups, industry, recreationists, and, of course, the province, various jurisdictions that

have an interest in those lands, whether that be municipalities, provincial governments, and in the case of national parks federal governments.

It is a misrepresentation of the National Parks Act and of the national parks process and the role of Parks Canada to suggest that the province does not have an opportunity to approve or be involved in the conversation around creating a national urban park. That is simply not an accurate representation of the act. Therefore, this act is redundant, and it is unnecessary because of that. We have heard from members opposite on every private member's bill that we've debated so far that has originated from this side of the House that it's redundant and it's unnecessary, yet here we are having a conversation again about a private member's bill that is redundant and unnecessary except this time it's coming from the UCP. That's disappointing to me.

The other part of this that I think is important to remember is that when a community has an idea to create a park or protected area, it is important that all possible tools of protection be considered. There are many different kinds of provincial parks and provincial recreation areas in our own provincial legislation as well as national parks, and when a community group sits down with this idea of this land needs to be protected, say, the Edmonton river valley, they should have all of that suite of options available to them. Every park and protected area has different allowances, regulations, and different specific characteristics. That needs to be part of the conversation. There's no point in removing national parks from the conversation. They do something different on the land than other provincial legislated protected areas, and that is why the community of Edmonton has gone for a national park in this case.

If the province is so afraid that this is federal overreach and we shouldn't have a national park here, well, they could probably create a provincial park if they wanted to, but I'm not seeing the province step up and suggest that protecting the Edmonton river valley legislatively through the Alberta Parks Act is on the table. If they're not willing to come to the table with that option, then national parks might be the best option for this particular park.

This bill adds red tape to the conversation, it adds bureaucracy, and it stifles economic development that comes from tourism. I'm not sure why the government would want to stifle economic development anywhere but especially from tourism, that tends to be sustainable, long lasting, and is a part of celebrating what makes Alberta great, which I hear from the other side of the House is such a big objective. All the time we need to share with the world how great Alberta is, yet here they are trying to stop us from sharing with the world how great Alberta is.

Tourism in our existing national parks and our provincial parks is big business – emphasis on big – but the businesses may be small, medium, or large. There are billions of dollars and thousands of businesses that rely on parks and protected areas for their income. The communities of Banff, Jasper, and Canmore rely on the national parks for their economic success as rural communities. In 2017 alone these three communities of Banff, Jasper, and Canmore generated \$2.7 billion in economic impact for the province and \$192,000 in taxes for the province, and a big portion of that money came from the fact that these communities are close to some of Canada's best national parks.

The municipality of Edmonton could also benefit from having Canada's second urban national park to be very history making. My colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford and also my colleagues from the other side of the House have commented on how special the Edmonton river valley is. There is no doubt that this is a spectacular place and something to be celebrated. The Edmonton river valley is the largest stretch of urban parkland in North America; we should be celebrating that. Designating a national park could be a way that

we do that. Designating it as a provincial park could do that, too, but as I've said, the government doesn't seem to want to throw that out as an option. Protecting urban green space is critical to tourism provision in municipalities, but it's also critical to urban biodiversity enhancement and environmental protections.

Despite what the members opposite say, this is an example of massive provincial government overreach into a municipality. The province is overstepping here. The Edmonton city council voted 10 to 3 to move forward with exploring an urban national park, just like the town council in Canmore unanimously voted not to have the Three Sisters mountain village development, and the province came in and said: no; you have to do this. This is an example of a municipality voting one way and the province saying: no, no; we have to be involved. When the province criticizes Ottawa and Trudeau all the time for the exact same thing, that makes this bill really hypocritical. It's not okay if Ottawa intrudes on the province, but it's totally okay for the province to intrude on municipalities: that's what this bill is doing.

The other thing is that we really should be moving reconciliation forward, and one of the best ways to do that is with land management and co-management and collaborative management agreements with Indigenous groups. There is so much space to embrace Indigenous groups' involvement in land management of parks and protected areas. The river valley tells stories of Turtle Island, colonization, the fur trade, industrialization, and environmental protection. Adequate involvement of our Indigenous partners in this land-use decision-making is critical.

When I was in school in junior high, I had the privilege to snowshoe down the North Saskatchewan River and have an overnight at Fort Edmonton, where we learned beading and we pretended to trade beaver furs. It is one of the memories of my school-age time that I cherish. All children should have the opportunity to experience and live Fort Edmonton in this way.

4:40

The last thing I'll say is that Albertans love their parks. They love them. You start messing with parks, and people get upset. They love their parks so much. Also, they love making new parks. The members opposite will love it when I say this. In 2000 former Premier Ralph Klein – oh, you guys aren't even going to give me a little bit there? – created Special Places 2000, which was a legacy that Premier Klein left us with, where 81 new parks and protected areas were created and 2 million hectares of the Alberta landscape were protected as parks and protected areas. Every single one of those hectares came from a local community identifying their special place that needed protection, and every single one of those communities contributed to expanding our parks and protected areas network in Alberta.

This is the community of Edmonton identifying their special place and asking for it to be protected. This act is not required to meet the needs of the community, and it actually hinders their progress.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to rise and speak on the bill. Listen, I think that, hopefully, one thing we can agree on on all sides of the House is that Edmonton's river valley is a natural gem and one of the many reasons why so many people choose to make a home in the city and the surrounding areas. It truly is beautiful. On this side we are aware of the concerns raised by some Edmonton residents, including some

members of Edmonton city council, about what this approach might mean for future management of Edmonton's river valley.

Those who have voted against this action did so because they saw no real benefit to pursuing such a project, fearing losing control of the area to a federal government who is hostile towards Alberta on a constant basis and lacked clarity in the ownership and administration of the park: give us the land, and we'll tell you later what we're going to do about it. Yet the folks on the other side would have us in Edmonton sign on to that with no promises, give away control of the land, no promise about what'll happen after that.

Moving to planning means that with approval from Parks Canada there'll be a broad conversation where the boundaries of the park are refined – that's a funny word, "refined"; that can mean a lot of different things – the governance model created and budgets confirmed. Well, budgets confirmed: I don't know about you, but I'd have a hard time running our government or even my ministry with an unconfirmed budget. As part of the Municipal Affairs' mandate letter one of the things I have been tasked with is protecting the province's constitutional right to oversee the governance of Alberta's municipalities without federal interference. So I'll touch on that a little bit.

