



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 27, 2024

Day 57

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Al-Guneid
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Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 27, 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.

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

Hon. Members:

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we were led in the singing of *O Canada* by Abha Sharma. Ms Sharma is currently an international student attending Concordia University of Edmonton, working towards a bachelor of music and drama. If that doesn't keep her busy enough, she is the president of the Concordia Students' Association. During my conversation earlier this afternoon she asked me to give a special shout-out to her family – her mom, dad, and sister – who've stayed up very late to watch from India. She's very thankful for all of their support. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also, I always enjoy the opportunity to introduce the families of members when we get a chance. Today in the Speaker's gallery we are joined by members of the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake. They are here today because his daughter and his niece's class is visiting the Legislature as part of their unit on the government. It's my honour to introduce for the Member for Lesser Slave Lake the hon. member's spouse, Shantelle; beautiful daughters Sloane and Ryan Sinclair; his niece Breeley Gramlich; and her father, Shawn Gramlich. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also in the Speaker's gallery today is a constituent from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Father Nilo. Father Nilo currently serves as a priest for the parishes of St. Stephen, St. Anthony, St. Anne of the Prairies, and Our Lady of Fatima, all located in the Olds area. Father Nilo grew up in the Philippines, and he entered seminary at the age of 22. He moved to Canada in 2003 and was ordained as a priest for the archdiocese of Edmonton in 2005. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I do have one final special introduction to make today on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, the hon. the Member for Morinville-St. Albert. Back on April 22 we had a class from the Guthrie school visit the Legislature and attend Oral Question Period, and when it came time to introduce them, due to unforeseen circumstances, mostly my fault, they were unfortunately missed.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

The Speaker: Exactly. A recall of the Speaker, I think, is in order.

Regrettably, the minister and I didn't realize it until after they'd left, so I wanted to do something particularly special for the students from Guthrie school, who, along with their teacher Mrs. Tremblay and EA Ms Kitching, are joining us online. Guthrie school is located right outside of the grounds of Edmonton Garrison, just north of Edmonton. Many of those families, their extended families serve in the Canadian military, so we wanted to provide a very special welcome, introduce those folks, and thank you for your families' service. Please provide the Guthrie school the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, or on his behalf perhaps. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie also perhaps has a school group if anyone has those. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow I would like to introduce members of the Pollard Meadows school grade 6 class here learning about provincial government, and they can see it in action here this afternoon. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Member Irwin: Did you do Kayande's? You said the wrong school. Okay. We're just trying to help here.

I just want to make sure both schools are properly introduced, so I'm going to do that right now. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, the Lycée International School of Calgary, a francophone school. Welcome.

As well, for the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, Pollard Meadows school. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my lovely wife, Rose, and my grandson Lothar. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you a recent graduate of a therapeutic living unit in Lethbridge in one of our correction facilities, where you get addiction treatment in location. Craig, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Democracies across the globe are lowering the voting age to 16. It's showing confidence in our youth and investment in creating positive habits of political culture. David Walsh from the constituency of Sherwood Park is visiting here today. He's heading to Vote16 Summit in Ottawa, and I invited him to come see the Legislature before he saw the Parliament. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Saymah Chaudhry, a multitasking individual, math teacher, and community organizer, with her husband, Pasha Hafeez. They host poetry events to bring all people and cultures together in celebration and to build connections. She is inspired by her mother, Nasim, and father, Noor. Also here with them are Huzaifa, Khawla, Rania, and Zareen. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, my guest is late. He's about three minutes out.

The Speaker: We'll come back.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, I introduce Gord Tulk, my friend and constituent, founder of Libertas Alberta, advocating for conservative principles and serving on the UCP Party Policy and Governance Committee. Please rise and be welcomed in your Legislature.

Mr. Ip: It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two local entrepreneurs who are at the forefront of helping revitalize Edmonton's Chinatown. Wilson Wong and William Chen are owners of Van Loc, a Vietnamese sandwich shop and local favourite in Chinatown. They are also spearheading the first-ever Vanbloc Party, that will bring vendors, artists, and Edmontonians to the heart of Chinatown on June 8 and 9. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my good friend Bryan Goehring, who is a senior director for Wood's Homes. Twenty twenty-four is a special year for Wood's Homes as they celebrate 110 years of dedicated service to Alberta and their strong commitment to supporting vulnerable children and youth. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce two guests from Calgary. Ahmed Raja is managing director of Prairie Western College. He is accompanied by his wife, Sazia Tasneem. They are also involved and engaged in the community, and I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, do you have an introduction?

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you my family. They were already introduced today. I appreciate that; thank you very much. But there's also a

school group here in the Legislature today. Unfortunately, they couldn't make it for question period, but just like you did with the online video, I'd just like to say hello to the grade 6 students from E.G. Wahlstrom in my hometown of Slave Lake.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce a gentleman in our area who is an entrepreneur and innovator, Gurpreet Ranu. He is the proud operator of Anohka Distillery. Please give him a round of applause. He's not here, but he's on his way.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a statement to make.

Amazon Fulfillment Centre in Calgary

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2010 Amazon has made \$40 billion worth of investments in Canada, and I'm pleased to report that Alberta has seen its fair share of those dollars. Amazon's presence can be felt throughout the province, including through facilities in my riding of Leduc-Beaumont and also nearby in Acheson. On Friday the Premier and the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade joined Amazon to cut the ribbon on YYC4 in Calgary, the company's latest, largest, and most high-tech fulfillment facility in the province.

Located in southeast Calgary's East Shepard industrial area, the YYC4 warehouse incorporates the use of robotics technology to ensure consumers get their products quickly while also creating a safer working environment for their many employees. In fact, this new facility will employ more than 1,500 Albertans and offer in-demand skills training and career growth opportunities with cutting-edge technology. With the addition of the state-of-the-art, 2.8 million square foot warehouse Amazon now operates five fulfillment centres, one sortation centre, three delivery stations, and two AMXL delivery stations in Alberta, employing a remarkable 7,500 Albertans.

Investments like Amazon's showcase Alberta as a logistics leader with our unparalleled access to other key jurisdictions, be it by air, rail, or highway. In making their investment decision, Amazon highlighted the ease and speed of doing business in Alberta. They also highlighted the support of the Invest Alberta Corporation. Amazon is not the only major company affirming Alberta's pro-business policies, investment support, and red tape reduction. Other global companies like Dow Chemical, Mondi, and Appexus continue to choose our province because of the Alberta advantage. Mr. Speaker, we are going to keep delivering on that Alberta advantage and make sure Alberta remains the best place to live, work . . .

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

National AccessAbility Week

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. There's not much to celebrate here in Alberta when it comes to accessibility. Nonetheless, this year's theme for National AccessAbility Week is Forward Together: Accessibility and Inclusion for All. I'm sure you know that Alberta remains one of the last jurisdictions to pass

accessibility legislation. What that means is that we have not begun our journey to barrier free.

Without a legislative framework we have no way of measuring the success or failure of provincial investments and activities. So when the government invests millions in, let's say, apprenticeship spots or housing or a new digital system, we have no way of knowing if there are barriers for disabled Albertans. Consulting people with disabilities is clearly an afterthought with this government. For example, this Chamber is not accessible and is far from barrier free for neurodiverse, hearing impaired, or deaf visitors and legislators, not to mention people with mobility issues. As there is no legislative framework nor process to make this place barrier free, we are at the whim of those in power to make investments for people with disabilities. It is minimal and pitiful.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's NDP is committed to an accessible Alberta legislation that will identify, remove, and prevent barriers in the built environment, communication, IT, transportation, infrastructure, and, most importantly, the design and the delivery of programs. Access and inclusion is a right, and when done properly, individuals, families, communities, and the economy thrive. We haven't got it right here in Alberta, but in 2027 we absolutely will.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a statement to make.

Drayton Valley-Devon Health Care Facilities

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard from many of my constituents regarding the need for upgrades to the hospitals in Drayton Valley and Devon, and I continue to advocate for improvements to rural health in our province.

Today I'm pleased to share that our government is investing \$872,000 over three years to upgrade the Devon general hospital. This acute- and long-term care facility provides 24-hour emergency services. It additionally houses home-care services, laboratory services, diagnostic imaging, and public health services.

Further west the Drayton Valley hospital houses 34 acute-care beds and 50 long-term care beds, with medical services provided by 14 physician staff. I'm very pleased to also share that \$792,000 of new capital maintenance renewal funding will go towards the Drayton Valley hospital and care centre over the next three years. This vital facility provides health services to my constituents in Drayton Valley, including a 24/7 emergency department, diabetes education, dialysis, and operating room service and is also home to the Drayton Valley community cancer centre.

I know that my constituents will be happy to hear about this important investment that our government is making. I and our government remain committed to ensuring that my constituents and all Albertans have easy access to the health care services that they need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Policies

Mr. Dach: The people of Alberta had a message for the UCP this weekend, and I hope they were listening: enough is enough. Albertans have had enough with a government that does nothing to tackle skyrocketing rents but has time to make sure that inflation doesn't impact the gifts they receive. They've had enough with a government that doesn't see a problem with students learning in overcrowded classrooms but proudly defends their decision to hand out hundreds of thousands of dollars to their friends and insiders. They've had enough with a government that once prided itself on standing up to the old PC style of cronyism and insider deals but

now embraces them. Albertans are fed up with a government that feels more entitled to their entitlements than any obligation to support Albertans.

Hundreds of thousands of Albertans can't access a family doctor, and this government's solution is to introduce more chaos. Wages are falling. Costs are climbing. Tuition rates, insurance rates, utility bills, rents: all and more are getting higher under the UCP. The government abandoned patients in motel rooms because they couldn't be bothered to read the e-mail sent to their offices.

But while Albertans have been struggling, what has this government been focused on? It wants to decide what university research deserves funding and is threatening academic freedom. They're limiting local democracy, giving the cabinet the power to cancel Albertans' democratic votes that don't line up with the UCP's or, more likely, Take Back Alberta's priorities. It's been one year since the last election, and Albertans are seeing the true colours of the UCP. They're focused not on supporting Albertans but themselves. The UCP is leaving Albertans to deal with the affordability crisis this government created, the health care crisis this government created.

Albertans have had enough of the UCP, and that's why I'm proud to be here with a team that each and every day, from this position of privilege, stands up for the province and the people who call it home.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Bill 20

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, since the introduction of Bill 20 the vast majority of municipal leaders across the province have registered their extreme opposition. In response, with no consultation but lots of entitlement, the government brought forward amendments that fix nothing. They can still scrap municipal bylaws in secret whenever they want and force recall votes on any municipal leader who stands up to them. To the Premier. Albertans did not vote for this. Why won't she stop this outrageous and entitled power grab?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been occasions where we have had to see various elected council members removed for violating the Municipal Government Act. There have been occasions where we have had to override municipal bylaws because they were going beyond their jurisdiction. What we heard from the municipal leaders is that they wanted us to be more clear about the circumstances under which we might step in. We've done that with the amendments, and I'm expecting that it will be used, as it has in the past, in very, very rare circumstances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Notley: Describing those circumstances as "whenever we want" is not an addition of clarity.

Now, I'm not sure I'd be the one to remind her of this, but even after her amendments the Premier is attacking her own base with this bill. Paul McLaughlin, president of the RMA, said: our friends are punching us in the face right now; you've literally just taken away rural municipal politicians' ability to support rural Alberta. To the Premier: why is she so intent on rushing through a bill that centralizes more power in Edmonton while undermining local democracy across the rest of the province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an omnibus bill that has 15 or 20 different provisions in it. We heard that there were problems with two of them, the way it was worded, so we've put forward amendments to address it. But there are other things in this bill that I think the municipalities are really going to like, like the fact that they're going to be able to have community revitalization levies applied to affordable housing, that we'll also be taking our education property tax off affordable housing so that it makes it more accessible to those who are in their communities. We know we've got a housing crisis, and this bill helps address it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier should be focusing on the many critical issues on which the province could actually be partnering with municipalities, not on hedge trimming in 300 separate jurisdictions. Instead, she's ignoring their concerns and making municipal leaders accountable to her instead of to their voters. This weekend the Minister of Municipal Affairs said: nobody wants control over 300 municipalities, nobody in their right mind, anyways. To the Premier: what is going on over there? Why does she need that control?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite may think housing isn't a very important issue, but on this side we think it is a very, very important issue, which is why Bill 20 will fully exempt nonprofit-subsidized affordable housing from property taxes, both municipal as well as education property taxes. It will enable municipalities to offer multiyear residential property tax exemptions to encourage more housing development, and it will update the community revitalization levy policy guidelines to help develop the criteria to allow capital costs for affordable and attainable housing. We need this bill.

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

Ms Notley: All those things unless the Premier doesn't like them.

Health System Reform Consultations

Ms Notley: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier's plan to blow up health care was leaked last fall, the UCP promised Albertans they'd consult with them on it, but they didn't, and last week they allowed just one hour of debate before calling time allocation to ram through her ridiculous plan. To the Premier. Health care is the most important thing she will ever do or fail to do, as is currently the case. Albertans need more say, not less. Why won't she delay the bill and talk to them before going any further with this damaging plan?

Ms Smith: Well, I don't know where the member opposite was when the Minister of Health went and did dozens and dozens of in-person consultations. I think it was well over 65. We had dozens of people participate in that. We've also done hundreds – how many? Thousands?

Some Hon. Members: Thousands.

Ms Smith: Thousands. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of people participated in them, all from . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Smith: Let me be specific. It was actually 3,000 front-line workers who participated in person, plus online, plus through telephone town halls. We've done lots of consultation, Mr. Speaker, and we know we're going in the right direction.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, watching an infomercial does not count.

Albertans already know she's failing to provide basic public health care. Last week we learned short-sighted and ill-advised cuts to physician pay have resulted in entire seniors' homes losing their doctors. When asked about it, the Minister of Health blamed the AMA for her cuts. To the Premier: how does she not understand that her bill builds more silos, puts the minister, who refuses to ever be held accountable, in charge of it all, and therefore makes problems like this worse, more frequent, and more damaging to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the member opposite knows, because she's been there before, that we have to work in consultation with the AMA, and no changes can be made without their approval. Now, is it the case that perhaps they're now having second thoughts about some of the policy changes? Fair enough. They can come back to the table, and we can negotiate that, but we will not act in a way that doesn't include our partners on the front line. It's part of the reason why we have a new AMA funding agreement, where we're going to be paying them differently so that as they roster patients, more people will get access to primary care, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate with them.

Ms Notley: Or, put another way, she's handing responsibility off to the AMA for the problems they created.

Today we raised the issue of complex mental health patients living together with patients in a continuing care facility that's not equipped to care for them, putting lives at risk. Creating three separate new bodies where there was one to address this failure will only make things worse. Again to the Premier: why is she ramming through this destructive bill before she actually listens to those who know what needs to be done, front-line health care workers, patients, and their families? And by listen, I mean listen to them speak to her.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very concerned about the situation, but it also reaffirms the exact reason why we need to refocus Alberta Health Services. Alberta Health Services needs to be focused on delivering the very best hospital care. Assisted living needs to be focused on delivering the very best assisted living. Those with complex needs because of mental health and addiction: they need to have specialized care as well. And now that we have four different agencies who will be focusing on that, in addition to building out our primary care system, we are confident that we're going to be able to find these problems and to address them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, the Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Alberta Serious Incident Response Team Investigations

Mr. Sabir: Recently Albertans have seen several concerning reports from the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team. One involved the shooting death of an unarmed man by a police officer,

and another involved the illegal monitoring of the Member for Lethbridge-West by a member of the Lethbridge Police Service. In both these cases charges were recommended but not pursued by the Crown prosecution service. We all understand and respect the need for prosecutorial independence. Can the Minister of Justice explain what steps he intends to take to ensure police accountability?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Crown prosecution service takes ASIRT recommendations very seriously but also has a difficult task of weighing the evidence to determine if it meets certain thresholds for criminal prosecutions. That's to say that a prosecutor must weigh the evidence and determine whether it can meet the threshold and the Crown's burden of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that a crime can be prosecuted. That being said, I have undertaken, as all members already know, a review of that relationship between ASIRT and the ACPS, and that current review is under way.

