



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 26, 2024

Day 31

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Al-Guneid
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Dyck
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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 35 visitors from the School of Hope, that provides home-schooling services to about 1,000 students from all parts of Alberta, from Grande Prairie to Lethbridge. Please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a guest.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce the members of the Alberta Life Lease Protection Society: Karin Dowling, Jim Carey, Cindy Farnel-Desnoyers, Richard Desnoyers, Dan Lamb, Kim Nelson, Gayle Mischuk. I would have them all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Dr. Metz: It is my pleasure today to honour the guests that I have here today. I have four members from Alberta's paramedics who are here today to honour us with their presence. I hope that you'll be able to understand my member's statement today, which relates to supports for our paramedics. Would you rise, please.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly members from Alberta Life Lease Protection Society: Anthony Wong, May Wong, Lisle Cameron, Robert Hansen, Deanna Pickering, Betty-Lou Munro, Dwayne McArthur, Christean Konashuk. I will ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members two amazing individuals who have been helping and working at the Edmonton-Mill Woods constituency office. Sydney Williams is a social work student who has been with us for the school year and has assisted many, many constituents, and Jessica Kunicki is the manager of my office and does absolutely everything and is invaluable. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, through you and to you I'd like to introduce two constituents who are studying in our great city of Edmonton at the University of Alberta. Ethan and Irish, studying engineering and chemistry, are from the town of Manning in my constituency. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mohammad Farhan, who founded the House of Dreams in 2015, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping the homeless, single mothers, and youth. Over the years they have grown to give back globally by caring for the most vulnerable and raising orphan kids. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Calgary-East is rising.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests joining from the Salvation Army's brand new Forest Lawn community resource centre in Calgary. I would like them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has an introduction.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you two guests who are seated in your gallery, Dre and Ethan. Dre is here to watch his mom, and I'll let all of you try to guess who she is. Thank you so much for both of you being here. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce two of my friends from Calgary: Harold Zibell, president and CEO of Hydrogen Plus, and Mike Simpson, who I'm sure has spent way more time in this place than I have already. Please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Chamber.

Members' Statements

UCP Election Promises

Ms Hayter: It has been 302 days since the 2023 election. As we approach the first anniversary of this election, it's important to take stock, pause, and see what the government has done since the election on May 29. Let's start with the promises that they have kept. Okay. Well, now that that's out of the way, let's get to all the promises that they've broken.

The Premier promised a permanent income tax cut to Albertans, but sadly that promise crossed the floor as soon as the ballots were cast. The Premier promised to make life more affordable but then set out to impose a \$430 million tax on Albertans later this week. The Premier promised the south Edmonton hospital but now tells Edmontonians to head on down the highway to Red Deer for hospital care. The Premier promised to build schools, but that promise didn't last as long as the Premier's commitment to the Wildrose Party. The Premier promised that health care was out of the crisis but then introduced motel medicine and has left 30 communities experiencing disruptions to health care. The Premier promised that there would be no pension plan or provincial police force but then immediately brought them back as soon as she thought Albertans weren't looking.

She didn't promise to work so hard to get herself better gifts or give her friends or insiders a pay hike, but those are among her top priorities.

But while the Premier breaks the promises made to Albertans 302 days ago, there is something else that happened 302 days ago.

Alberta elected the largest opposition in its history: 38 dedicated Alberta NDP MLAs who will hold this Premier to account for all their broken promises and who will in 2027 be part of a government that Albertans can actually trust to do what it promises.

Bridge Dedications for Constables Travis Jordan and Brett Ryan

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, I rise today and I'm incredibly humbled and honoured to acknowledge an important tribute to two courageous heroes of the Edmonton Police Service who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. It is with great honour and reverence that this government announced the dedication of two bridges on the southwest portion of the Anthony Henday Drive over the North Saskatchewan River to the memory of Constable Travis Jordan and Constable Brett Ryan.

Constable Travis Jordan, born in Digby, Nova Scotia, exemplified unwavering dedication and bravery throughout his service. The eastbound bridge dedicated in his memory will stand as a fitting tribute to his legacy of selflessness, bravery, and valour. Constable Brett Ryan, Edmonton born and a resident of Spruce Grove, embodied the spirit of service and sacrifice. The dedication of the westbound bridge in his honour will ensure that his memory lives on, inspiring future generations to uphold the values of integrity and courage. These officers' commitment to protecting the community serves as an enduring testament to their character and sacrifice.

The placement of memorial signs bearing the names of these fallen officers at the ends of each bridge will serve as a constant and stark reminder of their sacrifice and the profound impact the service of these two real-life heroes had on the city of Edmonton. As Edmontonians cross these bridges each day, we hope they'll serve as a reminder of the sacrifices of Constable Jordan and Constable Ryan and to be thankful every day that we all get to return home to our loved ones. For me, Mr. Speaker, seeing my wife and daughters at bedtime when I return home is a blessing that we're all so lucky to have. I know my colleagues and Albertans would agree how precious time really is and that tomorrow isn't promised.

In honouring their memory, may their names forever be etched in our hearts and our minds, serving as a symbolism of courage and service. Mr. Speaker, I read this speech faster than practised in the hope that this Chamber will join me in a brief moment of silence honouring these men with my remaining time.

Thank you, everyone, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

Funding for Theatres

Member Ceci: Tomorrow we will celebrate World Theatre Day, but if the UCP continues to fail our Alberta theatre community, there may soon be little to celebrate. Recently we were contacted by Chantelle Behrens from the Freewill Shakespeare Festival here in Edmonton, and she had a bleak message for the future of Alberta's theatre scene. She said that the pandemic was particularly hard on theatre. Every single theatre company in Calgary, for example, is a not-for-profit, meaning that a single missed production can have a significant impact on operations. Audience participation and ticket sales are still nowhere close to prepandemic levels. In the meantime under this government the costs for production for Alberta theatres are skyrocketing, yet they continue to consistently be ignored by the UCP.

1:40

The previous UCP government's funding for the arts was abysmal. As operating expenses rose, site costs skyrocketed,

staffing costs rose, utilities and insurance costs doubled and sometimes tripled, the UCP's support for Alberta's theatre community diminished. Chantelle's message is a mirror image of what we heard from Megan Dart from the Fringe a week ago. The Fringe may have to scale back two-thirds of its normal size this year due to soaring costs, and the government simply doesn't care. It's not about funding the arts just enough to barely scrape by; it's about sustained financial support required to thrive.

Chantelle says: theatre is about connecting; it's about giving members of the community a place to come together to share and to be inspired. I, for one, have been mightily inspired by One Yellow Rabbit theatre, Ghost River productions, Theatre Calgary, Grindstone Theatre, and more. I know I'll never forget Grindstone's most recent tour de force, called *Jason Kenney's Hot Boy Summer*. Memories from that show will stay with me forever.

The Alberta NDP will always stand with Alberta's theatre community. Happy World Theatre Day, Alberta.

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

Salvation Army

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Salvation Army is an important organization in Canada and the world as one of the largest direct nongovernmental providers of social services in Canada. I'm proud to stand in this House to show my utmost support for this wonderful organization. Their mission is to serve individuals' needs and effect positive social changes in communities around the globe. We are grateful for the generosity and appreciative of the dedication to the noble cause. The assistance offered has a significant influence on communities dealing with challenges. In 2022 alone the Salvation Army provided 4,800 shelters; addiction, detox, and mental health beds for vulnerable men, women, and families in Canada; served 3.9 million meals; and provided food, clothing, and other practical assistance to 1.5 million people.

Mr. Speaker, I was honoured to attend the grand opening of the new Salvation Army Community Resource Centre in Forest Lawn, such an amazing facility that shares hope wherever there is hardship. The centre can provide numerous programs to the community, including food distribution via the hamper program, financial literacy, English as a second language program, youth engagement, outreach, community support, and its Christmas toy program. Many constituents of Calgary-East have been utilizing such services provided by the Salvation Army. The new centre in Forest Lawn will bring more support to our surrounding neighborhoods.

Nonprofits make positive differences in the lives of Albertans and bring together communities to educate, shelter, heal, inspire, and nurture people of every age, race, and gender to create quality of life in our communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Paramedics

Dr. Metz: For many, a bad day at work means a colleague was difficult, but when a paramedic in Alberta has a bad day, they've likely dealt with another unspeakable horror, perhaps a deceased child, yet they don't get a proper debriefing or help with PTSD, a potentially debilitating and lifelong psychological injury. Alberta needs paramedics, and paramedics need support. They require preventive strategies, workplace protections, and appropriate professional support to manage the psychological trauma they regularly face. Taking better care of our paramedics is essential to a safer, healthier future for Albertans.

Over the last four years more than 1,300 of Alberta's 5,600 paramedics have suffered a psychological injury. These account for 1 of every 4 workplace absences, yet the sole staff psychologist supporting EMS doesn't have special training in PTSD. Recently paramedics have had access to up to \$3,000 per year for counselling, but they need to find their own therapist. A peer support program is being rolled out, but that is not enough.

More than 18 months ago the government published the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee report. Recommendations were made to support our EMS workforce, including changes to shift scheduling and to work with system partners to enhance access to mental health supports. If we do not act soon, we lose the chance to build a long-term, sustainable workforce, yet there was nothing in the '24-25 budget or strategic plan to retain paramedics by providing these supports. Paramedics are leaving the profession as our . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Health System Reform

Mr. Schmidt: The UCP's motel medicine scandal has laid bare the consequences of this government's reckless pursuit of privatization in our health care system. Vulnerable hospitalized patients awaiting placement to continuing care in an unsafe, unmodified motel room with minimal medical oversight didn't happen by accident. It's just another symptom of the UCP trying to create a deeply flawed system that prioritizes profit over the well-being of Albertans.

Under this government's so-called leadership we've witnessed a continued decline in rural health services. People are forced to take hours-long journeys to overcrowded urban hospitals just to give birth despite having hospitals and clinics in their hometowns. Thousands of Albertans are left without any family doctors, scrambling for basic health care. Staff at the Red Deer hospital are forced to hang tarps with duct tape just to create more space for assessments. And let's not forget the countless Albertans waiting months on end for essential surgeries, their lives on hold.

The UCP's privatization agenda is like a disease spreading through Alberta's health care system. If they don't pump the brakes on this harmful path, things are going to go from bad to worse, and in fact they already are. This is not governance, Mr. Speaker. This is a betrayal of trust and a disregard for the fundamental right to health care.

The UCP doesn't deserve a pat on the back for trying to clean up the mess they made with motel medicine, especially when it's just the Premier attempting to patch up a gunshot wound with a bandage. No. Albertans aren't buying it. We see right through the UCP's dogged commitment to privatization that caused these systematic failures in our health care and brought about this crisis. It's time for them to actually prioritize the health and well-being of Albertans over their ideology and profits before irreparable damage is done.

Albertans need real, long-term solutions that address the root causes of this crisis and ensure that our health care system serves the needs of all Albertans, not just the privileged few. The UCP created this crisis, but let's not forget who lit the match in the first place.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table the requisite five copies of two letters. One is to the zone clinical

department head of surgery, warning of a critical shortage of anaesthesiologists, from the chief of anaesthesiology. The other is from the chief of anaesthesiology at the Chinook regional hospital to the minister herself.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the inflation review recently released by the city of Calgary. This informative document outlines that inflation rose to over 5 per cent in Calgary last month and that rent escalated by a whopping 18 per cent since December, making a case for rent caps.

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of e-mails between the ministry of service Alberta and the Life Lease Protection Society – there are two packages – and also a table listing the Christenson Group of Companies, the line information, the key information, updated December 31, 2023.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table the five requisite copies of an article from the *National Post* talking about our federal government shutting down our energy industry.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Dach: I rise to table the requisite five copies of an article from today's *Edmonton Journal*, Mr. Speaker, titled Tegan and Sara Decry Alberta's 'Attack' on LGBTQ+ Youth, which describes threats to the well-being of transgender youth posed by the Alberta government's attempt to prevent trans youth from accessing vital care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. We will return to tablings after question period if there are others.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of the background information about the Life Lease Protection Society as well as an article from the *Edmonton Journal* that speaks to the introduction of the life leases bill.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Hospital Discharge Policies

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it's been more than a week since the consequences of the UCP's motel medicine scheme came to light. Still the Premier refuses to apologize, but the victims, their families, and all Albertans also deserve the peace of mind of knowing how this happened and that there's a firm plan in place right now to ensure it doesn't happen again. So to the Premier: will she join our call to the Health Quality Council of Alberta to have them undertake an independent public investigation into the tragic mess which is motel medicine?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we'll do three better. We already have started three investigations. The first is that the FCSS income supports division is investigating to make sure that income supports for things like AISH were not used inappropriately; the office of the public guardian and trustee is investigating to see if these vulnerable people have been taken

advantage of or abused; and consumer protection and residential tenancies through service Alberta is making sure that they are also not being taken advantage of financially and will investigate any fraudulent activities.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier can list all the internal reviews she wants all day long, but after all the confusion, the unpaid bills, the misinformation, the self-admitted gaps, and the general inability to describe how all of this happened, how can the Premier expect Albertans to trust her, her ministers, or anyone else conducting a review behind closed doors? This is our health care system. We're talking about the welfare of our fellow Albertans, so to the Premier again: will she ensure unfiltered facts through an independent public investigation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that the Alberta Health Quality Council investigates health care issues. This is a social services issue. It's an agency that, whether it was being accurate or whether it was being deliberately misleading, was giving the indication that they could provide a certain level of care and certain services that, quite clearly, they were not providing. The individual in question believed that they were going to a long-term care facility. They did have other facilities they were operating. For some reason they were in a hotel, and we need to find out why that was.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, allow me to quote. "We must get to the bottom of this. Without an inquiry conducted independent of government interference and intimidation, Albertans will be left to wonder just how many more cases are out there." To the Premier. She understood the need for independent transparency when she said those words a decade ago about a different health care scandal, which this is, so why won't she call on the Health Quality Council to lead an independent public investigation? This is clearly health care. It's part of the continuum of care. They are receiving health care. Why won't . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not a health care issue. The patient was discharged. They were discharged to an entity that provides social services. It is absolutely appropriate for FCSS to do one investigation to make sure dollars are not being misappropriated, and the office of the public guardian . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask another question, she's welcome to do so immediately after the Premier's response.

Ms Smith: The office of the public guardian and trustee is an independent office, and the office of consumer protection and residential tenancies is also an independent office. Both of them are going to be looking into this, and we will make sure that the results are delivered here when they're discovered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has a question.

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, the UCP claimed that motel medicine was normal procedure, that it was just following the normal discharge policy of AHS. The ministers claimed that these patients chose to be sent to motel rooms, which we know is false. Instead, though, while the UCP was blaming Albertans, each other, and the victims

of motel medicine, dozens of Albertans are still left in motel rooms. Albertans need answers and assurances that this will never happen again. Will the minister today table their plans for the vetting of health care providers in the community?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, these were not patients of the health care system; these were individuals living with a nonprofit organization who sold to them services that they were not adequately providing. It is very concerning what this organization has done, which is why we have multiple investigations taking place to find out what took place with that organization and to hold anybody accountable who did not come through with the care that they promised and took money for. But, again, nobody was receiving health care in hotels.

Dr. Metz: The Premier refused to apologize to these Albertans for her government and ministers failing them. The Minister of Health refused to apologize, instead giving a half-hearted statement that she was disappointed if people felt they'd been misled. The minister has even refused to apologize for her role in blaming these Albertans for ending up in motel rooms. Since the Health minister and Premier have refused to show leadership and compassion and apologize to these Albertans, will any minister show compassion and leadership and rise to apologize to the victims of motel medicine?

Mr. Nixon: This government showed significant leadership. Unlike the NDP, who stood in this House and continued to yell, we left this House, went and found individuals who found themselves in unfortunate circumstances created by a bad operator, Mr. Speaker, immediately provided them help, wraparound services. And I'm very happy to report that every one of those individuals is safely in their own apartment and/or in a very good service provider, receiving social services supports and moving on with their life. That's leadership. That's action. They just yell.

Dr. Metz: The UCP allowed a company to take patients to unvetted motel rooms not designed to accommodate their wheelchairs, and they fed them fast food. The minister defended this as proper procedure. The minister claimed that they would be removed from the list of recommended providers but couldn't explain how they got there or who created the list. Albertans are skeptical of this minister's claims, so before she or he asks us to trust them again, will they table the list of providers and guarantee that every single name on it has been completely vetted?

Mr. Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the NDP is having trouble hearing. We have done an investigation. We now know what has taken place with these individuals. They were living in apartment buildings receiving government income supports. They hired a bad operator who made a very bizarre decision to pack everybody up and move them to multiple hotels. This government located those individuals, brought wraparound supports around those individuals and got them back to safety, and is investigating that operator to make sure that this type of stuff can't ever happen again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Life Lease Housing

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, with life leases people hand over large sums of money to a landlord with the promise that those funds will be there when the lease ends. In exchange they have housing

stability in terms of cost and residency. But recently that promise has been broken, and scores of Albertans and their families are owed tens of millions of dollars because the landlord is not required by law to put the funds in trust. Why is the Premier refusing to ensure current and future landlords put these funds in trust so these Albertans can get their funds back?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That member is right. This is an unfortunate situation these members find themselves in. You know, we consulted with over 200 Albertans, most of them life lease holders, many of them family members. We even met with the NDP twice, but you know who we didn't meet with? We didn't meet with the critic for service Alberta, the Member for Calgary-Falconridge. I'm not sure if he was just too busy to show up or if he didn't care to attend any of our meetings. Perhaps he can let us know. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Boparai: The UCP refuse to guarantee landlords to put these funds into trust. Surety bonds would have been a way to protect Albertans in a life lease when they loaned them large sums of money. This would have gone a long way to protecting the Albertans who feel utterly failed by this UCP government and minister. Why did the minister refuse to make landlords put these funds into surety bonds?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of service Alberta.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Had that hon. member attended any of our consultations that he was invited to, then he would know that life leases are an affordability option in Alberta, and putting them in trust would actually kill the affordability aspect of that product. We did talk about surety bonds. Unfortunately, there are no surety bonds on the market for life leases, so we wrote the legislation with enough flexibility that if a product comes on the market, we can write . . . [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. the minister of service Alberta has the call.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we wrote the legislation with enough flexibility that if a bond becomes available on the market, we can deal with that in regulation to provide that enhanced level of protection. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Boparai: The minister promised Albertans affected by the life lease rip-off that he would listen to them on solutions. That didn't happen, and now families are feeling left out and abandoned by this government and minister. Why did the minister break that promise, refuse to consult with those whom he impacted, real and meaningful solutions? Will he at least apologize?

