



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 27, 2024

Day 32

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
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Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
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Official Opposition House Leader
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP),
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Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
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Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
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(UC)
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Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
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Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
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Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),
Premier
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),
Official Opposition Assistant Whip
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
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Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
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Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Long
Arcand-Paul
Ellingson
Hunter
Ip
Lovely
Rowswell
Sabir
Wright, J.

Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken
Dach
Dyck
Irwin
Petrovic
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Wright, P.

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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

Standing Committee on Private Bills

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

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk
de Jonge
Haji
Lovely
Lunty
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 27, 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 interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the Minister of Infrastructure has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to the House here today a group that the MLA for Airdrie-East and I had the pleasure of meeting up with just a couple of short weeks ago in what was just a fantastic visit. Could we please provide a warm welcome to the students and teachers joining us today from C.W. Perry school in Airdrie.

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 31 visitors from the Dr. Folkins community school that's located in Chauvin. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Vivek Shraya, Dr. Cathy Flood, Victoria Bucholtz, Emily Hoult, and Rowan Murdoch. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Irwin: I'd like to introduce you to some of my favourite humans: award-winning theatre star Patricia Zentilli; nurse Jackie Harrison; firefighter Ang Beaulac; Erica, Claire, and Erin from Pride Corner; Steve Archambault and Cassidy El Darazi from Stonewall Recovery. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members Christy Garland, Ryder Richard, Jason Purcell, Alex Pugatschew, Skye Pinay. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Member Tejada: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members some fantastic Calgary members: Hazen Ellwood, Nathan Fawaz, Christine Ha, Mateo Brown, Jakaya Brown, and Moss Gray. Please rise.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, through you to the House I'd like to have the folks from the resource policy branch of Alberta Energy and Minerals rise and receive the warm welcome. They are part of the incredible people of Alberta that do hard work for us and all of Alberta. Please rise.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce my friend Danny Gray. Danny was instrumental in my campaign and is also the son of the Member of Parliament for Kelowna-Lake Country, Tracy Gray. Please rise to receive the warm welcome from the Legislature.

Member Arcand-Paul: I'd like to introduce to you and through you Adebayo Katiiti, Roxann Roan, Finn St. Dennis, Steve Tsonev, Kayle Mackintosh, and the R.F. Staples Thunder Alliance GSA from Westlock. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Bekah Marcellus, Mael Bartlett, Kelsey Robbins, Myles Letendre, Avery Letendre, Jarod Letendre. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members Master Corporal Webb, Michelle Webb, Kayla Halliday, Charlee Peters, Keith Peters. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members in the House Kris Bennion, Julia Clifford, Natasha Fryzuk, and Tanya Thompson. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce both to you and through you, from my constituency, Angie and her three children Luba, Corbin, and Lydia. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members Donna Battaglia, Evan Westfal, Kristopher Wells, Cece Chow, Kimberly Daniels, who are all strong individuals, and they're free and caring in this province. I ask that they rise and get the adoration of all of us.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some amazing humans: Sam Barrett, Joe Smith, DJ Rouse, Quinn Wade, Jensen Maitland. I ask that you rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members Zita Dubé-Lockhart, Toni Harris, Ariadne Belle, Stella Buncette. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce my friend Cam Davies, a resident of Red Deer-South and a member of the RCA

board. If he could stand and receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, a gold star for everyone. Well over 17 introductions in less than six minutes. It is possible.

Members' Statements

Commercial Driver Training

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, today marks a significant milestone in Alberta's ongoing commitment to enhancing road safety and addressing the commercial driver shortage. The introduction of a made-in-Alberta learning pathway for class 1 training and licensing is an exciting and innovative model that will reduce red tape and accelerate a driver's road readiness while keeping the safety at the forefront. This new learning pathway, developed in collaboration with the commercial driver industry, represents a crucial step forward in bolstering driver skills, improving safety standards, and improving enhanced on-the-job training opportunities for both current and prospective class 1 drivers.

By embracing an apprenticeship-style model, we are empowering Albertans to embark on a rewarding career journey as professional drivers, fostering continuous skill development and progression. Through structured training and practical experience, individuals will have the opportunity to refine their skills as trainees and progressively build upon their expertise. With this ultimate goal of achieving a red seal designation and gaining the deserved recognition as a professional trade, this comprehensive approach not only elevates the professionalism of the industry but also ensures that drivers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate Alberta's roads safely, efficiently, and responsibly.

In working with the industry on this new pathway, we recognize commercial drivers as a critical profession that keeps us fed, clothed, and our vehicles fuelled up. Thank you to all the truck drivers in Alberta for ensuring our province runs smoothly and efficiently. With this new learning pathway Alberta will be once again a leader in commercial vehicle safety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

International Transgender Day of Visibility

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Sunday, March 31, is the international Transgender Day of Visibility, what I hope one day will be a day of unmitigated joy, recognition, and celebration for the 2SLGBTQIA community here and world-wide. Today we're joined by the brave and beautiful folks you see in the gallery. We celebrate you. We share our love for trans folks and all you contribute to our communities.

Today I think of all the two-spirit, trans, nonbinary, and queer youth in my life, how blessed I am to witness them in their joy, eye rolls, boredom, silliness, and even the hard days. On a personal note from this mama bear: we won't stop fighting for you, for safe spaces, for you to be who you are, to come out when you want, and to just be.

While we celebrate that trans people have the right to exist as they are without apology and with human rights intact, we know that existence is resistance to this UCP government and the policies

they propose. On this side of the House we will always stand against policies that target 2SLGBTQIA youth, deny their human rights, and put them in harm's way, policies that seek to legitimize discrimination and polarize communities, policies that are copied and pasted from far-right U.S. politicians the Premier sees as heroes at a time when hate crimes against this community are on the rise. All of this to make Alberta a, quote, little bastion of freedom in the Premier's eyes but not a bastion of freedom or safety for gender-diverse folks. They deserve better from their government.

1:40

Most importantly, we observe this day with hope and knowledge that this community is strong and has strong champions whose daily fight is a righteous one. We are grateful to be allies in that effort. Trans rights are human rights, and on this side of the House we will always stand with you in solidarity. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Diversity and Inclusivity in Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we live in the best place in the world. I've travelled many parts of the world, but I'm always excited to come home. They say that home is where the heart is, and my heart is bound to Alberta. My grandfather William Hunter moved to Fort Macleod in 1923. He came as a poor farmer from Donegal, Ireland. He tried to farm in his new home of Canada but, unfortunately, lost his farm in the Dirty Thirties. Because of boundless opportunities, he was able to find other work. As third-generation Albertans our family has nurtured our customs, heritage, and roots. Family and strong communities are cherished parts of our conservative past.

One of the things I love most about Alberta is the diversity of our society. In this Chamber to my right sits a dear, close friend from Calgary-North. He is a first-generation Albertan. He has brought with him his rich culture, tradition, and heritage from Pakistan. He was raised a Muslim. I was raised a Christian. Together we quietly confide in each other about the things that matter to us. He has a granddaughter who is the jewel of his eye. I have seven grandchildren that I like to share pictures of. We laugh and smile together at the bounties that we have been blessed with. We celebrate the fact that we live in a province that welcomes and embraces the universal idea of being neighbourly.

People from all over the world continue to travel here, excited to make Alberta home. Don't let anybody fool you, Mr. Speaker. Newcomers are excited about making new friends here and new opportunities in their new home. I finish with a few stanzas from a poem at the feet of the Statue of Liberty.

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
... Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Albertans have big hearts and open arms. That's why hundreds of thousands continue to make Alberta their home. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member for Calgary-Mountain View's World View

Ms Ganley: In this world where politicians get ahead by saying whatever is convenient in the moment, we absolutely need leaders who stand by their values. My record is clear. As Minister of Justice and Solicitor General I appointed two-thirds women to the bench. I stood up consistently for victims of sexual assault even when it meant complaining about a judge. I protected and I expanded human rights. I served in a government that cut child poverty in half

and didn't even pause to celebrate because we knew the job was only half done.

The UCP has broken almost every promise they have made to Albertans. To those Albertans: let me tell you a little about what I believe. I believe seniors deserve to retire in dignity. I will protect your CPP. I will not allow seniors to be warehoused in long-term care with no standards. I believe every child has the potential to contribute to our society and deserves an education that helps them get there. If we don't provide that, we steal from our own future.

I believe that when your child is sick, nothing else matters; that when you call an ambulance, one should show up; that every Albertan deserves medical care when they need it and that the fix is thoughtful, hard work, not private profits.

I believe we need to protect our air, land, and water, and I will make sure that companies clean up their own messes. I will not allow our Rockies to be coal mined. I will protect our water, and I will ensure that our children and grandchildren have access to the beautiful biodiversity that is the Rockies.

I believe that every family deserves a roof over their head and food on their table and the occasional vacation. I will fight to bring down your costs, and I will bring up your wages. I believe that Albertans share these values, rural Albertans and people in cities as well. I believe that we win by talking to people about those values, and I believe that we already have the team to do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has a statement to make.

Food Donations in Lacombe-Ponoka

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are difficult times for many families in Alberta. Rising costs are forcing more and more families to choose between heating and eating. According to StatsCan about 22 per cent of families here in Alberta experience some level of food insecurity. Sadly, more than 50 tonnes of food is dumped every year. Today I'm proud to report that this problem is being solved by local volunteers rolling up their sleeves to get the job done.

In Lacombe, Echo Food Rescue is working hard to keep edible food out of the landfill. Last year alone they rescued more than 115,000 pounds of food to support local families. Throughout the week food is collected and donated by grocery stores and restaurants and businesses. Twice a week community members are welcome to fill a reusable bag. Local farmers donate their surplus or less than perfect produce. Restaurants donate the extra food left over at the end of the day. One week there may be shelves of yogourt, bread, and pasta; the next may be potatoes, beets, and baby food. Every little bit helps.

Meanwhile in Blackfalds the Beyond Food Hub is another excellent example of a community group going above and beyond the call of duty. First and foremost a food bank, the hub also has a weekly lunch program for school-aged children, monthly food hampers, and an at cost veggie market.

Mr. Speaker, if you have ever been forced to make tough choices to feed your family, you know the desperation being faced by thousands. You also know the spirit-lifting joy that even the smallest gesture of generosity can have. The volunteers at Echo Food Rescue and Beyond Food Hub know they can't change the inflation rate or the unemployment rate or even solve single-handedly the affordable housing crisis, but they also know that they can make a monumental difference in the lives of their friends and neighbours.

Alberta has seen some tough times before, and we've always weathered those storms thanks to an abiding generosity of spirit

built on the kinship we share. That's why I call on folks to take some inspiration from the fine folks at Lacombe's Echo Food Rescue and the Blackfalds' Beyond Food Hub. Make a difference today.

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

Support for LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans

Member Arcand-Paul: Nanaskamon, Mr. Speaker. [Remarks in Cree] Hello, everyone. Today I stand in honour of the trans, gender-diverse, and two-spirit people who have existed on these lands since time immemorial and who will continue to exist despite any government trying to dim their light. As His Majesty's Loyal Opposition I sit across the aisle from this government and witness troubling comments and dangerous rhetoric coming from the UCP caucus about our trans, gender-diverse, and two-spirit kin. Since the Premier announced her arcane policy plans targeting the trans, gender-diverse, and two-spirit community, we've redoubled our efforts on this side of the House to demonstrate our unwavering love and support for our beautiful relatives being attacked by this government.

Today, rather than focusing on all of this government's negativity and hateful discourse, our NDP caucus is celebrating our kin for the amazing humans that they are and recommitting to ensuring that Alberta is always a safe space for them. Our communities are enriched by these folks, some of whom are in the gallery today. They are parents, students, doctors, social workers, industry workers, businesspeople, but most importantly they are human beings. They are Albertans. Even if this government forgets, Alberta stands with them.

Mr. Speaker, we are all here together. Alberta is for all, not just some fundamentalists who seem committed to erasing our names or existence. We are members of society and deserve equal recognition by this government, and we will never stop fighting for it. Alberta will once again show the UCP that it cannot use division and discrimination to score political points.

Human rights are not contingent on the wills of far-right political groups but, instead, on the rights of human beings being *prima facie* in our society. Trans rights are human rights, full stop, and we will celebrate and stand with the amazing folks in attendance today in the gallery and all trans, gender-diverse, and two-spirit people throughout Alberta.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East, the Chair of Committees.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 I can advise the Assembly that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the following petitions which were presented to the Assembly on March 19, 2024: the Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024; Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024; Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024. I'm pleased to report that the petitions comply with the standing orders 90 to 94.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

1:50 Transgender Youth Policy

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, two months ago this Premier appeared before Albertans to announce her policy to marginalize, bully, and discriminate against transgender Albertans, especially those under the age of 18. Through crocodile tears and ignoring the irony, she claimed concern for the safety of children even as she normalized bullying against the most vulnerable children at all to placate extremists in her party. To the Premier: will she look up to the more than 50 guests here and explain to them why their human rights are less important than protecting her leadership?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:50.
The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For some time I've become aware that there are gaps in care for those who are receiving transgender support. We don't do surgeries in our province even though we approve and pay for over a hundred per year. Those individuals have to go Montreal, and when they come back, there's not good postsurgical aftercare. Those who need to have lifelong support for hormone treatment can't easily find a doctor to connect with that. Those who are struggling with gender identity concerns don't have adequate multidisciplinary support. Those are all the gaps that we need to fill. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: They also have a governing party demonizing them. The misinformation the Premier promotes about gender-affirming health care in school curriculum is what creates the real danger to children. What's more, with her proposed hateful policy she's inserting herself into doctors' offices all across the province and telling medical professionals, parents, and vulnerable youth that their needs, their feelings, and their knowledge doesn't matter. So to the Premier: on what planet does she know better about individual young people than their parents, their physicians, and they themselves do?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:51.
The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In an undercover investigation Radio Canada in Quebec recently sent a 14-year-old actress posing as transgender into a private gender clinic. It took nine minutes of consultation for Sacha to get a prescription for testosterone. I think we can all agree that this is not good medical practice, this is not a multidisciplinary approach, this is not ensuring that a child is supported in both their medical needs and their psychological needs. I don't know the extent to which this is happening in Alberta, but we need to make sure that it isn't happening in Alberta so that kids get the support they need. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Notley: What it is, Mr. Speaker, is fearmongering. The Premier's cruel policies are an exercise in state-sanctioned bullying. Courts in other jurisdictions have ruled that laws like these amount to an infringement of the Charter and basic human rights. The protection of human rights, particularly those of a vulnerable minority from a bullying majority, the UCP government in this case, is fundamental to our democracy. As we know, once the rights of one minority are

taken away, others will soon follow. To the Premier: who is next on her hit list?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:53.
The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you talk to anybody who is a parent, they will tell you that is one of the most precious things to them, being able to have children. If you don't go through puberty and become sexually mature, you cannot have children. We believe on this side of the House that kids need to be able to be kids. They need to be able to make these life-changing, important decisions when they're old enough to understand the consequences of those decisions. We are going to support every person in their journey to become who it is that they are meant to be, but we are also going to make sure that adult decisions are made by adults.

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

Member Irwin: I have a nonbinary family member, and I believe these decisions are very personal, and it should not be debated in public: those aren't my words but the words of this Premier, and not decades ago but in 2022. How can that same Premier now stand here today and dare to attack the rights and safety of transgender Albertans? I'm not the only one wondering this. There's a gallery of people watching.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member Irwin: What's changed for this Premier, and if nothing has, will she have the courage to admit that she's wrong? It's not too late to change course.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:54.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping we would be able to depoliticize these issues, but the members opposite keep mischaracterizing what it is that we are trying to do on this side of the House. What we are trying to do . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I had no problem at all hearing the question. I would expect that the Premier would also be able to answer the question and I would be able to hear it.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we are trying to do is make sure that we fill a gap in proper medical and psychological support for those who are going through this type of care.

Ms Notley: You're barring medical services. You're breaching human rights.

Ms Smith: We know that there are many people – one of the doctors that we know who does surgical aftercare has 250 patients, all suffering some type of complication.

Ms Notley: Pandering to extremists.

Ms Smith: We need to make sure that we've got enough medical care and enough psychological care to give the proper support.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:55.

Member Irwin: This really is a case of life or death. We really do have a number of youths who have nowhere else to go if they're not

accepted by their community, not accepted in their home environment. Whose words were those? The words of this same Premier just 10 years ago, and she was absolutely right. We know that queer and trans youth face many barriers and an increased risk of homelessness, with over 30 per cent of unhoused youth identifying as 2SLGBTQ-plus. The Premier knows this. She's known it for a long time. She knows the damage her policies will do, so how can she possibly be willing to make our province even less safe for gender-diverse youth?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I do know is that individuals who are going through these kinds of issues need their family around them. They need to make sure that they are loved and supported for who they are and who they are going to be. Creating divisions in families when individuals are going to need lifelong support is wrong. It's wrong. What we want to do is make sure . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask another question, she's welcome to do so immediately after the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood completes hers.

The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The policies that we are doing are supported by all the adults in their lives, and it's going to make sure that they have the appropriate care when they need it. [interjections]

The Speaker: I just might provide some caution to members of the opposition. If you are going to heckle, you cannot heckle unparliamentary language from your seat.

Member Irwin: Well, let's talk about families, Premier. Most of their parents didn't know they were out yet. Most of them didn't know that if their parents knew, there would be some consequences. One young boy told me that if he came out to his parents, his dad would reject him.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Member Irwin: Words shared by – you guessed it – this Premier. The old her seemed to understand that while it might not always be easy to stand up and be courageous, when it comes to human rights, there is no debate. So I'm begging this version of the Premier to have a good long talk with herself from 10 years ago and remind herself what it means to be an ally, what it means to ensure that young people are protected at home and at school, and what it means to be a leader who leads for all.

Ms Smith: I do reflect on that, and that's why I know from personal experience how important it is for adults in a child's life to support them, to love them, and to make sure that they know that they are understood, they are respected for who they are, and to be given the time to discover who that is. This is the reason why we're taking the approach we are. We know that kids are going to need a multidisciplinary approach. When they do choose to go on to medical intervention, they're going to need to be supported with good medical care for life. That's what we're going to be able to provide.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services raised a point of order at 1:57.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a question to ask.

