



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 16, 2024

Day 39

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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McDougall
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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 16, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to introduce to the Assembly a delegation from Slave Lake who are joining us today in the Speaker's gallery. This group includes the Slave Lake CAO Jeff Simpson, Slave Lake town council, including Mayor Frankie Ward, the remainder of the council, other municipal leaders, including municipally elected leaders in the county, and also my good friend, also from Slave Lake, Mr. Gord Ferguson. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I don't know much about Slave Lake, but it would seem the majority of the population also came for a visit today.

The Minister of Forestry and Parks has an introduction to make today.

Mr. Loewen: Not yet.

The Speaker: Well, he won't make one, then.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you some amazing people from Lesser Slave Lake: some good family friends of mine, Rob Loroff and Justin Loroff; an amazing lady from the High Prairie area, Big Lakes county, Ann Stewart; Gordon Ferguson from Slave Lake; and then the rest of the town council previously mentioned. Please rise and receive the very, very loud welcome from this wonderful House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I wouldn't want to put the Minister of Forestry and Parks on the spot, but are you sure that you don't have an introduction and they're not in the gallery already?

Mr. Loewen: I think we might be missing one, but I'll go ahead with the introduction. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you. From the group ALUS we have Christine Campbell, the western hub manager for ALUS. We have Rhonda King, the national budget director from Vermilion River, and Michelle Tetreault from ALUS, senior adviser. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Bhagat Atwal, an accomplished academic with a master's in science and philosophy and a PhD in chemistry. He has served as a professor and administrator in

many national and international institutions, publishing research and guiding many on their academic journey. I ask that Dr. Atwal rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Official Opposition Deputy House leader.

Wildfire Prevention

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are resilient. We step up when we are needed and are dedicated to taking care of one another. Now is our time to lead on wildfire. The front-line staff of the wildland fires are asking this government to collaborate with them. They have responded to our call to address the climate crisis, the stage 4 drought, and ongoing zombie fires already burning in the province.

The province could lead. They could lead by ensuring that all crews are staffed with experienced wildland firefighters, that each crew has a team lead with years of seasonal experience to ensure that all crew members are safe. The province could lead by addressing retention issues with seasonal contracts that move to year-round wildland firefighting crews, just like B.C. The province could lead by ensuring wages, that haven't been adjusted for the past five years, are raised to a respectable rate. The province could lead by adopting danger pay compensation. The province could lead by ensuring mental health supports are provided to address the trauma associated with intense wildfire and emergency response situations. The province could lead by ensuring presumptive coverage for wildland firefighters with cancer related to firefighting, just like our municipal firefighters receive. The province could lead by working with municipalities and industry to create fireguards to protect residents building today and not waiting until the fires are imminent tomorrow. The province could lead by setting up clear communication guidelines with Indigenous communities, develop evacuation strategies for areas like Fort Chipewyan.

The province could be leaders on wildland fire prevention and wildland firefighting. It could be done by planning for fire, not simply hoping it won't be bad. It could be done by supporting front-line workers, not by abandoning them during recruitment. It could be done by working with federal government in assessing training, not by picking petulant fights. It could be done by training and working with municipalities, not by overreaching and leaving them out of the conversation. Mr. Speaker, I believe Alberta can be leaders in wildfire prevention, a leader in keeping communities safe from wildfire, but it's a choice, one I have yet to see this government make.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a statement to make.

Affordable Housing

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to rise today and speak about our government's commitment to ensure that vulnerable and low-income Albertans have access to safe and affordable places they can call home. This morning the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services announced the next step in our plan to build affordable homes across our province and to make sure our housing partners have the tools they need to keep affordable homes available to Alberta families.

I'm proud to announce that through Budget 2024 our government has invested approximately \$75 million in operational funding for community housing providers. This represents a historic increase of

\$21 million, or nearly 40 per cent, when compared to 2023. Throughout this funding Alberta's housing providers will be able to put this money to use in supporting their hard-working staff, covering utilities, routine maintenance, addressing costs associated with unit turnover, processing applications, and managing wait-lists. Right now more than 110,000 Albertans live in more than 60,000 government-subsidized housing units, and with the cost of living rising, demand is rapidly growing. In consultations with our housing providers it was clear that more funding was needed to meet the increased demand and keep operations running smooth.

Mr. Speaker, our government has heard them loud and clear. This is why our government will continue to do everything we can to ensure our housing partners have the tools they need to build and operate homes for Albertans. At the end of the day, today's announcement is an investment in our province and in Albertans. By ensuring that the operations of our housing partners run smooth, we can ensure that vulnerable and low-income Albertans have access to an affordable place they can call home. We are proud of all the hard work Albertans and our housing partners are doing. Through our partnerships we can make sure Alberta continues to be the best province to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you.

Bill 18

Ms Pancholi: The world's first antiviral treatment for hepatitis B; the C-Leg, a groundbreaking invention for artificial limbs used by amputees; the start of the artificial intelligence revolution; Quantum canola, a resistant strain that saved Canada's canola industry; the first oil sands separation process: these are all research-driven discoveries made right here at the University of Alberta, which might not have happened if the Premier and the UCP were making decisions on their behalf.

With the UCP's Bill 18 we risk losing the next big Albertan discovery. This bill demands provincial approval for federal funding to our cities and universities and is a major step back for our democracy and our freedom to innovate. Bill 18 essentially grants the Premier a free pass for political interference in our public institutions. I can only imagine what this might mean for cutting-edge research under way at our universities and colleges or how municipalities will struggle to accommodate the increasing hostility of this government. This bill is yet another example of how this Premier is more interested in petty politics than in serving Albertans, putting aside good governance just to own the libs.

Not long ago the Premier accused the federal government of, quote, picking fights, disrespecting jurisdiction, and partisan decision-making, only to turn around and introduce legislation that does exactly that. Bill 18 holds Albertans hostage to the Premier's whims. It won't help Alberta secure our fair share of anything, and it will likely delay progress in industries across the province. Instead of welcoming change that benefits Albertans, it closes the door on innovation and much-needed funding for public programs and services.

We need to protect the independence of our public institutions. We need to reject Bill 18 and keep Alberta a place where freedom and progress thrive.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon is next.

1:40

Electric Power System

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Making Alberta's electricity grid reliable and affordable remains one of our government's top priorities. Our efforts to achieve the right mix of

electricity generation to meet Alberta's needs for both now and the future involve having reliable and dispatchable baseload power. In the next 12 months more natural gas plants coming online will help stabilize our power grid. However, Ottawa's clean electricity regulations would threaten our ability to have the baseload electricity we need in this northern climate. Despite the interference of the opposition and federal government, our government has a plan to have an affordable, reliable, and carbon-neutral power grid by 2050.

Nuclear power, specifically small modular reactors, has the potential to play a part in these plans. Not only do modular reactors have the potential to reduce emissions, but they can provide Albertans with reliable baseload power, create jobs, and grow the economy. I'm extremely proud that Alberta continues to be a global leader in responsible energy development. I'm excited to see how Alberta could include small modular reactors in our power grid. Alberta's business-friendly deregulated electricity market will continue to attract investors and ensure that our electrical future looks bright.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Foreign Qualifications and Credentials Recognition

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, thousands and thousands of newcomers make Alberta their home each and every year. This is a history that we are proud of. For decades newcomers have been helping to grow our economy, but it's only been possible because our province has historically offered immigrants an environment which they could thrive in. The UCP government keeps saying Alberta Is Calling, but yelling this message out won't be enough. As people come to Alberta, it is also the UCP government's responsibility to facilitate the integration of immigrants and lay the foundations for newcomers to find success in our great province.

Newcomers don't come to Alberta as a completely blank canvas, simply waiting to be filled in once they arrive. What they bring with them has made Alberta what it is today. Their diverse backgrounds help to enrich the culture of our society while their technical skills and talents prove valuable to our workplace, but too many of these skills aren't being used. In the midst of a health care crisis we have trained nurses and doctors who are sidelined due to a slow credentialing process. At the same time, the unemployment rate for newcomers is climbing while labour force participation drops. This is unacceptable.

Albertans deserve a world-class health care system. Newcomers to Alberta deserve access to good jobs and a chance to successfully integrate and contribute to society. Both sides lose when credentialing is wrapped in red tape as it is now; both sides lose under the current system. The UCP owes it to Albertans to address the challenges of welcoming newcomers into our province. They have called for people to come to Alberta, and now it's time that they make sure those same people have access to good jobs, good schools, and a strong health care system.

Thank you.

Alberta Emissions Reduction and Energy Development Plan

Ms Al-Guneid: It's never easy to say goodbye. Easy is to rest on commitment. Easy is to let decades go by without meaningful change. Yes, it is easy to fall into dissonance, but it's never easy to say goodbye. Goodbye to preparing Alberta for a low-carbon future. Goodbye to climate consultations with partners and Indigenous communities. And goodbye to smoke-free summers, pristine rivers, abundant water, lush grasslands and potentially living with coal mining on the beautiful eastern slopes. Farewell to credible climate planning in Alberta.

This week we mark a full year since the UCP ceremonially and conveniently released their so-called climate plan two weeks prior to the May election. As Macbeth says, all “sound and fury, signifying nothing.” So, everyone, happy UCP climate plan anniversary. This so-called climate plan with an aspirational goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 with no targets and no budgeted implementation plan is as aspirational as the Premier’s aspirational health care delivery. This so-called climate plan promised to reduce methane emissions by 80 per cent, promised to engage Indigenous and youth groups on climate, promised to regulate oil sands companies’ targets, but did nothing about it for a whole year. Alberta is seen as an energy leader. Say goodbye to aspirational thinking that is neither addressing climate nor capturing investments nor preparing Alberta for the future.

Our actions today matter tomorrow. Here we are one year later without meaningful action. The world is moving ahead, but the UCP have left a lot behind. Goodbye and rest in peace, UCP climate plan.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is on the list, followed by others, I see.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table five copies of the cover and synopsis of a book entitled *Western Separatism* in an effort to encourage members opposite, in the UCP, to learn a little bit as they march towards their slow separatist walk.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling the requisite number of copies of a letter regarding the government’s failure to renew funding for the LEARN elder abuse program in Lethbridge. I have delivered 376 more letters just like it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Calgary-Elbow.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of this article from the *Calgary Herald*, with a beautiful photo, entitled ‘Ambition . . . Not More Red Tape’: Ottawa Assessing Impact of Alberta’s Bill 18 on Housing, and I urge the members opposite to read it.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted, that we’ll deal with after the conclusion of the Routine.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five requisite copies of a paper by Winter, Dolter, and Fellows about the impact of carbon pricing and rebates on median incomes, including both direct and indirect costs.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by Edmonton-City Centre.

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling another letter from someone concerned about the life lease legislation and some first-hand experience about dealings with Greg Christenson Group of Companies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, followed by Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two documents, five copies of each, from the Business Council of Alberta noting the sharp decline in physicians both per capita and compared to other provinces under the UCP government since 2019.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of an article in the *Globe and Mail* titled Alberta Fails to Move Needle on Emissions Reduction Plan, dated April 10, 2024, related to my questions today.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Ms Smith, Premier, President of Executive Council and Minister of Intergovernmental Relations, responses to questions raised by hon. Ms Notley, Leader of the Official Opposition, March 13, 2024, Executive Council 2024-25 main estimates debate.

Oral Question Period

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

Bill 18

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the UCP’s Bill 18 is supposedly copied from legislation passed decades ago by Quebec separatists, but where the Quebec separatists chose to back off, this Premier is plowing ahead. Quebec stays out of the way of the research granting councils. They know the money is not given out by Ottawa bureaucrats or Ottawa politicians. So to the Premier: if even Quebec separatists understand the process and trust the panel of experts in their respective fields to award these crucial research dollars, why won’t she?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite may have noticed there have been a couple of elections in Quebec, and the most recent government is the Coalition Avenir Québec. They have actually endorsed this type of approach, and it’s proven to be successful as recently as November 2023, when they were the first province to be able to get funding out of the housing accelerator grant, \$900 million. Why is that? Because right in the act it says that the federal government cannot do a workaround, cannot go directly to municipalities, cannot pit one against the other, and they have to deal with the province. We’re doing it, too.

1:50

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I’m talking about research grants, and the Premier is incorrect in what she just said.

But many of the experts deal with those right here in Alberta. So I’d ask the Premier why she doesn’t trust these highly respected Albertans, except it really isn’t about trust, is it? It’s actually about the Premier only wanting grants to go to people who justify her own views. She said herself: if she doesn’t like what she’s seeing, she will, quote, step in. So to the Premier: what makes her think she knows more about what makes quality research than independent, nonpartisan, arm’s-length experts who have trained for years to do this work?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'm not incorrect. In fact, when I was at the Council of the Federation meeting, the minister from Quebec for Canadian affairs printed the legislation off and told me that that was what they used to ensure that they negotiated directly with the federal government so the federal government could not do a workaround on them. We are going to make sure that every agency that we regulate that falls under our jurisdiction does not have the federal government circumventing what it is that Albertans want. We want to make sure that there is balance in our postsecondary institutions, so we're going to find out when we do our review.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, undermining the quality and independence of Alberta's researchers will hurt our universities, our international reputation, and our economy.

Now, given the Premier's penchant for pushing theories that a simple Google search would discredit like, say, smoking is actually good for your health, Ivermectin cures COVID, stage 4 cancer patients are to blame for allowing themselves to get that sick, to the Premier: doesn't she understand the reputation of our universities depend on keeping her bizarre theories as far away from academic freedom and our institutions as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I tabled a column yesterday so that the member opposite would be able to hear what professors who are in the system actually say about how unfair the federal government is and how they only fund one side of any discussion. In fact, they also said that Canadian university professors tend to be left wing, supported by recent research under the University of London, which found 73 per cent of academics sampled from 40 top Canadian universities identified as left wing, just 4 per cent on the other side. That doesn't sound like balance to me.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Access to Information on Coal Development Policies

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, sometimes court rulings can be confusing and unclear, but in throwing out the UCP's unending attempts to hide all the ways they're pushing to mine the Rocky Mountains, the judge was plain and explicit. He said Albertans "have been practically denied access to the information they are entitled to at law." And he added: "This court will not abet this conduct." To the Premier: how can she expect Albertans to trust her when her government breaks transparency rules as easily as she breaks her promises?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we will abide by the decision of the court. We obviously have had a change in leadership in this file, and we will make whatever documents available that the court requires.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no wiggle room here. The UCP wanted and undoubtedly still wants to mine the Rocky Mountains. Albertans do not want that to happen. Hundreds of thousands have spoken out against it. Local ranchers are looking for all the details, all 6,000 pages of details that this government's been hiding, so to the Premier: given the ruling, is she saying today that she will in fact release over 6,000 documents to those ranchers? Yes or no?

Ms Smith: Yes.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the thing is: it's been four years, and Justice Teskey said that what happens when you get these kinds of delays is that "democracy dies in darkness." The government has been playing games with coal policy all along.

These documents were first asked for in 2020. Will the Premier stand today and apologize to these ranchers for forcing them to go to court to get the documents they have always been entitled to?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I see the exchange happening between our Energy minister and the members opposite, I am reminded that it was in fact the members opposite when they were government that started the investment in coal in our province by giving the indication that they would be able and open to more coal development. So 2020; that sounds to me like it was just right after the members opposite ended up leaving government. It kind of sounds like this is a process that began under them. And yes, we will make sure that everyone has the documents required. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre is next.

Physician Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Shepherd: After five years of UCP management, our health care system is in full-blown crisis as their war on doctors, bullying of health care workers, nickel and diming of doctors has cost Albertans access to care. So says data from the Business Council of Alberta, that shows that since 2019, the number of doctors practising in Alberta has fallen and, for the first time since 2005, we have fewer doctors per capita than the national average. But faced with the results of the damage they've done the UCP are back to bullying tactics, shutting out doctors, and creating more chaos and uncertainty. My question to the Premier is simple: why?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The members opposite continue to create fear and smear. In fact, if they would . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:56.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I would encourage them to look at new data. The data they're referring to is from 2022. I know, because I just got the information yesterday, that we now have since last March, March of 2023, increased the number of doctors by over 500 in the province, of which 215 are family physicians. So they need to do better on their homework.

Mr. Shepherd: As noted by the Business Council of Alberta, in 2019 Alberta had more physicians per capita than any other large province; third highest number of any province outside of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador. Now, we're only one of two provinces where the number of physicians per 100,000 is below 2019 levels and our decline was by far the steepest. The data makes it clear: the UCP made Alberta a place doctors didn't want to practice; it hurt Albertans; it's hurting our economy. We've had years of committees, recommendations, and reports. When will we finally see real action to reverse the deep damage this government has done?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to read from the College of Physicians & Surgeons' registration statistics: 2019, 10,948 doctors; 11,120 doctors in 2020; 2021, 11,153; 2022, 11,407; 2023, 11,738 physicians. Again, we have had an increase

since last March of 500 physicians. We're continuing to make sure that we have family practitioners in the province.

Mr. Shepherd: Registrations aren't practising doctors. Ninety-one per cent of family doctors reported to the AMA that they're very concerned about the viability of their practice; 6 in 10 family doctors are considering moving, retiring, reducing their hours of operation, or laying off staff. With hundreds of thousands of Albertans with no access to a family doctor, we can't afford to lose more, yet the Minister of Health is denying crucial help to doctors hurt by her government's own policies, dragging their feet on critical reform. To the Premier: if you want to act on provincial priorities and not just your own, how about listening to Albertans and the Business Council of Alberta taking real action to support families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite just can't stand the fact that we're working so well with the Alberta Medical Association. In fact, we worked with the Alberta Medical Association on that \$57 million of panel management, on the \$200 million that we've added, in addition to the negotiated contract, the \$200 million of stabilization. I'm excited. We have got a lot of work that we've been doing on a new funding model for family medicine. I would invite the members opposite to stay tuned. That information is coming very soon.