But to the task at hand, Bill 204. The purpose of the bill is to stop federal overreach in provincial matters, especially regarding Edmonton's river valley. The bill amends the Municipal Government Act under division 8, Limits on Municipal Powers, section 70, Disposal of Land.

Now, I know the member across said that some federal legislation says that, and it may or may not. Here's what's funny. The member said, "Well, the federal government: we argue when they interfere with us, yet we interfere sometimes with municipalities." That is correct, but it's not the same thing. In the Constitution of this country we are on an equal footing with the federal government, not a subservient order of government; an equal footing, where the municipalities are subject to our legislation, in fact created by our legislation. It's not that they're not important. They are important. They are a third responsible order of government, and we treat them as such. But the fact is that unlike the federal government, who does not have authority to interfere with ours, we actually do have authority to change municipal levels of authority because it comes through our legislation. There's just a little civics lesson for the folks across the aisle. I don't know whether they'll notice it or remember it or not.

This bill would amend the Municipal Government Act, which all municipalities are subject to, to give cabinet the ability to create new regulations that would outline specific requirements before municipalities and the federal government could create a national urban park in Alberta. Where there are benefits to parks, it's important that federal influence is minimized, and this is where we get a key point raised by the Premier following a recent meeting of Canada's Premiers in Halifax. That's where our Premier, the Premier of Alberta, said that Alberta's government would explore a requirement for greater oversight of agreements between the federal government and municipalities of Alberta.

Now, in the Constitution, if the federal government is behaving the way they ought to, they should actually come through us to speak and deal with the municipalities. They repeatedly, seems like constantly, and certainly regularly try to end run the provincial government. Here's the sad part: it's not to make the world a better place. It's for some political advantage. Let's face it. They don't care about Alberta. They're hostile towards our province, they're hostile towards our economy, they're hostile towards our jobs, and they're hostile towards our government. It's actually despicable, but there it is.

We need to assure that our province's authority, as the government of Alberta, is not infringed upon while also making sure we ourselves can work with municipalities to get the best deal possible from the federal government. Here's why: under the direction of the Premier I've been instructed to review a Quebec law, Bill M-30, which requires now the federal government to negotiate with the provincial government rather than to go to municipalities. Let's face it. Why wouldn't we? Quebec does better. You can't argue with the success Quebec has experienced. They just announced \$900 million for housing, a result of negotiating on behalf of all their municipalities. All of Quebec's municipalities will now have an equal opportunity to access those funds.

Now, let's talk for a minute about what happens in Alberta. The last tranche of dollars for the same thing announced for Alberta, where Alberta is about 14 per cent of Canada's population: did we get 14 per cent of the national money? Did we get 20 per cent of the national money? No, Madam Speaker; 2.5 per cent of the national money. Somebody needs to stand up for Alberta, somebody needs to stand up for Alberta municipalities, and it sure isn't the folks across the aisle because they're in camp with Trudeau, who is in partnership with their leader, Jagmeet Singh, and they are subservient to Ottawa. They are partners with Ottawa in being hostile to Alberta, and they stand here like they care. They stand up in this room, this important room of the government of Alberta, and talk like they care when they are actually actively on a regular basis in league with Trudeau, through their leader in Ottawa, their main party leader in Canada being hostile to Alberta, and they're okay with us receiving 2.5 per cent of national funding when Quebec gets a lot more. All other provinces get more. But that's who the folks across the aisle have sided through.

For those in Alberta watching, you either got people on our side of the aisle that are on your side and people on the other side of the aisle happy with you getting – I don't know – 10, 15 per cent of what you deserve. No, not on this side, Madam Speaker. We're on Alberta's side. We're on the side of the people from Alberta, which is where we will remain. Alberta needs fairness, Alberta needs equity, and we are certainly not seeing that from the current funding model. If defending our jurisdiction by passing legislation somewhat similar to what Quebec does assists us in getting our fair treatment, then that is what this government ought to do.

It's important to ensure that all parties are collaborating, working towards common goals, sharing necessary information so that efforts and resources are not duplicated and wasted. Let's face it. We have shown great respect for our Indigenous sisters and brothers and will continue to. Alberta: the only province in Canada that actually has land set aside for Métis people that they are in control of, and we take that responsibility seriously. It's important to remember that all parties collaborating and working towards the common goals are sharing necessary information so that efforts and resources are not duplicated and wasted.

Did the federal government talk to us before they went to Edmonton about creating a federal urban park? No. They don't care about collaborating. They don't care about co-operating. They care about, even if it's for a day, some political advantage where they can stand up and have their picture taken with no promises about what level of funding or care for these valued, precious lands in the Edmonton river valley, how they'll be taken care of, whether the actual resources will be there for that. I don't know, but I'm guessing they haven't given it a thought. They only care about the next press conference, when they can take credit for what they haven't done yet and perhaps will never do.

4:50

We need to assure that our authority as the government of Alberta is not infringed upon while also making sure we can work with municipalities to get the best deal from the federal government. This is in line with the Minister of Municipal Affairs' mandate, my mandate, of protecting the province's constitutional right to oversee the governance of Alberta's municipalities without federal interference.

Now, Madam Speaker, unfortunately – no; there are times the federal government sometimes does the right thing. Let's face it. Let's give them credit where it's due. But too often they make decisions without consultation for political advantage and not for the care of Albertans. When municipalities get 2 and a half per cent of Canada's funding instead of the 14 per cent that they deserve, that's not happening. And it happens way too often.

The intent of this Bill 204, which I support – and I thank the hon. member for bringing it forward; well done – is to ensure the provincial government plays a role in any proposed development of a national urban park in an Alberta municipality.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to speak about my thoughts and concerns having to do with this Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. As I speak, I'm mindful of the fact that Erica Bullwinkle, Linda Duncan, and Kyle Schole – Linda, certainly, who is a former Member of Parliament – are here. All three of these folks have worked tirelessly to ensure that there is a continued discussion about and a commitment to preserving our watershed and the river valley. It's with their work in mind that I talk about my opposition to this bill.

Madam Speaker, this bill is, simply put, unnecessary. One of my primary concerns is, in fact, that the underlying reason for the bill isn't about the protection of Edmonton's river valley; it's because the bill is about us versus them, Alberta versus Ottawa.