Mr. Sabir: All members of this House have the right and privilege to be able to represent their constituents free from abuse or harassment. However, as we learned, the Member for Lethbridge-West was illegally monitored and had her privacy violated by a member of the Lethbridge Police Service. ASIRT recommended that charges be filed in this case. In 2021 the former Attorney General set up a public inquiry into the procedures and practices of the Lethbridge Police Service that awaited the outcome of this ASIRT review. Can the minister please inform this House about the status of that inquiry?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier, the minister of emergency services.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for the question. I also want to thank ASIRT for their investigation, for their report, and, of course, their recommendations. On behalf of all good, honest, hard-working police officers I can tell you that we do believe in accountability. With that, I will say that we will be looking at and taking all options, including an inquiry of some kind, and we'll be discussing that with my department to see what the best path forward is for accountability.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister. Albertans have a right to know that police accountability is something that will be taken seriously. Weeks ago we saw concerning and disturbing images of police breaking up peaceful protests on our university campuses. There were injuries reported as a result, and the incident has been criticized by members of the student body, faculty, and across Canada. The government referred this to ASIRT for an investigation. Can the minister provide an update on the status of this review?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, and thank you, Member, for that question. Right now it literally is in the hands of ASIRT. We certainly have not had any updates from them. We certainly respect the independence of the independent body, which is ASIRT, and I look forward to their report on the recommendations going forward. Thank you.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are finding it difficult to meet their monthly household expenses. Wages are down, purchasing power

is down, and quality of life is down; 62 per cent of Calgarians say so. Under this government more Albertans are living paycheque to paycheque, choosing between rent and groceries, figuring out which bill to pay. They certainly are not feeling supported. To the Premier: is our government blind to the challenges facing Albertans who are just getting by? Why no action on the high cost-of-living crisis facing Albertans?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Affordability is top of mind for this government. Every day we come to work to make sure that every ministry is doing everything they can to make those costs more affordable for Albertans, from restructuring our electricity market to looking at insurance for home and auto. Everything that we can do is focused on making life more affordable for Albertans. The problem is that in Ottawa the federal Liberal government and their NDP counterparts continue to increase the carbon tax, making this just an insurmountable wave of costs going up. We wish they would help. We wish the members opposite would take that message to Ottawa.

Mr. Ip: A single mother can't pay her rent with UCP spin, Mr. Speaker. Since the UCP took power, auto insurance is up by 29 per cent, power by 73 per cent, and natural gas by 71 per cent. But, apparently, the hot air blown by this government remains free of charge. This is an emergency, and that requires decisive action from the government, not spin, quippy QP answers, or gimmicks like a power price deferral which just ends up costing families more. Clearly, whatever this government claims to be doing isn't actually working. How long will this Premier ignore the needs of Albertans, and at what point will pride and stubbornness be cast aside in order to bring some relief?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, the members opposite are months behind, as they always are. Alberta's inflation rate is down to 3 per cent. We continue to drive those costs down. In fact, I'm very proud that energy inflation slowed from 13 and a half per cent in March to 7.1 per cent in April, almost a 50 per cent reduction. We are back to historical rates for electricity. We continue to see inflation drive down. That means the work... [interjections]

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That means the work that this government is doing is working. Prices are coming down. There is more work to do. We're happy to take that job to work every day and do what the NDP failed to do.

Mr. Ip: Try saying that to the face of a dad whose hard work can no longer buy the things that his kids need. But wait, that would involve talking to Albertans rather than ignoring feedback they've already given such as how Albertans pay one of the highest auto insurance premiums in Canada. But instead of a solution, what happens? Just closed-door meetings with big insurance companies, without advocates for Albertans. How can Albertans trust this government on affordability when they're part of the problem? How can the UCP be so reckless about the pressures facing families?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were happy to kick off our automobile insurance summit today at the fed. It's going on till 4:30. We invited all members across the spectrum of the system – from the legal system, from the medical system, obviously brokers and insurance companies – to talk about the two commissioned reports, the Nous report and the Oliver Wyman report, while having the online survey of Albertans. That's now up to 12,000 respondents and will stay live until June 26. And we reminded them that we're looking at this through the lens of Albertans' eyes.

Education Funding Formula

Ms Chapman: It seems like the UCP spent the weekend sharpening their scissors because 13 school boards are getting their funding cut, and it's all because of the UCP's shameful weighted moving average funding formula. Alberta schools already have the lowest per-student funding in the country. There is zero justification for cuts. Students are being crammed into classrooms. Teachers are overworked and overwhelmed by a classroom complexity crisis. How can this government justify cuts at a time when Alberta schools are at a tipping point?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the question has some serious flaws built in. The member alleged that funding based on enrolment is an inappropriate way to fund school divisions. [interjections] And they continue to say that. They're heckling me saying that it is an inappropriate way to fund school divisions. We believe funding school divisions according to their enrolment needs is an accurate and responsible way. That's why school divisions in Calgary ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: That's why school divisions in Calgary received over \$100 million in additional funding, given significant enrolment pressures, while others saw a reduction due to declining enrolment.

Ms Chapman: Well, given that CBE and Edmonton public plan to dip into their reserves because they are in desperate need of more dollars to match the overwhelming student growth and given that roughly 15,000 students in Alberta were considered unfunded this year because of the weighted moving average formula, given that boards are predicting thousands more unfunded students for the '24-25 school year, will the UCP admit that their funding formula is an embarrassment, scrap the weighted moving average, and fund schools based on actual enrolment?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the current funding model works well, and of course it's augmented with a number of different grants. As an example, school divisions that are experiencing some significant enrolment increase are also eligible for the supplemental enrolment growth grant. Of course, government is also listening carefully to our school boards and other partners to make adjustments. That's one of the reasons why we made some adjustments to the supplemental enrolment growth grant this past November. That unlocked \$30 million in additional funding to our school boards that are seeing some of that significant pressure.

Ms Chapman: Given that the supplemental enrolment grant is having to be used to address emergency maintenance costs, given that the UCP announced that they would hire 3,000 new teachers in

Alberta schools but Edmonton public is only going to be able to hire four more teachers, given that the solution to the UCP-caused crisis in education is simple – they need to build schools based on need, fund all students in Alberta schools, and hire teachers, EAs, and support staff – will the minister explain to Albertans why he would rather withhold the vital funding schools and students need to thrive?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we're not doing that at all. Budget '24 provides \$1.2 billion in new funding to help school divisions that are growing. Budget '24 moves 43 school projects forward, 19 of those projects in construction. That'll create an additional 35,000 spaces for students across the province. In addition, we're also continuing to provide funding for students with complex needs. Budget '23 provided \$121 million over the next three years to support students with specialized learning needs as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East is next.

Support for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nearly half of Albertans experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime; 1 in 3 Albertans experience sexual abuse while under the age of 18, including 24 per cent of boys and 44 per cent of girls. Sexual violence can be shattering for young survivors and leave long-lasting scars, including an inability to trust those around them. Can the Minister of Children and Family Services update the House on our latest supports for young survivors?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister of children's services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for that passionate question. Abuse of any kind, but especially sexual abuse, is unacceptable and even more reprehensible when it targets children and youth, and our government will not stand idly by. That's why I'm so proud that our government is providing Little Warriors \$5 million over the next three years. This will help more young survivors address their mental, emotional, and physical well-being so they can not only just heal, but they can thrive.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for support of Little Warriors. Given that addressing child sexual abuse is no easy task and it requires many community groups working together and given that Alberta has so many amazing organizations, including child and youth advocacy centres, that are focused on helping children and youth deal with all kinds of abuse, including sexual abuse, can the minister explain how Little Warriors is adding to the fulsome supports that our government is currently providing to survivors and their families?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is proud to support a wide range of innovative programs that are focused on helping children and youth right across Alberta recover from sexual abuse. Little Warriors Be Brave Ranch is the first and only treatment facility of its kind in the country. It offers young survivors a safe haven and the time they need to process emotions in a camplike setting. In addition, they help Albertans learn how to recognize the signs of child sexual abuse and prevent it in the first place so that children, youth, and their families know how to protect themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is Sexual Violence Awareness Month and given that it's up to every Albertan to keep children and youth safe and given that child sexual abuse is not only on the rise and given that social media and the advancement of technology play a role and further given that sexual abuse cases are also becoming more complex, can the minister inform this House how Albertans can take action to protect vulnerable children every day?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to that member for being such a passionate advocate for children and families. I encourage all Albertans to learn how to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect and how to report concerns about a child's well-being. If you see something that worries you, please don't wait; report your concerns by calling the child intervention provincial intake line at 1.800.638.0715. You can also visit littlewarriors.ca to access our online resources in order to keep our children safe.

Alberta Energy Regulator

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, I reviewed David Yager's report on the Alberta Energy Regulator. I can tell you that we agree that the UCP's 20 per cent forced reduction of technical staff since 2020 was terrible for the agency. The report also recommends: "Re-establish the AER as an arm's length independent regulator." How does that minister plan to establish independence when the UCP hands its insiders sole-source contracts from the Premier's office to the Premier's friends?

Mr. Jean: I suppose the member is referring to David Yager. Now, Mr. Yager is not a voting member of the AER, is not paid to serve on the AER. He is doing this, Mr. Speaker, because he is an expert, a world- and national-known expert in oil and gas. He is doing this for the people of Alberta, and he's doing a great job for us.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that Mr. Yager cites 25 separate research and investigation sessions with 163 senior executive stakeholders and even industry associations, given that he failed to consult with landowners who have been greatly impacted by the failures of the AER when it comes to liability management, given that the Auditor General concluded that the AER management of oil and gas liabilities remains seriously deficient in several key areas, given that Mr. Yager recommends moving liability management to the department, can the minister explain why landowners have been left out of this decision?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I can explain to the member that landowners have not been left out of the discussions, nor have they been left out of the consultations.

But let's talk about an NDP appointment to the AER board, Ed Whittingham. He defended Trudeau's no-more-pipelines act, Mr. Speaker, and he was on the Alberta Energy Regulator. He led the anti-oil Pembina Institute, his group actually took money from United States and European anti-oil activists, and he was appointed by the NDP government to the AER board. I don't think we need to take any lessons from them and their friend Mr. Trudeau.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that it has been five months since Mr. Yager submitted the advice to the Premier report to the Minister of Energy and Minerals and to the Premier and given that Mr. Yager continues

to have a sole-source contract of \$136,000 from the Premier's office valid until February of next year all while claiming to be an independent board member of the Alberta Energy Regulator, when will the minister release Yager's second report on his energy strategy advice to the Premier, and – I'm asking again – what are the professional services he's providing until next year while being a board member?

Mr. Jean: I and I think most Albertans would like to know when the NDP government, the former government, is going to apologize for the mess they made of the AER, Mr. Speaker. Appointing people like that to AER: that's almost as bad as Tzeporah Berman, an oil sands advisory group appointee. Her credentials on her resumé: well, she's an eco radical. She is a former Greenpeace director. She is also known for her antipipeline activism. She compared my community, my beautiful community, to Mordor. They should be ashamed of themselves for bringing these . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Affordable Housing

Member Irwin: The latest consumer price index report paints a very grim picture for Alberta renters. Our province is the not-so-proud holder of the title for the highest year-over-year rent increases in Canada, with prices shooting up a staggering 16.2 per cent. But here's the kicker. This isn't just a blip on the radar; Alberta has been leading the rent hike marathon for nearly a year. Why is the Alberta government fine with letting rents skyrocket and refusing to take action to make life affordable for Alberta renters?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Alberta still remains the most affordable place in the country. Calgary and Edmonton remain the most affordable large cities in the country. What Alberta's government will not do is what the NDP want to do, which brings socialist, communist policies that will slow down construction, make more people homeless, and prevent our construction industry from doing their job. We're seeing record numbers in construction. We're also investing in affordability. In fact, this government has invested more in affordability measures than any government in the country, \$5.4 billion, and we're going to continue to stand with Albertans, not just yell in the Legislature like that member. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Irwin: Given that I'm not yelling and I'm simply sharing the concerns of tens of thousands of Albertans and given that experts have been waving red flags about Alberta's runaway rental market for years and our booming population and the flood of people moving in from other provinces has turned the housing hunt into a relentless, stress-inducing quest and, despite some new builds, the supply is still miles away from meeting the demand, with the result being jaw-dropping rent hikes, shoving more Albertans to the financial edge, why is the UCP standing on the sidelines while the housing crisis worsens?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, some new builds? Only the NDP would call the largest housing boom in the history of the province "some new builds." I'll tell you what some new builds were. When that hon. member's party was in power, they struggled to build 1,200 houses in four years. That's not what's taking place in this province. We're on track to build more houses than any time in our history. In fact, it looks like this year will double our construction capacity, all because of the hard work of this government and most

importantly because of the hard work of Albertans. This government is going to bet on Albertans. The NDP continue to bet against Albertans.

Member Irwin: Well, let's talk about those hard-working Albertans who desperately want to become homeowners, but for most of them the dream of being a homeowner is further away than ever before. Given that Calgary house prices have risen a shocking 39 per cent since December 2019 and with average home prices now at \$600,000 and climbing in that city, the lack of affordable housing has never been more apparent, what does the minister have to say to the tens of thousands of Calgarians who want to be homeowners but are getting no support from this government?

Mr. Nixon: What I have to say to those Albertans, Mr. Speaker, is: not to worry; the United Conservative Party is here. We're taking measures to not do what the NDP want to do, which is make fewer homes, make it so that the dream of home ownership would be gone. We know that the NDP is focused on preventing the government from taking people out of dangerous encampments, so that may be what their policy is for housing. Our policy for housing is: build more, make it more affordable. The good news is that CMHC said that Alberta is the only bright spot anywhere in the country, so our plan is working. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has a question.

2:20

Camp L.G. Barnes

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 50 years Camp L.G. Barnes has been serving Albertans with disabilities by providing a camp experience at a fully accessible lake resort. Originally established for residents of Michener Centre to visit, it's grown in size and scope to meet the diverse needs for Albertans with disabilities. Given that Camp L.G. Barnes has been so closely aligned with the government of Alberta's Michener Centre in the past, to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: what has been the government's role in the past with Camp L.G. Barnes?

Mr. Nixon: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. L.G. Barnes is a very important facility to me. It's actually in my riding, just west of Bentley. I know it's very important to the hon. member. I've been a guest in that facility many times. It's done amazing work. You may be interested to know that the government of Alberta has partnered with the Michener Centre in regard to L.G. Barnes since 1955. It's been there on the shores of Gull Lake providing services, providing experiences for individuals on the outside to enjoy places like Gull Lake that otherwise would not be able to. In fact, it's the first of its kind, and I'm really happy to see that it continues to provide an essential service to this province and to our disabled across this province so that they can enjoy my beautiful backyard.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that Camp L.G. Barnes can serve up to 40 guests at a time with no charge for support staff, given that they offer a unique experience to enjoy nature, animals, and activities with opportunities to relax and just have fun and given that this camp has been historically funded by the government, to the same minister: what are the government's current plans for funding for Camp L.G. Barnes?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, L.G. Barnes has received some funding through our civil societies grant, \$150,000. They've also received \$250,000 this year as they go through a bridging process to realign their programs now that they're not associated with Michener. We're going to continue to make sure that funding is in place to help that organization be able to re-evaluate and restructure their organization to be able to make sure that it will be in place to be able to serve Albertans for the next 70 years to come.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the minister. Given that the relationship and funding model between Michener Centre and Camp L.G. Barnes has changed and evolved over the recent years and given that the need for this camp is still very relevant to so many in our province, to the same minister: what does the future relationship look like for funding for Camp L.G. Barnes?

Mr. Nixon: Well, the Department of Seniors, Community and Social Services, particularly the assistant deputy minister of disabilities, is in contact with L.G. Barnes. I've been down there recently, in the last several months, to have a look at the status of where they're at at the moment. We're in the process of negotiating a long-term agreement to be able to make sure they have sustainable funding going forward. I also think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to recognize they're a great nonprofit who's also fund raising, and we want to thank their fundraisers, their donors for helping us be able to make sure that we can continue to operate this beautiful camp for decades to come and make sure it can serve some of Alberta's most vulnerable citizens.

Collection of Race-based Data

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I was surprised recently to hear the Premier declare her support for affirmative action. In an interview she expressed deep concern about ensuring we have balanced perspectives in universities both in research and the range of individuals and views represented there. Indeed, she said that's why she introduced Bill 18, to give the UCP the power to vet every application for research funding and conduct a full review to identify bias and inequities in postsecondaries. So given the Premier's clear commitment to acting on systemic discrimination, can she provide an update on the government's progress on the collection and analysis of race-based data in all areas of provincial responsibility?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say that we had a very productive meeting with postsecondary presidents and board chairs on Friday. We covered a number of topics, including diversity, equity, and inclusion, including Bill 18 and exemptions that we will be exploring further. The engagement will continue this summer, but the formal piece actually did kick off on Friday, and we're looking forward to having more feedback received from the postsecondaries.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that in March 2022 the UCP government rejected my Anti-Racism Act, which provided a framework to work towards collection and analysis of race-based data, saying it tried to do too much too fast, but given that on perceived bias against Conservative ideology they've managed to draft and introduce new legislation in less than a year, now given there is no sign that they've made any progress on their promised expert report,

promised two years ago, on a framework and standards to collect race-based data, can the Premier explain to thousands of racialized Albertans why systemic discrimination that affects them every day is a lower priority than stories of discrimination about Conservative academics in other provinces?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This government considers it very seriously when there is inequality, discrimination, and we condemn all sorts of discrimination and inequalities in our system. That is also true in STEM and other racialized situations where people are affected by that.

Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that that's two years, no action, Mr. Speaker, and given that new polling data shows 71 per cent of racialized Albertans say that they're finding it hard to meet expenses like utilities, rent, insurance, that have soared under the UCP, and given that national data shows both Indigenous and Black Albertans are hit harder by high costs as they earn less frequent work and are 1.5 to 2 times more likely to be unemployed and given the large numbers of racialized Albertans who work in areas like health care, education, advanced ed, others, that are suffering under the UCP, is the reason this government is dragging its feet on collecting race-based data because they know it will show how badly their policies are hurting racialized Albertans?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is why this government is taking an every-ministry approach to make sure we address affordability. We want every Albertan to make sure that they can pay their bills. That's why we're doing the work to restructure our electricity market to make sure that low prices get back to the wallets of the people that pay them. Every single ratepayer should know that they can buy their utilities and pay their rent and buy the food that they need. That's our government's approach: every single ministry is at work to make life better for every single Albertan.

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

Road Construction in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Roads represent a core piece of infrastructure that is integral to the success of a region, and it's good that this government is committed to maintaining and improving Alberta's extensive road network. Our curse in Canada is that our weather causes permafrost, which damages our roads on an annual basis. Maintenance is always ongoing. I've asked questions previously about the state of the highway 63 south of Fort McMurray, so to the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: how are we doing in ensuring that those contractors are doing their job of repairing that highway and others?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for that very important question. Obviously, the maintenance of our provincial road network is a priority for this government. We have over 64,000 lane kilometres and 5,000 bridges, and we spend billions of dollars

every year to keep them in good shape. Highway 63 has seen 30 kilometres of repaving over the last few years from Ledcor and E Construction, and we're currently working on the planning and design phase to extend highway 63, the twinning of it. There's an extra 100 kilometres left to go to make sure that highway 63 is completely twinned, and that's between Grassland and Edmonton. We're also working on other very important projects in northeastern Alberta that will make sure that Albertans have the proper infrastructure.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. We're trying to entice out-of-province commuters to live in Fort McMurray. Given that with an easier drive to town from the plant sites, improvements like twinning highway 63 north could make things much more appealing to some of those 10,000-plus commuters who hail from Newfoundland to British Columbia to consider living in Fort McMurray, can the same minister update this Assembly on the status of the government's investments in highway 63 north to the oil sands?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections]

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to hear some hoorays from the NDP because Budget '24 actually has \$68 million over three years to twin the 11-kilometre stretch north of Fort McMurray, and that's due to the increased oil sands activity, so that workers can safely get to the camps and come back home safely at the end of the day. I'm pleased to report that design work is currently under way and construction will begin next year. There's a stark contrast between the NDP and this government, where the NDP encouraged people to move to B.C. and to ride a bike. We're actually improving the living conditions for people that live in Fort McMurray and also the roads up in northern Alberta.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Thank you so much for that answer. Given that recently, due to the wildfires around Fort McMurray, I had to take an alternate route to Fort McMurray via highway 881 and it was actually a really nice drive, our government announced significant investments into this vital secondary highway, which included passing lanes and other improvements to enhance safety and efficient travel that will benefit constituents and industry. That said, I didn't really see any construction going on. So to the same minister: when is the work expected to begin on these critical upgrades to highway 881?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Highway 881 actually has \$97 million invested into it over the next three years. That will help to improve safety and reduce congestion on 881. That includes 14 passing lanes that will be between Anzac and Clyde Lake as well as an oversized truck staging area, two intersection upgrades, and significant improvements to roadside turnouts. This project is currently in the design phase and will begin next year.

But you know what else we'll find out this year, Mr. Speaker? Who the NDP leader in Ottawa endorses for his leader here in Alberta. There are a lot of federal NDP members, and we'll see where they vote this summer.

Support for Newcomers

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, many recent newcomers are experiencing lack of support and high unemployment rates. Immigrants are key to the growth and energy of our labour market, directly influencing our economic prosperity. Settlement organizations in the province consistently warn that the current support systems are failing to keep pace with increasing immigration rates. Why is this government not making any attempt to address this lack of support or the soaring unemployment rates among newcomers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As the member already knows, our government is trying our best to increase our immigration levels, and we've been working with the federal government to do that. With respect to unemployment and our newcomers, as you know, this province has created so many jobs for all Albertans, including our newcomers, and they are thriving to come here to this province and raise their family and raise their kids and be happy here, and we are very much thankful for them.

Mr. Haji: Given that my question to the minister is specifically to newcomers – my office is inundated with stories of newly landed immigrants struggling to find appropriate support services or secure employment, with wait times for employment counselling sessions alone tripled – given that three members in this Assembly raised this escalating concern in this House, what concrete measures will this government implement to fix the processes and offer the vital support necessary for newly arrived immigrants to flourish in Alberta's workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Again, our government is very much committed to providing opportunities to all newcomers to our province, and we have been doing this through a number of measures that we have already taken and we continue to take. The support service is available through our immigrant-serving agencies as well as through the government itself. Whatever requests we see, we deal with them, we help them, and we're happy that they are coming here. The record is out there.

Mr. Haji: Given that two months ago I wrote to both the federal and provincial immigration ministers urging them to collaboratively address the dwindling services and escalating unemployment rates among newcomers, given that the current insufficient support poses a serious threat to the newcomer labour integration, to the minister: where is the tangible support promised to those who seek to build their future in this beautiful province?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has done a number of things to help our newcomers, including four or five years ago having a credential-recognition system in this province. We continue to supplement and support that system. We also provide mentorship help through our immigrant-serving agencies, and we have taken a number of steps ever since we have come to power, unlike when they were in power. They did zero, zero, zero again and again.

Bill 20 (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, this UCP government has used time allocation 50 times to stifle debate, a new record, more than any government in Alberta's history. Albertans are sure not buying what this minister is selling, allowing cabinet to override municipal bylaws, fire councillors. No amount of stifling debate can hide this fact. According to Alberta Municipalities they say that, quote, the way this government drafted Bill 20 lacked transparency and undermined trust, and the proposed amendments just serve to add insult to injury. Isn't it time for this government to face reality and scrap Bill 20?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, several municipal leaders have said that the amendments actually make the bill better. In fact, there's one in Rocky Mountain House, actually, who was quoted as saying that Bill 20: some parts are good. The mayor of Cochrane, the head of the mid-city mayor's caucus, said that the amendments are a step in the right direction. In fact . . . [interjections] I can hardly hear myself, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I appreciate your help. I'm not sure that I need it, but thank you.

Mr. McIver: I was just using my time, Mr. Speaker. I could hardly hear myself; that's what I was saying.

To continue, the fact is that the folks across actually are not the problem. One of the biggest concerns I heard today – they said: what if somebody else is in government? People are afraid of those people across.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the UCP did not campaign on giving this entitled cabinet the power to unilaterally fire councillors or amend bylaws and given that not one municipality is in favour of giving the UCP cabinet this sort of power despite what the municipal minister seems to say, given that this bill will undermine local democratic processes, allowing the UCP to override local elections, council decisions, is that why this government is afraid of fulsome debate on Bill 20? Scrap the bill. Do it now.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll remind Team Angry that their leader actually not very long ago demanded that this government instantly fire a councillor. No process, no rules, nothing; fire them now. They are in a very poor position to criticize legislation which actually puts a reasonable way to do what we've always been able to do. In fact, we did actually have to dismiss some councillors not long ago. I didn't hear any complaints from the other side then. Maybe they're coming now. Maybe the next question will include them. But it seems to me that we've done our best to act reasonably.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this government needs to bring up the issue of Sean Chu somehow to justify their Bill 20 – it just shows how rotten this bill really is – and given that the best course of action is to shred this bill, start over, not try to amend it and given that bringing in these union and corporate donations for municipal elections – nobody asked for that. Will the minister admit that the government is afraid to debate Bill 20 because it would show Albertans just how out of touch this government is here in the province?

Mr. McIver: Again, Mr. Speaker, their leader demanded a councillor be instantly fired.

I'll tell you what people didn't ask for. They didn't ask for \$1.7 million to support nine councillors in the last city of Calgary election. They didn't ask for a large amount of money, too, again, in Edmonton from the unions to support four candidates. Mr. Speaker, they didn't ask for the table to be tilted in the NDP's favour, as the NDP legislation did when they were in government. They made a heck of a mess. We are fixing it, and we will continue to do.

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

Distilling Industry Development

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone here has heard me call my constituency God's country and for good reason. This area is full of innovative and hard-working people and thriving industries. Anohka Distillery, for example, founded in Parkland by physicist and lawyer Gurpreet Ranu, is just an example of that. Mr. Ranu looked around our area in Parkland and found that he had grain, clean water, farmers, peat, an industrial complex to launch his business. Two years later Mr. Ranu's whisky won World's Best New Make & Young Spirit at the World Whisky Awards held in London, England. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: what policies are in place to ensure that distillers like Mr. Ranu have access to adequate supplies of locally grown barley and rye and . . .

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It's great to see Alberta distillers receiving global recognition. It's a testament to their skills and the high quality of Alberta's commodities. Knowing that world-class whiskies begin with world-class grains is why our government is supporting crop development through organizations like results-driven agriculture and Western Crop Innovations, whose well-known barley breeding program has produced several new varieties for domestic and international markets. We look forward to this industry's continued success in partnership with Alberta's ag researchers and our producers.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister, who is right close at hand, as it turns out. Given that some Alberta distillers travel abroad to receive their distillery education such as Mr. Ranu going all the way to Scotland to earn his master's in brewing and distilling and further given that postsecondary institutions in Alberta such as Olds College have strong brewing programs, to the Minister of Advanced Education: how are Alberta's postsecondary institutions supporting distillery education so that we can compete on the world stage with places like Scotland?

2:40

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, Olds College offers a two-year craft beverage and brewery operations diploma. Students enrolled participate in hands-on learning and take courses in sensory evaluation, beverage chemistry, sales, and brewery management, to name a few. During the program students have the opportunity to brew their own beer and potentially bring it to market at the Olds College brewery store.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that distilling alcohol is already a lengthy process, sometimes taking years to fire, filter, distill, and age the spirits, and given that our government

is committed to reducing red tape so that businesses can thrive and share their products with customers in Alberta and beyond, to the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: what is being done to reduce red tape and provide a competitive environment where Alberta's brewers and distillers can succeed at the world stage? Will it be possible to create a program to support craft distilling that recognizes implications when it comes to the aging process, similar to what exists in Kentucky?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We have a vibrant distillery industry in this province. Distillers such as Eau Claire, Anohka, ADL, Troubled Monk, and many more not only compete on the world stage, but they win awards for it as well. But we recognize that the work is not done and there's lots more to do. That's why I will be hosting an industry round-table this summer, when we're going to discuss things like markup and red tape reduction. Our brewers and distillers have lots to say, and we're going to listen.

The Speaker: It sounds like a round-table that all members might like to participate in.

Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Member's Wedding Anniversary

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it's a great day for Red Deer, and the NDP are very bad. Sorry. This is someone else's speech. Here we go again.

Mr. Speaker, today is May 27, and two weeks from now it will be June 10. Since we'll be finished session by then, I'm going to use my statement today to celebrate my wife and pre-emptively wish her a happy 14th anniversary coming up on June 10. I often catch myself saying that I'm the luckiest man alive, which is actually a strangely worded phrase, because how would anyone know who the luckiest dead man is? Anyway, it's not just luck. I'm also incredibly grateful for the life we have, and it makes me so happy knowing that I get a front-row seat watching this amazing woman work tirelessly, holding our goofy family together.

Now, I know I talk enough for the both of us, but when our daughters are grown up, I hope they remember some of my funny jokes. But I know they'll remember all the little details and the moments and all these core memories and just how much love she's shown in caring for us. When I say I'm the luckiest man alive or dead, I'm sure people think it's just because she's an absolute smoke show, and at best I look like someone who's finished fourth in a Lou Diamond Phillips look-alike contest. The real reason is her sense of humour and how we bounce off each other's strengths and weaknesses, mostly my weaknesses, of course. You're my best friend, and I love spending five to 10 minutes discussing the chaos, stress, and challenges of the day. I'm happy that we always seem to find the funny, and I hope we always will.

Mr. Speaker, I'll finish with a line from the Jack Nicholson movie *As Good as It Gets* that, to me, perfectly sums up the way I feel about her, not just today but the way I've always felt about her: you make me want to be a better man. Happy anniversary, sweetheart. I love you 3,000. Let's go, Oilers.

The Speaker: With some level of confidence I'm pretty sure the last phrase would have been "through you, Mr. Speaker, to my beautiful wife, I love you," but perhaps we'll let this one pass.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a statement to make.

School Playground Construction

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for Edmonton-Manning I have the privilege of representing some of the best students and schools in all of Alberta. This weekend I had the privilege and pleasure of joining the families of Soraya Hafez school for a fundraiser to help them get a playground for their school. The parents' group has been working hard to ensure their students will have access to a new playground located at the school since there hasn't been one since the school was built five years ago. They are currently only \$40,000 away from achieving their goal, and they've done it all without any support from this UCP government. They've held several fundraisers and worked hard so that they can ensure that the students there don't have to play in an empty field.

This isn't a new issue or item for this government since only last year I raised the concerns about the need for a playground at Soraya Hafez school. On November 27, 2023, I asked the Minister of Education what he was doing to support these families, students, teachers who are trying to get this playground built. The minister assured this House that the UCP would support the idea of building playgrounds at this school. However, nearly a year later and nothing has been done. I know that Soraya Hafez isn't alone. There are countless parents working tirelessly to raise money and organize to get playgrounds built across Alberta while this government just watches. If the UCP is serious about supporting students and supporting families, then this would be a place to start.

Instead of constantly justifying why class sizes are growing without increased support and students are learning more and more in overcrowded classrooms, this government needs to step up, start building the playgrounds these students need so that they have a playground for next year's school year and not have to wait until 2025.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide oral notice of Bill 23, the Miscellaneous Corrections Statute Amendment Act, 2024, sponsored by myself.

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 share an update from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency from early this morning about the horrifying attacks on people seeking shelter and safety in Rafah. They report that "Gaza is hell on earth" right now with mass casualties and yet silence from so many politicians on Palestine. What's it going to take for action?

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, of which there were none. If you like, perhaps I will have a sign to the left of the Speaker that says, "Days without a Point of Order: 1." Gold star.

Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Forest Resource Improvement Association Grants

- Q7. Ms Sweet:
How many grants were distributed to municipalities in 2023 by the Forest Resource Improvement Association through the Alberta FireSmart program?

2023 Wildfire Season Costs

- Q8. Ms Sweet:
What was the total amount paid by the government to municipalities for costs incurred in 2023 as a result of wildfires that occurred outside of forest protection areas?

2023 Wildfire Season Compensation

- Q9. Ms Sweet:
What is the total amount of compensation payable under any government program to municipalities for costs incurred in 2023 as a result of wildfires that occurred outside of forest protection areas that remains outstanding as of April 15, 2024?

Operator Audits and Investigations

- Q1. Ms Sigurdson asked that the following question be accepted. How many audits or investigations were conducted under the nursing homes general regulation, the co-ordinated home care program regulation, or any ministerial directive made under the Regional Health Authorities Act that resulted in a finding of a contravention by an operator of the continuing care health services standards, as amended July 16, 2018, during the period from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview or someone on her behalf? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to the written question brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:50

This question is significantly important. As we came through COVID and we heard outrageous reports that were happening all across Canada, not just Alberta, that were happening in continuing care facilities, some of the most disturbing stories came when the military was called in in eastern provinces to go and help when there were staffing concerns. We watched as the country was learning about some of these horrific treatments that were happening in seniors' continuing care facilities.

What this question is asking is for transparency. It's asking for the Minister of Health to identify which sort of operators have been found to have committed contraventions and then if the issues were handled. When families are looking for a facility, a home for their loved ones, these are the types of things that they have a right to know. If their loved one is being cared for in a continuing care facility program, it should be very easy for anybody to be able to

go in and identify some of the areas of concern and then perhaps some of the strategies or steps that have been put in place to help. What this government has done is made them not available to the public, so it's not only unfair, but it provides a space where people have no idea where their loved ones are aging.

It's quite concerning when we saw a review in 2021 where some of these problems came to light. There were significant problems that were highlighted, and we don't know what's happening in those facilities, so having my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview bring this question forward – I really hope that we have a government and a minister who wants to talk about the concerns, wants to talk about what's actually happening within these care facilities.

However, what we do have and what we've seen is a government that has brought forward legislation that is reducing standards within these facilities, not providing more information and higher quality services. We're watching a government that has just recently put legislation forward to reduce some of the minimum hours of care requirement. So it makes me suspicious when we're watching the actions of a government that is showing that they're not taking any sort of direction from the report and some of the criteria that they were saying needed to be addressed. We're not getting information brought out in a very transparent way, and that's really concerning.

To give you some context, Mr. Speaker, the report that was done in 2021: we as the Alberta NDP highlighted in April 2024 some of the data, and it showed some significant concerns. In 4,737 inspections in 2023 4,263, which is 90 per cent, were found to violate provincial standards of care. Ninety per cent. Some of the concerns were cleanliness, odour problems, insufficient nutrition standards, infection prevention failures. Those are all the things that came to light in this, so what we're asking to have information on is that these audits, investigations become public. We believe that when there are reports and findings, we should also know the follow-up to what that is and what that looks like to ensure that Albertans can age in dignity and safely. This report identified very, very clearly that continuing care standards are a problem.