Mr. Nally: The only one that should be apologizing is the critic for service Alberta, who was too busy to attend any of our consultations. But let me tell you what we did. We brought in enhanced disclosure. We brought in improved transparency. We brought in penalties, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The hon. the minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We brought in legislation that will move life leases under the protection of the consumer . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. the minister of service Alberta has the call.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That member would know all this if he showed up for work. But here's what we did. We took these life leases and we put them under the protection of the consumer protection unit so that we can bring forward fines of up to \$300,000 or two years in jail.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:02.

Elections Alberta Investigation of Take Back Alberta

Mr. Sabir: This government claims to follow the rule of law, and one of the most important tenets of this principle is that law applies equally to everyone. Elections Alberta has recently seen cases where the third-party group Take Back Alberta is refusing to comply with laws around third-party advertising. Albertans deserve to know who is financing third parties and trying to influence our democracy. Can the Premier tell this House: is it a government policy to do nothing when their friends ignore election laws?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, déjà vu once again. We spoke about this yesterday. The hon. member knows that Elections Alberta is an independent organization performing an independent investigation on a third party unrelated to government. We respect the independence of that organization to conduct its investigations. We will allow them to do their work. Unlike the members opposite, we will not interfere with that investigation. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: Take Back Alberta held a rally outside Elections Alberta last week. There are concerns that this was done to attempt to intimidate them from following through with their legal obligation to uphold Elections Alberta laws. Take Back Alberta has declared that one of their intentions is to force the resignation of Elections Alberta appointees, a threat against those who are enforcing election laws. Will the Premier tell this House: what is the policy of the government when it comes to making sure Elections Alberta can carry out their vital work without fear and intimidation?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, we just spoke about this, but I'll repeat my answer to the hon. member. Elections Alberta is an independent agency. It will be entitled and is allowed to, and we will support the ability for them to, conduct their investigations independently. We will protect that right. We will continue to ensure that Elections Alberta conducts and performs its duties independently without interference from this government or anyone else.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, there is no higher responsibility for a government than to stand up for open, transparent, free, and fair elections, and this House owes a deep thanks to those who work so hard to ensure all Albertans are able to freely cast a ballot. Sadly, Take Back Alberta has stated that they are declaring, and I quote, endless war on Elections Alberta and, by implication, on our democracy and the people of this province. Is it the government's

policy to agree with David Parker and do nothing to protect Elections Alberta and election laws?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, it is this government's position not to interfere with investigations of an independent agency. Elections Alberta will continue to conduct its work independent of influence from this government or opposition members.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder why the member didn't rise with the same vigour as when the third-party advertising in the 2021 municipal elections in Calgary came about and the contributions of the unions came into question. Nothing came up from that member. Radio silence once again. Shame on that opposition for not raising any issues about that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Fuel Tax Increase

Mr. Dach: If there is one thing the UCP loves, it is raising taxes during a cost-of-living crisis. On April 1 the UCP are going to hike Albertans' taxes by \$430 million. I wish I could say this was an April Fool's joke, but the only joke is how bad this government is at keeping costs low for hard-working Albertans. We stand up every day to share stories of Albertans who cannot afford life under the UCP. To the minister: why is the government hiking the fuel tax?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to just realize what's happening with fuel prices across this country when we think about the implications of the fuel taxes in Alberta. We have a carbon tax that's going up from \$65 to \$80, which is meant for you to drive less, which is telling you that we want this to cost more money so you can't get around the province, enjoy the province, work in the province whereas we, the province of Alberta, need a reasonable fuel tax rate so we can maintain the roads and bridges and infrastructure that Albertans rely on.

Mr. Dach: Given that Alberta's inflation rate is the highest in the country, sitting at 4.2 per cent, while the national average is a more respectable 2.8 per cent and given that high inflation, rent, utility bills, and mortgage rates on top of UCP tax increases will have a dire impact for Albertans who are already struggling to make ends meet and given that at every opportunity to keep costs low, this tax-loving government chooses to hike costs even higher... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is the only one with the call.

Mr. Dach: ... will the minister look Albertans in the eye and admit the reason they're strapped for cash is because of this government's poor decision-making?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the opposition seems very inconsistent. They want us to increase spending. I know they don't care too much about whether the budget is balanced or not. We have a budget that's on the floor right now that represents our linkage that we've kept to WTI price. That's a promise that we're keeping to Albertans so that when oil is high and the province is in the best position to provide that affordability, Albertans can enjoy it because it's their resource. Also, fuel prices are the highest. When we brought in the fuel relief program, fuel prices were about 22 cents a litre higher than they are today. The program is defensible, and we stand behind it.

Mr. Dach: Given that the government has promised Albertans time and time again that they will keep taxes low and cut taxes by \$1,500

per family and given that instead of tax cuts the government is increasing the gas tax by 44 per cent and took \$650 million from Albertans when they deindexed the tax code and given that the UCP have changed Alberta from an affordable place to call home into an expensive province, where Albertans pay more and get less under this government, will the minister explain to Albertans why the UCP strategy for Alberta is to price gouge the people they serve?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, always happy to explain this to Albertans, but I do think it's kind of humorous coming from that side. They want to talk about the promises we made to Albertans. I think they should focus on the little hot mess express their party has cooking in the province right now. When you look at fuel prices across the province, the GasBuddy report for today, the average price was \$1.45 a litre in Alberta, still amongst the lowest in the country; if you look across at Ontario, \$1.55 a litre. We have a competitive advantage in this place; that's what we want to protect.

They mentioned inflation. If you take out housing, the National Bank figured our inflation was 1.3 per cent. People are flooding here because of the advantages. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright has a question to ask.

Access to Surgical Procedures

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta deserves access to health care services where and when they need it. Work is under way to refocus the health care system and ensure patient care is prioritized. But in the meantime we need to make sure Albertans can access surgical care within clinically recommended timelines. We know that while progress has been made to improve surgical timelines, more work is needed. To the Minister of Health: what progress has been made in helping Albertans access surgeries faster?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Our government is working hard to ensure that every Albertan receives required surgeries within clinically recommended wait times. Steady progress has been made towards this goal. In fact, the latest wait-list data shows more Albertans are receiving surgeries within clinically recommended times than they did since 2020. We will continue to invest in improving operating rooms across the province and further prioritizing initiatives like the facilitated access to specialized treatment, or the FAST program, and the rapid access clinic pilot to reduce surgical wait times. We're making good progress.

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

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that we know this government has made progress in improving access to surgeries and given that we know there is more to do to help Albertans access surgical care where and when they need it and further given that today this minister announced Budget 2024 investments into the Alberta surgical initiative to further enhance surgical capacity, to the same minister: how will today's announcement support this initiative and improve timely access to care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to say that Budget 2024 provides \$313 million which will be invested over three years in the Alberta surgical initiative capital program. Additionally, we're also providing \$305 million to Alberta Health Services to enable the completion of 310,000 surgical procedures this year, which is an increase of almost 6 per cent from '22-23, and \$159 million over three years will also be allocated to renovate several medical device reprocessing departments. These measures will help to reduce surgical wait . . .

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

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that we know that every Albertan and every corner of the province deserves timely access to surgical care and given that we know this minister has attended engagement sessions on the refocusing initiative across the province, ensuring that rural Albertans can share their thoughts on an improved health care system, can the Minister of Health elaborate on how investments in the Alberta surgical initiative will specifically enhance access to surgical treatments for residents in rural areas?

Member LaGrange: Through the Alberta surgical initiative capital program Alberta's government is renovating surgical suites and support areas in various zones across the province, including: Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Brooks, Taber, Innisfail, Olds, Crownsnest Pass, and Rocky Mountain House. These projects will increase surgical capacity and improve the use of existing capacity. They'll be reducing wait times and advancing the objectives of our health care action plan. Through capital funding projects in hospitals and facilities across the province we are expanding operating rooms and lowering wait times to ensure that all Albertans have access to timely care.

Surgical Wait Times

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, it's March 2024 and just over a year ago the Premier, her Minister of Health, and her chief administrator all swore that by the end of this month Alberta would, quote, be at zero waiting outside of clinical wait times by March of 2024. But just last week the Health minister admitted that, in fact, thousands of Albertans are still waiting longer than the national standards for hip, knee, and cataract surgeries. They promised a hundred per cent reduction and delivered 20 per cent. To the minister: with only five days left in March, when can Albertans expect the announcement of zero people waiting outside of clinical wait times?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are moving towards that time period. Of course, we have seen great improvement. Up until recently patients, 40 per cent, were waiting to have their surgeries, and they were doing it within clinically recommended times. Now we're over 60 per cent. That is a huge increase. Again, we are moving in the right direction, but there is much more work to do. All of these programs: we're taking a multipronged approach. I'm proud of the work that's happening and of our medical professionals that are stepping up in a big way.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that national standards for wait times are based on the time from when a patient and doctor agree to surgical treatment to when the surgery is actually performed but given that the UCP recently told columnist Don Braid that they're moving the goalposts, instead measuring from when the surgeon is ready to treat, can the minister clarify why they're abandoning the accepted national standard, and why her business plan and announcement

today include no performance metrics at all? Is it to try to conceal their utter failure to live up to the grand promise they made last year?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are seeing much improvement. Wait times for knee and hip replacements have greatly improved. As of September about 53 per cent of hip replacement surgeries were completed within the clinically recommended timelines compared to 38 per cent in September of 2022.

Mr. Shepherd: Which metrics, Minister? Is that the national standard or the UCP standard?

Member LaGrange: For knee replacement surgeries about 48 per cent were completed within clinically recommended times in September of 2023 compared to 30 per cent the year before.

Mr. Shepherd: Is that the old standard or the new goalpost, Minister? What's your measurement?

Member LaGrange: We're continuing to make good progress. More needs to be done; I've said that, and we are committing dollars to make sure it happens.

The Speaker: Now the hon. member has another opportunity.

Mr. Shepherd: Lots of numbers; no metrics.

Given that the Premier changes eras faster than Taylor Swift – back in May she was in her “say anything to get elected” era; now she's in her “promises are meant to be broken” era – and given that Albertans deserve a leader they can trust, who follows through on commitments they make during a campaign and not a government who instead moves the goalposts to hide their failures and misrepresents the facts, will the Minister of Health explain why this government continues to put its political interests ahead of people's needs, hiding the truth while Albertans live in pain and the health care system continues to be pushed further into crisis?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, while the members opposite continue to practise political theatre, we on this side of the House are making sure we're actually dealing with real problems. Real people waiting for surgeries: now more of them are absolutely able to get their surgeries done within the clinically approved timelines, and we are using CIHI data. We will in fact make sure that we continue to increase those numbers. We are seeing 310,000. We've allocated over \$300 million to make sure that over 310,000 surgeries will be done in '24-25.

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

Life Lease Housing (continued)

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. Life leases are supposed to offer stability and peace of mind for Albertans. They entrust significant sums of money, frequently their life savings, to landlords for the assurance of lower monthly costs and that they'll get their money back when the lease ends. Instead, more than 160 Albertans are owed \$55 million from an Edmonton-area landlord with close ties to the UCP, Greg Christenson, and the government has done nothing to get their money back. To the minister of service Alberta: why is the government refusing to help these folks get their money back? They're right here. They're waiting for an answer.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, as that member knows or ought to know, we're having conversations right now, but this matter is currently

being investigated, and we can't comment on a matter that's under investigation. Let me tell you what we have done. We've made a commitment to Alberta seniors that we will not allow this to happen again. We brought forward life lease protections with enhanced transparency, disclosure, with penalties that will include fines up to \$300,000 and two years in jail. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Renaud: Given that during an embargoed news conference on Bill 12 the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction mused about offering a bailout to Greg Christenson in the life lease fiasco, given that this is an insult while families are struggling to deal with this, can the minister confirm that if a bailout were to be offered, only the affected residents and their families would get the funds, not unscrupulous landlords? They're watching. They want an answer.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that we are not looking to offer a bailout, but other than that I can tell you that this matter is in front of the investigators. It is being investigated, so we can't comment any further. I will tell you this, though: we have brought forward some very practical, very pragmatic protections that are going to make sure that in the future ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, you have to forgive Team Angry over there, because I guess Nenshi is sucking up all the oxygen from the room, and it's causing those members to gasp for relevancy. Well, while they're fighting their leadership battles, we're on this side taking care of Albertans and protecting Alberta seniors. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

2:20

Ms Renaud: Seems a little defensive.

Given that the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, the hon. Member for Morinville-St. Albert, has a mandate from the Premier to bring forward recommendations to ensure appropriate protections are in place for Albertans ...

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Renaud: ... and given that this minister has failed to do that with his legislation and given that he failed to consult the people he actually needed to consult, why is this government still refusing to do the right thing and get these Albertans their money back? They're here. They would like to meet with you, Minister. Explain why they're wrong. You seem to be happy to do it.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at both 2:20 and 2:21.

The hon. minister of service Alberta.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the NDP are not anchored to the truth. You see, we met with the life lease association on March 14. Now, remember: they actually didn't exist prior to March 6. Prior to March 6 they were just a Facebook group. But you know what? We met with them anyway. We met with Karin Dowling on October 10. We met with Jim Carey on October 19. We even met with the NDP twice, and we have letters from them from the consultations. We will continue to listen to Albertans, and we will continue to bring forward pragmatic solutions. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Substance Use Treatment Programs

Mr. Yao: The NDP opposition have been attacking our government on our compassionate care model as we address the issue of homelessness, which is plaguing our entire nation. One major underlying issue with homelessness is the disease of addiction. Mainly people living in the dangerous encampments, which the NDP loves so much, suffer from opioid addictions. By promoting their policy of safe supply, the NDP are directly facilitating drug addiction and abuse and empowering criminal syndicates. The NDP's preferred method of dealing with drug addiction is demonstrating to be an astronomical failure. To the government: what have you done to stand up for Albertans against failed radical ideologies like the so-called safe ...

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

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, safe supply is the policy backed by the Trudeau Liberals and NDP where you put drugs on the streets across Canada. However, it is illegal in Alberta by law, and we will maintain that as long as we're elected. We know that is not the path forward. What we are doing, however, is partnering with First Nation communities, reducing the cost of access to treatment. When it comes to safe supply, I could not think of a more quintessentially NDP and categorically harm-producing policy than one that gives drugs to drug addicts in a hope to try and help them. It is not compassionate. We will oppose it every single day of the week. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, it is given that despite the conclusive evidence against safe supply the NDP continue to push these drug facilitation programs. Given that the NDP opposition, including the members for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, Edmonton-City Centre, for the first time in Legislature history resigned from an all-party committee that was tasked with studying safe supply, it leads me to believe that they don't seek to understand what international experts are saying about the concept of safe supply. To the minister: can you tell us what the experts are saying about safe supply?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the NDP, when they were in opposition, supported the globe's most radical policy on drug addiction, which is to deliver drugs into the hands ...

Mr. Sabir: Sick Albertans are dying.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Hon. member, we've heard you on numerous occasions. I think it's time that we hear from the minister.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the NDP policy on communication is to throw it at a wall and hope it sticks like a Jackson Pollock and then call it beautiful.

Safe supply is a horrible policy, and the experts agree; 72 doctors recently wrote to the minister in B.C. saying that they believe it is harmful. We see the B.C. provincial health officer admitting that diversion is commonplace. Mr. Speaker, not in Alberta.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is given that the RCMP have made drug busts which have yielded thousands of pills identical to

the ones provided by the federally funded safe supply programs and further given that this indicates that the NDP and Liberal governments across the country are literally putting opioids into the hands of street gangs with taxpayer money, the result of many radical policies compounding the opioid crisis under the reign of the Liberal and NDP alliance, to the minister: what is our solution to stop the diversion of addictive drugs prescribed through the so-called safe supply initiatives?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, we ask, first of all, that the NDP and Trudeau Liberals stop it, but if they refuse to do that, at least listen to the letter that we wrote as the government of Alberta asking for unique chemical tracers found in all of the safe supply. If they did that, we'd know if there are overdoses happening, if there's diversion happening, if there's a criminal element. They want to deny that. I'm asking the NDP in Alberta today to join me and ask the federal government to impose a unique chemical tracer on safe supply. At the very least, call Mr. Singh and let him know that we in Alberta do not want to see safe supply on our streets and we want evidence-based policy rather than ideology coming out of . . .

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

Anaesthesiologist Recruitment

Ms Phillips: Quote: there is an impending health care crisis at Chinook regional hospital; there will be a severe shortage of anaesthesiologists by the spring of 2024. Quote: we will be so short-staffed, we may not be able to provide emergency call coverage, including maternity care. Those are the words of the chief of anaesthesiology in Lethbridge to the Minister of Health. In response, the Minister said that there are 15 anaesthesiologists in Lethbridge; there are only nine. This is an insult to every physician in Lethbridge, who are being gaslit about the existence of six theoretical or imaginary colleagues. What will the minister do to avert this looming surgical wait time and health care crisis in Lethbridge?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working hard and, of course, Alberta Health Services is working extremely hard to make sure that we have the anaesthesiologists we need right across the whole province. I know that if they don't have enough in a particular area, they do bring in locums. I speak on a regular basis with anaesthesiologists across the province, and we also have a concerted recruitment effort happening not just within Alberta, not just within Canada but also globally to recruit those anaesthesiologists that we need.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that none of that is working and given that the Lethbridge anaesthesiologists asked the minister to undertake aggressive locum recruitment, retention for current staff, immediate changes to physician recruitment as the current system has been described as, quote, a complete disaster by physicians and given that I know the minister has seen this letter – she just hasn't done anything about it – what is the minister's excuse for her inaction, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the members opposite are not being honest in this particular regard. We are working diligently to recruit anaesthesiologists as well as other

health care professionals right across the whole province. Alberta Health Services has a workforce strategy. We as a province are doing everything we can. We've got additional dollars allocated for this, and we will continue to do this because, of course, we need the right professionals in the right places to make sure that our health care system proceeds.