Madam Speaker, I love Edmonton's river valley, and I'm pleased to see the work that our city is engaged in. As my colleagues have already noted, we are lucky. We are lucky to have been blessed with that largest urban parkland in all of Canada. In fact, two municipal parks in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview border the river. There are pathways that join one area of the riding to another area, even to the north over to the Edmonton-Manning side, and there are other pathways that allow people to run, walk, and bike, and go all the way across the river to the south side to the parts of central Edmonton. To the southwest it is a gem. In fact, I even know of a former teaching colleague of mine who used to use the river valley for her teaching. She believed that teaching on the land was extraordinarily important for the kids in Beverly.

Our river valley is in use throughout the year. We as Edmontonians understand the importance that it holds. We understand the importance, the fact that it is located on Treaty 6 territory, that it is land that has been here for millennia and that has been home to the Cree, the Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Dene, Saulteaux, Anishinabe, Inuit, and so many others. This land, this river that goes through this land tells the story and lives the story of this place and the people for whom it has been home for millennia, the people for whom it has been home for a couple of hundred years, the folks who continue to enjoy picnics and running with their dog, talking to neighbours, taking a quiet walk through its trees. I'm reminded of one of the first times I took my then two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter down to the river and her absolute joy of being there

under the canopy of the trees, the streams that she wandered by, the fact that she attempted to skip rocks but wasn't quite successful at that point.

I would urge the members opposite, as they consider the pros and the cons of this Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023, before they vote one way or another, to consider the importance that this place has in Edmonton's history but also to consider the importance of folks like a constituent that we talked to just last week about this very issue. He is an important member of our community, and he absolutely supports the work that is going on between Edmonton and the federal government right now. He wants there to be a national urban park in Edmonton, Madam Speaker. He is in favour of conservation, of education, and, most of all, of reconciliation. He's in favour because he sees all of this work as protection for the park, protection for generations so that the trails there can not only just be maintained but so they will be there for his grandchildren and great-grandchildren and going on and on so that we can all benefit from all that the river valley can provide to us and all those things that it can give us.

I certainly understand, Madam Speaker, that the members opposite are concerned. But, again, it's my belief that it's unfortunate that the reason why this bill came about is more about that fight with Ottawa, as ably demonstrated and stated by members opposite, rather than with the protection of Edmonton's river valley. This is about wanting to continue that fight with Ottawa. It's a proverbial shot across the bow, and unfortunately that land and this river have landed in the middle, and that simply isn't right.

While folks in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview grapple with a series of crises – grocery prices, housing prices, utility prices, wages that have not kept pace with inflation; e-mail after e-mail about these issues and others, including, of course, staying in the CPP – these are issues, Madam Speaker, that this government should be concerning itself with. And, beyond that, in the face of all of those crises, this is an incredibly tiresome narrative, this fight with a park. Extending the narrative is unhelpful.

In my view, this idea, just looking into the idea of establishing an urban national park in Canada and establishing an urban national park in Edmonton, isn't overreach, as the member stated. It's simply a discussion. It's a discussion about collaboration, protection for future generations, protection for sacred space. It's about partnership, a shared vision connecting people who are here to the land and to the nature that surrounds them. More than anything else, it's about reconciliation, and as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford so eloquently stated, that reconciliation means that my grandchildren, my grandchildren's grandchildren can continue to enjoy and reflect on the privilege of what it means to live in such a place and what it means to live as a treaty person.

I'm opposed to this bill, Madam Speaker, and I hope that the members opposite will take consideration in that.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak on behalf of the member elect from the amazing riding of Leduc-Beaumont and his bill, that I'm super happy to support today. This is Bill 204. I just wanted to make it clear because there seems to be some confusion here. It's on the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. I think our members opposite seem to be: we're trying to cancel all of Indigenous parks across the world. I think that they maybe need to reread or listen to some of the specifics of this bill.

I also just want to make mention that there's some confusion here about Indigenous people and this bill. Our government is very, very happy to be a willing and collaborative partner with Indigenous groups, Indigenous communities on parks, on land, just like we are in all the amazing work our Minister of Indigenous Relations is doing on the AIOC. The other minister spoke earlier about the only province in Canada recognizing the Métis people. So we care about things that are meaningful.

We're not trying to work with Prime Minister Trudeau and their boss, Jagmeet, on another fluffy photo opportunity, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to remind members opposite and anybody else that's watching right now that if Prime Minister Trudeau cared so much about Indigenous people, there would be clean water on reserves, full stop. So it frustrates me as an Indigenous person to stand here and listen to the members opposite continue to side with Prime Minister Trudeau while he continues his overreach while pretending to help out Indigenous people, because we all know it's not true.

It's no secret that Edmonton's river valley is a national treasure. Its sprawling network of lush green spaces, meandering trails, and scenic riverbanks make it a haven for outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers alike. Spanning over 7,400 hectares, the river valley stands as one of the largest urban park systems in North America, offering a breathtaking collection of biodiversity within the heart of Edmonton.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sorry. I hesitate to interrupt, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

P3 Models and School Construction

504. Mr. Deol moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a bill that would prohibit the use of public-private partnerships, otherwise known as P3 models, for school construction in Alberta.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to stand in the House to move the motion. The P3 models were originally introduced in Canada in 1990 as an alternative for government projects that consistently overspent on budgets and went beyond the estimated timelines. P3s, which transfer partial responsibility to private partners, have created the problems of schools being built at subpar with minimal accountability.

[The Speaker in the chair]

P3 models have been expensive for taxpayers, and contractors cutting corners led to leaky roofs and unusable sports fields. Community needs were not incorporated into school designs, and community groups were charged exorbitant fees to rent the facilities after hours. A series of incidents and the information from here in Alberta, from home and across the country, shows that the P3 models have failed to meet expectations as mandated. Instead of saving taxpayers money, they have become a white elephant that costs Albertans more, eventually getting infrastructure full of problems.

There is a lot of evidence, a lot of examples we have discussed in the House many times. I would like to present it once again to support my argument. Information in Edmonton at Bessie Nichols school: the temperatures were regulated by offices in other

provinces, so there was no control over heating, air conditioning, creating an extremely uncomfortable learning environment in completed buildings.

Schools funded by P3s have many restrictions to prevent the private partners from incurring extra costs. Educators and administrative staff have no control over the school infrastructure and must submit work orders to address changes, which takes significantly longer. Schools constructed under P3s have struggled with flooded and muddy schoolyards because of drainage problems they were completely powerless to fix. Johnny Bright elementary school penned a letter to Alberta Education complaining about the mud problems around the school and saying that the solution of fencing off the mud pits was not sustainable. Recently the overcrowding of the school contributed further to the mud and drainage problems as the school was designed to hold 850 students but actually was accommodating over 1,000 students.