As I just mentioned, in result of this report what we saw is the Minister of Health bring forward legislation by putting new continuing care regulations into effect that removed a minimum hours of care requirement, when the exact opposite has been advocated for by those that are working in the continuing care homes. It is the exact opposite of what should be happening. There should be more insight into what's happening. There should be more support being provided because if the current standard isn't able to meet it with a 90 per cent failure, why would this government think that reducing those standards would increase outcomes? It just doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker.

When I think about why this government isn't providing this information, it makes me question what they're trying to hide. Why are they hiding this? When you look at a recommendation coming through that there needs to be better supports and services and accountability to these continuing care facilities, why is the government then reducing those standards and then saying that they're not going to publish it and make it available to Albertans? It's significantly concerning when we have a government that continues to say, "Just trust us; we're doing what needs to be done," when we've seen over and over and over that is absolutely not what is happening. It's concerning that the way that they respond is by scrapping the legal requirement to provide care altogether instead of increasing the hours and increasing the funding. They see a problem, 90 per cent failure with compliance, and they're reducing supports and resources and then saying: we're not going to show you the report.

I would really hope that this government is listening and takes these recommendations to heart, takes the importance of being able to identify these failures and the risks that are happening in these facilities and make them public. Let Albertans know what's happening in these facilities not only to our current loved ones that are residing in there but for when helping to select a place.

I know I have the incredible privilege, Mr. Speaker, of having my 72-year-old mom live in my home. She has been in my family home for close to 20 years. I couldn't imagine seeing these statistics: 90 per cent. Then where do you start to try and find somewhere that's safe, that's going to be a wonderful place for your aging parent to reside? Then not being able to accurately find the information: it's very, very concerning. I know that in my situation I am privileged that I am able to have her age in my home, but that's not the case for everybody. One of the things that I've watched friends struggle with is trying to find some facilities that they believe are offering the care that their loved ones deserve.

Now, that's not saying the intention behind these facilities is bad. It's just that they're not properly supported by government to be able to do all of the incredible work that they need to do. You hear horror stories of seniors being left in bed for days in soiled clothing and bedding, and when you talk to these front-line workers, they didn't want to do that. They just don't have capacity. There aren't enough staff, there aren't enough hours, there isn't enough oversight for them to be able to come in and do the job that they need to do. Some of them are working out of two or three different facilities to try and make ends meet. It's absolutely heartbreaking: the stories that we hear. Then to know that the government isn't doing anything to address those concerns is quite concerning.

My ask today is to have the question that we've brought forward today by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview be answered. I believe that Albertans deserve a response to this question, to lay out the accountability, basically, when it comes to these facilities. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my time to listen to the debate and then will pop up once again to close debate.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health to respond.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are rejecting this question because this information is publicly reported and is available online through accommodation standards and licensing at standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca. We are all about transparency. Alberta Health monitors all facilities with outstanding non-compliances and escalates enforcement when the non-compliances could negatively impact the health, safety, or wellness of residents or clients.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, our government takes noncompliance very seriously. In fact, I recently expanded the division in Alberta Health that is responsible for investigating concerns. I wasn't happy with the number of investigations that was happening. We needed to do them in a more timely fashion, so when I became minister, we actually expanded that area. The licensing and compliance monitoring branch of the continuing care division continues to work diligently to address current or ongoing concerns.

The health and safety of residents in continuing care homes in Alberta is of utmost importance to our government, and we strive to ensure that their experiences in continuing care settings are positive and enjoyable. That is why in Budget 2024 we continued our historic investment of a billion dollars over three years to begin

transforming the continuing care system. This investment includes initiatives that will enable a shift to more care in the community, enhancing workforce capacity, increasing choice and innovation, and improving quality across the continuing care system.

And I have to correct the member opposite. We did not reduce the minimum hours of care. Actually, we are paying for almost double the time that residents were receiving previously.

Budget 2024 continues our government's commitment to the health and safety of Albertans in continuing care by including dedicated funding to incrementally increase direct hours of care in continuing care homes. This will also enable more person-centred care and is expected to result in increased quality of care and quality of life for residents as well as decreased pressure on staff. Mr. Speaker, this happened after an extensive – and I do mean extensive – engagement with the continuing care community, with residents, and with family members.

Furthermore, we created and implemented the new Continuing Care Act to address this, and on April 1, 2024, the regulations and standards came into effect in Alberta. The Continuing Care Act establishes consistent authority and oversight for Alberta Health regarding licensing and compliance, monitoring of continuing care accommodations, and the delivery of continuing care services in Alberta, reflecting current practices and settings and addressing the changing needs and expectations of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, with an aging population, we needed new legislation enabling modernization and innovation in the provision of continuing care for Albertans. It improves protections for continuing care residents and clients by enabling the government to assume a more consistent level of oversight and enforcement across the spectrum of continuing care services and settings. The Continuing Care Act sets the stage for the legislation to ensure it is enacted and implemented with person-centred care as the focus. This includes quality of life, person-centred care, dignity and respect, recognition of the contributions of caregivers, importance of staff, and enabling Albertans to age in place as a couple.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite quoted facts that she actually got online, probably going to our online standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca, that I spoke to earlier. All of the information is there, publicly available. The members opposite need to do more homework on their side to find these facts, but they're all there. We want to have that transparency; in fact, we're going to improve that transparency as time goes on. It is the reason we are doing the refocusing and making sure that there is a continuing care organization that can actually focus on continuing care, making sure that the recommendations and the new legislation are implemented and that we're following best practices not just here in Alberta but across the country and around the globe.

Our seniors deserve to live with dignity and respect, and that's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker. That is the reason why we rejected the question.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and just to maybe contradict some of the things that the Health minister just said, that this government is transparent and that all the information people need is available at their fingertips. That is absolutely incorrect and not true.

In Canada right now – and, actually, this was a couple of years ago – there are 400,000 people that are in care. During COVID we saw 16,000 deaths of people that were in care, particularly nursing homes, long-term care facilities. The reason I'm bringing up these numbers is because there is an excellent book that was written during the pandemic. It was called *Neglected No More*, and the

writer was André Picard. He's actually a reporter. It was in 2021. I would encourage anybody that's actually interested in hearing about facts about the state of long-term care in nursing homes and all of this care in Alberta to have a look at this book and see some facts that contradict some of the things the minister is saying.

Let me just go back to some of the things she said, Mr. Speaker. One of the things she said is: "Absolutely, there are all kinds of inspections. Yeah, we're reporting." There is a piece of legislation that this government doesn't like to talk about, and that is called the Protection for Persons in Care Act. This legislation, this act, was actually passed under a Progressive Conservative government, and what it aimed to do was to create a place where people could go to make allegations of abuse. Now, the abuse that was covered in this piece of legislation is pretty comprehensive. It includes things like bodily harm, financial abuse, emotional abuse, nonconsensual sexual contact, inadequate nutrition, inadequate medication administration, things like that. It goes into quite a lot of detail about the kind of abuse that is possible to happen in a place like a lodge, a long-term care facility, even a group home. Perhaps it's a mental health group home, a group home for people with disabilities, whatever it is.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? They might be able to report. There's a 1-800 number that you can call. There's a local one in Edmonton. They might be able to report the allegation of abuse and then expect that an investigator will be assigned and go out and do that investigation and then, again, expect, because the legislation requires it, that it's publicly reported to Albertans about: we've had this many allegations of abuse, this many financial, this many of medication, this many restrictive procedures, this many of financial abuse, whatever it might be. Then it tells you the recommendations that came from there and the service provider, and then it tells you what the service provider is doing to meet those deficits.

You know what? This government has not reported on that since 2019. Why is that? If they're so transparent, why is that? Why is it that Albertans do not have access to any numbers? We used to. We used to be able to go online and print a report and see exactly how many allegations were made in any given year, how many were made against publicly funded service providers in different areas. That could be long-term care. That could be nursing care. That could be supported independent living. That could be a group home, a group home of two people, Mr. Speaker. But we don't know any of that anymore because this government has decided not to publicly report on abuse allegations. Throughout COVID they didn't report abuse allegations. After COVID they did not report abuse allegations. But they want us to believe that they're so transparent that they don't need to respond to this written question, which is just ridiculous.

I would expect that a government that actually wants to be able to improve a system, like they are saying they want to – they want to improve, rewrite, reorganize two huge systems, mental health and health, yet they don't even want us to know the problems that they're fixing. One of the things that they could do is just release this information, but they will not, and that is incredibly – incredibly – alarming, actually.

Now, in this book that I read during COVID – we had a lot of time on our hands during COVID – one of the things we learned very clearly during COVID was that private operators, in particular private operators in long-term care, nursing homes and that kind of thing, were experiencing more deaths and other problems. Mr. Speaker, I think we can all remember what COVID was like. It was hellish, and what I think we should all have learned from that is that there were some systems where a flashlight was shone right on it and we could see where the problems were. We all could agree at that point that it was people being locked up in nursing homes that

couldn't see their people. Staffing ratios were awful. People weren't coming into work. We had to ship in people. At one point the military even came in. But this minister wants us to believe: "It's all fine. It's all good. There's lots of transparency. Nothing to worry about here." But this could not be further from the truth.

Accommodation standards – and the minister mentioned this. Accommodation standards: it's called supportive living accommodation. It goes into great detail about what these inspections will look for when they go in and look at how an operator is operating. But, again, we don't get to see all of that information. We aren't even getting the recommendations about how things can be better or how they can be improved. Sometimes that information is very important because the licensing inspections that are done, the ones that the minister referred to, are very detailed.

3:10

I'll give you an example. In my previous job we actually had I think at the time probably 24 residential programs, and some of them fell under this legislation, so naturally you anticipate these inspections because that's what they're for. Normally they're good, but sometimes the inspectors will have really great ideas about, let's say, cross-contamination for laundry, or they might spot some difficulties that we didn't see around accessibility to the house, to the outside, to the front, to the garage, whatever it might be. These inspections were always very useful.

Now that I'm out of that job and looking back, what was even more useful, Mr. Speaker, is that it was public, that the deficiencies were public, that we knew that we had to correct these deficiencies or it would be publicly reported to Albertans that an organization, publicly funded, did not meet these requirements and here's what they need to do to fix it. That is a system that works. That is transparency, not just saying that you're transparent and "all good, nothing to see here" but actually putting the information out there for Albertans so they can look at it themselves and determine if the government is telling the truth.

Now, the accommodation standards look at all kinds of areas. They look at building code requirements. These are the basic requirements around accessibility and safety codes, safety standards. We have maintenance requirements, and these are especially important because here in Alberta we do not have accessibility legislation, so it's not even a given that these things are happening. We don't have a legislative framework that says: you must do these things to include and be accessible for all people with disabilities in this province. We don't have that, so it's a bit hit or miss, depending on the ministry, to see if you're actually complying.

The other things that they inspect – and this is very important – are things like personal choice. They look at: do the people that are living in that place have some choices? Do they all have to go to bed at 7:30, or do they have choices about when they can go to bed? Do they have choices around their menu? Do they have choices around when they can have a bath? Do they have choices around when they can get their hair washed? These are all things that are very important. Contracted services, social and leisure time, the use of social and leisure time: it might not seem like a big thing, but it's a huge thing if you are living in an institution like a nursing home or a lodge or even sometimes an institution for people with developmental disabilities like Michener Centre.

If you don't have these standards in place and you aren't reporting publicly, then these folks are not safe. You can act like you think everything is all good – "We're transparent; they're safe," but they are not. Mr. Speaker, sadly, every day – and you can just look at the stats from the protection for persons in care legislation and reporting – allegations are reported of abuse in these facilities.

So I would hope that the UCP government is more interested in being transparent than they are because they are not all transparent right now.

It would be my hope that they would be more transparent and actually want people to see: here's the problem; we fixed it; it's better. But I don't think there is that desire here. I think it's a desire to hide, to just move on. "We'll fix the system because it's broken. We won't tell you where it's broken, but we'll fix it. We'll make it better." It's just ridiculous. And you know what is most insulting? There are a lot of things that are insulting in this place, but what is most insulting is to have them stand up and try to boast about the fact that they're transparent. I mean, it almost feels like the upside-down world, the upside-down universe, because we know that's not true.

You know, I'm on the Public Accounts Committee, so regularly we're looking at different annual reports, different ministries. Regularly, Mr. Speaker, I'll go online and I'll try to find a report, try to find some stats to back something up, and it is really difficult. There is no place more difficult than in Health and in seniors' services. It is very difficult.

Going back to some of the things that are inspected, one of those things is around menu – I mentioned that – and cleaning requirements, you know, personal care. The minister likes to stand up and say: no; that's not true. The reality is that the standards of care are lax, and they're not good.

And I am running out of time, so I will take my seat.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I'll refer to the Minister of Health to respond to that. Oh, sorry. You're only allowed one time to speak to each written question, so we will go with Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to speak to Question 1. I strongly urge the government to agree to public reporting of the investigations and audits of operators of continuing care services. Of course, continuing care includes home-care services. We know that in 2023 there were 4,737 inspections, and as we've heard, 90 per cent were found to violate provincial standards. We also may not be aware, not everyone may be aware that these inspections are scheduled. They're not just: drop in and find what's not going well that day. They're scheduled, and the providers are notified before the inspection occurs. Despite that, operators usually don't meet the minimum standards.

The issues are all of great importance to your home. This is the home of the people that are where the inspections are occurring. You want your home to be clean. You want it not to smell bad. How often do people talk about going into a seniors' home and it smells like urine? What's going on here? This shouldn't be like that. Nutrition standards: food is part of quality of life as well as the health and well-being of people. Nutrition needs to be sufficient for people. I've heard people complaining, patients of mine complaining that they're not getting enough food, that they're hungry as well as of getting the same thing again and again that is poor quality, just heated-up food all of the time. We also need to ensure that infection prevention failures are well known and reported.

With regard to the cleanliness, if there isn't enough attention paid that things are going to be cleaned and dusted, particularly in our kitchens, in our eating spaces, and in our bathrooms, we're going to end up with health problems as well as a pretty crappy quality of life. I mentioned odours already. These are things that are part of inspections and are critically important to whether a person is happy to live in that place or not.

Nutrition. Not only is it the food that's being served, but there are many people that need to be fed in some of our care spaces. I've heard from workers that if they're short-staffed, they sometimes call on cleaning staff to help feed people. Who knows what they were just cleaning? They have no training, they're very nervous, and that is what is being asked of them and asked of the people living there to put up with. We don't know. You know, training is important when feeding people that need to be fed.

Infection prevention. One of the very important things there is that people are moving and being turned enough. Again, feeding comes into this. Feeding someone too fast, feeding them the wrong things can result in choking and pneumonia. If a person that isn't able to move themselves isn't helped to turn over properly and they don't have clean linens and well-kept linens, we see these as consequences in terms of bedsores. This requires training as well as the hours of the staff. We need to know what's going on in these facilities.

There are a lot of other safety issues. I've had people talk to me that they had to have their meals in their rooms because the elevator has been out for two weeks; it's just not accessible to get to a dining room. I've had people complain that even light bulbs aren't being changed, that people are in the dark or in dark corners, or that hallways are filled up with stuff, that they can't move safely through the hallways, that the carpets are torn and there are tripping hazards. All of these things need to be inspected, remedied, and we need to know what's going on.

I also wonder what is happening with the impact of not reporting all of these issues. Is this giving all of these facilities just a free ticket to ignore their deficiencies? We already know that there are problems with making the places follow through and make the changes when deficiencies are found, but if nobody is even reporting them, then what's the point? Why should they bother?

3:20

But now that the public is not even aware of which facilities – having an aggregate report after the year-end doesn't tell anyone about which facilities are having problems and are not meeting the standards. If a person lives in those facilities, they may be quite aware of the deficiencies. They may be quite aware of the poor food, the lack of attention. The families may know that their loved one is not getting turned and cleaned and showered, as they're supposed to be.

Many people are in the phase of trying to decide where they're going to move or where their parent or loved one is going to be moving, and this reporting is very important so that they can understand what the different issues are in different care facilities, particularly as we're hearing that this government may be moving towards a voucher system where some of the contractual obligations that AHS might impose on a place taking funded beds are going to be totally left up to individuals, to make those arrangements, yet they don't have any way of knowing what's good, what's not good, and what's going on with these places. Where would you put your loved one? Wouldn't you want to know, on all of these issues, what the deficiencies are, and wouldn't you want to know whether they're being dealt with appropriately so that they're responsive to the problems that are identified?

Then we come to the issue that this government needs to be able to report to us if the changes that they're making in our health system are actually making it better or making it worse, and deficiencies are one of the ways that we can know whether we're moving forward. How will they know if the focus on continuing care is actually helping rather than just building more government infrastructure and bureaucracy? We know that's happening, but we don't know what is happening in the homes where people are living.

We all need to know if progress is being made or, as I predict, if more and more standards are simply not being met.