Life Lease Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, hundreds of seniors are awaiting the return of over \$60 million of their life savings as a result of the life lease crisis. Bill 12 does nothing to address the challenges these seniors are going through. Seniors worried about getting their life savings back are not reassured by the minister's repeated meetings with a long-time UCP donor, Greg Christenson. They want action to make them whole. Can the Premier clarify for the House how many times she's met with Greg Christenson?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, this is a deplorable situation any time vulnerable seniors can't get their deposits returned to them, and that's why we have made this a priority. Now I'm bringing in forward legislation that is going to bring in protections so that this situation never happens again.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, my office has met with that particular developer 12 times. Nine of those meetings I attended personally. We will continue to apply pressure to see to it that everyone is made whole.

2:00

Ms Sigurdson: Between 2012 and 2015 Christenson Communities received over \$21 million in grants from the government of Alberta. The UCP have been unable to rule out giving prominent UCP donor Greg Christenson or any of his companies future contracts or grants while they are waiting for him to make the 80 seniors impacted by the life lease fiasco whole. Every senior must be repaid, and they need to be assured their tax dollars are not going to any of Christenson's companies. Will the minister commit to telling Greg Christenson at their next meeting that no more Alberta tax dollars will be given to him until all these seniors . . .

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

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, nothing of what you just heard is ground in the facts because we actually told that to Mr. Christenson several

months ago. In fact, I delivered that myself, that we will not be signing new contracts until everyone has been made whole. I gave that commitment that our government is going to keep fighting and applying pressure to see that everyone is made whole, and that's not going to change.

Ms Sigurdson: Greg Christenson has met with the minister of service Alberta nine times. The group representing the impacted seniors have had only one meeting and had to listen as the minister repeatedly described them as just, and I quote, a Facebook group. Many are worried about the impact that these meetings with Christenson, who isn't a registered lobbyist, have had on the drafting of Bill 12. Will the minister of service Alberta commit to tabling all notes, memos, and materials related to his nine meetings with Greg Christenson?

Mr. Nally: Again, Mr. Speaker, that is not true, what that member is saying. Here's what I can tell you. We consulted with 170 Albertans, either life lease holders or family members. We met with the individuals, the founders prior to them, forming the life lease association. We met with them again after they formed the association, and we invited them to a third meeting, which they were unable to attend, but there will be a fourth meeting happening this week with the Premier. We have cast the net wide, and we have met with as many individuals as we can, including the life lease association.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

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

Elder Abuse Program Funding

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the Lethbridge Elder Abuse Response Network provides an essential service to our community and has done so for 12 years. The province provided funding to ensure seniors have a voice when they're at risk of financial, emotional, verbal, or medical abuse or neglect in the form of physical or sexual assault. But with just one month's notice the UCP cut that funding because – and this is what the letter said – it doesn't align with the strategic priorities of the government. To the Premier: why did a Lethbridge program helping at-risk seniors find services and housing lose its funding?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I think the member should be aware that there is a new specialized criminal justice navigator grant program. It's a transition grant that is both competitive and has new criteria. This grant provides \$6.8 million to support victims as they navigate the criminal justice system right throughout Alberta, and there are a couple of organizations within the Lethbridge area that certainly have met the criteria and do qualify for this grant.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that that's all well and good but in the meantime the LSCO has now lost that funding for an undetermined amount of time and 40 at-risk seniors were just dropped from getting any hope whatsoever until the government gets their bureaucratic act together, will the government restore the funding and, in fact, increase it given that previous resources could easily have been doubled in order to meet the needs in Lethbridge?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's important to be very clear. No senior has lost service anywhere in the province. The hon. member is incorrect. We have been in contact with the organization involved and made sure that those seniors will continue to receive services.

There are some adjustments taking place in the public safety ministry, but I've instructed my ministry to make sure that we pick up any slack that may happen as a result of those changes. I want to assure Albertans that those individuals are safe. The hon. member should maybe retalk to her stakeholders so that she can know what is going on.

Ms Phillips: Given that 40 people have been dropped from case management at the Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization as a result of the cut in this funding and given that the grant funding needed to keep this program alive could easily be found, will the government reverse course, restore the funding, and, in fact, double it so we can end the scourge of elder abuse in Lethbridge? What will it take for this government to get out of this bureaucratic cul-de-sac that they've driven themselves into?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the hon. member is not talking to the organization that is involved. I spoke to the organization on Friday. They were clear. No services have changed for those individuals. When public safety made their changes, my department already reached out to make a commitment to make sure that we will continue to walk with those individuals. [interjections] I mean, yelling in the House and heckling the way the opposition does isn't going to solve that problem, but I am going to solve that problem for those individuals. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Drought Preparations

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and the rest of the country continue to face warmer temperatures, coupled with even less precipitation this year, leading to more than 70 per cent of Canada experiencing drought conditions. Albertans, especially in southern Alberta, continue to face risk of worsening drought conditions, and many basins and reservoirs continue to be strained. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: could you please update this House on the current situation regarding drought conditions?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member for that important question. Of course, with the snow and rain that we've seen over the last number of months, we've seen snowpack and precipitation levels increase across the province. This is great news. Every drop of moisture matters. The conditions in the Red Deer, Bow, and North Saskatchewan basins have all improved; however, the Oldman basin and other parts of southern Alberta remain very dry. All of this means that the outlook has gotten better, but the risk of drought is still there. The next couple of months will go a long way in letting us know what exactly that's going to look like through the summer and fall.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that our situation has improved but we are still not out of the weeds yet and currently our province is undertaking unprecedented water-sharing agreements to ensure we secure Alberta's water supply and given that water-sharing agreements are the best tool at our disposal to combat drought and water shortages, to the same minister: can you please inform this House

on when these historic agreements will be concluded and what this means for Alberta?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The final water-sharing agreements will be shared publicly with all Albertans on Friday. This year's discussions were the largest in Alberta's history, with licensees representing up to 90 per cent of the water allocated in the Red Deer, Bow, and Oldman river basins. I can't say enough about the leadership, dedication, and community spirit that these water licence holders have shown with these agreements, and I'm very grateful for their efforts.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thanks again to the minister for the answer. Given that many Albertans will be tuning into their first water-sharing press conference this Friday and given that these agreements seek to reach timely and voluntary reductions to prevent an emergency situation and further given that many municipalities, irrigators, farmers, ranchers, and Indigenous communities will be watching this closely, to the same minister: can you please inform this House on what these water-sharing agreements will cover?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Schulz: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Now, voluntary reductions are what have worked here in Alberta in the past, and we're pleased to see all of the major water users coming together to work on these agreements. We now have four draft MOUs negotiated, covering the Bow, Red Deer, Oldman, and upper tributaries of the Oldman River basins. Those agreements will see the largest and oldest water licence holders voluntarily commit to using less water if drought conditions worsen this year. I do look forward to sharing those agreements with the public on Friday as we continue to take unprecedented steps to prepare for the risk of drought.

Education Funding for FNMI Students

Mr. Schmidt: Today at Public Accounts the Department of Education informed the committee that the federal government provides around \$100 million to school authorities without any involvement from the Department of Education or the Premier's office. This funding goes to support things like First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. The minister's department made it clear that there were zero issues with these agreements. The UCP's gatekeeping bill could stand in the way of school boards and the support they need for First Nations students. Why is the minister trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Public Accounts the officials also stated that the government of Alberta has standards with respect to the implementations of those funds. Of course, education is a provincially mandated priority. Through Bill 18 we'll continue to ensure that the standards that we have set aside to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students continue up to our provincial standards and ensure that those funds are being directed in the best possible way to support those students.

2:10

Mr. Schmidt: Given that his deputy minister said that those were guidelines and not standards and that they don't monitor those for compliance and given that the Edmonton public school board received millions of dollars from the federal government through

an education service agreement that didn't involve the provincial government and given that there were no issues raised about this by the minister's department or any of the other agreements between the federal government and school authorities and given that the UCP's bill to protect Albertans from their own tax dollars could put the funding at risk, will the minister commit that he will backfill every single dollar of funding that Bill 18 blocks from supporting Alberta's classrooms?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, my deputy minister did say that these are standards, not guidelines. I hope the member goes back and recounts his interactions with that committee. We do have very clear and identified standards as to how any federal funds should be used, and we use those standards to help ensure that our school boards, if they're entering into an agreement with the federal government primarily in the area to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, are doing so in a way that is student centred, that supports the development of students, takes into account multiple different issues and perspectives. We want to continue to maintain those standards in place.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the department was very clear that they don't monitor these agreements for any compliance with standards and given that the First Nations school authorities receive funding directly from the federal government, which goes to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students to access education, and given the concerns raised that Bill 18 could put this funding at risk and given this government's failed track record of consulting First Nations communities on things like the sovereignty act, can the minister inform this House what consultation was done with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit school authorities or communities before Bill 18 was introduced?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is providing some misinformation. As the member opposite should know, Bill 18 relates specifically to provincial agencies . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nicolaides: . . . public bodies and postsecondary institutions, school boards, and other legal entities that receive more than 50 per cent of their funding from the province. Any funding that would be received directly to First Nations communities would not be impacted by the bill. Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that we have strict provincial standards with relation to any funds that are provided to school boards to ensure they comply with provincial standards.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:12.

Bill 18
(continued)

Member Irwin: The University of Alberta receives one-third of its funding from federal agencies. In return the U of A contributes \$19.4 billion a year to our economy, over 5 per cent of our province's GDP. This Premier loves to talk about academic freedom when it suits her, but when it comes to protecting the freedom of academics to receive arm's-length, nonpartisan, independently peer-reviewed funding for their research, this Premier sings a whole other tune. To the Premier: how many academics will we lose because of her meddling, how many staff will have to be hired to vet research proposals, and how much will this ridiculous red tape cost Alberta taxpayers and cost our reputation?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we are introducing the Provincial Priorities Act to push back on federal encroachment into provincial jurisdiction because we do know that happens. It's happened recently on the housing file. As it relates to the postsecondary institutes, we know that data is available to varying degrees from varying sources like the tricouncil data, but we do not have a consolidated data set within the government of Alberta. We're going to work with the postsecondary space to make sure that we get that information. Bill 18 will enable that process, and we will make sure that the postsecondaries are at the table.

Member Irwin: Given that this Premier called Bill 18 the stay-out-of-my-backyard bill – let me be clear; this is not her yard. She does not own this province, Alberta is not her political playground, and with hundreds of millions of dollars on the table right now to help with the housing crisis, this Premier blocking Alberta from funding is unconscionable. Given that this Premier has said that the federal government has been bypassing meetings on housing with the province, will she please stand in the House today and table all e-mails sent to the Prime Minister asking for housing meetings that have gone unanswered?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:14.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, there have been several meetings with the federal housing minister. Many of them have been in the media after we've had the meetings, where we have been clearly asking for a deal that would benefit every community in this province and help tackle the housing challenge inside the province. Unfortunately, you saw the federal government continue to sneak into town and make deals with one or two municipalities that had their phone numbers, but I'm happy to report to the House that all of a sudden the federal government has come back to the table, and there will be meetings taking place this week to move towards a serious housing deal. So through you to the Premier: thank you for Bill 18. It finally got them to the table.

Member Irwin: Well, let's talk about municipalities, Mr. Speaker, because given that the VP of the Rural Municipalities association called Bill 18 another level of bureaucracy, rural communities are legitimately concerned. They run on tight budgets, with small, dedicated teams that have worked well for years with the federal government. Bill 18 will add so much more red tape. Municipalities will spend their precious time on consuming grant proposals and holding the hand of the province instead of doing the important work that they should be doing. The system wasn't broken, but Bill 18 will break it. Does the Premier want to stand here today and argue she supports Bill 18 because she thinks municipalities were doing a bad job?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. McIver: Apparently, Mr. Speaker, the NDP is perfectly happy when 60 of 65 rural Alberta municipalities are getting zero from the federal government. That's less than 10 per cent; we'd kind of like a number a lot closer to 100. So that is, right there, the difference between our government's position and the NDP's. They're happy to sit silently at the beck and call of Justin Trudeau while municipalities get nothing. On this side we're fighting like dogs to get something done because Alberta municipalities deserve more than they're getting right now.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:16.

Federal Oil and Gas Emissions Cap

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, the proposed federal emissions cap would destroy energy sector jobs, damage Alberta's economy, and impact the quality of life for Indigenous communities who work in and with our world-class energy industry. A growing number of Alberta's Indigenous communities have become owners in the oil and gas sector, with a seat at the table in the decision-making process, but Justin Trudeau and Goofy Guilbeault want to stamp out their prosperity. Could the Minister of Indigenous Relations please explain how this upcoming emissions cap will harm Indigenous communities who share in our booming economy?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. As always, the member is right on the money here. The upcoming federal emissions cap will erode Alberta's world-renowned energy industry, costing people jobs, threatening our economy, and destroying all the amazing progress that we have made to promote Indigenous prosperity in our economy and mainly in the energy sector. Indigenous peoples play a vital role in these areas, and we are doing all we can to ensure that this progress will move forward.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the federal NDP alliance's claims, which are phony and disingenuous, that they're committed to economic reconciliation and further given that this federal fugazi government claims to support Indigenous partnerships and natural resource projects while simultaneously risking their long-term investments in some of those projects, many of which now they're partners in, could the same minister please help me understand why the federal government would bring in destructive, de facto production caps, which would harm the ability of Indigenous Albertans to benefit from the prosperity through our natural resources?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has shown a notorious reputation for letting Indigenous people down all across the country. They're failing to address key issues and failing to follow through on commitments made for years and years. But here in Alberta we're taking action, real, meaningful action. I may have told you all once about the AIOC. Have I? That's reconciliation, creating jobs and generational revenue streams for Indigenous communities.

Mr. McIver: Hear, hear. Great job, Minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you.

This level of commitment is unmatched across the country, and the emissions cap will prove to be a detriment to programs like this.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for that, Minister. I'd love to hear about the AIOC.

Given that numerous Indigenous communities across Alberta are heavily invested in the oil and gas sector as employers, workers, and partners, given the economic benefits this industry has brought the Indigenous communities and, hopefully, the potential economic prosperity for future generations through our AIOC program in supporting further Indigenous participation in our energy industry, could the same minister please outline how this short-sighted

proposed federal emissions cap will affect future economic opportunities for our First Nations communities?

Thank you.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Indigenous people across Canada play a vital role in the energy sector at large. Just in 2021 Indigenous people made up over 7 per cent of the energy industry's labour force, and those numbers have only continued to rise with so many amazing opportunities, many right here, of course, in Alberta. This emissions cap will prove to take those opportunities away, stripping Indigenous communities of jobs and the potential for revenue streams, which make real change. The federal government needs to observe and to listen and be a strong advocate for Indigenous people across the country.

Indigenous Consultations on Energy Development

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, let's focus on Alberta. Just before the election the minister of environment introduced the Emissions Reduction and Energy Development Plan. With that plan the term "Indigenous" is cited 92 times, a lofty and commendable inclusion but ultimately one that falls flat on its face given the lack of any attempt to include Indigenous peoples' voices in the conversation on emissions reduction or energy development. Indigenous nations' voices have already been raised and ignored by the UCP when it came to renewable energy. To the minister of environment: does this government actually care to include Indigenous knowledge, or are these references in the plan just 92 empty gestures to Indigenous peoples?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that on this side of the House we are proud of Alberta's reputation as being a sustainable energy leader and, of course, when it comes to emissions reduction. We are also working with First Nations and Métis communities across our province who want to see our energy industry grow and thrive but, of course, want to steward our environment for generations to come. Myself and the Minister of Indigenous Relations are doing that work. We'll continue to because we want to see job opportunities as well as opportunities for Indigenous communities continue to grow and thrive.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that the Indigenous knowledge keepsers circle is cited in the Emissions Reduction and Energy Development Plan on page 13 but to date the IKKC has yet to see any progress, given that this government has stated that, quote, Indigenous engagement and participation are crucial to delivering on this plan, end quote, given that the UCP has been dragging their feet with the establishment of the IKKC and given the UCP's track record – there has been zero consultation – if the minister of environment actually respects Indigenous knowledge in this plan, will she commit to finally consult with all Indigenous nations to establish the IKKC?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, we absolutely will continue to engage with First Nations and Métis communities across our province. We do that through the Indigenous Wisdom Advisory Panel, that's run through the office of our Chief Scientist. We're going to be releasing our panel on the oil sands mine

water mandate item, that I, of course, have talked about before in this House. There will absolutely be Indigenous representation on that. We are of course making sure that Indigenous voices and perspectives are heard and included in our emissions reduction plans moving forward.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that Budget 2024 has produced zero commitments to the establishment of the IKKC despite this government saying one thing but doing another and given that the Alberta Emissions Reduction and Energy Development Plan was implemented exactly one year ago and the Minister of Indigenous Relations just a few weeks ago shied away from any promise of any dollars for the IKKC, will the minister of environment or Indigenous Relations commit today that this government will adequately fund the IKKC, or are Indigenous nations going to remain shortchanged and provided paltry honorariums for this government wasting their time?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to our Emissions Reduction and Energy Development Plan. I just want to take a minute to talk about the record of the members opposite: chasing headlines, economic decline, 180,000 jobs lost . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. member had his chance. Now the hon. minister has her chance.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, it was not an emissions reduction plan; it was a carbon tax plan. Our record is one of job opportunities, where they are back, people choosing Alberta every single day. We are leading the way in technology and innovation, and we're actually reducing emissions. That is a win, and we will continue to lead in this area alongside Indigenous communities.

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

Site Rehabilitation Program

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few years ago the federal government began funding an oil and gas site remediation program, managed by our provincial government, to clean up abandoned oil wells. The program created over 4,100 jobs, many going to more than 100 Indigenous-owned companies contracted for the various projects. Despite this, there's still roughly \$137 million allocated by the federal government for this program, that Trudeau is now demanding we return. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: what can you tell us about this program and its effectiveness?