LGBTQ2S-plus Student Supports

Member Tejada: A disgraced former UCP candidate, Torry Tanner, told a crowd at a UCP event that she's influencing this government's antitrans policies. She was dumped as a candidate for lying about pornography in schools and attacking teachers for recognizing students' preferred pronouns. At the UCP event she said, quote, we've provided a way for teachers to become pedophiles, but even more concerning, Tanner said that she met with the Education minister and he committed to act on her policy ideas. Why is the Education minister implementing antitrans far-right policies in schools based on the conspiracy theories of an embarrassing failed candidate? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we're doing nothing of the sort. It's important to provide clarity. The Education Act stipulates very clearly that all school boards must ensure that they create a safe, welcoming, and caring environment for all schools. That's provincial legislation. Those are mandated requirements that are required of all school boards. We'll continue to work with our school boards to ensure that they meet that objective to ensure that every student is welcomed at their school.

2:00

Member Tejada: You can create the conditions for that to happen.

Given that as a parent I know teachers are crucial to the well-being of all students, including our trans and gender-diverse youth, and given that Torry Tanner told the UCP audience that, quote, we're learning of teachers who are counselling their students to change their gender identity and given that this government's policies would prohibit teachers even affirming preferred pronouns, why is the Education minister not defending teachers from these far-right, radical attacks, and why is he putting in place the same radical agenda called on by a disgraced former UCP candidate?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, there's no radical agenda. The Education Act already stipulates that parents are to be involved and that parents have the ability to opt out of any instructional material that deals with human sexuality and/or religion. This is stated legislation, and we'll be expanding this to include subject matter related to sexual or gender identity, in the same premise that the current practice exists within the legislation, to ensure that parents have the final ability in determining the education of their children.

Member Tejada: Slippery slope of the UCP agenda.

Given that the UCP's failed candidate hailed this Premier's policies as, quote, a huge victory and given that trans and gender-diverse youth deserve a place to simply be themselves at school and given that students and teachers in communities such as Red Deer have raised concerns that these policies are being implemented, why won't the Education minister stand up for all students and ensure that trans and gender-diverse youth have safe schools, a recognition of their preferred pronouns, and a clear, loud rejection of all the far-right hatred directed their way?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I will always stand up to ensure that all students have a safe, caring, and welcoming environment at school. That's precisely why those policies exist within the Education Act. That's precisely why gay-straight alliances and other clubs will continue to operate and exist in schools as normal so that we can ensure that students have a safe and welcoming place at school should they need it. Of course, we're also looking to

support and supplement counselling and mental health services so that all students have the support that they need. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Access to Surgical Procedures

Dr. Metz: Yesterday we heard that the number of surgeries completed in Alberta during the '23-24 fiscal year increased by less than one-quarter of a per cent over the previous year despite a much greater investment in chartered surgical facilities. Now, with more investment in chartered surgical facilities the minister promises that the number of surgeries will increase this year by almost 6 per cent and calls this improving access to surgical care. Can the minister tell Albertans how using the same plan is expected to get better results?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I believe the members opposite have their facts wrong. In fact, we have increased 6 per cent from '22-23 to '23-24, and we plan to make that even grow further. In Budget 2024 it includes \$618 million to reach our target of 310,000 surgeries this year. Budget 2024 includes an investment of \$4.4 billion in operating expense for acute care. We've gone from 40 per cent to over 61 per cent in clinically approved time periods.

Dr. Metz: The press release from the minister demonstrated that there were 650 additional surgeries done out of about 300,000 during the past year. With population growth and this plan of 6 per cent plus a quarter per cent over the next two years it is clear that Alberta is falling behind in the number of surgeries that are needed. Showing an increase in the number of surgeries does not mean progress when we need to bump this up and get a better pace. What does the minister plan to do to stop the situation in Alberta from deteriorating further?

Member LaGrange: Again, Mr. Speaker, they're quoting inaccurate numbers. In fact, the number of surgeries that were actually performed in '22-23, if they'd like to listen, was 292,500. In fact, we are on track to get to 310,000, which is a 6 per cent overall increase, in '23-24, and I anticipate going even further in the subsequent year. Unlike the members opposite, we're committed to making sure surgeries get done.

Dr. Metz: The minister reports that capital investments will enhance the surgical capacity in several rural hospitals, including places like Rocky Mountain House, which already face closures of existing resources and facilities. How does the minister plan to find physicians and nurses to staff these new surgical facilities? Will the minister commit to reporting the number of operations that occur in each of these new surgical facilities so that Albertans can see if they are getting value for their investment and that rural Albertans are getting the care that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the members opposite, we can walk and chew gum. We can do both. We can actually increase capacity within our facilities right across the province, and we also can bring in additional supports and workforce. In fact, in Rocky Mountain House the physicians, the orthopaedic surgeons that will be doing those surgeries, will be coming from outside of the area as well as supporting those physicians that can do surgeries within their local area. We are able to increase the numbers, and I'm glad the members opposite can see that we will make this transparent to Albertans.

Grassy Mountain Coal Project

Dr. Elmeligi: The minister and Premier have both asserted that the Grassy Mountain coal mine will improve the environment by reclaiming the historical mine footprint from the 1960s. They don't want to tell Albertans about how this exploration is larger, with more test pits digging deeper for an even larger mine than what was already rejected. They want Albertans to believe that this advanced project can never die even though it's been denied. They don't want to tell Albertans that nowhere in this new exploration proposal does Northback mines talk about reclaiming their footprint. Will the minister be up front with Albertans about what is involved with this exploration proposal? [interjections]

The Speaker: Just prior to me calling the hon. the minister, I might remind members that if they want to have a private conversation, there are lots of places in the building to do it. Across the aisle is not one of them.

The hon. the minister of energy.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the member that, first of all, we're not going to do what the NDP tried to do in 2015, 2016, 2017. We are not going to invite Australian and other countries' billionaires into Alberta to mine the coal in any way they want to do, especially not in category 2 lands. Now, they made some amazingly bad moves for Albertans in relation to our environment. We're going to put people first, Albertans first. That means clean water that is protected by this government, a clean environment that is protected by this government, including the land and the air. We are going to protect Albertans.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. Well, let's talk about some bad moves that this government has made, then. Given that coal exploration also comes with its own impacts, particularly in the form of new road building and what is referred to as linear disturbance, which impacts ecosystem function in many ways, given that in 2020, when the coal policy was revoked, 450 kilometres of new roads and redisturbed roads were approved for coal exploration by the AER and given that these roads are supposed to be reclaimed within five years of exploration permits, can the minister guarantee these roads will be reclaimed by 2025? How many kilometres of road have been reclaimed so far?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, acting in the best interests of Albertans means we are open-minded about the long-term solution of the best interests of Albertans. It doesn't mean we're close-minded. It also doesn't mean that we have the number one export terminal in North America for coal like their cousins to the west of us, in NDP land, have in B.C. The mother ship in Ottawa is truly in control. There are record shipments in B.C., and meanwhile the NDP in Alberta are suggesting that they stand up for the people of Alberta on coal. They don't. They never have. They never will. They should stop focusing on something that they have . . .

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

Dr. Elmeligi: I'll take that as a zero.

Given that coal exploration projects from 2020 resulted in a road density three times higher than what ecosystems can sustain in some parts of the eastern slopes and given that these currently unreclaimed roads are shedding sediment into waterways, spreading invasive weeds, and damaging the precious eastern slopes every day, given that reclamation of industrial liabilities and impacts seems to be a continual struggle for this government, what assurances do Albertans have that these exploration roads and test

pads will actually be reclaimed or that a Grassy Mountain mine would fully be reclaimed anyway?

2:10

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we are going to listen to Albertans. We are going to make sure we have comprehensive consultation on the land use right across Alberta because it is so important to Albertans. What we aren't going to do is talk one way and act another. We are going to do what's in the best . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of energy.

Mr. Jean: We are going to listen carefully. We are going to do what's in the best interest of Albertans always, Mr. Speaker, and we are going to make sure we do that by truly listening to all Albertans and making sure their best interests, their environment is taken as cause number one.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has a question.

Navigation and Support Centre

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public safety is a serious concern and continues affecting people across Alberta. We have heard reports of people getting stabbed in Edmonton and seen the effects of gang-operated drug markets and encampments growing in our cities. Removing the encampments has been a key first step in stopping the gangs and violent criminals that are hurting our communities. Repeat violent offenders appear to have no consequences as they prey on vulnerable Albertans. To the Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services: how is the Navigation and Support Centre keeping our cities and vulnerable Edmontonians safe?

Mr. Ellis: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. She is absolutely correct. These encampments are unsafe, gang-run drug markets. People were actually getting burned alive. They were being stabbed. They were being sexually assaulted. There was human trafficking that was going on. You know, the police chief of Edmonton, Chief McFee, has said that since they've opened up the navigation centre, there have been no deaths in the encampments, and in fact there have been no people being burned to death, which is a positive thing for Edmonton. You know what? People are actually getting supports, unlike the members opposite, where they would actually have people stay in these encampments and give them the drugs in order for them to continue to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that the Navigation and Support Centre has connected hundreds of people to services under one roof and is a better alternative for individuals living in high-risk encampments and given that we have heard countless stories about lives being changed, people being helped and given a sense of hope, to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: what does the future of the Navigation and Support Centre look like, and how will it continue to have an impact on lives here in Edmonton and across our province?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will make sure that the NDP's plan to house homeless people inside tents, where they are being

victimized and losing their lives, will not take place anywhere in this province, not just in Edmonton. We'll continue the navigation centre in Edmonton, we'll expand to Calgary, and we will expand its mechanisms across the province to keep homeless people safe. Here in Edmonton in two short months over 500 people have been housed. That is a stark contrast to the NDP's plan to put them in tents and let them freeze to death. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given that many who experience homelessness are suffering from the deadly disease of addiction, which puts them in a more dangerous, devastating situation, and given that our province has . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms de Jonge: . . . been building the Alberta recovery model to support people in their pursuit of recovery and to no longer be stuck in the throes of addiction, to the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: how is the Navigation and Support Centre connecting people with life-saving addiction treatment and recovery?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that we are not going to sit back and wait for addiction to run its course with Alberta's most vulnerable. What that navigation centre has done is connected Albertans with life-saving treatment. One example is an individual in his 70s who had not known about the virtual opioid dependency program and, because of that program, now has life-saving access to treatment, something that, if you oppose the navigation centre, would never have happened for that individual and hundreds of others when it comes to services we provide. We're proud of our compassionate approach, and we're going to continue to do this because we have a moral responsibility to help the most vulnerable in our province.

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

Life Lease Housing

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. Yesterday I introduced some scores of Albertans fighting to get back millions of dollars owed to them by their landlord, Greg Christenson. I asked the minister of service Alberta why he failed to consult with them, and he dismissed them, saying: they're just a Facebook group. He said he met with them on March 14. While he did meet with them, will the minister admit that he denied them any involvement to improve the legislation before this Assembly that does nothing to actually help people get their money back, in many cases their life savings?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. It's terrible when you have vulnerable seniors that can't get their life savings back, and our heart goes out to them. Yeah; we did meet with them. This group formed on March 6; we met with them on March 14. Prior to that, they were just a Facebook group, but we met with them as well. In fact, we met with over 170 members of that group, and we'll continue to do so.

Ms Renaud: Given that dismissing a group of concerned Albertans, many of them seniors, as just a Facebook group is incredibly insulting and given the stress they're going through

trying to recoup their life savings from a greedy landlord, given the minister said that they actually didn't exist prior to March 6, which is untrue, Mr. Speaker; these Albertans have had concerns for well over a year, to the minister of service Alberta: will you admit that this dismissive tone and bungling of the life lease file adds to the stress of dozens of Albertans trying to get what is owed to them by Christenson?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, this nonprofit group was formed on March 6. That's the fact. We met with them on March 14. And not only that; we met with the founders of that Facebook group ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we met with the founders of that Facebook group. In fact, we met with 170 of them. We heard what they had to say, and we put some thoughtful protections in legislation, and I look forward to debating that in the House.

Ms Renaud: Still seems pretty defensive today.

The minister of service Alberta keeps hiding behind the claim that he can't comment on the life lease fiasco because it's currently being investigated and given, in fact, that there is no investigation into the previous life lease agreements and the money owed to these Albertans and what's being investigated are the shady sales tactics of Christenson, that has nothing to do with the issue at hand, will the minister of service Alberta admit he was not honest with this Assembly by saying he cannot comment on this matter because it's being investigated? They want answers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

On more than one occasion during that question a point of order could have been called, particularly when the hon. member implied that the minister of service Alberta was not honest. We know it would be a point of order. The hon. member can rise and apologize for her comments.

Ms Renaud: Sure. I apologize and withdraw my comment of the minister not being honest.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, that member seems a little angrier than usual today. But that member also knows, or at least that member ought to know that when the matter ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

You might not like the answer; the minister quite likely didn't like the question either, but he remained in his seat ... [interjections] Order. And he allowed the question to be answered. He should have the same right.

The hon. the minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That member knows, or at least that member ought to know that when a matter is being investigated, it's inappropriate for elected officials to comment. In fact, I think back to when their ethics critic was investigated for hacking into AHS. They didn't want to comment at that time because they know it's inappropriate. To the member opposite: do better for your constituents. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I would like to bring to the attention of the House an egregious cellphone infraction somewhere in the neighbourhood of the hon.

Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I can't point specifically but perhaps maybe can remind them of the necessary arrangements that should be made if such an egregious incident takes place.

Social Studies Curriculum

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, a key goal for any government is to prepare children for success and for jobs of the future. Whatever the future holds, governments must ensure that children have the knowledge, critical thinking skills, and resilience to navigate the economy of tomorrow, but given how the UCP is bungling the curriculum with an ideological approach – their second attempt is so bad that experts consulted for the social studies curriculum are now disavowing it – how can the minister prepare children for the future when this government can't get a curriculum right after the second try?

2:20

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, the social studies curriculum will give students a deep foundation in history – Canadian history, global history – which, of course, I think as everybody understands and can recognize is essential to be able to understand contemporary issues. In addition, the social studies curriculum will focus on giving students critical thinking skills that are essential to their lifelong success. As an example, in grade 5 students will work to differentiate between primary and secondary sources, distinguish between the steps and research processes, and other skills will be sharpened throughout the curriculum as well.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, given that educators say that this curriculum uses an approach that is outdated by decades without building age-appropriate skills or understanding and that it treats students as empty vessels to be filled with information and given that the criticisms sound very similar to the government's last attempt to rewrite the social studies curriculum, which was called Eurocentric, age inappropriate, and too focused on memorization, when is the minister willing to change his rigid ideological ways and actually adapt and deliver a curriculum that prepares Alberta children for the jobs of tomorrow?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, that statement is completely ridiculous. The only ones who are intent on driving ideology into the curriculum were the NDP when they were in office. They were determined to ensure that social studies creates, quote, agents of change. End quote. That was their objective. They had a very clear ideological objective with the curriculum. Our objective is to ensure that students are presented with an unbiased interpretation of the facts, an unbiased view of history to be able to form their own conclusions and sharpen their critical thinking skills.

Mr. Ip: Given that the government's ideological approach to education is deeply concerning and disregards all advice from educators and experts and given that children need a curriculum that enables them to develop the skills and competencies to succeed and adapt in an ever-changing world, not to mention develop a sense of agency to be active, engaged citizens, and given that these skills and competencies are also needed in the modern workplace, which requires critical, solution-based thinking, is the government so entrenched in their ideology that they are willing to put future generations at risk?

Mr. Nicolaidis: No, we're not, Mr. Speaker. That's why we took the NDP ideology out of the curriculum and got back to an approach whereby we teach an objective view of history to give them foundations for the future. In addition, as I mentioned, additional critical thinking skills will be sharpened in grade 6. Students will

formulate project plans, carry out project plans, and reflect on the outcome. In grade 2 students will learn to differentiate fact from opinion, formulate personal opinions about topics, all of the critical skills that are essential to them being informed citizens.

Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, \$2.75 billion: that's the amount of savings to Albertans, their families, and their businesses with all the red tape reduction we have reduced since 2019. These savings come alongside our government hitting our 33 per cent red tape production goal this year. This is a massive accomplishment, and I am proud of all the work that our government has done to get out of the way of Albertans and Alberta businesses. Can the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction inform the House of how we achieved this impressive milestone?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what this means. This means that our plan is working. We've cut red tape by 33 per cent. We've saved job creators \$2.75 billion. Individuals are flocking to Alberta at unprecedented levels, and investment is following. If I had said five years ago that we'd be building airplanes in Alberta, you would have told me I was crazy, but that's what's happening. De Havilland is building their water bombers right here in Alberta. Our economy is on fire, and we're proud of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that reducing red tape is important to attracting more people and investment to this province for all sectors and industries and given that when we streamline the regulatory process for an industry, you increase the efficiency of doing business, which saves Albertans time and money, can the minister share with the House which ministry was able to reduce the most red tape while reaching this goal?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, what that member is really asking is: who is really winning on red tape reduction? The answer to that question is Albertans. We've cut red tape. We've saved billions for job creators. Individuals are flocking to Alberta, and investment is following. We've seen Dow Chemical make a \$10 billion investment. We've seen Air Products make a \$1.6 billion investment. You know what else? Housing starts are through the roof. Our economy is on fire, and we feel terrific about it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that regulatory burden creeps up over time and given that although we have to hit this impressive goal of 33 per cent regulatory reduction, we need to continue working to ensure that Alberta stays the best place to live, work, invest, and do business, can the minister inform the House of his plans to continue reducing red tape to drive economic growth into the future?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what we're going to do. We're going to continue cutting red tape. In fact, you could say that red tape is dropping faster than the NDP in the polls, and that's saying a lot. I'm not sure if you've seen the last poll, but Albertans are rejecting their socialist fantasies.