Anybody who lives in Edmonton knows the trials and tribulations of P3s with the valley line, that finally opened after multiple years. There's so much evidence in Alberta – we can keep going on and on – and not only in Alberta but also around the country. The information from Saskatchewan: the roof of a newly built, \$407 million hospital needed to be replaced after the roof began leaking and eventually fell through.

The highways were then privatized by Premier Mike Harris in the year that was leading up to the provincial election, in 1999. The highway was leased to a conglomerate of private companies called 407 International Inc., which was initially owned by the Spanish multinational Cintra infrastructure as well as various subsidiaries of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board and the Montreal-based engineering firm SNC-Lavalin.

The deal included a 99-year lease agreement with unlimited control over the highway and its tolls, dependent on traffic volume. However, the government maintains the right to build a transport system within the highway right-of-way. It is today described as a value-generating monster and a cash cow for SNC-Lavalin and one of the worst financial missteps from any government in Ontario's history.

In 1999 the Nova Scotia government signed an agreement to build two dozen schools under P3s. In 2010 the provincial auditor determined that \$52 million could have been saved if the traditional route for building had been taken instead. Auditor General reports from the end of the decade reveal that the funding arrangements made the projects more expensive overall and banned future governments from using such accounting fallacies to fund infrastructure projects.

On top of being more expensive for taxpayers, P3 school projects had significant negative consequences. Contractors cutting corners led to leaky roofs and unusable sport fields. Community needs were not incorporated into school designs, and community groups were charged exorbitant fees to rent the facility after hours. In Halifax P3 school facilities were 10 times the rate of public school facilities. School grass and walls were designated as private assets, not public, and artworks could not be hung on school walls – what a joke – without the approval of the owner. The owner would also demand a share of the proceeds from fundraising events on school property. Similar issues were found in Alberta P3 schools built in 2000, forcing the government to cancel the development of an additional 19 P3 schools in 2014.

Ottawa's LRT project has been repeatedly delayed, with significant overspending because of these continuous delays, which the Rideau Transit Group called: the underlying risk of public-private partnership. On the problems with a severe lack of transparency, conflict of interest between partners, and less control by the city over massive infrastructure problems, the Toronto

Eglinton Crosstown P3 project was warned, saying: no other city should have to suffer the same hardship. Toronto's Eglinton Crosstown project began in 2011 and was projected for completion between 2020 and 2021 but has faced multiple delays in timeline, with no explanation or knowledge of what was happening behind closed doors. In November 2022 city councillors announced that they were being stonewalled and were fed up with the lack of transparency around why the project has stalled for a third time. As of November 30, 2023, there is still no timeline for when this project will be completed despite multiple delays in timeline, raising questions surrounding the budgets and quality control.

Instead of showing sincerity – I still recall. I know we discussed this issue in the last Assembly, and my colleagues and my caucus are really fighting to end this failed model on behalf of Albertans. It reminds me, this discussion – I don't know. It still appalls me when I remember. Instead, like in the last Assembly . . .

5:10

The Speaker: This concludes the time for the opening remarks.

I see the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, the Minister of Infrastructure, has risen.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to address Motion 504, put forth by the Member for Edmonton-Meadows. The motion here and request from the NDP is to urge our government to prohibit the use of public-private partnerships, P3s, for all school projects, so to prohibit in the form of legislation. The NDP want us as government to not only forbid the use of this tool as a policy but to formally make it illegal by law. It's unimaginable to me as to why a request would be made to eliminate a capital delivery method that maximizes value for our limited tax dollars, to criminalize a tool that is used extensively around the world to successfully deliver projects. P3s do this with increased efficiency, with improved collaboration and innovation, a method that better shares risk among multiple parties, one that leverages private-sector expertise, and one that improves cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Speaker, naturally I cannot support a motion that would illogically disadvantage Albertans purely to satisfy a closely-held NDP ideology, one that opposes Alberta's business community. Now, let's analyze the roots of this ideological position and how it relates. P3 stands for public-private partnership, and that right there is the aha moment. Whenever that element of private comes into play, the NDP categorically cannot and will not support any for-profit business in a capitalist marketplace. They fundamentally oppose the free market. They do this to, well, I guess, favour union friends like the big boss man himself, Gil McGowan.

I can surmise that, you know, they fear that with the private sector and private-sector contracts that are in place, it would lead to fewer union dollars being routed back to the NDP. Ultimately, anything that goes against state ownership – and let's call it what it is – anything that's not socialist by nature, the NDP will oppose, and certainly that includes the evil business owner who works hard to provide for his or her family. You can see their disappointment there, Mr. Speaker.

As a former business owner myself, actually, I really should take this opportunity right now to thank the Leader of the Opposition as well as the entire party across for me being here today, because it was the NDP that provided me with the motivation, Mr. Speaker. You see, back in 2015 I owned a successful franchise business, and it was the NDP's mandate to wage war on Alberta's corporate enterprises which drove me to get involved. And what did they do, you ask? Well, they increased corporate taxes by 20 per cent, and one will never forget the NDP's secret carbon tax. They introduced Alberta, as the first jurisdiction in all of North America, to a retail

carbon tax. During that time they increased the minimum wage by over 60 per cent, in a time of declining revenues in this province. They massively increased regulatory red tape and made a bureaucratic mess that cost my business and others like mine tens of thousands of dollars. [interjections]

You can hear them chirping away over there, Mr. Speaker, as they're not happy with hearing all of this. It kind of reminds me of the Knights Who Say "Ni!" with Monty Python. The use of these words and the word "capitalism" makes them recoil, and they don't like hearing it, but I'm digressing here. I wonder how they would feel about shrubbery delivery if we could do that with a P3.

Mr. Speaker, they did all of these things in order to inflict punishment on the private sector in pursuit of their goal of nationalization. As a province we cannot neglect, ignore a financial program that benefits our constituents. In reality a public-private partnership is a proven tool in our financing tool box, and Alberta taxpayers deserve to get the best value for their investment dollars. Ignoring this approach would be an error.

The NDP may not care about getting the best value for the taxpayer dollars, but we certainly do. As such, we assess all capital projects for P3 compatibility and only recommend the approach when it presents value for money. That's astonishing – I know – but by value for money what we mean is that taxpayers will financially benefit from using a P3 over traditional builds. One can see that I question the motives of the NDP in bringing forward a motion that would remove a mechanism to save taxpayers money. It's illogical. That said, Albertans can rest assured that our government will continue to use alternative financing approaches like P3s to deliver infrastructure projects that Albertans need.