Mr. Jean: Thank you to the hard-working and great-dressed MLA from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Mr. Speaker. It's true; the oil and gas industry has contributed trillions of dollars to the Canadian economy, creating many, many jobs. This \$1 billion federal program was managed successfully by Alberta's government to stimulate the oil and gas industry during the pandemic, and the federal government is asking for \$137 million that they want back, but they still have the obligation to clean up those oil and gas wells on First Nations. We're requesting the federal government not take that money back, not claw it back from First Nations, and support First Nations in Alberta.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much for that. Given that in March chiefs from treaties 6, 7, and 8 held a joint press conference to call on the federal government to continue funding this remediation program and I've been contacted by First Nations leaders from my region who want to continue with this rehabilitation program and further given that by utilizing these unspent funds to clean up oil and gas

facilities on the reserves and territories, the federal government is meeting their obligation to these communities, to the same minister: why won't the federal government do the right thing and leave these funds with the Alberta government for their intended purpose?

Mr. Jean: Why, Mr. Speaker? Why? We don't understand the federal government either. They have this obligation. It's an obligation on First Nations reserves to clean up the oil and gas infrastructure that they left behind. Why won't they support First Nations? We don't understand that. We're going to continue, because of this Premier's leadership and this government, to support First Nations in Alberta. We are the example for the rest of the country. Saskatchewan, B.C., and now the federal government are emulating our First Nations programs. That's because we have it right. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal government claims to be serious about reclamation and the environment yet is failing to continue funding a project that is actually doing the necessary work and further given that this program was embraced by the chiefs because it created local jobs and entrepreneurs and established expertise in the environmental sector, to the same minister: what are the impacts if the federal government does not extend the site rehabilitation program to Indigenous communities to continue their good work?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, chiefs around this province keep asking me: why won't the federal government come and take responsibility for what they have to do? They've made billions, trillions of dollars off the people of Alberta. They have land that they want to build into schools, into hospitals and health care units, into policing opportunities. They want to do something with this land that belongs to them. The federal government has a responsibility. They need to leave this \$137 million with Indigenous communities in Alberta. We'll make sure it's done right even though the federal government and other levels of government and the NDP before us got it wrong.

TIER Fund Revenue Utilization

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, one year ago this government released their climate plan. Addressing climate change offers Alberta an incredible opportunity to grow and diversify our economy. Alberta has in place the technology innovation and emissions reduction, TIER, program designed to reduce emissions from large industrial emitters. It is funded through a price on carbon. Can the Minister of Finance share with us the percentage of TIER funding collected that is directed into achieving the aim of emissions reductions?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, of course, we're very proud of our technology innovation and emissions reduction program and the funding that goes into driving innovation and technology when it comes to emissions reduction. There is a small portion of those dollars that goes towards debt reduction. We've also earmarked a portion of those dollars to support carbon capture utilization and storage projects here in Alberta. Then, of course, we work with Emissions Reduction Alberta to invest in technology innovation and emissions reduction.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that a direct path to achieving emissions reduction can be found in the development of new technologies and given that Alberta's clean technology sector is competing against clean technology hubs globally, given that Alberta is facing a

productivity challenge based on investments in technology falling behind the investments being made in other technology hubs, can the Minister of Finance explain why we're not directing 100 per cent of TIER funding into technology development for emissions reductions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I'm not sure the members opposite spend any time talking to our amazing leaders in our energy sector. But I can tell you that when you ask them what the barriers are to technology and innovation in this space, it is the federal government and their policies that are having the exact opposite impact on exactly what we're trying to do here. When we're looking at things like an emissions cap that is absolutely going to cap production, a clean electricity regulation that essentially has performance standards that nobody – nobody – around the world has been able to meet, that have never been tested, that is the kind of thing that gets in the way of the emissions reduction technology . . .

2:30

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

Mr. Ellingson: I do meet with energy tech leaders all the time. That's not what they say.

Given that Alberta did not experience any growth in venture capital investments in 2023 after seven years of annual growth, stretching back to when the NDP was in government, given that clean technology companies in key areas such as hydrogen development are receiving support through Alberta agencies like Alberta Innovates but still struggling to find capital to scale, can the minister share why this government is choosing to direct TIER funding into the energy war room instead of fuelling the growth in venture capital and clean technologies in Alberta?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, the only folks who know anything about a broken venture capital system are the members opposite. Case in point: 2017, \$30 million of venture capital investment into Alberta tech companies. On the other hand, under the UCP we have grown exponentially over the last five years: \$729 million in 2022, over \$700 million in 2023, at a time when the Canadian market was down by 30 per cent. The NDP have got to take their heads out of the sand and recognize that what we're doing in tech is working. Everywhere I go in the world, I tell people about what's happening in Alberta. They agree that something special is going on here, and they want to be a part of it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hospital Construction in Edmonton

Member Loyola: It bewilders me how this government can fail so miserably at its most fundamental responsibilities, keeping Albertans healthy, keeping Albertans alive. "Oh, no, it's too expensive." Why? "Oh, we can't say." "Oh, no, it's that we don't know if the location is right." Pardon me? This hospital has been in planning for seven years. "Oh, no, perhaps there are cheaper alternatives." Cheaper alternatives to hospitals, Mr. Speaker? In fact, let's start there. To the Health minister: why does the UCP believe it's okay to be cheap when it comes to the health of Albertans?

Member LaGrange: With the largest funding budget in Alberta's history for health care, Mr. Speaker, we are anything but cheap. We are doing what is required to make sure that we are getting good value for dollars. The members opposite would see us spend \$4.9 billion for a 400-bed hospital, but every indication indicates that

that's required elsewhere within Edmonton. We will continue to make sure Edmontonians get the health care that they deserve and need.

Member Loyola: Given that infrastructure costs will only continue to rise and that the UCP's mystery \$5 billion price tag will increase the longer this essential hospital project is bungled and given that offering a myriad of reasons that make no sense to not build a hospital would be par for the course for the UCP, a government that cares so much about Albertans' health that it will allow them to be sent to motels, to the Health minister: does the UCP forget that they campaigned on this very southwest hospital?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to build health infrastructure right across the province. With the Minister of Infrastructure we've got an \$88 million plan, funds that we can tap into, that we are actually looking at. How can we develop a strategic plan for the whole province, particularly what is required in Edmonton? How do we meet the needs of Edmontonians in a quicker, more efficient manner? We're doing that. We have announced the stand-alone children's hospital, the Stollery hospital, which is much needed. They're spread out over four different facilities right now.

Member Loyola: Given that the UCP's claim of insufficient planning is preposterous as the clinical service plan was both completed and approved before the 2019 election, not to mention that the UCP's south Edmonton hospital was guaranteed a year ago, and given that this clinical service plan provided structure for patients requiring surgical care, critical care, mental health care or dealing with emergencies, heart failures, and strokes – all planned; all approved – can the Health minister please explain how, after seven years, the planning is suddenly so insufficient that the Premier doesn't even know if we picked the right spot yet?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are looking at options that include building smaller, purpose-built facilities like surgical centres, continuing care facilities, family care centres, and delivering what Albertans need. We have indeed announced the children's Stollery hospital. We've also announced the redevelopment of the Royal Alexandra hospital, the WestView health centre, the Strathcona community hospital. We've made upgrades to the Misericordia. We continue on the Mazankowski. Edmontonians can be assured that we are making sure that they have the health care services that they need when and where they need them.

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

Wildfire Prevention and Control

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year's fire season was terrible. A few years ago, in 2020, Alberta saw just under 35 hectares lost to wildfires compared to the devastating effects of the 2023 season, which saw 2.2 million hectares burned, 67 per cent of which were caused by humans. Motion 505 recently passed in the House unanimously, and it urged the government to increase penalties for committing an offence under the Forest and Prairie Protection Act, which the minister actually spoke in favour of. To the Minister of Forestry and Parks: can you advise any progress that's been made regarding the development of such legislation?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you to the member for the question. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Motion 505 would help the Alberta government make

changes that are needed. We're reviewing the current Forest and Prairie Protection Act and its regulations. After the Fort McMurray wildfires the act updated its associated fines. This increase allows for judge-ordered statutory fines up to \$100,000 for individuals and \$1 million for corporations. In addition to the fines already in place, we're actively exploring how to further strengthen penalties and fines related to wildfire infractions. We are currently examining Motion 505 to assess how we can enhance fines and penalties even more effectively. We take this fire . . .

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Minister, and thank you for the answer to that. Given that in our area we've already seen some vandalism taking place on power poles, especially with transformers out near that Gunn area – it's pretty disappointing – but given that farmers and pilots both recognize that wind and temperature diminish greatly at night, which is extremely advantageous to our firefighters as well as the pilots that are flying in those periods, and further given that the minister has taken the lessons learned from last season, has opened innovation, and has seen the effectiveness of nighttime helicopter usage as well as the use of drones and integrating them into effective firefighting, helping with the load placement, could the minister advise how Alberta's firefighters are approaching the . . .

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

Mr. Loewen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again for the question. This year we will be engaging in enhanced nighttime wildfire suppression operations. Our firefighters will be working early mornings and late nights to combat wildfires while the fire behaviour is typically more subdued. This will include the use of night vision equipped helicopters to better direct air tankers and ground operations. Ground operations will include the use of heavy equipment and ground crews to fight fire at night. Alberta has also added an additional two helicopters for this season to assist in nighttime operations, bringing our total to three machines that we will be able to operate at night. There is also an opportunity to hire casually more helicopters.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Thank you for the work on the nighttime file. Given that better managing forest fires requires new and innovative ideas such as the use of alternate firefighting materials like polymer gels and given the growing use of polymer gels in many jurisdictions, including in the U.S., and that some jurisdictions, I understand, are having issues with conventional chemicals right now, given further that these gels are innovative alternatives to the conventional firefighting products, to the same minister: can you advise what the government is doing in regard to the use of polymer gels, a standard firefighting practice, going forward?

Mr. Loewen: Alberta currently uses gel with our heavy helicopter contract. We have been trialling these fire-retardant gels for many years now, and we are entering into our final year of the contract utilizing two heavy-class helicopters with fire-retardant gel.

As technologies improve and new innovations come to light, we are continuously looking for methods and equipment and products to improve fire suppression efforts throughout the province. We are using drones, we're using thermal imaging, and we're using good, old-fashioned boots on the ground. Mr. Speaker, we're doing everything we can to protect Albertans and our communities.

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.

2:40

Hon. members, prior to Oral Question Period the daily Routine had been completed, so now we are at points of order. At 1:47, during Tabling Returns and Reports, the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Exhibits

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, the point of order was called during tablings, at which point the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was tabling a document, which is customary in this place, but knowing full well that the use of props is not, holding up an article with a picture on the front for the cameras to see clearly, I think, would be reaching the level of using a prop in this Chamber. I do find it particularly bizarre that the member would hold up a picture of herself, but, you know, different strokes for different folks. I don't think props should be permitted in this place. It's a long-standing tradition. I believe it would be a point of order.

The Speaker: The Deputy Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the said time the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was on her feet to table an article from the *Calgary Herald*, which happened to have her picture in that article. By no means did she intend it to be a prop. She was holding that in her hand to table it for the records of the Legislature. It's not a point of order.

Mr. Schow: She referenced the photo.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has made his argument.

Are there others or otherwise?

I do have the benefits of both the Blues as well as the tabling, and I was inclined to have the point of order just move on by. However, unfortunately – oh, you should probably wait next time, but it's fine. Have a seat.

Ms Al-Guneid: Oh, sorry.

The Speaker: No. It's okay. Have a seat. We've come this far.

Having said that, the Deputy Opposition House Leader rose and made the argument that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood tabled the document as she had tabled every other document in the Assembly, of which she is a very learned, proficient, and prolific tabler of documents. But at no point in all of the other documents which she has tabled has she made such reference to what I might say is "with a beautiful photo," which she held up for the Assembly, which quite likely could be construed as the use of a prop and which she did use. It is a point of order. I ask that she apologizes and withdraws.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I unreservedly apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 1:56 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to 23(h), (i), and (j). At that time the Minister of Health was responding to a question from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, and she responded with something like, and I quote: the member opposite continues to create fear and smear. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but that comment was directed personally at the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. It's clearly an accusation, allegation against another member, and it's kind of insulting language that the Minister of Health chose to use about another member of this Legislature who was asking a question about shortages of doctors. The minister accused him of creating fear and smear, so it is clearly offside the standing orders of this House.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, I agreed there was a point of order, but I would suggest that it was from the members opposite when the person asking the question, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, said that in a full on crisis, with the war on doctors, bullying health care workers, "the UCP are back to bullying tactics, shutting out doctors, and creating more chaos and uncertainty." This is language that certainly creates disorder. I don't think that what the Minister of Health said was a point of order. She was simply pointing out that the Member for Edmonton-City Centre was using inflammatory language and should cease from doing so. I don't think it's a point of order.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. At the reported time of 1:56 the hon. the Minister of Health said the following:

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The members ...

Plural.

... opposite continue to create fear and smear. In fact ... they ...

Also plural. There are interjections, a point of order was noted, and the minister continued to say:

I would encourage them to look at new data ...

that they are creating. I would suggest that this isn't a point of order as this is a matter of debate. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:02 the hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, 23(i) and (j). At that time the minister of service Alberta was responding to a question from my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and in response – I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but that's what I wrote down at that time – the minister said, "That is not true, what that member has said." Again, what you cannot say directly, you cannot say indirectly. Essentially, that was pointed directly at the member, individually, that what she said was not true, implying that the member was not truthful. So that is offside our standing orders.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I remember growing up with four brothers and a sister, and I would say what my brother said, and then he would say what I said. It was clearly a matter of debate, and my mother would be the arbitrator of that. This is very similar. The hon. minister of service Alberta is clearly suggesting that what the member opposite is saying is not true. They are not calling them

liars. That would be what, I suggest or suspect, the opposition deputy House leader is insinuating. At no time was that word used. I don't think this is a point of order. I think it's a matter of debate, which is our job in this Chamber, to debate.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I do have one question for the hon. the Government House Leader: in this situation am I your mother, and are you both brothers, and teamwork makes the dream work?

I might just add – and I can appreciate because I anticipate a point of order 4, which will come only in mere moments, I'm sure – my sense is that I feel one way about one particular argument and another about the next. Having said that, there are many similarities between point of order 3 and point of order 4.

In this particular case, I do agree that members should be able to make statements with respect to their opinion on something being true or false. Now, because the Speaker has said such a thing, I encourage members of the Assembly that that doesn't mean that tomorrow and Thursday and Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday of next week we all need to come into the Assembly and say, "That's not true," because all too often when the Speaker makes a ruling, members will take that as absolute permission to use such language. So I do use an order of caution to the hon. minister of service Alberta with respect to specifically referring to what a member says is true or not true. However, this is not a point of order. I consider it a matter of debate. I hope that members in the future will govern themselves accordingly when making comments specifically directed at a member, but this instance is a matter of debate. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge, the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader, on point of order 4.

2:50

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

The Speaker: Oh. Yes.

Mr. Sabir: This one is a very serious one. At 2:12 the Minister of Education was responding to a question about consultation from my colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and the Minister of Education said, and I quote: the member opposite is providing misinformation. It was not directed at the group, as the opposition; it was squarely directed at the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that he is providing misinformation. It is offside 23(h), (i), and (j), and that's one of my submissions for this one.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that given your previous ruling and the language you used – I don't want to presuppose your ruling, but I suspect I know where it's going – with my unofficial record suggesting the member is providing misinformation probably verges on the cusp, so without forcing this issue, I'll just retract and apologize on that point.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, though, if I may, that I believe an abundance of caution has been given to members of this Chamber, specifically the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, on the use of props. Currently the member's stickers are visible in this Chamber. While the hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader is speaking, that member is clearly in the camera angle. I'm not quite sure where your message has been lost. That's also not personal

property; that's government property, something you stated yourself. I'd just like to note that for the Chamber.

The Speaker: I do . . .

Member Irwin: That was literally a mistake.

The Speaker: Oh. Okay.

Because I provided some significant commentary on point of order 3, I just want to note the difference between saying that something is not true and saying that that member is spreading misinformation. The hon. the Speaker has ruled on a number of occasions where members of both of our entities here have had to apologize for such language that does create disorder as well as that it has been ruled a point of order in the past. That is the difference between point of order 3 and point of order 4. I accept the apology. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

I do also think it's important that members are cautious with the use of their government Legislative Assembly property, as I've provided caution on in the past.

This brings us to point of order 5, which I believe was at 2:12. The hon. the Government House Leader rose.

Point of Order

Supplementary Questions

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, I rose on a point of order as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was asking questions that were clearly unrelated to the initial question. Supplemental 1 and supplemental 2 were about housing and then about Municipal Affairs whereas the first question was about postsecondary. I understand that there is a loose connection with regard to Bill 18. However, I believe it is tradition in this House that supplementals, if you're not in the first set of four questions, should be related to the first question that was posed to the minister. I would ask that the member in future questions make sure that all subsequent questions are, in fact, related to the initial question posed to the government.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the question in hand, and they relate to Bill 18 and the impact this bill will have on direct funding that the federal government provides to different entities. The question talks about that bill and its impact. First, it talks about research, and then it talks about some more funding and provides a specific example of how this bill may impact housing funding and then talks about its impact on municipalities who have direct agreements with the federal government. I see a clear connection between these supplemental questions with the broad frame in question 1, so I don't agree with the Government House Leader that it's a point of order.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I do agree that the supplemental questions ought to relate to the first question. In this case, I would suggest that the string of relation is in fact closely linked enough together, being questions about funding to the municipality and how those may be impacted by Bill 18. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Orders . . .

Mr. Schow: There's one more.

The Speaker: Oh. I'm sorry. I've missed one at 2:16. The hon. the Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'll try to be quick. At the time noted, I rose under 23(h), (i) and (j) when the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was speaking. At the end of her question, without the benefit of the Blues and to the best of my knowledge and my chicken scratch, when referring to the Premier, she said that she thinks munis "are doing a bad job." There are plenty of ways to suggest that the bill may negatively affect a number of stakeholders in the province, talking directly about policy, but when you talk about intent of a specific member, especially the hon. Premier, who cares deeply about this province and all stakeholders, it would be unparliamentary to imply false motive.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the question of what the member said: "The system wasn't broken, but Bill 18 will break it. Does the Premier want to stand here today and argue she supports Bill 18 because she thinks municipalities were doing a bad job?" That's the whole thing that member said. I look forward to your guidance on this one.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I do have the benefit of the Blues. For the benefit of all members of the Assembly, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood opened with: "Let's talk about municipalities, Mr. Speaker." I think this is a reasonable and prudent time to remind members that after question 4, there are no preambles that are allowed, and I think this is a perfect example of that. I would remind the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to conduct herself appropriately with respect to preambles.