Now, here's the best part. We're introducing another piece of red tape reduction, a bill, in just a couple of weeks. It's going to reduce

red tape even further, and not only that, Mr. Speaker; we're going to enshrine the principles of red tape reduction in legislation. I look forward to bringing that forward. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Alberta Energy Regulator

Mr. Schmidt: In May 2022 the Alberta Energy Regulator was informed that brown sludge had been found outside of the Kearn site. Two years later there have been multiple subsequent incidents. The underlying issues have not been addressed, and the AER and government are being sued for over a billion dollars. The CEO, Laurie Pushor, has clearly failed in his role to regulate the industry effectively, and the board has failed to hold the CEO accountable. Why is the minister standing by the board and the CEO of the AER?

Mr. Jean: Because they're doing a great job, Mr. Speaker. You know, when I travel the world, as I did last week to Houston and the week before to Toronto, I have one overwhelming question from energy providers all over the planet: how do you get such a great regulator to do such an incredible job for your industry? Well, I'm proud to say that it's the great men and women that work in that AER that do such a great job. Are they perfect? No. But every single day they try to get perfect because that's where Albertans expect us to be. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar without a preamble.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that rural municipalities are owed over \$200 million in unpaid property taxes and given that this number has been growing under the UCP with \$43 million of that bill added in the 2023 tax year and given that the president of the RMA has said that the Alberta Energy Regulator has looked the other way when it comes to the nonpayment of property taxes and asks: when will the AER regulate in the public interest? Will the minister explain when the AER will start regulating in the public interest, or is he just seeing how high the unpaid tax bill will climb?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, taking lessons from the NDP on the AER: well, the criticisms from them are about as good as the work that they did when they were in government. When the NDP was in government, the AER's executives were running a for-profit, get-rich scheme . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the minister of energy has the call.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just repeat that. When the NDP was government, the AER's executives, which are no longer there, were running a get-rich profit scheme on the backs of Albertans. Now, that was under the NDP's nose. Their management of the AER was shameful, and we're not going to let that happen. In the meantime we're doing everything we can to stand up for people . . .

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

Mr. Schmidt: Given that it's remarkable to hear the energy minister say that we should be ashamed of letting the AER fleece the people of Alberta for a million dollars but he's absolutely proud that they're being sued for over a billion dollars, when will the minister stop working for the AER and start working for the Albertans that hired him and fire the board and the CEO?

2:30

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, after what the NDP did with managing the AER, the people of Alberta fired them. Now we're in charge, and we're doing everything we can to stand up for the environment and stand up for Albertans, and we're going to do exactly that. We're cleaning up the environment that they left behind. In fact, we saw record numbers of wells cleaned up last year, and we expect more this year. We're doing a great job, and we appreciate everything the hard-working men and women do in the AER and elsewhere in the Alberta government.

Thank you.

Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, I have a message from Albertans to Trudeau and his ilk: Alberta is a land of freedom and prosperity; woke, socialist ways do not belong here; go away, and leave us alone. Albertans do not like surprise NDP carbon taxes. Albertans fired the NDP. Trudeau and his NDP puppets are the very, very worst. They are all bad. To the minister: why is Trudeau's carbon tax . . .

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It is clear that the carbon tax isn't working. Federal Minister Guilbeault has said that maybe it will work in 2060. The member is right: it's very bad. It's very bad. We know that this increase will cost Albertan households \$911 a year. That's a \$200 increase. We know that Trudeau and his federal government want Canadians to drive less. They've also said that they do not intend to help us continue to build roads across our province. He wants everyone to stop enjoying our province. Come April 1, the carbon tax will increase 23 per cent, making every aspect of life more expensive.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the U.S. has no federal carbon tax and given that Canada's per capita GDP is falling like a rock and given that Trudeau wants to jack up his carbon tax each year to 2030, more than doubling it, harming Alberta businesses and families, to the minister: how do we fix the damage of this dead weight Prime Minister, the very, very worst ever, and his hated carbon tax?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal carbon tax is a tax on a tax on a tax. Axing the tax will reduce inflation, increase affordability, create jobs, and attract investment. While the Bank of Canada has stated that the Trudeau-NDP carbon tax increases inflation year over year, our government's affordability action plan has already measurably lowered the rate of inflation for Albertans. We are also modernizing our electricity system to reduce the impacts of the carbon tax and lower Albertans' utility bills. Unlike Trudeau's carbon tax, our policies will actually reduce emissions.

Mr. Stephan: Given that Trudeau is an unwelcome guest in House Alberta, lying on our couch all day, throwing virtue signalling garbage on the floor, watching himself on CBC all day, filling his mind with Pabulum mush, destroying Canada, aided and abetted by the useless NDP, to the minister: how do we kick Trudeau and his hated carbon tax out of House Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that every opportunity that I, fellow ministers, and the Premier have to discuss the impact the carbon tax has on Albertans, we take at that level. This includes numerous conversations with the Liberal federal government, whether that's in FPT meeting settings, the Premier's joint letter, signed with six other Premiers. I know that the Premier is testifying to the Government Operations and Estimates Committee tomorrow, because they were deliberately ignored by the Finance Committee, and I heard that the Saskatchewan Premier, Scott Moe, had a very passionate testimony today. So we're not alone in this effort.

Land Titles Levy

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, this government is obsessed with making Albertans pay more in higher taxes and fees. They took nearly \$700 million from Albertans when they deindexed the tax code, they took millions out of the pockets of disabled Albertans when they deindexed AISH, and this week they will impose a \$430 million tax hike on Albertans. This budget also makes it more expensive for Albertans to buy a home, with their more expensive land title tax. Will the minister agree that this is a bad idea and cancel it?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you recall, the NDP in 2017 cancelled the land titles transformation project, and they literally sentenced Albertans to have to suffer through four- and five-month wait-lists. They caused grief for the municipalities, for developers, realtors. It was a nightmare. You know what? We can't make that same mistake, so we're investing in land titles. Because we process \$50 billion a year in land titles transactions, we need a system to process that, and we need a way to pay for it. That's what this is.

Member Boparai: Given that the government anticipates that this new tax will cost Albertans \$45 million this year, \$91 million next year, and given that over two years they plan to raise over \$100 million from Albertans looking to buy a home and given that this is the worst decision that a government can make during an affordability crisis, why is the government looking to target homebuyers with more and more higher costs? Don't they see what a bad idea this is?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't stress enough that our province is growing at unprecedented levels and, as I said earlier, our plan is working. But you know what? We need to have systems in place to deal with that growth, so we need to invest in land titles. As further proof, in the last three years construction has started on more rental units than were built in the preceding 15 years combined. So, yes, we did increase the land title fee, but I can say this: it's still the lowest in the country, and we had a very light touch when we looked at it. We think we got it right.

Member Boparai: Given that this government is advertising Alberta as a place with lower house prices and given that under this government rent is becoming unaffordable and given that if they have their way, it will become more expensive to buy a house and given that Alberta families looking to buy a home shouldn't be punished with \$500 in higher fees, will the minister explain why he is supporting this dream-killing housing tax, and will he stop it?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this is all they've got, it must be a slow news day for the NDP. I've got to tell you that our economy is on fire; our housing starts are through the roof. We saw the most housing starts in January since 2015, and we saw 48 per cent more housing starts than January 2023. Yes, we need a way to pay for this, but we think we got it right. We took a look across the country and we made sure that we had the lowest land transfer fee by a country mile. We're 40 per cent less than Saskatchewan, and we're about 75 per cent less than most other provinces. This was a very light touch and won't impact housing.

Postsecondary Tuition and Student Financial Aid

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, it's going to be a cruel summer for Alberta students as they wonder how they will be able to afford their studies amid high tuition increases. In fact, tuition has gone up by 33 per cent in the last four years because of the UCP, and tuition is higher here than the national average. Does the Minister of Advanced Education want to tell students to cancel their summer plans because they will need two jobs just to get by, or is this government planning to address these unfair and unaffordable tuition increases?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned about the messaging that is coming from members of the opposition, especially at a time when postsecondary institutions, our world-class institutions, here in Alberta are trying to be globally competitive to attract faculty and international students. The fact of the matter is that tuition is at a national average across the country. Actually, our 2024 budget is incredibly healthy and incredibly robust, and certainly these postsecondary institutions have lots of supports at their disposal.

Member Hoyle: Given that students are couch surfing, sleeping in cars, and turning to campus food banks, all at record rates, and given that the government knows students are struggling because the UCP had to double the amount of money for student loans, which is the canary in the coal mine for student affordability, and given that students should be able to pursue their studies without incurring tens of thousands of dollars of debt, something previous generations were able to achieve, will the minister admit the UCP are the reason students could no longer afford their studies.

2:40

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we value the voices of students in this government. In fact, during my engagement with postsecondaries across the province I met with student leaders many times. Based on their feedback, we have capped tuition at 2 percent at public postsecondary institutions, and based on their feedback, we have reduced the interest rate on student loans, and based on their feedback, we have extended the payment and interest-free grace period for loans to 12 months. Again, we do take their feedback into consideration when we're looking at policy levers related to addressing affordability.

Member Hoyle: Given that students should not be treated like cash cows for university, something the NDP have always understood, which is why we froze tuition, and given that under the UCP government Albertan students have more debt than the average Canadian student and given that postsecondary education unlocks bright futures and enriches our economy, when students can afford

to get degrees, will the minister explain why this government is comfortable with price gouging students who try to study in Alberta?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, student loans are up because enrolment is up. We have had record migration into this province. People all across the world and all across the country want to study at our world-class postsecondary institutions. We have over \$1.4 billion in supports to help students access postsecondary education, and we also have about \$113 million in scholarships and awards for about 7,500 students across the province in Alberta. Again, Budget 2024 for Advanced Education has a very, very healthy and robust budget.

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

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill Pr. 2, Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024, sponsored by myself.

Thank you.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill Pr. 3, Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024, sponsored by myself.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill Pr. 4, Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024, sponsored by myself.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of e-mails around the life lease consumer investigation unit, proving what I mentioned earlier in my question.

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table more e-mails from constituents, this time a constituent in Edmonton who is urging the UCP and all members of this House to support Bill 205 and support rent caps.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. As earlier mentioned, at 1:50, 1:51, 1:52, 1:53, 1:55, and 1:57 points of order were raised. I'm not sure if the hon. the Government House Leader would like to deal with those in a group or individually, but I will call on him to do so now.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I dive into the points of order, given that this may take some time, I do wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m.

With that said, I will combine the first three points of order, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: The first point of order. The Leader of the Opposition was speaking at the time mentioned and said, when referring to the Premier: “as she normalized bullying against the most vulnerable children.” This is obviously against 23(h), (i), and (j), which I usually have on me, but at this point in time I don’t have. I’m sure one of my colleagues will be able to find that for me in just a moment. But it certainly implies false motives and uses language that would create disorder in this Chamber. Again, when referring to the – thank you – Premier, said: “as she normalized bullying against the most vulnerable children.”

The second point of order would be during the second question. The hon. Leader of the Opposition had said that the Premier is promoting misinformation. You cannot do, Mr. Speaker, indirectly what you cannot do directly in this Chamber. Again, that would be referring to the word “lying.” There are many ways to go about using that term. Certainly, misinformation and promoting it or suggesting a member of this Chamber is promoting misinformation would be unparliamentary.

The third point of order is, at the time noted, said at the end of the question, which would be the third question in the first set of questions for the Leader of the Opposition. “To the Premier: who is next on her hit list?” Mr. Speaker, a hit list is a list which you create to kill someone. I don’t think there’s any suggestion otherwise; whether the Leader of the Opposition meant that or something else, I think the choice of language is abhorrent. The Leader of the Opposition, being a very senior-ranking member and long-standing member of this Chamber, should know much better than to use that kind of language in this Chamber.

At your pleasure, Mr. Speaker, I do combine the first three points of order.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Upon reviewing the comments and the questions, certainly it would have been more parliamentary to refer to government policy to marginalize, to refer to government policy normalizing bullying, and to the government actions in this case. I certainly would, on behalf of the member, apologize and withdraw for unparliamentary language and personalization used in these questions.

The Speaker: I appreciate the apology. I might just add – and, typically speaking, the Speaker accepts those apologies without comment and considers the matter dealt with and concluded. However, in this case it’s reasonable to believe that the Official Opposition did so intentionally, which certainly does not help decorum inside this Chamber. I implore her to not do that in the future. Having said that, I do consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. the Government House Leader is rising on additional points of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language Exhibits

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fourth point of order I’ll deal with on its own. This was with regard to conduct by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. There are two here that I’m combining; I called one, but hopefully I can deal with two at the same time.

One is on the comments which say, as much I can paraphrase without the Blues that you have, Mr. Speaker: “How can that same Premier now stand here today and dare to attack the rights and safety of transgender Albertans?” I think it’d be abhorrent to suggest the Premier is deliberately standing in this Chamber or outside of this Chamber, for that matter, behind a podium attacking anyone. We work for Albertans. It is our job to do what’s in their best interests. As a government we feel we’re doing that regardless of policy, whether the opposition agrees with it or not.

At the same time I would like to make a note about the use of props in the Chamber. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood continues to use props with stickers on her laptop. You have provided caution on this already. At the time the member was speaking, stickers were clearly visible. I myself had a sticker on my laptop promoting a certain government agency that I felt was aligned with my beliefs and political beliefs, and I removed that sticker, as was directed by the chair. The member opposite has not done that. Those stickers were clearly visible while on camera, and that is a breach of something you’ve already provided caution on.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the first point of order, around language, on behalf of the member I’ll apologize and withdraw.

On the second point, I’m afraid my back was turned to the member, and I was not able to see and did not realize the point of order had to do with props, so I cannot speak to that.

2:50

The Speaker: I will accept the apology and consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

With respect to the use of props or stickers I notice that members who have elected to use props or stickers on their Legislative Assembly Office devices have been fairly reasonable about ensuring that they are covered. I didn’t notice that today. However, if they weren’t, that is a point of order, particularly given the fact that I have provided caution. I might just mention to members more broadly that those devices are Legislative Assembly Office devices and not personal devices. Perhaps we can conduct ourselves in a manner that would reflect the fact that they are Legislative Assembly property and not personal property. But it is important that should they not heed that advice, those laptops need to be covered with the appropriate coverage if they don’t remove those stickers on their own accord. I am unaware of that happening today, but I encourage the government and opposition House leaders to ensure that’s the case in the future.

The hon. the Government House Leader is rising on the last point of order, or perhaps he has more than one.

Mr. Schow: There are two, Mr. Speaker. I called one, and the hon. Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services also called one, but I’ll argue that one separately.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: This point of order is with regard to the Leader of the Opposition. This comment was made off the record, not while speaking, so I don’t know if it was caught by the mics. The Leader of the Opposition said while the Premier was speaking, “You’re breaching human rights,” and in a separate comment said also: you are “pandering to extremists.” Those are comments directed at a specific member in this Chamber. Those comments would clearly create disorder. They would impute false motives against the hon.

Premier. I think that is unparliamentary language. The Leader of the Opposition knows that, should know better, and I would ask that those comments be withdrawn, apologize, and not use them any further.

The Speaker: The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader. I might provide some help to her in arguing this point of order because I do have the benefit of the Blues. The statements that have been made by the Government House Leader will be confirmed by the Speaker as I have the benefit of the Blues. I'm not sure if that impacts your decision to rise and argue the point of order.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member I will apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded. On your last point of order.

Point of Order Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a busy day stacking up Ws right now.

My last one is with regard to comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Usually I would actually let this slide, but I feel that lately members of the opposition, while asking questions, are not doing so through the chair but, rather, appear to be making direct comments to members across the aisle. In this instance the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood opened her question by saying, "Let's talk about families, Premier." Now, the question went on to say that most parents don't know, most of them didn't know if their parents would have consequences, and asking questions regarding policy.

I don't take issue with the nature of the question, but I do again believe that if we're looking to promote decorum in this Chamber, we should adhere to the rules that have been laid out, one of which is addressing the Speaker and addressing the Chamber through the Speaker. That is clearly not being done in this instance. I think it's a point of order. I would ask that that member in the future act more accordingly to the decorum levels that we are expected to have in this Chamber.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For this point of order I don't have the benefit of the Blues in front of me, so I will simply defer to your ruling. Based on what I have in front of me, I believe the member was speaking through the chair, but that may not be accurate.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues. While perhaps not the most egregious case of not directing comments through the chair this afternoon, I would take this as an opportunity to remind members that decorum is always increased when debate is depersonalized and comments are directed through the chair, and I will remind all members to act accordingly. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Okay. I'd call the committee to order.

Bill 14 Appropriation Act, 2024

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024. For those following along at home, since we've been in the Legislature this last session, we've had a budget that has been introduced by this government, and I can tell you that it's really unfortunate to see that this budget is full of broken promises from this UCP government. There were a lot of promises that were made prior to the election, and this was a great opportunity for the government to fulfill those promises, and we haven't seen that.

Bill 14 outlines a whole bunch of different areas where government has done spending. The major concern is that none of this spending actually helps Albertans deal with the affordability crisis that has been impacted and enhanced by this government. We attempted to bring up many of the issues in estimates and then again in supplemental supply to ask those questions that Albertans are asking about why this government is proposing this legislation, this bill, this budget that doesn't actually address the needs that Albertans are saying are important. At one point there were conversations happening in estimates from the ministers that had nothing to do with their budget or the legislation. I have to say, Mr. Chair, that I've learned a lot about some of the personal lives of the ministers but not a lot about defending this budget.

When we're here in the Chamber and we're talking about the legislation related to the budget, which Bill 14 is, it's quite concerning that the messages that we're hearing from Albertans are related to things like affordability, health care, education, and this doesn't address the real needs of Albertans at the time. What Albertans care about is wanting to know that when they need a doctor, they have one. So many of my constituents have reached out and have let me know that their family doctor that they've had perhaps for 20 or more years has either left the province or is retiring because of the chaotic state that this government has created for family physicians in the province. When you're sick, you should be able to go and talk to your family doctor, and if you don't have a family doctor, you should be able to adequately find one. Well, that's not the case.