On top of this, the minister removed minimum hours of care. The previous standard was already inadequate. We've been told that there is a minimum number built into contracts, but we don't know what they are, and we don't know what they are for different contracts. These minimums need to be reported for every provider so it's known if that care is actually being provided. Hiding, lowering, removing standards is not the way that Albertans want this government to address the failures in long-term care. We need to know what the standards that are expected are, and that's easy to find on the website for me, where you can find out what the list of standards is, but that doesn't mean that people know whether they're actually being met.

We need monitoring, we need enforcement, we need follow-up, we need reporting, and we need that by facility. Reporting needs to include the resolution of all of these issues, and we really need to know that the government is making the changes that are needed and not actually harming Albertans by removing reporting and standards, that vulnerable people are not just being shut in or locked up and made out of sight, are actually being cared for as we expect them to be and as all of us want our parent to be looked after. The reporting of standards and deficiencies is really the only way that we're going to know if we're moving forward and making changes.

I urge the government to accept this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Sherwood Park has risen.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the other members, and thank you to the minister for addressing this question. I just do think the question is not worth rejecting. I think it's worth answering, and I think the question being brought up and highlighted by the other members is that it's really important that we talk about our aging population. When we can highlight, as the other member pointed out, the deficiencies in our long-term care, then we can work on the quality of life.

We can take a look at the government-sponsored survey from 2021 put out by Meyers Norris Penny, and that one highlighted quality of life. What was interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, when I looked at that survey, at quality of life, is the perception of quality of life by people that are living in long-term care, working in long-term care, or families and friends of people in long-term care versus the perception of external audits, the public when we go into these long-term care facilities. It's a stark difference. I think the external view – maybe by somehow living inside that setting, you get too accustomed to the low quality of life.

When I think of our aging population, I know we've got the baby boomers now cresting into older age and getting into more elderly states of life. In Sherwood Park we've got ways to care for them with nonprofits, and I think the questions that need to be looked at – we should also be looking at for-profit vendors versus not-for-profit vendors. And then to hear that in 90 per cent of the audits and investigations there are contraventions of the health and safety standards for vendors: that is startling. It's stark information from what we expect to be hearing.

Let's just look at the quality of life. Overall, the respondents – the residents, family caregivers, and facilities, from the staff and those who administer – rated the overall quality of life for residents in kind of that 60 to 74 per cent range in the categories that we identify for quality of life. I'll address those a little bit, what those are. We're talking about things like your comfort, your security, meaningful activity that's provided, your relationships with others,

functional competence of the staff and facilities team, your privacy, your dignity, your autonomy, and your spiritual well-being. So inside people that are living there and the staff are giving kind of a score of, like, 59 per cent to 74 per cent for their rating on levels of quality of life.

What's really interesting is that when an external organization goes in to audit or when the public visits and they are surveyed on the same measurements of quality of life for comfort, security, meaningful activity, relationships, functional competence, privacy, dignity, these things that make our quality of life, their rating is 23 per cent to 38 per cent, so a failing grade. It's a very stark difference. The average coming in from external organizations is about 36 per cent on a percentage rating of overall quality of life for people living in these facilities.

Just to bring out some of those qualities where they're looking at them, I did note that there is a big difference from an external set of eyes on the quality of life versus the people living inside it. I think that's important because, related to this one, we want to bring it back to: how do we fix things? If we don't measure it and we don't report it, how are we going to manage it?

That's what I think we're trying to bring up with these questions that we're wanting to bring forward, so that we can address publicly knowing that the audits and investigations are reported in a very transparent way so that potential clients and the families of potential clients can review them. And then also, from the industry and the vendors' perspective, they know they're being monitored in a way that they can put resources forward so that they can improve so we can get back to these higher quality-of-life standards.

There has been mention of the reduction of supports and resources that are going into long-term care, and I think we are addressing these. As a society we need to be talking about: what is it that you pay for as a client, and what is it that we pay for as a society? We need to acknowledge that we're talking about people that have built our society and have put the time in and are our elders. We want to care for them when they're getting to that stage of life when they need that extra help and care. We need to have protections for these persons in care.

3:30

Inside the report that we're looking at from Meyers Norris Penny, that was commissioned by the government, internally, you know, supports and security and safety come in from staff and residents rating it quite high. Then someone that comes in from the outside perspective: they're saying it's barely passable. The highest score was 50 per cent for security. When we look at it from an external perspective and we review and audit our facilities, we're finding out that these are failing grades for facilities that we are responsible for. So the reporting is important.

For physical facilities, the quality of the facility itself: that's where it gets down into the 38 per cent rating. Externally, we look at these facilities, and they don't look passable. They don't look livable. They're not someplace that you would want to go as a client. They're not someplace you would want your family member to go to as well.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I was more co-ordinated on my mouse pad. I'll just try to fix this up a little bit.

Connectedness with other individuals: we talk about people that can't get out of bed and can't move around the halls. First off, inside the facilities they don't feel like there's room to move around. Then feeling connected to others inside the facilities: they are rating it from an external perspective at 41 per cent. They are again in the failing range.

The only place where it's close to passable for these facilities is relationship with the staff. We know that the front-line workers are

doing their best, and they are good people that are working in these facilities. I know, having visited Sherwood Care and Laurier House in Sherwood Park, another place I'm familiar with, they have amazing staff that are doing their best to care for their clients. The ability to have more resources or more staff: some of the ways that we have recommended that we could achieve that are also put forward in this report.

How do we make sure that we raise this quality of care? The expert panel put forward by Meyers Norris Penny reported that the quality of life for residents could be improved through a few important measures: having a more resident-centred model of care, supporting residents that age in place, and care should come to the residents instead of the residents moving. That's an important thing we can look at before we get to the facilities. How can we care in place? I know a member of my constituency, Carol Wodak, has been advocating for this for over 40 years of her life. I'm convinced that the more opportunity we have for care to come to clients is going to help. It would be good to have reporting on that as well, especially if we're supporting it together.

Improving the food and quality of meals inside the facilities is identified as a simple way to fix this. That is something where I know that in the nonprofit sector they are excelling over for-profit with the food and meal quality.

Where the tickets for larger prices are going to come, that the government has to acknowledge that maybe we have to pay for, is improving the physical environment of facilities for residents and having spaces that are conducive to walking and moving. We live in a cold climate environment. If you're going to be aging in this part of the world, it is going to be important to have space for people to be able to move or find ways to get them to facilities where they can move, finding those solutions in the communities.

If there are ways to involve families in care, maybe you go visit – I know I've visited family in long-term care, and sometimes you're not sure what your role is versus the staff. The staff are kind; they're good. You want to talk to them, but you're not sure: am I supposed to advocate here, or am I supposed to do this kind of work? If we can have those open and honest conversations and we make those more common practices within facilities, perhaps as a community, when we come together, we will find a way to make sure that the care for our loved ones is up to a quality where we want it to be for people that have put so much time and care into our own province.

You know, creating opportunities for meaningful contributions to the community, I think, is one of the things when I visited places like Sherwood Care – the ability for people to contribute is still very high, and we want to make sure we involve these people in our society, and that includes reporting on the deficiency so we can improve the quality of life.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to try today just to speak on this a little bit. Prior to my role as MLA I was a nurse, and I worked in the health care industry for over 13 years. So hearing the members opposite talk about this actually – I'm not going to lie – brings me a little bit of anger. Right now when we look at this, I actually just had a chance to quickly read the nursing homes general regulation while the member opposite was reading, and as I read it, I think it's actually wonderful right now. I care deeply about our seniors. On this side of the aisle we care deeply about our seniors. They are who built this province, they are who essentially raised me, and these are the people that I got to take care of when I worked in that field.

Right now I'm in constant communication with health care workers in my role as par sec, and of course that's where my friends and family continue to work, in the health care industry, so I know that their standards of taking care of these residents are high. That's what they truly care about, making sure that the residents have the absolute best possible care imaginable.

Right now we've nearly doubled the number of hours for our seniors, which is extremely significant. Our seniors deserve the best, and we're willing and ready to provide it. We're increasing the standards of care. We have monitoring, enforcing, and follow-up. If standards aren't met, we have the stiffest penalties, financial and closure, for some of these facilities. Right now we have inspectors, and they're there to make sure that these standards are met and these standards are upheld. That's truly what's most important, and that's something that is currently happening. It's something that I've seen happen when I worked in the health care industry as well.

These health care workers are more dedicated than ever, and we're more dedicated than ever for our seniors. So to sit and listen across the aisle about how necessarily we don't care about seniors or we don't want to report – this is all reporting that is available. It's public reporting. It's online. It's more transparent than ever.

I just need to speak to this and say that what I'm hearing is absolute nonsense right now, what the members opposite are saying, and I wanted to clear the records, to say that we here on this side of the aisle care about our seniors. We're increasing their hours of care. We are making sure that these standards are met and upheld and will continue to do so because that's what seniors in Alberta truly deserve.

That's all I had to say. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak to Written Question 1?

If not, then the mover, Edmonton-Castle Downs, has up to five minutes to close debate.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I have to say that I'm really disappointed to hear the minister stand up after one person debates this question and immediately say: I reject this question. She cited that the information is already reported online, and that is simply not true. When you go online, the UCP has not reported abuse and allegations investigations since 2019. So the whole argument that she used as to why this question should not be supported and answered is not accurate.

You know, I think that when we hear people get up and talk about the reasons for this question, it's not about the type of care that individuals are providing. It's the standards. It's the concerns. I think Albertans need to know if there has been anything that violates an individual's dignity and safety, and that's what we're asking. So when members are sitting in the House and they've got direction from their minister to reject the question, I would say that the rationale provided by the minister is not accurate. It has not been reported; it is not publicly available since 2019. So when she stands up and makes this statement about why she's not supporting it, it's inaccurate.

3:40

I would really implore all members of this Chamber to support this question and have the government answer the question. This is really important, and we want to know that – when operators have committed contraventions, we need to know that they've been addressed. So every member sitting in here that has – on this side of the House we know that we want this answered and we want the government to respond. We have a government that, like I said,

after me simply moving this, rejected it with a rationale that isn't accurate.

You know, for those that are following along at home, again and again this government shows their true colours. They're not being transparent. There's not honesty in the rationale behind why they won't answer this question. What are they trying to hide, Mr. Speaker? It's really, really concerning when we have a minister that stands up and just says: "Nope. They're wrong. We already do it." They don't. The simplest solution is answering this question. Answer "How many audits or investigations were conducted between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2023?" instead of just saying: "We already do it. We reject it." They're clearly trying to hide something, and it's really concerning that this is the first question that we're bringing forward this afternoon in those that have been accepted to debate, and already the minister has said no, rejecting it with false rationale.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would just really implore everybody to vote in favour of this very important question to be accepted by the government for an answer. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Good. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:42 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Boparai	Elmeligi	Renaud
Calahoo Stonehouse	Goehring	Sabir
Chapman	Kasawski	Schmidt
Dach	Metz	Shepherd
Eggen	Pancholi	

Against the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz
Bouchard	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Sinclair
de Jonge	Lovely	Singh
Dreeshen	Lunty	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fir	Nally	Wiebe
Getson	Neudorf	Williams
Glubish	Nicolaides	Wilson
Guthrie	Nixon	Wright, J.
Horner	Petrovic	Yao
Hunter	Pitt	Yaseen
Jean	Rowswell	

Totals: For – 14 Against – 47

[Written Question 1 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre is rising on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Nursing Homes Act Investigations

Q2. Mr. Shepherd asked on behalf of Ms Sigurdson that the following question be accepted.
How many investigations were undertaken by the Ministry

of Health in response to complaints about an operator under the Nursing Homes Act during the period from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023?

4:00

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise and speak to Written Question 2. This is an important question. We have been discussing concerns that have been raised about the quality of care, quality of life provided to residents in continuing care in Alberta. What we do know from work that our caucus did going through about six years of inspection reports published online: we were able to determine that there have been 4,737 inspections, roughly, last year, in 2023. Of those, going through those reports, we found that 4,263, or about 90 per cent, of those inspections found that there were violations of the provincial standards of care. Ninety per cent. Data also showed that as of January 2024, so at the year-end, 337 issues had not been resolved. Now, this is a significant level.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

When we also look at the data as reported by CBC News, the noncompliance rates over five years in the province range from 46 per cent to 71 per cent. So this is a significant increase from the previous peak in five years, nearly 20 per cent higher. The number of inspections do vary from year to year, but 2023 did in fact have the highest.

Now, this is interesting because, of course, the Minister of Health, in rejecting the first written question, talked about how her government takes compliance very seriously, Mr. Speaker. She said that they've expanded the investigative division, that they've worked diligently to address current and ongoing concerns. We certainly can't fault them for the number of inspections that took place. Certainly, that does seem to be a significant number and seems to be at the higher end of what happens on an annual basis: 4,737.

What we're asking for, Mr. Speaker, is a simple thing. We're asking for a simple clarification of this total of 4,737 inspections. How many were initiated in response to a complaint that was made about an operator under the Nursing Homes Act? Now, this should be a simple thing for the minister to be able to answer, and if she's not able to answer it today – well, she has had the written question for some time, so certainly her staff has had some time to compile that information. Certainly, this should be a simple thing. The minister has spoken at length just now in the House about her government's desire to be transparent, their commitment to transparency. She is proud of their record of conducting these inspections, so it should be a simple matter simply to identify how many of these inspections were started specifically because of a complaint about an operator made under the Nursing Homes Act during 2023.

Now, this is important, Mr. Speaker. We do want to ensure that we are providing the best quality of care for seniors in this province. But what we found when we reviewed those six years of reports of the time largely under the UCP government, the inspections that were carried out, the concerns that were raised: indeed, again, there were violations of the provincial standards of care found in 90 per cent of the inspections that were carried out. That included things like concerns about cleanliness, concerns about odour, insufficient nutrition standards, infection prevention failures. These are all things that came to light in the findings that were published online.

Now, we know, Mr. Speaker, that in this government's own continuing care review back in 2021 we indeed saw some of those similar issues being highlighted. In the review, when they spoke to residents of continuing care facilities, they rated quality of meals at

5.3 out of 10. They raised concerns, it would seem, about recreational activities: 5.9. There were some others where they rated them a little bit higher: 7.5 for security and safety, 7.1 for support for their family and friends, 7.1 for resident dignity. So we did have some things that were higher but some things that were lower. There were definitely concerns that were raised in what we find when we go through these reports again, as our staff did.

In 90 per cent of the cases there were violations of the provincial standards, raising some serious concerns. What we're asking here is just a little bit more transparency from the government. Again, that is something they said that they are committed to do, that they are committed to providing. Indeed, if the minister through her expansion of the investigative services is endeavouring to do more of this work, it should be a simple thing to provide, and indeed I would imagine it would be something the minister would be proud to provide, to demonstrate how responsive they have been to complaints that have been raised under the Nursing Homes Act against operators and the direct action that our government has taken. Of these 4,737 inspections that were carried out – I apologize. Mr. Speaker, I should note that those are specifically in 2023, 4,737 in 2023. How many of those were initiated because of a complaint filed under the Nursing Homes Act?

One of the other reasons that this is so incredibly important, Mr. Speaker, is because there is a significant disruption that we are seeing in the health care system under this government. Now, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod stood and talked for a few moments. She's proud of the record of her government. She spoke about health care workers, and indeed on both sides of this aisle we support health care workers, and it is health care workers who are bringing these concerns forward to us. We hear from families, we hear from residents, and we hear from the health care workers.

To be clear, nobody on this side of the aisle is questioning the great efforts that front-line health care workers are putting in to look after our seniors in this province. If there's anything that I hear even when families come to me, when they come to bring their stories – when we spoke to the family of the senior who was housed in a hallway for 17 days, they were very clear that they saw the incredible efforts that front-line health care workers were putting in to support their father. Every single person I speak to even when they come and tell us about the impacts of this government's repeated decisions that have created so much additional pressure and chaos in our health care system: they are always abundantly clear that they see health care workers going above and beyond to look after their loved ones or themselves.

The challenge we have here, Mr. Speaker, is a lack of support from this government that creates and continues to create additional chaos and pressure that makes it more difficult for them to be able to provide that care. From operators who choose to make cuts, who choose to reduce the hours of care, who choose to cut corners and then leave these front-line staff to have to deal with the aftermath, struggling with too little time and too few hands to provide the care that Albertans in these facilities need and deserve, the dignity they deserve, the quality of care they deserve, again, that is why we are asking this question, so that we can better understand the data that's in front of us, not a total that was provided by the government.

While the minister speaks about their incredible transparency, again, we had to go through six years of reports and compile these totals and this information ourselves. What we are asking now: now that we have done that work, can the minister clarify for us, of these 4,737 inspections that we know were carried out, how many were initiated specifically due to a complaint that was raised? This is important because, unfortunately, we have seen an utter lack of transparency from this government on so many fronts, not only an

unwillingness to release data but actually endeavouring to hide data.