The hon. member went on to say a number of things as they are reported by the opposition deputy House leader:

The system wasn't broken, but Bill 18 will break it. Does the Premier want to stand here today and argue she supports Bill 18 because she thinks municipalities were doing a bad job?

My sense isn't that this rises to the level of a point of order but as a matter of debate.

I do continue to remind members that depersonalizing the debate as much as possible with respect to "does the Premier" as opposed to the use of "he" or "she": these are types of things that will often help raise the level of decorum, but I can appreciate members are keen to communicate in as passionate a way as possible. With respect to the help of decorum, perhaps it's not helpful.

Now I believe that concludes the points of order. We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 11

Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

[Adjourned debate April 10: Mr. McDougall]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has some time remaining should he choose to use it.

Seeing not, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has yet to speak, and he is welcome to do so now.

Member Arcand-Paul: Nanaskamon, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. I've had the benefit of *Hansard* on this debate and in particular the comments from across the aisle accusing members of my caucus of not caring about policing in Indigenous nations and communities. Before I get started, I'd like to address some language in this House when it comes to Indigenous peoples in Alberta. We do not belong to this province. The paternalistic reference to, quote, our Indigenous peoples or our First Nations or my Métis settlements, end quote, is language that is unbecoming of a member of this Chamber in representation of Albertans and our role serving under His Majesty. I'd urge the members opposite to refrain from such language moving forward. I'd also hope that some of the ministers opposite take some of their own advice when referencing the Indigenous peoples, to, quote, stop speaking on our behalf because you're not speaking on our behalf. End quote.

3:00

I would like to clarify with my experience on how this province has failed to move the needle forward with policing on Indigenous nations, including through this extremely futile last-ditch effort to make political attacks that involve much-needed demands for policing that Indigenous nations have been asking for for decades. It is incredibly disingenuous. The short of it: they have failed miserably. I've worked for nations who have wanted to develop their own police. But I'd like to ask: how helpful has this province been when it comes to Indigenous police services in this province? The answer to this question is three. There are three Indigenous police services operated by the nations themselves. I have a nephew working for one of them. I've represented numerous nations who have worked very hard to have the UCP government and its predecessor, the Progressive Conservatives, make necessary funding promises to help develop these programs on their nations.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Police Act has had provisions within its current iteration since 2020 to enable the province to assist First Nations and Métis settlements to develop police services within their territories. But what is this new argument being made across the aisle, that the members on this side of the House want to prevent First Nations and Métis settlements from accessing police services for their reserves and settlements respectively? Well, to that, I will use an oft-quoted line from across the aisle: nothing could be further from the truth.

You see, Madam Speaker, I've done this work, and I know the ins and outs and the gaps. The biggest gap is that this provincial government loves to self-congratulate for all the help it is providing to one or two Indigenous nations, but when push comes to shove, the UCP get a good-news story but nations are always left asking: where is the money? Indigenous nations can't rely on just good words of the members opposite when they say one thing but do another. Empty platitudes do not solve the issue of crime on Indigenous nations. It does not put police in their community, and it certainly does not accomplish whatever it is that the members opposite think it does.

Further, Madam Speaker, for an intimation to be made that the UCP knows rural Alberta best: I'd like to challenge him on that point. No, I do not need a bus to see rural Alberta. I have travelled these lands, much like my people did long before the arrival of all but a few of the ancestors of members in this Chamber to these

lands. You see, my work as a lawyer took me to every corner of this province. I've worked for many First Nations and Métis communities and businesses. Heck, I grew up on my nation, where many, many, many of my family and friends continue to reside. That's pretty darn rural.

Policing is top of mind. In my capacity as the vice-president of the Indigenous Bar Association I have appeared before the federal committee as well as in engagement sessions with the provincial government. While police certainly solve one piece of the puzzle, I ask why the members opposite are relying on this as their explanation for this policy. To me, we're also missing the other crucial piece of the puzzle, which has always been enforcement. To date the RCMP and, certainly, provincial fish and wildlife officers and sheriffs have not occupied the field of enforcement, and neither have Crown prosecutors on anything on-reserve.

In 2021 I delivered these comments to the House of Commons, and in 2024 they're still applicable, sadly.

If they were given the tools to do so, first nations may be better suited to exercise the law-making capacities with the assistance of their neighbouring police detachments or through their own officers where applicable. This latter option obviously comes at the nation's own cost to draft bylaws; apply to become an authorized employer of an officer; purchase equipment, including appropriate vehicles, uniforms, firearms, etc.; and hire a fair complement of officers to ensure coverage to the nation. Many nations do not have spare funds to even consider engaging in these activities, as they have other pressing issues to deal with.

It does not empower First Nations or Métis settlements. It does not create a framework for Indigenous police services specifically, and it does not provide that crucial element of funding that they have been asking for for decades.

And why do you think there is this urgent call for Indigenous-led policing initiatives? Well, let's look at the overincarceration of Indigenous peoples, the deaths of my people at the hands of the police, or the ongoing jurisdictional gap left by the provincial and federal ineptitude. Our nations have been calling for this service since long before this government started using Indigenous nations as political fodder to support the creation of a provincial police force, something they did not campaign on, might I add. It is offensive because of the difficult relationship my people have had with police on these territories since the ancestors of many in this Chamber arrived to these territories to live alongside my ancestors, who have been here since time immemorial.

In reality, what this act does is legislate the ongoing policing of Indigenous peoples on this territory and nothing more. Arguing otherwise is a disservice to Indigenous nations and communities. I've watched too many of my own people die at the hands of the police, I've heard anecdotes of my own cousins who have been abused by the police, and I've watched my own relatives take their last breath over video, something I would never wish any of these members in Assembly to witness, let alone any other person in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, this conversation needs to be nuanced, and the members opposite arguing that my colleagues on this side of the aisle do not know the concerns of rural Albertans is an absolutely offensive argument to be made. The government should think long and hard about these offensive comments after deflecting and failing to adequately fund all Indigenous nations to undertake the work of creating their own police services. There is the rub, that this government has not allocated the necessary dollars to assist all First Nations and all Métis settlements with establishing their own police services, nor does it seem like there is any political will to do so.

Just last week I was speaking with leadership whose main issue was a lack of enforcement in their community; this is why it is

laughable that the members opposite think that they are doing monumental and worthy work when it comes to Indigenous nations in this province and policing. Sure, some of the mighty First Nations or Métis settlements will benefit from their community moving away from the RCMP and establishing their own police service, but where does that leave the other 44 First Nations and eight Métis settlements?

How different is this from the amendments to the Police Act from 2020, where First Nations were able to develop their own police services? In my view, there's nothing added to this bill that would make those changes and help Indigenous nations access policing on their nation. We need the money, we need the support, and no ministry in this government has identified that support for nations to implement their own police services. These are empty platitudes.

Again, it doesn't serve our people, it does not serve the work that needs to happen on nations to address crime within First Nations and Métis settlements, and it really does not attract necessary dollars that First Nations and Métis settlements require. It's so transparent that this government although hinging their support for this bill on helping out Indigenous nations – the bill itself and Budget 2024 have made zero commitments to Indigenous policing other than the vague remarks made in this Chamber.

This bill is just bad. It creates a provincial police force that the UCP did not campaign on. I urge this Chamber to not support this bill in any iteration as it is bad law.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As a former nurse, municipal mayor as well as a mother the health and safety of my community is something that I take very seriously. That is why it is my privilege to stand and speak in support of Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, a bill that takes real action to address the safety concerns that Albertans have been repeatedly voicing. If passed, Bill 11 would require individuals subject to a court ordered electronic monitoring condition to wear a GPS tracking device, which would be administered by a central monitoring unit of the correctional services division personnel within the Alberta government and monitor compliance 24/7.

3:10

Furthermore, Bill 11 would allow Alberta's government to continue to look at more ways to modernize policing and improve accountability through further legislative and nonlegislative changes. One such legislative change, if Bill 11 is passed, would be the changes to the Peace Officer Act, which would enable the creation of a new independent police agency that would be responsible for carrying out police-like functions currently being performed by peace officers and the Alberta sheriffs such as fugitive apprehension and surveillance.

Madam Speaker, let's be frank. The federal government's bail policies are failing to keep people safe. The federal Liberal-NDP alliance and Bill C-75 have created an environment in Canada where repeat violent offenders and organized crime have been able to thrive with little to no consequences. Despite the seemingly desired chaos from the Trudeau-NDP alliance, our government is taking a firm stance against crime, and Bill 11 is no exception.

As part of our safe street action plan, this is a key action we're taking to help combat rising crime and restore safety for our families and our communities. Too often police services in Alberta issue bulletins about the release of offenders who are at high risk to

reoffend, yet Albertans are still being victimized by offenders who should not have been released at all.

Alberta does not currently operate an ankle bracelet electronic monitoring program. As it stands, under provincial community-based court conditions, bail supervisions are monitored by community corrections staff within correctional services, primarily during business hours. This program would also help Alberta better align with the 10 other Canadian jurisdictions, including British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Yukon, which operate some kind of electronic monitoring program that uses ankle bracelet technologies.

Monitoring Alberta's high-risk violent criminals is a major priority for our government, and introducing an ankle bracelet electronic monitoring program is a priority specified by the current minister's mandate. This is reflected in the \$5.25 million in funding allocated by this government for electronic monitoring through last year's budget. Of that funding, \$2.8 million would cover implementation costs for this 2024-2025 fiscal year, with the full funding of \$5.25 million to begin in the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

Ankle bracelet electronic monitoring would protect Albertans and communities by helping to secure offender-restricted areas such as victims' residences, places of employment, or any other area deemed off limits as part of an individual's bail or community release conditions.

The Alberta sheriffs will support enforcement of this program by assisting with the execution of warrants on individuals in violation of the electronic monitoring program, where feasible. Correctional service division staff will also continue to engage with local police to address reoffenders and noncompliance.

The other important step Bill 11 takes is working to meet evolving public safety and policing needs in the province. We have already successfully expanded the roles of the Alberta sheriffs, but we will continue to work further to enhance the current policing model to ensure it's meeting the needs of our communities. These initiatives in Bill 11 are aimed at augmenting the efforts of the police by having sheriffs perform some specialized law enforcement functions.

If passed, Bill 11, Alberta's government will take further steps to determine the scope, size, and structure of the new agency. The main legislation governing the Alberta sheriffs and the Peace Officer Act was not designated to encompass the full scope of police-like functions that the sheriffs carry out today. The new police agency's functions would come under the Police Act, and officers would be subject to the same level of oversight and accountability as those working for Alberta's existing police services. Furthermore, the independent agency police service would have the authority and jurisdiction to support the RCMP, municipal police services, and First Nations police services here in Alberta.

Ultimately, Bill 11 is a big step forward in the Alberta government's ability to step up where Trudeau has failed and keep citizens safe. Bill 11 is a necessary piece of legislation, which, if passed, would include measures intended to protect Albertans, hold violent criminals accountable, and respond to the evolving public safety needs of our communities.

Madam Speaker, I encourage everyone in this House to vote yes for Bill 11. Thank you.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise for the opportunity to address Bill 11. As my learned colleague on this side previously addressed this and indicated he was not going to support this bill, I similarly will not support this bill. The main

objection that I have is around the creation of an independent agency police service.

I have fewer objections, of course, around the ankle monitoring program, and as my colleague from the other side just talked about, the number of provinces that have such a program in place: 10 Canadian jurisdictions, covering almost all of Canada in terms of population, have this program in place. I was surprised to read that we don't, and I don't have an issue with that in particular.

What I do have an issue with: as a former social worker, as a former city councillor in this province for the city of Calgary – I did my practise as a social worker in the same place – and as a member of this Legislature since 2015 I have great concern where the government is bringing in an act, and not just this act but many others, that addresses things that we don't need to address. We do need to address many challenges in this province, many brought on by the government, but forming an independent agency police service is not one of them.

I say that because several times last week, as I was listening to debate on Bill 11, I heard from the other side statements like: people don't care what kind of stripes are on the pants of the police officers that show up; they just want one to show up. But is that really accurate, Madam Speaker? It may be anecdotal. There may be some people who say that to members on the other side and take the opportunity to share that information, but we know that when, you know, opinion polls have been done, when the National Police Federation did its own work, when previous panels under the PC government did their work, particularly when the Fair Deal Panel did public opinion research, that public opinion research comes back in support of the RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Several other groups, in addition to the ones that I've mentioned, polling firms, have done that same work, and they've come up with that a clear majority of Albertans, when asked if they would replace the RCMP with another policing agency, said: no; fix what we have where there are issues, but keep the RCMP; fix what we have.

With regard to fixing what we have, I think time, energy, and money should go more into that than starting another independent agency police service in this province. And why do I say that, Madam Speaker? For instance, the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, which I think is about two to three years old now, maybe closer to three years old, talked about: transitioning costs of the RCMP into an independent agency police service would be \$366 million minimally. And that's an old report, so those numbers have no doubt escalated and inflated since that report was created.

But that's not the only cost they talk about. Of course, we know there's \$170 million of federal funding from the federal government that comes to this province to off-set the costs of the RCMP across the province, and that would be lost as well because it wouldn't be here, and no amount of asking for it from this government will make that happen if we don't have an RCMP. So those are costs that we would need to pick up in this province.

We would also need to see that – just a few quotes perhaps I'll share with you – there would have to be a new agency stood up, and there are challenges around that. And the challenges are real because we know there's a real-life example in Surrey, B.C., where it's gone back and forth to try and figure out what they want to do there. Those costs are high, and the province of B.C. has had to step in and help sort that out.

3:20

The other kinds of information that I just want to share with this Legislature is that when we look at the people who are deeply involved in policing, whether they're retired or still in policing – one thing was shared through media with Albertans from the NPF President Brian Sauvé. "Alberta has significant policing infrastructure in place," he

says, "through the Alberta RCMP, yet the Government has not increased funding for our Members to keep pace with population growth and evolving crime in the province."

I know when we were government from '15 to '19, we worked with the RCMP and K Division to put in place I think it was called the rural policing task force. While it didn't have immediate results, it did have results that over time picked up and addressed more and more the needs of rural Alberta residents who were dissatisfied with the level of policing. What Mr. Sauvé is trying to communicate is that there is infrastructure in place, and using that infrastructure is in the best interests of Albertans and costs less than creating an independent agency police service. That's what we did when we were government.

We also need to listen very closely to the organizations that represent Albertans across this province. We talk many times about Alberta Municipalities, formerly called the AUMA, now Alberta Municipalities. That has a significant number of municipalities; I think it's 300 or so under its association. The RMA: far fewer; 60-some in that association. I've been, like many people here, I'm sure, to numerous conventions and meetings of both of those associations over the years. About four years ago resolutions started coming to both of those associations, and those resolutions, of course, come from the membership, whether that be an Alberta Municipalities member or an RMA, and there are a few that cross over to both of those associations.

But those resolutions – and I'm not quoting them, of course – had to do with this transitioning from the RCMP to an independent agency police service. I can remember not only the votes being quite one way in terms of people saying: keep the RCMP, fix what is the problem, and spend some time doing that. I don't remember any of those resolutions going the other way, and I've been to those association meetings. Right up until this fall I was at some. The spring ones will probably have the same kind of resolutions brought forward by different member municipalities, and those municipalities are saying loud and clear: do not start up an independent agency police service; the costs are too high.

As my learned colleague from this side was previously speaking on this issue, you know, spend the money. Spend the time working in the communities that have the significant challenges, and don't kind of fritter away hundreds of millions of dollars to do something that won't address the challenges of crime in communities. Those challenges can be better addressed by working with communities to identify what approaches would help, whether they be social supports for young kids in schools or in communities, whether they be supporting the education of people in communities or housing or health care, opportunities for meaningful employment. All those things address crime in communities. It's not that we don't need policing – we do – but my argument is: let's keep what we have, fix it, move forward, and spend money investing in communities to improve themselves, in individuals to improve themselves.

You know, as my colleague was talking about, for the longest time this government was not talking about policing. It went silent, off the radar, last year around this time. What also went silent, of course, was dumping the CPP, the Canada pension plan. That wasn't talked about during the election. But those are critical things in people's lives, and keeping them should be the work of this government because they don't have a mandate from the electorate to move out of them.

For the longest time this government was, you know, not wanting to talk about, as I said, moving away from the RCMP even though many, many people, whether they be pundits or whether they be regular people in community, said things like this. This is from a criminologist and sociologist from the University of Alberta who has previously advised this government on changes to the Police

Act. The quote that I'm looking at is one that many people kind of agree with. His name is Mr. Oriola. He said: "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. Let's just call it what it is. This is going to be, for all intents and purposes, if not immediately, over time, a provincial police service."

A provincial police service does not have the backing of Albertans. A provincial police service does not have the support through any of the polling, opinion polling, that I've seen of Albertans. So why is it before us? Well, it's before us because – and not just the ankle bracelets. The ankle bracelets, as I said, I don't have an issue with. It's this not following the direction of Albertans and seeming to know better than what Albertans need and want.

Albertans have been clear. They want the RCMP. They want it fixed. They want a better relationship between this government and the RCMP over time. Albertans have been clear. They want their CPP. That's not before us today, but they do want their CPP, and this government doesn't seem to listen to those things. It presses ahead. Just as Mr. Oriola says, you know, for all intents and purposes, not immediately but over time, a provincial police service, end quote, will be formed.

Madam Speaker, we have many, many challenges in this province. We don't need to create them where there aren't any. Yes, there are concerns that the capacity in the RCMP is not as high as it should be. Let's work on that. Let's form a task force to find ways to ensure that more young people come into the service and they stay longer. Let's sit down with K Division, like we did between 2015 and 2019, to address a rural crime strategy, a rural crime prevention strategy.