We have a government that had this opportunity with their budget to provide some real assurances to Albertans about what possibly they could look forward to when it came to health care. Prior to the election we heard a commitment that they would build the south Edmonton hospital, the Airdrie health centre, the cardiac centre in Lethbridge. Surprise, surprise: this budget does not address any of that. One of the lines that we continue to hear from the Health minister is that they are supporting a new stand-alone Stollery hospital. That is incredible. That is wonderful. As a mom who had a newborn baby at the Stollery and lived there with him in his first few weeks of life, I know the importance of a Stollery. But saying that you're building one and not the other doesn't make sense, especially when it was a commitment from this government and this Premier that they would go ahead with that. When asked what the solution would be, because they are not going forward with the south Edmonton hospital, the Premier said that south Edmonton residents can drive to Red Deer.

3:00

Well, I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that when I was talking with my own family doctor about this, she said: I don't know whether to

laugh or cry because it's so outrageous that the leader of the government is saying that but absolutely heartbreaking for those Albertans that that is the reality, that their Premier is saying that if you need a hospital in south Edmonton, just drive to Red Deer. I don't know about you, but I know in my house when an emergency happens, you're trying to find the nearest hospital; you're not packing your bag and planning a trip to drive down the QE II to see a doctor. That's absolutely absurd and offensive that that's the plan for this government.

The fact that they left it out of the budget is awful, and it's a broken promise. We know that in the province of Alberta we're seeing – sorry, the Premier's budget numbers say that inflation and population are set to grow by 6.2 per cent. But the services that are outlined in the budget are stalled at 3.9 per cent. So there's an acknowledgement from this government of what the expectation and the growth is, yet we're seeing a direct budget that reflects not even supporting that, not even supporting the growth of the population and inflation. What that means is that those that are struggling are not getting the support that they need. When you come to the province and you're excited and you're going to build or buy a new home, you're now stuck with an additional \$550 fee.

Mr. Chair, when you're buying a new home, the whole process of moving, period, is quite expensive. You have all of – just never mind the stuff that comes along into your home, but you're setting up your utilities, and all of those things have a fee. When you're already paying skyrocketing utilities because the UCP took away the caps, it's a little bit of a slap in the face to have a budget that says: we're not acknowledging that you're struggling; we're not acknowledging inflation; we're not acknowledging the full capacity of population growth; we're going to charge you a little bit more; we're going to make it a little bit harder for you to see a doctor.

This is not a budget that supports Albertans, and I know that this government is hearing it because my office gets CCed in all of the e-mails when they're reaching out to the Premier's office, when they're reaching out to the minister responsible for Health or affordability. They're just not responding. And the biggest nonresponse is this budget. Bill 14 doesn't do anything to support what Albertans actually need. To be honest, it's not unusual that we're in this place. This government has created absolute chaos in health care, so to see something perhaps move towards supporting health care would have been nice. It's not amiss.

We've seen this government completely attack teachers during the pandemic, laying off 20,000 people, support staff for youth, defunding and underfunding PUF. When Albertans cried out that those are things that were important to them, that their kids are taken care of in school, that their kids should perhaps have a desk when they attend class, or that even appropriate staffing would be nice: no, that's not in this budget. Bill 14 does not address any of those things. I don't think it's unrealistic to expect a doctor when you're sick, expect a hospital to be accessible to your community, and for your kids to have a properly funded school. Those are not things that are outrageous. They're not spends that a government can articulate on and say: "You know what? It's not worth it." But they did by producing this piece of legislation and this budget. It's embarrassing to look at this and to hear what Albertans are actually talking about and not to see it reflected at all within the budget.

I know that this is something that we're going to be talking about for a few more weeks now. We've been in the budget mode since we came back to this House, and unfortunately I'm not seeing anything that reflects what Albertans are actually asking for. I'm really looking forward to continued debate on this budget, all of these pieces of legislation, actually, that relate to the budget. I'm hopeful that perhaps the government will listen to Albertans and change their mind and do some of the things that they committed to

do instead of just breaking their promises and pushing this legislation forward.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will cede my time. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity has risen to speak.

Dr. Metz: Thank you. I very much would like to rise to speak to this bill. I will start with my comments around the Health budget. First, I want to note that there are very few outcomes in the fiscal plan relating to this budget, so this will make it very difficult to measure the value of this multibillion-dollar expenditure that Albertans honestly want to know about. They want honesty, transparency, and value. Albertans want to know that they're getting value for their money. We know that the outcomes in the health system will never be perfect. Every person won't get their service within the perfect amount of time. But we need to be moving towards those goals, and we need to have minimum standards. We need to even decide what those goals will be. When we're spending billions, as we know are needed, we want to know what we're getting for it.

Now I'll get into some specifics. We've been told that the cost of refocusing health care will be around \$85 million. This is in addition to the cost of running the health care system. We note that the budget for the minister's office is increasing by 17 per cent, the budget for the deputy minister's office is increasing by 22 per cent, and the budget for the ministry itself is increasing by 25 per cent. Combined, that's an increase of about \$16 million. The budget for the Health Advocate is essentially flat.

We've really not been told how this or if this refocusing plan, with its very high price tag – we don't know how we will know if it has been successful. What are the metrics? We need to know along the way if progress is being made, not at the end of several years, where we maybe have nothing to show for it. We know that the outcomes need to include access to care. That's one of the very important markers in health care. With a growing population we need to know the proportion of people getting care, not just the number getting care. As we are approaching 5 million people in this province, we need to increase the resources that go into the health care system so that we can serve an increasing number of people. We need that proportion of people that are getting care when they need it. We need to know that we're hitting some marks on timeliness, and we need to know that they're getting it where they need it.

Also related to this issue of restructuring is that we need to know exactly how this money is being spent. How much of this money is going to consultants such as Ernst & Young, who are doing a lot of consulting on this restructuring? We've not seen any breakdown or heard anything about what that dollar figure is. What are we paying for this service, and what service are they actually providing?

When we come to expenditures for health planning, which I assume is probably a large part of the reason that these budgets are increasing, Albertans want to know what the numbers are regarding current deficiencies such as the current lack of acute-care beds. We know that many are closed due to lack of staff. We know there is a deficiency of acute-care beds such that people are staying sometimes days in emergency departments waiting to be admitted to hospital, yet we also know that we're told that we don't need more hospitals. We would like to see the planning for that so we know that we haven't truly wasted money on planning a south Edmonton hospital, that now we're hearing isn't needed. We haven't seen any of the actual numbers that will tell us where these beds are going to come from.

3:10

We anticipate that eventually once the Stollery is built – there's a budget item for planning the new children's stand-alone Stollery, which is much needed. Totally agree with that. But we do not believe that the number of children's beds and cribs is going to translate into that many adult beds. It's way down the line, and we need them now, so we need to know what is happening with this planning, future planning. How are we going to be keeping up with the needs of our population?

We also need a comprehensive workforce plan. Again, I am hoping that some of this money for refocusing or this money that's going into the ministry is going to be pulling together a comprehensive workforce plan. We know that one of the largest issues in health care today is a deficiency of workers. We used to have an advantage in Alberta. We've lost that advantage. We're now competing with every other province, and we're being outcompeted, so we're losing more and more physicians and nurses all the time.

This workforce plan really needs to be put together not just by ministry staff, but we need the on-the-ground expertise of those that are providing the care, so AHS, for one. We need the educators. Those are our universities, our nursing schools, our medical schools, the colleges that are providing training such as for EMS providers, and we need the professional associations as all of these bodies will know what the current trends are in expectations of students, what kind of people are being recruited into these positions, and we need them all at the table.

We also need to be including our Indigenous leaders, our Indigenous leaders in the health care sphere, to be at the table, to help with the planning of how we can move forward on Indigenous health care. We need to know what their thoughts are on how to improve the workforce, to provide care by and for Indigenous people.

I'm hoping that we will have a very inclusive workforce plan and that some of the funding will go towards putting together this critically important plan and that Albertans will get a report. A plan itself would be the first step. Then we need to see the plan. But we don't even know if there is a plan for a plan, so I'm concerned about what we are going to be getting for the money that we're putting into this budget.

Another major concern relates to the government's plan to improve primary care. This is another major deficiency in the health system. There are several initiatives mentioned that will improve primary care, but we don't really know what they are. They have titles but no real description most of the time, and the only performance indicator listed is the number of practising family physicians and nurse practitioners. Unfortunately, that's a meaningless metric. It does not measure how much primary care service is being provided. Many primary care physicians actually don't provide comprehensive primary care. They may work as a surgical assistant, or they may work half a day a week providing primary care. Just counting the number is not meaningful.

Also, in terms of nurse practitioners, in the plan there are a number of nurse practitioners, but most nurse practitioners in this province do not work in primary care. They work in specialty care teams, and there's no separating out the role of those nurse practitioners. They're very much needed there and highly valued, but our outcome should not be the number of nurse practitioners, because it does not provide meaning.

The other thing that we're not told is, really, what the plan is to increase that comprehensive team care and how that is impacting the number of patients that can be cared for by any one physician. We know that there are some dollars flowing towards helping physicians with some administrative costs around the number of

patients that they have in their practice, but the methodology of determining that is challenged, and I'm hoping that that will be improved so that we can actually look at those true numbers.

When it comes to this number of practising family physicians, we need to know how that's arrived at. What does that mean? But, more than anything, we need to be looking at some standardized outcomes so that we can see what care we're providing.

There are standard outcomes used and reported by CIHI and by The Commonwealth Fund International Health Policy Survey, which reports internationally. Canada is part of that, and each province is part of that reporting. We need to know that what we're doing in Alberta is actually resulting in improvements to care.

I'll give an example. One example would be the proportion of seniors that are able to get an appointment to see a physician or a nurse that same day or the next day. In 2021 the international level amongst high-income countries was that 51 per cent could get that appointment. In Alberta this was 30 per cent. Now, this was in 2021, and things have only gotten worse since that time.

As we know, the number of people without a family physician is growing. They have nowhere to go, and this is adding to the number of people that end up in our emergency departments or end up not getting care when they need it. They're more ill by the time they get their care, and they're not getting the preventive care that's required.

The number of over 800,000 Albertans without a primary care doctor is a number that has been put out by the Alberta Medical Association, who run a doctor-matching service and have enormously long lists of people who cannot get care. We need to know how much of that money in this budget we're spending on this very targeted problem, and we need to know that we're measuring the outcomes so that we can see progress and know what we've achieved with the money we're spending.

We also know that continuity of care is critically important in providing high-quality care. We want to ensure that when we're spending our money, it's going towards the clinics and the physicians and the nurses that are providing continuity of care rather than episodic, one-time care.

3:20

One of the services that is being funded is Telus virtual health, I understand, by contract from Alberta Health Services, but I can't see that anywhere in the budget. I'm not sure how much funding is going to this service, but this is not providing continuity of care. I think we need to look at where our dollars are going. Is this a temporary measure, or is this a long-term measure getting a foothold in our system that will actually erode the care of Albertans and harm their health as well as cost us more in the long run because people don't have continuity of care?

Besides knowing the cost, we also need to know some dollar values or some metrics around how many people who access that service also then go see their family doctor the next day, or how many of those people just get sent to the emergency department. It's complex, and that virtual service is unassociated with the ability to actually examine a patient, and therefore people may get sent to the emergency department.

How is this better than Health Link, where much service is also provided virtually to patients? This kind of service does not help build the circle of care and the confidence that patients need that they're looked after. It instead creates silos. While it may be necessary at times, we need to have transparency on this. That certainly relates to our budget. How much are we spending on this? Do we have a plan to look at what the long-term impact of that is?

On the same issue, how much primary care funding is expected to go towards pharmacy health clinics? We know that there is an

important but limited scope of care that pharmacists provide. The advertising and naming seems to extend beyond that. We've seen that in Ontario there's even a situation where a Shoppers Drug Mart got an exclusivity clause on a mall so that no other health care providers could set up shop there. Family physicians could not set up an office there. Are we looking at limits on how these activities of care in this silo of care – again, another silo – might be impacting our ability to improve our primary care system? There are really no assurances in this budget or in the related plan that we will have an improvement in care. We have no assurances that there will be any measurement of the cost of the professional services provided by pharmacists, by Telus Health, by other siloed care providers. We don't even know what the costs of those are and what will eventually come of this.

I'm also concerned about EMS services. We've seen that there has been some increase to the EMS budget, but we know that about 1 in 5 of our EMS are out on sick time at any one time. We're looking at a major shortage of EMS providers. Now there are often ambulances that remain unstaffed, so we have a shortage of ambulances, much worse in rural areas, even, than in the city. We have to look at retention of our EMS providers – 20 per cent out at one time is too much – and when we dig in to find out what that's all about, we see that the largest issue there is for mental health concerns, largely PTSD, largely due to the trauma that's experienced almost every day by our EMS providers.

Yet there's nothing in this budget that looks towards supporting our EMS professionals to stay well. That is for their sake, but it's for the sake of every Albertan, because we need them. We need them working, and we need them on the roads. I wish that we could see that in this budget. There was a task force that reported over 18 months ago that included many measures that would help with this issue, but we don't see anything in the budget that suggests we're actually moving in that direction.

With that, I would cede my time to the next speaker.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Sherwood Park caught my eye first.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Varsity for just a great review of health care. On behalf of the people of Sherwood Park and Strathcona county and also as the caucus critic for Municipal Affairs I'm happy to speak to Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024.

This act is key to Budget 2024. Danielle Smith's budget is just full of . . .

Some Hon. Members: Name. Name. Point of order.

Mr. Kasawski: Oh, good point. The Premier's budget is just full of broken promises. Thank you very much, members.

Our growing province needs a government that is focused on increasing the basic services that people rely on, and the government did not deliver any plan on how to fix the mess they made in our health care system, address the pressures in our schools, and deliver government services. Their own budget numbers say that inflation with population is set to grow to 6.2 per cent this year, but they stalled the budget at 3.9 per cent growth. It's a 2.3 per cent deficit budget. That means less money for schools, less money for government services, and less money for public health care.

The province doesn't succeed unless we all succeed together. Strategic urban planning, infrastructure development, business-friendly initiatives: we can set conditions for our towns and cities to thrive. These municipalities that we have maintain the social fabric of our communities. From health care and education to

community engagement and cultural enrichment, municipalities are the architects of our social well-being. That's why I believe strong local governance is such an important part of empowering communities to be the very best that they can be for our province. That's the lens through which I view my job here in opposition.

The Appropriation Act is the time to focus on solutions and ensure the government we have now makes the best choices possible for Albertans. Albertans can and should lead Canada into the future we all want to see: thriving, sustainable, full of opportunity. But I would argue that at present, with this Appropriation Act, we are missing too many of those chances.

The UCP is focused on the wrong things or creating distractions with its government bills and private members' motions. A bill stopping the Edmonton region from accessing funding to preserve, maintain, and manage the beautiful North Saskatchewan River valley: that's not what Albertans need. This would be great help for the municipalities that manage this recreational and environmental treasure in the Edmonton region. A bill to create a new police force: it was a hotly contested campaign issue that the UCP pulled back from to get elected and now in government is pushing ahead with an Alberta security service even though the estimated cost will add half a billion dollars annually to the Alberta budget. This is a distraction for Albertans.

We know that by 2050 our province is going to welcome another 2 million to 3 million people, by the province's own estimate. That's major growth, the kind you have to prepare for, yet when we look at the appropriation act, tabled in the Legislature three weeks ago, the big gap between where we're going and how we're going to get there is huge. Instead, we have a massive shortfall in infrastructure investment, cuts to community programs, hospital projects that are cancelled or deferred, only a fraction of the new schools that we need, and even more downloading of costs onto the municipalities, which are so critical to our province and how we manage our communities. Let's be clear. This budget invests the least in local infrastructure in modern memory. Every community in this room that we represent is short dollars.

3:30

The government put forward in the fall the local government fiscal framework, which the municipalities asked for, but the amount of money that they asked for was far greater for being able to build the infrastructure that's critical to their communities. It's starting with less than half of what Alberta municipalities are telling us they need to meet the challenges they face with our growing population. It's more than a billion dollars short. This Appropriation Act, 2024, is short a billion dollars for municipalities.

On the other side, I just want to point out that education property taxes that municipalities collect on behalf of the provincial government are going up, and many of the areas that we are seeing an investment for this province still fall short of the population plus inflation. Total revenue in this province is estimated to be at \$28,688 million, \$28 billion, that municipalities are earning for the treasury and through their collection of property taxes for the province. The municipalities bring in the third most tax revenue for the treasury. Personal income tax is the largest source of revenue, corporate income tax is the second largest, and municipal property tax collected for the province is the third-largest tax revenue for this government. Personal income tax revenue, \$15.6 billion; that's 54.5 percent of the tax revenue. Corporate income tax revenue, \$7 billion; 24 percent share of our revenue. Education property tax, the provincial property tax that municipalities collect for the province is \$2.7 billion; 9.6 percent of the revenue for this province.

Municipalities are truly economic engines, but they also are earners for the province, and they're not recognized as that with the

transfer back of funding for municipal governments. The local government fiscal framework, that we are projecting with this Appropriation Act, 2024, is \$724.2 million. Of that, \$382 million will be provided to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, and that means there's just \$342 million for the rest of the province.

Back to the property tax. Strong growth in property values and increased development across our province mean that provincial education property tax requisitions are expected to grow from \$2.5 billion in the last fiscal year to over \$2.7 billion in this upcoming year. Municipalities are going to generate \$2.7 billion for the provincial government, and the provincial government is only returning \$724.2 million to municipalities. It is an unfair transfer of funds. For the local government fiscal framework formula education tax requisitions collected by Edmonton and Calgary are actually factored into the grants for our two largest cities. So even though they're outsized earners, at least they get a portion of that tax they collect for the province. This is not the case for all other municipalities. Many of our midsize cities contribute mightily to the revenue for the province.

You know, for example from previous years, in 2022 Strathcona county contributed \$70 million to the provincial revenue. They're getting back about \$12 million for the local government fiscal framework this year, massively outearning what they are getting back from the province. Spruce Grove generated \$45 million in provincial education taxes collected; Red Deer, \$44 million; St. Albert, \$36 million; Airdrie, a fast-growing community, \$33 million; and Cochrane, \$16 million. The Appropriation Act, 2024, is unfair to municipalities and wrong for so many other important provincial priorities. If this government brings it forward as it is, I will not be able to vote for it in its current form.