Ms Phillips: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that none of that is working and we are on the precipice of a massive health care crisis in Lethbridge, given that physicians from Lethbridge have asked the minister to, quote, reallocate funds from the Alberta surgical initiative towards supporting physician staff as, quote, the expansion of infrastructure is useless if there's no staff to deliver the care and given that this Alberta surgical initiative is code for health care resources being funnelled towards expensive for-profit private surgical clinics, will the minister abandon her private health care fool's errand and listen to the physicians of Lethbridge and avoid this crisis?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, a lot of political theatre on that side, but the actual facts are, by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, that at the end of December there were 11,738 physicians registered in Alberta. This reflects an increase of 331 from January of 2023 to December 31 of 2023. There were additional individuals – let me see here – over 300 physicians across this province. In the south zone: 23 registered physicians, 4 per cent increase.

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

Supports for Seniors

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors are cherished members of our communities. After dedicating many years of their lives to the betterment of this province, Alberta seniors deserve our respect and support. We wouldn't be here without their hard work and efforts, and now is our chance to give back to those who have given us so much. However, there are many aging Albertans who feel anxious about rising costs and affordability. Could the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services please share what our government is doing to help provide seniors with the support they deserve?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we start off with making sure that we continue to have the highest senior benefits anywhere in the country. We've also made sure that we've taken steps to index those benefits to keep up with inflation, and I'm happy to report to the House that we have the lowest poverty rates among seniors anywhere in Canada, which shows that the efforts that we do here in Alberta are working. We also continue to invest in supports to be able to make sure that seniors can remain in their homes or within their communities for as long as they want to and/or are able to so they can remain in the communities that they built, including bringing forward grants for things like snow removal and landscaping to be able to make sure that we don't have to bring seniors through the health care system if they don't need to be.

2:30

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that many seniors in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont and seniors in many communities across Alberta are struggling to find adequate affordable housing options and given that many seniors' housing options have high demand and long wait times, can the

same minister please share what our government is doing to support more affordable housing options for Alberta seniors?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2024 invests just over \$60 million in our lodge assistance program. That's an increase of over \$20 million in this budget. We've also provided a 55 per cent increase in funding per person per day because we recognize that that investment in keeping seniors inside places like seniors' lodges keeps them out of the continuing care system, the health care system if they don't need to be there. They want to remain in the communities that they built, unlike what the NDP tried to do to them when they were in power. We also just announced another \$840 million in capital to go to affordable housing in our province in this budget, which includes a tremendous amount of seniors' facilities. We will continue to invest at the highest rate inside the country on this important issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given all the great work that this UCP government is doing to help seniors find the housing they need, to retire with peace and dignity and further given that I know this government is taking even more steps to provide housing when and where Alberta seniors need it, can the same minister please share how these specific steps will help seniors age in their own communities?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we launched a seniors panel review of the lodge program, which is actually chaired by the hon. member, who's doing an excellent job. That's to be able to bring forward all of our stakeholders together along with seniors to be able to make sure that our lodge program, which is our oldest affordable housing program in the province, is able to work for multiple generations to come. We're going to be bringing forward, as a result of the work that they've done, significant changes to be able to make sure that we can modernize our lodge program and, again, make sure that we never go down the path that the NDP did by being able to force seniors to leave our communities and try to centralize them in large urban areas.

Energy Industry Liability Management

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, last week I spent nine hours in budget estimate meetings with three different UCP ministers. While the UCP has singled out renewables in the name of liability management, the government has no plans to address the estimated \$260 billion in other energy liabilities, that Albertans could be on the hook for, growing under the UCP's watch. These are liabilities in oil and gas, oil sands, and pipelines. When will the Premier turn her attention to liabilities in oil and gas and protect taxpayers from this looming crisis?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the one thing we are doing and will continue to do is put people first, and that's the people of Alberta. In that regard, we have taken more steps to protect Albertans and our ongoing liabilities than any government in our history. In fact, just last year we had a goal, and the industry in Alberta actually overshot that goal, so now we picked that new goal as the next goal. We're doing great work, and we're going to continue to do that to protect Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the Premier singled out the renewable sector in the name of liabilities, given that the Premier has openly

endorsed the R-star program that would give \$20 billion to pay companies to do what they are legally obligated to do and violate the polluter-pays principle, given that there are roughly 237,000 drilled wells in Alberta's conventional operations, when will the Premier mandate the Alberta Energy Regulator to address liabilities and comply with the many warnings from the Auditor General?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have done exactly that. We're working with our Indigenous communities. We're going across the province. We're trying to get the federal government at the table to let us use the \$135 million that was allocated for the Indigenous communities across Alberta to clean up these wells that are the federal government's responsibility. We're working with chiefs, we're working with industry to make sure we do exactly that. We've had closure work completed on 1,824 inactive well sites during the Indigenous community grant program alone. We've seen thousands upon thousands of wells being cleaned up right across this province, and we're doing the job for Albertans to protect Albertans, to protect the water, and to make sure that we have a great quality of life.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that we learned that oil sands liabilities increased from approximately \$34 billion in 2022 to around \$47 billion in 2023 and given that the Auditor General has raised the alarm twice and recently said that the environment department "has not made satisfactory progress implementing [our] recommendation," can the Premier explain why this isn't a priority for her government and why both her energy and environment ministers cannot explain this 40 per cent increase in liabilities?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we had an opportunity to talk about in our estimates, we are taking a hard look at ways to strengthen the reclamation liability system. My department is currently reviewing the mine financial security program and looking at whether changes are needed. We will also continue to pilot new reclamation approaches. We remain fully committed to Alberta's polluter-pays principle, where industry fulfills its responsibility to remediate and reclaim land for future generations. The latest AER annual report shows more sites being reclaimed than ever, more funds being invested into cleanup work than ever, and more action being taken by industry than ever before.

Supports for Wildland Firefighters

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, during estimates the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade said that wildland firefighter families are eligible for the hero fund, which is a one-time payment of \$100,000 if they die in service. This is false. The family of the wildland firefighter pilot who died last year was apparently not eligible for the program. Since the minister believes they should be, will he change the regulation to include wildland firefighters?

Mr. Jones: Our government is very appreciative of our firefighters and our paramedics who put their lives on the line to provide important services for Albertans. We are constantly reviewing the supports and programs that we have in place for our firefighters. I just met with firefighters this week, actually, and we committed to evaluate our current programs and supports and to step them up where it is appropriate.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Sweet: Wildland firefighters are not the same as municipal firefighters. Given that wildland firefighters and municipal firefighters fight different types of fires and given that all firefighters deserve to be protected while facing the risk that comes from the complexity of structural fires versus extremely hot wildland fires, will the minister commit to a safety assessment for PPE to ensure all firefighters have the equipment to keep them safe when they have to work in both fire settings?

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

Mr. Jones: Yeah. Our government is obviously willing to look at any way that we can improve the safety of our firefighters, which includes regulations and rules regarding their equipment. I look forward to any submissions from that member opposite. Also, I'm happy to meet with the firefighters to continue to hear their recommendations for how we can improve their safety and their equipment.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that wildland firefighters work much longer hours than their contract at 7.25 hours and given that they have zero health and mental health supports once their contracts are up and that they do high-risk work to protect our province while being paid some of the lowest wages in the country, what is the minister's plan to increase mental health supports for the first responders who are risking their lives every single time they go to work?

Mr. Jones: Our government is investing in mental health research and programs, including for our first responders, including firefighters. Again, we are always interested in how we can better support our firefighters and wildland firefighters. I'd be interested in hearing that member's recommendations. I'm happy to meet with firefighters to hear how we can continue to support them and to really lead Canada in our coverage for firefighters.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has a question.

Job Creation

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the opposition's bleak outlook on Alberta's economy you'd think our province is doing terribly. In fact, nothing is further from the truth. Our province is booming once again. In February this year Alberta gained 17,400 jobs, a majority of them being full-time positions. This growth brings increased labour demands on business owners, which our government is working hard to address. Could the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade please expand on the ways our government is addressing increased labour demands?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the member for the important question. Alberta is the economic engine of Canada, and we continue to grow and diversify, creating jobs across all industries and in all corners of the province. In fact, we've added 17,400 jobs in February, the majority of which, about 16,000, were full-time, and we've added a staggering 100,000 jobs over the last 12 months.

What are we doing? We're continuing to invest in training. We're continuing to work with our postsecondaries to increase seats, and we're even looking to partner with unions and industry to create more training opportunities for workers.

2:40

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta remains resilient despite increased labour demands and stifling policies imposed by the federal government, including the highly punitive carbon tax, and given that Alberta continues to be the best province for businesses to thrive, with significant increases in high-value and high-paying jobs, could the same minister please highlight some of the industries that are experiencing a surge of employment opportunities in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the lowest taxes in Canada and among the lowest in North America, our pro-business and pro-energy policies, and our efforts to reduce red tape, we are seeing job creation in most industries. This is only going to grow with large recent investments by Mondy, Fortinet, and the Dows of the world with their Path2Zero expansion. There have been large increases in health care, construction, trades, and tech, in many cases outpacing the national growth. We're also seeing a boom in our tech industry with record venture capital. We now represent 13 per cent of the national demand for tech workers. Alberta is booming. Albertans are working. Our government's plan is working.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that people are moving to Alberta in record numbers to be a part of our vibrant economy despite the members opposite's refusal to acknowledge this continued growth and given that our government has maintained the Alberta advantage by working to ensure that our economy remains strong and diverse, could the same minister share details on any exciting new initiatives for stimulating job creation and investment in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are actively recruiting top companies from around the world, and they're choosing Alberta and so are workers because of our quality of life, high wages, low taxes, and world-class education system. We also have a number of initiatives to recruit workers, including the upcoming \$5,000 attraction bonus for skilled trades through the Alberta Is Calling campaign. We've got a \$20 million provincial investment over four years for the Canada-Alberta jobs grant, \$10 million in aviation skills grant, and a lot more. We are committed to ensuring that Alberta remains the best place in Canada to live, work, invest, start a business, or raise a family.

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

Hon. members, at the call of Oral Question Period we were at tablings. I am not sure that there are any others, but I am happy to double-check.

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:02 the Official Opposition deputy House leader rose on a point of order. It would appear that the Official Opposition House Leader is rising.

Point of Order
Insulting Language
Referring to the Absence of a Member

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At 2:02 the deputy House leader rose. If he had not, I would have as well. In response to questions from the critic for service Alberta the minister of service Alberta across multiple questions was using – under 23(h), (i), and (j) – insulting language, abusive language, making false, unavowed motives, and making allegations against another member. I believe that the minister was attempting to deflect blame for poorly thought out legislation that has been introduced in this House and did so using the language: if the Member for Calgary-Falconridge showed up for work.

This insulting language not only is against the practice of this Assembly and speaks directly to a member's character, their work ethic, and their integrity; it borders very closely to chapter 13, page 619, referencing members, specifically the presence or absence of a member. Certainly, someone listening to this interaction, upon hearing the language "if the member had showed up for work," might believe that they were being accused of not being available in the Chamber, which as you know, Mr. Speaker, is unacceptable. "Speakers have upheld this prohibition on the ground that 'there are many places that Members have to be in order to carry out all of the obligations that go with their office.'" I think that the language that the minister chose to use to defend his own lack of work on a bill that was very disappointing to many members here in this Chamber and in the gallery was certainly regrettable.

I believe this is a point of order. Hurling insults back and forth like this, Mr. Speaker, does not help decorum, does not help the debate in this place. I hope that this is ruled a point of order, as you have when members on the other side have said goodbye when members were leaving the Chamber or in other ways implied that our members and any member is not doing their job as a legislator. Again, I call your attention to chapter 13, around order and decorum, and I hope that this is ruled a point of order.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I will kick off where the member left off, and that is with regard to hurling insults. Look no further than the Leader of the Opposition for hurling insults. That happens often in this Chamber, but we don't always call points of order there. It's commonplace as long as they are within the confines of being a heckle that, I guess, meets the levels of decorum. I think that's a bit of a stretch.

I think this point of order is definitely a stretch, Mr. Speaker. Suggesting that the member is present in the Chamber or not is out of order; there's no question. There's a long-standing convention. It's in the Standing Orders. You can't talk about that. And the member is correct: there are duties that as MLAs and ministers we get pulled out for so that we cannot attend every single waking moment in this Chamber. However – the big "but" – in this instance the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction was clearly referring to that member's – I forget his constituency, and I do apologize – presence or absence at public consultations. This is not referring to his presence in the Chamber – that would be out of order – but referring to public consultations.

There have been lots of instances where members from the opposition have suggested that members on this side of the House are not doing their job properly and not attending and not consulting with certain people. I mean, that's back-and-forth banter of the Chamber. But to suggest that this is a point of order because the minister of service Alberta said to the opposite member that he's

not showing up to consultations: that's totally different and, I would suggest, well within the bounds of what's fair in this Chamber. I don't think this is a point of order.

The Speaker: Are there other submissions?

I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues when the hon. the minister of service Alberta made a number of statements. I would submit to the House that the Opposition House Leader has raised two issues of concern, one being whether or not the minister was accusing the member of motives that are less than honourable and then, additionally, with respect to the long-held convention of referring to the presence or the absence of a member.

I do agree with the Government House Leader that in this particular set of questions the minister was referring to his or her presence at other meetings, not specifically with respect to the presence in the Chamber. I am, however, very sympathetic to the Opposition House Leader's position when the hon. minister of service Alberta said, "That member would know all this if he showed up for work." It becomes difficult to determine whether or not work was a public meeting or was a meeting held here inside the Assembly, of which I would consider that to be a point of order.

The additional comment that I would like to make is with respect to the motives of the member. Tensions sometimes rise here in the Assembly, and this is one of the challenges that we all face with respect to decorum when we personalize the statements. He didn't care to show up to work: that was an example that the minister used today that is likely to create disorder, but I might add that on numerous occasions I've heard from the other side of the Assembly, who make accusations like "Does the minister just not care?" or "Do they not care?" or "Does he not care?" particularly in light of some members who sit closer here to the Speaker.

With the strongest of caution provided to both sides of the Assembly, I would recommend that we depersonalize these sorts of statements. But with respect to referring to the presence or absence of a member, I think that in this case it's far too close to determine whether or not he was referring to coming to the Chamber or the public meeting, so I'll ask the Government House Leader to apologize and withdraw.

2:50

Mr. Schow: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That brings us to the second point of order. I believe it was at 2:20 and at 2:21. Both the Government House Leader and the minister of seniors and social services rose on a point of order. I'm not sure that they were the same – perhaps they're unrelated – but I'll provide the Government House Leader the opportunity to bring them to the attention of the House.

Point of Order
Parliamentary Language
Referring to the Galleries

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to correct myself from earlier, it was the Member for Calgary-Falconridge; I'll try to remember that in the future.

If I may combine these points of order.

The Speaker: Please do.

Mr. Schow: They're not necessarily on the same issue, but they're against the same member and generally about the way the member was asking questions of the government, if it's okay.

The Speaker: Yep.

Mr. Schow: The first point of order here was the way that the Member for St. Albert was referring to the hon. minister of service Alberta, not by his title of Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction but, rather, as the Member for Morinville-St. Albert. You have provided an abundance of caution on this specific issue if we go back to when the members opposite made a point of referring to Tyler Shandro, the Minister of Health at the time, by his constituency and not by his ministerial title. I think that's an appropriate thing to request from the opposition, to refer to a minister by their title. If it was by accident, then I can understand that, but if it's something that persists, I think it would be unnecessary and inappropriate.

But, in the same vein, the member who was asking the question was engaging the gallery. This is something that we have also been provided a lot of caution on. I understand that this can cause some consternation and a lack of decorum even in the gallery. There are high expectations of members visiting here. I believe this point of order – I'm not necessarily referencing a standing order but, rather, referencing precedent that has been set here of not engaging the gallery and of referring to ministers by their titles rather than by their constituency name.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that this is a point of order. The Member for St. Albert, while referencing that there were members in the gallery, was not speaking to the members of the gallery, was not inciting the members of the gallery. These are things that could be of concern. Referencing that members are here and in the gallery is entirely within order and, in fact, was done just yesterday by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont when doing his tablings regarding the support for Bill 204. During debate, when there are members in the gallery, mentioning that they are here, their presence or absence, has been a long-standing practice and certainly has happened many, many times in my nine years in this Assembly. I do not believe that the Member for St. Albert was inciting in any way, shape, or form but merely pointing out the presence of these displeased individuals.

The member also – and apologies, Mr. Speaker, because I may be misremembering. The Government House Leader referred to concerns around the appropriate use of titles. I did not, having not heard his argument, have the chance to go back and review previous Speakers' rulings, which I will happily do. I believe he's referring to when titles other than ministerial or constituency titles were used in debate – more made up names. Referring to members in this Assembly not by their names but by either their title or their constituency: I believe that is appropriate, Mr. Speaker, but I look forward to your ruling. Certainly, the Member for St. Albert was attempting to engage respectfully on a highly charged issue.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I'm happy to deal with a number – there's a real hit parade of challenges around this particular set of questions from the perspective of the Speaker, perhaps none of which rise to the level of a point of order, but I think it is very reasonable to provide caution on a number of them.

First and foremost, I do agree that there is a significant difference between mentioning the presence of individuals in the gallery and engaging with those members.

I think it's also fair to point out what you, the Official Opposition House Leader, failed to perhaps note was the very strong and robust gesturing that the hon. Member for St. Albert was making at the time of speaking to those members in the gallery. It's not just a common practice, but in fact it is very clearly stated in *House of*

Commons Procedure and Practice, chapter 13, page 610, that “any Member participating in debate, whether during . . . the House or a Committee . . . must address the Chair, not the House, a particular Minister or Member, the galleries.” It's very clear that it speaks to the galleries, and it is important that while I'm happy for people to indicate the presence of individuals in the gallery who may be interested, I don't think that it's appropriate for us to be gesturing to them, doing things so that we can bring them down into the debate. They have no place here in the debate. They are merely observers. I agree that it is unhelpful, so I would encourage members to not do that, and I've provided caution to both sides of the Assembly on this particular issue.

With respect to the other point, on addressing ministers or members by their names, questions are to be made to ministers in the area of their responsibility. It is certainly not in the area of responsibility of the Member for Morinville-St. Albert to answer a question with respect to his or her particular area of responsibility, so I think it could be viewed as a disrespectful position to call them merely by their constituency name. I know that I have provided caution in the past, in previous Assemblies, with respect to the then Minister of Health, and while there was large-spread disagreement on his performance at the time, there certainly was correction with respect to calling him the Member for Calgary-Acadia when expecting him to answer a question in his area of responsibility as the Minister of Health.