Oh, sorry. I didn't see you over there. Yes. I'll take the intervention, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. Over the past couple of weeks there have been some deaths in various communities through gun violence. There is a need for some interventions now. I'm just wondering: how will this bill help to protect lives and the immediate need that is now pressing within the community? What do you think?

3:30

Member Ceci: Well, it's a tragedy, of course. The proliferation of guns in our society is something that we need to find ways to address, and the federal government needs to be onboard with working with provinces around all of that. Gun violence is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: For next time.

Any other members to join the debate? Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising today to speak to Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, and here, yes, another broken promise by the UCP. To quote my colleague, the member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, our critic for Justice and public safety:

The Premier said before the election they would not pursue a provincial police force. She said in May during the last campaign she wouldn't bring in a police force. In August of last year, she removed it from the Justice Minister's mandate letter.

Yet here we are, now looking at legislating an agency with policing services.

The UCP has no credibility in keeping their promises or on public safety. For the record the UCP took funding for police away from municipalities in 2019. The UCP increased the provincial share for the fine revenues from 26.7 per cent to 40 per cent based on the 2018-19 data, which was roughly about a \$32 million loss that financial year. These funds support different public safeties related to efforts in municipalities. In comparison, \$32 million was roughly used for salaries for 300 police officers. The UCP is downloading

the cost of municipalities and may have put more pressure on policing and public safety budgets.

Madam Speaker, one of the functions of Bill 11 is that it is creating a new police agency. It creates the framework for the creation of an independent agency for police service. It enables the province to establish such services, and it lays out how oversight of a police force under the framework would work. The provincial police force was proposed by the Alberta Fair Deal Panel. Even the panel's research showed that a provincial police force was unpopular. The plan had been widely opposed across the province. In the cities, urban, rural – you name it – it's been opposed across this province. The National Police Federation, which represents RCMP officers, has been fighting to keep the RCMP in Alberta. The National Police Federation president, Brian Sauvé, said in a statement that they were deeply concerned and perplexed about this bill. To also quote him, "Proposed changes to policing in Alberta have been deeply unpopular with Alberta residents and today's announcement appears to be yet another attempt to force an unwanted and expensive policing change on taxpayers."

This bill does allow the government to create any kind of police agency, but the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services stated that it is meant for sheriffs and in case the RCMP doesn't renew its contract in 2032. The Fair Deal Panel's public opinion research found that only 35 per cent supported an Alberta police force replacing the RCMP. As my colleague had referenced, a PricewaterhouseCoopers report commissioned a few years ago by the provincial government said that the cost of transitioning from the RCMP would be at least \$366 million. The province would lose \$170 million in funding that it receives right now from our federal government.

I just want us to think about \$366 million. The UCP is focusing on Bill 11 instead of other things. I'm wondering why we are not focusing on using that money for health care, why we're not using that money for affordability, and why we're not using that money for the education of our children. Albertans are concerned about their health care, the affordability, and their children's education, and an Alberta police force would cost Albertans lots and lots of money. As I said, you know, Albertans don't want it.

Do you know what we could be focusing on with that \$366 million? Affordability. In my own constituency of Calgary-Edgemont I was at a community meeting, and this group of very dedicated volunteers in the area: they have a breakfast club that meets every Wednesday morning to serve the community. What they also do is this group collects food, period products, diapers, and much-needed formula as individuals in my own riding are struggling for the basic needs to survive because we are in the midst of an affordability crisis. Families are struggling for basic needs to feed their children, let alone being able to get brand new clothes for their children or shoes. And I was quite taken aback by this story from these volunteers because they were telling me that they are now having individuals go into this community, and they are now offering young children fancy shoes and fancy clothes to join those gangs.

Do you know what else we could be focusing \$366 million on? Education. If we were funding for teachers, educational assistants, and other very important support workers, if we were funding for smaller classroom sizes, if we were funding for mental health supports in schools, we could be saving money down the road with incarceration. Research is increasingly examining the connection between school failure and later contact with the criminal justice system for minorities.

There was a thesis put out by Jenna Levay and Doug King from Mount Royal University regarding this, and to quote their synopsis:

Unless you have children, are a teacher or school administrator, or feel you were mistreated by the education system during your

school-aged years, you may not think . . . about the disciplinary actions used within our school systems. However, from a societal perspective, it's important to understand that a common recurring theme within educational disciplinary action is the usage, and over usage of suspension and expulsion as punishment . . . Studies have shown that the misuse of suspension and expulsion can and does lead children toward a life of criminalization and institutionalisation.

It's a phenomenon that I actually want to now read a lot more on, about the school-to-prison pipeline, and it fundamentally influences crime rates in Canada and in Alberta. Even the phrase "school-to-prison pipeline" sounds inherently damaging for our children for obvious reasons, but the main reason society should care about this phenomenon is because it forcefully filters today's young people into the criminal justice system.

So, Madam Speaker, if we had more funding in our schools, more children would be detected and treated for their mental health concerns.

Member Arcand-Paul: May I offer an interjection?

Ms Hayter: Yes.

Member Arcand-Paul: Madam Speaker, I think the member also raises a really important point that we need to expand further, that the experiences of children in care are also part of this pipeline system. When you are faced with traumatizing events and your government does not provide you with the necessary supports to adequately respond to those traumatic events such as being taken away from your family, it is very difficult to not see yourself fall into the issues of being incarcerated or recidivism.

This is a common concern. There's been study after study about the effects of being in care and the traumatization of being in that situation. I'd like to urge the member and perhaps put it to her that in those comments, I think, it's very important for us to also consider that it's not just the education system but also . . . [Member Arcand-Paul's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

3:40

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Member. I really appreciate your comments, and I think that there are a lot of ways that we need to be looking at the school-to-prison pipeline and all of the different factors that play into this.

You know, as I was saying, if we had funding in our schools for children, Madam Speaker, we would be able to detect and treat their mental health concerns, students who wanted to pursue their own academic achievement and their success then. Students with diagnosable mental health problems suffer usually under a zero tolerance policy. Such policies do aim to create safer classrooms by removing potential disruptions, but many in the mental health, social services, courts, and other related fields believe they fail in the school, and this is resulting now in less safe schools and communities.

Zero tolerance policies also fail to account for neurological developments in youth. Studies show that the brain is still under construction until about the age of 21. Youth are more likely to take risks, act impulsively, and exercise poor judgment. When these actions result in their involvement with the criminal justice system, they're punished rather than taught how to develop. One issue in improving mental health services in school and interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline is that the schools are unequipped to identify disorders and provide help for them.

The cost of transitioning from the RCMP to a provincial police force would be at least \$366 million, but I believe that we should

be investing this money into our children's education and their mental health, giving them places to live.

Mr. Williams: Madam Speaker, point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Williams: Madam Speaker, I rise on 23(b)(i), speaking to a matter not before the Chamber. This is not a supplementary supply debate. There's no funding involved with this. It's definitely not, as I would know, a mental health and addictions bill. It is a substantive question surrounding civilian oversight of policing within Alberta, and I'd like to debate that topic.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The bill in question is about creating a new police force that will at some point require funding according to government documents that have been, that are widely available. Therefore, I believe this is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I guess probably I'll take the opportunity to remind all members of this Chamber that we are on the Bill 11 debate, and I'm sure the hon. member was getting to the point in relation to this bill.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Debate Continued

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, I was wrapping it up to my point there, that I believe that investing this money into our children's education and giving them an affordable place to live and giving their families ease to feed them would help take a strain off our police system down the road.

Bill 11 is just another broken promise that Albertans do not want. Municipalities do not want Bill 11. Bill 11 is extremely costly for Albertans, for taxpayers. This is costing the taxpayers. The UCP, as I stated earlier, has no credibility on our public safety. So, Madam Speaker and all members of this Chamber, I hope that you will join me in opposing Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, today.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there are others that wish to join the debate on Bill 11 in second reading?

Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time].

Bill 12 Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024

[Adjourned debate April 11: Mr. Amery]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is a bill regarding the regulation of life leases. I'm going to come at it from a slightly different angle. Of course, the seniors who have put, in many cases, their entire life savings into the safekeeping of the Christenson Group of homes, who are not receiving their money back as they were

promised: it's a devastating situation. But these sorts of devastating situations arise specifically because of challenges with the regulation of the entity and, frankly, with the business model, that is actually quite profitable because it takes advantage of a gap in regulations.

Let me talk about that a little bit. I do want to, like, humbly remind the House that in my own career, you know, working on Wall Street, advising large investors how to invest in energy as well as my history as an energy analyst, which from 2015 to 2019 was a very wild time worldwide in that business, in addition to being an expert on hydrocarbon and oil and gas and pipelines, I was also able to go to bankruptcy school because many, many fossil energy companies at the time, especially in the United States, were groaning and breaking under a collapse of debt and a debt load that was breaking them. It gave me a sensitivity to financial instruments that are kind of debt-like but not regulated as debt. This is especially relevant for the Christenson Group because basically what you're doing, what Christenson is doing, what any life lease company is doing is taking money today from their clients. They're taking the money today and promising to return it in the future.

That looks like a bank to me; it looks like an insurance company; it looks like a brokerage. These three entities in the, you know, financial economy are regulated under various different acts. For example, if you're a brokerage, it is incumbent for the broker-dealer to segregate all client funds. If it is a bank, obviously a schedule 1 chartered bank is federally regulated and can really do anything that it wants with deposits but has the federal government in its kitchen every single day to make sure that those deposits are protected because the consequences of bank failure to the economy are very serious.

Again, this issue with Christenson is that they have none of those regulations. They're operating a very similar business model to a bank or an insurance company or a brokerage with none of the regulatory overhead and, in fact, have said again and again that that regulatory overhead would make the business nonviable. Let's think about that for a second. If they were to have the same regulatory burden as other businesses in the same line, you know, they are saying that their business would be significantly more difficult and may not even exist. That is something that in the financial world we call a regulatory arbitrage. I want to talk a little bit about what that is because, you know, "arbitrage" isn't a word that we use in common conversation.

An arbitrage is basically any time the financial market – or any time you're getting free money from someone, right? The classic case of arbitrage: the analogy is diving in front of steamrollers to pick up nickels. You do that often enough, and you can collect a lot of nickels, but sometimes a steamroller gets you. Hopefully, by then you'll be gone. I'll be gone. Everyone's going to be gone and everyone's made their bonuses.

3:50

A regulatory arbitrage is that kind of money-making opportunity that exists because of a regulatory failure or because of an edge case that regulation did not envision. Bill 12 is intended to close a regulatory arbitrage that exists because this is primarily an unregulated business that, I have to emphasize, takes cash from people with a promise to return it with no capital controls, no government oversight, no segregation of funds.

Those are very different models of regulation, whether you have controls and oversight or whether you have segregation of funds. Both are acceptable depending on the business model of the company being regulated, but each one leads to very, very different regulatory outcomes. The upshot is that both models are regulatorily equivalent and, by the way, create enormous costs for businesses in each one of those lines.

Where are we? We are at a place where now there is a regulatory arbitrage that is being exploited by the Christenson Group, and, by the way, like my history and my going to bankruptcy school and my familiarity with credit actually, you know, if I were to enter such a deal where I'm giving my life savings to somebody in return to receive it, I would want things like audited financial statements that are, like, created and made for me. I want to trust the person who is, like, creating that product for me. I would want to make sure that the assets are sufficient, and I would really, really want to make sure that the company that I'm doing business with has the ability to return my funds without relying on new people coming in. Because when you rely on new people coming in in order to pay back people who have loaned money to you, that is a Ponzi scheme, Madam Speaker. A Ponzi scheme is just that. [interjection] For the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is asking me – I'm sure facetiously – "What is that?" a Ponzi scheme is when a security relies on new people coming in in order to pay people back what they have been promised. It ends badly. It is illegal. Bernie Madoff is still in jail because of his very highly successful Ponzi scheme that he ran over multiple decades.

The model of regulation that will prevent the Ponzi-ing of good people's retirement securities is something that requires significantly more study than we've had right now. It requires significantly more consultation. If this is a business model that provides value – and clearly it does because people have entered into it – then it is appropriate for the government to come in with a regulatory environment that allows a business to succeed and that considers the protection of consumers as the primary good.

Because of that, Madam Speaker, I would like to propose an amendment to Bill 12, if I may.

The Deputy Speaker: Perfect. Just wait till I have a copy before you proceed.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment REF 1.

Please proceed to read it into the record.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 12, Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: Bill 12, Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, the reason why I believe that this bill needs to be referred to committee is because of that question of regulation. Here's the problem. Of course, everyone knows that water flows downhill. Money flows downhill as well. Money flows to the jurisdiction or the business model of least regulation. It flows to the direction of the greatest profits, which, in businesses that have similar regulation and similar regulatory burden, is wonderful. People operating their businesses in essentially the same way get to make money doing it and provide some services to the market, and I'm all for that; I think that's great.

Where a business grows because it is exploiting a gap in regulation, you know, things can go badly. Things go badly in regular businesses when that happens. Whether you're selling used cars or leasing apartments to tenants, these are all areas where somebody who's unscrupulous and taking advantage of gaps in regulation can do significant damage, but in no business is the damage of insufficient regulation more serious than in financial services businesses. It's especially serious in financial services businesses because they can grow very quickly as a result of regulatory arbitrage, and they can grow without scale.

Therefore, this bill really does need some committee oversight. It needs the committee to have a look at it because we have to not just save the folks who are being harmed by the Christenson business model today but also ensure that the regulatory loophole is closed and that the Christenson Group of Companies is actually required to either have segregated funds or capital requirements or some other regulatory model that ensures that consumers entering into such an arrangement are going to get their money back, that consumers entering into this relationship know that the counterpart of the Christenson Group of Companies and anybody else who wants to enter this business are going to be there for them.

This cannot be left to the domain of consumers, to worry about audited financials and going through financial statements and making sure that they have lawyers. That is unacceptable, Madam Speaker.

We have history on previous regulatory arbitrage that resulted in very bad things happening to the people of Alberta. The reason I'm banging on about this again and again and again is that if this regulatory loophole isn't closed, then the inevitability is that more people will be harmed. If the bill, Bill 12, does not adequately close these loopholes, which it does not, this is no more than putting a towel under your door during the flood and hoping that the water doesn't come in. Madam Speaker, the water always comes in. A mere towel can't do it.

In the '80s there was a company that for a short time – a short time historically; worked out very successfully for a great number of years – took advantage of regulatory arbitrage between schedule 1 chartered banks and trust companies, which were regulated provincially. The company was known as the Principal Group, and it was run by the CEO, Don Cormie. The company was – it turns out – a Ponzi scheme. It was taking advantage of a gap in regulation, that the relevant provincial entities that were responsible for ensuring that capital adequacy requirements appropriate to a banking entity were being met, and they were not, and as a result the company went bankrupt. A trust company went bankrupt, Madam Speaker.

4:00

Thousands upon thousands of investors were harmed in that bankruptcy. The cost was over a thousand dollars. The cleanup took over 20 years. There was – sorry; a billion dollars. My mistake. It was a billion dollars. It took 20 years to clean it up. There was a public inquiry, run by Bill Code, that took two years. At least one cabinet minister, that I know of, lost their position because of it. It could have all been avoided. It could have all been avoided if the provincial regulator had taken its responsibilities seriously.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in support of the government's Bill 12, the life lease protection act. Before I get into the substance of the legislation, I want to say a few words on why this legislation is necessary and even long overdue.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. We're on the referral amendment. Just a reminder to craft your debate around relatable events.

Mrs. Johnson: What just happened?

The Deputy Speaker: A referral amendment has been introduced to refer this matter to a committee on the bill. Speak to the bill in relation to its referral to the committee. We're on the amendment.

Mrs. Johnson: Keep going?

The Deputy Speaker: Yeah.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to say a few words on why this bill is necessary and even long overdue. The affordability crisis in housing is very real, and it's getting worse. *The Economist* magazine recently reported that when Justin Trudeau took office in 2016, the average homebuyer dedicated 39 per cent of their income to housing. That figure is now 64 per cent. At the same time, our country has the highest levels of household debt in the G-7, and three-quarters, 75 per cent, of that debt is mortgage debt. Due in part to the inflationary policies of our federal government and the restrictive developmental policies of many municipalities, we're now living in a Canada where only dual-income families can afford to buy a home.

[Mr. Cyr in the chair]

Among the hardest hit in this housing crisis are two groups of people. First, the young people just starting out, who now may never be able to afford to own a home. Across Canada and much of the western world real wages have not kept pace with our housing expenses for decades. As a result, home ownership, once the hallmark of our middle class, is becoming a dream for far too many. Secondly, of the hardest hit in this housing crisis are our seniors on fixed incomes. According to CMHC in 2021 seniors' housing rents averaged \$3,400 in Alberta, with prices in Calgary reaching \$4,100. Even with full CPP and OAS it's not affordable.

At the end of the day, the biggest cause of the housing crisis is a lack of supply. Our country continues to welcome record numbers of newcomers every year, and at the same time here in Alberta we've benefited from record interprovincial migration. It is clear we're not allowing housing developers to keep pace with all this population growth. Not even close. According to CMHC, if the current rates of new construction continue, the national housing stock will increase by only 2.3 million by the end of the decade, but to restore basic affordability in Canada, we need an additional 3.5 million units. That's how much is needed. This is a massive, once-in-a-generation problem.

Our governments are vastly underestimating the effect that this will have on our communities and our society. Even with unlimited budgets governments are not equipped to directly build the supply that's needed. Instead, best case scenario: governments at all levels will get out of the way and let the free market work to build the homes that Canadians want at a price they can afford. In the meantime we need additional market-based solutions to help bridge that gap. That is where the growing popularity of life lease agreements proves vital, especially for our seniors.

As others have pointed out, life lease agreements are allowing both nonprofit organizations and private housing providers an additional option that is sorely needed right now. For seniors who may struggle to keep up with home maintenance, these agreements help keep husbands and wives together longer in the communities that they helped to build. That is something I think we can all support. However, with this housing affordability crisis driving more and more seniors to the life lease market, government needs to take steps to protect Albertans from these opportunists who may seek to exploit grandpa and grandma.