Furthermore, Alberta has a tremendous amount of success delivering through a P3 model, and I can highlight some of those. In total we have saved Albertans \$3.4 billion using a P3 model to deliver 11 projects. This includes 45 schools with a package of five high schools that are award-winning high schools in this P3 package – they'll all be open next year – six portions of the ring road in Calgary and Edmonton as well as a waste-water treatment plant in Kananaskis. That is \$3.4 billion in savings above the cost that we would have spent to deliver these projects using more traditional methods.

Knowing that we have limited resources, I would ask the NDP: which department would they recommend making cuts in for this \$3.4 billion? Perhaps a few schools, fewer health care facilities; maybe they would cut in the area of affordable housing. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the realistic response from the NDP would be, "No worries; we'll just go further into debt," which, by the way, is exactly how they ran their government, but it is irresponsible to ignore instruments that place our government at a financial disadvantage and reduce the amount of infrastructure that we can deliver. These savings can be channelled directly into funding provincial priorities to assist Alberta communities and help families thrive.

In addition to saving money, though, the P3s have other benefits. They provide schedule and cost certainty, meaning that the contractor is responsible for ensuring the project is completed on time. If they fail to deliver on schedule, they're not paid for additional hours. The P3 model is also effective in addressing life cycle costs of a project. Under this model the contractor is often responsible for maintaining buildings for several years after construction ends, which ensures that the facility meets optimum operating standards for the duration of the agreement. When looking at these life cycle costs of P3s, once construction is complete, the contractor is responsible for keeping the facility components, like heating and cooling systems, in good working condition, and this incentivizes high-quality delivery.

Our government will always look to innovative financing and delivery models, including P3s, if they make sense. Rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that the P3 approach will continue to be considered for major capital projects such as schools, health facilities, affordable housing, and for our roadways.

It should be noted that this is a transparent process and we disclose the value-for-money proposition to the public each and every time, and this provides Albertans with the comfort that this is a good deal. Our end goal as government is to always ensure Albertans get the infrastructure that they need and that Alberta taxpayers get optimal value for their . . .

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, Motion Other than Government Motion 504. The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to Motion 504, public-private partnerships. I'm going to open by saying that we are not anti private sector. I am not anti private sector. I spent 12 years of my career attracting investment into this province.

Now, I have also heard from many of my constituents in Calgary-Foothills about the lack of school infrastructure in our rapidly growing area of Calgary. So many of our residents purchased their homes in the hopes that schools would be built in the empty fields next to them. We need to be focused on rolling up our sleeves and building these schools. We can't spend any more time in negotiating public-private partnerships. I would query about the schools that have been built. Have they been delivered faster through P3? What we need to be concerned about is not just the cost of construction but how quickly we are putting a shovel in the ground and building these schools. We can't waste more time in delaying these projects.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the P3 model has been in use around the world. We know that Europe went down the P3 path long ago, and we know that they're facing some challenges that they've had in some of those P3 projects. We know that some of those countries are dialing back on pursuing P3 and moving back to a model of public construction. We absolutely respect the private sector, the need to encourage the private sector, and having policies in place for the private sector to flourish, but I think we also need to separate social infrastructure that our society so critically needs – education, schools, health, hospitals – and focus on the fact that it is the government's responsibility to deliver on these critical pieces of infrastructure.

We've learned from Europe that P3 projects don't always deliver on value for money. I think we can all agree that the private sector is motivated by one goal and one goal only, to deliver profit. They are not in the business of delivering social good. We do need to respect the goal that the private sector is trying to achieve. We need the private sector to flourish and create jobs in our economy, but we need to separate the social goals that we're trying to achieve and the demands on the government – the government – to meet those social goals.

The only way for profit objectives to be met is by reducing costs. To deliver a project with lower costs potentially means cutting corners. I might ask – this is not a P3 question – what happened when we privatized laboratory services in Calgary? Did we save money? Did we achieve better outcomes for Calgarians in making that partnership with the private sector? Often the private sector is unable to deliver on the timelines and the costs promised in their negotiated agreements. They often come back to the government stating that they can't meet what they initially signed up to, that

they need more time, that they will need more funds. While the Minister of Infrastructure suggests that risks are shared with the private sector and the government in a P3 model, often if that model goes off the rails, it's the government that is ultimately responsible for delivering and holding that risk.

Again, we should be clear on what our objectives are. In this case we're talking about delivering on social infrastructure and that the private sector is not in business to deliver on social infrastructure. We should have policies in place to encourage businesses to flourish, but we need to be clear that public infrastructure is the responsibility of government. We are well behind on delivering education and health infrastructure in this province. We do need to roll up our sleeves in delivering those critical infrastructure projects.

Let's focus on doing that rather than negotiating P3 partnerships. Let's focus on what the government's role is in delivering those projects. I support that we should be moving to ban public-private partnerships. I support that we should be, again, rolling up our sleeves. A government should always be looking for the cost effectiveness in how they approach a project, but that doesn't mean that we need to look to partner with the private sector in delivering on social infrastructure.

We know that the past Conservative governments in this province have tried P3s before, and they didn't work, and they backed off that and moved back to a public delivery model. We've even had former ministers in this government talk about how P3s did not work for schools. Why do we insist on pursuing a model that we know in the past has not necessarily delivered the outcomes that we're looking for?

I encourage the members in this House to support 504. We should be focused on delivering the social infrastructure so needed in this province. The government should take responsibility for that, and we shouldn't be spending our time negotiating with the private sector to achieve social outcomes that they are not designed to deliver.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the members opposite and my colleagues that have spoken here on Motion 504. I really enjoy the conversation and, actually, the fulsome debate. You know, sometimes they say – there's an old adage: to catch a thief, you have to think like a thief. I've been hearing a lot of things that made me pause for wonder and to get into the headspace of the opposition.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadows: love this man; absolutely respect him as a colleague. Out in the different constituencies we have a fantastic working relationship. I absolutely adore this gentleman. He is very well intentioned and an absolute professional. Firstly, any criticisms that I may have against your motion, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, is absolutely no criticism of who you are as an MLA; a ton of respect for you.