The last thing that I might just remind all members of the Assembly and, in particular, the Member for St. Albert of is that all questions after number 4 are to be done without a preamble. I think we saw good examples of what happens to decorum when that isn't followed.

I consider all these matters dealt with and concluded. That was not a point of order but an opportunity for correction.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 14 Appropriation Act, 2024

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. This includes the following amounts from the general revenue fund: \$158 million for the Legislative Assembly; \$61 billion for the public service, including the government's various ministries and departments; \$53.8 billion for expense; \$3.7 billion for capital investments; \$1.8 billion for financial transactions; and \$2 billion in contingency funding to help the government to respond to disasters and emergencies, including wildfires and droughts. Altogether, this funding will ensure the government has the resources it needs to continue providing Albertans quality programs and services over the coming fiscal year as laid out in Budget 2024.

Budget 2024 is a responsible plan for a growing province. It strikes the right balance between meeting Albertans' needs today and creating a bright, sustainable economy for the next generations. Budget 2024 invests in vital public services and infrastructure for Albertans, and it maintains our commitment to fiscal responsibility,

including saving for the future. Our positive fiscal trajectory continues with another balanced budget. This includes a forecasted surplus of \$367 million in 2024-2025.

The future is promising. Alberta's economy continues to gain momentum following a year of phenomenal growth. The opportunities are tremendous, with entrepreneurs and builders, businesses, and newcomers choosing and investing in our province. In turn, job gains will continue.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, we continue to strengthen Alberta's economy and create opportunities so our economic engine can keep humming. We're helping projects get off the ground sooner through programs like the Alberta carbon capture incentive and the Alberta petrochemical incentive programs.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

To support a growing economy, we need to sustain a vibrant and robust workforce. Attracting and retaining more workers is important in key industries facing labour shortages. That's why we are introducing the Alberta Is Calling bonus in Budget 2024. The program will provide \$5,000 tax free for up to 2,000 applicants to cover the average cost of moving to Alberta. It targets all skilled trades, with priority occupations including electricians, pipefitters, heavy-duty mechanics, welders, and crane operators.

Budget 2024 also supports economic development in towns and cities across the province. We're investing \$724 million in capital infrastructure funding to help municipalities keep up with pressures from population growth. We're also providing an additional \$60 million through the new local growth and sustainability grant program. Municipalities will apply for the funding, which will be provided over the three years. This funding will help advance infrastructure projects that support unique economic development projects within their communities.

Budget 2024 makes life better for Albertans and families. We're putting Albertans first by strengthening health, education, and social supports, managing our natural resources wisely, and investing in safety for all Alberta communities. We're investing in our youth so that they have the skills to benefit them in their future. In total, Budget 2024 provides an additional \$9.3 billion over three years to fund enrolment growth, support education choice, meet students' specialized learning needs, and strengthen postsecondary programs. We know that students deserve to learn within modernized spaces. The 2024 capital plan includes \$1.9 billion for new and modernized K to 12 school projects. This includes funding for 43 high-priority projects which will provide 35,000 spaces for students, create jobs, and revitalize communities across Alberta.

Budget 2024 also commits \$26 billion this year to strengthen health care, the largest health care budget in Alberta's history. We know access to quality health care is the top priority for Albertans. They deserve timely access and quality services. Funding will modernize Alberta's primary health care system, with \$475 million to help every Albertan access their own family doctor or health care professional. This is important with a growing population. That's why we're investing \$26 million to the University of Lethbridge rural medical teaching school. This program will train doctors in smaller communities with the intention they remain in those communities where practitioners are needed the most.

Albertans also deserve safe communities and a fair and efficient justice system. Budget 2024 invests \$553 million to support Public Safety and Emergency Services. We're also protecting Albertans, communities, and businesses from natural disasters; \$206 million over the next three years will improve our wildfire management strategy. This money will enhance the province's ability to fight

wildfire with more personnel and equipment on the front lines. Investments will support wildfire response readiness, air tanker and night operations as well as volunteer and community wildfire response programs.

Our government is taking action on several water projects to protect our province from drought. The budget invests more than \$250 million for irrigation projects across Alberta. This money will be a relief to farmers and agricultural producers, who work tirelessly to get food on Alberta's tables. We're also investing \$539 million over three years in municipal and regional water and wastewater projects across Alberta. All communities deserve reliable water services. It's why we're taking strategic action now. Further investments include \$251 million for flood and drought mitigation projects over the next three years. These investments will promote sustainable growth, protect the natural environment, and ensure uninterrupted access for water for Albertans and Alberta businesses. We must prepare Albertans and communities for the upcoming summer season, this year and beyond.

Our commitment to responsible fiscal management remains essential to keep our finances on track. We're targeting spending to address key priorities and relieve pressures. We're maintaining fiscal balance and encouraging sustainable economic growth and prosperity. Our robust fiscal framework ensures the government continues to control spending, save for the future, and pay down debt. We're using the good fortunes of today to make sure future generations won't be on the hook for costly decisions.

Budget 2024 is a responsible, balanced budget that reflects the results of our government's commitment to fiscal responsibility while ensuring Albertans continue to have access to the programs and services they rely on. It builds upon our economy's strength and keeps that momentum going. Our province is growing, and Budget 2024 responsibly funds programs and services for Albertans now and into the future. We're putting families first, we're investing in stronger health care and education, safe communities, and social supports for Albertans, and we're planning now for a better future. We're spending responsibly today and saving for tomorrow.

Colleagues, I ask you to support this bill today and help us deliver on our responsibilities to support Albertans and a promising future for our province. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate on second reading of Bill 14? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak about Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024. There has been a lot of budget pomp and circumstance, but the job of the Official Opposition is to mute this noise and focus on what story the numbers actually tell us.

I want to start by saying that this budget missed the opportunity to signal investments in a low-carbon future and to future-proof our province, and this is why we are in a race to attract low-carbon investments to Alberta. The Inflation Reduction Act, or the IRA, in the U.S. is transforming the energy industry's outlook and the energy investment space. Capital is flowing in places where there is policy certainty and where jurisdictions signal that they understand we live in a carbon-constrained future.

Neither Alberta nor Canada will be able to match the deep pockets of the IRA, that subsidizes low-carbon tech through taxpayer money, but Alberta has the technology innovation and emissions reduction system, TIER. TIER manages emissions from industry and provides revenue which is then invested in emission-reducing technologies. We learned through budget estimates that

some of the TIER revenue goes to the energy war room, the same war room that spent \$22 million on a media campaign last year. A reminder to the members opposite: the TIER fund is an industry levy that should never be invested in the war room. Why isn't the government investing 100 per cent of TIER funds in emerging tech to incentivize new investments in Alberta?

Thanks to the Minister of Finance, yesterday we also learned, in the supplementary supply debate, that the energy ministry also funds the war room. This money should be derisking tech and attracting investments in low-carbon tech that will lower emissions and fund rebates for Albertans, not funding the UCP war room. Madam Speaker, I cannot help but wonder: where are the so-called fiscally responsible conservatives in this UCP caucus?

This budget also lacked carbon contracts for difference, or CCFDs. CCFDs are a financial measure signalling to companies a price guarantee backed by government. It gives companies certainty to invest in emerging technologies. The beauty of CCFDs is that it drives investments to almost no cost to taxpayers. Why didn't the government bring carbon contracts for difference? This is a tailored, made-in-Alberta approach to ensure we're positioned to attract and compete for low-carbon investments like storage, hydrogen, and renewable energy.

3:10

Madam Speaker, we have \$12.5 billion in revenue from bitumen royalties. While this is impressive, it also underscores Alberta's dependency on resource revenue, a reminder that we need to invest in new sectors to diversify our revenue. Alberta has a revenue diversity problem. I asked the energy minister about his plans to support emerging industries like geothermal energy. I did not get an answer. For starters, how does the minister square boasting about geothermal energy when this government banned geothermal energy development under its self-defeating moratorium?

My biggest question is: how are the rules developed by the Alberta Energy Regulator under the energy ministry being impacted by the new rules around renewable energy development? The uncertainty around the new renewable energy rules is immense, and we don't even know what they mean at the moment. I'm afraid this mismanagement of renewable development will also impact geothermal energy development. Has the Alberta Energy Regulator or the department undertaken any analysis on the impact on investment for the geothermal sector in that regard? I also did not get an answer to that.

The other missed opportunity in this budget is the government's inability to provide clarity around the minerals strategy in our province. In previous years the budget included line items for the AER to develop new regulatory frameworks for geothermal and mineral resources. We are still waiting for this strategy to be executed, and we did not see any investments in the budget that will signal the implementation of this strategy.

Madam Speaker, one of the biggest opportunities for Alberta is the processing, upgrading, and refining of minerals. This is even outlined in the energy minister's mandate letter, to develop an incentive program for these opportunities. What is the status of that? How is this government making sure we're attracting these projects at a time where there is more global interest in these types of projects? We don't know. We don't have any answers in this budget and from this UCP government. It's another day, another missed opportunity to provide certainty to investors and make Alberta relevant in a low-carbon future.

The most concerning element of this budget is the lack of planning to address liabilities. It was clear to me that neither the energy ministry nor the environment ministry are on top of

addressing liabilities in oil and gas, oil sands, and pipelines. It is a looming crisis. Madam Speaker, I spent nine hours in budget estimates meetings with three different UCP ministers. This government singled out renewables in the name of liability management, yet the government has no plans to address the estimated \$260 billion in other energy liabilities that Albertans could be on the hook for. It's growing under the UCP's watch. These are liabilities in oil and gas, oil sands, and pipelines. When will the Premier and her ministers turn their attention to liabilities in oil and gas and protect Albertans and taxpayers from this looming crisis?

Looking at Budget 2024, I am not convinced that there are real investments to manage liabilities. The orphan well levy appears to be the same as last year. The industry levy for the Alberta Energy Regulator increases slightly to almost \$7 million, or 3.2 per cent. There is not much else in the budget that would increase confidence in the Energy Regulator.

Madam Speaker, the AER has lost the confidence of Albertans because the government has failed to clearly mandate this Energy Regulator to address liabilities. A First Nation in northern Alberta has filed a lawsuit against the Alberta Energy Regulator, alleging negligence and a failure to live up to treaty obligations due to multiple tailing leaks at Imperial Oil's Kearl facility. The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation claims the regulator failed to inform the First Nation about the leaks. The lawsuit alleges "negligence, nuisance, breach of the duty to consult, breach of the honour of the Crown, breach of fiduciary duty and unjustified treaty infringement." What is this government doing to investigate these allegations? These are serious allegations. The public has lost trust in the Energy Regulator, so when is the government going to reform the Alberta Energy Regulator and mandate it to use its power to address liabilities? It is unconscionable to have – we cannot even estimate the real number of the liabilities.

Then comes the tragedy in the environment ministry that has no current plans to address the liabilities of oil sands mines. It was extremely concerning to me to realize that neither the minister nor her staff were currently making liability management a priority. We heard that we will hear an update end of the year. I am flabbergasted by the double standards here. This government singled out renewables in the name of liabilities, yet we have billions in oil and gas liabilities that could be left for Albertans to take the bill: billions in oil and gas, billions in oil sands liabilities, and billions in pipeline liabilities.

Madam Speaker, it has been over two years since the government initiated its review on the mine financial security program, the MFSP, and 17 months since staff at Alberta Environment and Protected Areas and the Alberta Energy Regulator received detailed submissions from the industry and First Nations on potential reforms to the MFSP, yet the minister's business plan is devoid of any details or concrete plans to reform the MFSP to ensure that oil sands companies carry out remediation and reclamation in a timely manner and that Alberta's taxpayers won't be left holding the bill. The most recent MFSP report shows that the total estimated mine closure liabilities increased from approximately \$34 billion in 2022 to around \$47 billion in 2023. In that same report the AER briefly attributes the significant increase to changes in mine closure plans and inflation. Can the minister provide further details or clarification about the sudden 40 per cent increase in estimated liabilities? We did not get an answer.

In other news we saw in the utilities and electricity budget other revenue – and that was \$86 million in revenue – that comes from the Alberta NDP's renewable electricity program. It could have been named so because that was under the climate policy, and it

shows that climate policy is also economic policy. That's revenue for the government because of climate policy.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will pass it on to my colleague.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise in support of Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024. Before I delve into this specifics of Bill 14, I'd like to first express my appreciation to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for the tireless work he has invested in crafting Budget 2024. The Minister of Finance has taken the time to listen to Albertans from across the province on what matters to them, and this government has worked hard to ensure that this budget continues to strengthen health care and education, build safe communities, and manage resources wisely to support a growing province responsibly.

3:20

The challenges the minister faced in delivering this budget were no small hurdles. Somehow in the face of these challenges the minister has crafted a budget which manages to remain fiscally responsive without jeopardizing the services which Albertans value.

The fiscal responsibility portion stands as uniquely important to me as an elected official. When I first decided to run for public office, it was the thought of saddling future generations with debt they didn't earn that motivated me. It is truly unthinkable to burden our children with the consequences of our reckless spending. Now, perhaps the members opposite and their friends in Ottawa don't see this as a burden and as a big deal, but that view could not be further from reality for me. The 2024-25 budget will spend over \$3 billion on servicing the debt alone. Every dollar spent repaying Alberta's debt is a dollar that could be better used for funding the services that Albertans deserve.

My constituents were also happy to hear the approach Budget 2024 is taking. They know as well as I do that debt today may very well mean a tax hike tomorrow. That is something that we simply can't afford. That is why both they and I are happy to know Alberta will be ahead of the curve and prepared no matter what Ottawa throws at us next.

Now, Budget 2024 doesn't just bring peace of mind to my constituents and me, but it also upholds promises that our government has made. In 2023 our government established a new fiscal framework which required future governments to balance their budgets, pay down their debts, and save for the future. This is why I'm so proud of the fiscal responsibility demonstrated in Budget 2024. This budget represents three more years of balanced budgets with \$367 million surplus in 2024-25 and projecting surpluses over \$1 billion for the following years. The budget also addresses the debt portion of the fiscal framework. Though Alberta already has the lowest debt burden of any province, Budget 2024 allocates billions to pay off more debt and brings that burden even lower.

Budget 2024 is also one which prioritizes saving for the future. If passed, Bill 14 would see \$2 billion invested in the heritage savings trust fund from the Alberta fund in addition to more than \$1 billion in investment earnings for 2023-24 that would be retained in the heritage savings trust fund. This forward-thinking investment means that Albertans can rest easy knowing the services they need will be funded for many years to come regardless of external economic circumstances.

I believe the choices made in Budget 2024 not only reflect the fiscal responsibility I have so deeply but also the priorities of Albertans. This is a responsible plan that puts Albertans and Alberta

families first by investing in their health, education, safety, economic growth, and success. The proposed \$25 billion capital plan would build the schools, hospitals, and roads our communities will rely on as they grow.

Madam Speaker, economic hardship is not the only problem many governments across Canada are facing. Health care is another challenge we all have in common. Here I must once again voice my support for Bill 14 and the 2024-25 budget. If passed, Budget 2024 would also invest \$475 million to continue modernizing Alberta's health care system with prudent investments and initiatives to improve access to family doctors, improve primary health care for Indigenous communities, and develop a compensation model for nurse practitioners. This budget would also provide \$6.6 billion for physician compensation and development, supporting Albertans' hard-working front-line health care workers.

Madam Speaker, the list of investments doesn't stop there, with \$1 billion being allocated towards transforming continuing care over the next three years. Through Budget 2024, if passed, Alberta's government will also ensure that anyone suffering from the deadly disease of addiction or facing mental health challenges has an opportunity to pursue recovery, with \$1.5 billion invested to continue building the Alberta recovery model.

Budget 2024 also seeks to invest in a bright future for Alberta students with new and modernized schools, learning supports for students of all abilities, and postsecondary programs to help build a skilled workforce. That is why Budget 2024 proposes \$1.9 billion in capital funding over the next three years for planning, design, or construction of new and modernized schools across the province. If passed, this would include \$681 million in new funding for 43 priority projects that would create 35,000 new or modernized student spaces. A total of 98 school projects are in various stages of the planning, design, or construction process in 2024.

Budget 2024 also aims to keep life affordable for Alberta seniors. Seniors are cherished members of our communities, especially in my constituency of Camrose, and our government is committed to supporting them. If passed, Budget 2024 would provide a 25 per cent discount for seniors on personal registry services and medical driving tests, saving seniors between \$16 million and \$20 million per year. This budget would also include \$38 million to increase operating funding for the seniors' lodge, social housing, and specialized housing and rental assistance programs in 2024-25. These are meaningful decisions that I know will be welcomed by many seniors in my constituency and across the province.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2024 would make investments into areas my constituents value. It would support our seniors, it would protect Albertans suffering from addiction and mental health challenges, it will bolster the future of Alberta through significant investments in education, and crucially it would invest in refocused health care so that every Albertan has access to the care they need when and where they need it. This is why my constituents have been asking for it, and this is what Budget 2024 delivers.

Budget 2024 is a forward-looking budget. By supporting Alberta's booming economy and providing the programs and services that Albertans deserve, Budget 2024, if passed, would ensure a strong and vibrant Alberta for many years to come. Supporting Budget 2024 means supporting the future of Alberta, which is why I call on those in this Chamber to join me in voting for Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I stand today to speak against Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024. A year ago we had a

Premier campaign on a number of items that Albertans cared about. We had a Premier that campaigned on better health care, a world-class education system, and taking actions on affordability. What we got was a Premier and a government that are committed to not providing the best services to Albertans but breaking promises and undercutting our already crumbling public services. This budget builds on four years already now of a slow bleed to social infrastructure in this province.

While inflation and population growth in Alberta are coming in at more than 6 per cent annually, this budget holds increases broadly to less than 4 per cent. Imagine that you live in a home that – I'm just going to personalize this a little bit – needs some repairs. Five years ago you estimated that you should be spending \$1,000 per year in repairs to keep that home in good condition, but you didn't spend that. Instead, you spent \$900 each year. Now, here we are, five years later, with a deficit of \$500 on top of the \$1,000 in repairs that you thought that you needed. As you sit down and map out your future, you continue on this path, knowing that you should be spending \$1,000 each year for repairs on your home but spending only \$900, and in five years' time you'll find that you still need to be spending what you should be spending, \$1,000, but now you have a deficit in spending on taking care of that home of \$1,000.

Madam Speaker, this is what this budget does. Rather than acknowledge the real lives of Albertans, this budget will not build promised hospitals and schools. This budget won't help people struggling to find a home that they can afford. It will ask postsecondary students to pay even more when they're struggling even to buy groceries.