Life leases, a sort of hybrid between your home ownership and the rental market, currently fall into a legal grey area. The Residential Tenancies Act does not apply to them. At the same time, there are many contract options that have not been standardized in our province, opening the door to unnecessary confusion and conflict. The one common element between most of these agreements is that

they require a substantial upfront entrance fee, some or all of which is refundable when that agreement ends. Without standardization of these agreements, too often seniors and their families are being forced to wait months or years to collect their redemption value payment.

In my home constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka I've been aware of many such situations. One couple from Blackfalds gave notice at their life lease facility in March 2023. They moved out two months later, on May 30, 2023, due to some increasing monthly fees. They are still waiting a year later for the \$338,955 owed them. Another lady in Lacombe moved out in February 2023, passing away, sadly, a short time later, and this grieving family is still waiting over a year now for the money owed. There are many more.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In fact, in Lacombe-Ponoka as of March 28, 2024, there were nine loans in queue, with over \$2 million outstanding. No payments have been made against this amount since December 31, 2023. If \$2 million sounds like a big number, it is, but \$2 million pales in comparison to the \$55 million owed to seniors and families throughout this province. For many of these folks, these outstanding payments represent their life savings. For others, this money was intended to be bequeathed to family members as an inheritance. In these difficult times of rising costs, our seniors on fixed incomes and their family members deserve to be treated with respect. They certainly should not be denied access to the money they spent a lifetime working hard to rightfully earn.

Probably the best part of Bill 12 is that it will legislate a timeline for the return of entrance fees to be within 180 days of termination of the lease. This will provide some assurance to our seniors at a time in their lives when they need it most. Furthermore, Bill 12 will allow the government to create interest penalties for redemption payments not repaid within that 180-day period. This will remove any financial advantage for opportunists seeking to take advantage of grandpa and grandma by hijacking their nest egg. In addition, the bill clarifies that people or companies who don't play by the rules will face enforcement under the Consumer Protection Act. This is important. Rules without enforcement are meaningless.

Finally, Bill 12 aims to maintain operator flexibility in their housing models to keep life leases an affordable option for our seniors. The key here is standardizing the language in contracts while protecting options. Currently there are five basic styles of life lease models, each of which has its own advantages based on the customer's needs. This is important because every family situation is unique. Too often governments and bureaucracies lose sight of this fact in a mad dash to regulate. It's important to keep in mind why life leases are necessary in the first place: to keep housing affordable.

4:10

Will life leases single-handedly fix the housing affordability crisis faced by our seniors? No. Ultimately, housing costs too much because there's a shortage of supply. Until more housing is built, affordability will remain a major and pressing concern. However, life leases are a popular financial tool which can help bridge the gap in this medium term. To that end, Bill 12 will help protect the growing number of Albertans who choose to take advantage of this tool. Because of this, I support the goals of this legislation, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to do likewise. We owe it to grandpa and grandma.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1 for the purposes of those in the Chamber and those watching online like the daughter of the hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Up to speak next, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to speak against the amendment and for the bill. Thank you for the thoughtful comments by the MLAs for Lacombe-Ponoka and Calgary-Elbow. I don't normally like to do this, but I perhaps would preface some of my comments since the MLA for Calgary-Elbow, like, wanted to talk about his financial background. I also bring to this Chamber some background and experience in this regard. I also, like the member, spent time as an oil and gas analyst in the international financial markets, rising to, with one of the world's largest banks, senior vice-president for economics and equity research.

I did this working out of a number of countries, emerging markets in New York and in London, and in that capacity saw a huge number of financial markets, the regulatory structures and products that exist there. One of the things that I think we need to understand is that total regulation is not always a good thing. There is a balance to be achieved in terms of the cost of red tape and the compliance and the protections that consumers deserve. You need to provide a structure that provides those protections but also attracts investment.

For any of those who have been watching and looking at economic news here in Canada these days, we can see what's happening to investment in Canada in large part because the regulatory system and the taxation and other systems scare away investment. I can tell you first-hand, having spent a big part of my career in emerging markets, that when you scare away investment, it's not a good thing. People suffer, including the consumers that some regulations purport to protect. Like I said, you need to have a reasonable balance, providing protections and safeguards but also making sure that you can do business.

As the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka recently pointed out, we do have a shortage of financing going into housing. That's why we're asking governments to pay and contribute and participate in the market. Why? Because the financial markets are not there – right? – in the size that we need to meet the increase in demand. The last thing we want to do is start going around throwing around regulations that are going to scare away any of the available funding that exists.

Let's be clear. We're speaking on Bill 12, consumer protection life leases act. In reference to that, in section 41.6(1) under Regulations:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations . . .

- (d) requiring lease operators or trustees who receive entrance fees or pre-lease payments to deposit those [funds or] fees or payments into a trust account.

Then there are other rules and things. These are all going to be in regulation.

The question is: what goes into the law? What goes into the bill, and what goes into the regulation? What is appropriate? A lot of the times, most of the time, what is appropriate in terms of regulations is to be in regulations, not in the bill. It takes a long time for a bill to be introduced and passed in the House to make changes and adjustments to some of the finer details as to how to appropriately manage any particular product or organization. What is clear is that for almost 30 years, or over 30 years, there has been this product out in the marketplace that is targeted primarily to seniors, that I think we all would agree did not have the protections appropriate for this type of vehicle, so what the bill's intention to do is to provide what is a reasonable set of laws and a regulatory structure that will provide those benefits.

The thing to keep in mind – and I have a facility in my constituency called Sundance on the Green, managed by Bethany, that is under life leasing, and when I talk to the residents there, they love the life lease arrangements they have, they trust their operator, and they're happy with the project. What they do want is to ensure

that when it's time that they need to move, they receive their money back on a timely basis.

This is exactly what this bill intends to do. There will be interest rates for those who do not provide the money within 180 days, and those interest rates will be punitive. I mean, let's be clear. The reason why this structure is in place is that it provides a financing option for companies to build senior facilities. That's what it does. If you require all the money to go into a trust account where they can't touch it, then it doesn't really serve that purpose. So maybe you need to have a portion of it thereof. These are things in the discussions that have – but this is a financing arrangement.

What we need to make sure is that that financing that is provided by people who sign these contracts, that they clearly understand the contract. It's very clear as to what the conditions will be and that money will be received within the time frames required and, if it doesn't, that there will be penalties both in terms of interest rates so that there's no incentive for the company to continue to ride off the seniors' money instead of avoiding paying other kinds of financing costs. They will be punitive, so that will no longer be an option, and there will be other penalties depending on the severity of the issue, including jail time. So it is responding to the concern.

Again, I'm a little bit surprised that it's taken this long for us to come to do this type of thing. I would remind the member opposite that they also did not do anything during their term in office. This has been going on for a long time, and it's been identified as a problem, and now this government is trying to address that.

So what are we doing here? We're providing penalties for those who delay repayment of the entrance fees, and we're providing regulatory consistency and clarity for what has been previously an unregulated product. We're only the third jurisdiction in Canada that's actually going to do this, following in the footsteps of Saskatchewan and Manitoba in this similar regard.

Other key things that are part of the bill, that the amendment doesn't address because it's already addressed, are minimum disclosure requirements for the contracts; I talked about the return of entrance fees within 100 days; a 10-day cooling-off period after the contract signing; and, as I mentioned before, broad regulation-making authority, which is the appropriate place to put a lot of the finer details as to how the regulations should be followed and establish that noncompliance will result in severe consequences. This bill that's come is a result of engaged stakeholders. Many people have been talked to, including, as I indicated before, people who are involved in these types of products in my own constituency.

It appears that we have one particular operator that has been an issue, and we should not penalize the whole industry because of one player, you know, that is for whatever reason not able to be performing in a way that we think is appropriate. There are a lot of other players. A lot of these people are nonprofit organizations that are involved in these products, so we don't want to set up a system for either private or nonprofit not to be able to participate, because this is a source of funding for housing that we require.

It's a delicate balance, and this is the thing about government, that we need to find the right balance. You know, onerous regulation is not a good thing. Neither is the wild, wild west. We have consumer protections for a reason, and this is what's here.

4:20

It's a balance between protecting the consumer rights and ensuring the sustainability of the life lease amendments. It will benefit Albertans. It promotes fairness, transparency, clarity, and financial security. I reiterate importance and urgency for voting against the amendment and voting for the bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on my support for Bill 12, Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024, in support of deferral of the bill to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with the Standing Order 74.2.

I'll speak a little bit about some of the background. Life leases are typically for older adults. If they cannot self-evacuate from the building, then they must move, usually to a seniors' lodge. Life lease holders pay an upfront entrance fee – it's basically a loan – usually large, but averaging \$300,000. After paying the entrance fee, life lease holders are offered assurance that monthly housing costs will be low and it will be predictable, something that is very important to seniors who are living on fixed income. In addition to the entrance fee, monthly payments typically cover management, operations, and maintenance.

So why is this a topic of importance, and what is the history behind it? Issues with life leases in Alberta became news in 2022, a year after a fire broke out at Citadel Mews West main street seniors complex in St. Albert, not surprisingly managed by Christenson Communities. Residents had to move due to building damage. Families expressed concerns that Christenson kept most of their upfront entrance fees, so this became the news. Christenson has not allowed existing leaseholders to renew life leases, moving them instead to rental arrangements with much higher costs. If a life lease holder dies or otherwise leaves the arrangement, Christenson is supposed to return the entrance fee, but this has not happened.

So what are we talking about in terms of financial significance? This has involved an estimated 161 residents and families, who are owed about \$55 million from Christenson because their lease hasn't been renewed, they have died, or they have moved. A further estimated \$146 million is held by Christenson from life lease holders still living in his properties.

The argument from the other side of the House is that they cannot put funds into a trust because that will damage the affordability options in this industry. Instead of putting the funds in a trust, the UCP looked at surety bonds, but there are no surety bonds for life leases currently. The minister acknowledges that people currently owed money from Christenson have not been grandfathered in because the bill is not retroactive. Because of all these things, this requires a deferral to a further conversation at a committee level.

What other people, constituents are writing to many of the members in this Assembly, particularly those who are trying to find a solution that will protect consumers on this side of the House? We received quite a number of correspondences. There's one that caught my eye, and I wanted to read that in the House.

Two Hundred and One Million dollars . . .

Yes; \$201 million.

. . . have been loaned to Greg Christenson from Albertans. These people [who are] smart enough, [were] careful enough and responsible enough to save their money and store it in what they felt was a safe place, not to mention the 5 page 'trust agreement' included in the life lease packages from Christenson.

Out of this \$201M, currently over 180 people have terminated their contract with Christenson. They have passed away, moved or needed a higher level of care. The outstanding loans owed to these people is over \$60 Million . . . Imagine what this money could do in our AB economy. How long will you wait . . .

How long are the members on the other side waiting for Christenson?

. . . to owe the whole \$201 million to Albertans? The problem grows . . . every day.

It grows larger every day.

This loaned money was to be repaid to them in 90 days save for some . . . This money is owed to Albertans who . . . need extra money for care in assisted living or in extended nursing care or holding up estates and families cannot close these estates. Now,

the letter says,

the rest of us Albertans are paying to care for these people who were planning to have money for their elder care.

The constituent continues by saying that

Christenson said in a TV interview that the money is in the buildings, in the drywall, in the lumber.

The constituent continues by saying:

I press upon each and every one of [the members], particularly those in the UCP party who are intrinsically linked to this man, to not be influenced by his whispering in your ear or political donations, and let him continue this treachery. Stand up and say, 'time to sell some of your assets Greg and pay these people back!'

The constituent continues in his letter by saying that

the Alberta Treasury Branch did loan Christenson over \$14,000,000.00. The ATB was savvy enough to put a stop to him getting any more loans on the Timberstone facility in Red Deer. Sadly, Christenson has taken out very large second mortgages on his other facilities and postponed all of the Albertans who loaned him money for their life lease. He did so without informing these people. They did not get the opportunity the ATB had to stop him getting more loans.

This Albertan continues by saying that

part and parcel in this mess is the current Bill 12 . . . that does nothing to prevent this from happening again.

It continues:

Nothing to make these Albertans . . . It needs to be recalled and actually have consultation from those who really matter, Albertans who chose a life lease and not the operators.

For that reason, I am supporting the amendment that this be deferred to a committee conversation.

4:30

The author continues and says:

By the way, the Alberta Life Lease Protection Society submitted its application on December 20, 2023 and was successfully granted incorporation.

The author provides a testimony here and says:

My mother lives in Devonshire in Edmonton. It was a terrific facility for many years. Over the last 3-4 years it has fallen into disrepair, services are being curtailed and the future for these people in life leases are uncertain. Her health started to deteriorate June 2023 when Christenson tried to strong arm these life lease holders into rental agreements.

A life lease is for life and I hope we can keep my mom comfortable in her unit with less stress and anxiety created by this situation.

The author concludes:

You can help.

There are so many constituents, similar to this e-mail, that reached out to say that the UCP are doing nothing for seniors, their families, who are currently owed tens of millions of dollars.

Bill 12 allows dishonest operators to get away with swindling seniors and their families. The penalties in the Consumer Protection Act are too lenient given the scale of funds being withheld from seniors and their families. The 180-day period for landlords to release the entrance fee is too long. Many of the people who loaned landlords these funds, often in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, are nearing the end of their life. The long delay adds needless stress and anxiety.

Madam Speaker, I therefore support the referral amendment to send this bill to a committee for more review and consultations. We have heard from many Albertans that will be impacted and not

heard by this government about Bill 12. Therefore, I'm encouraging all members in the Assembly to support the amendment brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on referral amendment 1, as you've just said, that

Bill 12, Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I certainly speak in support of this referral motion, Madam Speaker, because, you know, the legislation, despite what we're hearing from the UCP members, does not actually address the key issues that are at play here. Of course, as my other colleagues have said, we're in a bit of a fiasco right now with the life leases in Alberta, specifically with the Christenson set of companies, Greg Christenson being the CEO of that.

We know that life leases are long-term housing tenure, and they're typically targeted at older adults. They are meant to be places where people can age and have less responsibility for things like maintenance. You know, they don't have to shovel their own front driveway. I mean, they can rely on the management of that facility to take care of that.

A lot of times, of course, as seniors age – you know, they may have been in a long-term marriage, but one of the spouses dies. Often it is, because women still outlive men in our society, the male who predeceases the female, so some of the maintenance that he would regularly take care of now she needs to take care of, and that's sometimes difficult and not very desired. These life leases certainly purport to support people to be able to live in this low-maintenance kind of environment and were marketed as very attractive, so of course many people did put their life savings in this.

But the big problem now is that when people's life situations change again – perhaps they have some significant medical issue. They could fall, break their hip. There could be other medical concerns that require them to have higher level care. Of course, this is independent living. It's not a continuing care facility. People need to get this higher level care, so that's one reason that people would need to terminate their life leases.

Another reason would be that they move for various reasons. I know one of the reasons that I hear repeatedly is that people move to follow their children. Their children might move somewhere, and they don't want to age in the community that they're in because their children or their grandchildren are no longer there. That's another reason, and therefore they would like to terminate the life lease.

Then the third reason is because they die, and of course then the estate should be able to have access to that entrance fee. You know, the entrance fees are around \$300,000 to \$500,000, which is the life savings of many of these seniors. They've worked hard all their life to be able to have this money, that they have a right to, but of course Bill 12 is not addressing that. We know that it's not retroactive, so it doesn't even apply to anybody who currently holds a life lease.

That's why this referral motion is so important in that we do not go ahead with this legislation but, rather, refer it to committee because it doesn't fix the problem that's at hand. I just commend all of my colleagues in the Assembly to vote for this referral motion but eventually vote against the bill, but we're talking now about supporting this referral motion.

I think another really important thing to mention is that this situation is mostly concerning specifically the Christenson Group of Companies. It seems like there was some poor management and not understanding how these things work and certainly not being able to fulfill on the commitments that were made to people when

they did, you know, invest their life savings in the Christenson Group of Companies life lease program. We know that about \$60 million is owing to these life lease holders, and it's very tragic.

I've talked about those specific situations where people may have medical issues, and sometimes when you have medical issues, you would need to be in a higher care facility, like a continuing care centre or something like that. You know, these may have additional fees and costs, so if they don't have access to this money, it means that it can be a real hardship and burden on the family, perhaps the extended family, because this money is tied up and there is no access.

An interesting detail is that certainly Greg Christenson has been involved in this sector as a developer for many, many years. He has continuing care facilities, and he has life lease facilities, and often his life lease facilities have been built right next to his continuing care facilities. That's one of the marketing ideas behind all of this, that: hey, you're in independent living here; you live by yourself, but over time you may need higher level care, so we'll move you over, right next door, to the continuing care facility.

4:40

The government knew about this. They certainly gave Greg Christenson, I think it was, over \$21 million in capital grants. Some of the members may be familiar with the ASLI program, the affordable supportive living initiative. That was a program that we stopped when we became government because we knew that there were some significant issues with that. Really, that program was about taking care of the friends of the Conservatives, and it made a lot of people millionaires, including Greg Christenson. I mean, the Conservatives are complicit in this because they encouraged this.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Williams: Madam Speaker, it's obviously going to cause disorder in the House when members opposite accuse certain sides of the House of being complicit in what is, in her mind, some sort of corrupt act. We are having a substantive debate. I'd like to keep it to the substance and not accusations around complicity and illegal or inappropriate acts.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't believe this is a point of order. Again, clearly, it's a matter of debate. It was not creating disorder in the House. In fact, I thought we were having a lovely afternoon. The hon. member did speak to the Conservatives but did not speak to any individual member across the floor nor highlight any individual member across the floor. So again I would say that this is a matter of debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I might agree that this is a matter of debate; however, language like that is probably not helpful in keeping decorum here in the House. I'll ask the hon. member to keep that in mind as she continues with her remarks.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Debate Continued

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Again I'll just say that I commend all my colleagues to please vote in support of the

referral motion. We know that there are significant issues with the legislation. We know that this particular bad actor – we'll call him that – has really caused so much strife and suffering for many Albertans, and we need to fix that. This referral motion will give us the opportunity to go to committee and look at this legislation again and make sure that we're getting it right, because we're not getting it right right now.