The last thing I just want to bring up with this Appropriation Act – and this is a general comment on the government. Loaded throughout all of the sections is the notion and this commitment this government has made to the climate and to be carbon neutral by 2050. I take seriously this government's commitment to being carbon neutral by 2050. I actually embrace it, but I do not see anything in the Appropriation Act that tells me that they are actually trying to move towards being carbon neutral by 2050. In the recent motion in the use of the Sovereignty within a United Canada Act the government voted to support a commitment for Alberta to have a carbon-neutral economy by the year 2050. It's embedded in there in the Gish gallop around all the rest of the wording of the use of that act.

When we look at some of our tools in our province to actually help municipalities and communities address climate change, there is less money going towards things that would mitigate and help us adapt for climate change. The Municipal Climate Change Action Centre funding, which is a five-year term, went from \$54 million over five years up until now, and now it's going to be \$28 million for the next five years. The government is actually cutting in half one of their best tools for helping municipalities address climate change.

We have to keep in mind that every building built at today's minimum building code will need to be retrofitted by 2050 if we're going to be a carbon-neutral economy by then. That's a really important thing to keep in mind and to consider. We start something tomorrow. We build it. If we don't build it to a net-zero standard by 2050, it needs to be at a net-zero standard to meet this government's commitment of a carbon-neutral economy by 2050. Keep in mind that 45 per cent of Alberta's emissions come from community and corporate buildings and transportation, all things that are governed by municipalities. Municipalities need the tools to help us address climate change and meet our 2050 commitments.

What is Municipal Affairs doing to address climate change and help municipalities reach the government's commitment to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050? Nothing. What work are you doing to mitigate climate change? Less than you've done before. What is the government going to do to adapt to climate change? There's nothing in this Appropriation Act to show that we're going to adjust to the changing environment and changing world we're living in with climate change. How are you going to help municipalities become carbon neutral by 2050? There is nothing in the Appropriation Act to address the incredible opportunity for Alberta in transforming to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050, and there is nothing that's going to help Albertans get there on the timeline that we need to. That's only 26 years away.

Just in wrapping up, Mr. Chair, overall, when we look at this Appropriation Act, we are looking at a deficit budget. Make no mistakes. On paper we might have borrowed money so it could look like a surplus, but it is a deficit budget, and rather than being felt by people, you know, on paper looking like a deficit budget, it's going to be felt by people walking our streets, working our facilities, building our economy, and providing local services. I agree when the Minister of Finance says that this isn't a champagne budget, but as I said before to Alberta Municipalities, it's not a case of beer either. It's, rather, the half-empty cans you find the day after. No one is going to be refreshed by this budget. More importantly, it leaves us in quite a bind. How do local communities keep pace with the kind of pressure even if we're going to see it in just the next four years? We have a \$1 billion shortfall in the local government fiscal framework, and we need to see that brought into this Appropriation Act in order to allow municipalities to do the good work that they do in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to speak.

3:40

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024. I will bring to light a number of local concerns that arise to my attention and to the attention of my constituents in reading the Appropriation Act, Bill 14, as we debate it this afternoon in the House.

I mean, the bill is a reflection of the broken promises that the budget is littered with, Mr. Chair, that the government has failed on many, many accounts to live up to the expectations of Albertans who historically thought they could count on government to at least keep the fundamental infrastructure of the province in place and in good repair, yet no matter where we seem to look, there's an embarrassment of crumbling infrastructure, whether that be our roads, our bridges, our hospitals, which are in real disrepair and in need of replacement.

University funding. Universities are suffocating, notwithstanding what the government is trying to tell Albertans about the level of funding there.

Talk to nurses and doctors at Alberta hospitals, and you'll find the same thing is happening as well. I recently spent some time at the Misericordia hospital, and it's heartbreaking to talk to nursing professionals there. I'm sure the same thing may be true in your riding, Mr. Chair, in the Westlock hospital, where nursing shortages are causing staff to work 16-hour shifts on a regular basis. I talked to nurses who I'd seen in the morning and then I'd go there later at night to visit a patient there, and the nurse was still there, and I thought: holy smokes, this is well beyond an eight-hour shift. Sure enough, that nurse was working 16 hours. I asked repeatedly to staff

there about these shifts. There are many, many nurses at the Mis and other hospitals that are working 16-hour shifts because of staff shortages. There are no nurses to hire, so these nurses are being burned out working 16-hour shifts. It's a huge concern because there are not enough hours in a day for these nurses to go ahead and do the extras that used to be done in even acute-care hospitals such as actually bathing a patient once in a while rather than doing a bed bath instead. So that's one thing.

Another thing, and it's at the Mis as well. We'll know that, of course, the former NDP government instigated the construction of the new emergency ward at the Mis. At the time it was expected that there would be a new CT scanner dedicated to that hospital, yet after an expenditure of some \$80 million that is not the case. I, Mr. Chair, in my recent visits to the emergency ward had the occasion to talk to nursing staff there, and of course that CT scanner was not replaced. It has a history of breaking down, and I brought this issue to the floor of this House before imploring that the then Health minister Copping go ahead and make the expenditure to get the CT scanner replaced at the Misericordia, and that didn't happen. They're only about \$2 million to \$3 million, and in the scheme of things when you're looking at an \$80 million new emergency room at the Misericordia, it would have been something that would have fit in the budget, but it just didn't happen. Emergency room doctors there are very, very disappointed that it didn't happen.

There's space, Mr. Chair, in that ER for potentially locating a new CT scanner, but it is unknown as of yet whether or not the actual electrical infrastructure was put in place to allow that to happen. What has to happen now in the new emergency ward: they're relying upon a CT scanner that is up to a 20-minute walk away from the new emergency department across to the other side of the hospital to get to the old CT scanner, which regularly breaks down and which was last broken down for about five weeks last year. The whole hospital relies upon that one CT scanner, and it's a regional CT scanner that other hospitals and care units will send people to for CT scanning. It's a risky situation to be in.

With respect to the expectations of this budget and the Appropriation Act that we're considering now, there are many missed opportunities, Mr. Chair, to invest in things that Albertans expect to have as a level of standard or a standard of care in the province, that is no longer apparently there. There is not an interest of the government to make sure these basic and fundamental pieces of infrastructure are serving Albertans.

It behooves the government, I think, to really take a close look at some of the deficiencies that are potentially life-threatening such as a CT scanner. If you go to an emergency room, Mr. Chair, and you need to have something investigated, a CT scanner is a basic instrument now. If you go and you suspect that you may have perhaps, let's say, an abdominal aneurysm or something like that, even kidney stones, they differentiate between what you've actually got. The pain may be the same; a CT scanner is often used to make that differentiation. It's life-saving if you can get that decision made, that information at hand quickly so that the patient can receive the proper treatment.

Yet we in Alberta in 2024 have decided, through the UCP government decision and the budget and the Appropriation Act that we're talking about now, not to make expenditures that would bring us back to the standards that we expect so that a hospital with a new emergency ward does not have a new CT scanner dedicated to it and, dare I say, another one to replace the old one so that the wider region could be served with a proper CT scanner. These are critical infrastructure expenditures that the government is failing to make on a regular basis.

In many other ways we're probably heading towards U.S.-style medicine in this province, Mr. Chair, given the direction of this

budget and this government, particularly in the decision made not to fund the construction of a south Edmonton hospital. Now, the government has not really given an adequate or detailed explanation as to why indeed they made the decision. They claim it will cost \$4.9 billion. Where this number exactly was manufactured from I'm not sure of, but that is the backdrop against which they say that they're backing away or pausing. It seems like they're just totally cancelling the south Edmonton hospital, which indeed is needed desperately in this city, and they're suggesting that people should go to Red Deer perhaps instead, which is only an hour and a half away. Well, that's an absurd suggestion. The south Edmonton hospital is badly needed. The last hospital to be built in Edmonton was the Grey Nuns. I believe it was in 1988.

Our population is growing, and it's something that the government should be planning and funding for, yet they're not. They like to boast about this growing population, but indeed they're failing to prepare our Alberta infrastructure to meet the needs of that growing population, which includes investment in hospitals, which includes making sure that the proper equipment is in those hospitals, which includes funding the nursing staff that are required to run those hospitals. A good section of that emergency room, the new one at the Mis, sits idle and empty because the staff funding is not there. That was years ago asked for by Dr. Jarrod Anderson and other emergency room doctors when they were talking about the CT scanner deficiency there. Another one of their basic pleas was for proper funding for staffing.

It begs the question, Mr. Chair. Through the appropriations that we see in Bill 14 and the budget in general that we have seen come through the House, through estimates and so forth in the past number of days, it begs the question: what is the government really up to? It would surprise me not in the least to see a new proposal for another hospital in Edmonton come forward as a private hospital, period. Not a private surgical centre but an actual private hospital: I can smell it coming. I would not be surprised to learn that the government is actually working on this and will bring it forward as a solution to Alberta's hospital bed needs and say once again that the private sector is going to be riding in on a white horse to save the day. Mark my words: that would not surprise me.

3:50

That's one element: the hospital infrastructure, the health care infrastructure in general, the equipment shortages, the staffing underfunding, the critical lack of staff in hospitals so that the nurses are doing 16-hour shifts on a regular basis. That's one element, but there are many other things. In the critic role that I play, Mr. Chair, I noticed in many cases a deficiency in what the minister responded to in terms of questions about the maintenance of our Alberta highways, our roadways. The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors seems to think it's fully acceptable, completely the norm, that approximately 43 per cent of our Alberta highways are in poor, fair, or very poor condition, and that's a chronic figure.

Mr. Chair, I know you're well aware of this because there was a highway in your constituency, which is called highway 55, where constituents of yours got together because they weren't getting answers from the government about repairing and maintaining that highway properly. They formed their own advocacy group, and they contacted my office. I went up there with other MLAs to drive highway 55 wearing a T-shirt that said, "I can't drive 55," because it was in such disrepair.

Now, it took that type of advocacy, Mr. Chair, for the government to actually move and do some resurfacing on that highway, but those folks up in the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock area on highway 55 are not alone. There are other groups across the province that actually claim that their roadways are in worse

condition, and indeed it's not an uncommon thing for my office to receive on a weekly basis somebody else complaining about their particular highway being in disrepair and having deferred maintenance. It seems as though on that 43 per cent figure the needle hasn't really moved for years.

I think that it's time, if we're looking at improving our economic corridors and getting them to the standards that we expect in 2024, knowing that we're increasing population and more traffic on our roads, with a desire to increase tourism to the province, that the investment should be commensurate with those expectations and those growing needs. It's incumbent upon the government to make sure that those dollars are ready and available, yet the transportation ministry seems to be the low ministry on the totem pole, Mr. Chair, on a regular basis; otherwise, that percentage would change. Forty-three per cent of our highways in either poor, very poor, or fair condition on an ongoing and chronic basis is not acceptable in a province that wants itself to be known as a go-to province. These are basic things.

The government likes to talk about in its estimates, in its budget, aspirational railways and spending up to \$9 billion on a railway that will go between Edmonton and Calgary to move people at a higher speed. Well, in fact, that may or may not be the solution to the problem that we need in order to get people between Edmonton and Calgary. One of the things that's staring us in the face, Mr. Chair, is actually the quality of the roadway between those two cities. Indeed, if it was improved, we might see people more safely travelling on it. The QE II and other roads in this province are woefully undermaintained. The fact is that people complain about them, and their complaints largely fall on deaf ears.

The other element of that, of course, Mr. Chair, is that 75 per cent of our bridges are not rated in good condition, and that's a huge, huge deficit. We spoke about deficits. The government likes to talk about not having a deficit. It's a surplus budget, yet there's an unwritten deficit that doesn't show up necessarily on the balance sheet. It's that deficit of deferred maintenance and neglect, and that's evident in our highways, it's evident in our bridges, and it's evident in our hospitals. Like, the Misericordia was built in 1969. It probably needs replacement as well. Yet the government is failing to consider building the south Edmonton hospital. Whether the Mis will get replaced in my lifetime is an open question, but the same scenario happens no matter where you go down the line.

If you want to talk about education, when we were in government, we got 200 school projects completed. They weren't just renovations; they were 200 schools, the biggest school build ever, about \$2 billion, if I'm not mistaken. Yet we have very, very few schools being built, relatively speaking, by this government in a time when we have a huge population increase, and it's a failure of this government to cradle those people who are coming in and build the infrastructure and supports and fund them properly.

That is going to end up costing us dearly. People will come, Mr. Chair, to the province, but what you want – as in any type of process where you're trying to attract people to do something, whether it's in business or in government, you'll get your first pieces of business, but you want the referrals and repeat business to keep on coming. You want those people who come to tell their friends and neighbours that they have had a good experience here, and that experience will mean that they were able to buy a house and afford to buy a house, that they found that their utility bills were something that were within their means to pay, that they had a school that their child could go to in a neighbourhood that they lived in or close by, that the hospital that their mother-in-law would go to when she visited was adequate and had a bed that would serve her, and if she had to go to long-term care, there was a place that was going to be

respectable and worthy, comparable to what they left in, say, Nova Scotia or other parts of the country.

Yet we don't have those things, Mr. Chair, in the abundance that one would expect in a province so wealthy. The government's focus has been on anything but looking at our fundamental infrastructure needs, and that is something that has to change. I don't know what it will take for this government's policy and focus to change the themes of the Appropriation Act that we see and the patterns of spending that are consistent in this budget. There's a Band-Aid approach that is going to fail us in the long term.

As we all know, when it comes to transportation, Mr. Chair, it costs five times more to rebuild a road than it does to properly maintain it over time, and that is the deficit. That's something that this government has been willing to accept and live with for decades. I don't see it as changing in the near future, particularly if you look at the current bill before us and the expenditures that the government is planning to make. They are finding that they're looking to have a bottom line and a claim that they have a surplus as an example of their economic management, but in fact it shows that they are absolutely operating contrary to what they boast about.

They are a tax-loving group of Tories who have raised the cost to Albertans who want to come here by a lot of money. They've raised the cost of buying a home, for example, by around \$550, \$650, by raising the land titles registration fees unnecessarily at a time of an affordability crisis. I can tell from experience, Mr. Chair, that when people sit down with their mortgage broker or their real estate agent to do their interview, to consider qualifying for a house, indeed what the story usually is is that it's a really tight calculation. That calculation will involve the buyer scrambling together whatever they can from their assets for a down payment and, not only that, between \$2,000 to \$3,000 in closing costs, which will include land titles, registration fees, and so forth.

With that, I think that I may save some time and conclude my remarks and adjourn debate.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:00

Bill 15 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to offer comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen to speak.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 15, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024, on behalf of my constituents. I've got a lot of feedback on this government's very first budget. When I say very first budget, this is the UCP government's first budget after the election. Not only my constituents in Edmonton-Meadows but Albertans were promised big time in the province of Alberta during the election by the UCP campaign. So they were excited. They were so very hopeful – I'll give you an example why they were – as much as this budget came as a big disappointment to them.

One of these was during the election. You know, even though we had a history of stands and positions on the south Edmonton hospital in the past almost five years during the UCP government, this Premier actually promised Albertans and particularly Edmontonians one new hospital, that was already announced by the previous NDP government in 2017. The UCP government, following that, delayed that project twice. But this Premier during the election promised that that will be one of their first tasks to complete when they come into power. That didn't happen. They got

a very discouraging, unexpected response, not only the constituents of mine in Edmonton-Meadows but a lot of Albertans who voted UCP in the past elections. Not only the UCP voters, but also I've been in conversation with past UCP candidates in the south Edmonton ridings. They're very, very disappointed because they also made this their election promise, and they were misinformed. They are feeling that they were misinformed, and they're feeling betrayed because the UCP government under this Premier in the previous term told us that this was one of the top, top promises in their agenda. They also misinformed that the NDP government was not going to build it, that this is the UCP government that will complete the project.

Mr. Getson: How's that highway 60 overpass? How did that one work out for you? Not good.

Mr. Deol: If the government whip is willing to speak to this, you're most welcome to stand up and share your concern. You know, I have no problem with that.

But that is the truth; you know what happened. That is the biggest concern. The concern is not only because this hospital is not coming anymore; the sign on the site that was showing that the hospital is coming was also taken away, removed from that site. People are every day e-mailing my office, walking into my office, and going to social media and sharing their concerns. I hope that the UCP MLAs also would get feedback on that. I know that many of the UCP members took to social media claiming that they had voted UCP in the past election, and they are very disappointed with what they have done after winning the election.

Albertans are going to pay the cost of the direction of the government's decision-making by not moving ahead on the promised project. Health care is already in crisis. Doctors are not taking new patients. Doctors are overburdened. There are no new doctors actually introducing practices in the communities, in primary care service areas, and the shortage of staff in the hospitals already, a number of other issues, shortage of beds.

I just wanted to come back to the issue that the hospital was specifically going to serve the 500-bed shortage in the capital city even though that was going to happen when this hospital was going to be complete. The 500-bed shortage in the capital city is today. But the hope that Edmontonians and my constituents and the constituents in the Edmonton-South riding – and mostly, I would say, everyone who lives on Edmonton's south side is disappointed because this is going to make a bad situation worse. On top of this, what was disappointing was when the Premier was asked by the media and maybe by their own party members, and the Premier came out suggesting that the people from south Edmonton, you know, they can drive one and a half hours to Red Deer to seek the health care services they need. So very disappointing.