We know that currently the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is conducting a systemic review of multiple departments of this government, multiple ministries, in response to allegations that they are systematically breaking transparency laws. That is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve transparency, especially when the government is undertaking such a significant overhaul of the entirety of the health care system, placing significantly more power directly in the hands of the Premier and the Minister of Health. With great power comes great responsibility. So it is my hope that the minister will take that responsibility and answer the question.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Any others wishing to speak to Written Question 2? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:10

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this question. I want to start off by thanking my friend from Edmonton-City Centre for moving this question and giving a compelling argument as to why the people of Alberta deserve an answer to this question. I will admit I wasn't so quick to pop up to speak to this question because I was hoping that the Minister of Health was going to rise in her place and perhaps provide a response to this question, but I saw that no response was forthcoming. Perhaps my friend from Edmonton-City Centre, who I find quite persuasive, was not persuasive enough, so I guess the task falls to me to persuade the Health minister to provide a response to this question.

There are a couple of points that I want to make with regard to Written Question 2. You know, the question asks:

How many investigations were undertaken by the Ministry of Health in response to complaints about an operator under the Nursing Homes Act during the period from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023?

One of the things that I hear from my constituents time and time again who have loved ones in nursing care homes is that they don't fully understand even the requirements that nursing care homes are supposed to meet. I understand that the minister touts the website publishing care standards and those kinds of things as being transparent, but we need to keep in mind that the families and caregivers for people who live in nursing care homes are working flat out just to keep everything going.

When you have a loved one who is being cared for in a nursing care home, it's incredibly expensive in many cases, and that cost is often borne by the families. Most people can't retire with enough money to pay for their own nursing care, so those expenses fall to the families. Not only are they responsible for meeting the financial obligations of their loved one in care; they also need to be there for their loved one in person providing visits, often providing supplemental care that the nursing home staff is incapable of providing for a whole host of reasons that my friend from Edmonton-City Centre outlined in his speech.

If you are working full-time and the rest of your time is dedicated to caring for your loved one, when do you have time to educate yourself on the standards that nursing care homes are supposed to meet? It's not a simple thing to understand, and being able to find time to read through government documents available on the website is a challenging thing to do. I think the ministry has some work to do to educate the families and caregivers of people who are in nursing care homes about what standards they can expect in a

nursing care home so that they can properly raise these issues. That's why I think it's really important to answer this question: how many investigations were undertaken by the Ministry of Health in response to complaints about operators? I think that would give us a meaningful measure of how well people with family in continuing care understand the standards that nursing care homes are supposed to meet and then are willing to take action and hold those operators accountable.

The sad fact of the matter is that we cannot rely on nursing care providers to provide that information to the families. They're not willing to explain in great detail the standards that people can expect their loved ones to be given for care when it comes to nursing care homes because in many cases, and in the case of for-profit care providers, they have an economic incentive to not provide care, to violate the standards, because doing so will pad their bottom lines. So if they've got a whole bunch of people who are well educated in the matter of nursing care home standards and are calling the Ministry of Health whenever they see violations, that impacts their profitability, Mr. Speaker. And that is not something that any for-profit care provider wants to see. They are driven by the bottom line, so it's counter to their interests. So who is responsible for making sure that people with loved ones in care homes understand what the standards are? It's the Ministry of Health.

You know, if the Ministry of Health is doing such a good job of educating people, then presumably we would see a high number of investigations undertaken by that ministry regarding operator concerns that are generated by complaints, because people will know when standards are being violated or suspect that they know when standards are being violated, and then the Ministry of Health's investigations team can undertake those investigations. If a very small number of the more than 4,000 inspections that have been undertaken over the last six years are not driven by complaints, then I think that points to a bigger problem, that the people of Alberta don't clearly understand what standards they can expect for their loved ones in nursing care homes and can't act to defend the interests of the ones who are in care.

Now, the second point that I want to make on this issue, Mr. Speaker, is something that my friend from Edmonton-City Centre raised. Now, our staff put together research that looked at six years of inspection reports carried out on continuing care facilities, and we found that 90 per cent of the inspections resulted in violations of standards. And then my friend from Edmonton-City Centre highlighted some of the standards that had been violated, simple things that you would expect any care operator to meet, and those are standards of cleanliness, standards of nutrition, proper infection control, proper control of odours, the very basics that somebody in continuing care should expect to receive.

Now, when we have a failure rate of 90 per cent, that indicates that these problems are incredibly widespread. I would suggest to anyone with an interest in fixing the problems that we see in continuing care that a significant step forward in improving continuing care is to get for-profit operators out of the system altogether so that there is nobody who is providing continuing care that has a financial incentive to cut corners on these kinds of things. That is the fundamental premise of public health care, that we get the health care that we need regardless of our ability to pay but based on our needs. We have thousands of people in continuing care right now who are not getting the care that they need because we have such a significant profit motive in the continuing care sector. I can tell you that if the system were entirely run publicly, we could expect standards of care to increase, and the number of violations of health standards would go down significantly.

Now, maybe members opposite will say: well, how are you going to pay for it? That's the question that we're always faced with as democratic socialists when we propose radical ideas like public health care for people in continuing care. How are you going to pay for it? And the answer is always taxes, Mr. Speaker. We pay for public services through taxes. If we want to increase the level of public services that we deliver for our loved ones in continuing care, then we raise taxes, especially on those who are able to pay more. How much better could we provide care if we had the courage to raise taxes on people who are making all kinds of money? I think that would be an interesting question to answer.

Thank you.

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any others wishing to speak to Written Question 2? The Member for Calgary-Falconridge has risen to speak.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak about the question about "How many investigations were undertaken by the Ministry of Health in response to complaints about an operator under the Nursing Homes Act during the period from January 1 . . . to December 31, 2023?" As my colleagues from Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-City Centre have mentioned in their speeches, we know that from 4,737 inspections in 2023, 4,263, or 90 per cent, were found to violate the provincial standards of care. From cleanliness, odour problems, insufficient nutrition standards, infection prevention failures, all came to light from these findings.

Well, when the ministry or government received these complaints, there was a lack of transparency on if the department is going to deal with it. All Albertans expect that these complaints must be done in a timely and efficient manner, and we believe: don't let these private operators loose their hands, do whatever they want to. When seniors go to those facilities, it's their human rights as well. Also, people and the families who have spent their entire lives in Alberta, paid their taxes for their lifetimes: in their end moments they had to deal with all those problems.

We know that there are significant problems with nursing homes in Alberta, which we already have seen from the reports. I do have a few nursing homes in my riding as well, and when I get a chance to visit those ones, we still do see the same problems. Lots of people, seniors who live there, just are getting used to or start ignoring those problems. Most of them don't come out or make complaints. It's very sad and sorry to see our respectable seniors going through all that. Plus, their families, who work hard the entire day: when they go and visit their seniors, I have seen the people crying when they see their parents, whatever they are going through.

Well, we have no reason to believe that the government was not aware of those problems and the poor conditions Albertans were forced to live in. These are the people they trust here to work for them. But, again, they failed at that, to work for the common man, to work for Albertans. In turn, we also want to understand how many complaints were made and how many investigations were conducted as a result of these complaints. We don't understand why there is no transparency. What is this government trying to hide from Albertans, from the seniors, people who have invested all their life here for the betterment of Alberta? We from this side of the House would urge the minister to answer those questions. When we go and face the people, we feel it's hard, too, and we don't want to get into the blame game either, but we have no answers to face them.

With such glaring problems in our continuing care system, the government should be responding to complaints quickly and taking

significant action to investigate and address complaints made. There is a lack of staffing, lack of resources. Intentionally, there is no transparency there, which is very shameful and sad to see.

Mr. Speaker, as we all discussed, these problems are rising, and these are growing day by day. Why don't we control those operators? There is lack of accountability. Why don't we force them or get them to fix all those things? No one would want to live with a bad smell, an odour, that the food they eat has a lack of nutrition. All those seniors have paid their part, and after that, they are not getting the services they deserve. They are left with no choice. As we know, there is lots of demand out there. Even with lots of people moving to Alberta, the senior population is quite huge. There is lots of demand there and lack of operators or the beds or the facilities.

We know that Alberta has a continuing care standards problem. We want to know: what are the reasons behind it? Why can't we fix it? What is stopping this government from fixing those challenges? Mr. Speaker, as we know, the minister put new continuing care regulations into effect that remove the minimum hours of care requirement, and at the time we heard in answers that operators are being consulted, that residents are being consulted, but at the ground level we haven't seen anything.

This government responded by scrapping the legal requirements to provide care altogether instead of increasing the hours and increasing funding to match. It does not have to be this way. In Ontario their government increased minimum hours of care to four hours, answering the call from the advocates, but here we are not even giving the full 1.9 hours of care.

They should do proper consultation. They should listen to Albertans. They should listen to our vulnerable seniors before making such kinds of decisions which impact them regularly in their day-to-day lives. We believe the government should be accountable for the practices within continuing care facilities, nursing homes, and home-care programs. They already know the information we are requesting, that seniors are requesting, that the families are requesting, that Albertans are requesting. It's been hidden, which is unfair. How can Albertans in good conscience trust this government to handle seniors' care while they have seen their failures in the past? They don't have any expectations. This government has just three more years left. It's time for them to fix these problems.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just want to say a couple of things in regard to this question specifically and written questions generally. I think that it's incumbent upon a government to provide information if it's reasonable and it provides some illumination into how the state of affairs are in our continuing care, in this case, and health care generally.

Any time, Mr. Speaker, you withhold information that you obviously have, then you cast doubt as to the integrity of how the government is dealing with information, how they're dealing with complaints, and how they are trying to fix things to make them better for the future. That simple act of saying, "Sorry; we can't give you that information," or "You can find it on the website," you know, when you know it's not there – if it is there, then they can give us that information off the website, and it clears a lot of things up, right? Governance is not just paying the money for health care and education and paving the roads and so forth; it's a question of trust and integrity. If you fail to give that trust and integrity through

a reasonable ask for information, then you are undermining maybe lots of other good things that are happening around the system.

We know that our health care professionals are doing the best that they can. They work very hard. I know I have health professionals in my own family and friends and neighbours as well. They know that the system depends on them working harder and harder to cover the gaps, let's say, in long-term care or continuing care, as it were. So for us to be able to analyze the information and for the public to do so as well and say, "Okay; there have been 4,737 complaints or whatever; exactly where are those coming from? Are they coming from inspections? Are they coming from individuals? Are they coming from patients? Are they coming from the professional staff?" can really help to boil down and to look for ways by which to improve continuing care here in the province.

We know that (a) we do have a large, growing seniors population. We know that especially a lot of our continuing care facilities are under a lot of stress. We saw that, just a light shone that magnified that during COVID, and that was generally a call to action to say: let's try to fix some of these problems. The best way to do those things in 2024 is to use metrics and to use analysis based on metrics, and this is what this question is designed for.

Again, it's a very practical question that could really help not just us understand better what's going on but the general public as well, each individual facility that's providing continuing care, be it public or private or a nonprofit or whatever, and they can go from there, right? That's the way you make intelligent decisions. To withhold information or say, "Oh, well, it's already there," then release that thing that's already there and we can see how good it is, right?

This idea of somehow denying that information or, you know, putting up some kind of bluff to that regard: it only makes things more difficult. It makes it more difficult to analyze, to build better health care for our seniors, for our health care workers, who work so hard in those facilities. But, again, as I said, Mr. Speaker, it also is a question of trust and integrity, and those are the currencies that you really only have as a government, and if you undermine those just by simply being obstinate or stubborn and not giving the information that people need, then you're not doing your job, quite frankly.

I hope that the minister is going to stand up and say, "I'll accept the questions," and away we go, and we'll all be better for it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member who originally put forward the question. Again, we're going to reject the question because this information is publicly available and is available online through the accommodation standards and licensing at standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca.

I find it fascinating to listen to the members opposite speak on this because they quote publicly available numbers that they found. You know, when they started talking about the over 4,000 – 4,737 was the number that was quoted, I believe – investigations that took place and that 337 issues were not resolved, that means the remainder were resolved, that we have detailed inspections, that we are going in and doing the work. Every complaint that comes in gets investigated, and of course if there is merit to it, then there's further investigation. There are penalties that can be put in place. There are closures that can happen. Mr. Speaker, there is just so much detail there in terms of what those investigations are. They quoted why some of those investigations took place, cleanliness, et cetera. So when they're not resolved, that means that the investigators are continually going in and making sure that those standards are met,

and not only are they met in public places but in independent facilities as well.

Under the new continuing care legislation – and I want to remind the members opposite that the Continuing Care Act, that came into force here April 1, was a modernizing act and, in fact, replaced four or five other acts that were outdated and needed to be brought into today's, you know, modern times. I look at the fact that we have done an extensive engagement that led to that continuing care legislation that came forward, that subsequent to that legislation there was, again, increased engagement which added to the regulations being brought into force, to the standards coming forward.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I heard the Member for St. Albert mention that she was really pleased that when she was in the workforce, there were investigations happening and that those inspectors provided useful information that they needed to . . .

Ms Renaud: Maybe you should start reporting on them?

Member LaGrange: I'm not sure why the members opposite are so noisy, but I hope you can hear me, Mr. Speaker, on my answers.

The members opposite, you know, again, should be listening to the fact that these investigations, as I said earlier, are detailed. They go in, and if there's a deficiency, it is investigated more fully. There are recommendations made on how to solve that deficiency, and they go back and they reinvestigate, and they make sure until they're satisfied. The fact that there are 337 issues that haven't been resolved should give people comfort to know that those investigations are thorough. In fact, I want to give kudos to the investigators because I know they care.

For the members opposite, you know, to imply that the members on this side don't care about seniors is ludicrous, Mr. Speaker. I think it's just abhorrent. We all care about our seniors. Seniors have made this country. In fact, right now 1 in 7 Albertans are 65 years of age and older. Within the next 20 years that will be 1 in 5. I am very close to that category myself. We care deeply. I journeyed with my elderly in-laws as they went through their senior years and their final years, so I know very well the issues that are out there.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite talk about that we're not funding hours. In fact, we are funding hours. We are funding more hours. We increased our funding; we almost doubled it. It went from 1.9 hours. We're actually funding 3.6 hours. We have provided record investment, over a billion dollars of investment into modernizing and bringing forward operational best practices within the continuing care organizations and facilities. We've added through our capital investment; in just this year alone we anticipate adding 2,000 spaces.

So to imply that, in fact, we're trying to hide something: that's not true. The data is there. The members opposite found it. They've been speaking to it for the last almost an hour and a half, I would say, over the last two questions. We continue to make sure that families are satisfied with the care for their parents that are in continuing care facilities across this province.

4:40

We've added additional record investment into home care, whether that's medical home care or community home care. We are holding our facilities to account, as was listed by the high numbers of investigations that are being performed and the follow-ups that happened subsequent to those investigations, and that's for public facilities as well as independent for-profit facilities, Mr. Speaker.

Again, for the members opposite to say that that's not happening, that we don't care about that, that is just not so. We continue to make improvements both in the way that we're providing funding

but also in listening to the community in care, the whole spectrum, the whole system.

I know there was extensive engagement before the legislation came into existence and came into force on April 1 and our regulations came into force, but we feel very strongly that that has to be an ongoing conversation. Part of the standards that came into force is ensuring that the families of their loved ones, of their parents, have the ability to have input. Staffing plans have to be publicly posted. There has to be a mechanism to complain, Mr. Speaker.

All of these things we continue to refine. We continue to work with them. We are planning more engagement sessions throughout the summer and into the fall on continuing care. It has to be an ongoing dialogue because, of course, our seniors are very, very important to all of us.

I know that as a former rehab practitioner – and I worked at Michener Centre. The Member for St. Albert, when she spoke about the Protection for Persons in Care Act: I know myself – and that was a publicly funded institution – that I had to report on individuals that were physically and/or mentally and emotionally abusive of some of the people, some of the residents, that were there. As my job as a rehab practitioner, as a shift charge, and in my various roles at Michener Centre I had to do that to protect the people that were living there. I am glad that we do have mechanisms in place to deal with people that are not following through with their commitment to looking after our most vulnerable in the best way possible.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I had a younger brother who was born with Down syndrome, and I take it very personally because I always think that that could be my brother in that situation. When I think about seniors in long-term care facilities at every level, that could be my mother, that could be my father, someone I love in those facilities. That's the lens we have to make decisions through, and that is the lens that our government is making the decisions on continuing care through. For the members opposite to imply anything else is just not so. We are wanting to make it as transparent as possible, but we're also working hard to do the refocusing, which we know is much needed.

Mr. Speaker, to have the members opposite imply that we're not willing to provide information: that's not true. They can go online, and they have. They've gone online, and they found that information. They found it and they've been speaking to it, so to say that it isn't publicly available when, in fact, they keep quoting questions and reports and submissions that have been put forward – we're going to continue to provide that information because people deserve to know. In fact, we will probably make it even better as time goes on because we are looking, as we develop the continuing care organization, that we have a sector that is specifically focused on continuing care improvements, having accountability, providing outcomes.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to Written Question 2?