3:30

What this budget does is continue our reliance on resource royalties, comprising about 20 per cent of the revenue in this budget. This government is banking on higher prices to balance the books. Economists have noted that the price required to balance the budget has increased from \$68 a barrel last year to \$73 a barrel this year. Madam Speaker, that doesn't sound like a budget that is getting us off the resource roller coaster, another promise made by this Premier.

Madam Speaker, this government is leaving Albertans worse off. Alberta has the lowest recorded wage growth in the country, and with wages increasing slower than inflation, many Albertans are struggling financially, and this government isn't helping. This government promised lower taxes in addressing affordability for Albertans, but rather than deliver that, what they have delivered are increases to land title registration levies, where Albertans will now pay \$550 on average for mortgage registrations. They've decided that they are decidedly against reducing carbon emissions, and they will now levy a \$200-a-year flat tax on electric vehicles. Fees are increasing for international qualification assessment services and the Alberta advantage immigration program while this budget is cutting funding available to newcomer and multicultural support.

While this government had promised an attraction bonus for health care workers, this will now apply only to tradesworkers. This budget doesn't address utility costs and auto insurance rates, that are now the highest in the country. It doesn't address tuition fees, that are now also the highest in the country. This budget does not address surgical wait times or access to a family doctor or provide support for renters. The rent supplement program will increase by only 500 households, at a time when Albertans are facing the steepest rent increases in the country.

Madam Speaker, the priority for Albertans, the number one priority for Albertans these days is health care. Every day in this House we hear the Premier and the Minister of Health talk about delivering care when and where Albertans need to receive that care.

When comparing the budgeted increase to Health against inflation and population growth, never mind our aging population, this budget is experiencing a \$462 million cut in real terms. This government cancelled the south Edmonton hospital and has no plans for hospitals in Airdrie or north Calgary. The budget for EMS is down. Funding for public education and disease prevention is down. Acute-care funding is well below population and inflation growth. Research funding is down. Physician compensation sees an increase this year, with no increase next year. The Health minister's business plan no longer includes surgical wait times as a measure. The budget does not mention the Premier's proposed health spending account or the medical services that she intends to remove from Alberta health coverage and put into that health spending account.

Reporting on assessed clients transitioning into long-term care has changed, all while motel medicine is now the norm. We no longer know how many patients are waiting to be discharged from a hospital each day or where they might be going. When we listen to responses here in question period on a daily basis, that number might be 200 people a day, might be 500 people a day, might be a thousand people a day. It kind of depends on the day, I guess, when the answer is being given.

Madam Speaker, I hear from constituents in Foothills about the need for a Calgary board of education school. I do dwell on the Calgary board of education because there are many residents in Calgary-Foothills that are looking for non faith-based, nondenominational educational schools. The government talks about historic investment in schools in this budget, yet most of the schools planned in this budget are just that, planned. There are very few new schools being built with shovels in the ground this year.

The budget plans for 35,000 new students across the province in the next three years. Last year alone there were 28,000 new students entering the educational system. School construction, new school construction, shovels in the ground, is approximately at one-third of the rate needed. There are 19 new schools planned, new schools, shovels in the ground, in this budget for this year. Two will be Calgary board of education schools; two new schools for a school division that grew by 7,000 students last year, 25 per cent of the student growth in the entire province. Other schools are budgeted for planning and design, but it takes two, three, four years to move through that process, get shovels in the ground and build a school, and in that time the Calgary board of education will have added another 13,000 students.

Madam Speaker, the residents of Calgary-Foothills – I represent a constituency that has grown from approximately 45,000 people in the 2016 census to over 65,000 people today. In this time this government has not managed to build a single new Calgary board of education school. Eight thousand children each day get on a bus for a trip of up to an hour to attend a school that is overcrowded, without the teacher or EA support needed for ever-expanding and complex classrooms. In real terms the Education budget is being cut by \$156 million and would be short 613 full-time staff to meet the needs of growing student enrolment. This budget has let the people of Calgary-Foothills down.

The funding in this budget for Advanced Education follows the same pattern. Direct funding supports for postsecondary are continuing to decrease in real terms, meaning that students will have to pay more, and despite increases in demand for student aid grants in the current fiscal year, the government has allocated less than in last year. Support for adult learning has also decreased.

We have seen this budget attempt to compensate for this government's inability to deploy capital in previous years. There's an increased amount allocated for irrigation infrastructure assistance, but given that this item was significantly understated last

year and irrigation infrastructure should have been building up over the last three or four years, this side of the House questions whether or not the budget really sees this as a priority or whether or not this government has the ability to deploy that capital.

This government is also struggling to deploy capital in providing high-speed Internet to rural Albertans. In the first year of the Alberta broadband initiative \$150 million was allocated but only \$21 million was spent. Last year \$229 million was budgeted; only \$69 million was spent. Even if the budgeted \$98.3 million is spent this year, the rural broadband fund will still have not yet deployed 50 per cent of the capital allocated, leaving it unlikely that we will reach the target of 100 per cent coverage by 2027.

Madam Speaker, as the opposition critic for Technology and Innovation I cannot help but notice there are no new or innovative programs here to continue the growth and development of our technology sector. I cannot help but notice that there's no mention of a digital media tax credit even though the exploration of a digital media tax credit was included in the minister's mandate letter. While venture capital into Alberta is waning, flatlining last year after years of growth, this budget does not recapitalize the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, a corporation that plays a critical role in attracting venture capital into Alberta.

We aren't seeing real movement on funding for arts and culture. While there is an increase to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, funding is still lower than it was in the last year of the NDP government.

There are no changes to the Alberta media fund, flatlined now for years.

Children and Family Services is languishing under this government. The number of FTEs in this area is not planned to increase. Child care investment, while increasing, is largely due to funding from the federal government. Early intervention remains lower than the amount budgeted in 2020.

Inflation relief payments have been removed from this budget.

3:40

When it comes to ensuring the future of our energy sector and reducing carbon emissions, we see that not all TIER funding is directed towards reducing carbon emissions, and we don't see clear plans for the Alberta carbon capture incentive program. The budget includes \$167 million from TIER into this program while it should be expected to be in excess of \$3 billion. It is unclear where the remainder of these funds will come from.

It is also clear that this government isn't prioritizing Indigenous Relations. Operation costs for Indigenous Relations are down while the minister's office itself is receiving more money. There is no increase to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. The First Nations development fund is decreasing, and funding to the Indigenous women's initiative is decreasing.

This government seems similarly disinterested in the services to youth and mental health and addictions. Madam Speaker, I sat in on the committee that was reviewing the budgets for the Child and Youth Advocate office. I sat there and listened to holding that funding to less than inflation and population growth, with a lack of acknowledgement that Alberta funds a lower amount per capita in this office than other provinces, that Alberta has a higher per capita of youth than other provinces, yet we seemed unwilling to meet the needs of this office and the needs of children in their suffering from mental health.

Madam Speaker, on this side of the House we are deeply concerned about what this funding and these budgeted amounts mean. We're deeply concerned that year over year under the UCP government we're not meeting, we are less than meeting population growth and inflation. Each year we suffer an infrastructure deficit

in this province, and I shudder to think where we may be sitting three or four years from now in taking this approach.

Madam Speaker, this budget is not addressing the needs of Albertans, and for that reason, I cannot support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As we've established already on this side of the House, this is a budget that is full of broken promises, and even on top of broken promises what I'm seeing here is a budget that really has us set to fail. We're looking to have population growth of 6.2 per cent, and our services are stalled at 3.9 per cent. How is this not aiming to fail? That means that everyday Albertans will see that the services that they need just aren't going to be there when they need them. The UCP's plan was already setting Alberta down a path with a failing health care system, classrooms that are crowded – as a mom I can attest to that – skyrocketing insurance – I can also attest to that – and utility costs, and zero relief for people who are begging for relief from this government.

What I've heard from the other side is a lot of really wonderful words about putting people first, and frankly that's not what I'm seeing in terms of putting our money where our mouths are. At a time when this government has gone on and on about Alberta calling, when I look at specific areas where I'm responsible in terms of my critic file, in terms of newcomers, we saw an overall decrease of \$3 million to newcomer support services.

Let's not forget that over time this side of the House has made calls, even through budget estimates, which we were doing just last week, and asked for answers as to why settlement services are consistently underfunded. In many, many conversations with the amazing people who dedicate themselves to serving newcomer communities and helping them thrive, a consistent theme that I'm hearing is that there's a real lack of financial support, especially as it relates to language training, which is also a key component to success around settlement and thriving. Just yesterday we were talking about, you know, how important it is to ensure the success of newcomers, and that's why we were talking about credentialing; that's why we supported Bill 203. There are a lot of other areas that we need to strengthen, though, in order for that to happen.

Our wait-lists are growing. Supports aren't keeping pace with demand. This is what we're hearing from all sorts of newcomer organizations, and we're set to see record increases in immigration. When we asked the minister what they were doing to address the growing wait-lists for language assessment, for unemployment among new immigrants, around the overrepresentation of immigrants in shelters, including women, 2SLGBTQQIA, and other marginalized groups, there were really no answers and definitely nothing that was represented in this budget.

What I do see in terms of numbers that we were specifically able to pinpoint is an increase to come here. So on top of having to pay more for housing, for insurance, for groceries, Alberta is calling but newcomers will just have to pay about \$340 more to be part of that. One of the things that we heard over and over again was that newcomers are often the first to be impacted by the housing crisis. Support for renters through the rent supplement program will only increase by 500 households. We know that we're seeing an increased growth in population, in immigration, and this is all happening at a time when Albertans are seeing the biggest increases in their rent. Anywhere from 30 to 40 per cent is what I'm hearing from my stakeholders.

This government has also committed to providing funding for ethnocultural communities and making inclusive communities, yet what we saw were stagnant targets for the average amount of

funding in terms of the grant programs over the next three years. We heard lots of talk about the antiracism grant, and the measures that they used and the performance metrics that were used, frankly, just really tell the tale. If we're aiming to create inclusive communities, if we're wanting to fight racism, if we're talking about antiracism, and if we want to take action to do that, stagnant grants are not a way to do that. The amounts that were slated as part of the metric were around \$7,000, which, frankly, doesn't do anything around systems change.

A lot of our organizations are asking for more predictable funding so that they can actually do that work out in their communities. One of the antiracism council's recommendations was to adequately fund the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee; that was specifically stated as one of the goals for the Immigration and Multiculturalism ministry. When we were asking for transparency as to where this is in the budget, we didn't really get any answers on that, and we don't know what the ongoing work will be. There is no way to measure that.

In terms of engagement with stakeholders, we know that a lot of our immigrant-serving agencies are experiencing a large influx of folks in the 2SLGBTQIA community. These are the folks that are most vulnerable to becoming homeless. We're seeing overrepresentation of this specific community in our homeless shelters yet no support for rent control increases, which is something that we've called for, no meaningful increases to rent support.

We know that a lot of these newcomer-serving organizations are working hard and working just, really, at a feverish pace to develop their offering, to be inclusive, and to give all the supports that they can to the gender-diverse community. We're seeing a rise in hate crimes against these vulnerable folks. And we were looking even just at the business plan in terms of indicators when it comes to, you know, referencing complaints based on race, colour, ancestry, origin, and religious beliefs. We're seeing that the indicators just aren't even sufficient to address the issues that we know are at an all-time high, especially around the gender-diverse community. We don't know how to measure those hate crimes, we don't know how to address them, and there were no real answers in terms of the plan to end gender-based violence as to how that specific community would be protected.

3:50

We talk about gender-based violence, yet when I'm looking at the business plan under which this community resides, which would be status of women, we're seeing that the performance indicators don't mention them, that the goals in the business plan have now removed them from the gender-based violence program. So we just have a lot of questions, and I'm seeing a lot of areas in which vulnerable communities just aren't reflected in this budget. For that reason, I will be voting against this bill and encourage my fellow members to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Oh, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 14, one of the bills that brings the budget to life, and a budget, of course, brings values to life. A couple of things to know about this particular budget are that it's in a bit of a holding pattern, I think by way of political context for this Bill 14, in anticipation of a leadership review in November. That's why I think there's no real centrepiece here. When we look for the centrepiece of this budget, the best that we can find is the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus, that will spend \$10 million for 2,000 people, with a price tag of

some \$4 million for advertising and administration, in terms of overhead. So there's that.

There is also borrowing \$2 billion to put in the heritage fund. That has been a head-scratcher for some of my constituents, certainly. It's definitely a choice, and it doesn't exactly meet Albertans' priorities as articulated during the election campaign and ostensibly by the government even since then because, of course, Albertans' priorities are affordability, health care, stability of our education system for a growing province. Let's examine some of those priorities for a minute, Madam Speaker.

Affordability. Well, this budget brings in new taxes on newcomers' fees to be able to live and work and make a career and a life here. This budget allows for the fuel tax to increase. If the province was so concerned about the effect of the carbon tax, they would off-set it by the fuel tax, as Wab Kinew is doing in the province of Manitoba. But right away here the fuel tax will be jacked up, and it will take hundreds of millions of dollars from Albertans. There's actually no need for this. If the government is focused on ending their own waste, making life more affordable, then they would take action via the fuel tax. They're not doing that.

This budget, in fact, that Bill 14 puts into place continues to waste money on very silly things such as the energy war room, that has now cost us \$150 million and counting over the years that it has been in so-called service. I'm not exactly sure what they're doing over there other than being embarrassing. But, of course, the budget estimates debate, of which this bill forms a part, revealed in terms of process that they have also wasted millions on government advertising, especially on the Alberta pension plan, an initiative they did not campaign on and that, to be clear, no one wants, not that it needs to be said anymore. It barely needs to be said. Maybe it needs to continue to be said because the government soldiers on.

Now, of course, this is a government that promised a tax cut to get elected, and one would think that the first place at their first convenience to make that promise a reality is, of course, within the confines of this budget, of which Bill 14 forms a part. It is not, however, in this budget. It's not in next year's budget. It's not in the year after that's budget. In other words, it was a fabrication to get elected. It's not here and has led a number of people to conclude that this is a budget of broken promises.

Now, the governing party during the election campaign didn't have a whole lot to say about education. We do know that it is a priority. They, you know, said that they would look at the weighted moving average. They said that they would take action on school construction. They sort of patted parents, school boards, teachers on the head and said: yeah, yeah; we'll get to that. Well, we know that the Minister of Education has had an earful for the past five years on the funding formula. What school boards want is simple. They want each child in the system to have funding. This seems painfully simple, in fact, Madam Speaker, but they are not doing it.

School boards would also like school construction to keep up with enrolment growth. It does not. Let me give you an example. Back in 2022 I prepared an analysis on school capital needs for the city of Lethbridge, taking into account the identified capital needs for the public board and the Holy Spirit Catholic board. That analysis revealed Lethbridge's public and Catholic boards had identified the need for two elementary schools and 11 modernization projects that needed to be moved forward right away just to keep up with enrolment growth, which is mostly on the west side of Lethbridge, and keeping our existing schools in good condition.

I should add that we have some of the fastest growing enrolment in western Canada in the Lethbridge school divisions, and we are in dire need of new school infrastructure. At that time, in 2022, that was 13 projects ready to go in an urgent need, and in Budget '22 we

got zero. In Budget '23 we got one west side Catholic elementary for the Holy Spirit division, and in Budget '24 we got one modernization planning design project for the Galbraith elementary school. It's about 110 years old. It's one of the older schools in the capital stock in the province, and it was identified as the highest need because of the diversity of the children that it serves on the north side. The public board identified it as the highest priority. They got the planning funds for that. Nothing else, just the planning. So we've still got a minimum of 11 projects waiting, including the need to either modernize or build a new St. Francis middle school in downtown Lethbridge as part of the Holy Spirit division.

Now, it was a very pleasurable experience to spend time with the Holy Spirit board members. It was not very pleasurable to tour that school. That school is ancient. It is an occupational health and safety hazard for the people who work there. It is a safety hazard for the kids who go to school there. The gym isn't appropriately outfitted so that the kids can do the right activities. The hallways are narrow. The basement has hallways that lead to nowhere. It is in dire need of either a full knock-down or a full modernization. I know that the member for Lethbridge-East toured it as well. I know that the Holy Spirit board, because, of course, they represent schools all through southern Alberta, have been vociferous in their advocacy, and they were utterly ignored in this budget, which indicates to me that the capital plan that accompanies this Bill 14 does not actually take into account the needs in a growing city, the one that I represent. It is not exactly clear to me that anyone on the other side cares about the very, very rapidly growing enrolment growth in Lethbridge.

I do want to say a few further words about education, Madam Speaker. I want to dedicate these words to the memory of a former educational assistant and union activist, Christy Storrs, and her husband, Kealy, and their kids, Callum and Holden. I met Christy at an event last year in the spring, just around a year ago, right before the election. She passed away unexpectedly of a pulmonary embolism. She was young; she was about four years younger than me. She passed away after I met her, a couple of weeks later.

I recently attended a large rally along Mayor Magrath Drive, that I know Christy would have been at had she still been here, in support of the very education workers that Christy Storrs spent all of her extra energy advocating for and organizing for and with, with the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

At that rally there were hundreds of educational assistants, administrative assistants, custodians, and bus drivers, folks who keep our kids safe and our schools functioning, along with hundreds of those workers, those essential workers, what we used to call during the pandemic essential workers until we fired 20,000 of them with a tweet, along with teachers and administrators and parents and other unions. Of course, they had at least their Lethbridge-West MLA along to express solidarity with them.

Now, for these folks life has gotten more expensive, as it has for everyone, but their wages haven't gone up for some years now. This is, in my view, a moral outrage. These are people who work to make sure that kids with disabilities get what they need in already overcrowded classrooms.

4:00

But there are also administrative assistants, who are the first line of defence not just for absence reports or forgotten lunches but also for kids who need health care, kids who need to access other services. One administrative assistant in a southern Alberta school, in a Taber school, says that her wages are so low, her kids have to work in the evening so they can make ends meet. Her teenagers. Another educational assistant who assists children with disabilities in the classroom says that she makes less today than she did 17

years ago when she worked at a grocery store. Another woman who works as a school bus driver says that her 18-year-old, who works at Subway, makes more than she does. She said in a recent CUPE advocacy video that she literally drives the future, and her kid, who works at a sandwich shop, makes more than she does.