I mean, we all know that this legislation does not – it's not retroactive. Of course, it doesn't impact people who already have life leases, and it's only sort of that after it's passed will it have any kind of law for life lease holders. Even with that, we know that it's insufficient. We know that they're saying now that the entrance fee, that \$300,000 to \$500,000 amount that people put up at first – the legislation indicates 180 days before it should be returned to them. That is six months. That's a very, very long time. As I've articulated previously, sometimes that money is needed much quicker, especially if someone has a significant medical event, so that should be cut in half at least.

I really think that this bill should go to committee, and we need to look at this more deeply so that we make sure we're doing the right thing. You know, so many people's life savings are caught up in this, and we need to be very careful about how it's done.

I stand in support of this referral motion, and I thank you for my time.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate on amendment REF1?

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: I am seeking speakers for Bill 12. The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 12.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 13 Real Property Governance Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to move second reading of Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act.

If passed, this legislation will ensure that the sale of public buildings and lands is managed consistently and transparently to the benefit of all Albertans. Back in 2019 the blue ribbon panel and subsequent MacKinnon report recommended a broader view be taken of government property owned by departments and consolidated entities. From that report, recommendation 16 stated, "The Government of Alberta should redefine its inventory of land assets to include the broader public sector and create a definitive policy to clearly define surplus assets and a process for disposal of surplus assets." With that challenge provided, we developed Bill 13, which increases transparency, reduces red tape, and ultimately will save millions for Alberta taxpayers every year.

Now, the Real Property Governance Act applies to departments and consolidated entities, with a few exceptions. It does not apply to the office of the Legislative Assembly, offices of the Legislature, regulated funds, government business enterprises, and, naturally, entities that are not consolidated in the government's financial statements.

There are two primary elements that make up Bill 13: first, implement a centralized property inventory whereby departments and consolidated entities provide their property information to the GOA with administration through the Department of Infrastructure, and second, enable and offer to transfer land and related buildings to government prior to selling those assets. This will allow

government the first right to buy back assets that have strategic value and offer benefit to Albertans. The inventory and offer to transfer form the basis of the RPG act and are necessary for good governance.

You see, Madam Speaker, governments across Canada spend billions to purchase land, build public infrastructure, and then transfer away direct ownership of those assets to an agency, board, or commission, an ABC. They do that for a nominal fee, usually a dollar. Now, the major flaw with this approach is that the GOA relinquishes access to those properties for future use unless, of course, they wish to pay market pricing to repurchase or lease the very lands that taxpayers already paid for once. I know that it is an unusual practice, and I can tell you that in the last five years Alberta has transferred away \$3.3 billion in land and buildings to our consolidated entities. In fact, currently \$83 billion in assets reside with ABCs, mainly related to health and education.

With Bill 13 in place, when a department or a consolidated entity decides to sell surplus property, it will be a requirement for, first, the offer of the property be to the GOA via notification to Alberta Infrastructure. Transfers will be conducted at net book value, noting that department transactions will be noncash in nature while consolidated entity transfers – that is, ABCs – will be cash transactions. If Infrastructure declines an offer, the consolidated entity will retain the right to dispose of the property. Prior to and during the offer to transfer process, the property cannot be disposed of or transferred to another party.

Since there are multiple acts that may provide conflicting direction where property is concerned, Bill 13 will supersede all other provincial acts relating to inventory disposal and transfers. There are exceptions to the offer to transfer, Madam Speaker, and those include Crown lands without title, grazing leases, donated lands with caveats, single-family accommodation under the Alberta Housing Act, contaminated land, and other property identified as government priority.

4:50

As mentioned, the intent here is to create a single inventory of property assets so that government has line of sight on what it owns, to be better at evaluating and governing those evolving priorities that we have; also, to create a database, which will include the creation of a platform having a public interface, to improve awareness and transparency where government assets are concerned.

The option to transfer provides government the opportunity to maximize taxpayer lands, and as a policy piece on a go-forward basis, the government of Alberta will no longer transfer ownership away but instead enter into long-term leases with ABCs at the same nominal fee. It should be noted that the operational costs will not be affected as this change in policy will maintain current fee structures.

To be clear, these changes do not alter decision-making authority on existing property. Surplus land processes remain as they are now with the responsible ministry and their applicable ABC. The offer to transfer at book value applies only when the asset is no longer needed for program delivery. In the end, the intent of Bill 13 is to improve decision-making, allowing for more flexibility with landholdings and with the added benefit of reducing costs and saving money for Alberta taxpayers.

Madam Speaker, I hereby move second reading of Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising to speak at this second reading stage of Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act, understanding that this comes as a result of

some of the recommendations of the MacKinnon panel. It came as recommendation 16, the idea being here that there's a definitive policy to clearly define surplus assets and a process for disposal thereof and increase the ability to dispose of assets to help off-set capital costs of new investments and provide revenue for the province. That was the stated reasoning for recommendation 16.

When I was preparing to speak to this bill, of course, I thought: well, let's go and have a look at recommendation 15 just for fun, as we're scrolling through these recommendations in the MacKinnon report, and, lo, Madam Speaker, what do we find? We find: to examine the legislative framework for capital funding to municipalities, in which it says that we should make better use of federal infrastructure funding through the investing in Canada infrastructure program to more effectively manage the costs of Alberta's capital plan. *Hansard* doesn't have a, like, laughing tears emoji capability quite yet, but let's just read that into the record. Of course, we're being pretty selective here with the MacKinnon panel recommendations. We have a subsequent piece of legislation that, of course, makes it much more difficult to make better use of federal infrastructure funding, but I guess here we are. Close bracket on that.

Okay. Bill 13, Real Property Governance Act. You know, on the face of it, this is sort of a drumbeat of government type piece of legislation, or at least if one could trust that this is a government interested in governing, then one might conclude that. However, when it was first introduced and we had a look at it, I thought to myself: oh, there's an old memory that I have of Conservatives trying to make deals between each other and with themselves to the benefit not of the public interest but to somebody's private pecuniary interest. I couldn't quite remember what it was, and it took me a little bit of googling. But I did remember that one Tom Olsen, who's the war room director still, I guess – he's still warm in the benches over there. Anyway, back in 2014 he mused about using P3s to develop surplus school property. I do remember them lobbying the government of the day to allow developers to bypass school boards when it came to surplus property.

That sort of brought up my antenna for the intent of this legislation because, certainly, you know, of the MacKinnon panel recommendations, some of them are quite ridiculous and the government didn't do because they couldn't, also because it was released right before the pandemic and a number of health care recommendations. Some of them really crashed on the rocks, like renegotiating with the doctors and doing it by legislation if necessary. That ended well.

Anyways, this business of definitive policy to clearly define surplus assets: that is a good idea because, quite frankly, some of these surplus assets – we know that municipalities have identified some, the federal government has identified some of theirs in terms of federal land development for housing, and the province should absolutely do same. Oftentimes surplus school assets in particular are located in the middle of cities, where we should be developing housing. No question. Or sometimes schools can be redeveloped in conjunction with other social goods such as child care facilities, and multi-use agreements with cities can be executed. Again, that is a good thing for the property values of the homeowners adjacent to some of these inner-city schools, for example, and other properties held by school boards and others.

However, you've got to wonder if we've got some other agenda happening here. There is no question that there is a history in this province of these kinds of ideas being floated to the benefit of some private interest or the detriment of two other interests. For example, before winning the UCP leadership contest in 2018 – and I well remember this particular fracas – Mr. Jason Kenney floated the idea of selling Crown lands in the Peace region to help with the deficit, which was all fine and well if you don't talk to the Treaty 8 grand

chief, who was not amused. None of the local First Nations were amused because, of course, the province can't just go around doing whatever it wants with Crown land without consultation. Mr. Kenney did not understand this. He didn't understand it before he became Premier. It wasn't clear to me that he understood it the entire time he was Premier.

But we have something called the Public Lands Act and the Public Lands Act regulation, in particular, that this government was taken to court on, and that matter was resolved at some point between the 2015 and 2019 period, when I was the minister responsible for Crown lands, when we resolved that particular dispute with First Nations. It was one of those things we inherited from Conservatives, who just went merrily along their business without any recognition that Indigenous people have treaty rights. If they are not recognized in legislation, then the courts will make them do it. So there is no question that there is a history of moving forward with disposal of assets or treating provincial assets in a certain way that may not conform to the public interest.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It is troubling that the government seems to have their sights on school board properties. Rather than school boards and cities determining the best use of school board properties, the government will put them up for sale. In places like Medicine Hat, currently the locally elected school board decides what to do with surplus properties. It's not clear to me that this legislation consolidates anything if all it does is create an incentive for agencies, boards, and commissions to just simply not declare property surplus, which is absolutely a possible consequence of this legislation. It's not clear to me how they're going to get around that or if the government, in fact, should get around that. Boards do set their policy for surplus land, considering things like enrolment trends and student accommodation and transportation. This will allow the Minister of Infrastructure to decide where previously the Minister of Education could override school boards on some of those considerations. It seemed to me that the Minister of Education likely has a better line of sight on things like enrolment pressures and board forecasts than the Minister of Infrastructure, who may be under a differing set of cross-pressures and incentives.

5:00

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I will note that the government should probably answer some of these questions around what it intends to do with surplus school board property and if it does in fact intend to sell them off to private developers or execute some sort of P3 arrangements that are imposed on boards. We're seeing a very troubling trend. Far from, you know, oh, this sort of "We're going to provide line of sight on what the federal government is up to"; we're seeing a troubling trend of interfering in local decision-making, whether it's municipalities or school boards, postsecondary institutions, who also oftentimes have surplus land and for varying reasons. There is a very, very troubling centralizing trend to take voice away from local decision-makers, to take voice away from agencies and boards who are acting in the best interest and in the public interest of this province and centralizing it in the hands of Executive Council, in particular in the Premier's office, that does not have a mandate of trust from the people of Alberta. We all know it.

With that, I will conclude my comments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak at second reading to Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed likely by Calgary-Glenmore.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act. Before

we dive into the details of the legislation, I want to share some thoughts briefly on the importance of transparency in our modern world. In all forms of business, including government, transparency is absolutely essential. Without it there can be no accountability to investors, stockholders, taxpayers, ratepayers, and future generations. Back in 1933 U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis argued in favour of transparency, writing, "Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman." Since that time, laws requiring openness in government and business have been referred to as sunshine laws.

Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is just one example. The creation of this law was no accident. Through the 1980s both Premiers Lougheed and Getty regarded FOIP legislation as unnecessary. However, voters demanded greater transparency after several high-profile government scandals. Influenced by public and political pressure, Premier Klein took action. As a result, Alberta's FOIP Act was approved by the Legislature on June 1, 1994, and it came into force on October 1, 1995.

Now, we may have concerns about the ways various governments have sought to circumvent this legislation over the past 30 years, but there's no question that government remains more open today because of the FOIP Act. Since the days of Ralph's team I think that the public has quite rightly come to expect a higher level of transparency. In many regards the business world has complied with these demands. Governments, on the other hand, may have lagged behind. The shadows cast by political scandals amplified and repeated constantly in the digital sphere have left folks jaded and angry. The pandemic era just threw things into overdrive. Currently even the perception of a lack of transparency can have a real and lasting impact on support for our public institutions. Now more than ever it's incumbent on all of us to raise the blinds, throw open the windows, and let that sun shine in.

Bill 13, I believe, is both necessary and long overdue. To properly frame the importance of this legislation, I think we need to first divest ourselves of the very notion of government-owned property. The fact is that every piece of land and every building ever retained by government was and is funded by taxpayers. For clarity's sake, when we speak of Bill 13, we're talking about taxpayer-owned property, not government-owned property. This is an important distinction because it reminds us, as we all sit here comfortably in our chairs in this historic building, that all of this was provided to us by the hard-working citizens of our province. Let me put it another way. We don't own this House; this is the people's House. We work for them, and it's our duty to remain transparent and accountable to them.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the management of billions of dollars' worth of property, the government of Alberta remains hopelessly behind the times. We can't answer even the most basic questions with a high level of accuracy. How many pieces of land does the government manage on behalf of taxpayers? We don't exactly know. We could find out, but it would take some time. What is the current market value of taxpayer-owned buildings? Again, we're not really sure. I have seen one estimation that pegs this value at \$83 billion, but that's not a figure we can take to the bank with a high level of confidence.

The reason we can't answer these questions accurately or without weeks of study is that our property management systems are fragmented across dozens of silos, some of which remain stuck in the predigital age. No modern, publicly traded corporation would be allowed to use such accounting without violating any number of public disclosure laws. Revenue Canada would audit small-business owners for much less. For a province that prides itself on technology and investment and innovation, it has to be more than a little embarrassing that we haven't adopted a centralized property

management system more advanced than maybe a series of Excel spreadsheets.

How can we prove to taxpayers that the government needs to purchase a piece of property when we don't have a centralized list of this currently owned property? How can we prove to taxpayers that we are selling their properties for full market value when the rules for divesting properties vary from department to department and agency to agency? Well, we can't, and we know it. Moreover, the public knows it, too.

In a situation like this, we have two options. One, we can keep operating business as usual with minimal transparency, content in the illusion that we don't know what we don't know, or we can try to convince a wary public that it is okay that the average used car lot has better inventory tracking than the government of Alberta's property management system. Or, two, we can raise the bar and join the 21st century when it comes to basic government transparency. Simply put, we can let the sun shine in. I think you know where I stand on this.

The government has spoken extensively on the importance of Bill 13 when it comes to requiring all departments, boards, agencies, and commissions to offer surplus land back to the government before proceeding with sales – I won't belabour the point; it's just common sense – but, for me, the best part of Bill 13 is that it sets the stage for true advancement in government transparency. You see, once the government has fully catalogued its property inventory, a project that will understandably take some time if this \$83 billion value estimate is accurate, the government can give this information directly to the public. Ideally, a public-facing digital online portal detailing which properties are managed by government can and should be created. As the owners of all this property taxpayers have a right to know what they own and how much it's worth.

Moreover, such disclosure would both increase the returns on any property sold while decreasing the chances that such properties would be sold for less than market value. Such a system all but removes the possibility of government insiders offering sweetheart deals to friends or insiders. The good news is that by including all agencies, boards, and commissions in this legislation, the government is taking a huge step forward in transparency and accountability.

5:10

Maybe a minor concern I have is that this new centralized property management system will not include all government-managed property. My understanding is that Bill 13 will not apply to office of the Legislative Assembly and offices of the Legislature regulated funds, government business enterprises, or other nonconsolidated entities. I fully understand no government would ever consider selling off the Legislature, for example. However, taxpayers have invested heavily in renovations to this building, some of which are currently ongoing, as we know. Excluding such properties from the property management list seems to imply that these buildings don't have value – and we know they do – or that taxpayers' investments should remain off the books.

When it comes to transparency, taxpayers rightly expect a touchdown. In this regard, Bill 13 gives them to the 95-yard punt return. With all that being said, I intend to vote in favour of Bill 13. On balance, this legislation represents a vast improvement in transparency and will ultimately help restore faith in our public institutions. At the end of the day, we are all elected to represent Alberta's families and communities, and Bill 13 is a clear win for them, so let's let that sun shine in.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Drayton Valley-Devon.

Ms Al-Guneid: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act. Now, the government says that this bill creates a centralized inventory of public property to help government better manage these assets. It's a centralized system for collecting and reporting real property owned or leased by departments, including school boards and postsecondary institutions. The bill gives the Minister of Infrastructure authority to sell surplus properties or repurpose them.

Now, I want to be clear. It is important that publicly owned buildings and lands are managed and managed in a transparent manner. Mr. Speaker, I want to spend time here on transparency in our democratic process because the Premier has proven that transparency and the UCP do not go hand in hand. Albertans cannot trust this government with public resources. I can cite so many examples of the lack of transparency and government overreach and the UCP interference that impacts our democracy as recently as today with the Alberta Energy Regulator getting sued again. This time it is on the government's interference in Northback's coal mining in the Rockies. It is embarrassing.

Upholding confidence in our democratic processes, in our institutions, in our public agencies, like the AER, is of utmost importance. The lack of transparency within this government is so deep that yesterday Judge Kent Teskey ordered the UCP government to produce a massive number of coal documents after a four-year fight with ranchers. The UCP government blocked releasing documents to ranchers, documents ranchers are entitled to. How can Albertans trust this government with managing publicly owned buildings and lands in a transparent manner when they refuse to be transparent with the ranchers in rural Alberta?

The ranchers asked the ministry of energy for briefing notes, internal memos, reviews, reports, and correspondence on why the UCP government chose to rescind a decades-old policy that had blocked open-pit coal development from the beautiful landscapes of the southern foothills and Rockies. By the way, these are the same so-called pristine viewscapes that they're banning renewable energy development around. That's government hypocrisy in action, Mr. Speaker. The UCP refuse to be transparent and release the government documents, and the ruling from Judge Teskey is important.

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise again today on 23(b)(i), speaking to matters not before the Chamber right now. I understand that there is a debate going on on Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act. I've heard ranchers mentioned a number of times, rulings that have nothing to do with this legislation mentioned as well. I am asking that we debate substantively the bill in front of us. I have read the act. It has no mention of ranching, has no mention of anything to do with environmental impact assessments or court decisions. I would like to see this bill debated with the precious time we have in the Chamber.

Member Ceci: I'd like to defend the honour of my hon. colleague. She is addressing this bill before us, and she is doing a wonderful job.

The Speaker: Despite the defence by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo I would suggest that this isn't a point of order. I am under the

understanding that the legislation has been – there have been approximately three speakers to it. Of course, we provide a pretty wide swath with respect to the debate at second reading. I'm sure the hon. member was just mere moments away from making the important connection from her remarks to how Bill 13 is connected to those.

Debate Continued

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The connection is the lack of transparency. There have been many cases here showing a pattern in the lack of transparency of this government. Judge Teskey has made the point that democracy dies in darkness, and I could not agree more. It's hard to trust this government with managing publicly owned buildings and centralizing decisions for collecting and reporting. We've seen that they do not want to be transparent, do not want to share information under the freedom of information act, let alone willingly. A judge is requiring them to release information. It is very concerning to see this continuous lack of transparency.