The Member for Calgary-Foothills: I found this interesting. I'm going to take a little bit of a run at you, partner. You're new here, but you're enough. You said a couple of things that got my attention. Firstly, the gentleman, the MLA for Calgary-Foothills, was talking about his prior life and how he attracted capital here yet in the last six or seven minutes just told me how incompetent the private industry was and how nefarious their intentions were in delivering projects. I'm having a hard time with that because, again, what we're talking about is a form of contract.

A P3 model is a tool. Let's pretend. Let's all pretend we've got that little first toolbox that mom and dad gave us when we're branching out on our own. In there – guaranteed, Mr. Speaker, because I know you love it, too – we've got a Robertson screwdriver, something that's unique. When you need a Robertson, you've got it. It's the square head, for those that aren't following or keeping, paying attention, but when you need that tool, that's the one you reach for. Trying to use a butter knife ain't going to work for you. Trying to use the Phillips when you're doing that: it's not going to work for you. When you've got a square-headed screw that you need to screw into the wall, you want your Robertson. A P3 is simply a contract, a form of contract.

In my prior life I was very fortunate. When I was first cutting my teeth, I was a contract administrator for a large industrial company. We had a ton of different types of contracts depending on the services that were being performed, not only on one job site but on a number of job sites across the country.

5:30

Later on I had the fortune of starting my own consulting company and providing my services to some of the larger companies that we have, one of which now is the largest pipeline company in North America. When I was going through different jurisdictions and we had different forms of contract, different jurisdictions, and everything else, the last thing that we were going to do was to hamstring ourselves by not having our complete tool box at our disposal. And always – always, always – we did a bid evaluation. That bid evaluation was set up on the front end to look at your forms of contract and allow for that. Again, in those different areas you actually set it up, when you went out for your proposals, to come back with the best solution. Whether it was a request for quotation or proposal or otherwise, you always looked for innovations to come forward. Sometimes we would use a fixed-fee cost reimbursable. Sometimes you'd use a unit-price item. Sometimes you would even do something really crazy and partner up with some of these companies, joint ventures and otherwise.

The P3 model has been around, and where we keep getting fixated, you know, again, with all consideration and fairness to my friend from Meadowview or Edmonton-Meadows – I apologize; is that right? No? Sorry. I was looking for an intervention there; wasn't sure if I was getting one.

What I was looking for was that form of contract. So with all consideration, some of the issues that you've spoken about and my colleagues from across the aisle have spoken about are simply execution of contracts, not the form of contract itself. If you don't have – a couple of things in mind here. The gentleman from Calgary-Foothills kept talking about what the drivers were. I can tell you full well that on a project these were nonnegotiable items in every project regardless of private industry or otherwise: safety, quality, the environment, cost, and schedule. Those are the key elements that you manage. They're basically like your six-pack or like your cluster when you're driving home in your vehicles. Those are the things that you're always watching on those projects. Your form of contract will help you deliver those, but you have to manage each one of those areas.

The items of deficiency I've been hearing about have been cost overruns; I've heard about some of the site conditions. It has nothing to do with the form of contract. That has everything to do with the management and execution, the quality you're talking about or the items at the end for cleanup and restoration, et cetera, or handover. That's all part of the commissioning phase or otherwise, and if you write your terms of contract correctly, then the contractor is on the hook for that or your engineering consulting company that you have as an intermediary in between while you're

delivering these projects. And again, schools, from my background, are just a fancy box. There isn't anything major inside of that as far as industrial equipment, complexity of engineering design, et cetera. These are not overcomplicated projects. So, again, when you look at the base, root element of these items, what you have is: how do you manage it? You have to have at the disposal for your team, again, all of those different elements.

So let's start to de-vilify the bogeyman here, and let's go through this. A P3 partnership: it's a tool in the government's financial tool box. Hey, look at that; it's a Robertson. Let's call it that, just for all of that.

What you end up doing is taking a little bit more planning in the front end when you're starting to look at these forms of contract. It does take a little bit more time to negotiate and work through these items, but schedule is one of those lower elements when you're looking at the items and there's a definite need for the schools but you want to have it up and functioning when you need it. That's something I believe we can all agree on. Even the member from Calgary – I can't remember yours, ever, but I'll get it one day. I'll remember where you're from.

Even we can agree on that. That's one of the things of time of the essence. But to take that off the table when you think, when you honestly think, that the government infrastructure group – God bless them – as good as they are, are going to be able to manage projects one hundred per cent better than the private industries that actually are getting paid to do this, because when they put their proposals in, they're tied to it. They're hooked to it. Their risk is there. Our own internal groups that are doing this do not have the same skin in the game to deliver, ever.

We were talking about some of the cost overruns. Typically that's change management. Understand what your design is. If you spend more money on the front end and time on the front end of these projects, understanding clearly what your deliverables are, understanding clearly what the design is and don't change the darn design once you're partway through the project, a lot of this goes away. And typically on your specifications it's "meet or exceed" qualities that typically come out because that allows the innovation to come from those different groups and communities executing the work. Again, why would we take one of those tools out of our tool box to deliver? [interjection] The other member is heckling, and I'm not sure what he's saying. It's inaudible, but I'm sure it means a lot of important sense. I'll get to that later if I can understand what he's telling.

The government should and will continue to use our alternate finance role approaches, again, trying to find the best bang for the buck depending on that project or that service. Despite the noise and misinformation the NDP has seen, we've seen actually some really good projects they can place. Now, like anything else, you see projects that go sideways on you, too. But again that comes back to managing these key elements: safety, quality, environment, cost, and schedule.

In total, as the minister had noted, we'd already saved about \$3.4 billion using P3s to deliver these projects: 45 schools, six portions of the ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary, and the water treatment plant in Kananaskis Country. Again to my friend from Edmonton-Meadows, if we took this one element off the table, it would actually preclude us from having that ability when the conditions are right to be able to save those dollars and cents on it.

The Speaker: There are no interventions on a Monday afternoon during private members' business.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Schedule and cost certainty: those are two of the elements that helps us, because when you have those negotiations, you start – people like to think you can mitigate risk. You can't really mitigate risk in the sense that you can make it go away. You can identify risk, and the worst thing that you can have is an unknown unknown. But you can have a known unknown, and you can quantify these risks.

One of the contracting tools you have is to have that complete and fulsome dialogue of how this project looks at the start, the middle, the turnover, and, moreover, the operations. Typically when you're doing a turnover in a traditional model, whether it's a lump sum or a fixed fee or however you want to put it, the contractor commissions this thing and walks away. You've got a period where there is a warranty period, where you're looking at deficiencies, but that period arguably is pretty short.

The P3 model extends out that operational phase. Potentially, as an example, they could take care of all of the heating and infrastructure within the school itself, so they would be on the hook for a longer time. What that does is help spread out that risk and the certainty with it as well. They know they'll be tied into this for a while and all those other types of things. Again on the school model it's still the schools that actually own and operate that facility, but you've got a tie back into there that actually has those contractors having more skin in the game under that model.

The other point on here that I wanted to make sure I made was that the Alberta government should always look to the combination of traditional and innovation financing models, which includes P3s if they make sense and provide financial benefit. Again, folks, in here we're spending other people's money after tax dollars, and that should be treated like gold. With all the other things that are going on here, with the affordability costs and everything else, when we're squeezing that last dime out of people, we want to make sure that goes the longest way, absolutely as far as we can get it.

I get excited about projects. I'm a proje-holic, Mr. Speaker, and if you took away my tool set to deliver good projects, I'd be sad. That's why folks should not vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of this motion. I know members opposite would like to approach this debate perhaps from an ideological point of view, but you know for me I'd like to approach this motion, really, with a few simple questions. Does it work, and does it meet its objectives?

The reality is that the P3 model for school construction simply does not work. It doesn't work in terms of saving money. It doesn't actually work in terms of saving time. In fact, you know, I think the members opposite have come to the right conclusion when in 2022 the Minister of Infrastructure at the time nixed P3s as the preferred way to build schools, saying that this, in fact, isn't necessarily going to help them meet their objectives.

The reality is that the only advantage of P3s is that they allow for a little bit of creative accounting, where it allows the expenditure to be delayed on the books, obfuscating the true spending in a given fiscal year. As a former school board trustee I've heard countless stories of less flexibility, bottlenecks when it comes to maintenance, and ultimately costing more for maintenance over time for school divisions. I know P3s all too well. Several P3s in my ward at the time were dealing with ongoing muddy fields and maintenance issues because third-party contractors were reluctant to invest in what's needed to actually fix the problem. Johnny Bright school, a school in my ward as a trustee at the time, actually wrote to the

Ministry of Education because they were so fed up with the muddy fields and nothing was being done. In fact, Alberta Infrastructure said at the time that there was nothing that they could do because the third-party contractor was fulfilling their contractual obligations even though the issue wasn't fixed.

5:40

Another school, Bessie Nichols, in my riding of Edmonton-South West: the temperatures, believe it or not, were actually regulated by offices in other provinces so there was no control in heating or air conditioning. These are just examples of some of the challenges that have surfaced around P3s. And many of my colleagues would know of the stories in the early days of P3s from school administrators who were not able to post things on the wall unless it went through a third-party contractor.

Mr. Speaker, this model doesn't do what it was set out to do, which is potentially save money. It doesn't because it costs school divisions more money in the long run when it comes to maintenance. In fact, school divisions have repeatedly requested, particularly those in metro areas, to the Ministry of Education that they need more flexibility in the current P3 model. I was, in fact, part of the meeting with the then Minister of Education when we as the Edmonton public school board said to the Minister of Education: no P3s.

There are alternatives to delivering better quality education projects. In fact, there are examples of models that have worked well. One such model is the integrated project delivery model, in which trades, designers, builders, and school divisions work together efficiently to build a school project. Edmonton public schools, as an example, was able to employ that model to deliver several schools ahead of schedule and more cheaply, I might add, than if it had been done using the P3 method. Dr. Anne Anderson high school is such an example.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's been well established by, certainly, our side of the House but also by members opposite that the P3 model hasn't actually worked in delivering the schools that our province so desperately needs. It hasn't saved money. This is not a debate about ideology; it is a debate about what works well and what is ultimately going to deliver the schools that Albertans need, and it certainly is not the P3 model.

In fact, I would encourage members opposite to consider integrated project delivery and to ensure that schools are delivered on time. I would encourage them to look at the Dr. Anne Anderson high school build that was completed just a couple of years ago. Integrated project delivery, I would say, is a much better alternative. It's time that we recognize that P3s are no longer serving us when it comes to school infrastructure and do away with them altogether. In fact, this government did the very same thing in 2022 when they paused using P3s as a way to deliver schools.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Calgary-North East.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Motion 504, a motion that calls to disrupt public-private partnerships, also known as P3s, for school construction in Alberta. P3s have supported countless capital projects, including schools, health facilities, affordable housing, and roadways. Our government is responsible for ensuring that these projects are financially sound and that P3s are only implemented when taxpayers benefit.

I think it's pretty obvious that generally the private sector performs more efficiently than the public sector. With the P3 model contractors are hired to design, build, finance, and maintain major

capital investments while following a specific timeline. Governments hold these contractors to a standard of excellence; failing to meet contractually defined standards results in financial penalties.

Mr. Speaker, legislation that would disrupt P3s would have a significant impact on our economy. Alberta has had tremendous success with P3s, saving Albertans \$3.4 billion – yes, that's "b" for billions – on over 11 different projects, allowing room for investment into other priorities that help Alberta families. These projects include 45 new schools, six portions of ring roads, and a waste-water treatment facility. Harming Alberta's economy is not new to the Official Opposition. The NDP can't be trusted with taxpayer dollars nor to make fiscally sound decisions.

We have all experienced the job-killing time when they were in government. As I mentioned in my maiden speech, I was a business owner in downtown Calgary from 2004 to 2022. In my last two years, however, mandates forced me to stay closed. From 2005 to 2014 my business grew every year, and then the NDP came into power, and their policies were simply terrible. For example, one of their policies they campaigned on and were elected on was increasing the minimum wage from \$10.20 to \$15 over three years. What was never discussed out loud but should have been mentioned was that roughly 50 per cent of minimum wage earners were students aged 15 to 24. This policy specifically ended up harming many small businesses, including mine, by increasing labour costs and thus having to cut employees' hours, raising prices, and making it less affordable for Albertans to dine out.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the NDP government did not make things more affordable for Albertans. The policies they put in place not only made life more expensive; it racked up debt that Albertans continue to pay for. This motion is another irresponsible policy being put forward by the Official Opposition. This motion would increase the costs of building schools, the same schools the NDP dumps all over our government for not being built. In fact, when the NDP was in office, they only announced 47 school projects throughout their mandate. In our last mandate our UCP government announced 98 school projects, more than double what they did in four years.