The UCP must increase wages for these workers, they must negotiate fair settlements with these workers, and there is nothing in Budget 2024 or in Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024, to make that happen. It is very clear to me why there were hundreds of people at that Lethbridge rally supporting these workers.

Meanwhile, health care. What can we say about that other than express a heavy sigh? Lethbridge was promised a cardiac care expansion at the Chinook regional hospital. It was a haphazard sort of slapdash promise, and right on the eve of the election. They tossed a couple of million out the door. It wasn't really ever clear if those funds were actually spent on this issue. Okay. Whatever. But if those design and planning funds were actually spent, we would see the beginnings of cardiac service expansion in the capital plan. It is not. It's nowhere in there. The government can say whatever it wants, tell itself whatever kinds of stories it likes. The numbers tell the real story, and there are no numbers for this investment in this budget.

The biggest challenge I think to the continued resilience of sustainability of our public services in Lethbridge or anywhere else is that this budget does not account for the incredible amount of inflation present in everyone's lives, which includes the cost pressures to deliver our public services. It seems to me that every Albertan understands acutely the pressures of inflation. There is only one that doesn't, and it is the Premier. Their own budget numbers say that inflation and population are set to grow by 6.2 per cent, which I think is probably low, but services are stalled at 3.9 per cent.

When you adjust for population growth and inflation, for example, this year's budget alone cuts \$80 million from the operating support to postsecondary institutions which, of course, once again, hits the city of Lethbridge and our economy. The University of Lethbridge alone had to take \$5 million worth of cuts four years in a row. That's 20 million bucks pulled out of a city of 100,000, when the University of Lethbridge is a major economic driver not only for the people who work there and go to school there but for all of the procurement and the other services that they do and the private-sector connections they have throughout the city.

When we convert these budget numbers into per capita spending and also adjust for inflation, use the government's own projections, the net effect three years out is an 11 per cent reduction across social services ministries, 5.8 per cent reduction to health spending, 7.3 per cent reduction to K to 12 and postsecondary, and 14 per cent increase to funding for private schools. That's what tells the story.

Bill 14 brings the budget to life. The budget brings values to life. That is where we see the government's values, that we will over time just allow our public services to erode the things that bring us together as a community, for sure, but also the great equalizers so that a kid like me can end up here. With a working-class background like mine, I probably, you know, had no business being here, yet here we are. A great public education and a great university education and a whole bunch of really great opportunities that accrued from that basis brought me here.

One last thing. We were promised a new bridge over highway 3 in Lethbridge in 2019 by Jason Kenney himself. It's 60 years old. The New Democrats had also indicated in late 2018 or early '19 that it was in the capital plan. That vaporized. It disappeared. Somehow that promise has dropped completely off the radar. Lethbridge just does not rate in this government's capital

investment priorities. We are forgotten. The extent to which we get any attention at all for our health care system, our education system, our infrastructure or otherwise is the extent to which we have the efforts of citizens, physicians, health care workers, education workers, civil societies speaking out.

We're seeing that again through the looming drought, where we see civil society, environmental groups, Indigenous people raising the alarm as well. Those are the folks that I represent. Those are the folks that I look for in any budget, and I did not find them in this year's budget. I barely found them in last year's and, in a rare moment of agreement, agreed with the mayor of Lethbridge. She thought there was a page missing out of Budget '23. That page remains missing in Budget '24. Clearly, it will continue to have to be up to people who work in education and health care, parents, patients, and citizens of all kinds to keep the pressure on the UCP to make sure that our city is not forgotten.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Lots of strong deliberations here this afternoon. However, I wish to move that the Assembly adjourn debate on Bill 14 at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 15, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024.

The funding requests in Bill 15 reflect the government's commitment to strengthen and refocus our health care system, keep our communities and families safe, and support government's disaster response. It would go to the following offices and government departments: Advanced Education; Agriculture and Irrigation; Arts, Culture and Status of Women; Children and Family Services; Energy and Minerals; Forestry and Parks; Health; Justice; Mental Health and Addiction; Municipal Affairs; Public Safety and Emergency Services; Seniors, Community and Social Services; and Technology and Innovation.

If passed, Bill 15 would authorize an approximate increase of \$412.7 million in voted expense funding, \$4.5 million in voted capital investment, and \$304.1 million in financial transactions. Supplementary amounts for Health include \$133 million, including \$69.4 million for continuing care and \$63.7 million for primary care, both amounts fully off-set by federal funding. Albertans deserve the best health care possible. This funding would ensure the government can take action to support the dignity of care for our seniors, expand access to family doctors, including within rural and remote areas, and support our health care workers.

Next is the Department of Agriculture and Irrigation with \$109 million. Our agriculture providers faced a tough season last year, dealing with increased insurance premiums due to higher disaster claims. This funding would allow government to lend a hand and provide provincial contributions so this industry maintains its forward momentum.

The third expense, for \$81 million, is for Public Safety and Emergency Services. This funding will support the Alberta Emergency Management Agency in its disaster response work,

combat serious crime and human trafficking, and provide for correctional programs and services such as inmate education.

The fourth expense is \$46 million for Mental Health and Addiction. This funding will expand mental health and addiction programs for children and youth and provide operational and capital funding to support treatment and recovery programs. These programs and support centres are important for the Albertans who need these services.

Other funding is requested across ministry departments to provide for various services and initiatives that support opportunities for Albertans to learn, top up funding for wildfire response, keep our communities safe, and support economic growth. This includes \$278.8 million for increased student loans to cover rising costs of living and education costs; \$22.7 million in supplementary funding to top up contingency supply vote funding; and \$839 million for wildfire suppression and response to address expenses related to last year's unprecedented wildfire season; \$2.3 million for initiatives under the national action plan to end gender-based violence for three ministries; \$1.2 million for assessment services' legal services costs associated with a rise in assessment complaints; \$9.9 million for community justice and integrated services for the drug treatment court and the impact of race and culture assessments, also off-set by federal funding; \$25 million to fulfill a government commitment to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation for its recapitalization; and \$7 million for the cost of selling oil due to higher prices.

4:10

Madam Speaker, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act will provide the additional funding needed for the government's fiscal plan in 2023-2024. The amounts in these supplementary estimates reflect our government's commitment to Albertans. Actions by this government have contributed to securing Alberta's future and will continue to show Albertans we have their backs. I urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members that wish to join the debate on Bill 15? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Completely inadequate: that is how I would describe Bill 15, the supplementary supply bill being proposed by the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board.

I was born in Fort McMurray. My dad worked in the mine. I was born in January. The night I was born, the car wouldn't start. My dad just came back from night shift – my mom spoke very little English – and had to figure out how to get her to the hospital when it was minus 47. I grew up in Edmonton, and I think I've had a fairly successful life growing up here in Alberta. The foundation of so many good things that I've had in my life is a great public education system, that was invested in by every single government for my entire life except this current one. So when we think about the determinants of the Alberta advantage, and we think about it as – the story has been told: oh, it's about, you know, light-handed regulation and low taxes. But, in fact, through it all, the consistent narrative thread of our society has been government investing in the great equalizer and leveller which is public education.

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

It's a priority for me because I had the opportunity of living in other places and working in other places. I spent a great deal of my career even living here, working in the States, and the advantage that I gained from having a great K to 12 education, from having

been to an absolutely first-class university at the University of Alberta to get my chemical engineering degree, made it a no-brainer when we were thinking about where to raise our kids and when I made the case to my wife from California that, no, we should actually move to a place where winter lasts six months and it will be better for us. It was up until four years ago.

Twenty-eight thousand new students this school year, Madam Speaker, 28,000 new students in the province of Alberta, a quarter of whom are in Calgary board of education; 7,000 new students in CBE schools, and this budget pays for two additional schools for those 7,000 students. The schools are not 3,500 students each. It's very easy to see the mismatch, and my constituents in Calgary-Elbow are very, very clear in the mismatch when they come to me and they tell me that their school, their local school, Altadore school, is bursting at the seams or when the residents of Rideau Park-Roxboro come to me and they say: there's no room at our school. In this way a school and room at the school actually become a housing problem because the social licence for building additional housing falls apart when there's no room at a local school for those children.

Two schools under construction. You know, the government talks about planning funds, talks about design funds. I mean, I suppose were I in government, I would do the same thing, announcing every project five times to get the credit for each one. But let's be clear: there is only one thing that is a school, and that is an actual classroom. Designs are not classrooms, plans are not classrooms, and it is exceedingly problematic that it takes so many years of talk before schools can actually be built, with the scale of the population crisis that we're facing, with so many children entering the school system and not having anywhere to go.

This is something that could be handled in this supplementary supply, yet it is not, because, as my learned colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West pointed out, budgets are where values live. The budget is the document where we say what we value as a society, and sadly the reading of this budget is that this government doesn't seem to value, unfortunately, the lives of and the educational potential of Alberta's children. I know that that's not true; therefore, I would wish that there was additional funding allocated to our children to make sure that they could have the same quality of life growing up here in Alberta as I had.

Now, oftentimes we go back as well to the fiscal framework. You know, the government likes to talk about the government between 2015 and 2019, but of course between '19 and '24 there was another government. That was led by he who must not be named, Jason Kenney. Between '19 and '23, in fact, the Kenney government passed a fiscal framework. I want to be very clear that the fiscal framework is an absolute minimum, and if the terms of the fiscal framework are to be held over a generation, it would mean a significant underinvestment in services that Albertans expect. It would mean that everything gets worse.

But there's a fiscal framework, and that framework calls for spending to be about population growth plus inflation. Last year that number was 7.7 per cent. In fact, this budget calls for a spending increase of 3.9 per cent. The differential between 7.4 per cent and 3.9 per cent is about \$3 billion. It is a \$3 billion cut relative to what even Jason Kenney would have put in place.

An Hon. Member: Billion?

Member Kayande: Billion. Yes. Three billion dollars.

Now, where do you get the \$3 billion from? Well, it turns out that the budget and the estimates within the budget significantly underestimate both personal income tax revenue and corporate income tax revenue. The budget, by its own sensitivities, each

percentage point of household income growth is worth about \$180 million to the treasury. The reason why I mention this is that we are talking about a 2.3 per cent increase in personal income tax according to the budget. Two point three per cent sounds like a lot except that household income growth is actually 6.7 per cent.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

When you run that through, just as back-of-the-envelope math, it turns out that personal income tax revenue is actually underestimated, by the budget's own sensitivities, by about \$1 billion. Despite rising GDP, the corporate income tax take is actually projected to drop this year. I think the people of Alberta will be very disappointed if they find six months from now that the government is portraying itself as heroes for higher than expected revenues when those revenue estimates were lowballed by approximately \$2 billion in this budget. When we think about lowballed revenue estimates that are presented as an excuse for cutting funding and for abrogating a key election promise of lower taxes, I think that the people of Alberta have a right to be extremely disappointed.

4:20

There is increased spending in this budget. AIMCo is staffing offices in New York and Singapore in order to compete in the credit market, particularly the unitranche market. My learned colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West had the opportunity to ask at estimates about our capability and competence and risk management policies. The challenge is – let me back up. The challenge here is that lending always looks like a good business until the bills don't get paid. It's always easy to be competitive in debt deals, especially new forms of debt like the unitranche market. It's very easy to be competitive until we know what the loss rates on some of these debt instruments are. Right now the unitranche market is so new that I fear that we're unclear about what some of these loss rates actually are. The fact is that AIMCo is standing up an entirely new office, based in New York, in order to compete for these deals against BlackRock credit and Apollo . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Just a reminder: we're on the supplementary supply debates. You seem to be maybe on the budget debate. You've had about 10 minutes in this space. I'll just ask that you get back on track.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

When it comes to the supplementary supply debate and when it comes to a supplementary supply bill, the challenge around health care in addition to education is extremely acute. I wish that the government had taken more of an opportunity to address waiting room and surgical wait times, had taken the opportunity to address emergency room wait times and to especially address the family physician crisis.

It's very unfortunate. I myself have a child with a chronic medical condition who lost her family doctor, and when we think about the scramble that it takes when somebody who has a medical condition loses their doctor and the amount of stress that it causes to try and backfill that, if it's even possible: it's not something I would wish on anyone. The supplementary supply, unfortunately, did not adequately fund family medicine to the extent that it would need to in order to ensure that doctors wish to practise here.

It fails in so many respects to match up with population growth, it fails to match up with inflation, and it makes very clear – you know, my constituents understand the impact of inflation on their lives very, very clearly. They can point to everything that is more expensive this year than it was last year, including some senior citizens in my constituency who had events in front of the media

when their rent was going up by 54 per cent. There is nothing in the supplementary supply that can address their concerns with ensuring that their rents are managed and that they are under control.

You know, it's just really a shame when senior citizens are getting kicked out of their homes, especially when they're on fixed incomes, and are losing tenancy and having to go to the media in order to make the case that, no, their lives have dignity, that their lives have meaning, and that they don't deserve to lose the roof over their head. There could be something in this supplementary supply that actually helps people who are struggling with housing and are struggling with that kind of uncertainty, and sadly there is nothing here.

Really, the theme is one of broken promises. Promises are broken, especially in regard to the tax cut. Now, in order to get elected, the Premier promised that there would be a new tax bracket and that ordinary middle-class Albertans would enjoy a tax cut. That should have been in the supplementary supply because that tax cut was actually in the platform. It was priced out. It was costed. It was in there. It is not in this supplementary supply bill. This is the bill where that broken promise can be unbroken. It could happen today, yet it's not.

Now, the fact is that Albertans had a choice in May 2023. They had a choice between going forward with a plan that would fully fund education, that would fully fund health care, that would credibly reduce the deficit and create a small surplus versus the plan they actually voted for, which is a middle-class, broad-based tax cut. Right now the people of Alberta have neither plan. They don't have a plan for addressing their affordability issues, and they don't have a plan that actually funds education.

I want to be very, very clear. Education is an affordability issue. When education is underfunded – and I talk to so many of my constituents who are paying additional for tutoring. One of the biggest private schools in Calgary is located in my riding. When they find that they're not getting the quality of education that they have come to expect in the public school system, they find it very easy to go private, and I can't blame them. In fact, I don't. It's a choice that they make, you know, if they want to spend that kind of tuition and they have the resources for it. It means, though, that that tuition and that tutoring comes out of their pocket rather than out of the public system, that should be adequately supporting their schoolchildren the way that it supported me as I was growing up myself.

It's very unfortunate. This supplementary supply bill is, in fact, nothing more than the next phase of the broken promises that this government made in order to get elected. I think it's a shame. I think, frankly – I'm a little old school here – that governments should keep their promises. I don't support this bill, and I encourage this House to vote against it.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 15? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 15, the appropriation act, 2024, sometimes known as supplementary supply. We know that one of the purposes of this act, of course, is to defray further charges and expenses of the public service, classed as expense, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. These are additional funds that the government believes it needs because it has some level of interest or value in making sure that those programs go ahead. I'm going to talk about a couple of programs. One is looking at the Seniors, Community and Social Services program, and the other is in Health.

4:30

The supplementary amount of \$525 million requested to support the national action plan to end gender-based violence is what is requested, and that's all that's requested by this ministry. Certainly, one of the things that – you know, last evening, when the minister was answering questions about his ministry, I asked what specific funding is going to gender-based violence in the seniors population, and the minister, unfortunately, wasn't able to answer that. He just spoke in general about elder abuse. Of course, elder abuse is a significant issue in our province, and we know that about 10 per cent of seniors experience elder abuse. That probably is an underreported number because a lot of times when seniors are experiencing elder abuse, it is often someone close to them like a family member or a friend. They often are ashamed of the situation and hide it, so oftentimes it is very underreported, so we believe that there would be a much higher prevalence than just 10 per cent. Regardless, I mean, I think that there are some very specific issues with gender-based violence and seniors. Unfortunately, the minister could not answer that question.

Another question that I asked the minister at the time was that the national action plan mentions improving supports for seniors as a way to ensure participation in the economy of women, who are often caring for families. Yeah. Oftentimes this is still gender-based. Women are often the caregivers in families, and they forgo their careers to care for not only children but also elders in our community. You know, I asked the minister yesterday evening – because this is a goal of this action plan, to ensure that women are able to participate well in the economy – what kind of things is he doing to make sure that seniors are well supported by government programs? Unfortunately, the minister wouldn't even rise to answer that question, so it seems to me that the government is not thinking that's important, isn't using the funds in that way, and that's disturbing to me.

We certainly know that there are so many other challenges right now because we are in an affordability crisis. Of course, seniors are on fixed incomes, yet they have to pay energy costs, utility costs in their homes. They pay for insurance. They pay for groceries at the grocery store, just like the rest of us, but they don't have the flexibility that people who are of working age have. So, you know, I'm disappointed that Bill 15 does not actually address this and give these kinds of further supports to seniors to make sure that they are able to be supported well in our communities.

As many of my colleagues on this side of the House have already spoken about, you know, the overall budget isn't even keeping up with inflation and population growth. I know that there are a few numbers floating around, but the government is capping sort of an increase in public program funding by 3.9 per cent, so that's really a cut to programs. Our analysis said that it should be at least 6.9 per cent. Of course, with the seniors population, because we have 745,000 seniors in our province – and that demographic is growing at a faster rate than all other demographics, so that means that this lack of investment, this lack of keeping up with inflation and population growth is actually hurting the seniors population even more.

Certainly, Bill 15 could have been much more supportive of seniors and made sure that there was investment in programs. Sadly, we haven't seen that from this bill, and we know that there have been some significant cuts to some of the programs within this ministry. For example, the special needs assistance grants were cut by \$4.1 million. This is funding for very low-income seniors so that they can age in their communities, in their own homes. It gives all sorts of funding to them for just basic things. Sometimes, you know,

there is a replacement for a fridge or a washing machine. There used to be – and this is one of the cuts – orthotics covered. Of course, as we age, sometimes we do need extra support in the types of shoes we wear, and that has just been completely cut by this ministry. In terms of Bill 15 and the supplemental supply and the importance of supporting seniors to age with dignity, I mean, I feel like this is a significant miss in this bill that's before us right now.

I'd also like to talk a little bit about just the Health ministry. Let me see; the Health ministry. One of the things that we know about the supplemental supply is that \$69.4 million is going to continuing care as part of the aging with dignity initiative. Of course, I did ask the minister in the evening about: you know, we haven't even signed the agreement with the federal government, and what's the delay in that? She couldn't give me a specific date, but again, she did speak about: it's going to happen soon. So we are supposed to sort of keep watching for that.