Education is another part. I was listening to the Premier's prebudget speech. I'm just appalled to see – like, how to process this and what has happened. The Premier was saying that she has instructed the Finance ministry to stay below inflation and population growth.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just want to point out that we are on Bill 15, the supplementary supply act. I have allowed a fair bit of latitude and comments with regard to that. I do have a little bit of difficulty trying to understand – we moved into the subject of education expense, but no education expense is identified in supplementary supply. So if you could please bring your comments towards Bill 15, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024, that would be helpful.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate, you know, your guidance on this. I will go back to this bill again when we are discussing the Advanced Education expenditure in this Bill 15, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024. Maybe these are the only government members that cannot see the huge outcry by postsecondary students. They're going to pay almost \$200 million more in postsecondary fees. What is proposed in this bill doesn't really address the concerns and the issues that I hear every day and that my constituents expect me to raise in this Chamber. The postsecondaries got a huge cut under the previous government; it was more than three-quarters of a billion dollars cut to postsecondaries there. The buildings are struggling to get timely repairs, maintenance.

4:10

They ended up cutting staff, and the debt is being downloaded to the struggling students when I'm seeing that Alberta is already last in line in the country when we see the wage growth. The affordability has hit very hard, specifically to the young individuals who are working hard to build their lives and build their futures. In this budget when we see the supplementary supply and we're going to vote – definitely we are going to vote on Advanced Education and Education and the other stuff – my constituents are looking at how it will really address their concerns and how it is going to address postsecondary education and the challenges in postsecondary education not only that students are facing but the postsecondary institutions themselves.

The affordability crisis: Albertans were expecting, as the government promised – I know the previous UCP government under the same Premiership, you know, deferred or pushed back their four-year promise. They were going to give \$100 affordability rebates to buy votes to get into the elections. That payment ended right after the provincial election, but Albertans are still struggling. They didn't receive any help. The wages are stagnant; the wage growth is the slowest in the country.

And not only the inflation hike, the unexpected inflation the world actually experienced: Alberta is not immune, but Alberta, on the other side, has a disproportionate impact of inflation. On top of that, utility bills are skyrocketing under this government and a number of other things that people rely on in their daily lives; insurance is one of them. The highest insurance rates in the country. When it comes to the expenses that Albertans should pay to afford the bare minimum, the basics of life, the necessities of their life, they keep going up. But when it comes to wages, wages are unexpectedly and unprecedentedly actually lower; the slowest growth in this province.

This budget does not provide any help to my constituents on what I hear about, the concerns I hear every single day in my riding and in my community. I definitely wanted to say for the sake of the record – if someone is watching from my riding, anyone who came to my office or sent me an e-mail sharing their concerns and their challenges – that this budget does not address anything that Albertans are worried about. The Bill 15 we are discussing, unfortunately, does not provide any option or help that Albertans are looking for.

In this budget also, I know the ministry of immigration has written to the federal government to increase their share in the federal immigration program, to take more immigrants to fill the gaps and labour shortage and skill shortage, but the worst thing was to see that ministry also got a huge cut in support to newcomers. It does not also provide me the rationale: how does it make sense? Then, the online web application portal right now is paused, and the files are not being moved. The ministry already didn't have enough resources to put in to speed up the process, but in this budget the

ministry has got further cuts. So how are they going to support that newcomer support services?

The Infrastructure budget was quite concerning. We see over 25,000 new students to schools every year. This year, if I'm not wrong, Alberta has nearly 28,000 new students in school. This budget did not provide any additional funding for the student growth. It's also important to mention that the ministry confirmed for me during the budget estimates that there are only seven schools under construction right now in the province, and that will not meet the demand in the education system.

The worst part of that is that all those projects are going under P3 models, where the expense is always high, the cost is always increased, and the projects have been delayed. This is not what I'm saying; this is what the UCP previous Infrastructure minister has said in this House not even long ago, about a year ago, and he cancelled a number of projects. I don't know why this government wants to be spending more money on P3 models than investing into education and why they reversed their decision, for not doing it. At the same time, we are voting something under Bill 15 that doesn't really help my constituents and Albertans and the questions and the concerns everyday Albertans have. I'm hearing from parents who purchased their new homes or moved to new places because of looking at areas close to schools, paying extra cost, but ended up seeing that there are no spaces in the school.

With that, I will actually conclude my comments, Mr. Chair, so thank you. Thank you for your time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Committee, we have in front of us Bill 15, a money bill, and a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor that recommends for consideration this bill. In the preamble:

the Supplementary Supply Estimates accompanying the Message, that the sums hereinafter mentioned are required to defray certain charges and expenses of the Public Service of Alberta not otherwise provided for during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024 and for other purposes relating thereto.

So we are on Bill 15. Please direct your comments to the appropriation supplementary supply bill and judge yourself accordingly.

The Member for Edmonton-South West has risen.

4:20

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 15, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024. Let me begin by saying that I have been looking at the general numbers and hoping to find a silver lining. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to find that silver lining. This act, much like the budget, is a budget of broken promises, a bait and switch from the election, actually, when Albertans were promised all kinds of announcements only to be told: well, sorry; we were just kidding. The cancellation of the south Edmonton hospital comes to mind, and I perhaps was too hopeful in hoping that I would find some extra money here in the act that would be devoted to the south Edmonton hospital.

Now, as I talk about and debate Bill 15, I want to make sure that I set the context because numbers tell a story, and a bill is simply a vehicle to help government and all of us in this Legislature to help realize the dreams and opportunities of Albertans. I think that context, Mr. Chair, is important.

First of all, I think it's important for me to note that the problems that Albertans currently face are dire as Alberta is in the worst affordability crisis in a generation. Many Albertans are facing higher housing costs, power bills, grocery bills, insurance costs, tuition, and property taxes. Many Albertans are living paycheque to paycheque, and hundreds of thousands of people are on the brink of homelessness. This is the backdrop to which Bill 15 is currently

being debated. According to a Food Banks Canada report from late 2022 Albertans access the food bank at an increased rate, more than double the national rate in comparison to prepandemic levels, and according to data from Rentals.ca Edmonton has the highest rent increases in Canada at 20 per cent year over year.

Mr. Chair, this is all relevant because at the end of the day as we consider Bill 15, the question that we have to ask ourselves in this House is: is it adequate? Is it serving the needs of everyday Albertans? Overwhelmingly, as I consider this bill, I would say that the answer is no. Now more than ever we need the government to make decisions that make life affordable for everyday Albertans, and we need the government to ensure that utility costs are affordable and brought down so that Albertans can heat their homes, so that Albertans can put food on the table, so that they can afford staying in the place where they're living and in some cases obtain an affordable home.

We also need to ensure that Albertans have well-paying jobs. We need to ensure that we have a quality health care system so that Albertans can seek the help, the medical care, they need where and when they need it. Of course, we also need to maintain a quality education system and ensure that Alberta families have access to affordable child care. In the face of rising costs everywhere Albertans need a government that prioritizes their well-being.

Mr. Chair, I've mentioned these facts in the House before, and I'll mention it again because, as I have said, context is important and numbers tell a story, including the ones contained in Bill 15. Utility bills have doubled over the last year, auto insurance is up 30 per cent, tuition is up almost 30 per cent, and municipal taxes have increased due to funding cuts downloaded to municipalities. The number of doctors accepting new patients has collapsed by 80 per cent over the past four years, school and bus fees are up, Alberta students get less funding than anywhere else in this country, and we're still short many thousands of educational assistants after this government made cuts.

The challenges ahead are not going to get any easier, as demonstrated by some of these key numbers, and according to page 26 of the government's own fiscal plan Alberta's real GDP per capita is expected to stagnate between 2022 and 2027. Mr. Chair, this government prides itself to be a government that is able to put forward the Alberta advantage, yet according to the government's own words, "real GDP per capita [is] falling behind." That means that life is only going to get tougher for everyday Albertans over the next several years.

In addition, as recently as yesterday the Bank of Canada warned that waning productivity growth is an outright emergency. In this context productivity means that Canadians are equipped with the tools they need to accomplish more in the same amount of time. Yet according to the Bank of Canada Canadian productivity is similar to where it was seven years ago. Why is this relevant, and why is this important? This is important, Mr. Chair, because governments through economic diversification, public education, research funding bear a large amount of responsibility in growing productivity.

This brings me to Bill 15. As I have heard every day when I speak to my constituents, Albertans want this government to fix the problems we are facing in Alberta today and ensure a prosperous future. This government brands this budget as a responsible plan, but it is anything but, and in fact it will not deal with the major issues that everyday Albertans are facing, not only today but also tomorrow.

I'll focus on productivity growth because as I look at the numbers again, Mr. Chair, I do not see any investment in ensuring we have a viable economy in the years to come. One of the best tools of any government to ensure long-term productivity is to actually invest in

our public research universities. But when I look at the numbers within Advanced Education, what is included in the supplemental isn't actually even enough to address the cuts over the last many years. Even the amounts that are in this bill are simply not enough to ensure that we have a well-supported and well-funded postsecondary system.

When we look at the base operating grant this government is giving to Alberta's largest university, the University of Alberta, it leaves a lot to be desired. This year the University of Alberta's base operating grant will be the same amount received in the last two budget years. Now, mind you, during the last two years inflation has increased over 10 per cent.

Further, when we look at our province's second-largest university, the University of Calgary, we see a similar story. Today there's news that the U of C relies on student tuition more than its provincial base grant for its budget. On top of making the cost of living worse for Alberta students, this government is missing opportunities to grow Alberta's productivity. Investing in advanced education, like universities and colleges, means that Albertans have the skills and know-how to adapt to an ever-changing world and fill the jobs needed in the economy of tomorrow.

I think it's extraordinary to think about the economic impact that university and college graduates generate over their lifetimes, but we're not seeing this government making the necessary investments, both in this supplemental bill and also in the budget. This government is underfunding its public research university, and frankly, Mr. Chair, it represents a missed opportunity. It represents a missed opportunity for Alberta's economy and for our economic future.

4:30

Consider the economic impact of both the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. According to an economic impact study from R.A. Malatest & Associates released last April, for every dollar the government invests in the University of Alberta, as an example, there is an economic return of \$4.80. Similarly, according to a 2020 analysis for the University of Calgary performed by HR Hanover Research, that institution's quantifiable economic impact is \$17.3 billion. Although the government may tell us that they value education and ingenuity and innovation, that simply isn't the case when you look at what this bill is doing for Alberta's universities and colleges. It simply isn't enough. This supplementary bill and the general direction of this government is missing significant opportunities. It's missing significant opportunities for us to harness the potential and the talent within this province.

The government, obviously, cannot control global economic changes – you know, I certainly understand that – but it can shape how Alberta's economy adapts to the changes in the global economy. The government can ensure that talent within Alberta and Albertans are equipped with the best education possible so that they are resilient and are able to adapt to the changing economy of the future. Mr. Chair, that means harnessing the potential within Alberta's public universities and colleges, and we're not seeing that in Bill 15. Instead, what this government is doing is that it's breaking its promises to Albertans and thereby holding every Albertan back because we're not investing in the full potential of this province. Moreover, families are being left behind.

You know, as I mentioned during the budget debate for the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade, automation poses a significant risk to Alberta's current workforce, especially in the oil and gas sector. I think it's relevant to note that according to Ernst & Young as well as McKinsey and several other, actually, research organizations, many have noted that the workforce and the nature

of work is changing, and by 2030 globally millions of jobs will be lost to innovation. What's unclear in both the budget supplemental and Bill 15 as well as the larger budget is how this government is committed to tackling the changing economy. Mr. Chair, we have an opportunity in this House today to make decisions to get ahead of these trends that will impact Albertans for generations to come. The old way of doing business won't cut it anymore. Alberta needs a government focused on building the economy of the future, and that means an economy that has the ability to adapt. That means investing in energy transition. That means investing in postsecondary education and research and innovation. It means adequately funding our public education systems across this province and ensuring that every student has the support that they need.

I'll give you one more example about why this government just isn't willing to meet this moment in time. I think we are at a critical moment, Mr. Chair. First of all, the government introduced a self-defeating moratorium on renewables that caused harm to Alberta's economy, and not only did it add new and unnecessary regulations; it also destroyed investor certainty and the province's reputation as a stable and predictable place to invest. [interjections] It absolutely did. It absolutely did. I was hoping that these supplements would show that this government is serious about ensuring that we are ahead of the opportunities, the very robust economic opportunities present in the renewable energy sector. But, certainly, much to my disappointment, there is no such investment in the supplementary bill.

Mr. Chair, Alberta has the potential to be home to a thriving and competitive renewables industry. The strict rules the government has introduced last month lead to further investment uncertainty. It signals to the world that we're not open for business. Bill 15 itself, as a whole, sends this message as well. I should note that there is no supplementary funding for the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade. Bill 15 also represents a missed opportunity to support the diversification and resilience of Alberta's economy. It represents, really, the crux of the problem that we have in this House with this budget, and that is it demonstrates this government is out of touch with the priorities of Albertans.

With that, Mr. Chair, I cede my remaining time to my colleagues. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Calgary-Beddington has risen to speak.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Chair. Bill 15, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024. I do love how much you learn in this job. Supplementary supply estimates: this is where we report additional requirements for public money to fund the operations of the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government, and that's for this fiscal year that we are in right now. As I understand things, a request for an additional \$412 million in operating expenses, \$4.5 million in capital, and \$304 million in financial transactions. This was another learning piece for me because, of course, I know what the operating and capital are, but financial transactions was a new one for me. I did take a look at that because, of course, \$304 million is it not an amount to be sneezed at.

For folks at home, many of whom I'm sure are watching right now, who might be wondering, as I did, what this was for – because this is a big amount, right? This is almost as much as the ask for operating expenses. As it turns out, the vast majority of that \$304 million is just for a single ministry; it is for Advanced Education. Just about \$280 million of the \$304 million flows into Advanced Education, and this amount was requested for a single purpose, to

provide funding for student loan disbursements related to disbursement increases in '23-24 and an encumbrance from '22-23.

That's really a big mouthful, but what does it mean? Well, it turns out that all this money is needed due to increased demand for student loans, and those student loans are needed to cover the rising cost of living and education costs. This was an interesting find for me because, of course, Conservative governments, this one and many across the country, are talking about that need to tighten the belt, you know, to bring spending under control. They present budgets that don't fund for population growth. They don't fund for inflation.

I think what we see here is really a direct result of that ideology because what happens when a government cuts services, cuts programs, cuts grants to things like advanced education is that they just download those costs to everyday Albertans, and I think this is exactly what we've seen in postsecondaries in Alberta. Over the last five years the UCP have cut almost a billion dollars from postsecondaries across Alberta. For the first time ever – we learned this today – provincial funding levels for the University of Calgary are below what the institution collects from student tuitions.

4:40

I mean, I do worry that the system is maybe working exactly the way the government wants it to work. You know, maybe the government balance sheet looks better, or maybe they can go to Albertans and say: "Look, see here, we're keeping expenses under control. We're keeping the spending down." But really it's a shell game. So this \$280 million that we see here in supplementary supply estimates: needed, again, to cover the increased demand for loans, to cover that rising cost of living for students.

That rising cost of living, I mean, really kind of falls directly at the feet of this government. These cuts to municipalities, cuts to advanced education, things like holding funding on social services flat in the face of a growing population: all of these things are ways that the government increases the cost of living for everyday Albertans. Of course, students are a part of this group, and students are having to pay tens of thousands of dollars in tuition fees.

I hate to age myself, but it really wasn't that long ago that actually it was possible for someone to complete a postsecondary degree with no or minimal debt. Certainly, I know that wasn't the case for everyone, but for those of us who were living in cities with excellent postsecondary institutions where we could continue living at home with the very gracious support of our parents – you know, I talk to a lot of parents, definitely, in my riding of Calgary-Beddington, and what we talk about is how those days are over. For folks of means, for wealthy families – there are some people, of course, who can afford to pay tuition for their children, so they're not having these students who are needing to apply for these student loans. That's why the government is asking for this money here. But for working-class folks, for the middle class: those parents know they can't do it; there's simply no way to do it.

I looked up the cost of my program – I just wanted to see how much it costs these days – a bachelor of commerce at the University of Calgary. I know it was 20 years ago that I completed this program, but I was able to complete it and graduate from that without debt. Thank you very much, mom, for feeding and sheltering me at no charge. Good job, mom. Major shout-out to the moms. I couldn't have done it without that. And, yeah, sure, it did take me an extra year to complete that program, of course, because I had to defray the costs over an additional year, you know, spread it out a bit so I could make enough money to cover the tuition costs, have the time to make that money but also spread out the number of years over which I paid for those courses. Anyways, my point is that it was possible. It was very possible 20 years ago.

I looked at the program today. What would it cost for my kids today? You know, are my kids going to be these students who are going to be having to get these student loans? The program today would cost close to \$50,000. Fifty thousand dollars. I have three kids, so I automatically triple the cost of everything in my head, be it winter boots or curling registration or lunchroom supervision fees, so \$150,000. I don't know a lot of parents who are able to foot that kind of a bill, and certainly I don't think that students are in a good position to foot that kind of bill either.

I think we know that students right now are facing an affordability crisis. We know that students are using food banks in record numbers, so we're asking these students, who, I mean, to be perfectly clear, should be focusing on their education, should be focusing on their learning – but they're not able to do that because instead they're having to step in and backfill the UCP's defunding of our postsecondary institutions.

So here we are. We've got the government coming with this ask for an additional \$280 million for this increased demand for student loans to cover that rise in cost of living and education costs. Oh, yeah. I heard something in the House earlier today that I thought was relevant to this discussion on supplementary supply. You know, I know the government. They want to say that they're doing things. They want to say that they're taking action. It's not lost on me that the action that they should be taking is simply to properly fund our postsecondaries. That's not an action that we see happening through the budget. It's not an action that we see happening through supplementary supply, right? Rather than properly funding those postsecondaries as a way to keep tuition low, instead we're relying increasingly on students having to borrow, borrow, borrow money to be able to pay for that tuition.

The action I heard about today was to increase the interest-free period on loans to 12 months. Sometimes I think that maybe when you get kind of far away from those years, you can forget a little bit what it's like to be a young person, you know, what it's like to have the kind of debt that you can have from tuition, to graduate and have these tens of thousands of dollars in loans that you have to pay back.

I remember my first job postuniversity. I took that shiny bachelor of commerce and immediately started working for a nonprofit, where I made \$28,000 a year. I know that wages have risen a little bit, certainly, over the last 20 years, but in fact wages, especially here in Alberta, are not keeping up with increases: with the rising cost of living, with increases to things like the cost of tuition. You know, for me, it was a possibility to take that degree and to put it to work in a field that I was very passionate about.