With Bill 13 the lack of transparency is not the only thing we should be concerned about. We should be also concerned about the lack of accountability, Mr. Speaker. As we have learned recently, information in relation to seniors' care has lacked not only transparency but also accountability, information that is hard to find and buried on the government's website. We've learned about the lack of critical infection control, kitchen mould outbreaks, and even rodent droppings. This is a situation in which the government is dealing with people, not even publicly owned buildings. This is a situation in which the government is dealing with some of the most vulnerable populations, seniors, not even publicly owned buildings. We have seen disturbing data showing that many continuing care and supportive living operators are not being held accountable for a lack of care provided to seniors.

We've seen the recent dangerous pattern of lack of transparency and accountability with seniors' care. The UCP government has shown it is inept in this concept and system of centralized management, as we've seen in seniors' care. The sad reality is that they're not ensuring our loved ones are getting the high-quality care they deserve. The UCP is showing this recklessness with seniors' care. I cannot imagine the lack of accountability they'd show in managing publicly owned buildings. There's a dangerous trend here of the lack of transparency and accountability that is growing under this UCP government.

In Bill 13 we also see excessive government overreach. Bill 13 will give the Minister of Infrastructure the ability to override local decision-making when it comes to surplus school properties. Why not let school boards and cities determine the best use of surplus school board properties? In places like Medicine Hat the locally elected school board decides what to do with surplus properties. Local decision-making is good. Locals know the region. They know the local issues. They know the nuances of the area. They are the locals, not the centralized government that is trying to take that autonomy from them without understanding the local context.

5:20

I remember the time the minister of community services got up here and talked about urban privilege and decision-making. Mr. Speaker, this UCP centralization of decision-making for publicly owned buildings and school lands in many communities, especially rural communities, is the embodiment of urban privilege. The hypocrisy of this government is not escaping anyone. School boards in rural and urban Alberta should have local decision-making because they understand their local context, not the government's

central authority removing their ability to choose what is best for their local needs.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, sometimes we need centralization in government decisions, and sometimes we need decentralization. In the case of Bill 13 schools and postsecondaries and cities need to have some decentralization to make decisions at the local level. This UCP approach, thinking that a central authority should take over and not allow local decision-making, is absurd. Mr. Speaker, this type of government overreach and centralization is not a sign of a healthy democracy. The process of governing is most legitimate when it incorporates democratic principles such as transparency, pluralism, citizen involvement in decision-making, representation, and accountability. Why does this government think they can take away local decision-making from schools and postsecondary institutions?

More importantly, Bill 13 allows the Minister of Infrastructure the ability to sell public assets without consultation. I mean, when we think of the track record of this UCP government since the election, this pattern of not consulting with the impacted communities and stakeholders is not new, Mr. Speaker. We've seen that with the ill-conceived moratorium on renewables this government neither consulted with the renewable sector nor generators nor Indigenous communities nor rural communities nor industry associations. The UCP did not consult on an economic impact analysis before banning a thriving industry from developing multibillion-dollar renewable energy projects in our province. If this government was reckless with billions of dollars in investments, I can only imagine the recklessness with managing land and publicly owned buildings, schools, and postsecondary institutions.

And it's not just renewables, Mr. Speaker. We've seen their inadequate public consultation with the so-called Alberta pension plan. Even the board of the Canada pension plan had to step in and say that Alberta's consultation with its citizens on quitting the CPP is not a straightforward fact-finding exercise but, rather, a biased manipulation of public opinion. These are big words.

The CPP criticized the UCP government's pension exit public survey and advertising campaign in a letter to Mr. Jim Dinning, the head of a panel collecting public input on whether Alberta should leave the CPP. The letter literally says:

We respectfully want to flag to you as head of the panel some troubling elements that in our view undermine the transparency, fairness, and integrity of the consultation process that has been put forward to the public so far.

This was Michel Leduc, the senior managing director of the CPP Investments Board, writing to Mr. Dinning. These were important words, Mr. Speaker: "transparency, fairness, and integrity of the consultation process." These words and elements are foundational to governance, and this UCP government should know better.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support Bill 13. This centralization of power, this lack of transparency, this dismissal of local decision-making, the lack of accountability, the unilateral decision-making from the minister's office: this is all very concerning. I will not be voting for Bill 13.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon is next.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased to rise today in support of Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act. Our government has committed to the principles of accountability and transparency. If passed, Bill 13 would improve transparency in the way government manages and sells its real property while also maximizing value for taxpayers' dollars and allowing the government to take a more strategic approach with its assets.

If passed, this act will centralize the process of approving property disposals with the help of a new centralized inventory. This modernized approach would ensure value for taxpayers and would enhance government's ability to strategically support priority projects for the benefit of Albertans.

Our government has a responsibility to ensure the efficient management of government buildings, facilities, and lands, and this bill would contribute to the goal by centralizing the way the land and building sales happen across different departments and agencies of this government.

This bill would improve accountability and transparency through centralizing our approach to the management of the government properties. At present the administration of government properties across these departments and agencies occurs in an inconsistent and inefficient manner, complicating efforts to support the government's priority investments. A more centralized, singular approach will allow us to use our assets more strategically while getting optimal value for the taxpayers' dollars. By removing cumbersome red tape, we can streamline processes to ensure responsible, ethical asset management in our government.

If passed, Bill 13 would also enable Alberta Infrastructure to lease buildings to agencies, boards, and commissions rather than transferring or selling them. This keeps lands and buildings under government control and allows for the repurposing of these assets for the benefits of Albertans at the end of the leasing period. Alberta's government consists of a large organization with many properties and assets necessary to keep this organization functioning. Considering taxpayers finance the operation of these, we must take extra care to ensure that we maximize efficiency and value for money in the management of these assets. I personally take pride in working alongside a government with such a strong commitment to removing red tape and streamlining the procedures of government.

Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act, would modernize how the government manages public property to improve accountability and transparency. It will ensure the consistent handling of public property sales across the government. This bill would also require departments, agencies, boards, and commissions to offer the transfer of public property to Infrastructure prior to sale.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act, would create a centralized inventory of public lands and buildings. Under the existing decentralized system, policies for the disposal of the land and buildings vary across government, making it difficult to resource priority projects. However, centralizing the inventory of public property will help the government manage these assets more efficiently.

Furthermore, if Bill 13 passes, the Ministry of Infrastructure will have the ability to hold on to property with strategic value to ensure that decisions by agencies, boards, and commissions to surplus property do not lead to losses of significant assets and cost taxpayers more in the future. The current situation of property administration sees the distribution of government properties across various departments and agencies not administered in a consistent, consolidated fashion. This creates challenges when trying to support the government's priority investments. A centralized approach will allow more strategic action from the government while getting the best possible value for taxpayer dollars.

If Bill 13 passes, the province will no longer transfer ownership of new buildings to agencies, boards, and/or commissions. Instead, the government will retain ownership and make lease arrangements. This structure will give the government needed flexibility and use taxpayers' money more efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe in Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act. I believe that, if passed, this legislation will make it easier for the government to manage the full inventory of government-owned property and allow for more expeditious conservation of available real estate to prioritize use. This bill would truly allow for smoother government with less red tape, more decisive actions when necessary, and save taxpayers money. I would like to encourage all members to support Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak in opposition to Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act, and to have the chance to voice in the House some of the questions and concerns that I have. Of course, publicly owned buildings and lands should be managed in a responsible and transparent manner, but I would also add that those same publicly owned buildings and lands must also be managed in a collaborative way. Collaboration is, of course, one of the ways in which an organization builds trust.

Unfortunately, this government has proven time and time again that collaboration is not exactly its strong suit. That, coupled with the distinct pattern of behaviour that's becoming crystal clear, has served to factor into the erosion of trust between this government and the people of Alberta. This pattern: we've seen it with the refocus of health care, the introduction of the new recovery organization, the lack of consideration for workers. We've seen it with Bill 11 and the lack of notice given to unions, and of course we've seen it with Bill 18. There is indeed a clear pattern of all decisions being made and then announced rather than having been worked through, rather than having been discussed, presented, workshopped, if you will, having a chance to gather feedback for ideas before the legislation is introduced in the House . . .

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Ms Wright: Not right now. Thank you.

. . . making sure that all of that happens in a manner that can serve as an example for active and meaningful collaboration rather than as an example for what not to do. It isn't enough to simply promise that you'll consult when it's time to think about the regulations.

Additionally, the MacKinnon report notwithstanding, there are distinct elements of a small club at work here gathering all the bits and pieces together, collecting everything into the centre, deciding what's going to happen, then adding in a wee bit of bad federal government, then talking to a few friends, making sure to vest power and decision-making ability on one person, and then to call a few folks 30 minutes before the announcement to make it seem like engagement with Albertans has occurred. That, Mr. Speaker, continues in this bill, Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act, and I'm wondering, really: to what end? I'm wondering if this perhaps is about wresting control of all things, in particular from school boards and municipalities.

Now, apart from the issue of collaboration, there is, for me, another little bit of nuance having to do with this bill. It's the fact that when we are speaking in terms of infrastructure, although not perhaps the most exciting topic in the world, we do need to remember that it's people who use all that infrastructure and that it's people who indeed built that infrastructure. Furthermore, the bill, all about infrastructure, is about communities throughout this province and is about local autonomy. It's about collaboration with partners.

It's about the ways in which communities and the values they represent appear through land and how it's used and through buildings

and how those buildings are used and how the folks who utilize those spaces are treated and considered when important decisions are being made on their behalf. Or, rather, it's how those things aren't considered as they should be and how this is something I can see on the horizon with this bill. I can see people and communities, buildings and lands being seen simply in terms of the number of dollars that they can contribute to the government's bottom line, in fact being commodified by this government.

All of these places and all of these people who use these buildings have stories to tell, and these are stories, Mr. Speaker, which deserve to be heard. Given all of that, I am concerned that this bill, Bill 13, could, for instance, lead to the government selling school properties and, of course, other properties to good friends and insiders rather than first taking a moment to hear some of those stories and consider some of the communities involved. That's because this act changes the way in which school boards, for instance, will endeavour to dispose of unused or surplus property.

All of those joint-use agreements that have been set through the years, partnerships established and maintained to make sure that when a school is leased for a time by a community group or declared surplus – there's a really specific process that all of those partners need to follow. That's, of course, to make sure that whatever decisions are made about that piece of land or that building or that school, whatever it happens to be, all those decisions are made with the people and the community in mind.

This bill, Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act, allows, of course, the Minister of Infrastructure the ability to sell public assets without consultation, and because of that, it gives me a great amount of pause. For instance, what exactly will happen to the money that might be accrued as a result of any of those sales? Where will those funds end up? Will those dollars go back, say, into a city or a school board, perhaps in the case of a school being declared surplus and then having its building sold? Instead of any money accrued going back into education, perhaps toward improving education, what will be the likelihood that it's simply funnelled back into general revenue?

Another related concern is that properties, school properties in particular, will simply be sold to, as I said earlier, friends of the government. I worry what that might be for the communities where these properties live at the moment, and I wonder how, in fact, those buildings might indeed be repurposed. Related to that, I'm also worried about some of the expectations folks interested in using or purchasing some of these surplus or unused buildings might have. I can see instances where a purchaser's wishes and desires for that building or a plot of land might override the community's wishes, might override something that the community, in fact, needs and wants.

Maybe, for instance, a community wants a daycare to stay in the building, or it might override a municipal study that indicated a good use of the building or land might be through a repurposing to affordable housing. It might also be something to serve the citizens of a particular municipality, thereby failing to consider long-term implications of such a sale. Again, Mr. Speaker, it's important to remind folks that currently there exist many joint-use agreements across the province between a myriad of community partners, and this bill, Bill 13, of course, overrides those agreements.

But these agreements, again, put the community in the centre, and this includes school boards and municipalities and any other community partners. All of that allows for local complexities and local needs to be thought of when discussing what to do with a recently closed school. So much of the decision-making power inherent in this bill, Mr. Speaker, gives the minister and just the minister the authority to sell surplus properties or repurpose them based on whatever assessments that minister might have received. It all comes down to that one individual's decision and discretion

and whether or not they decide to accept an assessment that's been given to them. That's an awful lot of decision-making power resting in one person's hands.

5:40

Since right now closed schools are often leased to organizations that can indeed provide valuable services to seniors, folks like newcomers, children, youth groups, and more, I think that that one is a point that we need to think about a little bit more.

In my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, we've had a few school consolidations, and of course that has meant that we have some schools sitting empty. Thankfully, those schools are being used at the moment. For instance, in the former Rundle school lives the Beverly Day Care Society & Family Resource Centre. This is an organization that's been around since 1972 providing a really important service to the folks in Beverly. It's an established organization that's been making a difference. It's really important to the community. They've worked with so many children, so many families, parents, and friends of Beverly.

While it's true that as a school, certainly, Rundle was indeed the hub of the community, I think it's equally true that now that this organization is centred in the old Rundle school, they themselves have become very much a hub of our community.

In that old school the Beverly Day Care Society & Family Resource Centre runs parenting workshops. They offer 11 different support programs, a stay-and-play program. They have a donation centre, a clothing exchange, all of that plus, of course, that daycare and out of school care. As an organization which understands the importance of community, they place a great deal of emphasis on maintaining and retaining their staff. In fact, 90 per cent of their staff currently hold their level 3 child care certification.

This is a group of people and an organization which truly puts the needs of the children and the families they serve at the centre of everything they do. They're about health, resilient families, community, about serving that community, not only through the offering of that daycare service but also through the empowering of the community through the programs and services they offer. As a side note, the building is also busy on weekends, too, as Harvest Vineyard Christian Fellowship members worship there on Sundays. The north Edmonton PC and the primary care network previously ran balance or wellness classes for seniors out of the building. It's a really important part of the Rundle and Beverly communities. While this building may no longer be a school, it remains a vibrant part of the community and really important to the people I'm lucky enough to represent.

Right now in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview we are also looking at the consolidation of three Catholic schools, which will mean that, like the Edmonton public school board a few years ago, the Edmonton Catholic school board will soon be in the position of adding three additional properties in school board and city lands to its portfolio. It's entirely possible that one or more of these surplus school buildings will be leased just like the old Rundle school. But if they happen to be sold, where will the money go from the sale of the assets, and again, for what benefit? [interjection] Not at the moment. Thank you.

That, Mr. Speaker, means that the impacts of this bill will undoubtedly and eventually be felt in my riding by the folks who live and work in Beverly and Rundle and by all of those folks who have found community in these old schools.

Now, we've heard from the government about their concerns having to do with the federal government and something that the UCP has said over and over is that it's overreach into provincial affairs, but I'm going to suggest that a similar situation is quickly heading all too

quickly toward Alberta school boards and postsecondary institutions as a result of some of this bill's considerations.

I will say that I very much love and appreciate a good spreadsheet. I certainly appreciate when things are organized, though my children would probably beg to differ on what my version of organized means. I really do understand the need to take and maintain an accurate inventory, particularly when that inventory can collectively be worth many millions of dollars. It's a responsible thing to have an accurate inventory.

Years ago when I worked in retail, I learned just how important inventory taking was. Certainly as a music teacher, though it might have pained me, counting every single one of the finger cymbals and claves and rhythm sticks and ukuleles meant I not only had more than just a sense of what instruments we happened to have in the school, but it also pointed me toward where the gaps were, where our next purchases might be, toward music we might perform in the next year. In other words, it was data I could certainly use that would help me in my job to be more effective and efficient.

However, if I would have been asked to take that inventory, send it along to whoever I was asked to send it along to, and then wait to see if I was going to be told what was going to happen with, say, some of those ukuleles without a conversation even taking place with me, without an understanding perhaps that I had an agreement with a couple of schools down the road to loan them the ukuleles, at the very least I'd be feeling some measure of disappointment, Mr. Speaker. While it isn't a perfect line between a ukulele and this particular bill, it is, I think, an example of what could happen in this instance.

For instance, the bill under section 2 states the purposes of the act.

- (e) to inform decisions on priority capital investments and generating revenues from disposals of real property, [and]
- (f) to ensure proper assessment of real property and to determine better purposes for retaining or transferring real property to meet the priorities of the Government of Alberta.

And when those decisions ultimately, as I said earlier, rest at the feet of one person, whoever the minister happens to be at the time, I begin to wonder again what the underlying purpose really might be.

Is this a bill about efficiency and lovely looking spreadsheets, or is it about the disempowering of school boards and universities and other entities which may happen to fall under the scope of this legislation? What happens when folks in an office who don't necessarily understand local context or complexity or years-long partnerships are the people

making the decisions far away from that local community? What happens when an assessment gets forwarded on to a minister? What happens if that assessment is made purely on a dollar value of something instead of the story that can be told by that land or in that building? What happens to the folks who use that school, for whom that building and its programs have become an important part of their lives? I certainly know in my community, in that part of Rundle, for instance, lots happens. There's a loss of trust in government. There's a loss of community, a loss of attachment in a place of belonging, and perhaps even a loss of a place to call home.

In addition to that, some of this bill also indeed has to do with the nature of consultation, less consultation with stakeholders, particularly in advance of bill development. Stakeholder consultation is more than a cursory phone call to let people know what's going on 30 minutes before it's announced. That is not consultation, and I don't understand why it's being used as consultation. All of this is really hard work, and it's work that sometimes means that hard conversations need to be had, particularly if you're having conversations with community members and you don't like the answers that you happen to be getting from them.

This bill does nothing, Mr. Speaker, to demonstrate to the people of Alberta that this is a government worthy of trust. It just represents another broken promise and, in fact, represents interference in the decisions made by school boards and local decision-makers. It puts up barriers for local communities and organizations and their ability to be fairly represented and heard. For those reasons, I will not be supporting this bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [An electronic device sounded]

The Speaker: Just a second. Just let us get the clock set. Might have to call it 6 o'clock.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader. We're going to adjourn.

Mr. Williams: We have had wonderful substantive debate, and with this unprecedented technological snafu, I move that we adjourn the Assembly.

Oh, maybe I won't. I withdraw. The government wants its last 12 minutes if I may. We'll vote it down if you make us vote.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m.]

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