



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 17, 2024

Day 40

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 17, 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 Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, earlier today I had the absolute pleasure of welcoming Her Excellency Esra Demir, the ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye. It was wonderful chatting with her about the strong relationship between our education sectors and how Alberta and Türkiye can continue working together to support economic growth. I invite the ambassador and the remainder of her delegation to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of very special guests joining us in the Speaker's gallery today. Karen Storwick and Robert Curtin are from Combined Forces production collaborative, located in Calgary. They are premiering their latest project, *Fallen Heroes: Their Journey Home*.

Today it's my great honour and pleasure to be joined by a number of veterans who served in Afghanistan, including those stationed at Kandahar in 2002, that were involved with the creation of the now renowned ramp ceremony. I invite you to all rise as I call your name and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Willy MacDonald, James Sinclair, Shaun Peterson, Jim Butters, Paul Franklin, Mike Gauley, Jeff Rainey, Ken Zack, Joe Jasper, Nick Grimshaw, Manny Mandahar, and Nancy Mandahar. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the fantastic grade 6 classes of Sister Annata Brockman school, including their teachers Dawn Langlois, Audrey Huculak, and Kenna MacDonald. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Member Loyola: Yes. Mr. Speaker, through you and to the whole Assembly and on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods I would like to welcome 43 students from Grace Martin school along with their teacher Siraj Hussain, also a school that I have the pleasure of going to as many of the students from that school are Muslim and I enjoy reading to them during Read In Week. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Rithesh Ram, the president of the Alberta Medical Association section of rural medicine, and his wife, Dr. Véronique Ram, who operate a successful comprehensive family medicine practice in Drumheller. I want to thank them for joining us. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to rise today and introduce to you and through you my guests from the Calgary Canadian Sudanese community, headed by its president Eisa Gumaa. They were able to drive despite a bit of rough weather on the highway. I ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my dear friend and a friend to many in this Chamber, Dr. Sayeh Zielke from Lethbridge, a great cardiologist in that community who cares for community and, on a personal note, has been a great support to both Tiffany and I and our kids during Austin's long ordeal. That support I can never thank her for fully. I'd ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the new Alberta Foundation for the Arts board chair, Cynthia Moore. Cynthia has extensive experience in the arts community, including serving on several boards: the Alberta University of the Arts, Theatre Calgary, and Alberta Ballet. Cynthia, please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you again our veterans and the Combined Forces production team that are here today.

I would also rise to introduce three amazing constituents from Cypress-Medicine Hat: Della Burkitt, Corey Burkitt, and Ian Parkinson. Thank you for all you do in our community.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock has a statement to make.

Physician Compensation

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is taking action to support our dedicated health care workers, and we want to ensure that our physicians are properly supported so that they can continue delivering high-quality, comprehensive primary health care to Albertans. These targeted initiatives include implementing a key agreement with the Alberta Medical Association that invests \$780 million to stabilize the health system to provide competitive compensation for Alberta physicians, which also adds close to 5 per cent in rate increases for certain practices over the agreement term. Our government is committed to working with the AMA to stabilize and improve primary health care across the province.

We are also moving forward on recommendations from the MAPS initiative. Over three years \$57 million will be provided to family doctors and nurse practitioners to help manage costs to increasing patient caseloads. Additionally, we are investing \$40 million over two years to support primary care networks, and \$200 million will be allocated over two years to support family physicians and rural generalists to help transition to a new primary care compensation model. Mr. Speaker, I am excited to say that this new compensation model was revealed earlier this morning, which will further support family physicians in Alberta to deliver comprehensive primary care, and it will aid in creating long-term patient and physician relationships across the province.

Currently Alberta has a number of alternative compensation models available, including the fee-for-service model; however, this new comprehensive care compensation model will be the first model in Alberta that focuses on family physicians' and rural generalists' extensive training and leadership. It addresses the need for better compensation to incentivize patient attachment, productivity, and the work that goes beyond direct patient care. Mr. Speaker, this new model is a welcomed opportunity to show our dedicated support to our physicians and to our growing communities.

Government Policies

Ms Chapman: Ninety-five to 102 per cent capacity: that is the state of neonatal intensive care units in Edmonton. Each of these infants rely on nursing staff to ensure their vital needs are met. When capacity is high, staff are stretched thin. The results can mean that infants who are underweight end up waiting longer to be fed. I want to be clear. This is not the nursing staff's fault. The Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association has been raising this issue since 2022. These lives are fragile. They require care and attention. It is this government's job to ensure Albertans, including our newest ones, are able to get the care they need. Airlifting infants out of a major city that should have enough beds for them is not a solution. It is a failure.

The UCP doesn't just fail infants in NICUs. They fail schoolchildren as well. Alberta has the lowest per-student funding in the country. Our classrooms are over capacity, and children in our province are falling behind. Some go to school in portables without water. Others have taken class in winter coats, shivering in shoddy P3 classrooms this government green-lit. Then they go to university, where they are failed by the UCP again. They can't afford rent, tuition, and textbooks, so they couch surf, sleep in cars, or skip meals to get by. And now the funding that grad students rely on to live and conduct world-class research is also at risk.

1:40

It doesn't have to be this way, but the UCP wants to meddle in everyone else's business rather than putting their heads down and fixing the problems they created, like the crisis with NICUs. From birth to adulthood this government has seized every chance to make life more difficult for the people they serve. There are no excuses for what they have done, but I sure hope they start to fix it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Highway 28 Capital Plan

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to highlight the significant step forward in enhancing the infrastructure on highway 28, a crucial lifeline for northeast Alberta, running from Cold Lake to Edmonton with a multitude of invaluable Alberta communities in between.

In a meeting on April 8 with NAAGO, a group of 40 municipalities and Indigenous communities that advocate for investment into highway 28, the transportation minister provided a noteworthy status update on the anticipated upgrades, upgrades like twinning highway 28 between Cold Lake and Bonnyville, the addition of passing lanes extending to Smoky Lake, critical intersection upgrades, essential curve reconstructions, and the construction of safety rest areas. Our collective efforts will materialize as we prepare for groundwork in 2025, with full-scale construction anticipated by 2026. As we look forward to these upgrades, let us also recognize that there are projects already under way through the current construction year, including the repaving and intersection improvements.

I'd like to extend my gratitude to the chair of NAAGO and the regional leaders for their steadfast support for the highway and to the minister for all of his decisive action. Their involvement has been essential as we turn these plans from paper to pavement. The voices of residents and business leaders of our communities have also been crucial. I want to thank them for their relentless activism over the years, and I want to also be grateful for their support. Without my advocacy to the minister and the Premier would not have been as compelling.

This isn't just about road improvements. It's about bolstering an economic backbone of our region. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Social Studies Curriculum

Member Irwin: Curriculum was my life for years when I worked for the provincial government. I was so proud to have worked with countless stakeholders. I learned so much. The work was nonpartisan. It was collaborative. It was forward thinking. It was evidence based. I was especially proud of our work in social studies. As a proud social studies teacher and someone who lived and breathed social studies curriculum through my professional work and my graduate work, I could say with confidence that our curriculum drafts were something that we could stand on.

But you'll remember what happened in 2019, when the UCP were elected. They killed all that good work and put forward what many called an absolute Dumpster fire of a curriculum, but because of the outrage and push-back from tens of thousands of Albertans the UCP took those curriculum drafts back to the drawing board. Fast-forward to now, and the UCP have released their latest draft of the social studies curriculum. I wish I had better news, but the reviews are in, and they sure as heck are not good.

The expert panel that the UCP asked to weigh in on their new kindergarten to grade 6 social studies curriculum published an open letter to the UCP. Their request: scrap the draft and start again. Their concerns: all well-founded ones from a group of people incredibly qualified to weigh in on social studies curriculum, postsecondary educators and curriculum specialists. Their concerns are valid. They point to four main issues: the lack of contemporary or relevant vision for social studies education; the limited opportunities for critical thinking and informed decision-making; the token gesture towards First Nation, Métis, and Inuit world views and perspectives; and the failure to acknowledge the diverse identities in Alberta today. Each of these issues is huge in itself. I could unpack each one, but I only get two minutes.

What's also alarming is that when these experts raised their concerns, they were largely ignored. They concluded that Alberta students deserve better, and we agree. Our students deserve a modern, evidence-based curriculum. On this side of the House we won't ever accept anything less.

Thank you.

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

Aviation and Aerospace Industry Development

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the previous NDP government, which scared away investment and drove jobs and Albertans out of the province, killing 189,000 jobs, our UCP government has been working to make Alberta the best place to live, work, invest, raise a family, and operate a business. In fact, in February 2023 to February 2024 we created almost 100,000 jobs.

In my area of Cypress-Medicine Hat we've seen business growing and booming, and beyond my riding we are seeing the collective economic growth of the aerospace, aviation, and defence industries. Mr. Speaker, incredible things are happening in this field.

De Havilland set up shop in southern Alberta. We've seen investments in Alberta by other companies and organizations such as Lufthansa, NATO's DIANA initiative at the University of Alberta, and at SAIT, where we've seen a huge growth in aviation and aerospace engineering. In my own riding of Cypress-Medicine Hat we have Landing Zones, Atlantis Research Labs, Qinetiq, UVAD, and Avro Aerospace. Yes, Mr. Speaker, that Avro.

Mr. Speaker, this growth in our aerospace and aviation and defence industries will help us as we continue to diversify our economy. This will help eliminate the boom-and-bust economic cycles. Our government is taking great steps in growing and diversifying these industries into Alberta's economy through investment attraction and encouraging and strengthening our workforce through training opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, more importantly, the diversification of these industries will allow us to support our active duty members by giving them new technologies and tools to help keep them safe. Generations to come will benefit through the investments and innovations of these industries and what they bring to the table.

Mr. Speaker, if this wasn't good enough news already, we know that Alberta is leading in innovative investments in technologies like carbon capture utilization storage, sustainable aviation fuel development, and hydrogen projects.

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

Bill 18

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have seen in a matter of days the downfall of what interference by a government does. This shows us the true colours of the UCP and their failed leadership with Bill 18 to destroy businesses, stifle academic thought, and impose the Premier's ideological agenda on Alberta. On this side of the House my colleagues and I hear the alarm bells from every direction coming from this new proposal of interference and petty gatekeeping from the UCP.

I have been a long-time partner with local Calgary businesses. Today I want to speak out for the business leaders, employees, and regular Albertans that will be harmed because of this bill. Bill 18 is just plain ideological, just another excuse for the UCP to pick fights with Ottawa while leaving Albertans behind as they fail on education, health care, and more.

We stand with small businesses, municipalities, innovators, academics, and all the other community leaders who will be impacted by this regressive piece of legislation. We will be ready to back the economy and we'll be ready to become partners with businesses in 2027 to clean up the mess of Bill 18.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a report that just came out just yesterday from the city of Calgary, an inflation review that shows that, once again, inflation is out of control in Calgary, especially when it comes to rent, and I'd like the members opposite to please read.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of the e-mail which I referenced in discussion of Bill 205 from my constituent Sandi.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the five requisite copies of the news article I referenced in my speaking to the bill on Monday about the NDP leadership helping to kill the carbon tax.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Capacity

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, ideally, childbirth is an exciting time for families. But when the new baby's life is at risk, it's terrifying. Yesterday health care workers in Edmonton's NICUs issued a dire warning: families may not be able to rely on neonatal care in this city when their brand new babies most need it. The minister claims that she was unaware of the problem. It turns out she's actually been warned at least three times. To the Premier: is she satisfied by her minister's response, and does she think that Albertans should be?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that the letter circulating yesterday was alarming, which is why the Minister of Health immediately directed her department and AHS to look into the concerns and report back. We are relieved to have learned that there is still capacity within our NICU units. As of noon yesterday, April 16, there were nine NICU beds available in Edmonton zone, 14 in Calgary zone, seven in Red Deer, seven in south zone, and three in Grande Prairie. Should capacity become limited, we'll take action to make sure these infants are cared for.

Ms Notley: Telling these front-line health care workers that their concerns are not real is absolutely not the right answer, and yesterday the minister's answer was: don't worry; if we have to, we can send these tiny babies away from their families and out of the province.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Notley: In a province as rich as ours, NICU families should not be shipped away from the support networks they need. The consequences of the travel alone could be devastating. To the Premier: will she (a) acknowledge there is a problem, not gaslight these front-line workers, and (b) acknowledge that her minister's evacuation plan . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Notley: . . . is an admission of failure?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:50 and again at 1:51.
The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe our Health minister in a press conference talked about that the last time a child did have to be airlifted was seven years ago, when those folks were in government, and we have the ability to take care of our NICU most vulnerable infants with the capacity that I had mentioned. We always have instances where, because of a complicated birth, because of an illness, the capacity is going to be needed because that is, sadly, one of the realities that we have. But our front-line staff are doing a great job caring for them.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this government was warned about this crisis in 2022, in 2023, and this February. Their response? Well, they slow walked and then cancelled the new Edmonton hospital, including what would have been 20 new NICU beds. They picked a fight with health care workers, and they blew up the health care system, and now they're denying the problem exists. Doctors, however, say that the lives of these babies are at risk because of this chaos. To the Premier: everything the UCP has done so far has made the situation worse. Why won't she actually start working to make it better?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason we've prioritized the building of the Stollery is exactly to make sure that we have dedicated care for young people. Right now the Stollery, which is a world-class operation, is spread out over four different facilities. Once they're consolidated into a single space, that will free up not only 236 adult beds, but it will allow us to be able to ensure that we have all of the resources needed in one place to deliver better care. You know, it might have been better to have started when they were in office – they didn't – but we're going to start now. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The only one with the call is the Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: As a former neonatal intensive care nurse I know the struggles that are faced by the staff, the family, and the children who need to be able to access the NICU. But I cannot imagine the stress and the pain that they are feeling right now. This government, this UCP government, has allowed this crisis to unfold for some of our most vulnerable patients. The overcrowding is putting babies' lives at risk, leading to situations where we might need to airlift sick babies away to keep them alive. How did the minister let it get to this point?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, it is as a mother of seven and a grandmother of eight that I know how traumatic it can be to have a sick child, particularly one in NICU. So when I received the letter yesterday, I immediately contacted Alberta Health Services as well as my department to do that intensive review. In fact, as the Premier indicated earlier, we have not had to airlift a baby because of capacity issues within the last seven years. I am glad to hear that there is capacity within Edmonton. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Batten: The minister was warned in February about this crisis. Her office was on at least two briefing notes. Her predecessor was warned. His predecessor was warned. Every day there are more stories and more warnings from Albertans about the impact this UCP government has had on our health care, and now we're faced with a situation where this minister is again dodging responsibility

where the lives of babies are at risk. Can the minister tell us why she failed to react when this crisis was first brought to her attention? Did she not read the briefing notes? Did she not understand the warnings, or was there something else that she thought was more high value?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to reassure parents across Alberta that, in fact, when a child is sick, we will in fact take care of that child. That is very near and dear to my heart. It's the reason why we've accelerated the Stollery to a stand-alone Stollery. In fact, I can reassure Albertans that by this morning we were at 48 NICU beds that were empty and available across the province; 17 beds were available in Calgary; 12 in Edmonton. We're going to make sure that those babies are looked after.

Member Batten: Well, the UCP might find this a laughing matter; I don't.

The fact that the minister today is celebrating that we haven't yet had to airlift a child shows how far this government has gone. This minister has been in government for five years. Sure, she's only been the Health minister for a year, but she isn't the only one who should face the blame. There's an entire cabinet of UCP ministers who watched this crisis grow and grow, and now doctors are fearful that babies might die because of the situation in health care. Will anyone in the UCP cabinet take responsibility and apologize to Albertans?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I think the fact that the member opposite continues to create fear in Albertans is reprehensible. I want to assure . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Health has the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, there is capacity within the system. We have 12 beds open in Edmonton right now within our NICUs. We have excellent doctors and nurses that will respond to every case who take great pride and great care in making sure that every vulnerable baby is looked after. We are continuing to make sure that we develop more capacity and workforce within the system.

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

Dr. Metz: Quote: we are starting to get to the point where there is serious harm that is going to be afflicting the most vulnerable patients we have in this province. Those are the words of Dr. Mona Gill speaking out about the staffing crisis that is unfolding in Alberta's neonatal intensive care units. Units are often understaffed. The option proposed by the minister is to fly babies out of Edmonton or even Alberta to get care. Flying sick babies because they can't get care in Edmonton: how did we get to this?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker. I would agree that flying a baby out of Edmonton is an absolute last resort. The last time it happened was actually under the NDP's watch, seven years ago, due to capacity.

Ms Notley: Take responsibility for your job.

An Hon. Member: Is five years long enough for accountability?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The minister was reasonable enough to listen to the question. I think it's reasonable that she should be able to answer the question.

The hon. minister has 12 seconds remaining.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure every Albertan that we do have excellent health care for NICUs right across Alberta. We actually have 133 NICU beds in Edmonton zone and 126 beds in Calgary zone, 17 in Red Deer, 10 in Grande Prairie, of which 48 are available right now.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 1:58.

Dr. Metz: The letter from the Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association stated that an overworked nurse caring for too many babies at the same time can result in "frail, underweight" babies not eating on time. The minister claims that she learned about this crisis yesterday, but the doctors and staff at the NICU have been raising the alarm for years. We are now in a situation where the Minister of Health is proposing flying children to other locations because their lives could be at risk. Why were these warnings ignored? Will the minister take responsibility for the consequences and apologize?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I received the letter yesterday. I've acted very quickly to contact Alberta Health Services and my department. They have assured me there is capacity. As I've indicated, there are 17 NICU beds in Calgary, 12 in Edmonton right now, 48 open right across the province. We have excellent health care: doctors, nurses, allied health professionals that are looking after these vulnerable babies each and every day. They're going to do their best because that's what they do. They care about babies. We do as well. We're going to make sure those babies are safe and cared for.

Dr. Metz: Two briefing notes were sent to the minister's office in '22 and '23 sounding the alarm. They were ignored. Dr. Gill states that infants would have to be moved, quote, because of lack of foresight by this government to address capacity issues that they have known have existed for years now. But this is where we've ended up after five years of UCP government. We need staff. How can the minister assure families she has their best interests at heart when this is her record?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I bring to your attention that I received the letter yesterday. I've only been the minister since last June. I have worked and spoken with Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health as well. Both have assured me that they do have capacity, that they're continuing to work on the ongoing issue of an overall capacity strain at particular times, as well as the fact that they continue to build that workforce. We are absolutely making sure that we're looking after every one of those little vulnerable babies.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this potential nightmare in NICUs is about the smallest children in our province, Alberta's most vulnerable patients in our health care system. There's no reason a province as wealthy as Alberta, with our abundant resources and young, growing population, should even need to contemplate airlifting vulnerable newborns to other provinces because we don't have capacity to care for them here. For years experts across our health care system have warned this government of a critical lack

of capacity in our hospitals, so why has this government neglected our most vulnerable children and left parents to wonder if there won't be support for their infants in a critical time of need?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated before, I'm a mother of seven, a grandmother of eight. Children are my life. I have defended children, preborn and birthed children, from the very beginning. It's at the heart of who I am. We do have capacity within our current system. There are 133 NICU beds in Edmonton zone, 126 in Calgary zone, 17 in Red Deer, 10 in Grande Prairie, 16 in Lethbridge, and seven in Medicine Hat. Currently as of 9:30 this morning 48 NICU beds are open and empty across the province.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this government's number one job is taking care of Albertans, but they're failing. Their neglect and disrespect have kept our health care system teetering at crisis level for years. Instead of listening to front-line health care workers and their desperate calls for more beds, more staff, more support for crucial services like neonatal ICUs, they cancel hospitals, create more chaos, waste hundreds of millions of dollars on failed privatization schemes, and we see the result. Will this minister commit to an immediate review of neonatal health care needs so we never have to airlift a child due to capacity issues? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. None of that is true. In fact, we are continuing to build capacity across this province. It's why the Foothills is increasing the NICU capacity. It's why we're going to build the Stollery. We're actually going to build the Stollery stand-alone hospital, something the members opposite didn't do. I agree; flying a child out is a last resort. It last happened under the NDP's watch seven years ago, but you know what? We are going to make sure those babies are looked after. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Shepherd: The minister wears a pin that says, "Children First," but her government is failing to ensure children's health care needs are being met. The Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association shouldn't have to sound the alarm three times for this minister to take action. If this government wasn't driving our health care system into chaos, if this minister was focused on building the system up instead of tearing it down, then maybe she'd be briefed on her number one job: saving the lives of our province's smallest, most vulnerable children. Instead, NICU families face a potential nightmare. How does this minister think it's acceptable to have just learned of this crisis yesterday?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:05.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I am so grateful and thankful to all the doctors, nurses, everyone who works on the NICU. They do an amazing job saving lives each and every day. They are heroes.

Ms Notley: So why are you telling them that they don't matter?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I received this letter yesterday. I've got Alberta Health Services and my department working very

closely to understand the capacity issues and the workforce issues so that we can move forward and fix it.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:06.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning is next.

Wildfire Prevention and Control

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government committed to having 100 more additional staff hired, trained, and employed on April 15. Given that the government issued an early start date to wildland fire season on February 20 due to the high risk and given that the whole province is currently under a fire advisory, I will ask the minister again. February 20, March 21, and all the other times that I've asked, you promised a thousand positions would be staffed up and deployed on April 15. It's been two days. How many staff have been hired, trained, and deployed? Do you even know the number?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just for the member's information as of April 15 we have close to 300 type 1 firefighters. That's helitack and unit crews that are trained and ready to go. We have 280 firetack contracts signed with 280 firetack firefighters. Those contracts are secured. We have 40 more coming onstream for that. We have 175-plus seasonal staff support that are on staff right now, and more coming there, too. We have 423 permanent staff, and of that, 16 new hires there, too. The good people in Wildfire are doing their work.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the promise has been broken because that's not a thousand staff.

Given that yesterday TC Energy had an industrial fire that spread to the wildland fire zone and given that wildland firefighters were required to respond and given that team leads are required as per national standard to have an incident command training of 100 and 200 to respond to these incidents, can the minister guarantee that all team leads have been trained with incident command 100 and 200 before leading teams to manage these types of situations?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've just done the quick math. That's over 1,200 people that we have working on wildfire and forestry in Alberta right now.

Mr. Speaker, what I find quite appalling by these questions, actually, is the disrespect shown to the good people on wildland firefighting crews in Alberta. The statistics are that our people in wildfire have extinguished 148 fires already this year in Alberta. That is a record. Of the 64 wildfires that were held over from last year, there are 39 left. We've been doing really good work there.

Ms Sweet: Let's try a different minister. Given that yesterday's TC Energy fire is still under investigation but there are concerns that due to extremely dry conditions and the use of welding equipment, the fire could have been started by a spark and given that these dry conditions can be found across the province where industry interfaces and given that trains can also spark and bush fuel along the lines is highly flammable, can the minister tell this House the plans to decrease the fuel risk along rail lines along with the plans to limit fire risk in high industrial rural areas?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We did have that incident with the pipeline blowing up. We had crews available and on the site. We still have crews on-site right now. We had two water tankers drop off loads of suppression fluids last night on that fire. We have one firetack crew still on-site. We have three water trucks on-site right now.

Mr. Speaker, just the other day I was at CN Rail and looked at their two railcars that they've designed to help fight wildfire and make sure that they're doing their duty as industry to protect Albertans, protect their infrastructure, and make sure that we go into this year ready for fire.

Federal Budget 2024

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the federal government tabled their 2024 budget, you know, the ones that are supposed to balance themselves. Not surprisingly, there doesn't seem to be anything surprising in their continued massive spending, in their programs that aren't working, or in their failed policies. According to the federal government this budget is going to get more homes built, make life less costly, and grow the economy. To the Minister of Finance: does it actually do any of this?

2:10

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The short answer is no. The long answer is also no. The Bank of Canada called Canada's productivity levels an emergency that is making it harder to control inflation. I was in the room at FPT when the Bank of Canada governor pleaded to all of the provinces and the federal minister, saying: the biggest thing you could do to help with inflation and affordability broadly is to control your spending. This budget certainly doesn't do that.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that the federal government is making the outlandish claim that the budget will make life more affordable for Canadians and given that through their punitive carbon tax, which so happened to be introduced by Alberta's own NDP, making life more expensive, can the Minister of Finance tell the House whether the federal budget will do anything to help affordability?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again to the member. The answer to that is also no. There are almost no measures in the budget for affordability. The federal government is increasing the inclusion rate on the capital gains tax, which is a complicated change. The quick explanation is that it's going to take money out of our economy, and with the increase of the carbon tax, the lack of measures to help affordability, and the crippling deficit, the federal government is in fact hurting affordability.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that the budget was titled Fairness for Every Generation and given that it included a \$40 billion deficit and \$50 billion in new spending that they claim will be off-set by increased taxes, showing clearly that the federal government does not have a plan to ever return to balanced budgets, can the Minister

of Finance tell the House what this increased debt and deficits will mean for future generations?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the member. The title of the federal budget is very ironic given that it is the complete opposite of fairness for every generation and the next generation. By the end of the federal fiscal plan just the cost to service the federal debt will be \$60 billion, which is more than the entire Canada health transfer sent to the provinces. Future generations are going to be faced with less money for programs and forced to pay off these deficits for generations. It's gone from \$35 billion two years ago to \$54 billion in this fiscal year.

Wildfires and Industrial Infrastructure

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, yesterday between Hinton and Edson, 28 kilometres north-northeast of Obed Lake, there was a rupture along a TC Energy natural gas pipeline, and a wildfire was sparked in the area. Due to a commendable emergency response and the efforts of workers, first responders, which included wildland firefighters, the fire was held by 7 last night. To the minister. This wildfire could have been far more serious. What is the government's plan to investigate its cause, and how will the UCP ensure this sort of situation doesn't repeat?

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question. The RCMP, of course, have a proper response, and they will be investigating this incident that has occurred.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that wildland firefighters are being called upon to respond to fire events at industrial facilities such as this pipeline rupture and given that, due to climate conditions, we can expect more forest fires and a longer fire season and given that, as a result, health risks faced by wildland firefighters increase in severity every year, to the minister: what is this government doing to ensure that our heroic wildland firefighters are looked after with proper PPE and additional training for these sorts of complex incidents?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thanks very much, and thanks for that question. We do have exceptional training for our wildland firefighters. We know in Alberta we have an incredible amount of urban interface, which is interface with wildfire and industry and communities, more so than any other province in Canada, actually. We make sure that our wildland firefighters are trained. We do have, of course, the good people on our municipal firefighting teams. A shout-out to the Yellowhead county fire department on that pipeline rupture the other day. That actually helped extremely – it was very helpful having them there on the site right there.

Ms Wright: Given that the health and safety of first responders in communities must be our focus when incidents like this occur and given that drought conditions are expected to contribute to more and bigger fires, putting even more communities and firefighters at greater risk, to the minister: what work is being done in conjunction with OHS, local communities, and other ministries to determine health impacts for fires which occur because of incidents like yesterday's, and what steps have been taken to make sure wildland firefighters will be eligible for presumptive coverage of any illness

they develop after being exposed to toxic smoke and other airborne contaminants?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you. Alberta's presumptions for certain work-related cancers recognize the great work and risks that our firefighters take to protect Albertans' lives and property. Cancer presumptions do help firefighters and their families receive benefits and support they need with fewer delays and hurdles as they don't need to prove the cancers are work-related. Wildland firefighters and firefighters with cancers not on the presumption list can still submit workers' compensation claims through the regular claims process, and we are constantly re-evaluating the science to update our presumptions and benefits. We're also looking at wildland firefighters in regard to our heroes' fund. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Coal Development Policies

Dr. Elmeligi: The Minister of Energy and Minerals likes to talk about "Dig, baby, dig." Well, the deeper I dig into this Grassy Mountain mine coal fiasco, the shadier it gets. When the UCP government rescinded the 1976 coal policy, it caught many Albertans by surprise. But you know who wasn't surprised? The coal companies. Turns out the government had been in conversation with them about opening the eastern slopes to more coal developments for at least seven months before telling Albertans. To the minister: why the secrecy? Why do Albertans have to learn about these backroom deals through a FOIP request?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. We are open and transparent as a government, and we insist on that happening with all of the agencies. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Jean: They are required by law to provide information as required, and we in return have to protect Albertans. But the Premier has been clear that we would be transparent, as we will, because we serve Albertans and that's in their best interest. But I want the opposition to know, Mr. Speaker, through you, that I found the smoking gun. It's right here, and it's a letter from the Crown when, of course, the NDP was in power, asking the Ram River Coal Corporation to dig.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that it was the UCP that rescinded the coal policy and given that for years Albertans have been waiting to understand how and why that happened given that the first time their FOIP request was addressed the information came in five separate packages with over 600 pages partially redacted and 750 pages completely blank, forcing these Albertans to go back to the commissioner for more information, and it took two years for them to get this inadequate information, can the minister apologize and commit to getting them the remaining 6,000 pages by the end of the month, or will they have to wait another two years?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to apologize for the NDP being in power in Alberta for four years and causing such chaos with our economy and our people. I would like to continue. From, of course, the NDP minister at the time:

Ram River Coal Corporation is seeking clarity about the 1976 A Coal Development Policy for Alberta. I encourage you to advise Ram that, like all coal development projects in Alberta's foothills

and mountains, a surface coal mine application on coal category 2 land would be reviewed.

Category 2 land? They are trying to destroy Albertans' future. Unacceptable.

Dr. Elmeligi: Let's focus on what we're talking about right now. Given that after the public backlash the UCP was forced to reinstate the coal policy and conduct a thorough stakeholder consultation and given that this consultation engaged with municipalities, unions, Indigenous leaders, environmental groups, ranchers, landowners, and industry representatives, given that 85 per cent of these Albertans weren't confident in coal development regulations and many Albertans were opposed to coal projects especially along the eastern slopes – the minister keeps saying the government wants to listen to Albertans. Great idea. How about start by getting rid of the Grassy Mountain mine?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that member is right about something. Albertans don't trust the NDP in power in relation to anything to do with coal mining because they asked billionaires from across the world to come down into Alberta and take our category 2 lands and turn them into open-pit mines. We're not going to let that happen. We're going to protect Albertans. We're going to protect water. Water is life. Alberta is the greatest place in the world, and it will always be the greatest place in the world as long as this Premier and this government here are in control and not the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

2:20 Renewable Energy Development

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government announced the renewed path forward for renewable power projects, which includes protections for Alberta's pristine viewscapes, many of which are in my constituency. New wind projects will no longer be permitted within the new buffer zones, and other proposed developments located within the buffer zones would require a visual impact assessment before approval. There's currently strong opposition from the town of Fort Macleod and the MD of Willow Creek for the proposed solar storage project in their area. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: what actions are being taken to address the concerns of these communities and ensure that their voices are heard?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the important question. Our government is committed to listening to Albertans and representing Albertans. We are now granting municipalities the automatic right to participate in the AUC's approval process for all new energy projects. Additionally, municipalities will be able to receive financial assistance for their participation. We are making sure that municipalities have their voices heard, and this is likely why we have had such strong support from the Rural Municipalities association on these actions.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta Utilities Commission continues to receive new applications for renewable power projects on valuable agricultural land and further given that agriculture is the backbone of Alberta and our agricultural land is highly productive, producing food needed around the world, to the same minister: can you share with the House how the government is safeguarding Albertans from the potential unintended consequences of solar projects in southern Alberta?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Agriculture is at the heart of Alberta's heritage and economy. We are making sure it's protected for generations to come. This is why we are taking an agriculture-first approach. We're ensuring projects can coexist with agriculture, strengthening reclamation requirements, and will ensure that our native grassland, irrigable land, and all productive land is protected. We are going from the no-rules NDP to responsible development within this province.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've recently received a letter that claims a proposed battery storage facility in my riding will have limited to no off-site impacts and further given that it is well known that battery storage facilities come with serious risks – fires, explosion, and the release of toxic gases if the battery happens to fail – to the same minister: what is being done to ensure Albertans are protected and well informed about the risks associated with battery storage facilities?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The AUC's approval process is rigorous and evaluates all proposed electricity projects, including battery storage, for safety, risk mitigation, and environmental impacts before they can even be built. Ensuring the safety of all these projects is a top priority for this government and all of Alberta's regulators. Albertans deserve to reap the benefits of new, innovative technologies while being protected from potential hazards, and that is exactly what we will continue to do. As technologies and efficiencies develop around the world, so do our regulators so that they can provide the best outcomes for all Albertans.

Bill 12

Ms Phillips: Life lease holders in Lethbridge began writing to me in about mid-2023 indicating they could not get their entrance fees refunded, some amounting to more than \$400,000. These issues also began to bubble in Saskatchewan a few years back, and in 2021 Saskatchewan passed a 50-page bill that, if adopted here, contained provisions that would protect my constituents and hundreds of others like them. But Alberta's bill is seven flimsy pages that give no protection to life lease holders. Why did the minister for service Alberta mail it in on the assignment he was given by the Premier? She asked him to protect life lease holders.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, that's just not true. First of all, I heard about this several months ago, almost a year now. Let me just say that it's deplorable that seniors can't get their deposits back. So I didn't waste any time in approaching the Premier and asking her to put it in my mandate letter, because we need to work hard to make sure that this never happens again. Let me give you some of the examples. We've put in prescribed time frames, we've put in more transparency and disclosure, and if there are any infractions, fines will be up to \$300,000 per infraction or two years in jail.

Ms Phillips: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the Saskatchewan legislation has 50 pages of details on reserve funds, funds held in trust, processes around entrance fee refunds, both going forward but also transitional provisions for existing life lease holders – the Alberta legislation has none of these things; it's an empty shell of a bill, and even ChatGPT would have done a better job – why is the

government tolerating this failure by Service Alberta when it comes to consumer protection for life lease holders?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, that member knows, or at least she ought to know if they spoke to any of the nonprofit operators, they were adamant that if we put these funds into trust, it'll kill the affordability aspect of this legislation. What we did do is that we wrote the legislation with enough flexibility that we could use surety bonds that will protect their investment. I made a commitment to my constituents, and I stand by it, that we're going to make sure this situation never happens to another Albertan again.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that the minister could have read the Saskatchewan Law Reform Commission report and the 2021 Saskatchewan legislation – it's just literally, like, an hour of work, Mr. Speaker; that's all it took me – given that if the minister had done this bare minimum, he may have avoided having elderly people protesting him on the Legislature lawn, why won't the government pull this barely a bill, rewrite it even if it's just a cut and paste from Saskatchewan? We all know that Albertans deserve better from the department of service Alberta.

Mr. Nally: I don't know where that member is getting her information from, but I know it didn't come from Bill 12. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker. We've brought in cooling-off periods that never existed. We brought in prescribed time frames. We brought in fines, up to \$300,000 per infraction, and jail times up to and including two years in prison. These are the most . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, these are the most prescriptive protections that we ever had in this province, and I encourage those members to read the legislation and join with us in voting to support seniors in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Support for Agriculture

Ms de Jonge: Mr. Speaker, I'm a farmer's daughter. I'm proud of my roots and where I come from. My dad always said that you can take the girl out of the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the girl, and I'm proud to now represent the many farmers and ranchers in Chestermere-Strathmore. There is a sign I pass when I drive to my dad's farm that says: if you ate today, thank a farmer. At the mercy of the weather, farmers work tirelessly to ensure we all have food on our tables. So can the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation share with the House what this government is doing to support farmers during the challenging El Niño weather conditions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this great question. I've seen similar signs in my constituency, and that's why I state: no farms, no food. That's why our government is working hard to support Alberta farmers as we face what could be another dry season. We've hosted several town halls on drought preparedness, established a drought command team, and we continue to meet with farmers and ranchers. We also have a number of business risk management programs and programs with my department to aid farmers during drought conditions. I recommend farmers reach out to afsc.ca or my department for more information.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my dad immigrated to Alberta from a farming family in the Netherlands and his father, my opa, like many others before and alongside him, grew food to feed Europe and the world for generations and given that just earlier this year farmers across the EU were again protesting out-of-touch, heavy-handed climate policies designed to dismantle farming in Europe, can the same minister explain how our government is pushing back against similarly ignorant agriculture policies from the eco extremist federal government in Ottawa?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the members in this room may know, farmers are proud stewards of the land. They are leaders in practices to preserve that land and lower GHG emissions. They're using conservation cropping or zero tillage, 4R nutrient stewardship, and incorporating nitrogen-fixing crops, like pulses, into their crop rotations already. We're advocating for common-sense legislation to help, not to hinder, this industry, and this government will continue to push back on any regulation that continues to impede farmers and ranchers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:30

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that while the opposition couldn't find rural Alberta on a map, on this side of the House we understand and empathize with the challenges facing farmers in Alberta, and given that farming isn't just a job, it's a way of life, and that agriculture is integral to our provincial heritage as well as our future, can the same minister please explain how Budget 2024 takes steps to ensure Alberta's farmers and ranchers have the tools and resources they need to succeed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the member for this great question. Our Budget 2024 shows a serious commitment to our Alberta farmers in allocating \$5 million over three years for water storage and feasibility studies, \$19 million per year to help irrigation districts update their water infrastructure, funding for eight new full-time meat inspectors, \$3.2 million for applied research associations to replace infrastructure and equipment, and \$2.5 million for ag societies' infrastructure revitalization program to help protect their infrastructure.

Affordable Housing and Emissions Reduction

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, the minister went on national TV to turn down federal money for affordable housing. I personally was grateful the rest of Canada had the opportunity to hear his Gish gallop. What stood out to me was the minister saying: we will not take any money if it comes with requirement to adopt green building codes. Every single one of the UCP MLAs voted for legislation that commits Alberta to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050 in line with our international climate mitigation commitments. Will the minister please explain how affordable housing will be carbon neutral by 2050?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to correct the member, what I said is that Alberta will not be bribed with our own money to adopt green building codes, and our position with the government remains that we will not be. First off, we will respect provincial jurisdiction and stand up against the feds when they step into our jurisdiction. We will not adopt Justin Trudeau's green ideology on our building code, which will slow down construction, make more people

homeless, and raise the cost of living for everyday Albertans. I know that's what the NDP want to do, but we're not going to do that.

Mr. Kasawski: Given that buildings and transportation account for 45 per cent of Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions, given that buildings and transportation are managed by municipal governments, which are your jurisdiction, given that carbon neutral and net zero mean effectively the same thing in principle and they both refer to the balance of greenhouse gases with avoided or removed emissions, given that 2050 is less than 26 years from now, what is the government's plan to meet the United Conservative Party's commitment to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about housing, we have a crisis in this country that has been created by the federal Liberal government, supported by the NDP, who continue to make life unaffordable. We have seen, even this week, that party across from us . . . [interjections]

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

Mr. Nixon: . . . stand up and vote to keep the carbon tax and support Justin Trudeau, and now they're standing in the Chamber and advocating that we bring Mr. Trudeau's crazy green policies into our building code and make life more expensive. We're not going to do that in our province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kasawski: Given that the Building Industry and Land Development Association of Alberta has mapped out a pragmatic set of recommendations for the government to build affordable housing to a net-zero standard, given that BILD Alberta's conservative estimate for the additional cost to build to a net-zero ready standard is under 1.4 per cent, given that because of the UCP's commitment to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050 every house will need to operate at a net-zero standard in the future, will the minister commit this government to following BILD Alberta's road map to net-zero new construction, or should we count on more of the UCP standards of just good enough?

Mr. Nixon: I will continue to commit to working with BILD Alberta, who loves this government's policies, because it's resulting in record-breaking construction numbers, Mr. Speaker, but, through you, to the hon. member: is he advocating for things like removing natural gas from our houses inside the province or to support Mr. Guilbeault's plan for no infrastructure or roads to go to those houses when we build them? Is that really how far the NDP have fallen, and they truly want to make life that much more expensive in our province? Not going to happen here in Alberta; they're welcome to move to Ottawa if they want to support Justin Trudeau.

Wage Growth and Cost of Living

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the worst wage growth in the country. In fact, Albertans are losing ground to the second-worst inflation in Canada. The causes? First, housing costs and the UCP's disaster on utility bills with rates skyrocketing by over 120 per cent last year. Secondly, the policies of this government have resulted in the worst wage growth of any large province in Canada. Why is this government failing Albertans by making life more expensive while making it harder for Albertans to catch up?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, it's not surprising to see the members opposite continue to be negative on Alberta despite us having the highest weekly

earnings in the country. In fact, 90 per cent of private-sector job creation in Canada over the last six months has been in Alberta. That's not a typo. That's 90 per cent, and that's what happens when you don't tell people to move or invest in other provinces and when you're proud of your world-class, responsibly produced energy.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, given that people used to move to Alberta for good jobs, but now they're faced with skyrocketing rents, insurance, utility bills, and more and given that Alberta has seen the lowest wage growth in the country combined with the second-highest inflation in Canada and given that the average Albertan's wages are 4 per cent lower than they were in 2019 after inflation – 4 per cent lower – how can this government justify this appalling economic performance?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, I'm just going to help the member opposite. He needs to know some of the statistics. Alberta has the highest weekly earnings in the country. We have the lowest taxes. This is one of the reasons we have the fastest population growth, 200,000 Canadians choosing Alberta because we have the best combination of job opportunities, wages, low taxes, and the best place in the country to live. That member opposite should look at the statistics and be proud of Alberta. Join us in cheering on Alberta and our businesses.

Member Kayande: Given that it was the UCP with their disastrous management of utilities causing Alberta to now face the second-highest inflation in Canada, given that this government has been laser focused on things like the job-killing sovereignty act, the gatekeeping Bill 18 that threatens investment in academic freedom, banning renewables, as a result failing time after time after time to grow the wages of Albertans, literally the things that governments are elected to do, what signal does it send to the world that Alberta Is Calling but the UCP is intent on making life as hard as possible for us?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, the member opposite just characterized the sovereignty act as job-killing, yet we've seen roughly 100,000 jobs created over the last 12 months alone, 90 per cent of Canada's private-sector job creation occurring in Alberta over the last six months. But let me tell you about real job-killing things like the carbon tax, like the NDP telling the world that Alberta is the embarrassing cousin, that if you need a job, you should go to another jurisdiction. They did everything they could to take the economic engine of Canada and destroy it, and we've repaired it.

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

Economic Corridors

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta is an economic powerhouse in Canada. Whether it be our energy, agriculture industries, tourism, our emerging tech, aerospace and aviation, Alberta exports and products are world-renowned and an economic driver – that's right – in all of Canada. However, Alberta's landlocked province relies heavily on economic corridors to link Alberta to vital markets in and out of our province. Since the development of truly successful economic corridors requires collaborations as they cross multiple jurisdictions to get our products to global markets, could the Minister

of Transportation and Economic Corridors please update the Assembly on the memorandum of understanding on economic corridors this government has with Saskatchewan and Manitoba and what this means for Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland for all his leadership on the economic task force that he worked on years ago. The prairie MOU that we signed before the last provincial election focused on three things: to promote cross-border projects, to politically derisk projects by harmonizing regulations and timelines, as well as aligning capital plans and construction plans. That's what we've done with Saskatchewan, and we will continue to do this very important work for the country.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and minister. Given that the other side voted against that plan way back when, in the day, to kill economic corridors but given that the most successful economic corridors reach beyond neighbouring provinces and take a nation-building approach to the economic corridors, expanding even internationally, and further given that Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors is a member of multiple national organizations such as the Western Transportation Advisory Council and the Transportation Association of Canada, to the same minister: why are national economic corridor organizations important for Alberta's future?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that the Premier is actually taking great leadership on this as well. She's worked with B.C., Yukon, the other territories as well as the other prairie provinces to actually work on a similar MOU that we have with the prairie provinces. This is Alberta taking the lead. Obviously, we're not waiting on the Trudeau-NDP coalition in Ottawa to actually prioritize this. We're going to make sure that we can actually get nation-building projects built in Canada again.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is critical that businesses and industry across Alberta have easy and consistent access to our major highways to get their products to market as well as to import materials – economy, equipment, labour – to, moreover, fuel our economy and given that highway 60 is a vital highway that connects in the Acheson industrial park, over the CN Rail, onto highway 16, to the same minister: can you please inform the House of the status of the proposed highway 60 improvement project, including the twinning to a four-kilometre section of highway 60, from highway 16 to 16A?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There will actually be twinning on highway 60 between 16 and 16A. There will be a realignment of the 16A intersection as well as an overpass going over the CN track, which is heavily congested at peak times throughout the day. But land acquisition is under way. There's also

utility work. I'd just like to thank that member for being such a fierce advocate for this very important project in his riding.

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

Prior to the end of question period we almost concluded the daily Routine. That portion of our day is dispatched of, which brings us to points of order. At 1:50 and 1:51 the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order. I'll leave it to him as to whether or not those are separate points of order or they will be combined.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I would not like to combine these points of order, if it pleases the chair.

The Speaker: Please proceed with point of order 1.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you. At 1:51 the Leader of the Opposition was speaking and in asking a question to the Premier said something to the effect of, without the benefit of the Blues: why are you telling health care workers their feelings do not matter? Mr. Speaker, this is certainly language that would create disorder in the Chamber, and under 23(h), (i), and (j) I rise on this point of order.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I also don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I don't recall the Leader of the Official Opposition saying that. There may have been some comment that it was "not the correct answer," but I will leave it for you to decide.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and the Blues report the following. The hon. Leader of the Opposition said, "Telling these front-line health care workers that their concerns are not real is absolutely not the right answer." She proceeded with: yesterday the minister said don't worry; if we have to, we'll send tiny babies away from their families, out of the province. I'm not sure that this raises to the level of a point of order. My sense is that in this case it's a matter of debate on whether or not the minister said or didn't say that, of which I'm unsure as it didn't happen in the Chamber. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 1:51 the Government House Leader rose on an additional point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 1:52, or the time noted, the Leader of the Opposition was speaking and said that the Premier is gaslighting health care workers. We know that this was a ruling made in April 2021 to suggest that gaslighting anyone, especially an individual member and especially the hon. Premier gaslighting health care workers, is completely absurd. It's language that is unbecoming of an elected member of this Chamber. You have ruled on this in the past. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), that the suggestion that the Premier is gaslighting health care workers is, in fact, out of order.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't recall the ruling, but certainly if there is one, as the Government House Leader has said, I think we need to look at this within the context. On one hand, the Leader of the Official Opposition and my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre were asking a question about NICU capacity, and they were

referencing the Medical Association, Edmonton zone, and some doctors who are raising the alarm that capacity in our NICU is at limit, and the answer from the government side was that, no, it's not, and they gave an explanation. In this context, essentially, the word was used that literally those health care professionals, the Medical Association, is saying one thing, and the government wants them to doubt their understanding of the events. In this case, I guess, "gaslighting" was used in this context. It's not a point of order in this particular context.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues. Unless anyone else has additional information, I'm prepared to rule.

The hon. the Official Opposition leader said, "To the Premier: will she (a) acknowledge there is a problem, not gaslight these front-line workers." The hon. the Government House Leader is correct. On April 21, 2021, I said the following:

I will find it [to be] a point of order . . . particularly . . . it imputes false or unavowed motives of another member, not of the government but certainly of the Premier. It implies that [these] motives are to do those things. Of course, that would be unparliamentary.

On that particular day she used "gaslighting" in almost the exact context, and it was found a point of order then. It'll be a point of order again today.

I encourage the member to apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Sabir: I withdraw and apologize.

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

At 1:58 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Mr. Schow: Withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded; however, I will remind members that if they make comments that are unparliamentary, they're still unparliamentary. In this case those comments were included in the benefit of the Blues, and I encourage members to not do such things.

At 2:05 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Mr. Schow: Also withdraw.

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

At 2:06 the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the point of order at 1:58 I guess I probably could have argued it and taken the win, so I'll put that in the win category but unofficially.

At the noted time of 2:06 off the record the Leader of the Opposition was responding to one of the ministers answering her question and said, "Why are you telling them . . . they don't matter?" I believe that the context here was with regard to health care workers in the NICU. I could be wrong on this specific group of people, the stakeholders, to which the Leader of the Opposition was referring, but to suggest that we are telling them they don't matter is certainly unparliamentary. It was quite loud. I think it's under 23(h), (i), and (j). I contend that this is a point of order and ask that the Leader of the Opposition apologize.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I generally use this earpiece to get what the ministers are providing in answers, so I may or may not have heard this. But just prior to that, a similar kind of language

was used on members on this side when the Member for Airdrie-East was telling members on this side: stop lighting your hair on fire. So I guess that those kinds of things, if said in this Legislature, will certainly impact the decorum here, and we should all be careful when we heckle. It's not a point of order.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: Are there others who wish to comment?

I do have the benefit of the Blues. I am prepared to rule. In this particular occasion, as members know, the Speaker is unable to rule when there's not a reliable record or the comments weren't heard by the Speaker. In this case there is a reliable record. I didn't hear those comments, but I do have a reliable record with the benefit of the Blues. The hon. the Official Opposition leader said the following: "So why are you telling them that they don't matter?" Hon. members, there are a number of challenges with this particular comment. Particularly, it's not directed through the Speaker. The Leader of the Official Opposition wasn't standing. On a number of occasions today I could fairly clearly hear the Leader of the Official Opposition using unparliamentary language in a sedentary position. I encourage the hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader to apologize and withdraw, and we'll consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Mr. Sabir: I withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 18

Provincial Priorities Act

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and to move second reading of Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act, a piece of legislation that will prevent further intrusion from Ottawa into Alberta's constitutionally guaranteed jurisdiction.

Our government is committed to standing up for Albertans, and this legislation is one more way that we are doing that. You probably know that I love talking about our Constitution, Mr. Speaker, and for the benefit of the members opposite, who sometimes seem to have not fully appreciated what our Constitution, our founding documents of our nation, says, I think it's important for me to go through a few of the aspects of our Constitution Act to understand precisely why we feel this bill is so important.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

If you go to sections 55 and 56 of the Constitution Act, 1867, they have in there enumerated the powers of reservation and disallowance of federal legislation formally inscribed in the law. If you want to understand the original intent of disallowance and its practice for the first few years of Confederation, it was considered a means of ensuring that the federal Parliament enacts legislation compliant with the Constitution. It may interest you to know, Mr. Speaker, that since Confederation in 1867 the power of reservation was exercised 21 times by the Governor General, all before 1878.

Mr. Speaker, it's a bit of a shame that it has fallen out of favour, because I can tell you that with the latest spate of laws coming out of the federal government, I could well imagine there would be multiple times in a different spirit of the time that the Governor General might have also disallowed laws as being unconstitutional.

So perhaps the way to think of Bill 18 is that it's us essentially enacting our own power of disallowance, us declaring to the federal government, in the absence of the Governor General doing so, that under sections 55 and 56 what they are doing simply is not in compliance with how our nation is supposed to work.

Now, I think it's also relevant for me to point out the areas of law that the federal government do have, the powers of the Parliament, so that people understand as well just how far outside their constitutional realm they are operating. Let me just go through the legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada, section 91 for those who are interested. They have the power of the public debt and property; regulation of trade and commerce; unemployment insurance; the raising of money by any mode or system of taxation; the borrowing of money on public credit; the postal service; the census and statistics; military, militia, naval service, and defence; the fixing of and providing for the salaries and allowances of civil and other officers of the government of Canada; beacons, buoys, lighthouses, and Sable Island; navigation and shipping; quarantine and the establishment and maintenance of marine hospitals; sea coast and inland fisheries; ferries between a province and any British or foreign country or between two provinces; currency and coinage; banking, incorporation of banks, and the issuance of paper money; savings banks; weights and measures; bills of exchange and promissory notes; interest; legal tender; bankruptcy and insolvency; patents of invention and discovery; copyrights; Indians and lands reserved for Indians; naturalization and aliens; marriage and divorce; the criminal law except the constitution of courts of criminal jurisdiction but including the procedure in criminal matters; the establishment, maintenance, and management of penitentiaries.

Now, the reason I enumerate this list – there are 29 categories here, Mr. Speaker – is that I would pretty well guarantee you that if, having extended this power of disallowance to the provinces under section 90, I, oh, decided I wanted to create an Alberta unemployment insurance system, I'm pretty sure someone would step in and say: "Wait a minute. That is not your jurisdiction. You can't do that. We're going to disallow it." If, for instance, I decided to set up our own militia or military or naval service and defence, I am quite sure that the Governor General or the Lieutenant Governor would say: "Have you read your Constitution? You just simply can't do that." I'm pretty sure as well that if we decided to print our own currency – in fact, one Premier attempted to do that years ago. I think that was the last time in Alberta or one of the last times that it was used, the power of disallowance. We can't decide arbitrarily to do different weights and measures. Why? Because it says in the Constitution that that is federal jurisdiction. In addition, we can't set our own criminal law although I think we'd do a heck of a lot better job of it than they're doing at the federal level. It is not allowed under the Constitution. It would be disallowed. Now, why do I say this? What applies to them equally should apply to us, and what applies to us should equally apply to them.

Now, I should just mention, before I get on to our areas of jurisdiction, that this is not a boring list. I know that the federal Prime Minister has said that he thinks his job is boring, and maybe that's why he keeps on trying to do my job. But let me tell you the areas in which the federal government is not fulfilling their own responsibilities, as I've just read into the record. If the Prime Minister is looking for things to occupy his time, this is a pretty long list, and it is not exhaustive. He is not funding on-reserve housing; he should. They're not funding on-reserve mental health and addiction care; they should. They're not funding on-reserve health. They're not building strategic infrastructure. They're not collaborating to build economic corridors. They're not developing an aggressive plan on international trade to get our products to market. They're missing every single emission target that they have set. They're not partnering with First Nations to develop a

legislative framework for First Nations policing. They're not providing adequate levels of RCMP officers for rural policing. There's a lack of action to protect our ports and national trade infrastructure from work stoppages. They're not funding priorities for Indigenous communities that would improve safety and open the door to new economic partnerships.

Lack of action on rare disease drugs; lack of consultation before ramming through pharmacare and dental care and now a school lunch program; failure to consult with the provinces on how to address the housing crisis; failure to provide per capita funding on housing; failing to address unsafe drinking water on-reserve; failing to provide funding they acknowledge is needed to meet their own 2030 climate targets; no progress on their promised clean energy investment tax credit like carbon capture utilization and storage; no meaningful progress on a strategy to transport hydrogen or ammonia for export; no progress on promised support to help First Nations switch to another fuel from diesel; failing to properly address public safety concerns as the result of their lenient bail system; failure to appoint judges to fill judicial vacancies; failure to provide on-reserve supports for Indigenous youth; failure to properly fund French services in Canada; failure to address problems with equalization; failure to hold the Bank of Canada accountable to 2 per cent inflation; failure to properly address the inflation and affordability crisis; failing to properly manage the government's finances on deficits and debt, which leads to inflation; failing to effectively roll out broadband funding; failure to address the most expensive cellphone bills in the world; and, I might as well add, failure to live up to our international commitments on international defence and failure to protect our northern territories from the potential for incursion.

I would say that that's a pretty long list of failures. I think that the federal government would be well served to focus on its constitutionally mandated areas of jurisdiction.

Now, of course, you know, the Liberal government in Ottawa, along with their NDP coalition partners, remains intent on pushing through their destructive agenda regardless of the economic or social costs. We saw this with Bill C-69, the Impact Assessment Act, which has been rendered illegal under the Supreme Court's recent judgment, and, of course, with the ban on plastics, which was also struck down at the Federal Court when it was challenged, and we are proud to have played a role in both of those challenges. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that what we feel is most important is that we are able to exercise our areas of jurisdiction under the Constitution, and there's a reason for that.

3:00

There's a reason why those who wrote our division of powers realized that there are certain things that are best done at the federal level, particularly things that go cross-border, and then certain things that are best taken care of at the provincial level. I may as well read into the record the areas of provincial jurisdiction. I like the language in the Constitution. It says, "Exclusive Powers of Provincial Legislatures." It doesn't have an asterisk in there. It says, "Exclusive Powers of Provincial Legislatures." That means it's, you know, exclusive. It means that we have the right to be able to exercise our jurisdiction without interference from the federal government.

Subjects of exclusive provincial legislation. In fact, if you go into the record, you'll see that we have a longer list of areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction than the federal government does, but let me go through it so that you can see just how exhaustive this list is. We've got direct taxation within the province in order to raise revenue for provincial purpose. We've got the borrowing of money on the sole credit of the province. We've got the establishment and tenure of provincial offices and the appointment and payment of

provincial officers. We've got the management and sale of the public lands belonging to the province and the timber and wood thereon.

We've got the establishment, maintenance, and management of public and reformatory prisons in and for the province. We've got the establishment, maintenance, and management of hospitals, asylums, charities, and other institutions in and for the province, other than marine hospitals. We've got number 8 – this is important – municipal institutions in the province. I'll go back to that one, Mr. Speaker. We've got shop, saloon, tavern, auctioneer, and other licences in order to the raising of revenue for provincial, local, and municipal purposes. We've got local works and undertakings other than such things as lines of steam or ships, rails, canals, telegraphs, and other things that cross borders. We've got the incorporation of companies within provincial objects.

We've got the solemnization of marriage in the province; property and civil rights in the province; the administration of justice in the province, including the constitution, maintenance, and organization of the provincial courts, both of civil and of criminal jurisdiction, and including procedure in civil matters in those courts. We've got the imposition of punishment by fine, penalty, or imprisonment for enforcing any law of the province made in relation to any matter coming within any classes of subjects enumerated in this section. And here's the catch-all: generally all matters of a merely local or private nature in the province. That's only section 91, Mr. Speaker.

We've also got section 92A, which says:

Laws respecting non-renewable natural resources, forestry resources and,

importantly,
electrical energy.

In each province, the legislature may exclusively . . .

There's that word again.

. . . make laws in relation to

- (a) exploration for non-renewable natural resources in the province;
- (b) development, conservation and management of non-renewable natural resources and forestry resources in the province, including laws in relation to the rate of primary production therefrom; and
- (c) development, conservation and management of sites and facilities in the province for the generation and production of electrical energy.

We also under subsection (2) have:

In each province, the legislature may make laws in relation to the export from the province to another part of Canada of the primary production from non-renewable natural resources and forestry resources.

You see, Mr. Speaker, we actually have the authority to get our products to market as well.

Under subsection (4), taxation of resources, we can also raise money through a system of taxation on nonrenewable natural resources as well as sites and facilities in the province for the generation of electrical energy and production.

We also have the existing powers or rights for education.

Legislation respecting Education

In and for each province the Legislature may exclusively make
Laws in relation to Education.

Finally, I might just add section 95, which I'm quite keen to do a little bit more exploration in, agriculture and immigration, because here it's unique. It says that we have

Concurrent Powers of Legislation respecting Agriculture . . .

In each Province the Legislature may make Laws in relation to Agriculture in the Province, and to Immigration into the Province; and it is hereby declared that the Parliament of Canada may from Time to Time make Laws in relation to Agriculture in all or any [parts] of the Provinces, and to Immigration into all or

any of the Provinces; and any Law of the Legislature of a Province relative to Agriculture or to Immigration shall have effect in and for the Province as long [as only so far] as it is not repugnant to any Act of the Parliament in Canada.

I'm putting all this into the record, Mr. Speaker, because I assure you that in every area that is enumerated in the Constitution, we intend to fully exercise the full extent of our rights. We're just getting started, with Bill 18 being an expansion of some previous legislation that we brought in to assert our jurisdiction, under the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act.

Now, why is it that we think it is so important to vigorously defend our jurisdiction? Let me give a few examples here. I think the thing that we have found most offensive in recent weeks is the way in which the federal government has interfered in our area of jurisdiction and the way that they tried to pick winners and losers through doing a workaround and trying to ink deals directly with municipalities, which, as I mentioned, under subsection 8 falls within the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces.

Why is this so offensive? There are a couple of things. First of all, Mr. Speaker, federal funding comes with strings attached, like the funding for housing they just announced. It's dependent on municipalities completely rewriting their zoning rules to suit Ottawa's preferences, not Albertans' preferences. This is one of the things, one of the powers of municipalities that is the most important power that they have, which is identifying the character and nature of the development of their communities, doing their land-use planning, doing their zoning planning, and for the sake of, in the case of Calgary, \$228 million, for the sake of in Edmonton \$175 million, Ottawa is asking for them to completely give up their authority to set their zoning rules. I just don't think that that's a fair trade.

The price of Ottawa's support on these terms is just too steep. It's not aligned with Albertans' priorities, and our government isn't going to tolerate this kind of overreach in the future. The Provincial Priorities Act will require provincial entities to receive approval from Alberta's government before making, altering, or renewing an agreement with the federal government. As you can see, this is why it's so broad. Having gone through our areas of jurisdiction, provincial entities include public agencies, Crown corporations, boards, postsecondary institutions, municipalities; in other words, organizations and governing bodies that fall under provincial jurisdiction.

You know, one of the fears that we do have – I'll say a few more words about housing and the direction that I fear that the federal government is going, and it was alluded to by our Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services a bit earlier. It's not a matter of whether we can achieve net zero by 2050. I think we can, and part of the way that we're looking at how we're going to do that is that we are going to decarbonize our electricity grid over a period of time that makes sense, using carbon capture, utilization, and storage, bringing on nuclear when it becomes available and viable. Small modular nuclear is not a proven technology yet. It's not rolled out in Canada. It's not anticipated that we'd be able to even start adding it to our power grid until 2035, but we're committed to doing so and supporting the companies that are already exploring them.

We know as well that companies are experimenting with injecting hydrogen into their various streams, whether to do dual fuel combustion in the case of electricity or in the case of adding it to the home heating so that it can also reduce the emissions profile. There are additional experiments being done on direct air capture, carbon capture and utilization. For instance, you can actually take the CO₂, capture it, and add it to magnesium and calcium and use it as a building material. You can capture it and you can bury it

underground. You can also do direct air capture so that that allows us to be able to off-set our emissions and get to net zero.

The other thing I would say is that one of the biggest ways that Alberta can aid the world in emissions reduction is by exporting our clean natural gas and our clean ammonia to jurisdictions which have higher emitting fuels. One of the calculations we've done is that if China simply reduced its coal plants by 20 per cent, that would erase all of Canada's emissions, and if we were to continue to work with India, with China, with South Korea, with Japan, we would be able to have an enormous impact in reducing emissions.

I haven't even mentioned nature-based solutions, which our incredible farmers and ranchers and foresters are engaging in.

I have no doubt that we are going to be able to achieve net zero by 2050, just not on the accelerated time frame that the federal government wants us to by 2030. It's not achievable. We're not going to pretend it's achievable. We are certainly not going to saddle our municipalities with unachievable targets, nor are we going to saddle homeowners in Alberta with tens of thousands of additional costs trying to chase after that unachievable goal. That's the reason, Mr. Speaker, why we are standing firm on this.

3:10

This isn't an idle concern. We're seeing this in other jurisdictions. We're seeing it in Kelowna, with them having conversations about not hooking up new homes to natural gas. We're seeing it in other jurisdictions, with them talking about banning natural gas appliances. That's not the approach we're going to take here, Mr. Speaker. We know that our future economy is going to be built on a backbone of natural gas that will transition to other types of fuel, whether it's ammonia or whether it's hydrogen. That is going to be the fuel of the future. It's just not there yet, but I have great confidence that our innovators are going to be able to achieve it. This is the reason why these areas of jurisdiction have been assigned to the provinces. You have to have a regional focus, a localized focus to make sure you make the best decisions.

Now, it's not like the federal government doesn't know how to do this thing called co-operative federalism. It's not a novel concept. They do know how to do it because they've been engaging with us on the health accord. Ottawa worked with all provinces individually. They did not turn around and work with separate health authorities. In our case, since we had a single health authority, they did not try to do a workaround and go to each of the 106 different health facilities to try to cut some side deal so that they would be able to achieve their target. No. They came to us, and they worked with us directly. They made sure that when we signed agreements on four bilateral areas, they were tailoring them to our specific programs, to meet our specific needs as well as their priorities.

We have this kind of reporting criteria in the deal for accountability and for transparency. All provinces ended up signing on. B.C. was the first to sign on, on October 10, 2023. Quebec was the last to sign on, on March 27, 2024. But in all cases the Premiers agreed that we wanted to ensure that the federal government did not play one province against the other, that if anyone had managed to negotiate a better deal than the other, we would all be able to qualify to get that same deal, and it just didn't happen.

This is constructive co-operative federalism in action, and it resulted in what I think is a pretty good deal, that is going to allow us to be able to support our primary care providers. It's going to allow us to support mental health and addiction, and it's going to allow us to be able to continue to reduce surgical wait times. So I'm very happy that Ottawa worked with us on that. That is the model. That is how they should be approaching us in our areas of jurisdiction, not announcing things in budgets, not flying in with 24 hours' notice to do a surprise press conference, and certainly not

announcing things without even giving a courtesy phone call to the minister who's responsible for the area.

Now, I should mention where we got the idea for this legislation. I'll be quite frank about it. I have always said that we shouldn't have two classes of provinces in this country. Every province should be treated the same, and we shouldn't be having asymmetric federalism, but that's exactly what we have. Quebec has similar restrictions to what we're proposing in this legislation, and the government has respected those guidelines for the over 20 years – 20 years – that they have had this legislation, which says: don't do a workaround on us; if you want a partner, come partner with us; have a conversation.

It covers the same entities that are covered by our legislation: municipalities and municipal bodies; public agencies such as postsecondary institutions, school boards, and health agencies; other legal entities that receive more than 50 per cent of their funding from the province, which just makes sense if you think about it, Mr. Speaker. If you fund an agency more than 50 per cent, you're kind of the majority shareholder, and as the majority shareholder you probably should have the say in how that entity ends up exercising its duties that you've provided for them.

These agreements are still made, money still flows, and Quebec's provincial jurisdiction is respected. Although they may have been the last to sign on to the health deal, they were the first to sign on to a province-wide deal on housing. So it seems to work for them. I'm not sure why the members opposite are so defeatist in thinking that somehow it won't work for us. I believe it will.

At the Council of the Federation meeting in Halifax in November 2023 Premiers were united in the belief that Ottawa should work with the provinces, not bypass them. In fact, we had that issued as a line in our communiqué. We all left with a copy of Bill M-30 so that we could have a look at how we might be able to adopt legislation just like that in Alberta. That is no longer just talk. We're taking action to protect our constitutional jurisdiction.

Let me talk a moment about housing. Disproportionate housing funding across the country is being done based on where the Liberals are concerned they will lose seats in the next election. Think about that, Mr. Speaker. That is no way to use the federal spending powers. It's particularly galling for the citizens of Alberta who have gotten used to, over the last number of decades, paying far more into Confederation, with all of the taxes that we get levied for federal taxes, corporate taxes, sales taxes, fuel taxes, and so on, than we get back in programs and services. So they're taking our dollars and then not even having the courtesy to rebate back to us at least an equal per capita share.

In fact, in August 2023 Alberta received only 2.5 per cent of \$1.5 billion in the rapid housing fund despite having 12 per cent of the population. And I might say, despite now being in a position where more than 20 per cent of newcomers to the country are coming to Alberta – we had over 200,000 individuals come to Alberta last year; we are growing faster than we ever have at any time in our history – that the federal government is not partnering with us to be able to support our growth on an equal per capita basis. They're not funding housing in rural communities by and large. They are not funding Indigenous communities. The federal government is only signing deals with select communities, and that means many communities are left out regardless of their housing needs.

Our government is on the right track. That's the one thing that I wish the federal government would recognize. We're leading the country by having the fewest regulations and the fastest permit approval times to enable housing construction to increase the supply of homes. If you look at this, we have had nearly 10,000 housing starts year to date for 2024, which is remarkable because we are just beginning the construction season. We haven't even reached peak construction season yet, and that's an increase of a

third over last year. As well, together with our partners we're working to provide affordable housing for 25,000 more families by 2031, with an \$840 million investment over the next three years.

That is why strings attached to funding are problematic. The blanket zoning changes we're seeing are causing a massive push-back in Calgary at least. I'm not sure if it's having the same push-back in Edmonton. There are 40 members of the Federation of Calgary Communities that have written their opposition. There are lively and robust town halls taking place with hundreds of people turning out saying that in single-family communities they do not want apartment complexes being built on the site where a single-family home has been bulldozed. There has to be some recognition that people have chosen the kind of communities that they want to live in based on the commitment and understanding that municipal governments are responsible for setting zoning. No one ever anticipated the federal government would come in and dangle a few dollars and then they would end up having that commitment overturned and zoning rules unilaterally rewritten. Alberta has successful housing programs, and the federal government should partner with us to expand and enhance them, not create duplicative programs.

I do want to talk for a moment about postsecondary institutions, Mr. Speaker. Let's be frank. I don't know if it needs to be said or not, but it's my observation that at this current moment in time Ottawa's priorities are not Alberta's priorities. Alberta has been funding targeted enrolment expansion based on Alberta's labour market in order to ensure that industry and job creators have the skilled and professional workers that they need. We know with the Dow Chemical petrochemical facility. Whether it's Air Products, whether it's pipeline projects, we know that we need to have tens of thousands of skilled construction workers to be able to fuel that growth. We also need tens of thousands of skilled construction workers to be able to build the homes that we need.

Ottawa provides funding specifically in other areas that are not urgently needed in our workplaces and our economy. They specifically fund programs, initiatives, and research that furthers their ideology, and that ideology is often contrary to Alberta's interests. Let me just read into the record a couple of examples of that. I had already tabled this, Mr. Speaker, but I didn't have a chance to go through in detail talking about Professor Sylvain Charlebois, who is a senior director in the Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University. In this article he's an academic with such weight he's been quoted in publications ranging from the New York Times to the Economist . . .

So he is a senior voice in the field of agrifood economics.

Charlebois [has] said a major plank of the strategy by the Trudeau Liberals to convince the public of the rightness of the federal carbon tax is to fund academics and environmental groups, [and] then count on them to spread the government narrative.

His comment is this.

It appears the government has equipped itself with a mega-intellectual PR machine that supports a specific narrative . . . You do wonder why there is so much money poured into these institutions. What are we getting out of that? Are we getting a debate? Are we getting information? Are we getting good science? Or are we just getting research to support our current government's environmental policy path? That seems to be the case. It's all one-sided. Science is about debate. It's about looking at a policy from different angles. I don't see [any] angles here. I just see advocacy.

That is from Professor Charlebois.

3:20

What he has said is missing in the approach, and this is why we do not see the balance in this discussion.

There's no work on whether the tax has cut emissions . . . You'd think that would be pretty important.

In his own area, he worries about the multiplying impact of the carbon tax as it is charged not just at the grocery check-out, but at every step of growing, distributing and selling food. He also has concerns that the tax is making the food industry less competitive and might well drive away food processing and agribusiness . . . Part of the issue, Charlebois said, is there's a risk in speaking out against the carbon tax if you're an academic. "For decades the universities have hired like-minded people, so it's hard to believe that campuses can actually become neutral arbitrators on anything right now. If you're sort of leaning to becoming a pro-carbon tax expert or scholar, you'll fit right in. But if you dare contradict the overwhelming narrative supported by the federal government, you will be punished in one way or another.

He also points out:

To start, the argument that Canadian university professors tend to be left wing is supported by recent research out of the University of London in the U.K. It found 73 per cent of academics sampled from 40 top-ranked Canadian universities identified as left-wing.

That is what we're concerned about, Mr. Speaker: the federal government using its federal spending power in our areas of authority in order to circumvent the public debate, fund one-sided research, and not allow for a robust debate.

There's more. This is another article, and I'll table it tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. This is a "minority professor [who was] denied grants because he hires on merit: 'People are afraid to think.'" This is an article now from a few years ago, but he was an early critic of the federal government's approach.

An award-winning Canadian scientist said he has been refused two federal government grants for his research on the grounds of "lack of diversity" – even though he is originally from India and [he] has repeatedly suffered racism.

This is Professor Patanjali Kambhampati. He's a professor of chemistry in the department of Montreal's McGill University. What he said is that he feels he ended up running afoul of the arbitrators of who gets grants and who doesn't at the federal level. He dared to say "that he would hire on merit any research assistant who was qualified, regardless of their identity." That being said, as I mentioned before, he is from India.

Kambhampati said he didn't go public . . . when he lost the first grant, when it was rejected,

but decided to speak out . . . because the increasing use by the government of equity, diversity and inclusion, aka "EDI," provisions, as well as woke culture, are killing innovation, harming science and disrupting society.

"I believe this is an important stand to make. I will not be silenced anymore," [is what] he said.

An application from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada was turned down because, once again, he said that he would hire on the basis of merit. Federally funded national frontiers in research fund: again, grant application turned down because he said that he would hire on merit.

Kambhampati believes woke ideology, that is so prevalent on campus and has leached into government, is creating two major problems: self-censorship and a resistance to asking meaningful questions.

Here's what he says.

There's a lot of self-censoring. And certainly you see it among young people in university. So young people in the university self-censor a lot. Now they are afraid to talk. That's no way to advance our understanding of the world.

As a scientist, our job is to think about how nature works, ask questions, and find answers without prejudice. We cannot do that anymore. We cannot ask how humans work, and how science and nature work, because the woke are interfering with us and saying, "You can't ask those questions. You're a racist. You're a

sexist. You're a homophobe. You're a colonialist. You're a something." There's some way in which the woke are trying to get people (so they're) no longer asking meaningful questions . . .

Kambhampati said woke ideology had accelerated in the last [few] years.

Under the federal Liberals, I might add,

"And now it's the prevailing culture" but he believes "it's 90 per cent of the normal people against 10 per cent of the vocal minority that has shamed everyone into self-censorship."

That is what we are trying to correct, Mr. Speaker. That is the way in which the federal government uses its federal spending power to disrupt full, fair debate happening at our universities. Our academic institutions are vital for democracy. Having full, fair, robust, open debate on issues is vital for a common understanding. Having full, fair, robust research into science is essential for common understanding.

Also, I should add on this area that Ottawa has bypassed the province on various issues related to international students despite the province being actively at the table, and this is another part of the reason why we want to make sure that we are asserting our constitutional authority.

One other area: safe supply. In other provinces we have seen Ottawa spend hundreds of millions of dollars funding what they call safe supply. Now, of course, on our side, Mr. Speaker, we don't think that there's such a thing as a safe supply of heroin. We don't think there's a safe supply of crystal meth. We don't think there's such a thing as safe fentanyl. We're seeing growing evidence in the province that these pills prescribed by the federal government have become a bit of a currency for drugs like fentanyl.

There's an author, Adam Zivo, who has done some great work on this, looking at the way in which these prescriptions are being taken, essentially turned around immediately, sold on the street, so that the drug addict can get fentanyl. The pills are being driven down in cost, and they're showing up at junior highs and high schools and even at the border coming into Alberta. These programs are putting more highly addictive drugs on the street, making them more accessible to create new users. This is the kind of thing that we cannot allow the federal government to force through on their own, and if we don't stand in the way, that is exactly what they're going to do.

As I said, I also introduced into the tablings a column that had been written by Adam Zivo talking just about how devastating it's become in British Columbia now. Nurses are speaking out on the front line, talking about how now they are expected, in the name of harm reduction, to pour alcohol for their patients, to fill their crack and meth pipes, to give them pipes that they know that they are taking out onto the street and turning around and selling. They have been told that they are not allowed to confiscate weapons. They are not allowed to stop drug dealers from coming into the room, even seemingly not allowed to complain if they have to inhale second-hand crystal meth or fentanyl smoke.

In fact, a nurse who had recently had a baby was just told to stop breastfeeding when she got exposed to those toxic substances. It is creating a horrible environment for our hard-working nurses on the front line in British Columbia and is one of the things we absolutely will not see happen in Alberta. We welcome any nurses from other jurisdictions, who want to have a safe environment to operate in, to come to Alberta, knowing that we are not going to allow the federal government to dictate to us how we manage that vitally important issue of public health and addiction treatment.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Albertans know what their priorities are better than the federal Liberals and the federal Liberal-NDP coalition ever will. Unlike the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault, we believe that we should be investing in new and improved roads because they are a critical part of strategic infrastructure and economic corridors. We believe that Alberta

should be eligible for our fair funding for roads and infrastructure and housing and other priorities that matter to Albertans, and we're unwilling to cede our distinct areas of jurisdiction to the Liberal-NDP alliance in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Priorities Act will prevent the federal government from undermining Alberta's authority over matters within our constitutionally mandated jurisdiction. Our government believes in the principles of federalism, and we will be a good partner in Confederation. We always have been, and we always will be. But federalism only works if all parties respect the jurisdictional lines drawn up in the Constitution, and unfortunately we are not seeing much of that from the federal government these days. Ottawa does not and cannot understand what matters to Albertans like our provincial government does. How could they? They have a whole country to run and an agenda of their own, which often does not align with Alberta's interests or priorities.

Our government's primary focus is the well-being of our province, the communities within our borders, and the people who live within those communities. This legislation will enable us to ensure we are advancing Alberta's priorities, not Ottawa's priorities.

3:30

We believe that federal and provincial funding should be spent collaboratively on things that Albertans are asking for. This legislation will help ensure Albertans get their fair share and that it's spent on projects that will make a real difference in our province.

That's why I'm pleased to move second reading of the Provincial Priorities Act, Mr. Speaker. With that, I'll adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move second reading of Bill 16, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

Before I review the eighth red tape reduction bill that we've brought forward, I just want to take you back to 2019. I know that everybody on both sides of the House will remember what that felt like, to stand on the doorstep, Mr. Speaker, in April of 2019, when grown men would break down and cry because they lost a job and they didn't know if they were going to lose their house. The hair still goes up on the back of my neck when I tell that story because it's just heartbreaking to hear that, and that was because we had experienced 13 consecutive quarters of contraction in our economy. We were facing a jobs crisis as a result of the tax and spend policies of the previous administration.

Mr. Speaker, we campaigned on a platform of fiscal restraint. We said that we are going to cut corporate taxes, we're going to reduce red tape, and we're going to create a business-friendly environment, and we're going to attract investment, and we're going to end the jobs crisis, and that's exactly what we did. We lowered corporate taxes to the lowest in Canada, and we're cheaper than 44 U.S. states. Our corporate taxes put us in line with Louisiana and Texas.

And then we went after the red tape with a vengeance, Mr. Speaker. We said that we're going to cut red tape by 33 per cent. Well, I am proud to say that we implemented 700 initiatives to reduce red tape; 41 of those came directly from the public and 200 were from industry. In the course of doing this, we saved job creators \$2.75 billion.

But it wasn't just about the money we saved job creators. We made life better for Albertans. We created some convenience. I'm

just going to give you one example from my own ministry that was about creating convenience for Albertans and that was allowing them to register for personal registry services online from the comfort of their own home. It allowed them to do things in their space at their own pace, Mr. Speaker, and that created convenience for Albertans.

I am proud to say that after a little over four years on red tape reduction, Mr. Speaker, it's mission accomplished. We have cut 33 per cent of the red tape in this province. The CFIB has given us an A on the regulatory environment in this province, the highest grade in the country. They like what we're doing.

But it's not just the CFIB that likes what we're doing. Investment is coming to this province at unprecedented levels. I know that you know this. The Dow Chemical project, an \$11 billion net-zero ethane cracker, that's going to be 7,000 jobs during peak construction. Air Products, Mr. Speaker. Air Products is the world's biggest producer of hydrogen in the world, and they chose Alberta to build their first net-zero clean hydrogen facility. It's \$1.6 billion. It's going to be 2,000 jobs during peak construction, it's going to consume natural gas, and it's going to be up and running for 40 years, generating royalties and wealth for the province. Don't forget about the Heidelberg project, where they've managed to take a difficult to abate industry and turn that into net zero when it comes to concrete construction. And, of course, let's not forget the \$1 billion cloud computing that was announced in Calgary, or, one of my favourite ones, De Havilland. We're building airplanes in the province of Alberta; who thought that would happen? This is because we went after red tape with a vengeance.

Now I would like to talk about some of the work that's included in Bill 16, which is the eighth red tape bill that this government has brought forward. Bill 16 proposes changes to 12 pieces of legislation across 10 different ministries. Now, Mr. Speaker, as I go through these different pieces, you're going to notice some themes. You're going to notice it's about saving money. You're going to know that it's about being more efficient. You're going to notice that it's about making life better for Albertans, and that fits under the umbrella of compassionate conservatism, and I'm proud to say that.

Mr. Speaker, one of the fundamental themes that's common in this bill is finding ways to improve services by going digital whenever possible. For instance, the changes we're proposing to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act would increase access to justice, support time and cost savings for Albertans, improve enforcement of regulatory offences, and support an increase in digital justice services in the Alberta Court of Justice.

For example, one change, if approved, would allow for digital evidence and not just hard copy evidence to be accepted in court. This would speed up the trial process by increasing the speed of communication and allowing reliable digital records to be generated, submitted, and retained.

Through further modernization of services, Albertans would be able to interact through digital platforms with the court, helping to reduce or eliminate unnecessary trips to the courthouse. To clarify that: Albertans rarely need to appear in court to initially respond to a ticket. Amendments are being made to both the Provincial Offences Procedure Act as well as the Youth Justice Act. Whether held virtually or in person, all court proceedings will continue to be presided over by a justice or Justice of the Peace to ensure all matters are conducted in a fair and unbiased manner.

At this point I should also mention, Mr. Speaker, that options like mail, phone, and in-person appearances continue to be provided, ensuring those who cannot utilize digital services still have means to engage with the court.

Another justice-related amendment in this bill proposes to extend the limitation period, which provides the time frame for laying a

charge for a regulatory offence from six months to 12 months from the date that an alleged offence occurs. This would allow for more comprehensive investigations into serious and complex regulatory offences, supporting the proper administration of justice.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also contains amendments that would improve services that are related to the seizure of vehicles. The Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act protects victims injured by uninsured or unknown drivers by allowing the victims to sue for damages and receive compensation from the general revenue fund. An administrator appointed under the act receives applications and determines the amount to be paid to victims. The act was amended in 2022 to allow the administrator to delegate duties to program area staff, making administration of the motor vehicle accident claims program more efficient.

The same administrator also has duties under the vehicle seizure and removal regulation. Such duties would include receiving claim applications for reimbursement of the cost of seizing and storing impounded vehicles. What we're proposing is to further enhance efficiency by also allowing the administrator to also delegate powers and duties under two sections of the vehicle seizure and removal regulation. Such powers would include decisions regarding the persons entitled to costs and remaining monies from seized vehicles that have been sold. This change would ensure that Albertans making claims in respect to vehicles that have been seized would receive more timely decisions on any reimbursement that they are entitled to.

Mr. Speaker, another foundational theme in our red tape reduction bill is innovation. We're finding ways to help change or remove barriers to support innovation across the economy. In this bill we're proposing to make amendments to the Traffic Safety Act that would open new doors for innovation on Alberta's roads. If approved, these amendments would let us create short-term pilot projects to test transportation technologies in a safe, controlled, and reportable manner. This would be a flexible tool to test ideas or technologies that don't fit within existing rules and enable government to collect data to inform future policy decisions when the pilot project wraps up.

This approach has already been adopted in five other provinces as a way to test transportation innovation. For example, we could empower municipalities to let golf carts operate on select municipal roads. This isn't allowed under current laws, but if the amendment passes, something like this could be tested under terms and conditions that create a safe framework.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that much of our effort to reduce red tape helps kickstart innovation and support the economy but red tape reduction also helps Albertans in need.

3:40

We're proposing to amend the Income and Employment Supports Act to ensure individuals escaping family violence and living in a family violence shelter receive a more appropriate level of financial support, including considerations of family, ensuring that essential needs are being met. Harmonizing the level of supports for those in need across different facilities is a common-sense change that allows shelter operators and vulnerable Albertans to focus on well-being, not additional administration. In addition, eliminating separate program policies, processes, and rates for clients based on where they are living would simplify the administration of the program and reduce administrative burdens for shelter operators. Front-line staff, in particular, could spend more time delivering services rather than completing unnecessary paperwork.

Mr. Speaker, I was in my riding just the other day, and I was at a Jessica Martel event where we cut the ribbon on Eileen's Place, which provides secondary housing for victims of domestic violence. I was honoured when Jan Reimer came up to me and thanked me for the

work that our government did in reducing red tape for women’s shelters, again under that umbrella of compassionate conservatism and making life better for all Albertans.

A couple of weeks ago my colleague the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction announced our government’s intention to move forward with regulating counsellors under the College of Alberta Psychologists. To help make this happen, Bill 16 includes an amendment to repeal an unproclaimed section of the Mental Health Services Protection Act. This is an important step, one that will enable future work to help improve mental health care standards for Albertans, without creating additional red tape.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about some proposed changes in this bill that are coming from my department. The gaming and cannabis sectors generate significant economic activity in Alberta, and they create new jobs. As the cannabis and gaming industries continue to evolve in Alberta, we want to make it easier for them to do business while continuing to protect the health and safety of Albertans, particularly our youth. So in this bill we’re proposing to simplify employment requirements for new employees so cannabis retailers can hire staff more quickly. We also want to permit farm gate sales, where cannabis producers can sell directly to consumers on-site.

On the gaming side, we’re proposing a practical change that will make things less complicated for families staying at casino resorts that have hotels, restaurants, theatres, hockey rinks, and other nongaming facilities. Right now you cannot walk with your child through a casino even if it’s the shortest route between a hotel and the rink or the restaurant. Our amendment would allow children to walk through certain gaming spaces as long as they’re accompanied by an adult.

I’ll close today with some amendments that are in this bill that address how we’ll approach red tape reduction going forward at a government-wide level. Mr. Speaker, I may have said “mission accomplished” when it comes to reducing red tape, but that does not mean that the mission is over. Our work is just beginning. We worked hard to achieve a one-third reduction milestone, and we don’t want to take any steps backward on it. Our proposed amendments would further entrench red tape reduction policy into our legislation, making it a permanent cultural change. We would prohibit any net increases of regulatory requirements above our current benchmark. Ministries would work together to maintain this benchmark, and any new regulations brought in would have to be off-set by a reduction in others. The amendments we are proposing will continue to make life easier for Albertans as well as for businesses. In this spirit, I invite the support of the House on this bill.

I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:44 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Hunter	Sabir
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Ip	Sawhney
Boparai	Jean	Schmidt
Bouchard	Johnson	Shepherd
Chapman	Kasawski	Sinclair
Cyr	Loewen	Singh
Dach	Lovely	Stephan
Dreeshen	Loyola	Turton

Dyck	Lunty	van Dijken
Eggen	McDougall	Wiebe
Elmeligi	McIver	Williams
Fir	Metz	Wright, J.
Getson	Petrovic	Yao
Glubish	Renaud	Yaseen
Goehring	Rowswell	

4:00

Totals: For – 0 Against – 44

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the time of the motion the hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction was speaking. He has seven minutes remaining should he choose to do so.

Are there others? The hon. the Member for St. Albert has the call.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise and speak in second reading to Bill 16, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. I’m going to primarily focus my comments this afternoon on two sections, the first section on income and employment supports and the second section on mental health services protection.

I do want to agree with something the minister for red tape reduction said, that this is the eighth red tape reduction bill. It certainly is the eighth. You know, I have memories of the very first one, I believe, and that was in 2019, very soon after we were all elected and came to this place. That bill was chock full of things that the government told us were going to make life better for Albertans.

One of the first things that happened, Mr. Speaker, you’ll recall, is that assured income for the severely handicapped and income supports were deindexed, uncoupled from inflation, which, as we all know in this place, resulted in four years of people with disabilities, low-income Albertans receiving less money than they would have previously with indexed benefits. Now, that was significant as not too long after that, all of us entered into a really significant period of pandemic, when we saw all kinds of difficulty. Inflation was just out of control. Naturally, housing costs escalated. Food costs escalated. All of that time people with disabilities and low-income Albertans . . . [interjections] Don’t want to interrupt you over there. Low-income Albertans were struggling. It wasn’t until right before the election in 2023 that we saw those benefits reindexed.

You know, it’s a bit rich for me when I hear the minister talk about how his red tape reduction bills have made life better for Albertans, because they most certainly have not. Now, have they corrected errors or tweaked words or made a few changes to make some of the bureaucracy a little bit more manageable? Absolutely, that has happened. It’s unfortunate, though, all of the other pieces that get jammed into a bill. The minister talked a lot about how great these changes were. I would like to present another side of this argument for Albertans to consider because what you see is not always what you get. Just because the government says they’re making life better and that reducing red tape will make life better doesn’t mean it’s actually happening. Just like I’ve heard the government repeatedly say how transparent they are: we all know that’s not true.