My concern, of course, for young people starting out is that they would have the same ability that I had, you know, to be able to pursue a passion, to be able to build skills, to look for jobs that provide them with the opportunity to learn, to grow, rather than just looking at the job that's going to make them the money they need to pay off these student loans.

My concern when I see these huge numbers on student loans – right? – this \$280 million, is that our young people are in that place where they're having to make choices that are solely based on money. My concern is that during a time when Albertans need to be able to advance their education and where we should be encouraging our youth to actually stay in the province to seek that higher education, the UCP is making it harder. They're making it less accessible. I worry that the path the UCP is taking the province down will mean that universities and colleges will have to rely on more volatile funding models. I think that with that, we could see, you know, an increasing deterioration in our postsecondaries.

I did have a few other thoughts on this, but I know that I have colleagues who would like to speak on this bill as well, so I am going to take my seat. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

I will recognize the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to speak.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today in support of Bill 15, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024. If passed, the funding will support our province's refocused health care system, fund agricultural disaster response, and foster the safe and welcoming communities that Alberta is known for.

When I talk about funding, I want to highlight that our fiscal choices today affect the generations of Albertans that will follow, just like my children. Fiscal responsibility is about ensuring Albertans today get the medical and educational and other support services they need while maintaining the conditions of prosperity, growth, and opportunity for generations to come.

It is my understanding that these supplementary estimates request funding for 13 ministries to help provide for various programs, services, and obligations. This distribution is to best help Albertans today and to prepare for future generations. Our government understands the importance of health care services to Albertans, which is why these supplementary supply estimates include a request for \$133 million in Health. With funding, we can continue to strengthen our primary health care services here in Alberta.

4:50

Every Albertan should have access to timely and appropriate health care services, and our government is dedicated to ensuring this. Through initiatives like modernizing Alberta's primary health care system, as I mentioned before, we can fortify primary health care delivery across the province.

Agriculture is an industry very important in my riding. Agriculture isn't just important in my riding, Mr. Chair; it's important across Alberta. With our beautiful viewscapes and prime agriculture land, Alberta farmers, ranchers, and livestock producers bring food to our tables and the plates of countless people across the globe. I know that many in my constituency and many in rural Alberta work in this very important industry.

To further support our ag industries, \$109 million is being requested to support farmers and producers grappling with unplanned costs arising from agricultural disasters. This funding would particularly be crucial in the face of the challenges posed by very dry years. I know the constituents of Cypress-Medicine Hat have felt the effects of the drought over the last few years, even declaring a state of agricultural disaster last year. Notably, this funding would include provisions for vital programs such as AgriRecovery, AgriInvest, and insurance initiatives.

Mr. Chair, unlike the soft-on-crime NDP-Liberal alliance, our government is dedicated to supporting safe streets and communities. While some members opposite would like to see our police defunded, I want to highlight my personal gratitude for all of our first responders and emergency responding personnel. This is why our government is requesting an additional \$81 million in funding critical entities such as the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, the gun and gang violence action fund as well as the Alberta community safety analytics lab. I want to personally thank all of the brave men and women who serve as police officers, who keep our streets, our communities, our businesses, and families safe.

Next, many young adults are pursuing their education at a postsecondary level, and I know many individuals, including myself, at any stage of their lives who have chosen to return to college, university, polytechnics, or just continuing to expand their knowledge. Recognizing the financial burdens on students, \$278.8 million is being requested to be used towards increased student loans aimed to off-set the rising cost of living and educational

expenses. This increase would play an important role in making postsecondary education accessible and affordable.

Additionally, \$2.3 million is requested for initiatives under the national action plan to end gender-based violence across three separate ministries.

A further \$9.9 million is being requested which would support community justice and integrated services, including provisions for drug treatment court and the impact of race and cultural assessments. Drug treatment court offers a holistic support structure encompassing substance abuse treatment, case management, housing supports, and financial assistance addressing the root causes of crime.

Our government is committed to ensuring every child facing mental health challenges also has an opportunity to pursue recovery. This is why in these supplemental estimates we see \$46 million being requested for Mental Health and Addiction for communities under the new bilateral agreement with the federal government to expand youth mental health and addiction programs. Mr. Chair, I've heard the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction talk a lot about these programs and their importance. Our government's partnership with CASA Mental Health is also bringing mental health professionals directly into schools for students with complex challenges. CASA Mental Health currently operates eight classrooms, with more on the way. This is an incredibly positive impact on the children and youth they help.

Lastly, it's essential to emphasize that the remaining supplementary supply amounts are dedicated to ensure a seamless provision of services and programming on which all Albertans rely. Mr. Chair, despite what the opposition might say, these supplementary estimates strike a critical balance between supporting Albertans now and protecting the prosperity of future Albertans through fiscal responsibility. Bill 15 is not merely a fiscal measure; it is a testament to our unwavering commitment to the well-being and prosperity of all Albertans. As we navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead, we will continue to work collaboratively towards building a stronger, more resilient Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity. I want to keep it brief, because I know that the members on the other side just love to hear me speak.

Of course, with this supplementary supply bill, this has to do with the priorities that this party believes that Albertans desire. You know, as I run down the list of the ministries that will be getting supplementary supply, the one that, outstandingly, is surprising that I don't see on that list is Education. It's surprising to me because our public education system here in the province of Alberta is going through a myriad of problems, and I can't understand why this government doesn't seem to make it a priority. Children going to public schools in the province of Alberta: their concerns aren't being met.

I've heard from a number of constituents, not only in my own riding but throughout Alberta, that classrooms are just absolutely crowded. We're talking about 40 students to a classroom when the ideal would be having 25 students to a class. This continues to be a problem here in the province of Alberta. I would urge the government – and I know that they're big defenders of choice in education, and I don't mind that. If an individual wants to send their child to a private school, all power to them. But don't degrade the public school system, because the majority of Albertans are sending their children to those public schools. Neighbourhoods like the one

I grew up in in Mill Woods. Salt-of-the-earth people, good, working-class people that don't have the option of sending their kids to a private school: their only option is to send them down the street to the public school or the Catholic school that's inside of their neighbourhood. Those schools also need to be protected by the government.

But the problem is, Mr. Chair, that they're not. These classrooms are overcrowded. The maintenance on these schools is sometimes not even being addressed at all. One of the biggest problems that many of my constituents are coming to me for – and I know this is something in the purview of the Edmonton public school board, but this is something that can be addressed by building more schools – is the fact that parents have to go through a lottery system. Literally, I tell you that the school could be right across the street from where this constituent lives, but because of how the border has been drawn, they can't send their child to that school that's right across the street.

So this government needs to do better. It needs to do better to make sure that we have more public schools all across Alberta to meet the needs of all those Albertans, who, I would say, are salt-of-the-earth people, people that deserve their tax dollars going into the most important priority for them, which is their children and their education.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:00

The Deputy Chair: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 14 and Bill 15.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 14 and Bill 15.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly agree in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That is carried and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 10

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

[Debate adjourned March 26: Member Brar speaking]

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. Now, within this bill we have the provision to set up the framework to enable the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus. The 2024-2027 fiscal plan on page 95 shows that this attraction bonus will cost \$14 million. Now, the interesting thing here is that of this \$14 million, \$4 million is being spent to advertise

and administer the program. So in order to give away \$10 million, the government is going to spend \$4 million. That's a 40 per cent cost of administration.

This is interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, because, of course, this is a government that, for example, their UCP members, their affiliates have complained loudly and often about wasted dollars on administration in health care. They like to talk often about managers managing managers, talk about value for dollars. But this government, on their own, one of their flagship programs is spending \$4 million in order to give away \$10 million. If that isn't ridiculous levels of administrative spending, I don't know what is. Surely there are far more effective ways to make use of that \$14 million. There are far more effective ways that \$14 million could be spent to attract skilled workers to Alberta.

Now, again, this is a government that has often complained, its members have complained about administrative costs in the health care system, specifically at Alberta Health Services, which they are in the process of dismantling. Now, the most recent numbers from the Canadian Institute for Health Information for 2021-2022 showed that Alberta Health Services had a corporate services expense ratio – that's the percentage of their total expenses that were spent in administrative departments – of 2.7 per cent. Two point seven per cent, Mr. Speaker, for an organization responsible for co-ordinating the entirety of a complex health care system serving over 4 million Albertans. Now, multiple members across the aisle have criticized AHS for not being efficient enough with its dollars. Are they going to be rising on Bill 10 and similarly criticizing their colleague then, the Minister of Finance, for this grossly inefficient program which has to spend \$4 million in order to give away \$10 million; 40 per cent of the amount they're giving away to give that amount away? That is incredible inefficiency, but not a word from these government members about this incredibly inefficient plan.

Mr. Speaker, there is no arguing that it's against the fact that there is an economic benefit to attracting new workers to the province. I am not making that argument here. Absolutely, we need to bring more skilled workers to our province. When we bring more skilled workers to our province in a variety of industries, then they add to our economy. They boost our ability to produce. They boost the ability for our industries to function. That adds to our economy. They spend here in our communities. They boost our economy that way. They boost the local economy. They buy homes. They buy vehicles. They are contributing members of our communities and our economy in Alberta. That is an absolute benefit.

But I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there are far more efficient ways that we could be attracting skilled workers with \$14 million than spending \$4 million to give away \$10 million. Now, the members, I can hear, are listening with rapt attention for what those opportunities might be. So I look forward to being able to share more of that as we continue in debate.

Now, certainly, providing quality health care services would also provide economic benefits here in the province of Alberta and also would help retain and attract skilled workers here in the province of Alberta. When people are healthy, Mr. Speaker, they are able to work. It creates an attractive environment for people to want to be in the province of Alberta. But we are not seeing that from this government. We are yet to see any kind of a significant plan to attract and retain health care workers in the province of Alberta.

This government has been talking for months, years about a fair deal for family doctors in this province, attracting those skilled workers, retaining those skilled workers here in the province of Alberta. And if we want to retain other skilled workers in this province, they're going to want to have a family doctor. That \$14 million could go to actually providing the stabilization funding

those doctors have been asking for and which this government claims it intends to provide but has not provided yet. Instead, they did strike a series of six-month task forces, keep talking about the issue, not taking action. But they're willing to blow \$4 million on administrating a program to give away \$10 million. So there is one way that \$14 million could be put to better use to attract skilled workers that we desperately need here in the province of Alberta. Again, I maintain there are far more effective ways to invest that \$14 million to get the skilled workers we need.

Now, of course, we note now, Mr. Speaker, that this is \$14 million being spent to subsidize recruitment for private industry. Again, that is \$4 million being spent on an administrative program to give away \$10 million to subsidize private industry while we are in dire need of every kind of health care worker in every area of our system. Thanks in part to the incompetence of this government, to the chaos it has created in our health care system, we continue to pay inflated rates for contract nurses, which is a massive increase in costs for the public. And even with hiring those contract nurses, we are still understaffed in pretty much every health care facility across this province. That \$14 million could be going to retain those health care workers that we desperately need, could be going to hire more health care workers, could be going to help support the health care system where we desperately need it.

Mr. Jones: Intervention.

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly. If the member has a comment, he's welcome to make it.

Mr. Jones: I just heard the member opposite commenting on the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus, I believe, about the \$4 million. Three million will be used for advertising and marketing, and \$767,000 is earmarked for administration in '24-25. As with all programs delivered by Jobs, Economy and Trade, we will seek to reduce the administrative costs and be as efficient as possible and redirect that to either additional grants for skilled trades recipients or additional marketing to attract more skilled trades to build the homes, schools, hospitals, and petrochemical infrastructure that we need to build.

Thank you for the concerns. Hear them loud and clear. We certainly don't want outsized administrative costs in our program. We won't let that happen. So, again, \$3 million is devoted to marketing and advertising, and about \$750,000 in '24-25.

5:10

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for clarifying that, indeed, they are spending \$4 million in order to give away \$10 million. Now, they can call it advertising; they can call it administration. Whatever they want to call it, they are spending \$4 million in overhead costs in order to give away \$10 million. That is not efficiency, and there are better uses for that \$14 million.

As I said, we could be spending that \$14 million on incentives for family doctors. Now, other provinces took action months ago, Mr. Speaker, long ago, and they are seeing success in attracting and retaining the family doctors that are desperately needed to keep their economies functioning to attract skilled workers to their province. This government continues to drag its feet. That \$14 million could be better spent there.

I would also note, Mr. Speaker, that this is a government whose members cut the budget for the Auditor General. Let me repeat that. This is a government whose members cut the budget for the Auditor General. The Auditor General, I can tell you, year over year has delivered incredible value for money. The Auditor General, year over year, has done incredible service for the people of Alberta and

has done it on an incredibly slim budget. Now, the Auditor General asked for an increase this year because there is an increase in wages in their department, as did many of the officers of the Legislature, an increase, I will note, that was voted in favour of, that was mandated by members of the government. So he asked for a small increase to be able to cover that cost. The members of this government that sit on that committee refused. They denied him that, which is an effective cut, which means that he has to cut services. They say that the Auditor General, who does that service on behalf of Albertans, holding this government to account on their spending – perhaps he will be auditing that \$4 million that is being spent in order to administer the \$10 million in this program – needs to do more with less. That is going to cut into the ability of that Auditor General to be able to hold this government to account. Meanwhile, they are going to spend \$4 million to advertise and administer a program to give away \$10 million.

I see the minister has another concern, and I'm happy to give him the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Jones: Thank you to the hon. member. I always enjoy his remarks. He's generally very well informed.

I would encourage the members opposite to see value in promoting Alberta to the workers that we need to alleviate the challenges that we're facing. So to characterize advertising money as being wasteful to bring in the workers that we need to address the housing challenges that the members opposite talk about daily, to address the health care infrastructure challenges the members opposite talk about every day I think is unhelpful. I think that, for example, their usage of advertising dollars to promote a carbon tax – nobody wants that – would be something that I would characterize as a complete waste of the government's time and not aligned with the interests of Albertans. Again, the advertising money we're using is to bring the workers into Alberta that are needed to build the things that Albertans need, and the members opposite can mischaracterize it however they wish, but we're going to continue to address the infrastructure needs of Albertans, and we need the skilled trades to do that.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do see that this hits a sore spot with the minister and with the government members. I do see that they do not like the fact that we are highlighting the fact that they are spending \$4 million in order to give away \$10 million. Now, there are opportunities in many ways, the key to attract workers to Alberta. Indeed, we have seen in a CBC article that came out just the other day that we are indeed seeing a significant increase in people coming to the province of Alberta. We have seen a surge in the population to just over 4.8 million as of January 1. Certainly, that is moving forward. That is successful. In this case, the government feels they need to spend that \$4 million to give away \$10 million to attract skilled workers.

Of course, the government has had four years to take action to increase access to training incentives here in the province. There are opportunities, if we need those skilled workers, Mr. Speaker, to train those workers here in the province of Alberta. There are people that would like to gain those skills and take those jobs. This government has had four years to provide those opportunities and help fill those positions here in the province of Alberta. They could have chosen to invest \$14 million to lower tuition for postsecondaries, to lower the tuition for people that are going into the trades in some of these skilled areas, but they did not.

Indeed, they chose to make drastic cuts to our postsecondary institutions and drive up the cost of tuition for many skilled occupations in this province of Alberta, making it inaccessible for many of the people, particularly from marginalized communities

that would want to move into those skilled trades, those opportunities for people here in Alberta to step up and take on, fill those needs that we have here. Indeed, in the same way as bringing in a skilled worker from another province, giving people in Alberta the opportunity to gain those skills and step into those positions will also benefit our economy. That individual will do better, and they will contribute more to our local economy.

Again, speaking specifically of programs that would remove barriers for marginalized communities to learn a trade, now I think, Mr. Speaker, of NorQuest College right here in my constituency. The Alberta Indigenous construction centre, a wonderful example of just such a program: it's certainly where funding like this could be of great use. They partner with industry to provide opportunities for individuals from First Nations, Indigenous communities to come and learn a trade, get practical on-the-job experience, be able to access the postsecondary training they need, and move into those skilled occupations. That is a great investment, a better investment, in my view, than spending \$4 million to give away \$10 million.

Indeed, there are many opportunities like this that we could be expanding across communities. You know, the other day, Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to meet a gentleman, Mr. Courtney Parr. He owns a company here in town called Variety Finishing. Now, Courtney, I believe, came here from Jamaica; Caribbean heritage. He was telling me about the opportunities that were provided to him through the construction industry, and he wanted to give back. He's founded a company called Learning for Vision, a nonprofit. Through Learning for Vision he is offering a youth carpentry program, providing educational opportunities, mentorship for African, Caribbean, and Black youth. The youth carpentry program that he's starting: they're going to be taking, in their first class in June for youth aged 16 to 25, a 14-month program that will give them basic training and carpentry skills, opportunities to learn more advanced skills, and then open up a path to apprenticeship.

Now, imagine, Mr. Speaker, if we saw more investment from this government in those kinds of opportunities to give young people here in Alberta from marginalized communities who cannot afford the increasing tuition under this government the opportunity to move into a skilled trade, to meet what we recognize is a real need here in the province of Alberta and for themselves then to build a better career, to build a better path for themselves and their lives and thus be able to add more to our economy, be able to contribute more to their communities. That, to me, I think, would be a better investment than this boutique program this government is putting forward in which they are spending \$4 million to give away \$10 million.

Now, I will give the government credit, Mr. Speaker, in that this is one promise from the election campaign that they actually kept. We know so many that they didn't, of course. They promised that they were going to bring in a permanent income tax cut for Albertans. That has, of course, not occurred. That is being delayed and kicked down the road to the next election, when perhaps they'll promise it again, and we'll see if they actually follow through on that. They promised, of course, that this very month – today being Canadian orthopaedic day, I will note they promised that this month there would be zero Albertans waiting on the surgical wait-list beyond clinical wait times. They missed that target by 80 per cent. This is not a government that's fond of keeping its promises. As much as they promised they would not go forward with an Alberta pension plan, they promised they would not go forward with an Alberta provincial police force, they are doing all those things. But I will give them credit in that this was one promise that they made that they are actually keeping.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, I have my concerns with how these dollars are being spent, and I do think there are better ways they could have chosen to spend them. I look forward to more opportunities to debate this government's budget spending on some of the other bills.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I wondered if you might be inclined to adjourn debate on this.