Another piece of that is just, you know, we've been through kind of a horrendous week of concern for people who are being discharged from hospital. We know the case of a fellow who was discharged from the Royal Alex hospital, Mr. Canniff, and ended up in a motel in Leduc. He had been in hospital for six months. He had had a stroke, and he was obviously not doing that well. He was thinking he was going to a long-term care facility, and he ended up in a motel and didn't even have access with his wheelchair. It was very difficult for him to get into the washroom, to put his wheelchair beside his bed so he could get into it. He wasn't properly cared for at all.

So, of course, what's really important is that these funds that are in the supplemental supply with the working together agreement: will they actually go to making sure that providers of continuing care for people who need them, for seniors in our province – will they be properly vetted, licensed, tracked, and approved, and will they provide the necessary care to ensure that seniors, all Albertans can live in dignity?

Obviously, this was missing in this case. It was really an embarrassment of the government, but it was even worse than that because people were not properly treated. We know there were about 40 individuals, and perhaps there's more, but that's all we know about now. Certainly, we have asked the Health Quality Council of Alberta to do an independent review of this situation because it seems like there is so much confusion on the part of the government regarding this motel medicine. Certainly, we heard extensively from the Minister of Health for, you know, the better part of the week that proper procedures were followed; everything was done properly; there's nothing to see here. Yet then the story changed later on, and obviously there were some pretty significant misses, and now there is some investigation. So I'm just wondering if some of this money in this particular category is going to be used to make sure that people receive the proper continuing care that they deserve.

That's another important point with this appropriation bill. Certainly, we want to make sure that Albertans are served properly, that they live in dignity, and that seniors can stay in their own communities. That's why it's so important that this funding be available to them, and I'm sorry that the, you know, Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services has not seen it as important to invest in keeping the special needs assistance program robust and actually increasing it in terms of cost of living and population growth.

4:40

Another program, too, is the SHARP program, and that supports people to age in their homes by providing low-interest grants. Oftentimes we do have some mobility issues when we are aging, so

maybe rugs need to be removed so that you can move with your walker more easily, or stairs become prohibitive, so we have lifts so people can stay in their homes longer. I mean, this makes a significant difference to the quality of life of seniors so that they can stay in the communities that they love, be next to the neighbours they've known for a long time, be able to go down to the corner grocery store, enjoy their own yards, their own communities. We know that the quality of life is so much better, yet under the UCP's watch this program has been cut instead of expanded.

This is kind of confusing because I know that I've heard from the minister that supporting people to age in their communities is a value that they hold, but it doesn't make sense with the cuts to the special needs assistance program and also to the seniors home adaptation repair program, which is also known as SHARP as an acronym.

These are some of the concerns that certainly we have on this side of the aisle, and that is why we're very concerned about this bill and will not be voting in support. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you. Last night it was nice to hear from child and family services, the seniors and housing minister. I had had the opportunity during my own estimates to ask questions of the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women as well as the minister of child and family services, and it was nice to be able to hear from them and discuss the focuses on gender-based violence and women's shelters as well as women's participation within the economy, some of the things, for me, looking at supplies as the stuff that had been missed out, that would be supporting women in Alberta.

The status of women ministry: you know, it's a ministry that provides and promotes strategic policies and solutions to improve women's economic security. It's to address gender-based violence and support diversity and inclusion. Broadly speaking, the status of women should be promoting women's rights and advancements across ministries. It is the mandate of the status of women to promote economic security as well as gender-based violence. I would actually like to acknowledge authentically that I appreciate all the work that the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status Women needs to do to be able to work across three different ministries to support women as all of the funding for gender-based violence is in three other ministries.

Last night, you know, I made the point that the federal government had funded \$54 million for the national action plan to end gender-based violence, and that's over 10 years, so we would like to assume that that's \$5.4 million allocated each year here in Alberta. But when we were adding up the funds over all of the ministries of Justice, Children and Family Services, Seniors, Community and Social Services, we came to \$4.6 million, so we are concerned on this side of the House that we're leaving \$600,000 on the table.

I had hoped that I would have had a real answer and a more serious answer to when I asked: you know, if we didn't have this federal funding, would the Alberta government fund these much-needed and essential programs? I do hope that I do get an answer to that at some point.

Alberta is developing a 10-year strategic plan to end gender-based violence, and right now, when you look at the metrics, we are the fourth-highest rate of police-reported sexual assault and the fifth-highest rate of police-reported intimate partner violence causing bodily harm or death. I wish that we had had more specifics as to how we were going to end violence against women. The

Children and Family Services ministry provides grant funding to community-based organizations for the prevention of family and sexual abuse, and I would like to see more training for people. You know, I think it's key. We need to be training people to end gender-based violence. We need to be funding, building allies with men and boys. It would be nice to have more specifics on the overall training that we are doing that is earmarked for men and for boys and our other allies.

One of the other things is that women are often neglected in sports, and we face gender-based obstacles. This ranges from lack of funding and accessibility compared to our male sports and athletics to gender-based violence and the sexual assault of women in sports. Additionally, considering that Hockey Canada has recently been involved with the cover-up of gender-based violence and sexual assault of five of its athletes, who have now been arrested and charged with sexual assault in London, Ontario, we need to see money allocated to protecting women in sport and supporting women who experience gender-based violence in athletics. Steps need to be taken to address the culture that sports breeds in regard to violence against women.

The Children and Family Services ministry business plan had stated that the ministry funds programs and services so that Albertans can safely succeed in Alberta. Broadly speaking, the ministry is taxed with supporting vulnerable individuals. It is these individuals that I would like to start with: women experiencing domestic violence. We do not have enough shelters or the proper resources to support women. When survivors have access to the support and resources that they need, there is no end to what they can actually achieve. Their value in this province is infinite, and it is up to us as elected to speak up and ensure that they have everything that they need so that they can shine.

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters has been actively calling on this government to better fund women's shelters, and they've stated that they need an additional \$10 million a year. Your government did announce that it would provide \$10 million over four years, which is the largest amount coming in this current fiscal year, but it's decreasing going forward.

As the critic for status of women I am concerned about the priorities of the government, looking at the funding from the supplementary supplies. I have asked this government repeatedly to increase investment into women's shelters, gender-based violence training, and providing resources for women in dangerous situations, yet the money has never been available. I am wondering why this government can find an extra \$11 million annually for sports, but it continues to dole out pennies when it comes to protecting women. This government is well aware of the fact that when women are trapped in dangerous situations, whether it be in an unsafe home or in a relationship with a violent partner, they can die as a result. I wonder, when we're looking at the budgets and the supplies, if the government could explain to us why funding stadiums and athletes is a priority over that of the safety of the women in our province.

For the past number of years the industry has been clear that the need far exceeds the availability. I know that the minister recently announced funding, but it falls short of what the sector needs, which is a permanent increase of \$10 million per year to ensure availability and proper staffing and compensation. The minister announced \$10 million over four years, which is the largest amount in the current year, and only a \$1.5 million increase in the budget of 2024, which will actually be \$3 million less than the current fiscal this announcement.

Over the tenure of your government funding for women's shelters has gone from \$51.3 million to \$55.8 million. Accounting now for population and inflation, that should be closer to \$69

million. I think Albertans deserve to see the metrics that the minister used to determine that women's shelters don't require the funding that they're asking for. Operating costs keep going up with inflation but also the population growth and need. Shelters, food, and budgets have taken a cut because of inflation. We know that as of yesterday shelters and heating alone are up 12 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. Alberta's inflation is now outpacing other jurisdictions in terms of rising costs. Basic needs are not being met, and funding has not adjusted with inflation.

4:50

I would like to see how the government is – you know, with all things, not just gender-based violence, women's shelters but education: how are we keeping up with inflation? What is the plan? I would love to hear how decisions are being made for women's shelters in our province to receive the funding. Like, how are we choosing which shelters receive the funding, and how many beds are receiving funding? We know that there are many unfunded beds throughout the province. How many remain unfunded, and where are they located?

We know all too well that when women cannot access support to leave dangerous situations, the results can be deadly. We don't see it in this budget funding or the supports to ensure that every woman in Alberta has a place to go with her children. There are no metrics or statistics on how many women and families are turned away every month. I was hoping to see metrics about how many callers seeking admission are turned away due to the lack of space and capacity within shelters or even positive metrics to show how many women are being supported and successfully stay and transition into affordable housing from their shelters.

We talk about the workers in the shelters. I'd like to take a moment to thank the workers who work in the shelters, that support the families in a time of trauma, and the emotional burden that they must carry. I appreciate how much compassion and love you put into your daily workday. As you know, women's shelters are essential spaces to preventing the revictimization of women and stopping domestic violence in its tracks. These shelters need staff to run, yet staff who are predominantly women are not making the wages that allow them to live in Alberta. Most women's shelters are staffed by women, and those women are receiving wages that are below a living wage.

When I meet with shelters, I've heard the phrase "wife wages," meaning that you need to have a shared house with a partner making a higher wage to survive or work a second job. There's a high turnover in staffing from burnout, turnover because of emotional burnout. It's emotional. Does ensuring women's shelters are adequately staffed play into supporting Alberta women? How does providing less ensure adequate staffing? Ensuring women's shelters are adequately staffed should play into this budget. Women's shelters are essential spaces to preventing the revictimization of women and stopping domestic violence in its tracks. These shelters need staff to run, yet staff who are predominantly women are not making wages that allow them to live in Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Alberta has seen an influx of newcomers and immigrants, and I would appreciate knowing how we will be supporting immigrants and how much budget is there. Like, we need to be funding shelters for them and education for newcomers. It should be a priority. Women are part of the economy, and the government estimates say that the status of women ministry "promotes strategic policies and solutions to improve women's economic security."

I've been calling on this government to provide universal access to free prescription contraception in Alberta to ensure that women

are in control of their lives and their economic future. This policy not only helps the health of our children and mothers, but it strengthens Albertans' families, and it makes life more affordable for everyday Albertans, and it saves our government money. The cost of universal access to free prescription contraception in Alberta is estimated to cost less than \$3.5 million in the first year. We would expect cost neutrality at year 2, \$4.5 million cost savings at year 3, and \$24 million cost savings in year 4 onwards. Studies have shown every dollar invested in universal access to free prescription contraception can result in \$4 to \$7 saved in direct health costs and up to nine to 90 times' savings in the public sector overall.

Simply put, the cost of providing free prescription contraception is considerably lower than the costs associated with the unintended pregnancies. We are currently in an affordability crisis, and with the rising cost of rent and groceries, birth control should not be a luxury item. With the ability to effectively time their pregnancies, people can better provide resources like food, education, and housing for their children. Children who are planned have a better health and social outcome than those who are unplanned. This contributes to the better overall health and economic outcomes for individuals. The time has come for the government of Alberta to invest in women's participation in the economy and make universal access to free prescription contraception a reality. Birth control is not a partisan issue; it's a human one.

I'd like to know what this government is doing to advocate to assist women with this call. My fear with the UCP budget is that women are getting left behind with their decisions with our economy, that the funding is not there to support women leaving dangerous situations, and I really feel that this budget should have done better for Alberta women.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this very productive debate I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

[Debate adjourned March 14: Dr. Metz speaking]

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as I rise here to speak to Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. This bill contains an array of changes, but they all seem to amount to the same thing: more broken promises from this government. Bill 10 lays out exceptions from the framework put forward alongside Budget 2023 by this UCP government. Originally a key component of that framework was placing limits on in-year expense increases, but this bill exempts the Alberta fund from this rule.

It also puts into action the \$5,000 attraction bonus through a tax credit given to skilled tradespeople who moved to Alberta this year. While we know that Alberta is not exempt from the skilled labour shortage affecting the entire country, this attraction bonus won't include child care workers or health professionals like they promised. It's a completely different plan than what this government pitched when they said they would provide \$1,200 cash payments to an estimated 14,000 people who work in a variety of fields, including trades, health care, and child care.

Alberta desperately needs health care workers to ensure that all Albertans get the surgeries and care they need. Shortages of these crucial health care staff limit how many surgeries can be performed in our public hospitals, and child care operators are struggling to recruit early learning and child care workers every day, so why, Mr. Speaker, is this government no longer keeping its promise? Moreover, the program is budgeted for \$10 million, which is \$7 million less than the UCP pledged, and \$4 million is going to administration and promotion, a hefty amount for a \$10 million program. Perhaps these funds would have been better spent on reducing something like tuition costs, for example, or helping put a rate cap for utilities in place as Albertans are paying \$600, \$700, even \$1,000 to keep lights on.

Mr. Speaker, all Albertans get from this UCP government is broken promise after broken promise after broken promise. Quite frankly, I'm exhausted, and I know my constituents in Edmonton-South are exhausted, too.

5:00

The minister stated that, quote, what was proposed was a party platform and what has been put forward has been informed by consultation with stakeholders. Who were the stakeholders from health care and child care that were considered? One year ago the Premier declared that Alberta's health care system, quote, is not in crisis. End quote. Not only is this crisis real, but under the watch of this Health minister it is getting much worse. Emergency rooms were closed for more than 38,000 hours last year, and 60 per cent of family doctors are considering leaving Alberta even though about 800,000 Albertans already don't have access to a family doctor. Burned-out doctors have either closed their clinics or moved out of Alberta or retired.

We are facing a critical shortage of health care workers. We are in dire need of professionals who can help alleviate the ongoing crisis in our health care system. Albertans were promised that this government would be recruiting health care workers, and we are now losing people to other provinces because this government isn't bringing in the needed recruitment initiatives that make us competitive in wages or opportunities.

Albertans deserve to know that they can find a family doctor for them and their loved ones, that they can be seen at a hospital in an emergency, and that motel medicine isn't becoming the norm in our province. Even today patients are still waiting at a motel to find out where they will live. This is days after government officials finally showed up to the motel to find at least 39 patients abandoned without proper care, on the verge of being evicted into the shelter system.

If this government can't hold its promises under such dire circumstances, how can Albertans expect them to ever stick to what they say they will do? Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't trust this UCP government to handle the skilled labour shortage in our province any better than they're handling the fact that our health care system is literally crumbling. They are missing the mark to build a better economy that works for everyday Albertans with Bill 10.

There's no denying that we are seeing a shortage of skilled labour across this country. The Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters estimated that \$13 billion was lost across Canada last year in the manufacturing sector alone due to labour shortages. In 2023 trades-related postings accounted for nearly 19 per cent of all postings in Alberta, higher than any other large labour market nationally. According to a BuildForce Canada report the province will need 20,000 skilled workers to support \$22 billion worth of resource value-added projects between now and 2030, so the proposed

\$5,000 credit for only 2,000 skilled trade workers isn't nearly enough to meet the demand in our province.

This government has yet to provide clarity on which occupations this credit will be provided to, as the minister has only said that it will be available to those deemed to be in shortage. For skilled trade workers who come to Alberta, I have no doubt that the \$5,000 tax credit will be appreciated initially, but what will those workers find when they come here? Rapidly rising rents, sky-high utility bills, and wages that don't keep up with inflation. Mr. Speaker, \$5,000 doesn't even cover one month's rent, food, utilities, and necessities for a family in many parts of Alberta anymore.

Maybe these folks think that they'll be able to move here and get a job in a trade of their choice and buy a home. Well, I'm sure they would be elated to learn that the UCP also promised that they wouldn't raise taxes, but Bill 10 raises taxes on buying or selling a new home with changes to the fees charged for land titles. In fact, their tax hike will add more than \$550 to the transaction cost of buying an average home in Alberta. Maybe this government doesn't seem to think that that's much, but to hard-working Albertans who are doing all they can to simply get by each day, that's a significant cost.

I think this government is missing the huge elephant in the room with this bill as one of the best ways we could be filling the skilled labour shortage is by recruiting and training people right here in Alberta. Why is this government not providing scholarships to high school students to enter trades programs, and why are they not working with industry professionals to train more skilled workers, especially when the infrastructure resources are already available?

Across the country governments utilize union training centres to support apprenticeship training. These training centres in Alberta are already training and supporting apprentices, both union members and non-union members, yet they're fully funded by union members. In fact, Ontario's budget in 2023 has \$224 million for training centre support, including capital to train 1 million workers. If Alberta utilized them, we could double apprenticeship output by accessing state-of-the-art infrastructure that already exists. This would be an incredible savings to the taxpayer and provide the workers that the employers need.

We hear a lot in this Chamber about how this government claims to be making life more affordable for Albertans, but Bill 10 is the perfect example that this government is looking to hide financial information from Albertans. They're missing the mark in building a strong economy, and they're missing the mark on taking the much-needed steps to attract health care professionals here. Just earlier this month health care workers gathered at the BMO Centre in Calgary for a job fair, and plenty of companies were trying to get them to move out of Alberta. Recruiters were there from other provinces and even from around the world looking for all sorts of health care workers, from home-care aides to doctors and nurses, especially when seeing patients forced to choose motel medicine because our health care system is bursting at the seams.

Stats Canada found that in January 2023 there were 121,900 people employed in Calgary's health care and social assistance fields, and by December that number plummeted to 101,200. We need health care professionals right now. The Business Council of Alberta recently released a report showing that postings for jobs in health care have increased broadly. Over the last five years five occupational subcategories in health care have seen postings increase by 50 per cent or more. Postings for nurses, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants are leading, with postings for these roles increased by almost 170 per cent. But, of course, we know that this government is more interested in cutting costs than

properly funding our health care system and getting Albertans the services they need.

Given that between the end of 2022 to the end of 2023 Alberta saw a 4.4 per cent population increase, this government needs to be forward thinking and investing in health care more than ever, and despite that we're seeing more people moving to Alberta, there is zero comprehensive workforce planning. There is no retention plan. We know this because hundreds of doctors and nurses are feeling burnt out, and they're saying that they're considering leaving our province, and there's no aggressive recruitment. This government must stick to its promise to attract and retain health care workers to improve patient care. To do otherwise is a grave betrayal to all Albertans.

I'd like to quickly share an e-mail that my constituent Russel sent me expressing his deep anger with the fact that this government continues to pick fights with health care workers. He told me: "It has become evident that our government no longer values our well-being and no longer has our interests in mind. It is clear that their only motivations are profit and greed, and this is wholly unacceptable. I want to stress how important these issues are because people's lives are at risk. Until our government proves that they do value human life more than profit, I will continue to make it my mission to show as many people as I can that this government doesn't care." Mr. Speaker, receiving this kind of an e-mail and communication from folks in Edmonton-South is heartbreaking and also deeply saddening and frustrating.