Mr. Speaker, you don't need to be an astute businessperson to know that raising prices is not the easiest way to grow a business. In 2014 I employed 18 people. By 2017 this number was whittled down to eight, which included my wife, who had been a stay-at-home mom since 1999. She came to work with me just to keep the lights on. I had to let go of my part-time workers: hosts, food runners, busers. The policy the NDP put in place did the exact opposite of what they said it was going to do. We were forced to adapt quickly with much less staff.

Minimum wage is designed for an entry point for people into the workforce. The reality of who earns the minimum wage is distinctly different from the general perception and certainly the narrative offered up by the left ideology. Ignoring experience and pursuing policies based on ideology did not solve the province's pressing problems. The same people that this NDP government said that they were advocating for were the ones who were most adversely affected.

Why wouldn't the NDP want a cost-saving billion-taxpayer-dollar-saving system to build schools that our communities need? Albertans elected our government to make the financially sound decisions that the NDP government failed to make. Our government will continue to maintain a job-inducing, investment-bringing, money-growing economy that all Albertans deserve. NDP policies did not and would not grow our economy. It's clear that the NDP's priorities are not in line with Alberta's priorities, and they'll put ideology over sound policies whenever they can.

Throughout our province and throughout Canada the beneficial nature of P3s is evident. Alberta's model continues to be the envy of the nation as other provinces and other countries look to us, especially in relation to the building of schools. Pursuing policies based on ideology is no way to run any government.

With that, I urge all members to make the right decision and vote against Motion 504. This is for the future of our province, the integrity of our systems, and the livelihoods of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard enough of small-business cost raising and whatnot from the other side, but let me make it clear that I'm also a small-business owner, and I'm proud that I pay my workers a living wage. I believe they are my assets and they are not just my expenses. I do consider that they deserve to live with dignity, and they deserve to get fair wages and deserve to have access to better health care, better education systems.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that education plays a very important role in our society, and it is important that we have schools in our communities which are well built, well funded, and well maintained. Albertans pay taxes, pay their fair share of taxes, and they expect the government to deliver the best services, and they deserve to get those services. You know, it is the job of the government to deliver those important services. It is the job of the government to find the best ways to build new schools, new projects, and in order to do that, it is very important that we analyze the various methods that are in front of us.

5:50

Since this motion specifically talks about P3s and schools, I would like to talk about that. You know, before I do that, Mr. Speaker, I have heard the ministers and the UCP chief whip talking about the best value for taxpayers' money. That's pretty rich coming from the other side given that they couldn't even get buying kids' Tylenol right. There is no foundation to the claim that the private sector is better at managing risk than the public sector. Virtually all P3s in Canada have been justified on the basis that they transfer large amounts of risk to the private sector, but a growing list shows that P3s are both more risky and more costly for the public.

Let me give some examples to clarify so that the members on the other side can understand it. B.C. bridges, for example, started in 2006 until 2009. The Golden Ears bridge had a fixed total construction cost of \$808 million, which went well over \$600 million dollars. Alberta schools: for example, Mr. Speaker, a key player behind Alberta's P3 schools project also came close to collapse in 2008, when the PCs were in government. Babcock & Brown Ltd. lost 97 per cent of its stock value while its P3 arm, Babcock & Brown partnership, laid off 25 per cent of its staff.

Let me give some other examples that include excessive costs. Ontario hospitals, for example. In 2009 Ontario's Auditor General revealed that the province's flagship P3 project, Brampton civic, could cost the public \$200 million more than if it had been built and publicly financed. East coast toll roads; universities; a P3 project at the Université du Québec in Montreal failed, doubling the cost to the public from \$200 million to \$400 million. West coast highways: B.C.'s Sea-to-Sky Highway cost their taxpayers \$220 million more than if it had been financed and operated publicly.

Risks can never be completely transferred through P3s because governments will always be ultimately accountable for delivering public services and infrastructure. This responsibility is not changed by expensive and lengthy P3 agreements. If problems arise, it is the

public that always has to pick up the bill at the end of the day. If P3 operators run into problems or do not achieve expected returns, they can just walk away, leaving the public sector to pick up the tab.

Recreation, for example. The city of Ottawa was forced to bail out two of three of its flagship P3 recreation arenas projected in 2007. Both the parent companies were still very profitable but wanted even higher returns.

Water and waste water. Hamilton's water and waste-water services had to be taken in-house after a string of owners, including an Enron subsidiary, created a financial mess of the P3s, including a raw sewage spill that had to be cleaned up at public expense.

Mr. Speaker, in the end, I would like to say that Greg Malone puts it that P3s should be called P12s: public-private partnerships to plunder the public purse to pursue policies of peril to public and the planet for all posterity.

The Speaker: Though I hesitate to interrupt, pursuant to Standing Order 8(3) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has five minutes to close debate.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really wanted to enforce that this motion is presented after massive public demand from within my riding and Albertans across the province that building education infrastructure should not be for anyone's business profit. We should be focused on increasing our children's access to education and utilizing taxpayers' dollars wisely. The P3 model's lack of transparency and accountability needs to end.

Also, I have some reminders. I listened to the debates on both sides of the House, and I also wanted to thank all the members who took a keen interest in participating in it and all those who really supported me on this. Listening to government members – you know, I presented this motion by backing up with a lot of facts and evidence, so it was sad to see that much of the debate coming from the other side was very much on their ideological mood. Like, they did not even try to touch and address and engage in the evidence I provided. But thank you for participating anyway.

A few more evidences I wanted to say. In December 2022 the Infrastructure minister then and the Minister of Affordability and Utilities now said to the media – and I would like to quote – that P3s will no longer be the preferred method for major construction projects on Alberta schools. He further states, and I quote again: money, though very important, is not the only consideration, and there are other considerations that we want to adopt into this process and give value to. He continued to say, and I quote again, that he has nixed a plan to build six new school construction projects as a P3 bundle.

In 2014 it was the PC government's Infrastructure minister, Wayne Drysdale, who scrapped P3 models for new Alberta schools, stating that P3s did not make sense for value for money for Albertans. So I would once again encourage the government members particularly, listening to their arguments, to look into the facts.

Thank you once again for participating in the debate, and in the end I would encourage and request all the members of the House to vote in favour of this motion to help prohibit P3 models for school constructions in Alberta to support, to protect, and to promote public education for our children and build a better society for all.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I motion that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 pm.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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