Mr. Shepherd: Oh. Before I finish, I will adjourn debate. Yes.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:20 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 15 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024 (continued)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to make some comments about the government's supplementary estimate appropriation act. I think it's part of the government's fiscal policy how the government collects revenues, spends them, and these spendings do have an important and huge impact on people and their lives, on our economy. I will make some comments that particularly relate to the critic portfolios that I have, and then I will offer some general comments as well.

When we talk about last year's budget, last year's circumstances, there are many issues that are facing our communities. First and foremost, I think, ever since the UCP has been in government, health care has been an issue, and it continues to get worse. Wait times are skyrocketing. They were there before as well, but under the UCP they have gone up every single year and quite significantly. There are many health centres, emergency centres across this province that have been shut down because of the UCP policies, as a direct result of the UCP policies.

Instead of working with the people, listening to experts, listening to front-line professionals, what this government has done: they have come up with plans to further destabilize our health system and take more control in their hands, when I think they can't be trusted to get it right. There were promises made that they will fix in 90 days, things will be changed by appointing one executive and dismantling the board, but the fact remains that our health system has deteriorated every year with every budget under this government's watch.

The money that they are asking in supplementary estimates is not going to make a difference because the government's fundamental approach to health care is: just find as much opportunity to privatize it and as quickly as possible. Last time, last year, when they told Albertans that they will be privatizing lab services, they gave lab services to DynaLife, and the result was that delays in some cases were two to three months long just to get basic lab tests. That happened in Calgary; that happened everywhere across this province. That was a complete failure of this government's

experience, and now Albertans are hooked to pay almost \$90 million for the UCP failed experience on privatization.

There are so many studies out there that privatizing health care doesn't fix it, and now much of the public dollars are also going towards private surgical facilities, which, again, will not improve the health care. On this side of the House we support and believe in a publicly funded and publicly delivered health care that has no profit motives. The only motive is to make sure that Albertans get the care they need whenever they need it, wherever they need it. That's not happening in this budget, and these sums will not ensure that Albertans have that access to health care.

There are funds allocated to Advanced Education as well, Mr. Chair, significant funds. Just to, I guess, put this into context, back in 2019 Alberta used to have, among the provinces that have the most affordable university education, the lowest among many Canadian jurisdictions. The UCP government came in, they shut the doors on university education on everyone but for the rich, they removed the cap from tuition, and in some cases tuition fees have gone up 100 per cent. As a result, many Albertans are finding it difficult to get their kids to universities.

The area I represent, Mr. Chair, in northeast Calgary has the lowest student representation in postsecondary institutions, in the University of Calgary. The northeast quadrant of the city has the lowest number of students in university. That's not just a coincidence. There are many people who are first-generation immigrants. It is difficult for them to afford a university education, and with the policies of this UCP government it has even become more difficult. That disparity will remain there notwithstanding what the supplementary estimate will add to Advanced Education.

I think investing in advanced education is important. It is important to build a future economy. It is important for individuals to reach their full potential. It is important for opening up opportunities for all Albertans. Education is an equalizer. But when you make education so expensive that it's out of reach for the majority of Albertans, I think then government needs to think about it. Are they there to govern for all Albertans or for just a select few? This year we also found out that now the government is paying less than what universities are collecting in student fees. That's how much government has increased advanced education fees in the last four or five years. This estimate will not change that advanced education remains among the most expensive across Canada.

Then I can see some spending in the Justice department as well. Much of that spending, \$8.4 million, is going to Legal Aid Alberta's budget, another important expenditure because access to justice is important, access to representation is important. That's fundamental to a fair society where people can exercise their rights and can access justice when they are wronged.

5:30

What happened, just to put that in context, is that in 2018 the government of Alberta at that time worked with the Law Society of Alberta, Legal Aid Alberta, and they came up with a tripartite agreement which stipulated that the legal aid budget would be increased in four instalments. The first instalment was given in the '18-19 budget, making the legal aid budget \$104 million for that year. As soon as the UCP took over, among the many contracts they tore apart, Legal Aid's was one of them, and they started slashing the legal aid budget.

Then last year, eventually, the legal community and Albertans had enough of it. They thought: enough is enough. They came out and they protested against these unfair cuts to legal aid across this province, and then government was dragged to the negotiating table. Then, to save face, they added some money to it, but that was not enough.

While this year they changed the legal aid eligibility, making more Albertans eligible to get legal aid, what they did on the other hand was that they slashed legal aid funding by \$33 million in the '24-25 budget. I do recognize I'm talking about supplementary estimates, but in supplementary estimates – they have cut the legal aid budget, so they have to add another \$8.4 million. That's, in fact, coming from the federal government, but they are adding it here.

The concern here is that the government has an obligation to make sure that all Albertans have access to justice, and one of the ways they can make sure of that is through Legal Aid Alberta. But in the last five years the government has made cuts to Legal Aid Alberta and therefore is doing everything to impede Albertans' access to justice. That is unfair. That's not what Albertans expect from their government. Albertans deserve far better than this, and the government should think about how they are spending money, taxpayer money, and what outcomes they want to get out of it.

There are also some investments in public safety, Municipal Affairs. Last year municipalities had a lot of concerns about the province downloading costs on to them and many concerns that public safety is not . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: The Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm finding a difficult time making the connection between the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024, and the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. He's talking about previous years. He's talking about items probably that are more appropriate for Bill 14, the Appropriation Act, 2024. I'm struggling to find where we have anything in here about supplementary supply. It's pretty cut and dried. I feel like I'm missing that. I'm not sure if the member is talking about the wrong bill or if he strayed off the wrong talking notes, but it might be worth getting back on topic.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Chair, clearly, the Government House Leader is missing it – I'm not sure – because I talked about \$8.4 million. That's in this supplementary estimate. I was just putting things into context, what that program is, and giving a little bit of background on how that program has been struggling. I think my comment was clearly about supplementary supply and the programs that this supply impacts, so it's not a point of order.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, members. At this time I'm not going to consider it a point of order, but I will consider the comments made by the Government House Leader, and I have made comments with regard to ensuring that we keep our comments to Bill 15, supplementary supply, and try to focus on the actual bill in front of us.

The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has about five and a half minutes left if he wishes to continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was moving on to the supplementary estimates that are included in the public safety and Municipal Affairs departments. I think both of these ministries are important, and municipalities in many cases have a huge part to play in public safety. The public safety ministry, of course, is dedicated to making sure that people across this province are safe. However,

what we have seen is that crimes, according to the government's own report, violent crimes have gone up in rural Alberta, in cities. Property crime has gone up in cities, urban centres, in rural communities. People are concerned about the overall safety and security that they feel in their province. Sure, some of the supplementary budget will go towards gun and gang violence; however, those are the funds that are coming from the federal government. We have heard a lot of talk from this government – the zero-tolerance crime policy, all those announcements and reannouncements of police officers – but the fact remains that people are not feeling safe in their communities. People are not feeling safe in their cities. The government's own stats certainly reflect those trends.

Here the government is asking us to give them more money, write them blank cheques through supplementary supply but not talk about the outcomes, not talk about the output, not talk about the value that we are getting from this money. If Albertans are paying for public safety supplies for gun and gang violence, then I think that talking about gun violence in our communities is well within this bill. We have seen gun violence go up, and the only thing we heard from the government is that they are expediting the gun acquisition licences. That's the only thing that we see as their priority. There are monies that are appropriated through this, through the supplementary act, so government should tell us how this money will help us with gun violence, how it will help us curb gun violence, how it will stop the proliferation of guns, illegal guns in our communities. Part of this money is certainly going for that, but we don't have any details about how that will be spent.

5:40

Then I will talk a little bit about the K to 12 education budget. In supplementary supply, if I am reading it correctly, there are some adjustments, some expenses. I will talk about education because when I talk to my constituents, they talk about education; they talk about overcrowding of classrooms. I do get casework from constituents regularly about how schools in their neighbourhoods are over capacity and their kids are being bused to other quadrants. That's the case with Nelson Mandela high school, which is over capacity, and many people living around that school have reached out to me, to many of my colleagues with concern that they don't have access to a public school in their own communities.

We can see that in this appropriation bill there is more money going towards education, but what we are not seeing: we are not seeing more schools in our communities. What we are not seeing: we are not seeing any reduction in class sizes. We are not seeing any support for students, in particular those with additional learning needs such as English as a second language or with any learning disabilities.

So I cannot support this appropriation act.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 15? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 15, the supplementary estimates. This bill, like all of the budget bills that we're debating this week, I feel, contains broken promises from the UCP to Albertans again. We see tax hikes, new levies, things like that. I am going to get to supplementary estimates more specifically, but with all of these bills – and when we think about budgets, I think what it's really about is: how do we prioritize spending when decisions are hard? How do we choose where development happens versus where do we foster tourism? How do we choose where we focus reclamation

efforts versus development efforts? That is at the heart of all of our budgeting conversations. It's really a question of priorities.

For me, like, a lot of my issues with this supplementary supply are more about what's not reflected in supplementary supply. We don't see any additional funds being required for health system capacity, for example, but in my riding of Banff-Kananaskis the entire Bow Valley is facing doctor shortages. We have the Canmore and the Banff hospitals serving a population much greater than the residents that live in those communities. I don't see additional funding reflected in the supplementary supply to help those hospitals serving a tourist population and the increased cost that comes with that.

There's also no provision for housing people, to ensure that services are in place when they come to Alberta. We've all talked about the growing Alberta population, but we don't see a lot of support for services when people arrive here.

One of the things that is also not reflected in supplementary supply is that wages haven't kept up with inflation. Just for a little bit of context, the living wage in Canmore is \$38 an hour. There are not a lot of people who make \$38 an hour. What that does is that it off-loads costs onto the municipality to create programs that reduce that living wage. The town of Canmore offers free transit, for example, which is a cost to the municipality to reduce that living wage in an effort to make life more affordable for Albertans.

There's nothing in this supplementary supply or any of our budget bills that really tries to make life more affordable for Albertans. And when we don't do that as a provincial government, we off-load that cost and responsibility on to municipal governments, and that usually gets reflected in property taxes for folks.

In terms of tourism, the Tourism and Sport ministry is not reflected anywhere in the supplementary supply, but I wish it was because there are a lot of places where we could be boosting tourism. For example, the tourism levy . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but it is 5:45, and pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put the following question. Does the committee approve the following bills: Bill 14, Appropriation Act, 2024 and Bill 15, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024?

[Motion carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 14, Bill 15.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly agree in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried and so ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow. Oh. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

All right. Well, maybe we'll go over to second reading of Bill 10, then. How about we do that? How do we feel about that, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: I think you should probably defeat the motion that you made.

Mr. Schow: All right. Let's defeat that motion, then.

[Motion lost]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 10 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West is rising to speak to second reading of Bill 10?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, please. Thank you. I appreciate it. You know, you have to be nimble in this job, right? You're never sure what's going to happen. Like the Alberta weather, things can change very quickly.

I'm happy to come forward to speak a few comments about Bill 10 here this afternoon. You know, one of the things that I was concerned about with this budget was some areas of responsibility that I had both as critic for Advanced Education and as a Minister of Education and the underfunding that we saw so prevalent in both of these areas. When I got the supplementary supply book and saw Advanced Education with such a huge number, I mean, I was scratching my head: \$278 million added in supplementary supply. I thought: what the heck is this all about? Then I realized that, of course, it's to backstop the student loan program. Everything has become so much more expensive for postsecondary education students that they literally had to drop another \$278 million into the student loan program just to keep people afloat.

We all know just how much more expensive postsecondary education is now for students in Alberta. We've seen record increases for five or six years in a row, and the tuition and extra expenses have just put many people out of being able to go to school, right? We had the hon. member speaking earlier about how even years ago she took an extra year so she could pay for her education. Just imagine what it's like now, Mr. Speaker, where you literally have, you know, students with tuition exceeding \$50,000 a year to go to school. By raising the prices so dramatically here in the province, we've literally priced postsecondary out of reach for so many of our young people here in Alberta.

While we talk about, you know, quite a significant increase in the population of our province here from interprovincial immigration and national immigration, it's very worth noting as well, mind you, Mr. Speaker, that the biggest net increase by far is coming from temporary foreign workers coming into this province – right? – which is a whole other problem unto itself.

5:50

Regardless, people will move into a place looking for opportunity – you know, different parts of Canada are not maybe doing as well – but they'll move away just as fast, too, if they can't afford to be here. That same mobility that brings people into Alberta will also contribute to the exit out of Alberta if people can't afford to live their lives here in the province of Alberta. For postsecondary, that's a real issue. I sat in supplementary supply estimates last week, and the minister did admit freely, because it was there in black and white – you can't deny it – that the budget for Advanced Education did not meet population growth and inflation. Those two things together, even if you are flat in your budgeting, even if you're flat in your

expenditures for a ministry: it's actually a cut. It's actually a cut of about 5 per cent or so, again, with postsecondary education.

That's on top of four years previous of significant cuts to postsecondary education, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're now in the fifth year of that cycle, and we're not able to create the spaces that students need in critical areas such as health care and in our trades as well. I mean, there is an investment into trades, but it's more words on a page than it is actual, substantial money. You can create spaces in the trades or in some of them, but if people can't afford to go there, then it doesn't matter. It's a moot point.

Really, there are lots of ways by which we could improve this budget. We know that this bill is part of the string of broken promises that this government has brought through since the election and with these first few months of the government. We know, for example, that we are critically short of health care workers. I have lots of health care workers in my family, and, you know, if they somehow pick up the phone five, six, seven, eight times a day, even if they're on a day off, it's because the hospital is calling because they are always short of workers at our critical care facilities across this province. You know, this idea that we can bring thousands of people into the province of Alberta but not fund all of the things they need to live: again, Mr. Speaker, people will come – it's quite a remarkable thing to see people come – but they can leave just as fast, too. We need to think about that for long-term stability and building all of the things that families need in order to live.

I find that this budget, as well, is interesting and deeply ironic in that there are so many increases to fees that this government is imposing on Albertans with this budget. These fees are otherwise a tax by any other name, you know, and there are so many more new fees and expenses and taxes, really, built into this budget, which Bill 10 exemplifies, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. While we are in a generational inflationary period here in the province of Alberta, this government chooses to drop a budget that just makes things worse for Albertans and all of the inflationary pressures that they feel to meet the needs of their family with housing, with food, with tuition, as we saw before, with fuel, right?

The fuel tax relief is going to be taken off here on April 1, so we'll see quite a significant increase for fuel, gasoline for cars, and the list just goes on and on and on. Somehow it seems in some ways that this government doesn't even understand or is wilfully ignorant about what the expenses are that Albertans are facing here in the province right now. I heard the Minister of Finance say: oh, well, if you take housing out of the inflationary formula, then really our inflation isn't that bad. You could say: well, where does the Minister of Finance, for example, live? We all live in a house, or we live in an apartment. We need a place to stay, and that's usually the biggest expense that we have on a monthly basis, being a mortgage or rent or whatever. I mean, either that's just flippant or wilfully ignorant or not understanding what the real expense is that Albertans are meeting and facing here in the province of Alberta today. You know, again, a broken-promise budget.

This Bill 10 is enabling legislation. I don't want to enable cuts to our health care system. I don't want to enable underfunding education and postsecondary education here in the province of Alberta. We want to make sure that people can live and live comfortably. You can balance the budget and do those things, too, right? This constantly misrepresenting what the responsibilities of a government are – why we are in this Legislature in the first place is to supply, to ensure the safety and the security of Albertans in the broadest possible way, which includes health care, which includes being able to have high-quality education for your kids, to have an affordable place to stay, to have that actual safety through security and so forth, to know that people can afford to live here.

I mean, it's quite remarkable, really, and the more I sit here and listen to it, the more I see that it's simply, Mr. Speaker, a sleight of hand, this budget. It's a sleight of hand where this government was so hell bent on cutting health care and introducing more privatization in health care and cutting education and all the expenses that go with that, that even with a relatively high price for royalties for energy, they're still manufacturing a way to make cuts. It's irresponsible. It misrepresents the financial situation that this province of Alberta is in right now and merely exacerbates the unaffordable circumstances that the vast majority of Albertans are living in right now.

I mean, some people aren't. Maybe that's who these members on the opposite side hang out with, people who have no problem – right? – and say: “Things are going great. We're making lots of money.” That's a minority, a small minority, of the 4.8 million people that live in this province, Mr. Speaker. You need to make sure you represent everyone when you are in government. You don't just represent the special interests that fund your party or the special interests that drive your agenda or the ideological far-right people that you depend on to prop up your party – right? – the Take Back Alberta people. You're there to represent everyone and to make sure that their safety and their security and their well-being are looked after.

So I have a hard time thinking about supporting this Bill 10. I know that it has many sorts of small changes that are necessary to move the budget forward; for example, the extra cost in the land titles registration to buy and sell a house. Again, we have so many

people moving into the province, we have so many people that are looking for an affordable place to live, and then the government just says: oh, by the way, we're going to charge extra thousands of dollars to register a land title or a mortgage, right? I mean, all of these little expenses: they add up, and they deter people from making long-term investments that will eventually provide more stability for the family to get a mortgage, to buy a house, and all of those things, Mr. Speaker.

This is so exciting. I need to take a drink. It's just too much.

Over the next couple of days there are high expectations from the people of Alberta that this budget would make life more affordable for them, and quite frankly it does the opposite. It's as though you create a budget – everybody knows that there's a lot of economic activity, they know that the energy prices are high, and there's an expectation with those things that you get a share, that you get a share to make sure that you can look after your family. This government, instead, does quite the opposite. You know, people remember those things, Mr. Speaker. It's not like you can just get away with this sleight of hand. You don't get away with it because people have long memories, especially if they're losing their mortgages, especially if they're not . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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