5:10

It's disappointing to see the UCP break promise after promise after promise, so I will say that I cannot in good conscience support Bill 10 as it stands. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, a lot of discussion there on the Alberta Is Calling skilled trades attraction bonus that I wanted to respond to, but I couldn't get over the negativity that the members opposite have for Alberta: Alberta, the economic engine of Canada, leading in job creation, leading in economic growth, record GDP, record population growth. The member in the same remarks really painted the most bleak, dark future for Alberta and then highlighted that record numbers of Canadians are relocating to Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. member – sorry; I hesitate to interrupt – unfortunately, on March 14 between 3:41 and 3:45 you provided some remarks to second reading of Bill 10, which prevents you from doing so again.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for recognizing me. [interjection] Yeah, I'll do an intervention.

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta we are entrepreneurial, and we are innovative, and you've seen that here in the Chamber today. I want to tell you why Alberta is such an attractive place: we have the highest wages, we have the lowest taxes, and we have unparalleled quality of life. That's why . . .

Mr. Nally: Low cost of living.

Mr. Jones: And relative cost-of-living advantages.

Are there challenges in Alberta? Absolutely. Are Albertans ready to rise to that with the support of Alberta's government? Absolutely.

And that's why you continue to see Canadians vote with their feet and move to Alberta.

Now, let's compare our approach to the record of the NDP. You see, the NDP said: "Alberta is behind the times. If you want a job, you should look at B.C. It's a little embarrassing here. We're trying to shut down our primary industry." To be fair, they have quite a record on job creation and investment attraction for all of our competitors. You see, they attracted jobs that were coming to Alberta to competing jurisdictions, and they took tens of billions of dollars of investment, and they successfully moved it.

Mr. Hunter: I've actually really enjoyed the debate here today, but I wanted to just really quickly talk about a couple of things. First of all, I am in favour of this bill, Mr. Speaker, in that there are, with the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, amendments that would implement and establish some of the criteria needed to qualify for the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus, a one-time \$5,000 refundable tax credit aimed at attracting out-of-province workers to Alberta to work in the skilled trades. It was interesting. As I listened to the hon. Member for Edmonton-South, she said that we are doing nothing meaningful. I would say that a \$5,000 refundable tax credit is certainly meaningful. I know that there are people that I've talked to that have said that this is going to be helpful for them being able to find those skilled trades in order to be able to get the work done that they need to.

It was interesting as I was listening to the debate, Mr. Speaker, and I was thinking about all of the items that the hon. members opposite had asked for. It's interesting. I heard the argument from most of the past NDP speakers that they're against Bill 15, Bill 14, Bill 10, and as you know, each of those bills actually is going to add spending to help Alberta. But it's interesting. They said that we aren't keeping up. The argument was always that we aren't keeping up with population plus inflation. Now, if we had followed their advice, that would put us in about a \$2 billion deficit, and we would be in a situation where \$2 billion would be added to our children.

Now, it's interesting. We also have comments by the members opposite about what they say we're not spending enough on. One of the comments made by one of the members was that we need to spend another \$3.8 billion in health, and we need to spend another \$3.3 billion in transportation to fix the roads. What do you think Albertans would say if the NDP finished their sentences? Think of this as a media release, Mr. Speaker: "We think the government should spend \$3.8 billion more on health, \$3.3 billion on fixing the roads, and in order to do that, we are going to mortgage Alberta's children to the hilt. They can't do anything about it anyways. They can't vote." If they finished that sentence, if they finished that media release, I guarantee you most parents, most Albertans would say: "No. We're not doing that. We're going to be responsible with the monies that we have." As everybody knows, we are very dependent upon royalties that come in through oil and gas. Unfortunately, what happens far too often in this House is that we hear the NDP standing up, presenting a value proposition without finishing the actual statement.

You know, I was a big fan of Brad Wall. He always would finish the value proposition. He always finished the sentence. Why? What's the why? We've tried to do that, especially in this bill, Bill 10. We talked about the why. We talked about how we do have a labour shortage in this province. We need more skilled labourers. That's a great problem to have rather than the four years of the NDP, when they were in office, where they chased out 180,000 workers, 180,000 people from this province. They chased out about \$50 billion worth of investment coming into this province, and they added \$80 billion worth of debt, Mr. Speaker. Basically, what they did with that \$80 billion of debt: we have no idea. I'm not sure if

we can say that they actually built any more roads or any more schools or any more hospitals than we did as Conservative governments. But the problem with that is that that \$80 billion of debt now has cost us, in terms of debt servicing, \$3.3 billion a year.

It's interesting. I know that the transportation minister has often used the argument: "You know what? If we had not had the NDP in power for those four years and not had that \$80 billion, we would be able to actually double how much we spend on roads and transportation, another \$3.3 billion." I find it interesting and sad that the arguments coming from the NDP are always: "Add more debt onto our children. They can't vote anyway. No matter what, they're not going to be able to argue with us." But if they actually finished that sentence, I imagine that even those who can vote would say no.

In reality, a year ago, a little less than a year ago, Albertans were actually given that choice, and they rejected the NDP value proposition. They rejected the idea that we can spend more than we have and that we will put our children and our grandchildren into debt. That's something that Albertans rejected, and they'll continue to reject that. You know, we'll see who gets the nod from the NDP members in the leadership. We'll see whether or not they change their tune. If you take a look even at B.C. right now, Mr. Speaker, with their budget that just came out, it doesn't look too promising that there's any NDP government that actually is looking like they're going to be able to spend within their means.

Here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to being able to provide top-quality education, top-quality health, top-quality roads and transportation systems to be able to get around. We're committed to making sure that we do this in a fiscally responsible way so that we don't saddle our children and our grandchildren with that debt. I believe that Bill 10 specifically focuses on some of those things that we can do to be able to rectify some of those issues.

I've talked a little bit about the \$5,000 refundable tax credit to be able to help bring in those skilled trades.

5:20

The Film and Television Tax Credit Act is going to be amended in this. It's going to provide a little more clarity in helping some more of that industry be able to do the great work that they're doing. Mr. Speaker, I know you're a big fan of *The Last of Us* and that you've watched with bated breath every episode of that, a great view of Alberta and what we have to offer here for that industry.

The Land Titles Act. Now, the members opposite have talked about that, but I found it interesting that they talked about how we have an increase in that. It's true, Mr. Speaker. We do have an increase in those fees, but we are still 40 per cent lower than the closest jurisdiction, which is Saskatchewan. Again, we have that Alberta advantage, that ability to be able to make sure that we're doing it better than other provinces.

I found it interesting and rich that the NDP talked about how we're raising taxes. When the NDP were in power, they brought in the carbon tax, which was the first that the country actually saw. In fact, I think that it was probably the beta test for the federal government to come and bring in their carbon tax. We know how successful that's been so far. That added 11 cents per litre of gas, 13 cents per litre of diesel. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we don't get anything here unless it's shipped, so that was a tax on everything, an absolute tax on everything. So we're now in a situation where we have added some increases in the Land Titles Act. That is a modest increase. It is an increase, but it pales in comparison to what the NDP did in the past.

There's also the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act, the changes that we've done there. Budget 2024 represents three years of balanced budgets, and we'll have a surplus of \$367 million. There will be amendments that would exempt the Alberta fund and

the Alberta carbon capture incentive program from in-year expense limitation rules in Alberta's fiscal framework. Amendments would require the government to provide a fiscal update only for the current fiscal year in its mid-year reporting. Legislation currently requires the government to do three years. I guess this is a red tape reduction initiative to be able to help in that department.

Then the Tobacco Tax Act, also an increase. We're seeing the increase in a cigarette, a 30-cent tax on that versus 27.5 cents on a cigarette in the past. Then there's also the tobacco and vaping reduction strategy. There's also an increase that's going to happen on that, which is going to 35 cents from 27.5 cents per gram. There are some increases that are proposed in this bill. The Tobacco Tax Act: certainly, it falls within the mandate of that act to disincentivize, through tax, smoking and consuming of smokeless tobacco. I'm in favour of that, Mr. Speaker. As you know, that is not a good habit to get into.

The last thing that this bill goes through is the Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act. Amendments would make it easier for registered partnerships to apply to the agriprocessing investment tax credit program for a nonrefundable 12 per cent tax credit when they invest at least \$10 million to build or expand the agriprocessing facility in Alberta. These amendments would allow a registered partnership to apply using a single application and single investment plan, for a combined investment of at least \$10 million, rather than each corporation in the partnership submitting separate applications and investments, which, again, I think is a logistical red tape reduction strategy. These proposed changes would signal to investors that Alberta is a friendly, competitive place to do business and create new jobs in food and ag processing.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in the work I've been working on with the agrifood processing corridor between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, this was great news for many businesses and many companies throughout the world that I've talked to. They're very interested in this nonrefundable 12 per cent tax credit. In reality, this is an accelerated capital writedown from three to 10 years. If you remember correctly, that was what they applied down in the States in order to be able to jump-start their economy. I think that that's a really prudent approach.

Just recently we saw The Little Potato Company, which is close here. They actually took advantage of this with a \$39.5 million project in Nisku, doubling their processing capacity. We were excited about seeing that, Mr. Speaker.

I will just finish with: I'm very much in favour of this bill. I think that this is addressing some important parts to making sure we're fiscally responsible and taking care of Albertans the best that we can. I am proud to be an Albertan. I am proud to continue to try to build on the great forefathers and foremothers in this province who actually did something right that has allowed us to be able to get to, you know, 4.8 million people, with 200,000 people moving in last year. This is evidence that we're still doing it right, that we are still providing that Alberta advantage. People just want to be able to come, start a family, maybe start a business, get a good-paying job, and have some life that's meaningful. We seem to do that pretty well here in Alberta, and it's a great privilege and honour to be able to sit in this House and to work towards that end goal to be able to help families and make this a great place for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others on second reading of Bill 10? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree with the member from the opposite side that we are all proud Albertans. We want this

province to be the best it can. It has a lot of potential, and we believe that that is a possibility.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 10 is an interpretation of another broken promise. It's not the path where Alberta can be the best province in the country. This government campaigned on recruiting health care workers. Let's not forget that the latest annual report from Alberta Health Services shows that the percentage of job postings open greater than 90 days for staff positions has worsened over the past couple of years, in fact in the period where this government was in charge. In other words, it's taking longer for the health authority, in this case Alberta Health Services, to recruit. The vacancy rates for all AHS positions have also worsened, meaning that there are a higher number of vacancy rates within AHS.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Minister of Health mentioned that the Health department has developed a workforce strategy, but this question, the question that I ask, is on why the performance metrics and indicators of the health care system are not showing that. This government: we have seen the number of task forces, we have seen the number of committees, and we have seen the number of planning initiatives. We are not seeing performance indicators that demonstrate and that show the outcomes that Albertans want to see in their health and well-being. Now, the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus will not include child care workers, will not include health care professionals. Again it's a demonstration of a broken promise.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, it's not because of that – this is not the news that we want to demonstrate, but we have the responsibility to call facts unless there are proven records that demonstrate evidence against that. According to Stats Canada we have a record low of skilled worker retention since 2016. It's not because of calling; the problem that we are raising here is the problem of not being able to retain. The reason is not that people are not coming to Alberta – they are – but this government is unable to retain. There are no initiatives that demonstrate a growing retention of those who come to the province. We have lower retention rates of skilled workers and skilled trades than British Columbia, we do have lower retention of skilled workers and skilled trades than Ontario, we do have lower retention rates than Quebec, and we do have lower retention rates than, for the most part, the Atlantic provinces.

Furthermore, according to government records the labour contributions of new immigration is dropping. In 2019 72 per cent of the newly added labour workforce in this province were from landed immigrants. This shows, despite the increasing immigration now, that this number has dropped to 56 per cent. To add additional evidence to that, in speaking to the settlement organizations, they report that the number of newly landed immigrants in shelters is increasing.

Another scathing example on the health care front when it comes to the workforce is that 61 per cent of family physicians are considering leaving the Alberta health care system either through early retirement or by looking for work in another province.

Mr. Speaker, the province also has the highest unemployment rate in western Canada, and wages have not kept up with inflation. These are some of the reasons why the Alberta Is Calling initiative alone will not address the problem unless we come up with strategies to retain the skilled workers that this province needs the most. We simply can't retain the much-needed workforce that will help our economy and build the vibrancy of this province. Why? We have fundamental issues that the government is not addressing. A good example is affordability; 1 in 3 of those who call my constituency office speak to the fact that they are experiencing shrinking purchasing power, and the key driver of this shrinking

purchasing power is housing affordability. Unless you address some of those fundamental pieces, you cannot call people. When you call people, they will show up, but you cannot retain. And when you can't retain, you can't build a stronger economy.

In 2021, 1 in 8 households in Edmonton were living in core housing needs. It means their housing did not meet either the standard of affordability or the suitability or wasn't enough because of the pricing. Furthermore, 23 per cent of all renter households in the capital region were in core housing need. Renter households in Edmonton are four times as likely as homeowners to be in core housing need, Mr. Speaker.

Just to provide some, again, additional information when it comes to housing affordability as a key factor that contributes to the retention problem, the Edmonton Affordable Housing Needs Assessment indicates that 71 per cent of households in core housing needs were renters, renters that are earning less than \$45,000, which is quite a number. In Edmonton-Decore, as a good example, the majority are single-parent households, mostly female led, who also tend to work for minimum wage. In fact, as we have mentioned multiple times on this side of the House, minimum wage has not kept up with inflation, and that is creating an additional burden and challenge.

The 2023-2024 fiscal plan shows the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus. This is one of the government's strategies to address the problem. I just wanted to speak to it. The 2023-24 fiscal plan shows that the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus is costing \$1 million in 2024-25 and \$12 million 2025-26 and \$1 million in 2026-27. That is a total of \$14 million. The cost of the tax credit is \$10 million for only 2,000 workers. However, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board stated that that \$10 million is a tax credit amount, and the other \$4 million is for administration and promotion. Well, \$4 million in administration and promotion is a large amount for a \$10 million program from an efficiency perspective and return on investment.

In fact, these funds would have been better spent on reducing tuition costs or other affordability challenges that we continue to face. Hence, I will say that the Alberta Is Calling program is expensive and does not have a good return on investment and will not help us to retain the skilled workers that we are losing to other provinces. It doesn't provide a solution to the workforce crisis that our health care system is experiencing.

Another program that this government tried to use to address the health care workforce is the Alberta advantage immigration program, known as AAIP. Like, for the 10,000 certificates that were issued through this program, there were only 75 certificates that were issued to health care workers. Basically, it is less than 2 per cent, so it's not addressing the crisis that we continue to face.

This morning I was listening to the minister speak and respond to a question around hip replacement, around knee replacement in terms of the performance of our province, which is a key indicator of health care performance through CIHI. All provinces lagged behind during the pandemic, but compared to Ontario and Quebec and British Columbia, Alberta is still way far behind in terms of catching up to be at the level where the province was on the wait time for hip and knee replacements and cataract surgeries. These are some good examples that demonstrate the inability to retain skilled workers, particularly in very critical industries like the health care workforce. These programs are not addressing that. This is why this government is either unable to address or come up with initiatives and solutions that will address this challenge. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will encourage members in the Assembly to vote against Bill 10.

Thank you.

5:40

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

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans elected the UCP based on the promises that they made, and what we have seen since then is that this government has delivered the recent budget, which is the budget full of broken promises, broken promises about delivering tax breaks to Albertans; fixing health care, which they broke; recruiting health care workers, child care workers; building more schools; reducing the cost of living; and the list goes on. Albertans are facing high rents; high utility rates; skyrocketing insurance; fewer schools, that Albertans need; and fewer teachers and EAs in the classroom than the prepandemic levels. Alberta has the lowest per-student funding in the entire country. These are all the facts. Albertans are really frustrated, and Albertans really need this government to step up and fix these issues as soon as possible.

Alberta currently has the highest unemployment rate in western Canada. Alberta also has the lowest wage growth in the country. The UCP promised to lower income taxes by \$1.3 billion in the year 2024, which they broke as soon as they got elected. Now the usual Conservative promises: this UCP government is promising to give a tax break in 2027, and that is an election year. Who knows how many false promises they will make to get the votes of Albertans? The UCP also promised to not raise taxes. They are breaking this promise, too.

Housing is another big issue that Albertans are facing. Buying a home is already a challenge for Albertans, and instead of making it cheaper, instead of making it affordable to buy a home, instead of reducing the rents in this province, this government voted against the private member's bill, that my colleague has put forward, that would have capped the rents. This government has also made it more expensive to buy homes by introducing this Bill 10, which will increase the fees for mortgages and land titles as well.

They want Albertans to pay taxes, but they don't want to tell Albertans what they want to do with those taxes. This bill is a prime example of that. This bill will allow the UCP to hide information from Albertans. Albertans will see less financial information in quarterly reports if this bill goes ahead.

This bill will also make it harder to transfer land titles and mortgages. The average price of a home in Calgary is \$654,300, which is increasing by more than 70 per cent every year. That is not affordable, Mr. Speaker. That is a challenge for many Calgarians. I represent the riding of Calgary-North East, and I get to hear this thing every single day from many newcomers who are coming to Alberta and choosing this province as their new home. This bill will increase the cost of transferring land titles and mortgages from \$50 plus \$2 per \$5,000 of property value for property transfers and \$1.50 per \$5,000 of mortgage value for mortgage registration to \$50 plus \$5 for each \$5,000 of value for both property transfers and mortgage registration.

The members opposite, on the other hand, were writing the headlines for the media based on their own projections. Let me make it clear that spending more money on health care is not what we call spending. It is investing in Alberta. It is investing in Albertans. It is investing in the future of this province. Building schools does cost money, but it is not called spending. It is called investing in education. It is called investing in the future generations of this province.

I represent the riding of Calgary-North East, and Redstone school in Cornerstone is another big issue. I've never seen any constituent come to my office to tell me that ...

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on appropriation bills for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to calling on the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader, I just might remind members that over the past 24 hours or so there have been two egregious cellphone violations here inside the Assembly. I wouldn't want to point out any particular riding, but if the initials are L.M., you might

be encouraged to ensure that a fine is paid to a charity of your choice. I remind all members that your first offence is \$50; the second offence is \$100 to a charity of my choice. Please govern yourselves accordingly.

The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Consider us duly warned.

With that wonderful threat at the end, I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 tomorrow.

The Speaker: I would call it encouragement, not a threat.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m.]

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