Seeing none, I will call on the Member for Edmonton-City Centre to close debate.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just speak briefly to respond to the minister. It's an incredibly disingenuous argument. The minister is saying, "No, we don't need to and we will not provide" – simple question – "the total number of these inspections that were initiated because of a specific request, a complaint filed under the Continuing Care Act, because," she said, "all of the reports are publicly available; they're all online," akin, Mr. Speaker, to saying: "Oh, well, you want to know that answer? Well, we've got 1,000 filing cabinets out back. Feel free to go through,

rifle through, make notes, and add that all up yourself." That's what they consider transparency.

Either this minister's department does not track this information and she can't provide the answer because they don't have it – that would suggest, Mr. Speaker, a level of incompetence and failure in their work – or the minister is refusing to provide it. There would be no reason to refuse other than either out of some sense of not wanting to aid the opposition in any way, not wanting to support the public, or of a fear of transparency.

Indeed, as I noted, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is currently under investigation by the Information and Privacy Commissioner on multiple fronts, a crossministry systemic review for just this sort of behaviour. When Albertans reach out to this government and ask for specific information under the freedom of information act, this government is under investigation for reports of throwing up multiple barriers consistently, repeatedly to block Albertans from accessing information which they have, so it is difficult to see this minister's decision today to reject this simple question as anything but more of the same.

But, certainly, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to do our work as the Official Opposition to provide Albertans with the transparency which this government repeatedly chooses to deny them. Albertans do deserve answers, and they certainly deserve better than what this government and this minister are offering today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Boparai	Goehring	Pancholi
Chapman	Ip	Renaud
Dach	Irwin	Sabir
EGgen	Kasawski	Schmidt
Ellingson	Metz	Shepherd
Elmeligi		

Against the motion:

Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Rowswell
Boitchenko	Jones	Sawhney
Bouchard	LaGrange	Schow
Cyr	Loewen	Schulz
de Jonge	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
Dreeshen	Lovely	Sinclair
Dyck	Lunty	Singh
Ellis	McDougall	Stephan
Fir	McIver	Turton
Getson	Nally	van Dijken
Glubish	Neudorf	Williams
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Wilson
Horner	Nixon	Wright, J.
Hunter	Petrovic	Yao
Jean	Pitt	Yaseen

Totals: For – 16 Against – 45

[Written Question 2 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Amendment to Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act

513. Mr. Ellingson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a bill to amend the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act that, if enacted, would require on the introduction of a motion under section 3 of the act that the government

- (a) conduct an economic impact study on the potential effects of implementing the matters proposed in the motion; and
- (b) immediately publish the results of that study to ensure that members are informed before they vote on that motion in respect of all potential investment impacts due to regulatory or policy uncertainty, potential job losses, and potential negative impacts on the provincial economy.

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today and introduce Motion 513, which would require on the introduction of a motion under section 3 of the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act that the government conduct an economic impact study on the potential effects of implementing the sovereignty act and then publish the results before this House votes on the motion.

Mr. Speaker, I will refer to the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act as the sovereignty act or this legislation in my debate. In debating Motion 513, it is important to understand the potential negative impact of invoking the sovereignty act and outline the purpose and importance of conducting an economic impact assessment before invoking the act.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is about accountability. If you are concerned with accountability, you will support this motion. When this legislation was introduced in this House, there were many voices in the community speaking against it. Economists and business leaders alike questioned the impact this bill would have on economic growth. These included comments from Todd Hirsch, former vice-president and chief economist for ATB. Todd said, and I quote, I think this would be so politically confusing and disruptive. Just ask Quebec after 1976 how that went for them. It was 40 years of an outflow of people and capital and corporate presence and influence, and it has never returned. The same thing would happen in Alberta. Todd was referring to the economic malaise after the first election of the separatist Parti Québécois government. This is an insightful comment.

An article published by the Montreal Economic Institute in May 2007 noted that Quebec had among the poorest economic performance in Canada in the 25 years to 2007. The article notes that between 1981 and 2006 Quebec's annual GDP growth averaged 2.3 per cent compared to 3 per cent for the rest of the country at that time. The article laments Quebec's poor economic performance amongst its peers as well as its poor performance in investment attraction.

Mr. Speaker, these years of laggard economic performance occurred during the peak years of Quebec's ongoing threat to separate from the Canadian federation. We've heard this government debate that following Quebec's lead will result in more funding from Ottawa, but there are economic and investment consequences in following Quebec's sovereignty lead.

Mr. Speaker, Quebec is hardly the poster child to follow in developing legislation that creates a business-friendly culture and promotes economic growth. The relentless pursuit of sovereignty within Canada has not worked in Quebec's economic favour. Therefore, it is imperative to assess the potential negative

consequences of utilizing this legislation and understand the risk to Alberta's economy before invoking the sovereignty act.

Deborah Yedlin, president of the Calgary Chamber of commerce also spoke against this bill when proposed. She said, and I quote, there's no shred of evidence that this act will lead to economic growth. She went on to say: you can't tell me this is going to support economic growth and support continued economic diversification in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Chamber and other business organizations will say that the last thing that businesses need is uncertainty. There's enough uncertainty in the market today without the additional anxiety this legislation causes for business operators. With elevated interest rates and inflation in Alberta continuing to lead the country, businesses have enough to deal with without the added uncertainty of the sovereignty act being invoked. Conducting an economic impact assessment before invoking the act is a critical step to ensure Albertans and investors in our province fully understand the risks and pitfalls of this legislation.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, simply using the word "sovereignty" creates uncertainty for businesses. There are two great examples outside of Canada where we can see what happens when jurisdictions move to establish their sovereignty, the United Kingdom and Catalonia.

We all know that the United Kingdom left the European Union after pressure from conservatives convinced people that they would be better off outside the European Union. This is far from the reality that the United Kingdom has experienced. A January 2024 study conducted by Cambridge economics estimates the economic output of the United Kingdom today is 140 billion pounds, or 6 per cent, lower than if the United Kingdom had remained in the European Union. Further, in projecting to 2035, the study estimates that there are 1.8 million fewer jobs in the United Kingdom than if they had not left the European Union.

Similarly, it is estimated that 3,000 companies moved their official headquarters outside of Catalonia following their drive for sovereignty in 2018. While many retained managerial offices in Catalonia, it is estimated that 30,000 additional jobs could have been created in 2017 to 2019 had there not been such high levels of political uncertainty. Catalonia didn't leave Spain, but the fears of sovereignty were enough to drive businesses away. Because of this, Catalonia has lost its place as the leader of economic growth in Spain to Madrid.

Mr. Speaker, this is a cautionary tale for Alberta as this government continues to send signals of pursuing sovereignty through their actions. History has shown that invoking legislation such as the sovereignty act can create immense risk, generate uncertainty, and damage Alberta's economy. This government must do its due diligence to study and understand those potential negative consequences. Economic impact assessments lead to an understanding of economic activity and clarify questions surrounding the value of an industry to the overall economy, how changes will affect jobs, income, and spending.

Conducting an assessment and analyzing macroeconomic impact are important to ensure decisions maximize outcomes. They are used to look at the direct, indirect, and induced effects of a planned project or program. They go beyond looking at immediate impact to understand the ripple effect throughout the entire economy. As an example, invoking the sovereignty act to block the clean energy regulations from being applied in Alberta would generate uncertainty for the power generation market. An economic impact assessment would measure the potential investment lost from the uncertainty generated and the effect on the broader economy from that lost investment.

While economic impact studies are data driven, they also engage stakeholders to understand relationships between stakeholders and their perceptions of a project or a program. It is important to hear from stakeholders if the policy decisions being made will impact their investment decisions. Those same stakeholders should have the opportunity to review and discuss the economic impact of an assessment once it is completed.

The government of Alberta does have familiarity with economic impact studies; we maintain economic multipliers to understand how industries impact the economy. While impact assessments are most often utilized to understand positive impact of programs or projects, they can also be used to understand negative impact, as I gave examples for the United Kingdom and Catalonia. Regrettably, those were done after the political decisions were made.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons I hope the members of this House will support this motion and require an economic impact study be conducted before invoking the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Motion Other than Government Motion 513. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk to Motion 513, and I appreciate the essence that was brought forward under it by the Member for Calgary-Foothills. Economic impact studies are important and serve a purpose of providing significant information about potential outcomes of proposed legislation, regulation, or policy. I think in many cases it is the absolute right path forward. However, the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act provides a framework to protect Albertans from federal legislation or policies that are unconstitutional or harmful to our province, our people, or economic prosperity.

Much of the intent of the motion is inherent within the existing bill. The foundational significance of the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act is about constitutional authority. For instance, the Constitution of Canada enumerates exclusive powers of provincial Legislatures in sections 92, 92A, and 93 of the Constitution Acts 1867 to 1982. They include the following: matters of merely local or private nature, prisons, hospitals, municipalities, property and civil rights, administration of civil and criminal justice, education, natural resources, direct taxation within provinces, management and sale of public lands belonging to the province, formalization of marriage, and incorporation of companies. Should we, then, hypothetically subject constitutionally protected provincial jurisdictions like prisons, hospitals, schools, and municipalities to economic impact assessments when these are fully funded public services?

We provide these services as an obligation and responsibility to our constituents. The issue being addressed in the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act is jurisdiction and constitutional authority. Motion 513 puts the cart before the horse and misses the point of that legislation, in which case making it either unnecessary in the case of publicly funded services or redundant as when we seek to protect our economy.

I'm sure that if the members opposite were ever to form a government, they would want to make sure that they do not hamper their own provincially protected authority under the Constitution, and in such a case they wouldn't want to see that this motion goes forward. That's why I would ask all members of this Legislature to not support this motion going forward.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak in favour of Motion 513. As my colleague from Calgary-Foothills has

already enumerated, there are many reasons as to why this motion is certainly needed and important, all of the reasons he has espoused around the economic uncertainty that the sovereignty act will potentially impose. Motion 513 is a reasonable safeguard to counteract an overreaching and entitled government. We're not just talking solely about economic consequences and economic impact, which are certainly significant; we are also talking about the very foundation of democracy in this province.

I want to draw my colleagues in this House and their attention to the authoritarian pattern of governance from the other side of this House. What we have seen is a pattern of ignoring the will of Albertans and, I would submit, a culture of entitlement and stifling debate on positions that they don't agree with. In this Chamber alone I feel it is certainly apt to point out that we have seen unprecedented use of time limitations to stymie opposition. We have seen the withholding of information and time-honoured traditions of bill briefings for His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. We have seen an erosion of the culture of transparency and accountability in this House. What we have also seen, Mr. Speaker, is that politics and ideology are at the heart of every decision, not good governance, I might add, not decisions that will benefit Albertans the most but politics and ideology.

As my colleague has already pointed out, economic uncertainty will cost us and will continue to cost us. Motion 513 will at least offer a reasonable check and balance. It will at the very least offer some transparency and accountability on a very imperfect bill.

I do believe, Mr. Speaker, that we are at a crossroads. The question that I want to ask my colleagues again – I've asked this question before – is: will we continue to safeguard our democratic institutions and traditions, or will we continue to introduce cynicism and tyranny, which, frankly, the sovereignty act does do, in our democratic processes?

5:20

When we look at unlimited or excessive power, our tradition, our democratic, parliamentary tradition has always been that power needs to be tempered, if not by law then certainly by convention. Trust alone isn't enough, but what we have seen, not just with the sovereignty act, I might add, but with pieces of legislation we have seen introduced in this session, shows a pattern. And, as I've said before, patterns tell a story, Mr. Speaker. We have seen an erosion of democracy, of pluralism, of the freedom of thought through Bill 18. We have seen the continued concentration of power through the sovereignty act, through bills 18, 20, and 17. To paraphrase Dr. Jared Wesley: you don't just wake up in an authoritarian state; it's precipitous and happens over time.

Mr. Speaker, we're talking about some serious existential issues here because what is happening in this Legislature hits at the very heart of our democratic institutions and undermines our traditions. Again, power needs to be tempered, if not by law then by convention.

Why is Motion 513 needed? Very simply, we need accountability and transparency. It allows a very reasonable measure of sober second thought. On the sovereignty act, what we keep hearing from this government is "Just trust us; just trust us," but there's a huge risk in letting this government or, frankly, any government make unilateral decisions without considering the economic risks.

Motion 513, instead, will give Albertans some transparency on the risks this government may take. It will give this government the opportunity of sober second thought. In the sovereignty act as it currently is written, cabinet can bring a resolution to the Assembly that states that a federal initiative is either unconstitutional, causes harm, or is anticipated to cause harm, and while this sounds reasonable, it is anything but. It essentially gives this government

carte blanche to do whatever they choose for purely political purposes, and we have seen this government do exactly that with their authoritarian bills 12, 17, 18, and 20, and, of course, the sovereignty act.

Mr. Speaker, I implore all folks in this House that we can do better. What we're seeing from this government, the very clear message that they keep sending to Albertans, is that if we don't like city council and the mayor, we're going to create legislation that allows their unilateral removal, with little oversight or due process. The message they keep sending to academics, postsecondary institutions, and the innovation community is that if we don't agree with your politics or your perceived politics or your area of research, we will get in the way of your funding.

Mr. Speaker, the pattern is very clear: politics and ideology at the heart of every decision this government makes. What we have also seen is that they won't listen to Albertans or level with Albertans. I mean, who can forget how this government has handled the conversation around the CPP? They have refused and still continue to refuse to meet with Albertans face to face while on this side of the House we have met with thousands of Albertans with parallel consultation.

But it doesn't stop here. The sovereignty act goes further, where it becomes fundamentally undemocratic and becomes dangerous for Alberta's economy. After the Assembly approves a motion under the sovereignty act, the cabinet then has the power to unilaterally suspend or amend legislation. They can also pass orders of cabinet that will override existing provincial legislation. And that's why the act needs to be amended. You know, we have sounded the alarms on some of the challenges and the dangers of the sovereignty act, without much success, but I certainly hope that the members opposite, for the sake of all Albertans and for the sake of our democratic institutions, will take this opportunity to correct what, frankly, is a piece of legislation that is going to undermine our very institution.

I also want to add that what we've seen from this government is a pattern of control, of attacking our democratic institutions. We have seen Bill 20 allowing the government to unilaterally veto or amend municipal bylaws. All of this is incredibly troubling, Mr. Speaker.

But I'm also going to talk – let me just talk a little bit about the economic impact that the sovereignty act might have if invoked and why this motion is needed. The very well-known examples are of Quebec and of Catalonia in Spain. When the province of Quebec elected a separatist government in 1976, leading to votes in 1980 and '95 about whether to split from the rest of Canada, what we saw is that this economic uncertainty that was then created essentially dealt a punishing blow to Quebec's economy to this very day. Until the mid-20th century, until the 1950s, Montreal was, in fact, the financial capital of Canada, with all of the major banks headquartered there. But what we have seen with . . .

The Speaker: On Motion Other than Government Motion 513, the hon. Member for Taber-Warner has risen.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to be able to stand and to speak against this Motion 513. As I thought about it, I thought about the hypocrisy of this motion. Mr. Speaker, as you know and as you have been elected the same number of times as I have, we were elected first as opposition MLAs. During that time, in 2015, for four years I sat in the opposition bench, watching as the NDP unravelled everything that made Alberta great. I watched it for four years. I watched it as they chased away billions, tens of billions of dollars of investment from this province. That investment actually means good-paying jobs. I watched as they put

budget after budget by the worst Finance minister in Alberta history to take away our children's future by indebting them, by putting them into debt, future debt to the tune of \$80 billion.

When I take a look at the hypocrisy of this motion, asking for us to bring forward a bill, I am surprised at the audacity of it. Now, when the NDP had never been in government, they could say whatever they wanted because they had never had a track record, but they have a track record, and that track record is terrible, very, very terrible.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that we bring forward a bill, the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act, that says to the federal government: we have a Confederation that is an equal partnership between the federal government and the provincial governments. It is an equal partnership, that each has constitutional rights specifically enumerated within that Constitution, within that document, agreed upon by not just all provinces but by the federal government at the time as well and is supposed to be accepted and enacted by all levels of government.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, what is interesting is that for many years now we have seen the federal government continue to get out of their lane, move into our lane, and cause major problems for our province, for the province I have called home all my life. I live in an area of southern Alberta where we have been blessed with some great weather. The heat units down there, the sun days that we have: you add water to it, and you can grow 60 specialty crops. It's a magical place. I love it. I love being down there.

There's one company down there, Lantic sugar; we know them as Rogers Sugar. Every April 1 they give me a call and they say: why are we still up here when just across the border, on the U.S. side, there's no carbon tax? Now, if you remember, Mr. Speaker, the NDP provincially – not the mother ship in Ottawa but the NDP provincially – are the ones who established this concept of a consumer carbon tax. This company, Rogers Sugar, contacts me every time it goes up – it's now at \$85; it's supposed to go to \$170 – and I keep on saying to them: “You know what? I'm pretty sure that these guys in Ottawa are not going to make it longer than this term.”

I know that the members opposite are cheering for them to still stay in because I don't think that their mother ship, the NDP in Ottawa, would ever get that close to being able to form government in this country, because most of the country is not socialist. But you know what? They figured it out. Jagmeet Singh and his . . .

An Hon. Member: Comrades.