The first thing I want to touch on is section 6(2)(b), on the Income and Employment Supports Act. Now, the change that is made in this piece of legislation is in fact going to help somewhat for people that are in really dire circumstances, find themselves in a shelter, particularly people finding themselves in a shelter with children. This does give them access to a little bit more resources. That is fair.

But, Mr. Speaker, what is most important is what this bill does not do. Some of the most acute problems in income support today are with some of the regulations that this government continues to honour. One of those things – well, let me back up a little bit. One of the things they did a couple of years ago, you might recall, is that they started to cut supplemental benefits to income support. As we know, income support core is under \$900 a month for people that qualify. That's for barriers for employment, so that tends to be Albertans with disabilities. They cut supplemental benefits for income support.

Now, supplemental benefits: one of them was for supplemental shelter. Now, that shelter allowance was about \$300 – I think it was, like, \$307 or something like that, but it was about \$300 that actually allowed people with disabilities, low-income Albertans to afford a place to live. I think we can all probably agree, no matter what side you're sitting on, that living on under \$900 a month is pretty much impossible if you need to pay rent. That's just reality.

What this government did was cut supplemental benefits but then did not cut any of the other regulations that keep people in poverty. Now, they made this one little tweak in here, throwing somebody a bone. They made one little tweak for people in shelters. What they did not do was remove some of the most regressive regulation that is as a result of the legislation.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, if you're a person, let's say – let's pretend that you're a person that needs income support, barriers for employment. That means that you have demonstrated that you are unable to find and maintain employment due to barriers. Very often those barriers are disabilities, the whole range of disabilities. But let's say your partner has a job, and they've determined that they're at that level, so they're not going to take back any money, right? They're allowed to earn a little bit. Let's say it's, like, \$2,000 a month; I'm just making that up. They would not remove any money until you start to go up. So you're the person on income support, actually, or AISH, for that matter. You're on this benefit. Your wife or husband or your partner gets a raise, gets a cost-of-living raise, and it goes up. Guess what happens. If you're over that threshold, it gets clawed back from the person with a disability or the low-income Albertan on income support and AISH. So, yup, there's a little nugget in this bill that gives people access to a little bit more money, but this government has failed to address the structural problems with income support and AISH.

The supplemental benefits have been cut, removed. Eligibility is more difficult. The clawbacks from spouses, from cohabitating partners continue to cause poverty. Do you know that there are couples that are on income support or AISH that will purposely choose not to live together because moving in together, living together, will cause them to have less income? That doesn't seem right.

It also causes a financial dependence. If you've got one person on AISH and their partner is working and that partner, you know, gets a raise, makes more money, that person's AISH will come down accordingly, so you are creating an imbalance within a partnership, within a marriage, within a cohabitating partnership. You are essentially saying to the person with a disability or that low-income person: you must be dependent on that other person. That does not bode well, Mr. Speaker, for reducing domestic violence. That does not bode well for equality and health and safety of Albertans, not one bit.

So when the minister for service Alberta crows about how much he's making life better, it's a teeny little nugget, and it's a huge problem. We have a huge problem with income support, a huge problem with AISH in terms of regulation, and this bill does zip, nothing.

Now I'm going to move on a little bit because the next one is even more serious. The next piece that I'd like to talk about is the Mental Health Services Protection Act. I'm looking at section 1(1) and (2). The Mental Health Services Protection Act goes on at length, as I'm sure all members will know as they've read this riveting piece of legislation. They will know that the biggest change that was made is that there will no longer be a college of counselling therapists, that they will be absorbed at some point into a different college. Now, why do I have a problem with that? You know, at the end of the day, there will still be oversight for counselling therapists. It's because it delays it again until 2025, so that means for yet another year there will be no oversight for counselling therapists.

Not just that, but with this structural change that this piece of legislation is making, there are two – they're not really divisions – sections of therapists, of counsellors that will be excluded. And I bet you can guess what they are: they're addictions counsellors and the children and youth counsellors. Now, that, to me, is alarming.

4:10

Why I might sound a little passionate about this is because this work started five years ago. I am blessed to represent the people of St. Albert, and one of those people is Nicole Imgrund. She's an incredible community leader, business owner, therapist herself. She's received a number of honorary awards from universities, but she's just incredible. The work she's done for the community of St. Albert is truly phenomenal. And she and her colleagues worked even about a decade before I met her and started supporting her work. Even a decade before that, all of these counselling therapists from all different sections got together and decided, "We want to make sure that when Albertans hire a therapist, they can be assured that they are hiring someone who is skilled enough to be a therapist," because we've all heard those nightmarish stories about, you know, the really nice church lady who hung up a shingle saying, "Yeah, I'm here to provide therapy," when really it's just a well-meaning person who maybe has done some reading or some research. That therapy – counselling therapists are incredibly skilled and educated. There's a lot going on that qualifies.

But the reason I wanted to really spend a bit of time is that I want to give you a little bit of the timeline. Now, this government, this UCP government, has sat on this. They have not proclaimed the piece of legislation that passed years ago. They sat on it and sat on it and sat on it and sat on it some more until they came up with this, threw them a bone, and said: "Yeah, we're going to absorb it into another college. We're going to leave out two huge sections, but we're going to absorb it."

Now, naturally, the counselling therapy group, the association, is pleased to work with any government. This is not a partisan issue. They're pleased to work with any government to make progress because more than anything they want oversight. More than anything they want to assure all Albertans that if they hire a therapist for whatever therapy they need, whether it is marriage therapy, whether it is addiction therapy, whether it is play therapy for their kids, whatever it is, they can rest assured that these are qualified people. They are trained, they have done the practicum work, they have signed a code of ethics. I encourage all members to go to the Association of Counselling Therapy of Alberta and look at their website. It is very good. It outlines what the code of ethics is. What does it mean to be a counselling therapist? What's involved? How do you become a counselling therapist? It is very clear.

But what this government has done is sit on it for years and then thrown them a bone and left pieces out. Makes you wonder why they left those specific pieces out, doesn't it? So I'm going to take . . .

An Hon. Member: Ew.

Ms Renaud: Yeah, it is ew. It absolutely is. It's not good when there's no oversight for more years than I care to even think about.

In 2018 legislation passed – and here's the key – unanimously. It passed unanimously. This was a New Democrat government, and it passed unanimously. So the legislation to regulate counselling professions passed unanimously in this place, and it was called the mental health professions act, and the college of counselling therapists started their work to form this college. Now, that was in 2018.

In 2019 the government drafted regulations. Now, of course, we all know that the regulations include the definition, the scope of practice, the jurisdictional review, reciprocity agreements, substantial equivalency process, and professional titles. Now, naturally, professional titles is a thing because I think that we all can agree that when you are looking for a therapist, you tend to look at the titles. Is this therapist a marriage therapist or an addiction therapist or a play therapist? Whatever it is, these are important things. So the regulation work was done, and then we had an election. Well, we know what happened there.

In 2021 in January, February the government completed the consultation and had widespread support. Now, this was a UCP government. In 2021 the government completed that consultation. It was robust. There was strong participation and support from all stakeholders. Naturally, in early June the final work towards proclamation was started. The government completed all final steps for regulation approval, and they were good to go in July of 2021. Surprise: by September of 2021 the government stalled proclamation. Lots of different reasons. One of those reasons: I think they quite rightly identified that there was lacking an Indigenous consultation.

That did happen, and I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-West Henday for being the extraordinary human being that he is and for supporting the work of the counselling therapists to ensure that that consultation was done properly. We got the consultation in 2023. That was December, and then somewhat into January Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 called on the government to proclaim the counselling therapists act. The Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta sent letters to the Minister of Health, Minister of Mental Health and Addiction calling for that proclamation.

Guess what happened. Guess what happened. I have the press release. We saw the release on March 1, 2024. It wasn't very clear about what they were doing. They really did not outline that – sure, they believed that it was an important thing to do. Sure, they were taking some steps to provide some oversight. What they failed to tell Albertans was that they took out two very significant pieces that we know must have oversight, and those were addiction counselling, and the other one, of course, was working with children and youth. That was not good. That was not good at all.

What we know, Mr. Speaker, is that there was – I think everybody suspected that there was something else going on, why they were slow walking these and throwing out reasons why they couldn't get it done for years. For years they did that, and now they're trying to tell us, with a piece of red tape reduction, that they're making life better for Alberta because they're shoving it into another college, but they're leaving some important pieces out. But, hey, look at us; we did something. That's insufficient. That is not good enough.

Again, I encourage all members or anybody watching debate to go to their site. It's called the Association of Counselling Therapy of Alberta. They're very clear. You will notice right away that it is nonpartisan. It does not favour any government, and it is very clear about what the focus of their work is. The focus is not supporting a government. The focus is not trashing a government. The focus is getting the work done, getting that college built so all of the

important work that follows can happen. That has not happened. Even this piece of legislation pushes all of that into 2025. We started this work many years ago, and here we are in 2024, and it's still not happening in this year.

Now, it seems to be that with a government that intends to turn addiction and recovery services on its head and make significant changes and significant investments, oversight for addiction counsellors would be important. Certainly, therapists that work with children and youth would be important, but clearly they were not important enough. This government took them out, and Albertans need to ask themselves why. Why did they pull those out? Is it because they have some kind of ideological bent on what that kind of therapy looks like? I certainly hope not, Mr. Speaker, because that would be alarming.

You know, I encourage people to go to their website. For the government, if you're thinking about not going, you really should because you'd probably find some material there. They are literally explaining to Albertans how they're going to work with you even though you prefer not to do what is necessary or not to do what you agreed to, because you did agree to that. You agreed to all of it. You said that you could not proceed because there was not Indigenous consultation. That piece got done, so they had to resort to another trick. What this bill does is another trick.

I want to tell you a little bit about why – and people say: you know, why is it so important to have another college in the Health Professions Act? What does that mean? Why is it important? We already know that counselling therapists provide critical mental health. I think all of us in this place can agree that we have some significant problems in Alberta. Actually, we have problems right across the country, but we have significant mental health deficits and needs in Alberta, from our school-age children to adults. I know people with disabilities, people living in poverty – very often, I mean, it's something they just can't afford, but there are a lot of mental health needs. Counselling therapists are meeting a real need.

4:20

Now, there's another reason, actually, that creating a college of counselling therapists was helpful. There are economic reasons. If you don't like the reasons around, you know, the appropriateness of therapy or removing the ideology out of therapy, maybe think about economic reasons. For example, most third-party insurance providers, even employer benefits like the ones we have and noninsured health benefits for First Nations or Inuit communities, will only cover regulated professions. Did you know that? Counselling therapists need to be regulated for people to access their benefits. If you are fortunate enough, like we all are in this place – we have access to supports so that we can actually see a therapist. When it's time to do so, we have those benefits. But other Albertans have these benefits, and they will not be able to have their therapists covered.

There are a lot of – actually, I'm going to skip over that piece.

Now, I cannot emphasize this enough. The group of counselling therapists, the working group that has done this work, has been at this for – I'm not sure exactly the number of years, but I am guessing it's going on two decades. They're not doing this work because it's fun. They don't do this work and give up their weekends to have meetings on Saturdays, to work with other sectors of the counselling profession, to hammer out codes of ethics, or to talk about what this piece would look like or “How would we deal with this?” or “What would the consequences look like?” for fun. They do it because they believe in the work that they're doing, and they understand the importance.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen to speak.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 16, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment

Act, 2024. Just like the title is long, there's a long list of ministries that are impacted under this piece of legislation. For starters, it was moved by the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction. Then we also have Mental Health and Addiction; Health; Seniors, Community and Social Services; Municipal Affairs; Justice; Environment and Protected Areas; transportation; Affordability and Utilities. In the House we often refer to this as omnibus legislation. We're looking at a piece of legislation that is quite thick.

There are also many acts within this bill that are being impacted. There's the Alberta Investment Attraction Act; the Commercial Tenancies Protection Act; Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act; Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Act; Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2); Income and Employment Supports Act; the Libraries Act; the Mental Health Services Protection Act; the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act; Provincial Offences Procedure Act; Public Lands Act; Red Tape Reduction Act; Rural Electrification Loan Act; Surface Rights Act; Traffic Safety Act; and the Youth Justice Act.

In the limited time that I have to speak today, I have a comment to start my speaking. The minister got up a few minutes ago and spoke about how excited he is that their government has done all of this legislation to reduce red tape. Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this act that we're talking about today in the House is fixing some of the mistakes that the previous government made under red tape. They made some mistakes, and now they're fixing them. I don't see how that's a win. It's fixing their own errors.

The other piece of this legislation that I find interesting is that the bill would double the length of the Red Tape Reduction Act by increasing it from 480 words to 849 words and then add, not reduce, 17 new regulatory requirements. You know, the definition of "reduction" is less, and this act itself is creating more. Any time I've gotten up in this Legislature to talk about the red tape reduction ministry – it's a ministry that doesn't seem to do what it's intended to do, and just that information alone would support that.

One of the things that I think is hidden within all of this legislation, this omnibus, is something that's really concerning, and it's regarding the Mental Health Services Protection Act. My background is social work; I've talked about that at length in this House. I've had the pleasure of working with countless professionals in very, very diverse backgrounds, from counselling to medical to varieties of expertise. When we look at this legislation, it's really, really concerning that they're not legislating two of the major professions that impact Albertans, and that's addictions and youth. I think that a child and youth care counsellor and an addiction counsellor: in the title it sounds very, very impressive. A family that isn't involved with professionals perhaps might just look at a search engine and put in "addiction counsellor" or "child and youth counsellor," and a whole plethora of resources and supports would come up.

The frightening thing is that those two categories of counsellors are not regulated. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that a good-intended individual who's looking for supports for their child or for themselves with addictions could get someone who has zero oversight on them. They can identify themselves as an addiction counsellor, and the damage that could be done by those individuals to someone who is looking for help is frightening.

Mr. Speaker, in this House I had the incredible privilege to bring forward a private member's bill. It was the PTSD Awareness Day Act, June 21. Through that consultation I met with countless professions and individuals impacted by PTSD. Addiction sometimes is part of that. When you're looking for help and you want to reach out and get services to better yourself, you would assume, with such a professional-sounding title, that you're going to get the services that you need.

Now, the hon. Member for St. Albert had mentioned something that's quite significant. When it comes to billing in the province, you have to be an accredited, approved provider. What the average person doesn't know is that unless you ask, "Are you billable? Can I claim this through my insurance?" people with addictions counsellors and child and youth care counsellors probably don't fit that. So if you're walking in, you're on a fixed income, and you have good intentions to meet with someone, you do your session, they can charge whatever they want because, again, they're not regulated. And then it's out of pocket. If the individual doesn't understand the credentials and regulations that are required for these counsellors, unfortunately, they're going to have not only a bill but potentially damaging information.

When you're reaching out to talk to a counsellor, I think it is a huge first step for so many. If it becomes an impairment because you have benefits but your provider doesn't cover this person, you could mistakenly think that you're not provided care for counselling, which is inaccurate. You're not provided coverage for someone who's not regulated. It's concerning because when someone is at the place in their life where they want to reach out for an addiction counsellor, I would hate to see the barriers that are potentially in place when it comes to cost and the type of counselling that they're receiving.

When I look at this piece of legislation and all of the acts and all of the ministries that are impacted, this is really, really concerning. It's embedded in there, and quite frankly it might get overlooked, Mr. Speaker. I think that this government really needs to look at the information that's being provided to tell them that they need to redo this.

4:30

We have ACTA, which is the Association of Counselling Therapy, we have CAP also saying that they haven't been consulted on this, and they're the two governing bodies that oversee mental health and addictions and therapists in the province of Alberta. The fact that they haven't been consulted tells me that they're just throwing this act into this omnibus legislation without doing any real work, and that's concerning.

For now, Mr. Speaker, I will just leave it with: I hope the government is actually going to do some meaningful work on this and talk to those individuals.

I will cede my time, and I will adjourn debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 13 Real Property Governance Act

[Debate adjourned April 16]

The Acting Speaker: Any speakers wanting to speak to Bill 13? The Member for Edmonton-South West has risen to speak.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 13. In this case I will certainly oppose it because this bill on so many fronts is troubling. The government often talks about red tape reduction, but when I look at this bill, there's a bit of irony here because Bill 13, in fact, creates more red tape rather than less, and with the recent actions that we've seen in this House, whether it's Bill 13 or Bill 18, this government is increasing more red tape, not less.

At the end of the day, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the government really wants control, wants two things, to control whatever it is and to stick it to Ottawa and the Trudeau government

at every opportunity, not to help everyday Albertans. I think that's where this government is missing the plot.

We're not seeing in this House legislation to address the housing crisis or the affordability crisis. We're not seeing legislation to address skyrocketing utility costs. This government did not continue to suspend the gas tax. So everyday Albertans are seeing that their pocketbooks are hit every day.

Mr. Speaker, this is a short-sighted approach because poorly thought-out legislation, designed solely to make a political point, always has unintended consequences. Really, when you look at Bill 13 and so many bills, actually, this government has proposed, most of them are designed to do nothing but to make a political point.

Often the substance is quite vacuous, Mr. Speaker, and under this government we are seeing deliberate action to undermine civil society organizations and everyday, hard-working Albertans by undermining their duly elected representatives and dismantling public institutions and ultimately undermining the public's confidence in our democratic institutions. That is particularly pernicious and troubling.

While on the surface, Mr. Speaker, this bill is about consolidating public lands, which sounds, I suppose, harmless enough, it grants the minister broad powers to override the will of democratically elected school boards. You know, having been a former school board trustee, I can certainly tell you that that will hamper, effectively hamper, the school authorities' and school boards' ability to plan long term.

Let me just set the context. I mean, week after week on this side of the House we have been holding ministers accountable, asking them questions about why there isn't enough funding, particularly for new builds, not just in my riding of Edmonton-South West but, frankly, across the province, particularly in urban centres and new and growing neighborhoods, where we're seeing unprecedented growth.

We've seen tens of thousands of Albertans move into Alberta in just the last year alone. And while the government likes to tout their success of the Alberta Is Calling campaign, the reality is that Alberta certainly is calling, but there may not be schools or hospitals or supports for you when you get here. That's shameful, Mr. Speaker.

The role of government is to ensure that we all have the ability to flourish as Albertans, that we all have the opportunity to live the best life possible, and in order for that to happen, we need well-funded public schools. We need to be able to receive hospital care and health care, both preventative and emergent, whenever it is that we need it. We need to be able to have the services and supports across the entire lifespan, whether you are an Albertan who's between the ages of zero to 5 or whether you are in your later senior years. We need those protections and those supports in place. That is the role of government. The role of government is to facilitate the best possible living for each one of us, and this is where I think the government and my colleagues across the aisle have frankly missed the point.

I am going to focus a little bit on Bill 13's impact on school boards and why it is so particularly concerning. Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that we are facing unprecedented growth, and let me just give you perhaps some anecdotes to illustrate that point. Edmonton – Edmonton public, specifically, not including the Edmonton Catholic school board – will need 50 new schools to open their doors in the next decade in order to meet the growing number of students enrolling. Imagine that: 50, five zero, schools in the next decade, the next 10 years, to be able to meet the demand of students coming into our system.

How many have been fully funded this year in the budget? I can say one. One has received full funding in the Edmonton public capital plan, and that simply isn't enough. And while this government prides itself on creating different stages of funding, the reality is that that's

all smoke and mirrors. A school will not be built unless it receives full funding. Just keep that in mind. Calgary public alone has seen growth of over 7,000 students in the past year. Those are just some examples of the unprecedented growth that we're seeing.

In fact, the city of Edmonton has not seen these levels of growth since the early 1960s. This is truly a generational issue. This is not sort of a run-of-the-mill, you know, school-boards-like-to-complain kind of thing. This very much is a generational issue, an unprecedented challenge that we need decisive action on, and we're not seeing that from the government.

When it comes to infrastructure planning, as a former school board trustee and a one-time chair of the Infrastructure Committee I can certainly tell you that school divisions do their level best to ensure that they have accurate projections, to ensure that they plan far into the future with respect to their infrastructure needs.

As many of my colleagues in the House will know, school divisions are required to submit a three-year capital plan to Alberta Infrastructure and to the Minister of Education and I believe the Minister of Infrastructure as well, and in that three-year capital plan all of the priorities that are needed in year 1, year 2, and year 3, both in terms of new construction as well as modernizations or upgrading of existing infrastructure, are included in there.

School board departments work very, very hard. You know, I certainly want to recognize the amazing infrastructure department at Edmonton public schools. When I was there, I was always very, very, very impressed with the level of professionalism and expertise. School divisions come up with very comprehensive, robust plans that project what is needed over time.

4:40

The challenge isn't actually in the capital plan itself. Let me just point out that the capital plan is required by Alberta Infrastructure as well as the ministry. It is not optional. School boards certainly take that piece of that documentation very seriously. When I was on the school board, we often saw that as an opportunity to advocate for our needs. So the problem isn't actually in the capital plan or in what school divisions are doing. The problem is that this government is not providing adequate funding to meet the needs of students, to meet the needs of growth that's coming into our province.

What Bill 13 then also does is inject unnecessary uncertainty into this process. If you can imagine that all of a sudden the minister, for no rhyme or reason, is able to interject him or herself into the capital planning process and say, "I'm going to take this piece of municipal reserve land that's intended for education and for school infrastructure and decide to redesignate it as something else," that kind of uncertainty makes long-term planning incredibly difficult.

I can tell you that when school divisions look at their infrastructure planning, they look at planning – certainly, in terms of Edmonton public's perspective I recall that they would look at planning for the next 10 years, and they would look at all of their different assets as well as their school sites that are available to them. Any uncertainty that is now sort of introduced into this process will impact their ability to look at how they might plan over the next decade, and therefore it's going to make it much more difficult to submit a capital plan that is up to date, that has integrity.

Mr. Speaker, as I think about Bill 13, there really is no purpose for creating such a bill other than to assert control. I think that what a lot of education advocates are worried about is asserting control so that more lands can be given over to private schools, to charter schools, to other schools in which not all students necessarily have access. I think that is particularly troubling, and that is what makes this bill particularly pernicious.

I often talk about in this House, as I've said before, that we're all here because we wanted to serve Albertans. We're all here – many

of us in this House, on both sides of the House, have overcome various obstacles to earn the honour, in many ways, of representing our constituents. In my maiden speech I recall, Mr. Speaker, talking about the fantastic public education that I had received and recounting my own childhood. I would not be here if it weren't for the supports not only in my community but also the public supports that I received by way of education in order to be the person that I am today.

I believe sincerely that every single one of us wants the best for Albertans, regardless of where you sit in this House. I sincerely believe that we all want the next generation of Albertans to have it better than the way that we have it, and we want them to inherit a better Alberta. But what is being missed is that in order for that to happen, we need a strong public education system, and when I say public, I mean publicly funded, so that means Catholic schools and francophone schools as well. What we're seeing is an active undermining of publicly funded education by the proliferation of charter and private schools, Mr. Speaker, and that is incredibly troubling. Early in my career I actually did some work in Washington, DC, and New York City and was able to live in other jurisdictions, and I became acquainted with their public school systems. Early on I was once a young intern in Washington DC, working for the National Network for Youth, advocating for runaway and homeless youth, and I was able to actually visit some of the public schools both in Washington, DC, and later on when I went to school in New York City.

I can say to you that, truly, the great equalizer – and perhaps this sounds cliché, but there is a universal truth – is public education. Well-funded, strong education is the great equalizer. It gives folks regardless of background, gives children regardless of background an opportunity to thrive and to succeed. That's why I was particularly disheartened to see this government cut program unit funding that provides such critical supports to children between the ages of zero and five. We know that children between the ages of zero and five are in fact reaching their most important developmental milestones.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this piece of legislation this afternoon, Bill 13, Real Property Governance Act. Of course, any bill that comes before this House that has the two words "real property" and governance in it gets my attention right away, having an interest in conveyance of land for many years as a realtor. Some of the points touched upon by my colleague from Edmonton-South West are going to be, I would say, echoed by me in some ways, but I'm going to come at it from a couple of different angles.

I know that when I'm looking at legislation that appears itself to be somewhat benign, I always look for the malignant part. I know I always try to apply what I call the PET scan test. You inject the radioactive isotopes into the legislation, and you see what starts to glow, Mr. Speaker, and the diseased flesh of the legislation glows once those isotopes do their work. I see a couple of instances in this legislation where there is a tumour that is quite concerning, and I'll get to it pretty soon.

The major piece of it is something that jumped out at me right away from a real estate standpoint, Mr. Speaker, because in the legislation it, of course, talks to the requirement of an entity to dispose of its property not to the market itself but that it must relinquish it to the Crown, to the province when it's no longer used or in surplus. That in and of itself is problematic because I don't really see in the legislation a comprehensive definition of what this

word "surplus" actually is or what "no longer being used" might actually be.

If indeed the province has its eye set on a piece of property, probably held in freehold title rather than leasehold title, it seems to me that this legislation would allow the province to basically dictate to the entity that holds it, saying: "This is surplus. Like, you've been sitting on this land for a long time. It's been designated a piece of school property or designated for school purposes under the area structure plan, but it's been 15 years. You haven't built a school there. It's surplus." But that actually isn't defined, as far as I can tell, in the act, Mr. Speaker.

That's problematic in and of itself in that you'll possibly be having entities such as school boards going to court, fighting over whether a property is actually surplus to its needs or not. I'd like to have much more clarity around that issue as to who actually defines or declares something as surplus when it comes to a piece of land held by a provincial entity described under the act.

If, indeed, Mr. Speaker, that issue is clarified and the government itself accepts, say for example, that an entity has declared a piece of land surplus to its uses, to its needs – the bill as it's written now says that for a piece of land, when real property is no longer used or determined to be surplus, the minister must be informed and then the entity must – not should or could but must – transfer it to the Department of Infrastructure at net book value.

4:50

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is a piece of cancer in the bill. If indeed you look at the definition of net book value, it really begs a number of different questions. Net book value, in common definition, is a calculation you obtain by subtracting accumulated depreciation from the original purchase price. Now, that's the catch, because a lot of these pieces of land that municipalities will hold or school boards will hold or other entities that are deemed provincial entities will hold will have been on their books and in their portfolio for sometimes decades.

If you're forced as an entity to offer to transfer it to the Department of Infrastructure at net book value, meaning you subtract the accumulated depreciation from the original purchase price, that could have been a purchase price from 1912. What are we talking about here in terms of actual valuation of the property that must be now sold or transferred to the Crown at this ridiculous, at least seemingly ridiculous, method of calculating the value? If indeed this is the way the government wants to go, why could the entity not be talking about transferring it at actual current market value? Now, that may or may not be a good value.

Furthermore, why can the entity not be permitted under the legislation to actually negotiate what they consider to be a fair transfer value of the land currently? No; we have a very, very rigid definition, Mr. Speaker, that the entity has to transfer the property once it's determined surplus to the Crown and offer to transfer it to the Department of Infrastructure at net book value, which could be a value that is way, way less than the current value of the property.

I'm not sure what to call this kind of transaction in business terms, Mr. Speaker, but in layman's terms many might describe it as robbery. When you're looking at what value the province is asking the entity to transfer this land, they may be receiving lands that may be much more valuable than they're having to credit the entity for them. There's a significant injustice there. I would hope that the government will take pause and take a look at this valuation of land and realize that there's an injustice in it.

The provincial government likes to rail against inequities and injustices that are thrust upon them by the federal government. Well, this is a huge injustice if I'm reading things correctly, Mr. Speaker, on the entities which hold these lands, which end up being

declared surplus and then, if this legislation passes, must be transferred to the Crown using this calculation of net book value, this formula that is inherently unfair because it stipulates a very arbitrary value that must be used by the entity to transfer that land, when in fact it could be millions and millions of dollars less than the actual land value.

I'd like to have this House really deliberate on that and spend the appropriate amount of time so that we clearly understand what the legislation will mean for an entity that is forced to transfer land and how much of a loss they're being forced to undertake in doing this forced transfer. How much of a robbery is it? Is it something where you could say that the entity could have been planning to capture that value at some point and now their whole future plans have changed because the millions of dollars that they anticipated realizing from the future sale of that land are somehow disappearing because they have to transfer it to the province at a value that's well below current market value?

I think that whether you're a hospital board which has land, a school board, any public entity described by this bill that actually holds real property which may end up being determined to be underutilized or not used or surplus and being forced to transfer it using a formula dictated by this legislation, which is transferring it to the Department of Infrastructure at net book value, it is a wholly unjust calculation.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that we need to spend a lot more time listening to those directly affected by this legislation and determining if indeed they have the same concerns that I do about the definition, first of all, of surplus and the definition of no longer being used as well as the requirement that the entity transfer that land at net book value to the Department of Infrastructure and if the forced transaction is indeed demanded and dictated.

Furthermore, the department will make the determination if the property is repurposed or disposed of, sold, by the minister. What size of cash cow could this be that the province is looking at if indeed they're taking unto themselves, Mr. Speaker, the power to force an entity to sell land at a ridiculously low price compared to current market value and then also give themselves the opportunity in the legislation to repurpose or sell it themselves? The minister will have the power to determine that.

The minister may also under the bill transfer the property to another department or consolidated entity, so wide powers of disposal are granted to the minister under this piece of legislation.

Basically, what they're doing is granting huge powers of expropriation in the first place. Normally under an expropriation act and a measure of expropriation there is a sense of fairness and balance in that the Expropriation Act dictates that fair market value must be paid in order to compensate the owner when land is expropriated for public purposes. But, in this case, we have sort of an internal expropriation that's taking place, where the public entity that owns the land, has title to the land, is being forced to transfer it to the Crown through to the Minister of Infrastructure at a value that may be nowhere near what its actual value is.

I really want to make sure I drive that point home, Mr. Speaker, and have not only members of this Legislature but the wider community and, I hope, the entities that do hold this type of land which might be declared surplus actually be able to and without fear of repercussion from this government raise their voices and declare their concerns and show the injustice of this measure in the legislation. That is something that I wish to convey to the public, to put them on notice, that this is a piece of the bill that is a malignant tumour that needs to be excised.

Thank you, and I'd wish to now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

[Adjourned debate April 16: Mr. Williams]

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction has 14 minutes left to speak if he so wishes.

If not, are there any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely astounding that I would have to rise in this House and oppose a piece of legislation that should have existed a long time ago, not because it's not needed but because this government has failed so miserably to incorporate anything that will protect seniors entering into life leases in its current draft.

5:00

I'd like to begin by reading the following quote from the Alberta Life Lease Protection Society, who were, quote, "shocked and dismayed that the government has chosen to put the needs of operators ahead of Alberta's vulnerable seniors. ALLPS were clear with the minister that had the life lease legislation been in place years ago with the explicit requirement for all seniors' money held in trust, none of the horrors being experienced today by Alberta seniors who have lost their life savings would have occurred. We informed the minister that the government moving forward with legislation that does not ensure that seniors' investments will be secured in trust is inexcusable." End quote. This was tabled with this Chamber, and I'd urge the members opposite to have a glance at this piece of correspondence before voting on this incomplete piece of legislation.

It is quite shocking to know that the seniors in our community have not had legal protections from unscrupulous corporations that knowingly used and abused elders in our community. What is almost worse: despite this legislation, there will still be some seniors and the estates of some late Albertans that will not see any finality under this piece of legislation as it is presently drafted. Seniors, or elders, as I've been affectionately raised to reference them, have been pillars in our community. They raised us and our province up to what we enjoy today, and for corporations to have taken such advantage of them is unconscionable.

Mr. Speaker, we are in a position now where we must make those elders whole and ensure that the unjust enrichment of predatory corporations is corrected. This government has that power. What does this mean in layperson terms? Well, it means that there is an obligation to right the wrongs that have been done against some of our elders. Otherwise, these predatory corporations are receiving an outstanding benefit for swindling vulnerable seniors out of their hard-earned money, oftentimes their only life savings.

There is presently \$55 million that remains outstanding to seniors or their estates who have been taken advantage of by just one of these corporations, Christenson Developments. That includes seniors themselves but also the estates of some of our late elders, who left knowing that a corporation had taken their hard-earned money, the last of their life savings. This does not take into account the \$146 million that remains outstanding today by Christenson to those seniors living with life leases in their properties. Mr. Speaker, this is a lot of money that many of our seniors and their families are legally owed and a lot of money that was the life savings that is left in limbo because of unscrupulous corporations like Christenson Developments. These are monies that seniors had vested in their worldly possessions, oftentimes in their own matrimonial homes or primary residences.

This is unconscionable, that we sit here and the members opposite laud that we are an attractive province for people to work here. But we certainly do not want Albertans to stay here. The message in this whole debacle is that you matter to this province only if we can take your money and run. This is shameful.

The regulations that can be developed under the current draft do not go far enough, Mr. Speaker. They just don't. The proposed amendments do not capture the fullness of the gaps that exist within these life leases, and the requirements highlighted in the amendment of section 41.3(1), life leases as contracts, on their own leave a lot to be desired. In fact, under these proposed amendments I would never want any other senior to enter into this type of arrangement ever again, but alas not many have the option to choose otherwise, so it is this Chamber's responsibility to protect Albertans from these terrible situations.

Where does that leave seniors in our community? Well, Mr. Speaker, that leaves them to choose between the volatile rental market, where Albertans are also struggling, or perhaps they could turn to affordable housing stock. Oh, wait. This government is not moving that along either. So, then, where can seniors turn? Well, it looks like this government's plan is for those seniors to move in with their kids. In an interesting turn of events, mom and pop are moving in with Elizabeth and Becky because this government refuses to help Albertans out when it comes to life leases. It's truly sad that this is the reality that Albertans are faced with after spending their entire lives and careers building up this province, only to be taken advantage of by corporations and to be left forgotten by their government. It is truly a shame that we are allowing this to happen to elders in our community.

What does that say of the corporations taking care of Albertans during times of an affordability crisis, especially when it comes to the debate around how beneficial they are for Albertans in the current rental market? Clearly, corporations cannot be trusted to do the bare minimum, to not take advantage of Albertans who have worked hard to make this amazing province what it is today.

I would also like to discuss how this bill does not go far enough with respect to protecting the rights of elders going into these facilities. In particular, we must address the fact that although this bill is long overdue, it does not capture the needs of seniors in these facilities and within these arrangements, give them rights similar to tenants or condo owners in this province; this is despite what most of those seniors have come to believe they are living in in these types of arrangements, until they run into an issue where these life lease operators have failed miserably to actually help out these lessees and the seniors come to realize they have no rights in their own home.

Further, there is nothing in this bill that includes the ability to transfer their lease nor certainty as to what happens to the current life lease holders who remain entirely slighted by this government and this bad piece of legislation. An easy fix for this is by permitting registration of seniors' interests in the property so that there would be transfers of their interest to either their spouse or their families, because as it presently sits, the developer is the only one listed as having fee simple interest in the property.

All that this bill does is create a rubric for contracts, and it does not include mandatory trust obligations and securities developments. Instead, these items "may" be put into regulations after this bill is passed. Mr. Speaker, I can already hear the protesters that will be on the steps of this Legislature in a few months because those regulations are not mandatory for life leases based on the current drafting of this bill. This is incredibly concerning because these are the very matters which the corporations that have taken advantage of our elders should have already been required to establish.

What it does not do is put those who have been taken advantage of whole again. The UCP's beliefs that the corporations will always look out for the best interests of individuals is so obviously demonstrative of how appropriate this belief is in just how unscrupulous corporations have treated the very people that helped build this province. Corporations do not prioritize Albertans; they prioritize profits and their bottom line. [interjection]

It also still leaves out items which life lease holders have been asking for – and I hear the members opposite laughing. It's sad that they don't also prioritize Albertans.

This also includes certainty for how these arrangements will be moving forward for seniors that may want to enter into these arrangements, but if I'm going to be frank, Mr. Speaker, I do not see how this current legislation as presently drafted will persuade or encourage any seniors to enter into these arrangements moving forward because it lacks many of the rights that they could have entering into a tenancy or purchasing a condo. Then again, this government is also letting rent rise without any credible assistance for that class of Albertans, but I digress; I already spoke to this earlier this week in this Chamber.

Further, there is nothing in this bill that relates to potential defaults by developers, so in effect when a developer is unable to complete a project, those seniors who have made initial payments are then left without a good chunk of their life savings that they have squirrelled away their entire career and have no recourse to get any of this money back.

Mr. Speaker, I often get reminded when I'm out at community events that seniors or elders often feel forgotten by their government. These are the individuals that often show up to the polling places and have the wherewithal to be politically engaged because they know the importance of our democracy and that our rights are never guaranteed, but they are also the first to remind me that this is fact, not fiction. They are often forgotten because the rights of seniors do not score political points, like this government tries to do by, quote, owning the libs, end quote, so they can post it on their social media accounts, but this does not mean that we must forget that they deserve a strong advocate in the Legislature or in our communities. It was such an honour to see so many advocates in the gallery a few weeks ago to bring these messages forward to this government to ensure that they will not be ignored. On this side of the House we will continue raising their concerns while this government dismisses their calls to action.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, as I often do, I want to close by elevating the actual lived concerns of Albertans, including Sandra, who wrote to me the week after the UCP introduced this poorly drafted piece of legislation.

The News on Friday indicating the UCP Government has tabled legislation; Bill 12 to protect Albertans from this kind of fraudulent abuse of Senior Albertans' initially gave me hope. As I read the proposal I am disgusted to see that it pays only lip service to actually providing any real protection to Alberta Seniors.

And then just today wrote me again, with some very helpful advice to the province, should they choose to bother listening to Albertans.

The Province however holds great power to persuade. The Provincial grant programs, subsidized extended care funding, yesterday's announcement of inflation operating cost subsidies are only a few avenues the Province could withhold these dollars from operators in poor standing in an effort to apply pressure to return funds to life lease holder[s] who have left their leased properties.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear this legislation falls so very short on doing what it is supposed to do. It does nothing to provide real relief to Albertans and the families of late elders who deserve to be treated

so much better than this government has allowed to happen for far too long. We have an obligation to ensure no Albertan is taken advantage of by unscrupulous corporations, and this extends to life leases but, certainly, all housing in this province. This government must do better for those who have helped to build our province. It is deplorable that seniors cannot get their money back; we need to work hard to make sure this does not happen again: these are the words the minister sponsoring this bill rose and spoke today. If it is, in fact, deplorable, go back to the drawing board, implement changes like the excellent ones proposed by my constituent Sandra, and make those seniors whole again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre to speak.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 12, the Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024. You know, I get the opportunity to speak with a lot of different community organizations. Indeed, I get invited to go to a lot of cultural celebrations with a number of different African and Caribbean communities given my own Caribbean heritage and my role as a member of this Legislature of African descent. When I get those opportunities, I like to try to learn a little bit in advance, to show my support for those communities by learning a few words in their language, learning a bit of their history, and oftentimes I'll do a little research to look for some interesting proverbs that they might have.

A few years back I was invited to an event with the Somali community, and I took some time to sort of take a look at some Somali proverbs. I found one that stood out to me, that I found interesting. It's [Remarks in Somali] It's probably a very bad mispronunciation, but what it means, Mr. Speaker, is either be visible or be absent. What they mean by that is that if you're going to do it, either do a job well or don't do that job at all. If you're going to show up, make it count. That's something I try to keep in mind in my work as a legislator and, indeed, in a lot of areas of my life. If you're going to do a job, you may as well do that job well.

Now, when we look at Bill 12, as a number of my colleagues have noted, there are real questions about how well the minister of service Alberta has done his job in terms of standing up for and looking out for Albertans when it comes to life leases in this province. Really, Mr. Speaker, what was the minister's job? Well, I think there were a couple of things that folks that are dealing with life lease situations and certainly their families, their loved ones were looking for the minister to do.

The first one: well, of course, for the minister to develop regulations for life lease agreements because Alberta did not have any, which is what has landed us in the position where we are now, where, unfortunately, we have many seniors who, in their golden years of their life, have invested significant amounts of their life savings in what they thought was going to be protection for themselves, a place for them to live in their golden years, with a promise that those funds would be returned to them. Unfortunately, due to a lack of regulation we have an operator, Christenson Developments, and, I understand, some others who have reneged on that, so we have seniors who are out hundreds of thousands of dollars. They have no place to live, and they do not have their money back. That was one of the things this minister needed to rectify, to put in place regulations, legislation to ensure this does not happen again in the future.

The minister has indeed brought forward legislation amending the Consumer Protection Act to add some provisions around life leases. Now, the question is: in doing his job, has he done his job well? Well, as my colleague from Lethbridge-West noted earlier today, when

Saskatchewan in 2021 stepped up to address this issue – same issue, same problems – they introduced a bill that was 50 pages long. Fifty pages, Mr. Speaker. That bill goes into considerable detail on a number of aspects having to do with life leases. It talks about reserve funds; it talks about funds held in trust; it talks about processes around entrance fee refunds. It goes both looking forward and transitional provisions for existing life lease holders. It sounds like that minister did his job well.

The bill we have before us today, Bill 12, is seven pages long. Seven. It's seven times shorter than the bill in Saskatchewan. Now, either the minister of service Alberta is seven times more efficient than the minister in Saskatchewan, or he has failed in putting substantial amounts of content in this bill. Now, if you talk to the folks who brought forward this concern, the folks who were affected, they're saying the latter. They are not impressed. They do not feel this minister has shown up and done his job well.

Now, of course, the Alberta bill does contain a provision that some issues may be addressed in regulations, things like life lease requirements over and above what the bill states, prelease payment disclosures, refund requirements, maximum allowable entrance fees, percentages returnable, requirements of lease operators or trustees who receive entrance fees or release payments to deposit them in a trust account, and some other things. But that is substantially different, Mr. Speaker.

Let us remember that we are talking here about Albertans who have been burned and burned badly: seniors, as my colleagues have said, folks who gave their lives to help build this province, who took their hard-earned savings and put them towards what they thought would provide them with stable accommodations in their last years of life, that would support them so that they would not be a burden to their family, that would support them to live independently and allow them to enjoy their golden years. These folks were expecting to see legislation that laid out clearly for them how this minister, this government was going to protect them.

Now, I know this is not a government that's fond of doing things in the public eye; they prefer to do things behind closed doors. They prefer to hide as much information as possible, which is why they have a government-wide systemic investigation by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner into this government's potential abuse of the FOIP system. That's why four ranchers in southern Alberta had to file FOIP requests and wait two years to get the records of this government's secret negotiations behind closed doors with corporations to force coal mining through in the Rocky Mountains.

This is the government and a minister of it that is telling these seniors, these folks that they should wait for him to potentially, in regulation, maybe address the issues they're concerned about. Mr. Speaker, that is not a minister who has done his job well. Again, we have the example of Saskatchewan, where they managed to do this out in the open. Clearly, they did the consultation ahead of time. They took the information and they put it in the bill, clearly, up front, all of the pieces. Sadly, we do not have that here. We can then also look to whether the minister did his job well in terms of bringing in these regulations, whether the protections he is putting in place are actually going to be effective.

5:20

Now, page 7 of the bill adds life leases to offences under the Consumer Protection Act. This is the protection that's being put in place to protect seniors from the situation that we know some of them find themselves in now, where they have hundreds of thousands of dollars which are tied up, being held by a corporation which should have returned them because the seniors no longer have their accommodations and they also no longer have their

money. We have the minister bringing forward what are going to be fines up to \$100,000 per contravention to a maximum of \$300,000, up to two years in jail.

Now, these penalties are a little lenient when we stop and think about the scale of the funds being withheld from seniors and their families. A single company – a single company – in the life lease business here in the province, potentially one of the largest players, Christenson Developments, currently holds \$146 million from life lease holders that are still living in its properties. Mr. Speaker, \$146 million. When we are talking about a company that is dealing in hundreds of millions of dollars, how much discouragement is a fine of \$100,000 going to be? Even if it's multiple instances, the fine is pretty small potatoes compared to the stakes being held.

Again, I would question, in this case, whether this is the minister doing his job well. Certainly, we know, in hearing from those who are currently in this situation, who have currently been caught up by this, whose money is being held by companies like Christenson Developments, that they do not feel this is sufficient, that this is going to act as an adequate deterrent for the kind of abuse that we are seeing now.

That brings us, Mr. Speaker, I think, to the second part of what this minister's job was. The minister's job was indeed to introduce regulations going forward, filling in a gap that existed in our legislation and regulation here in the province, to ensure that Albertans were protected in the future when they enter into a life lease agreement. Again, the minister has gotten partway there, but there seem to be significant gaps. The minister has shown up; some would say that he might as well have been absent.

But when it comes to this latter part, Mr. Speaker, there was a significant expectation from Albertans who are caught in this position, whose dollars are being held, as they in the prime of their lives are now left without accommodations and without a significant portion of their life savings, an expectation from their families and loved ones who are now doing their best to look after them and look out for them that this minister would take some form of action in this legislation to support those individuals, to help them get justice.

But there is nothing – nothing – in this legislation for those Albertans, for those seniors, for those individuals who, again, have helped build this province, who worked hard for those life savings, who trusted that when they signed that contract the terms would be honoured, and they were not. We ourselves find, then, that the minister has indeed failed significantly in the second part of his job, which is to look out for those Albertans, to support them.

As my colleague from Calgary-Falconridge said, the UCP's Bill 12 does nothing to allay the concerns of Albertans who have millions of dollars tied up in life leases. I agree with him. The minister should be working closely with those life lease holders, strongly consider what oversight enforcement role the government could be playing right now to ensure that their concerns are addressed adequately.

Instead, what we have seen from this minister is that when these questions are asked, he stands up and plays political games, makes accusations across the aisle, dismisses groups that have come together to advocate for these very seniors. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, it turns out this is not a government terribly interested in listening to Albertans, so Albertans have to get creative. They have to come together in numbers, and they have to rely on protests and a lot of other means to get their voices heard. Sadly, when they do, what they get from this government is mockery and dismissal, much as we saw today.

You know, we've been talking about health care workers, who multiple times over the last four years have been forced to go public on social media, in the media to raise their concerns because

consecutive ministers of Health refused to hear them, refused to take action. We have those same ministers stand in this House and dismiss those concerns out of hand. I think Albertans are quickly seeing that this is not a government that takes their concerns seriously. It is more interested in its own political priorities than actually looking after the needs of Albertans, and that is what we see in Bill 12. We see the minister putting in a minimal effort, getting the ball partway down the field. But what we see and what we are clearly hearing from the folks who have the most invested here, who stand to lose the most, is that they feel this government has failed them, has failed to listen to them, is continuing to fail to listen to them, does not have time for them.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed has risen to speak.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and speak to Bill 12, the Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024. Our government has been committed to improving the lives of all Albertans, and I'm proud to say that I support this timely proposed piece of legislation. In our province life leases provide long-term, more affordable living arrangements and are typically accessed by seniors. These individuals access life leases because they offer stability and peace of mind as they age. However, recent concerns have emphasized the need for enhanced consumer protections in the area of life leases. The Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act claims to do just that. It seeks to safeguard the rights of Albertans who enter into life lease agreements and to bring consistency in contracts with life lease housing operators.

By implementing Bill 12, we would be able to ensure key provisions are in place to enhance protections for Albertans who opt into life leases, many of whom are seniors. Alberta's senior population is expected to rise to 20 per cent of our population by 2051, and it is integral that specific safeguards are in place to ensure fairness and transparency. If passed, Bill 12 would set out minimum disclosure requirements for what life lease contracts must contain, which will ensure that individuals who are considering opting for life leases have clear and comprehensive information before making that decision.

Bill 12 would mandate a timeline for the return of entrance fees to be within 180 days of termination of the lease as well as mandate a 10-day cooling-off period after contracts are signed, which will allow individuals to have the ability to reconsider their decision. If passed, Bill 12 would set out broad regulation-making authority to further regulate the life lease industry as well as establish that noncompliance with new requirements will be deemed offences and will be subject to administrative penalty or prosecution under the Consumer Protection Act's existing enforcement framework.

The Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act aims to strike a balance that strengthens protection for those opting for life leases while also ensuring they remain affordable and practical for seniors. This represents yet another step our government is taking to ensure the well-being and security of all Albertans. We are committed to keeping life affordable for Albertans and ensuring their interests are protected. We have heard of the recent challenges that have arisen within the life lease industry, especially concerning delays in the repayment of entrance fees to leaseholders who have ended their agreements. As of September 2023 approximately a hundred families were still waiting to receive money, with some waiting over two years for repayment of their entrance fees, a situation that is unacceptable. That is why our government is taking action through Bill 12.

5:30

At its core this proposed legislation recognizes the need for enhanced protections for consumers concerning life leases and aims to provide consistency while addressing the gaps in regulation to ensure fairness for Albertans. Our government has actively engaged with life lease holders, families, housing operators, and other stakeholders to help shape this legislation and address the genuine concerns of all parties involved.

This proposed legislation is laying the foundation for a more transparent life lease industry that supports the well-being of Alberta seniors. It is another step to ensure that the rights and interests of Albertans across the province are protected. It will help provide our seniors and their families with peace of mind and security when choosing a place to live.

Bill 12 is a testament to our government's commitment to upholding our core values of fairness and accountability. We're continuing to implement strategies to empower Albertans and enhance their livelihoods through pieces of legislation such as this. We're continuing to make decisions based on the feedback we hear from Albertans and then act accordingly.

That is why I will be voting in favour of Bill 12, and I'd like to encourage all members to do the same so that we can continue to build a better future for all Albertans.

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others that wish to speak to Bill 12? The Member for Calgary-Falconridge has risen to speak. I believe you've spoken to this already. Okay.

Then the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to speak.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 12. I'm just looking for the copy of the bill. I think it's a huge issue that exists. It impacts many Albertans, in particular seniors. It has implications for their lifelong savings, and government claims that they have taken action, they are trying to fix a problem, but this bill doesn't do what the government claims that it's doing.

That's not us saying that. There are many Albertans. There are a group of Albertan seniors who have raised their concerns pretty loud and clear. They have identified companies who owe them money, and it's not just a small amount of money. It's huge sums of money, their entire life savings at stake.

But this bill does nothing to help them. Instead the government's bill is protecting those who owe money to these seniors. Initially when these concerns were raised, the minister described them just as some Facebook group. They didn't even acknowledge that there is a group of seniors that is getting impacted by it. They didn't even acknowledge that there are Albertans out there who have outstanding claims that should be the focus of this bill.

As time passed by, then we found out that the minister has met almost nine times with one from that group that owes money to seniors. Government has met them more than that, but the minister met them nine times. Those who were impacted by this situation get hardly any time from this government; that is unfair.

When people looked into those groups, for instance Christenson, it was pretty clear that not only had government met them nine times – or the minister met them more than nine times – it was also pretty clear that that group has deep ties with this government. They have donated to the governing party, and Albertans are left to wonder whether those donations, those ties are getting in the way of this government doing the right thing and protecting those seniors and their life savings.

Earlier the Member for Lethbridge-West also talked about how a similar problem existed in the province of Saskatchewan, and when the province looked at that problem, their law reform institute did

the research, and then they came up with a piece of legislation that is more than 50 pages long and that actually addresses the issue of life leases. In this case, government could have simply looked at the research that has been done in Saskatchewan. They could have looked at the legislation that has been passed by the Saskatchewan government; there was, I guess, that resource available to them.

In Saskatchewan there is also a Conservative government who, from time to time, this UCP government looks up to, but that would have been one such opportunity for this government to consult with their counterpart in Saskatchewan, look at their research, look at their legislation and at least try to get this right.

Every time since they have presented this bill, so many of my colleagues have raised concerns with respect to the bill, and they're raising these concerns after hearing directly from the stakeholders, after meeting the stakeholders, after understanding what the issue is, after learning what's at stake for these seniors, and so far government has not listened to those legitimate concerns.

5:40

Government can easily take this bill back, engage with stakeholders, engage with those individuals who are impacted, and try to be a government for those Albertans as well instead of protecting certain groups that are aligned with their governing party. That's why I think we have been asking the minister in question period. That's why we have been asking the government to take action. The right thing to do will be to draft this legislation in a way that addresses the concerns of those seniors impacted by these scams. It assures them that these groups will not be able to get away with the money that they are holding from these seniors unfairly.

As it stands now, we cannot support this legislation. I urge all members of this House to vote against this piece of legislation and urge the minister to meet with the impacted seniors and groups and get this right. They already have legislation that they can follow. That's from Saskatchewan. That's not too much work. Let's get this right and stand with those impacted seniors.

Thank you. With that, I will take my seat.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate. The hon. Minister on their behalf.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:43 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Jean	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Schow
Boitchenko	Jones	Schulz
Bouchard	LaGrange	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Loewen	Sinclair
de Jonge	Lovely	Singh
Dreeshen	Lunty	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fir	Neudorf	Wiebe

Getson
 Glubish
 Guthrie
 Horner
 Hunter

Nicolaides
 Nixon
 Petrovic
 Pitt
 Rowswell

Williams
 Wilson
 Wright, J.
 Yao
 Yaseen

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul
 Boparai
 Chapman

Elmeligi
 Ip
 Kasawski

Metz
 Sabir
 Schmidt

Dach
 Eggen

Loyola

Shepherd

Totals: For – 45 Against – 13

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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