Mr. Hunter: I was going to say something else, but I will just state that his colleagues on the Liberal side have decided that they're going to work together and cause all sorts of problems for not just our province but many provinces, because we're not the only ones that are being affected by the carbon tax.

When you think about it, Mr. Speaker, affordability in your riding, just as it is in my riding, just as it is in every NDP Edmonton riding or whatever riding they have – they have as many calls as I do about affordability being the number one problem. That affordability, whether they don't seem to understand it, is obviously exacerbated by having the carbon tax continue to go up. When you live in a province like Alberta, you have to ship things here. We don't live on the coast, where you can take things in from big boats. We have to have it shipped, so any time that that carbon tax goes up, that's going to be a cost. And guess what? Whether they like it or not, that cost is passed on to the consumer.

This is why senior citizens on fixed incomes are struggling every day to be able to make ends meet, because they have had so much

of a price shock, whether it be utilities or food prices. Whatever it is, they have a price shock, and they have to struggle every day to be able to make ends meet. That is the problem that we are facing. The federal government have raised the cost of everything through the carbon tax increases, championed by our very own provincial NDP.

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker; this is exactly what the NDP in this province want. They believe that they can do it better. In fact, when I sat on that side, on the opposite side, and I listened to them, their argument was always: Alberta was broke, and we're here now to fix it. And what they did from 2015 to 2019: they fixed it. But I can tell you they broke Alberta, and it took a United Conservative movement to be able to come in and to be able to say: "You know what? We actually do love what has made Alberta great."

We love what this province was about. We love what it has done for our children and for our grandchildren. We love what it has done for our businesses, for people who have been able to say: "You know what? I've come here. I've got maybe a couple of nickels in my pocket, but if I work hard and I make something of my life, I can actually do a business here. I can make something for my children and my grandchildren." You know what? That's the Alberta story. That is what it means to be Albertan.

And you know what? We are not the embarrassing cousins. Mr. Speaker, we are a bright light in Canada. You know how we know that? We know that by 202,000 people moving into our province last year alone. And every time we talk about the Alberta advantage, this is the sort of thing that happens. People come out to our province, and they say: "You know what? We're not listening to the NDP, because they have no idea how good they've got it here."

But we've got a situation now where we've got to protect this Alberta advantage. This is something good. This is fantastic, what we've got here in this province. Our children and grandchildren can be proud of what our grandparents and our great-grandparents did to build an amazing place. This is something that I don't think we should be – we should be proud of what has happened here.

Mr. Speaker, with all my heart, I would state that this motion is not called for, that what we are trying to do is protect that Alberta advantage through this Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act. With that, I wholeheartedly ask all the members here to remember what it means to be Albertan and to fight for what we have, the good things that we have here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis is next.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Motion 513, obviously. You know, at the heart of it, this motion is actually about accountability and transparency. I knew, preparing for this debate today, that the debate was actually going to turn into being about the sovereignty act, but that's not what this motion is about. When the sovereignty act was introduced to this House and debated, it was highly contested. Albertans are very divided on how they feel about the sovereignty act. People feel very strongly about this on both sides, sure, and it was and I believe it still remains an example of the Premier putting her own extremist and entitled policies and politics ahead of economic common sense.

Time and again the UCP has ignored expert advice regarding the sovereignty act and the negative economic impact of its actions. The sovereignty act creates investor uncertainty in Alberta, and it scares money away from Alberta, and my colleagues previously have gone into detail about that. But, as I said, this motion is not about the act itself.

The UCP have repeatedly dismissed or been very dismissive about concerns that have been raised by the NDP and economists and Albertans who are concerned about the sovereignty act, saying that it spreads misinformation, that it's exaggerating potential negative effects. I don't even know all of the reasons why they dismiss so many of the comments that we say. That's what the UCP does, Mr. Speaker. They are dismissive about our arguments. They don't actually want to engage in productive debate. They just want to rant about the feds. So let's just agree to disagree on those details.

Basically, this motion is asking the UCP to prove it. You disagree? Through you, Mr. Speaker, to all of the speakers on the other side of the House: you think that the sovereignty act isn't going to negatively impact economic potential for Alberta? Prove it. Do an economic impact assessment; release that information to Albertans prior to invoking the act.

I've heard the UCP members opposite say time and time again in this House that they value transparency and accountability. If that's the case, pass this motion. I've heard the UCP members say that they value transparency and accountability when it comes to coal mining, yet there's information that hasn't been publicly released. I hear them talk about transparency and accountability in campaign promises, which are quickly broken once they form government, including a personal income tax break, the Kananaskis conservation pass, an Alberta pension plan. Need I go on? Can we trust the UCP? The answer to that, for me, is no. For most of my constituents, the answer is also no. For many Albertans across this province, the answer is no.

5:40

If you believe in accountability and transparency, pass this motion. Prove it. Do the work. This motion is about accounting to Albertans on how the decisions that we make in this House consider them and the concerns that they may or may not have. To not pass this motion is a sign of entitlement because it's basically telling Albertans: "Don't worry. Trust us. We've got it. We know everything, and we don't even have to tell you what we know or what we don't know." This motion will protect Albertans by forcing the government to consider, define, and publicly release the economic consequences when the sovereignty act is enacted. This is, really, about accountability.

Now, the UCP, the members opposite, have made some arguments, and I've been listening very carefully. I tried to take some notes on what I would say in response to that, but the only thing I can come up with is that none of what I've heard across the aisle is a reason to not review or provide an economic impact assessment when invoking the sovereignty act. This is not telling you that we shouldn't have the sovereignty act although I think that we shouldn't. This is just saying: prove it; put your money where your mouth is. You think that this won't have negative impacts? Prove it. Collect the data, and show me.

Everybody in this House will know that I am a scientist. I feel like I've said that many times. This idea of impact studies is, you know, part of my professional life, this idea that you would measure the impact of an action and then report back on it. It's called environmental monitoring in my world, but it could be called an economic impact study or anything of the like.

Part of the reason why this sovereignty act came into the news last fall was really around the federal emissions caps and the interim emissions and the numbers associated with that and the Premier saying that we need to develop our oil and gas industry at our own pace and that the federal emissions cap goes against Alberta's ability to do that. This is part of negotiating. It doesn't mean that we have to invoke a piece of legislation to be able to sit at the table and negotiate.

Also, never mind that climate change is real and that addressing climate change is up to all Canadians working together across levels of government. Never mind that reducing emissions is an important part of that and that many companies are actually poised to and are doing more work to reduce emissions than is required by regulations because it's the right thing to do. Never mind that the technological innovation required to meet interim targets can stimulate the economy by positioning Albertans and Alberta businesses as champions and leaders and attract investment here. You don't believe me? You think I'm making it up? Prove it. Pass the motion. Do the work.

The thing about the emissions cap and the sovereignty act is that people often react on feelings. They feel afraid of federal overreach. They feel afraid of provincial overreach. Everybody is overreaching and sticking their nose into everybody else's business. But that's what this motion is for. This motion is about collecting the data to prove that something will or will not have positive or negative economic influence on Alberta businesses and on the Alberta economy. This motion is not about how you feel about the sovereignty act. It is about the data that supports invoking the act, and that makes it an evidence-based, data-driven decision. I don't think that there's anything wrong with that. We should be able to answer the question: how much will it cost Albertans to invoke the sovereignty act in this particular case? Albertans should be able to have access to that information. They should know the answer to that question so that they can assess whether they support invoking the act or not.

In the environmental sector we conduct regular environmental monitoring. We have legislation, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, that conducts environmental monitoring activities in Alberta. We also have an Alberta environmental science program, led by the Chief Scientist, that provides science data, information, and reporting on the conditions of the environment. We have programs and policies for monitoring air, water, land, plants, wetlands, fish and wildlife, climate, oil sands. The list of monitoring that we do in the province is extensive, and we invest millions of dollars into this. It's very successful. But we don't invest the same amount of money, necessarily, into specific economic monitoring programs. This motion is suggesting that we do.

Monitoring is important because it provides that data-, evidence-based decision-making. It allows you to also test solutions. It's kind of an experiment. You try something out, you collect data on how effective it is, and then you amend or change your management action in response to the results of that data. Monitoring is how we learn in science. It's how we take information and change what we're doing on the ground to be better.

This sovereignty act is new for Alberta. It's a new approach. Why would we not want to take data and measure its effectiveness so that we can ensure it is serving Albertans and it is serving Alberta businesses? Monitoring provides transparency in decision-making. It is a way to gather the public and stakeholders in your decision-making process to see how they feel about something and report back to them.

But we also need to close the loop on monitoring results, and that's what creates adaptive management, when we take the results from monitoring and apply it to decision-making and test again how that change affects the outcome. That's why we do this. We do this to make better decisions based on the best available information, so why wouldn't we want to include economic data? Why wouldn't we want to include information and data in assessing the effectiveness of the sovereignty act in Alberta? I think the only reason you wouldn't accept this motion is because you don't value accountability and transparency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Motion Other than Government Motion 513. Do you guys want to play paper, rock, scissors, or I'll solve this problem?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I'm enjoying the debate on the motion in the Chamber. One of my favourite words: accountability. We'll start with accountability. As it relates to economic policy, I think there's tremendous accountability in Alberta, whether it be the sovereignty act or the policies as put forward by the NDP from 2015 to 2019. I think that was the primary reason why they are no longer in government.

The members opposite also talked about the sovereignty act, and I think it's useful to compare the results of Alberta's economic performance under the NDP from 2015 to 2019 to the performance of Alberta under a United Conservative Party government, including with the sovereignty act in place. Under the NDP we had record unemployment, tens of billions of dollars fleeing Alberta to be invested and create jobs in other jurisdictions. We had the government of the day, the NDP, actually suggesting that Albertans should seek employment in these other jurisdictions. We had tens of thousands of Albertans lose their jobs. We saw Alberta's productivity decline. That was under the NDP's economic policies.

Now under the United Conservative Party government we've seen a complete reversal of this trend. We've seen tens of billions of dollars of investment flow to Alberta after the implementation of the sovereignty act. Remember that they said that this would cause businesses, investors, capital, everybody to flee Alberta, that Alberta would just crater, yet we've seen the largest investment in about 15 years from Dow Chemical. We've seen 200,000 people choose Alberta as the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family.

I do think it must frustrate the members of the opposition because under their policies they had 13 quarters of people leaving Alberta, almost 40 consecutive months of people choosing to leave Alberta. Imagine how confused and frustrated they must be to see that under a government with the sovereignty act we've had 24 consecutive months of people coming to Alberta, of investors choosing Alberta, like Amazon. The Premier and I were just cutting the ribbon on their \$2.8 million state-of-the-art warehouse in Calgary.

I've challenged the members opposite before, you know, to say some nice things about Alberta. I think Alberta is a great place. I also think the members opposite, through you, Mr. Speaker: they tend to try to create panic and fear about things, including the sovereignty act, which is really about the Constitution and provincial and federal jurisdiction. That's really what it's about. And I think that if you try to create panic about everything, you kind of lose the ability to add value to any discussion because nobody believes anything you say. I think this is a case of that.

5:50

The sovereignty act is a tool. There is accountability, certainly, for us as government, as MLAs. If we misuse it, if it is used to the net detriment of Albertans, then we may find ourselves where the one-time NDP government now sits, in the opposition. Of course, as government, as a government that is actually invested in the success of Albertans, we would do an analysis to determine the impacts of potential uses of the sovereignty act before we would use it. Albertans can be assured that we're not going to do something we think is going to cause them net harm.

See, that would be policies like the NDP, like their carbon tax. They knew that that would drive away investment. They knew that would increase the cost of living and the cost of doing business. That was literally the point, Mr. Speaker. That was the point. They knew when they told people, "Alberta is embarrassing; go work in another province" that that probably wouldn't result in people

moving to Alberta. They knew that. When they supported a federal government, when they continue to support a federal government that is anti-Alberta, I suspect they even know that that is not in the best interests of Albertans.

On this side of the House we actually do act in the interests of Albertans, so the sovereignty act will only be used when necessary to defend the constitutional authorities and jurisdiction that Alberta has.

Mr. Getson: Like the clean energy centre.

Mr. Jones: Exactly right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for passing my comments on to the members opposite. Always enjoy a good debate on economic policy with the NDP.

The Speaker: I appreciate that the hon. member might like to rise to close debate. Unfortunately, there is time remaining in debate.

If there is another member of the Assembly that would like to join the debate, they would be welcome to do so. If not, I'm happy to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills now to close debate.

Mr. Sabir: There was a member.

The Speaker: Oh, there was a member? I'm sorry. I didn't see them.

Were you standing?

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. I'm short.

The Speaker: If you were, my absolute apologies. I did not see you. It was entirely my fault. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has approximately seven minutes remaining.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. I do want to point out very quickly, in response to some of the comments from the government members on the other side, that, again, this motion is about – we're not going to get back into a debate about the value of the sovereignty act. You don't have to worry about what we're going to do and how we're going to handle the sovereignty act because when we're in government, there will be no sovereignty act.

Also, I want to point out that it was not the Alberta NDP who voiced the most vociferous, although we certainly did, opposition to the sovereignty act when it came into effect. In fact, let me quote something for you, Mr. Speaker.

The Sovereignty Act would, without doubt, curtail new investment into the province. Not only that, we would see established businesses abandoning Alberta for more stable jurisdictions.

Quebec never recovered from the exodus of head offices and jobs in the 1970's as its provincial government beat the separatist drum. Albertans can't afford the same fate.

That quote – that quote – was from former UCP Finance minister Travis Toews.

Then how about this, Mr. Speaker? Another quote:

Implementing the Sovereignty Act would create instability and chaos. It is already doing that. I had international investors concerned about their assets in Alberta asking about what was going on with the sovereignty act . . . The sovereignty act could squander future opportunities. That's because it could spook investors who will then look to invest in more stable jurisdictions instead . . . Investors want certainty and predictability.

That quote, again not from the Alberta NDP, was from Sonya Savage, the UCP former minister of energy and the environment.

And then let's just bring it home a little bit, Mr. Speaker, to one of the current ministers. The current minister of environment was quoted as saying that the sovereignty act will, quote, kill investment. So it's not really just the NDP on this side; it's actually also the UCP who were concerned about that.

And let me just point out that the minister spoke to the fact there would be an economic impact assessment done every time that the sovereignty act was brought into place. If I do recall, Mr. Speaker, I think we were all sitting in this Chamber when back in November a motion was introduced by this government about the clean electricity regulations coming from the federal government. I'm surprised. I didn't see that economic impact assessment. It must be the same fictional one that took place when the Minister of Affordability and Utilities decided to implement a ban on renewable energy, claiming that it was coming from the Alberta Utilities Commission and AESO, but really it just came from his own mind or perhaps from that of the Premier. So that didn't happen either. I look forward to seeing those economic impact assessments.

Mr. Speaker, this is really about saying that, yes, we want accountability and information for us members when we're looking at a motion that is going to create the instability that is obviously the goal of this government when they introduced the sovereignty act. Before they do that, let's have all the facts and information on the table. That's all that this motion is about. If that economic impact assessment is already taking place and will take place, well, then the government members should have no problem supporting this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, I just love a good stump speech from a former leadership candidate. There is nothing better than to go back to the old merry trail on should have, would have, could have, and what could have been and the absolute opposite narrative of history of what's taken place.

I really appreciate the motion coming forward from the member opposite from Calgary-Foothills. I believe it's with a spirit of good intent, honestly. But, unfortunately, what I'm seeing from our side is that a lot of the responses that have taken place are happening already. We do the economic impact assessment. Quite honestly, when it came to the Sovereignty within a United Canada Act, I didn't ever think we'd have to pull that bad boy off the shelf. Like, honestly, when we went through it, a lot of our same concerns before we formed that policy internally had a lot of the same items addressed, and they were taken care of in the legislation, so by the time it came to the floor, it had covered a bunch of those concerns that we had.

When we're looking at the clean energy act, the member opposite said that there was no financial assessment. Well, she missed a lot of headlines where it was talking about trillions of dollars of impact to the electricity and to our economy. Not everything has to be done internally. Sometimes when you see the regulators or the folks that are actually going to be hit by it the worst, their fiduciary duty to their shareholders and to their stakeholders and to their customers also does those financial impacts.

I really appreciate the member opposite's proposal. I don't know that it's timely enough when we have to pull it off the shelf to be that tactile to go with what the member is doing. I do think he's doing it in the spirit of good intent, but I won't be supporting it, unfortunately. I believe that the Sovereignty within a United Canada Act is good as is. Hopefully, we won't have to use it too often, but when we do, it's a great tool to have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my thanks to that member as well.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills to close debate. Should he choose to have a vote prior to 6 o'clock, he will need to be in the sedentary position by then.

Mr. Ellingson: I will close debate really quickly.

I think we've heard good reasons why the motion should be passed. I think that we have heard that moving forward on constitutionality without understanding the negative impacts is reckless and does a disservice to Albertans. So I hope that we will vote for accountability. The Jobs, Economy and Trade minister has

already said that they will do an economic impact study every time they invoke the sovereignty act, so of course he will vote yes for this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 513 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I now move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

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

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca