



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 2, 2023

Day 4

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
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Deputy Premier
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
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Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 2, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. Today I have the privilege of honoring two such people.

Mr. Frederick Alan Stewart, KC
July 8, 1934, to August 11, 2023

The Speaker: Frederick A. Stewart served two terms as a Progressive Conservative Member for Calgary-North Hill from 1986 to 1993. He was the minister of technology, research and telecommunications and the Deputy Government House Leader from 1989 to 1992 and then the Government House Leader in 1992.

Before entering politics, Mr. Stewart earned a bachelor of commerce from the University of Saskatchewan, graduated from the University of Toronto with his bachelor of law, and was called to the Alberta bar in 1966. He cofounded a legal practice in Calgary in 1969 and was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1980.

Mr. Stewart was active in his community, giving his time to numerous organizations, including the Mount Royal College board of governors and the Canadian Cancer Society. Among the honours he received was the ASTech special award for advancing the benefits associated with a strong science and technology community in Alberta in 1999, the Lieutenant Governor's millennial award in 2001, and the Minerva mentoring award from the Alberta Women's Science Network in 2004.

Mr. Stewart passed away on August 11, 2023, at the age of 89.

Dr. W.J. David McNeil
April 29, 1945, to October 20, 2023

The Speaker: Dr. W.J. David McNeil was appointed the sixth Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on August 1, 1987. Dr. McNeil served as the Clerk for over 28 years until his retirement in 2016. The second-longest serving Clerk in Alberta's history, Dr. McNeil served under Speakers Carter, Schumacher, Kowalski, Zwozdesky, and Wanner. He navigated the Legislative Assembly Office through eight provincial general elections and served with seven different Premiers and 392 Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Dr. McNeil was an honorary member and former president of the Association of Clerks at the Table in Canada and was significantly involved in the Canadian region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. He was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II diamond jubilee in 2012 in honour of his contributions and achievements.

Well respected by members and staff alike, Dr. McNeil was an affable, approachable leader who would often be found doing walkabouts around the LAO branches to chat with his staff. He was fondly remembered for his quick wit, numerous puns, and frequent hearty laugh.

Dr. McNeil passed away October 20, 2023, at the age of 78.

In a moment of silent reflection or prayer I ask you each to remember former Member Stewart and Dr. McNeil each as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the King* by Ms Nicole Williams.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious King,
Long live our noble King,
God save the King!
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the King!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we all owe a debt of gratitude to the family and friends of those who have served this Assembly, so it's my pleasure today to be able to introduce some of those family members.

Family members of former Member Stewart attending today's tribute in the Speaker's gallery: we have Mr. Stewart's son Douglas Stewart, daughter-in-law Rose Marie Stewart, and granddaughter Alyssa Stewart. I ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

It's also my privilege and pleasure to introduce to members of the Assembly friends and family of former Clerk of the Assembly Dr. W.J. McNeil. In the Speaker's gallery today we are pleased to have Dr. McNeil's amazing wife, Dr. Mary Machum. On behalf of Members of the Legislative Assembly we thank you for your husband's service. We owe you a deep debt of gratitude. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

We also have one other visitor joining us today. This visitor needs no introduction to the echoing halls of this Assembly despite his departure over a decade ago. That would be, of course, former member and former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta the hon. Ken Kowalski. The former Speaker Kowalski was the fourth Speaker to serve with Dr. McNeil, serving as presiding officer from 1997 to 2012. Ken is joined by his lovely wife, Kristina Kowalski, who is also a councillor for Parkland county. I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure to introduce a number of former Legislative Assembly of Alberta staff who are joining us in honour of the former Clerk Dr. McNeil's passing. I ask that they remain standing as I read their names. There is somewhere north of 200 combined years of service to the Assembly.

I begin with the former Clerk Dr. David McNeil's protege Rob Reynolds. Mr. Reynolds served as Dr. McNeil's Law Clerk, director of interparliamentary relations, prior to 2016. He was appointed to be the Clerk following Dr. McNeil's retirement, serving in that capacity until his retirement in 2018.

Florence Marston served in the Parliamentary Counsel office during Dr. McNeil's tenure. Allison Quast served in Dr. McNeil's office as executive assistant to the Clerk from 2007 to 2016. Judy Bressmer served as bills and *Journals* clerk during Dr. McNeil's clerkship. Louise Kamuchik is the former Clerk assistant and

director of House services. Retiring in 2012, Louise worked with Dr. McNeil for over 25 years.

Lastly, I'd like to introduce Cheryl Scarlett. Cheryl served as the director of human resources, information technology, and broadcast services during Dr. McNeil's tenure. Cheryl has the distinction of being one of Dr. McNeil's longest serving colleagues, serving the Assembly for over 30 years. Following his retirement, she was appointed as the executive director of corporate services, the position she held until 2019. Members, please thank them for their service.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has an introduction, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and, through you, to all members of this Assembly Mr. Puneet Manchanda. Puneet is the president of the Council of India Societies of Edmonton, which is an umbrella organization representing 20 nonprofits and charities. Puneet is also the head of the India Center in Edmonton and has been an avid volunteer since he arrived in Canada in 2004. Puneet, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:40

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce Chris Gallaway. He's the executive director for Friends of Medicare, a prominent voice in protecting and strengthening public health care here in the province of Alberta. Please rise, Chris, and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and, through you, to all members of the Assembly Gurpreet Singh Johal, who visits us today from Scotland, an elected councillor in west Dunbartonshire and the founder of the Sikh Legal Assistance Board, which provides legal aid for political prisoners, including his own brother Jagtar Johal. I ask that Gurpreet rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce grade 6 students from Simons Valley school in my constituency, here today with their teachers: Mr. Moeller, Mr. Chong, Ms Brophy, and Ms Nagel. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

Government and Opposition Policies

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, I speak today on behalf of the Albertans who are struggling to stay afloat and to stay hopeful because of the choices this government continues to make. A few months ago I was approached by an EA during a school visit. She broke down in tears telling me how hopeless and scared she felt for the students with disabilities in her school who were struggling without the supports they deserved because this government chose to cut education funding even when there were more kids needing more help.

In Calgary I spoke with a parent who told me that her son didn't even have a desk for the first few weeks of school because his classroom was overflowing with kids. There literally wasn't enough space in the room to fit all the desks that were there for those many students. Again, the choice this government made to not build enough schools has real consequences.

On the local community Facebook page in my riding the posts that get the most attention are parents desperately looking for help to find a family doctor, and the responses are usually just more people asking for the same help. The UCP's choice to drive away health care workers and doctors continues to impact Albertans every single day.

Last month I was having dinner with my son in a local restaurant, and we overheard a group of seniors next to us passionately discussing how worried and betrayed they felt by the Premier's plans to pull out of the CPP and gamble with their retirement.

All that stands in the way of a better life for these and many Albertans are simple things like a desk, support in the classroom, respect for doctors, and retirement security. These aren't luxuries. These are things that Albertans should be able to expect from their government, and for almost five years the UCP has chosen not to provide them. And here's the thing. Governing is about choices. The UCP chooses to make life harder for Albertans, but the Alberta NDP chooses hope. We choose to prioritize the people of this province. We choose to secure the retirement of all working people. We choose to invest in our kids and their education, to create economic opportunities that benefit all, to embrace the future instead of clinging to the past. We choose Albertans.

The Speaker: The Member for Airdrie-East has a statement to make.

Former Clerk W.J. David McNeil

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a heavy heart I rise today to pay tribute to the life of Clerk David McNeil, who peacefully passed away in his home on October 20, 2023. On August 1, 1987, David McNeil assumed his role as Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, a position he held with dedication for 28 years. Dr. McNeil served alongside five Speakers, seven Premiers, and offered invaluable guidance and leadership to 392 MLAs, including myself and many others in this House. My colleagues agree that his kind and patient guidance helped each and every one of us. Throughout his career David McNeil provided a steady hand and sound counsel to all who sought his help. To quote Dr. McNeil: my duty is to support the 87 politicians and ensure they have the necessary office space, staff, and resources to effectively represent their constituents. End quote. David McNeil embraced technological advancements, making records of the Legislature digitally accessible to all Albertans. In recognition of his exceptional service Dr. McNeil was awarded a Queen's diamond jubilee medal.

Beyond his public service David McNeil loved his family, and we know his absence will be deeply felt by his loved ones. He was a dedicated supporter and past chair of the board of CASA Mental Health, a cause that held a special place in his heart. David McNeil was renowned for his love of wordplay, his passion for automobiles, and his sweet tooth. He was an accomplished lifelong skier who for many years was an instructor at Rabbit Hill and was often found kilted in the tartan of the Clan of MacNeil of Barra on special occasions.

We express our gratitude for his dedicated service and extend our heartfelt sympathies and love to David McNeil's family. His impact and legacy will long be remembered in this Assembly.

Health Care User Fees

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we believe that all Albertans deserve equal access to care regardless of their incomes. We believe that no Albertan should ever have to pay out of pocket to see a family doctor. That, sadly, is not a universal view in the House. The Premier has spoken openly about forcing Albertans to pay to see a

family doctor more times than I can count. She talked about how much she wants to see a payment relationship between Albertans and their doctors, she questioned whether doctors' visits should be covered by provincial insurance, she wrote a policy paper about how Albertans could pay to see their family doctors, and again and again and again. Albertans are rightly worried, especially after we learned about clinics that were charging Albertans fees to access services that should be covered. It is unacceptable.

That is why, while the government has refused to act to ensure that this practice is done away with, my colleagues and I will take action. Today I intend to introduce a bill that will make it illegal for Alberta patients to be charged to access a family doctor. This is a simple and common-sense reform that will provide peace of mind to Albertans worried about the Premier's intentions. Dr. David Keegan, a family doctor, spoke in support of my bill. "No Albertan should ever have to pay to see a [family] doctor. We should have legislation to cement this guarantee. And back it up with proper funding to stabilize our health system and focus on prevention & primary care." It is with this in mind that I propose this bill. It will make it clear that we reject the concept of forcing families to pay out of pocket to get the care they need. I hope that each and every single member of the . . .

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

Diwali

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Diwali, also known as the festival of lights, is a vast tradition that has been part of Bharat, India, for centuries. Diwali is primarily an Indian festival, but it's also widely observed in Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, and Fiji, where hundreds of millions of devotees pay their respect to Maa Lakshmi. As a practising Hindu I believe that Diwali, which is observed by millions of people world-wide in the honour of the Hindu goddess of riches, Maa Lakshmi, is the most significant celebration. Goddess Maa Lakshmi is a representation of beauty, youth, prosperity, and good fortune, just as light triumphs over darkness and virtue triumphs over evil. The main theme of Diwali is said to bring prosperity and positivity to the whole world as Maa Lakshmi is worshipped.

The five-day celebration is observed every year in early autumn after the conclusion of the summer harvest. Mr. Speaker, Alberta stands stronger for others who make their homes here a part of our culture, economy, and spiritual vibrancy. A joyous festival to all who celebrate.

During the festival we always see small lamps filled with oil lit and placed in rows along the parapets of temples, houses, and communities that brighten our autumn days. Families will enjoy a feast in their homes and are adorned with vibrant rangoli patterns on the flooring. Typically it's a time to celebrate relationships and appreciation of small pleasures as well as to visit, exchange presents, feast, and pray. It's a time to give to the less fortunate. To everyone celebrating Diwali: the Alberta government wishes you and your loved ones a very blessed Diwali.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has the call.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week our Member for Banff-Kananaskis tried to get answers from the Ministry of Energy

on a plan for coal mining in the eastern slopes, but she received only nonsensical responses, so perhaps the Premier might have better answers for me. During her leadership race she said she would be, and I quote, open to revisiting the idea if she became Premier. End quote. Will the Premier come clean with Albertans and tell us: is she in favour of coal mining in the eastern slopes? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member of the opposition knows that the ministerial order reinstated the 1976 coal policy, and we did that to protect the foothills and the eastern slopes, and we're going to continue to do that. The ministerial order, however, also said that there were three projects of active coal mines and advanced projects that they would be open to considering. The application for those is now before the AER. They have an independent process, and we're going to allow that process to play out.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not quite the story. Grassy Mountain was thoroughly considered and thoroughly rejected by a joint federal and provincial panel on the basis that the environmental risks, including water pollution and poisoning, were simply too high. The headwaters of the eastern slopes provide water to millions of Albertans. It's all we've got, so in the face of that, why is this application being considered once again when the only difference is that this proposal is bigger than the one that's already been rejected? Why won't the Premier shut it down?

Ms Smith: As the Leader of the Official Opposition knows, the Alberta Energy Regulator is a quasi-judicial body. It's independent. It would be highly inappropriate for me to interfere with any of their deliberations, so we're going to allow the process to play out.

Ms Notley: This should be covered by the Premier's pretend ban, but nonetheless one of the first acts of this Premier after the last election was to place a different arbitrary ban on renewable energy projects, a short-sighted move estimated to cost 24,000 jobs, \$33 billion in investment, but now she's inviting people to mine our mountains. The Premier claims renewable energy projects compromise our viewscapes, yet this government is considering open-pit coal mining in the Rocky Mountains. Come on, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the Premier protect our Rocky Mountains?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of those projects, Tent Mountain, actually has a really interesting proposal with the Siksika Nation, which is to use wind turbines to push the water up to an upper reservoir so that it can act as sort of a battery so they're able to have ongoing renewable power. I'm very excited about that potential change of scope, and that's the reason why we're going to allow the Alberta Energy Regulator to continue with its independent process, so more ideas like that can come forward.

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

Ms Notley: Sounds like close to a thumbs-up from the Premier.

Agency, Board, and Commission Executive Compensation

Ms Notley: Back when we were all members of the opposition together, the Premier and I, there wasn't a lot we could agree on, but we did come together to call for an end to PC pork-barrelling, including some of the outrageous executive salaries paid in agencies, boards, and commissions at the time. Nine years later the Premier seems to have switched sides. She once said that these

people “are the most expensive people on the government payroll,” so I ask the Premier: what exactly has changed?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we have a number of agencies, boards, and commissions. Some of them have to recruit people from the private sector, and we’ve seen an escalation of salaries across the board in all professions. We’re about to go into our public-sector bargaining in the new year, and we want to make sure that there is flexibility as well for agencies, boards, and commissions. That’s the intent of this legislation, and I’m looking forward to debating it.

Ms Notley: What we’ve seen, Mr. Speaker, is an escalation of cost pressures on regular Alberta families. At a time when they are actually struggling to keep a roof over their heads, food on the table, and pay for basic necessities, this government has prioritized legislation that allows their friends to set their own salaries without any reasonable controls. The Premier is ignoring everyday Albertans when it comes to coal mining and pensions and cost pressures, but she’s all ears for her elite friends and insiders, giving them their own special piece of legislation. To the Premier: why the hypocrisy?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, on this side we can walk and chew gum at the same time. We can do certain types of legislative reforms and still take care of the affordability issues that we know people care about. For instance, my Finance minister tomorrow is having a meeting with his fellow finance ministers across the country, and every single Premier across the country is lining up to talk about the number one issue, which is fairness on carbon tax. Sadly, the members opposite voted against fairness on home heating fuels. I think that shows who’s taking care of affordability issues and who’s not.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier wants to repeal the same laws and legislation that uphold the values she once campaigned for. The same leader who once demanded reasonable limits on executive salaries and expenses wants now to go back to a free-for-all. At least two former UCP MLAs are now appointed to senior public service positions. I’m confident there will be more. So is the Premier now saying that pork-barrelling is A-okay if she’s the one doing it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition is prejudging the outcome. This is to allow for independent agencies, boards, and commissions to have more local decision-making when it comes to recruiting people for their entities. That’s what we’re going to do. But the issue really is about affordability. It’s part of the reason we’re bringing through a package of reforms. We are supporting a building of... [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: We’re supporting the construction of affordable housing; 25,000 units in the next 10 years. We’re supporting those who have auto insurance hikes by making sure good drivers don’t pay higher insurance rates, and we’re going to make sure we fight against the carbon tax. I wish they would, too.

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, Albertans do not want the UCP to pull us out of the Canada pension plan. The NDP has actually talked to

and listened to Albertans about this issue. For example, Dan from Stettler writes: the CPP is a tried and true investment source for our pension; I have paid into it all my life, and I trust it; I do not trust the UCP to handle my future. Albertans would like nothing more than to send this government a message that this inane Alberta pension plan boondoggle is an expensive distraction, so to the Minister of Finance: what is the date of the referendum?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we’ve been quite clear with Albertans that we are talking about this issue in the public sphere with them. We’re engaging with them. We’re educating them. It’s a dynamic and live conversation with the federal government. It will be discussed tomorrow about an item that they have made completely clear that it is Alberta’s right to consider doing. I look forward to continue having that conversation. [interjections]

The Speaker: It’s almost like I didn’t hear the end of the answer and was interrupting to provide some guidance as such. Instead, we’ll go to the Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister is scared of hearing from Albertans because he knows folks do not support his plan to gamble with their retirement, but today I guess he is stuck listening to at least these Albertans who have written to us. Paul from Rimbey says: I have absolutely no faith in the UCP to manage a pension fund with their track record. Tammy from Drumheller says that she opposes the plan, quote, because the Premier’s numbers do not make sense. Can the minister tell these Albertans when they can vote no to his bad idea to take Alberta out of the CPP? When is the referendum date?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are not even in the part of this process when we’re sure we would like to proceed and have a referendum. We’re consulting with Albertans. We’re learning more from the feds. I’m going to talk to the other provinces also to continue to have this discussion. We know from the report that the CPP will be entirely stable if we were to begin an APP. That’s something we’re committed to for all Canadians. We think this warrants real consideration from Albertans because it has the potential to help every working Albertan, every Alberta business, every Alberta senior.

Ms Phillips: The minister said that his decision on whether to gamble with Albertans’ retirement would be based on his feelings, but the facts don’t care about the minister’s feelings, and the fact is that the minister’s half-baked Alberta pension plan is not supported by Albertans. Ray from Lethbridge says: do not trust this government to manage a pension plan. Bill from Lethbridge says: being a senior already receiving CPP and OAS, this is not in our best interests. Minister, when will Ray and Bill get the chance to vote against this minister’s Alberta pension boondoggle. When is the referendum?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Something that is completely clear is that we will not move forward to a referendum unless this has the support of Albertans. This is an active conversation that should be considered by Albertans because it has the potential to do great things for this province: \$5 billion back in the Alberta economy annually for every business, every senior, every working Albertan right now. It warrants fair consideration in the middle of an affordability crisis. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre is the only one with the call.

Family Physicians

Mr. Shepherd: Recently the Minister of Health stood and proudly announced she's investing \$19 million a year to support family doctors and expand primary care, but that doesn't even scratch the paint on the problem. Primary care is in severe crisis. The AMA says that clinics are dying and on the brink. Family doctors are leaving Alberta for B.C. and other provinces that have made real investments in fair pay and that provide actual support. To the Minister of Health: after years of UCP cuts and attacks on health care and doctors, does she really think \$19 million is going to be enough to bring the change we need?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. I'm glad to repeat the information that I shared yesterday because the member opposite must not have heard it. The CPSA, the College of Physicians & Surgeons, just announced that 255 physicians have registered to practise in Alberta just in the last four months. In addition, 248 physicians and surgeons chose to remain in Alberta after completing their training. This is great news. There's more to come.

Mr. Shepherd: It couldn't be clearer. This minister is failing to listen to Alberta doctors. Records show in 2021 alone the UCP saved over \$200 million on the backs of family doctors largely by nickel and diming virtual care in the midst of a pandemic. They spent \$75 million on knock-off children's medicine, most of which will never arrive or be used. Then there's the \$330 million for the billionaire owners of the Calgary Flames. Doctors get \$19 million. Does the Minister of Health recognize what this says about just how little this government values family doctors and the Albertans that depend on them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite again should do his homework and look into the numbers. Billing data shows that 5,470 family physicians provided services to Albertans in '22-23. This was an increase of 2.4 per cent from the previous year. Again, the numbers show 190 doctors that AHS has been able to successfully onboard, 190 doctors in Vermilion, Grande Prairie, Crowsnest Pass, et cetera.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, doctors are crying for help. It's clear this minister is not listening. The UCP didn't hesitate to tear up the contract with doctors and utterly undermine primary care. They didn't hesitate to spend Albertans' money on political pet projects like propaganda for the APP, the embarrassment of the energy war room, fearmongering ads on Ottawa buses, even as they claim they are going to have a \$2.4 billion surplus. Yes, I said billion. To the Minister of Health. ERs are overflowing. Tens of thousands of Albertans have no family doctor. Why are they dragging their feet instead of making real investments in primary care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, we are listening to the family physicians. I've been meeting with them on a regular basis. In fact, I have been meeting regularly with . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: . . . the new president of the Alberta Medical Association. He was my guest here at the throne speech, and I was able to show him around. Mr. Speaker, we are actually meeting with them. We will consult with them. We are actually going to solve real problems with real action, so stay tuned. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the call.

Medical Laboratory Services

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, Albertans were forced to deal with a collapse in lab services due to this government's botched attempt to privatize that health service. The UCP did that after blowing up a province-wide system that was working well. This government admitted that it was a huge mistake, but it was Albertans that were left to pay the price. That's unacceptable. Will the minister stand up today and apologize to Albertans for causing them stress, jeopardizing their health, and wasting their time?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, yes, the lab delays were unacceptable. In fact, it was very quickly apparent to me as I became the Minister of Health that something needed to be done, so right away we went into action mode. We certainly added additional capacity so that those individuals in those affected areas had access to lab service. We acted quickly, and we have stabilized the lab service delivery across this province.

Dr. Metz: Given that this boondoggle by the government resulted in frequent lab errors, omissions, and test delays – over 100 individual physicians contacted me personally to voice their concerns – and given that these delays in tests or incorrect results meant Albertans waited longer to be treated for serious illness and given that this mistake, which was the decision of this government, has broken down Albertans' trust in the lab system and health system, what is the minister doing to correct her colossal mistake?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, knowing that DynaLife actually was able to provide service to Edmonton and north for decades successfully, we had no reason to doubt that they would be able to provide service for Calgary and south. When that did not materialize, we acted quickly. In fact, since September Alberta Precision Laboratories has reduced wait times for walk-ins and scheduled appointments by 34 per cent in Calgary. The current overall average wait time in the area is less than 30 minutes. They have access to quality lab services across this province because we acted quickly.

Dr. Metz: Given that this government's ideological plan to contract out lab services resulted in Alberta taxpayers once again bailing out a private company and given that the UCP did not do the research or provide time for a transition – health care workers were left unsupported – and given that the fiasco resulted in chaos in health care and large costs to Albertans, will the minister promise that the lab will remain public and not attempt this upheaval ever again?

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. We will promise that Albertans will get excellent lab service across this province. We will continue to monitor the situation that is existing, but we will of course make sure that they have excellent lab service. In fact, we are continuing to see improvements day by day in Calgary and south. We are committed to that, and we will always be committed to that. You know what, Mr. Speaker? Albertans deserve the absolute best health care system in the whole country.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has a question.

Automobile Insurance Rates

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and ask my first question in this historic House. When many Albertans expressed concerns about the affordability of auto insurance, our government took immediate action to address auto insurance rates last winter. We paused auto insurance rates until the end of January 2023 to provide relief for Albertans. At that time we committed to developing short- and long-term solutions to steady and lower auto insurance rates. To the minister: please tell this House what reforms have been made to auto insurance in this great province.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the great first question from that member. Our government is keeping life affordable and taking immediate action to provide relief for Albertans. We intend to introduce changes starting in 2024 for Albertans with good driving records. These drivers would experience price protection, ensuring their auto insurance rates do not increase higher than inflation. We also intend to amend the automobile insurance premium regulation so that the rate board can request a filing from insurance companies at any time, which would then allow the rate board to lower insurance rates if necessary. This would give the AIRB more teeth to protect Albertans.

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

2:10

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that affordability is top of mind for Albertans across this province and given that my constituents of Lesser Slave Lake have expressed concerns to me about their auto insurance rates and further given that high auto insurance puts undue financial stress on hard-working Albertans, to the Minister of Finance: please update this House on the government's efforts to address the rising costs of auto insurance for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. In addition to ensuring that drivers with good records do not experience rate increases beyond inflation, we commissioned an in-depth analysis by an external consultant concerning longer term reforms. A draft report is expected by the end of 2023, with the final report slated for the first quarter of 2024. The results of this analysis will inform government's long-term reforms. I expect this report to be sweeping. Like I said yesterday, everything will be on the table.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for this action on this very important issue for Albertans. Given that the current auto insurance pause is in effect until the end of 2023 and given that the new insurance model won't take effect until January 2024 and further given that every Albertan needs auto insurance to safely drive their vehicle, to the minister: what long-term solutions are you doing to make sure Alberta's auto insurance industry is affordable and sustainable?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along with the short-term reforms announced earlier, we acknowledge that a longer term systemic reform of Alberta's auto insurance system is necessary. This time all options for long-term reforms are under consideration, including those suggested by industry participants as well as models seen in other jurisdictions, both within Canada and abroad. Again, our reforms will keep lives affordable for Albertans, and I look forward to the report and taking further action.

School Construction Priorities

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, students as young as kindergartners from my community are going to schools a one-hour bus ride away from their homes because there's no school space for them in their own riding. More and more kids will be bused away to other schools over the next couple of years. The parents have been patient with this government. They have been raising their concerns again and again, but it is clear that their requests are falling on deaf ears. How much longer will my communities have to wait until the minister finally listens to us and builds the schools that Edmonton-West Henday so desperately needs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure why the member is shouting. I'm happy to have a conversation with the member any time he wants to bring forward the concerns of their constituents. I'm happy to have that conversation and meet with them and chat with them and any other member. Of course, we're working to get schools built across the province. My mandate letter directs me to significantly expand schools in our growing communities. In addition, in Budget '23 we've provided \$400 million in additional funding to help support transportation needs across the province.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that our schools have been at overcapacity for a while now – Bishop David Motiuk is nearly 500 students over capacity; that is a 153 per cent utilization – and given that this minister can't even be bothered to properly fund the schools already built, let alone fund the desperately needed new schools in our community, forcing these projects back years, my question to the minister: is the empty site at Hawks Ridge neighbourhood just a permanent monument to the UCP government's failed prioritization skills, or can we expect them to turn it into a school any time soon?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, over the course of the last four years we've moved forward with 98 school projects across the entire province. When the NDP was in government, the number of projects that they moved forward with was about half that number. We're absolutely committed to working with our school divisions to get a better understanding of where the priorities are to significantly . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Okay. Okay.

The hon. the minister has the call.

Mr. Nicolaides: We'll be working with our school divisions and talking with them, getting a better understanding of their utilization rates, Mr. Speaker, so that we can significantly expand schools in our growing communities to ensure we continue to have a world-class education system.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that the Rosenthal K to 6 school has been a year 1 priority for the Edmonton public school board, Hawks Ridge K to 6 is a year 2 priority, and the need has been clear for a

while now, and given that these schools can alleviate the massive pressures our community is seeing with its growth, to the minister. It's impressive how this government can talk about Alberta Is Calling but send Albertans to voice mail when our community urges our needs for schools. Do they plan to remember our kids and their education any time soon, or should we expect more empty promises? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Of course that's a priority, Mr. Speaker. As I've said numerous times in this House already and reflected in my mandate letter from the Premier, we're working to significantly expand the number of schools in our growing communities. I'm not sure why the member doesn't like the Alberta Is Calling campaign. On this side of the House I think we want to make Alberta the most attractive jurisdiction in the entire country. I know they don't want that, and they want Alberta to return to dark days. We want Alberta to always be a place of hope, opportunity, and success. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Food Bank Funding

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. Edmonton's Food Bank now feeds more than 37,000 people per month, according to the 2023 client report. Seventy-five per cent of food bank clients are trapped renting at market value, over one-third don't have a family doctor, and most say that it would take more than \$700 of extra income to be food secure. To the minister: after deindexing AISH, income support for four years, a 128 per cent increase in energy cost, what advice might he have for an Albertan waiting on hold to get a food hamper?

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'm very happy – and maybe the member didn't hear. We did index AISH. This government is proud of that. Further to that, this government has invested \$26 million in food banks. Do you know how much the NDP invested in food banks when they were in government? Zero dollars. Zero dollars. Our government is proud to work with food banks to make sure there's food security across our province. They're critical partners. The Premier has put in my mandate letter for us to continue to fund food banks, and we will. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Renaud: Given that the \$10 million set aside for food banks by this government in 2023 amounted to \$280,000 for Edmonton, one month's worth of food purchases for a big city food bank – and that was January; this is November – and given that Food Banks Canada has given Alberta a D on its poverty report card, the lowest score west of Ontario, other than the sovereignty strategy written by the Premier's advisers, can the minister for social services tell us what playbook he's working from while food bank usage continues to explode?

Mr. Nixon: I'll tell you the playbook I'm not working from, and that's the NDP playbook, which is to invest zero dollars in food banks at the moment that we're dealing with affordability challenges all across the province. This government has invested \$26 million in food banks, Mr. Speaker, and we have committed to providing sustainable funding . . .

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nixon: We have committed to providing sustainable funding for food banks going forward, Mr. Speaker. But, again, that member provided zero dollars for food banks. I can't wait to hear the next supplemental, but maybe she could rise and apologize for that first.

Ms Renaud: Given that it's very clear to me they have no answers, given that only 25 per cent of food bank clients reported receiving help from other community agencies and given that a recent report by Alberta Municipalities on FCSS funding says that the system is chronically underfunded and given that food banks are clearly the last line of defence as people sink further into poverty, why isn't this minister focused on this instead of the Premier's dream of gambling away our pension?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, they should take yes for an answer. That's why we're the first government in history to invest in food banks. But it's very rich to hear the member want to talk about the issue of cost of food given that her party, her federal leader continues to support the federal government with a carbon tax, which is the single biggest thing that is increasing the cost of food in our society, from the farmer to the grocery store to the table. The price of food goes up each and every day because of the carbon tax, so why did that member vote just a couple of days ago again with Justin Trudeau and Singh to keep it? Shame on her. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has a question.

2:20 Red Deer Regional Hospital Expansion Anaesthesiologist Recruitment

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS has allowed a double standard for health care in Alberta. If you have a heart attack outside of Calgary or Edmonton, there are no cardiac cath services. But the Red Deer hospital serves about 400,000 Albertans, as much as any hospital in Edmonton or Calgary. Red Deer does not want special treatment; it wants fair treatment. To the minister: when will we see the Red Deer hospital get cardiac cath services? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the minister is the one with the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The cardiac catheterization lab is the very top priority in the plan to expand and redevelop the Red Deer regional hospital centre. This is why we included it in phase 1 of the project, and right now our plans are well under way. Construction will begin once design and schematics are complete, and we are very committed to completing this project as quickly and safely as possible without compromising quality. As the MLA for Red Deer-North, I'm proud that I'm working on this project and getting this done.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Minister. Given that prior governments and AHS were unfair to the Red Deer hospital and given the NDP did nothing on the Red Deer hospital expansion – but, Mr. Speaker, we did – and given there must be transparency and accountability for this expansion, to the minister. This is exciting. When will central Albertans see the critical path for the transformative Red Deer hospital expansion?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Red Deer hospital is one of the largest health care projects our province has ever undertaken. We are committed to completing it quickly and, of course, without compromising quality. I can say the project is on time and currently in the design stage. We expect schematics to be complete in the new year, followed by public engagement thereafter. Now, this project consists of three major phases: an ambulatory care building, a new in-patient tower, and renovation of the existing hospital. Our government looks forward to delivering a facility that meets the needs of the region now and into the future.

Mr. Stephan: That is great news, Minister. Given that there continues to be a shortage of anaesthesiologists, limiting surgeons for Albertans, and given AHS allowed this shortage to be worse outside of Calgary and Edmonton, to the minister: how is Alberta's government working to get more anaesthesiologists for Alberta and more specifically into areas of greatest need, including Red Deer?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recruiting anaesthesiologists is a problem that affects all provinces right across Canada. This is why we have a dedicated team in place to focus our recruitment efforts on this particular issue. In addition to helping address shortages in some communities, we've implemented a new team-based anaesthesia care team model, and it appears to be working. This model allows anaesthesiologists to help deliver a greater number of surgeries, which in turn helps to improve access to procedures, particularly in rural areas, and reduces surgical wait times for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Almost like I heard a cellphone go off during question period. For the benefit of all members, the first cellphone ringing here in the Assembly is a free one for everyone. The second one, of course, comes with a fine payable to a charity of your choice. The third is a charity of my choice.

Health Care User Fees

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a health care crisis. Families are struggling to access a family doctor, emergency room wait times still reach to as high as 10 to 12 hours, and AHS is today reporting there are 27 service disruptions around the province. This all stems from the UCP decision to pick fights with health care workers, tear up deals with doctors, threaten the pay of nurses, and so much more. That is this government's legacy in health care. Will the Health minister apologize to my constituents for the crisis created by the UCP?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I will emphatically state that we are here to fix the mess that the NDP left behind, because everyone knows that what we inherited was a giant disaster in health care. When the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are looking to improve health care right across this province. In fact, the Premier has tasked me with looking at the whole health care system and making sure that Albertans actually get the health care they deserve.

Mr. Ip: Given that the Premier has suggested that these same Albertans should, quote, have a payment relationship with their family doctors as a means of improving access to service, and given that we have seen evidence of clinics charging thousands of dollars

for preferential services and given that this government has refused to investigate these clinics and ensure that no one has to pay to access primary care, will the Health minister agree that forcing Albertans to pay out of pocket to see a doctor would make this health care crisis worse?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear. Our government has been very clear that we made a public health guarantee to Albertans. We are fully committed to Alberta's publicly funded health care system, in case the members opposite haven't heard it. Albertans do not and will not pay out of pocket for insured health services such as seeing a family doctor or a hospital visit. In fact, I've directed my department to investigate any clinic that has a membership component to their services and may be in violation of the rules. We take this seriously.

Mr. Ip: Given that we know the Premier's long-standing belief that accessing your family doctors should not be covered by health care, given that this government has refused to investigate clinics charging fees for services covered by health care and given that my colleague from Calgary-North East will today present a plan that if passed will ensure that no Albertan will ever pay out of pocket to see a family doctor, will the Health minister commit to supporting this bill, or should Albertans be ready for this government to send them a bill?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, it was obvious the member opposite didn't listen to the last answer, where I spoke about the investigations going on into those clinics. We do not need a bill to do something that we are doing already and have committed to continuing to do. The Canada Health Act is clear, and we will absolutely enforce it. We are firmly committed to public health care in Alberta. Period.

Educational Curriculum and School Construction

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, as I rise for my first question in the House, our UCP government remains committed to providing our students with world-class education that will put them on the path of success and ensure they are well prepared for their futures. Our province's rich history deserves a curriculum that truly reflects and honors Alberta's heritage. Can the Minister of Education update the House on the comprehensive redrafting of the social studies curriculum and the engagement process and elaborate on its alignment with our government's commitment to equipping students for the future both in my constituency of Grande Prairie and across Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the member on his election, and let me reassure the House that he is an incredibly fierce advocate for the community of Grande Prairie. As the member mentioned, we are moving forward on redrafting Alberta's social studies curriculum. We've taken time over the past two months to sit down with our partners in education – be they school divisions, cultural organizations, Indigenous communities, and other groups – and have a conversation with them as to what Alberta's new social studies curriculum will look like. We're talking as well with curriculum development specialists and subject matter experts to make sure that we get it right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the Ministry of Education's mandate letter, which emphasizes adding basic life and home maintenance skills as well as financial literacy training into the high school curriculum, can the same minister please tell the

House how the government will ensure educators are equipped with the necessary resources and training to teach these new potential topics and what potential benefits they anticipate in addition that will offer to Alberta students upon graduation? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you to the member, Mr. Speaker. We are working, of course, as we continue to implement the new curriculum, to make sure that our teachers have all the resources and supplies that they need. When I talk with our school divisions and superintendents, I hear positive responses with respect to the rollout of the curriculum, and, of course, we're going to continue to do that. As the member mentioned, ensuring financial literacy is taught is an important priority of this government. That's why it's a mandatory component in the K to 6 social studies curriculum. As we develop the 7 to 12, we'll continue to make sure that is a priority. [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Minister. Given that in Grande Prairie and right across the province we have seen incredible growth and the need for adequate educational infrastructure, can the same minister detail the strategic plan for increasing the number of schools in communities with the most pressing needs and the steps being taken to ensure the timely hiring of qualified teachers and educational staff to support our students?

Mr. Nicolaides: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we're very excited by the fact that Alberta is booming once again. I know the members opposite are very disappointed with Alberta's success, but we herald it. With respect to schools, of course, we're working closely to get a better understanding of where the pressure points are, which communities are in the most need, which schools are at the highest utilization, and using that . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: . . . information, of course, to inform our decisions. I'm sure, as the members opposite know, there's a budget process that needs to be followed. Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, they don't know that, because they just dish out money left, right, and centre. One of the reasons they got booted out of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is next.

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Member Eremenko: Mr. Speaker, this week a memorial was held for 118 Edmontonians who died on the streets over the last three months. They died because of a toxic drug supply, and one of them was 14 years old. It's horrific. Each of these lives was worth saving, but this government is letting Albertans die because they refuse to follow the evidence and take the necessary steps today to address this crisis. To the minister: is the government going to take responsibility for these tragic, preventable deaths?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. The truth is that every single loss of life from the deadly disease of addiction is a tragedy. We know the only way to overcome the cycle of addiction and the deadly disease is recovery. There is no

alternative, which is why we have doubled down on recovery. Under the opposition, when they were in power, they kept a \$1,240-a-day, prohibitive cost, expecting addicts to find over \$1,000 every month to get the life-saving treatment they deserve because they have dignity as Albertans. We introduced 10,000 new treatment spaces. We're introducing 11 new recovery communities. The opposition's proposal: safe supply of drugs.

Member Eremenko: Given that the minister and I can both agree that this is, in fact, a tragedy and given that Albertans are losing their loved ones every day and that Indigenous communities in our province are living in perpetual grief because the UCP have failed in their response and given that Albertans who use substances and the workers who care for them all deserve better than the UCP and this misguided and inadequate approach and given that this government refuses to take real action, will the minister stand up today and explain to the grieving families why this government is letting their loved ones die by denying them the health care they need?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, under the crisis that we underwent as a province with the NDP, they took no serious actions towards recovery. In Alberta we have immediate, same-day treatment, because of this government, for opioid agonist therapy. No other jurisdiction in the world has this. The truth is that their policy proposal, as a response to the deadly disease of addiction, is to hand out drugs en masse that are deadly and that kill. It is a tragedy, and there is nothing more uncompassionate than a supply of drugs handed out by the government to those who need recovery instead. We will not be bullied out of what we know is the right thing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. member.

Member Eremenko: Given that the UCP is hiding behind a bill that will not stop the climbing number of drug-related deaths today and given that there are tangible actions this government could take, again, today to save lives and improve access to medical care and given that these actions would ensure there are safe places for people to go so they don't have to live on the street nor use in our LRT stations, will the minister admit that when presented with every opportunity to help, the UCP has chosen fewer services, not more, costing thousands of lives, including the lives of children?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing hidden about Bill 3. The truth is that the opioid pandemic that we're facing today was fuelled by addiction 25 years ago because of a safe supply of drugs that permeated every single aspect of our society, and the opposition's proposal is to relive that tragedy with hydromorphone and federally funded safe supply. They talk about a toxic drug supply as though the solution is some sort of safe drug supply. News flash: all of these illegal drugs are poisonous. Every last one of these opioids can cause death. We will save lives by doubling down on recovery. It's too important to leave this alone. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Affordable Housing

Member Kayande: One hundred and fifteen thousand, Mr. Speaker: that is the number of Calgarians at risk of becoming homeless according to the U of C School of Public Policy. One hundred and fifteen thousand is also roughly the population of Red Deer. This is a crisis by every sense of the word, but let me be clear.

Calgarians are at risk of becoming homeless because of the inaction of this government. What is the minister doing to protect an entire city's worth of people at risk of homelessness?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. Our government has increased funding to homeless shelters across the province by 71 per cent. We are the first government in the history of the province, together with our partners in Edmonton and Calgary, to have the full capacity that we need to be able to get through the winter for our shelter system this year early in the winter, and we're going to make sure that we continue to fund our homeless shelters to do the emergency work that they have to do. That's only part of our solution.

We're also working towards long-term real housing solutions, Mr. Speaker, particularly on the affordable housing side. We're investing \$9 billion right now to create 25,000 more units of affordable housing across our province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Kayande: Given that I wrote to the minister seeking action on behalf of 52 Calgary-Elbow constituents facing 50 per cent rent increases and given that he has not yet responded and given that real actions on the housing crisis have been needed every single day the UCP has been the government and given that Albertans are scared they're about to lose their homes while the government holds all the power to help them yet refuses to, will the minister admit to Albertans who are barely scraping by that this government simply does not care about them?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government cares very much about Albertans. That's why we have already completed investing in almost 5,000 new affordable housing units over the last several years as a government compared to the NDP in their term of under 1,500 units of affordable housing. We're laser focused on making sure that we increase supply at all ends of the market to maintain affordability inside our province. We're doing that from everything from cutting red tape to investing in different types of affordable housing and working with our partners to be able to accomplish that, and that's why construction is up all across Alberta.

Member Kayande: Given that we asked for an all-party committee to address this crisis but were ghosted by the UCP, because the housing crisis is not a priority for them, and given that Albertans have heard excuse after excuse from these guys when the solution is so clear – fund housing, build housing, address rent increases, restore the rent supplements that the UCP cut and, better yet, increase them – will the minister agree to strike this committee with us so that we can begin the urgent work of protecting the children and families at risk from homelessness?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker the time of NDP committees has gone. We're going to do real action. We're already doing it right now. We're three years into a 10-year plan, our stronger foundations plan, to create 82,000 new affordable homes across this province. That's action we're taking today. Albertans don't want us sitting in committee talking to the NDP about the same tired arguments. They want us out taking clear action, and that's exactly what this government is going to do.

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

Crime and Public Safety

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Escalating numbers and increased severity related to crime and gang violence have reached even the most remote destinations in Alberta. Fort Chipewyan, perhaps the most isolated community in the province, has experienced gun violence and

drug trafficking. Crime is becoming a regular occurrence in the news, and many of my constituents are fed up. To the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services: what are you going to do to ensure that Albertans feel safe and they're protected from violence?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am fed up. You know who else is fed up? Albertans are fed up. I appreciate the question coming from the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I can tell you it is very clear that the NDP-Liberal alliance has made Canada less safe, and what we're doing right now is giving extra authorities to the sheriffs. In order to support our RCMP, we're expanding the safe communities and neighborhoods . . . [interjections]

2:40

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The minister has more time if he chooses to use it. [interjection] Order. The minister has more time if he chooses to use it. I was having a difficult time hearing the answer.

The hon. the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, then.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Thank you so much for your answer. It is given that open-air drug abuse has become a regular occurrence on public streets, both in small towns and large cities, with children walking home from school having to navigate through clouds of crystal meth. Needles are found in playgrounds and in public parks. Again to the same minister: what are you doing to combat this and ensure that our youth are safe on the streets? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. You know, with no help or assistance from the federal government or, actually, from the NDP across the aisle, I can tell you what we're doing to help people feel safe in their communities, because – you know what? – people have rights. You know who has rights? Children have rights. Children have rights not to have needles in the parks. People have rights not to walk down the street and inhale second-hand crystal meth smoke. People have a right to not walk down the street and get stabbed. And you know what we're doing right now? We're providing money to ALERT to make sure that we have police officers on the streets and tackling organized crime in the province of Alberta.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Thank you for all your hard work on the file. It is given that, along with drug abuse, gangs and violence are also prominent, negatively influencing the public's perception of safety across Alberta. People are afraid of taking the light rail transit and even concerned about who they might be riding on the bus with. Can the same minister please elaborate on measures that the minister is undertaking to show the public that they can feel safe from crime in our communities?

The Speaker: I'll expect the hon. member to do a question without a preamble in the following questions.

The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Thank you, Member, for the question. You know, transit safety is a huge problem. We're very clear on that,

but just remember that it's the Liberal-NDP alliance that broke the bail system. Bill C-75 is an absolute disaster, and we have been leading the country on this particular issue. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we are demanding that if actual, immediate action is not taken and if C-48 does not proceed through the Senate in a timely manner, we will be demanding that C-75 be repealed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period, and . . . [interjections] Order. Order. Order.

Prior to your departure I'd like to provide a ruling from the Speaker with respect to heckling in the Assembly. Members who have been here for some period of time will know that the Speaker has a deep level of respect for an appropriately placed heckle. I will just provide some overall guidance where you will experience an intervention from the Speaker in the future. If there are individuals who are in the House who are heckling – perhaps there's a voice or two of which that happens from time to time – that will remain the tradition of the Assembly. When the Speaker elects to interject, it is because there is a chorus of hecklers coming from one side or the other. I encourage members to consider when they may be heckling and when they are not.

That brings us to: in 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Government Policies and Children

Member Batten: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of children and to recognize and remind ourselves that it is both our privilege and our duty as elected officials to ensure their protection. This fall I've had the pleasure of visiting several of the 48 schools we have in the riding of Calgary-Acadia. I've also toured countless child care facilities and met so many incredible people doing the vital work of supporting our children, but they can't do it alone.

This government is failing our children. They have failed to recognize the value of evidence-based programs, failed to prioritize early childhood development, failed to recognize a modern and appropriate curriculum for our children, leaving them without important and necessary skills to grow and thrive.

They have failed to keep too many of our children safe. They have failed to acknowledge and take meaningful action to address the disproportional number of Indigenous children in care of child intervention services. They have failed to provide cultural consideration and recognition of the need to support healing from intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people here in Alberta.

We must not become distracted. We cannot forget to consider and protect the rights of the children. I'm a proud auntie of nine nieces and nephews. I want a world for them to grow up in that celebrates diversity, presents opportunities, and provides them the necessary skills and environments to thrive.

As we continue this First Session of Alberta's 31st Legislature, we need to model the behaviours we want to see in Alberta's young. More than ever it is important that we instill the values of partnership, responsibility, and accountability. We have to do better for the youth of our province. As the Official Opposition critic for child care, child and family services I raise their voices so that they might be heard and acted upon. There is simply no other option.

Thank you.

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

Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my critic role for arts, culture, and nonprofits I've been engaging with stakeholders from across the province, and without exception these hard-working and talented individuals recommend there be a significant increase to the budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. They also believe that the government of Alberta needs to better understand the current challenges facing artists and the creative sector and the value of the arts in our province.

Mr. Speaker, supporting the arts and culture of Alberta is essential. However, this government does not share our respect for the arts and artists. The UCP has cut millions from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and their budget has been slashed by 10 per cent since the UCP came into office. It is clear that the current AFA funding and arts funding generally is insufficient to enable the sector to recover from the pandemic and thrive through the economic challenges they face now and into the future.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that times are difficult for organizations and workers in the creative sector. Audiences have yet to fully return from COVID, and spending habits have changed. Revenue lines are down. Inflation and costs of doing business are higher than ever. Without an investment in the development of Alberta artists, we lose our chance to tell our stories and to make sure those stories and voices are heard around the world.

Mr. Speaker, if this government can find money to fund a war room that only serves to undermine our industry or spend millions of dollars trying to convince Albertans to gamble away their Canada pension plans, we should be able to increase the AFA budget and send the message to nonprofit arts workers and organizations that their talents are valued. Alberta's Official Opposition values and supports those who work in the arts, and we will always stand up for them.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 7, the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023, sponsored by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 2

Alberta Pension Protection Act

Mr. Horner: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act.

This legislation is about one thing, protecting the retirement security of Albertans. Today I'm tabling Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act, to provide Albertans reassurances that we won't move forward with an Alberta pension plan unless they approve it. The new legislation, if passed, will do four things. First, it guarantees Albertans will have the final say on a provincial pension plan. Second, it guarantees Albertans would receive the same or better benefits under an Alberta pension plan and pay the same or lower contribution rates than they do under the CPP. Third, it guarantees that all funds transferred from the CPP to Alberta could only be used to set up and operate an Alberta pension plan. Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act, would ensure that the pensions and benefits of Albertans and their financial security will be safe for generations.

Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of the Alberta Pension Protection Act. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

2:50

Bill 6

Public Health Amendment Act, 2023

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and request leave to move first reading of Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023.

This proposed legislation would clarify the roles and ensure accountability of both cabinet and medical officers of health, including the chief medical officer of health, during states of public health emergencies. These amendments, if passed, align with how decisions were made during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they should be made.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 6.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Calgary-North East has an introduction.

Bill 201

Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request leave to introduce Bill 201, the Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023.

If passed, this bill will ensure that no Albertan has to pay out of pocket to access health care services in Alberta, as the Premier wants them to. It would do this by ensuring health care delivery in Alberta is in line with the Canada Health Act and making it clear that access fees or charging fees to access insured services are prohibited in Alberta. In addition, it would strengthen the actions that a minister must take when an individual contravenes the act, as we saw earlier this year. I hope that all members in the Assembly will support it and allow for a full debate in the House as a priority for Albertans.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Phillips: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a few pieces of correspondence. The first one is from a constituent of the Member for Peace River who is opposed to the Alberta pension plan proposal.

I have one from a constituent named Tammy, who's a constituent of the Member for Lethbridge-East, who is opposed to the Alberta pension plan but would like a clear yes-or-no referendum as soon as possible.

I have a piece of correspondence here, with the requisite copies, directed to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, a 12-point, well-argued case for staying within the Canada pension plan from Ronald and Linda.

And I have a piece of correspondence here to the Member for Lethbridge-East from Tom from Lethbridge opposed to the establishment of an Alberta pension plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has a tabling, I believe.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the eve of a meeting of all provincial and federal Finance ministers I rise to table the five requisite copies of an October 23 article in the *Calgary Herald* which reports that when Albertans are asked a direct survey question, "Do you want to leave the CPP?" 90 per cent responded no.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Amery, Minister of Justice, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Alberta Law Foundation financial statements, year ended March 31, 2023; on behalf of hon. Mr. Jones, Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade, pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act the Workers' Compensation Board annual report 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 3

Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction has the call.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud to rise today in order to move second reading of Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023. If passed, this legislation would strengthen Alberta's legal case against companies and their consultants that contributed to the creation of the opioid addiction crisis in our province.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, before I go forward, I need to lay out the history that has brought us to this piece here today and why I'm introducing this bill. It's important to understand how the addiction crisis started. It began in the late 1990s, when opioid manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and their consultants began developing new opioid formulations designed to treat pain. These opioids such as oxycodone were hailed as a so-called safe drug that would change lives to improve public health by treating pain.

Unfortunately, this supply of opioids possessed the same addictive qualities that have long existed and that we knew existed in drugs like heroin and morphine. The risk of addiction was well known by the pharmaceutical companies that pushed these drugs, and instead of disclosing this risk, they lied to regulators and to the public. Instead, they told us that we are safe, that the drugs are safe, and that it's nonaddictive. Companies then pushed forward with an aggressive marketing campaign to promote their newly deployed painkillers, again omitting the significant risk of addiction in all of their presentations.

Millions of people across North America placed their trust in our doctors, in our pharmaceutical companies, and in the regulatory institutions that allowed and encouraged the prescription of this opioid supply. The profits from these products were reinvested in cooked-up research that they then would use to sell even more of their dangerous supply of drugs. As a result of all of this, Mr. Speaker, opioid prescriptions skyrocketed, and North Americans were given full access to the so-called safe and miracle drugs that would later be found as the creator of an opioid addiction crisis that still exists in our province today.

According to a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* there were 67 million prescriptions for opioids in the U.S. in the year 1991, prior to the push through the mass-marketing scheme that I described. By 2011, Mr. Speaker, these numbers rose to a peak of more than 219 million prescriptions. This marked a nearly 200 per cent increase in the supply of deadly and dangerous drugs into our communities.

Less than two years ago a committee of this Assembly heard from Dr. Keith Humphreys, a professor at Stanford University and the head of the *Stanford-Lancet* Commission, where he told us the following – and he told us exactly what the pharmaceutical companies and industry claimed. One, they claimed that legally procured and produced, clearly labelled opioids are low-risk medications. Two, they claimed that to be concerned about the risk of opioids is fearmongering and denial of the evidence. Three, they claimed that public health would benefit from increased distribution of opioids, and four, according to Dr. Humphreys they claimed that these drugs would be consistently taken as directed only by the persons they were prescribed to. We'll come back to the facts of the matter on those claims after.

It didn't take so long for the damages to show in our society because of this so-called safe supply of opioids that the pharmaceutical industry was pushing. Sadly, families started to see what these drugs were doing to their loved ones, and their relationships began to crumble. Personalities changed. The opioid addiction became commonplace in our communities. It became clear that what was said regarding these drugs being safe and nonaddictive wasn't true, but the impending crisis was already set in motion and was inevitable. Not only were the people receiving these prescriptions developing an addiction and having their lives changed irreversibly, sometimes forever, but these drugs were also frequently diverted to the community, creating a whole new class of opioid addiction not just in a few major centres surrounding heroin access but now accessible through prescription in almost every one of our communities, rural and urban, across this entire continent.

3:00

These so-called safe drugs quickly made their way into the hands of younger individuals who they were never prescribed to, creating mass numbers of new addicts in every single community that we live in. People began to understand that they had been misled and duped into believing these drugs were safe, and the impacts of the opioid addiction became very, very clear to us, as we see the results of this bill today.

These drugs were anything but safe, Mr. Speaker, and despite the risks and harms to communities, to individuals, the cost to our health care system, and even the lives sadly lost because of the danger of these pharmaceutical-grade, high-powered opioids, these drugs continued to be marketed as such. Trust in our health care system began to collapse because of this damage caused. The doctors who had a passion for helping people and caring for their patients were cynically used by opioid manufacturers to be the front-line drug pushers of what is now known to be a highly addictive drug that has the exact same effect on any individual that heroin does. In a sad sense of tragedy the pharmaceutical industry

setting out allegedly to eliminate pain did exactly the opposite en masse for three decades and counting.

Back to that *Stanford-Lancet* Commission, that Dr. Humphreys reported to this Assembly on. Let's outline what actually happened. One, Mr. Speaker, millions of people did become addicted to legally procured, clearly labelled opioids. Two, understating the risks of opioids is dangerous and in some jurisdictions it's criminal. Three, public health and public safety suffered from the mass increase of the distribution of a supply of opioids. And four, controlled drugs were not often taken as directed. They were frequently diverted, stolen, sold, spreading harm far beyond the individual to whom it was prescribed and procured for.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. The pharmaceutical industry, driven by greed and a lack of moral compass, has played a significant role in the genesis of this addiction crisis. These companies, driven by profit margins rather than the well-being and the common interest of Albertans, embarked on a campaign of deception and manipulation. They peddled their highly addictive opioid supply, downplaying the risk at every opportunity and overstating the benefits, all while knowing the devastating, inevitable, incontrovertible consequence that awaited these citizens, our constituents, that fell into their trap for the industry's profit.

They exploited the trust placed in them by the health care industry, by professionals, by manipulating the very pillars of our medical system for their own gain. Trust was broken as families faced the devastating carnage of an addiction in their home, losing the connection to those individuals, and often, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, losing the lives of the family members that they loved. These companies and anyone else who supported the painkilling marketing scheme were left with billions of dollars in their pockets while families were left watching their loved ones suffer and often, unfortunately, die from that deadly disease of addiction. The only way to restore trust is to uphold our rule of law to understand that we must hold responsible those who selfishly created this crisis, which we are doing as a government through our proposed legislation today.

Now, Mr. Speaker, with what we know about the genesis and origins of the opioid addiction crisis, it should scare us all to see what is happening right next door with the federal government pushing their so-called safe supply. The parallels between the marketing of painkillers of 25 years ago and a so-called safe supply today is so strong that we as policy-makers must take heed and stand united against any attempt to bring this kind of devastating policy back for a second round and destroy our communities, especially as we take account of both the financial and, more importantly, the human cost and damage that it caused.

Today activists and advocates will tell you that a new government supply of drugs is a safe option for addicts. Mr. Speaker, let's return to Dr. Humphreys' testimony to our Legislature, through the committee, and see what he had to say about Canada's safe supply program under way in Vancouver right now. He stated that today in Canada safe supply advocates claim: one, legally procured, clearly labelled opioids or low-risk medication; two, being concerned about the risks of opioids is fearmongering and denial of the evidence; three, public health would benefit from the increased distribution of opioids; four, that controlled substances will be consistently taken as directed and only by the individual to whom they are prescribed. Does this messaging sound familiar? It is as though we are looking at a repeat of history in front of our very eyes whilst we're in the process of looking for damages from the very first instance of this attempt at safe supply in Canada, in what the pharmaceutical industry put us through.

It doesn't take long to realize that this is a repeat unfolding before our eyes. Safe supply advocates, so-called, are making the same claims today that opioid manufacturers – that we are currently in

litigation against a province, and every single jurisdiction across this country are – were making two decades ago. Just because these are coming from people not associated directly with the pharmaceutical industry but instead from certain governments, whether they be in Ottawa or in Vancouver, makes it no better. The policy consequence of an increased supply of high-powered, pharmaceutical-grade opioids will remain the same, independent of your intent.

Albertans will be happy to know that last year our government introduced the community protection opioid stewardship standards. These standards were informed by the lessons learned by the prescription crisis of opioids in the 1990s and made it illegal to prescribe, provide, and dispense a dangerous opioid for the purpose of treating addiction alone. I'm glad to know that Alberta is doing the right thing by making this practice, which is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past, illegal in Alberta if we don't take heed.

But not every place in Canada, unfortunately, is on our page, Mr. Speaker. The west coast, known to be Canada's drug capital, welcomed a large supply and distribution of drugs, hydromorphone, from the government of Canada. On September 9 of this year, in a *Globe and Mail* published article, a B.C. physician tells us that, "Unwitnessed safe supply is causing immeasurable harm in unintended and deeply distressing ways."

Most commonly you will hear about Dilaudid, Mr. Speaker, a brand name of a pharmaceutical drug, opioid, with its generic name being hydromorphone, which is five times more powerful than heroin. Five times more powerful. These Dilaudid pills, or known on the streets as Dillies, are handed out every day to addicts in the Lower Mainland. The physician continues:

Between March 2020 and May 2021, [over 4,500] British Columbians were prescribed safe-supply Dilaudid. [...] In my experience as a hospitalist, almost everyone receiving safe supply Dilaudid gets the maximum allowable number of pills – 14 Dilaudid 8 mg tablets – and they get them every day. Put those numbers together and you have over 50,000 Dillies being dispensed daily in B.C.

That is over 18 million pills annually, five times more powerful than heroin, being passed out en masse, being diverted, as we know, outside of those they're prescribed to, trapping, unfortunately, thousands of new British Columbians and in all likelihood Albertans in the deadly disease of addiction.

From an Adam Zivo *National Post* article, a doctor was quoted saying: like oxycodone, hydromorphone has the same potential to create a new wave of people who are addicted to opioids; large amounts of inexpensive opioids in communities will likely be the stepping stone for many people of all ages becoming addicted to opioids. This is because the new supply of drugs will be diverted and it will end up in your communities, used by university students at parties, used and told it's a safe supply to our youth, unfortunately, in high schools. In fact, this crisis is so similar to the pharmaceutical-grade opioid crisis we saw 25 years ago. In fact, some of the exact same companies that were responsible for production of the opioids starting in the United States and then across Canada, that we're engaged in litigation for today, are the same companies that produce the drug used by the federal so-called safe supply program. The exact same story unfolding in our country before our eyes.

3:10

So the question remains: how do we respond to an opioid addiction crisis in our province? What do we do? We are policy-makers. We have this choice in front of us as we represent every one of our communities. And, most importantly, we have an obligation to care for the most vulnerable, most affected by this disease of addiction. Do we try and

take the easier and the softer way by facilitating addiction and once again flooding our streets with a public supply of deadly addictive drugs, or, as an alternative, Mr. Speaker, do we invest in the path of hope? Do we invest in recovery as the antidote to addiction?

In that same *Globe and Mail* article I mentioned earlier, the doctor shared an experience of a friend's daughter.

One night at a party, someone offered her a "Dilly." They told her it would give her a great high. She tried it, and yes, it was a great high. And as it turned out, it was also very cheap and easy to find, so she started using it on a semi-regular basis. Initially, she had no idea that the "Dilly" was in fact hydromorphone, a highly potent and highly addictive prescription opioid sold under the name Dilaudid. By the time she realized, it was too late. She was addicted.

What's more, because Dilaudid is the drug handed out through the Province's "safe supply" program, my friend's daughter thought they must be safe because they came in a blister pack from a pharmacy. But Dillies are far from safe, and the addiction they cause is just as powerful as the addiction to heroin or morphine or any other opioid.

More troubling still, when this 18-year-old went to seek help at a local addictions clinic, the first thing she was offered was a prescription for more Dilaudid so that she would be sure to have ... [a continuing] safe supply.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know the young woman in question. I don't know if she's alive today or if she's continued down this path of addiction. I pray she's received treatment, because recovery is the only way to overcome an addiction short of death, which I want for none of the vulnerable individuals who are struggling with this deadly disease.

Mr. Speaker, what was quoted to you is the Vancouver model. That is the choice in front of this Chamber. We in Alberta have taken a different path. We're going down the Alberta recovery model to ensure it never happens here. Through it we have added more than 10,240 publicly funded treatment spaces since 2019, and this means that every year more than 10,000 Albertans can get access to treatment and recovery that they otherwise couldn't have. These are making a difference in the lives of every single Albertan family where someone struggles from addiction.

The sad lack of investment in recovery before our government led people to suffering from this deadly disease of addiction, awaiting life-saving treatment. Instead, the former government forced individuals to continue paying over a thousand dollars a month. If you're an addict looking to get treatment and recovery, the one thing that can save you from the eventual death that addiction leads to – the government opposite left in place a \$1,240 fee for an addict to find. Mr. Speaker, where did they expect an addict to find over a thousand dollars a month when they finally want to save their life? The truth is that when claims come from the side opposite that we're not doing enough, I shudder to think what they would do if they were in government for all of these souls struggling with being captured by this horrible disease of addiction.

We provide same-day, on-demand treatment through the virtual opioid dependency program, known as OAT, opioid agonist therapy. Nowhere else in the country, that I know, in the western world has a treatment regime like this, where anybody can get on-demand, same-day access to evidence-based opioid medication to get folks on the path to recovery. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that we're building 11 recovery communities, where we saw opposition build none, invest not in recovery communities to deliver long-term care treatment at no cost. Instead, they kept their cost, and they said – what policy proposals they have are exclusively facilitating more addiction instead of overcoming it. With two of these recovery centres already open, more on the way, many of them working in collaboration for on-reserve treatment with our First Nation

communities, who are, sadly, disproportionately affected by this deadly disease of addiction and the crisis that ensues, we are going to continue to move forward when it comes to the treatment for individuals.

Mr. Speaker, the direction we're heading as a province is taking a strong stance against those flooding our community with a dangerous and even deadly supply of drugs, no matter if the opioid manufacturers, distributors, or consultants are the federal government or someone else. We saw the damage it caused years ago, and we will not let that happen again, a second time. The truth is, this class-action lawsuit is an important statement, morally and financially, that those who pursue policies that will endanger thousands of Albertans, lure them into the trap of addiction with no real hope of recovery, under their regime – we stand against it.

I ask you to support this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction has moved second reading of Bill 3, Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023. Are there any others wishing to speak to second reading of Bill 3?

Ms Schulz: I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Ms Lovely moved, seconded by Mr. Lundy, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate November 1: Member Brar]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others that wish to join consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech? The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has the floor.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise prayerfully, thankful to be living in peace in our great province and to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I thank the constituents of Chestermere-Strathmore for the privilege to stand in this Chamber today, the heart of our democracy where echoes of Ernest Manning, Peter Lougheed, and Ralph Klein still linger. I'm grateful to my family, my friends, and volunteers for the support and encouragement on the road to where I stand today. I'm humbled by the trust the constituents of Chestermere-Strathmore have placed in me and pledge to represent them to the best of my abilities. In what follows, I will sketch what makes Alberta great and the duty to guard against the font of two existential threats to Alberta and to the people of my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, the urban and rural blended constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore is a microcosm of the people of our province and a model of what Albertans have and can achieve. Indigenous peoples walked, hunted, and navigated through these beautiful lands for countless generations. Despite its beauty and splendour, the first settlers to arrive in southern Alberta's semi-arid environment in the 18th century considered it unfit for agriculture, but these pioneers worked together to irrigate parts of this semi-desert landscape. Future Albertans tirelessly carved the land and

diverted flows to inject life-giving water into what is now my riding.

Originally started by the CP Rail, the Western irrigation district of the Bow River irrigation system began in 1904. Its main canals brought clear waters flowing from the Rocky Mountains into the Bow River valley to reservoir 1, which is Chestermere Lake today. A partnership between the government and the rail company built a model farm near Strathmore to demonstrate that farming could be done here, which attracted more farming and ranching pioneers, now rooted in our land.

The irrigation development has seen cycles of state and private ownership, featuring the entrepreneurial and the innovative spirit that still inhabits the people of Chestermere-Strathmore to this day and shaped it into what has become the irrigation flow that many of my constituents enjoy, including the communities of Chestermere, Strathmore, Langdon, Conrich, Carseland, Lyalta, Indus, Delacour, Dalroy, Dalemead, Strangmuir, Ardenode, Janet, and more small hamlets. Among these, you'll find some of the fastest growing municipalities in the province. The city of Chestermere, for example, grew nearly 500 per cent over the last two decades. It was only 30 years ago that Chestermere had just over a thousand permanent residents. Today there are over 25,000. People come from within Canada and the four corners of the world seeking opportunity, putting their talents to work, building new, thriving businesses, and joining Albertans already here in shaping better lives and a greater province.

I'm also honoured to represent the farmers, ranchers, and cattle feeders who, like my father, work tirelessly to produce food for the tables of Alberta's homes, Canada, and beyond. I'm also honoured to represent the businesses and commercial activities that operate in the riding. These businesses, ranchers, and farmers are the backbone of our economy. I will be their voice in this Chamber. I'm here to serve them. I'm here to ensure that this flourishing constituency readies for its long-term development. I'm here to see to it that our communities enjoy excellent schools, roads, servicing, and water solutions and all the elements required to support such growth. I'm here to conserve and improve what our communities have achieved.

Mr. Speaker, my journey to represent Chestermere-Strathmore in this Chamber was inspired by my father. My dad was born into a farming family in the Netherlands. He left behind his family, his friends, his culture, and his homeland to immigrate to Alberta as a teenager. He sacrificed much to come to southern Alberta to forge his way. He started farming, and he built his future from the dirt up. Here he found the freedom and the opportunity that have defined our province for generations, and this has been the great story of hundreds of thousands of Albertans over the last century and a half. From their work habits and example, I've learned that the brightest season of our history lies ahead.

To create that brighter future, we need to protect the conditions that gave my dad his opportunities so we can pass them on to future generations. Our successful school choice model, unique in Canada, is an example of such conditions of freedom and opportunity. They foster the individual autonomy and responsibility that have become our North Star, and like the diverted waters from the Bow, they feed our traditions of good stewardship of our wealth, our land, and our resources. Autonomy and responsibility are the strength and pride of our province. They are the beacon of our Alberta advantage that continues to attract new Albertans.

3:20

You see, Mr. Speaker, standing here in this Chamber isn't the goal for me. Instead, it is a wide threshold. It is an open channel. It is a space to develop the best policy we can. It is a field to strive for good governance. It is a confluence of talents and hard work that creates

robust outcomes worthy of Albertans, and the guiding path to this threshold is the conservative principles that I hold dear and on which I ran: family, faith, free enterprise, personal responsibility, grassroots leadership, the sanctity and dignity of human life, limited government, and low taxes. My love for this land of rolling hills, fertile prairies, majestic mountains, and blue streams propels my desire to fight for the people of this province so that we may remain, as our provincial motto says: strong and free.

I got into politics to sustain the Alberta we love and to expand on the strength and freedom that nourish the Alberta spirit. We are strong when we are free, and we are free when we are strong. To sustain our strength and freedom and to ensure that these principles remain a beacon for generations to come, Alberta must face two sets of related challenges, simultaneously internal and external.

First is the woke culture of progressives, which includes radical environmentalism and an obsession with identity politics. Woke progressive culture is a creature that feeds on division sown by invented grievances. It is a creature that reduces and diminishes people to narrow identities. It is a creature that opposes freedom of expression in the public square and in our schools and universities. It is a creature that scorns science, faith, and hope. Woke progressive culture is a creature hostile to the core traditions of Albertans and who we are. It divides friends and families. It pits parents against children, citizens against neighbours, and workers against businesses. It is a creature that afflicts many, chief among them our friends across the aisle, Mr. Speaker. And in this execution of that progressive plan, we are seeing an attack on Albertans, on our provincial identity, our energy sector, our farms and ranches, our institutions, and our families. We are seeing an assault on parental rights and authority, tacitly endorsed by Ottawa with New Democrat complicity, and this is wrong.

As the main founder of our province, the famously pragmatic Frederick Haultain often repeated: there is no compromise with wrong. The family is the fundamental building block of society and how citizens naturally pass on the torch of culture. Healthy and strong families beget strong communities and healthy societies. Without strong families, individuals quickly become vassals of the state. There's no culture without families, and our coalition was built on this principle and on the promise that families are protected from state intrusions. We must never let ideologues interfere with the fundamental natural rights of parents to raise their children with the same love, care, and principles they hold dear. It is our job to sustain Albertans, and we maintain and develop a stronger culture by maintaining strong families.

The second challenge Albertans face, Mr. Speaker, is a federal government increasingly intrusive and hostile to western provinces. More than that, there's a federal government disturbingly bent on punishing Albertans. They have been shameless in applying double standards to reward and pump up vote-rich regions while punishing those who, in their eyes, unwisely diverge from their doomsday views. Ottawa is trying to crush our livelihood and our spirit. Using their cultish environmental ideology they seek to crush our businesses, our farms, and our ranches. Albertans are leaders in environmental standards, and we'll take no lessons from people who allow the pouring of billions of litres of raw sewage into the precious habitat for beluga whales.

In the five short months since I was elected, Mr. Speaker, I have seen a rise in the pitch and number of federal government belligerent attacks on our constitutional autonomy, our economic liberty, and on our way of life. We live in a time in which our federal counterparts actively expand their powers to the detriment of Albertans by cutting down the neighbourly fences between jurisdictions. We live in a time in which our federal counterparts are removed from the realities of raising a family or running a

business. There is a dangerous centralizing and homogenizing project to refashion the country in accordance with their progressive ideas, an ideology that operates bereft of common sense and in the irrational foreground of a contrived doomsday.

It is dangerous, Mr. Speaker, because expanding power without limits always unfolds into tyranny. Frederick Haultain, then Premier of these territories before provincehood, was cognizant of this problem when he warned Prime Minister Laurier in early 1905: if the provincial jurisdiction can be invaded by federal legislation, what limit is there to the exercise of such power? The federal denial of control of our own natural resources at birth took 25 years to reverse, from Haultain to Premier Brownlee. And who can forget the epic battles won by Premier Lougheed to push Ottawa's taxing hand out of Alberta's oil wells?

Alberta will vigorously resist the destructive progressive ideologies and attempts to invade provincial jurisdiction by expanding federal powers. We have been here before, Mr. Speaker. From Frederick Haultain to Premiers Lougheed, Klein, Kenney, and now Smith, we have risen to the challenge, and I am proud to stand with those who have defended us against these assaults. Albertans deserve strong leadership to protect our spaces and our livelihoods, to protect our institutions and our families. That is why they sent United Conservatives to form a government. Alberta and Albertans sent us here to get the job done, and I hope the Official Opposition will abandon their sometimes tacit and sometimes active complicity with Ottawa and work with us instead to fend off these federal attacks against Alberta's people and interests.

Albertans alone will decide and chart our future, Mr. Speaker. We aren't the sort to be governed by remote, and the best way to resist these open attacks is for Alberta to occupy fully the constitutional spaces that the Canadian Constitution grants our province in areas such as resource management, education, and health care. The best way to conserve what Albertans have built and to make it sustainable for future generations is to fill our jurisdictional spaces with more Alberta and then tend to our fences, because good fences make for good neighbours, and that's what Alberta sovereignty within a united Canada does.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to stand in this Chamber and follow in the footsteps of earlier defenders of our provincial rights. This room has hosted the policy debates that have shaped our present and will continue to influence the flow of our prosperity for generations to come. Our main mission is to safeguard Alberta and Albertans for Albertans. As such, it is my honour to serve as the youngest member of this 31st Legislature of Alberta, and I pledge my energy and my youth to my constituents and the people of this province. I will toil with vigour to advance and defend what we have achieved together since the territorial government led by Frederick Haultain. I hope to bring new and revitalized perspective and energy to tried-and-tested ideas and to the flowing, timeless truth of which I've spoken today. My father taught me the values I hold: hard work, the virtues of merit, quiet pride, and respect, and these will be my tools in the service of my constituents and this, my beloved province, to the very best of my abilities.

May the fearless spirits of those who tamed this rugged land, spirits which still move through the waters that flow from the peaked steeples of our mountains through to the canals of my riding sustaining bodies and souls, purify our oaths, bless our work, and hold our promises afloat in the rivers of our lives.

Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, members.

I might remind the Assembly that the use of proper names is not acceptable in this discussion as well.

Are there any others wishing to join in the consideration? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to you on your election. I also want to offer my congratulations to my esteemed colleagues in the Assembly. Today we find ourselves entrusted with significant opportunity and profound responsibilities to represent the diverse voices of our respective constituencies.

As the representative for Edmonton-Decore I want to express my gratitude to the people of Edmonton-Decore for their trust and confidence. Today I stand before you as a newly elected member in this Assembly. I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my family, particularly to my wife, Hamdi. Hamdi, thank you for the unwavering love and support. To my three children, Taslim, Feisal, and Hodan: thank you for allowing me to take the time away from you and run for public office. I'm grateful to the donors and volunteers who dedicated their time and resources to my campaign for the lasting friendship, that I deeply cherish. I owe them more than words can express, and I am committed to representing Edmonton-Decore to the best of my ability.

Mr. Speaker, I was born in a small town called Diinsoor, located approximately 300 kilometres southwest of Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. My life started being born in a place where maternal health services were virtually nonexistent. I was not born in a health care facility, nor was my mom assisted by a health care professional. Both my mother and I survived against the odds as infant and maternal mortality rates were and still are tragically very high. I became the trailblazer in my family lineage, the first to sit down in a classroom, hold a book, and pick up a pen. Neither of my parents had the opportunity to attend any form of schooling, so it was their dream to at least see me get an education.

After grade 10, unfortunately, my homeland, Somalia, was ravaged by civil war, shattering all my family's hopes and expectations. Every aspect of the public infrastructure was gone. Nonetheless, I stand here today because my dreams never faded. Despite the immense challenges, I managed to continue my education with the support of people who believed that children in conflict zones should have an opportunity. I eventually gained admission to one of the top universities on the continent of Africa. I had the privilege of studying at the University of South Africa, specifically their campus in Nairobi, Kenya. World Vision International sponsored my education, and I eventually worked for them.

For about a decade of service with World Vision International I dedicated myself to improving access to humanitarian aid and development in various parts of east Africa. One of my most passionate endeavours during this period was my work to enhance access to primary health care, with special focus on improving maternal and child health in the remote regions of east Africa.

Mr. Speaker, to put this into perspective, a child born in the very place I was born in today faces a staggering 20 times higher risk of not reaching their first birthday compared to a child born where I find myself today. These sobering statistics fuelled my determination to make a difference and ensure that every child and mother, regardless of their location, can celebrate life's precious moments.

My journey in Alberta started 13 years ago, when I joined my family in Edmonton as a new immigrant from Somalia. My wife, Hamdi, was the first one to migrate here as a government-sponsored refugee. With my wife and our beloved three children we made Alberta our home because of its people and the numerous opportunities that it can offer.

My first job involved supporting community engagement initiatives in Edmonton, particularly in the neighbourhood of Kilkenny, which is in the heart of Edmonton-Decore, which I represent today in the Assembly. While working part-time in Kilkenny, Hamdi and I made the decision to go back to school. I enrolled in the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta, where I pursued my graduate degree in public health. During my graduate studies we lived in one of Alberta's social housing units, where I came to understand the significance of housing for individuals and families.

Mr. Speaker, I was able to pursue my education dreams and reach where I am today because of these support systems, and I'm so grateful for these support systems. Many of my constituents are in need of such housing support due to the deteriorating cost of living. After two years of my graduate school I worked as a policy adviser for the Ministry of Health and managed Alberta's primary health care strategy. I was excited to restart life and continue working in the arena of primary health care, get back to the job that I like the most, which is improving access to family doctors and allied health professions, something that the team around me cherished.

In June 2017 the NDP government then announced Alberta's first affordable housing strategy. Yes, the first affordable housing strategy, a strategy that was looking into reducing wait-lists, increasing affordable housing stock in our province.

Giving back has always been part of my life, Mr. Speaker. Hence, following three years of service at Alberta Health, I took a secondment out of passion to manage Alberta's affordable housing strategy. It was an opportunity that enabled me to couple my lived experience with the practical policy formulation and implementation on housing. At the time the housing crisis was not as severe as today, and I commend the government then for recognizing the need for a long-term vision to address the unacceptable housing crisis that we find ourselves in today.

In 2019, as the world was in the fifth year of the decade of people of African descent, a decade dedicated to the recognition of the people of African descent, I went back to the nonprofit sector and took the role of executive director at the Africa Centre. My decision to serve in this capacity was deeply inspired by my desire to contribute to building Alberta's diversity. As someone who experienced the challenges of immigration, which still influences people settlement and integration, I felt a profound sense of duty.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, during my tenure I had tremendous opportunities to meet and engage with Alberta's remarkable Black communities. I listened to their stories and advocated for the equity and fairness that this province can offer. With the Black communities we positioned the organization to be one of the largest Black-serving organizations in Canada and the largest in the western provinces of Canada. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve in that capacity.

Over the past decade in Alberta I have engaged with people from various walks of life, spanning generations and representing diverse backgrounds. Each person contributes uniquely to the thriving fabric of this province. They share a common desire for a government that creates the conditions for them to pursue their goals and aspirations, as I did. Throughout my engagement with Albertans, when I share my story, people comment on the resilience and my overcoming of all odds. I've also heard similar stories from many Albertans who established a new life in their chosen home.

Mr. Speaker, my first involvement in politics was when I landed here in Canada. I was inspired by the ability to freely participate in a democratic process, which I had never seen. I was not able to vote yet, but I volunteered in the 2012 provincial elections. I volunteered on Ray Martin's campaign, a former member of this Assembly, a long-time New Democrat, and a wonderful human being. My first time to vote was 2015 at the age of 39. It was probably meant to be

that because my vote was one that contributed to the first NDP government in this province.

Looking back, Mr. Speaker, I reflect on my childhood classmates, the many who didn't make it to their adulthood. None of them were able to further their education as all opportunities were taken away from them by the conflict. None of them could ever vote in a democratic process, but here I am, sworn in as the 963rd member of this Assembly. I see this as the story of Alberta. It's the story of this growing province.

In the past two years I have knocked on countless doors, meeting individuals, small-business owners, teachers, health care workers. I had the opportunity to listen. What Albertans expect from their government: I have heard they expect to improve access to timely based primary health care, lower the cost of basic needs, make housing more affordable and rapidly increase the housing supply, build more schools and ensure kids are better supported to learn and grow, develop an economic plan that embraces the future and ensures that Albertans have stable and predictable retirement savings.

Mr. Speaker, the first week of October, during the Read In Week, I visited several schools, sat down in various classrooms. It was a joy; however, it was evident that not only class sizes but classroom complexities continue to add more pressure on educators in our schools. This is making school boards take difficult decisions, including reducing support services for our students, which will further worsen children's learning outcomes.

The rising cost of living is affecting many Albertans, making housing affordability the most pressing issue that we have ever seen in the recent history of this province. We are witnessing an increasing homelessness, deteriorating conditions of the existing social housing stock, an increasing wait-list for those who cannot afford the market price of housing. We live in one of the richest jurisdictions in the world, but many Albertans have no place to sleep, Mr. Speaker. We all have obligations to immediately address these unacceptable conditions.

The constituency of Edmonton-Decore and all Albertans worry about their economic resilience, their quality of life, their living conditions, and the current and future environmental risks they face. These are just a few of the various concerns that Albertans express. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne, that we heard on Monday, didn't address these concerns adequately. As a member of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition I pledge to do everything within my power to halt the further erosion of our vital, people-centred programs and services that define our quality of life. I'm deeply humbled by the trust and confidence *placed in me by the citizens of Edmonton-Decore, and I offer my unwavering commitment to serve them faithfully, loyally, and to the best of my ability.**

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 1

Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate November 1: Ms Smith]

The Acting Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak to Bill 1? The Member for Calgary-Elbow has risen to speak.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise at this moment to speak on Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023. The act requires a referendum for very specific tax changes, meaning an increase in tax rates, reduction in tax exemption amounts for both personal and business income taxes, and includes any changes or reductions in the exemption amounts for small-business taxes.

I have questions. Nothing in this bill addresses the stark affordability crisis that our constituents and the people of Alberta are facing, Mr. Speaker. The government has a majority. If they choose not to raise taxes, if they don't want to raise taxes, they can simply choose not to raise taxes. That is something that they can do in a legislative majority. If they wish to cut taxes, as they promised, they can do that as well. They can address many aspects of taxation policy without a bill of this sort.

Now, you know, I'm old enough to remember similar posturing bills in the past from similar styles of government, some that required a referendum in the case of running a deficit, others that required a referendum in order to change taxation, and in every single one of these cases, when push came to shove and the going got a little bit tough, the government of the day, the Conservative government of the day, threw these amendments in the trash can in order to make the judgments that they needed to make in order to govern as they felt was effective. And this is more of the same. This is a promise that does not, this is a bill that does not in fact reduce taxes for anyone. Not a single person will see reduced taxes because of this bill. Not a single person will see increased affordability.

3:50

Let's talk about affordability. Let's talk about some of what's been done by this government to hurt affordability. Utility bills have doubled in the last year. Auto insurance is up 30 per cent. Tuition is up almost 30 per cent. Municipal taxes have increased because of downloading of services to municipalities. The number of doctors accepting new patients has collapsed by 80 per cent over the past four years. School and bus fees are up. Alberta students get less funding per capita than anywhere else in the country. We're short many thousands of educational assistants, and that has a horrific consequence in an era where the complexity of classrooms is increasing all the time. Make no mistake; these are a form of taxation as well. These are downloaded costs that in many cases parents and families are required now to cover because government has stepped back. These costs and fees are borne by those with the lowest ability to pay. It's really unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

It could be that Bill 1 could be about addressing the affordability challenges of people, of Albertans, with the costs that they're actually facing, but it doesn't. Instead, Bill 1 is all about performative and unnecessary commitment to a process that, unfortunately, will not actually save a single Albertan even a single dollar.

Now, the other challenge here is that, of course, we are in many cases very blessed. We are absolutely blessed with resource royalty income right now because of world oil prices. That is profoundly beneficial to the people of Alberta. It's not always going to be the case, and in fact it was the case in 2020, when resource royalties collapsed and the government deficit situation got worse, that the government at the time was forced to reckon with that.

This bill, unfortunately, will tie us even more closely to that resource royalty roller coaster. It ties us to an extremely unpredictable source of income. Unfortunately, it ties us to further deficits in the event that the royalty resource gravy train stops for whatever reason, for any purpose anywhere in the world. And we know as Albertans this is something that we have always faced, and to increase the importance of resource royalties in such an environment is deeply, deeply irresponsible.

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

How does the government justify increasing the cost of living the way that they have? You know, one of the areas where I focus in my constituency for the people of Calgary-Elbow: what they're facing right now is a deepening challenge with housing prices, with the cost of housing, with the cost of rent, with interest rates, with managing that. Unfortunately, there's nothing in this bill that provides even a single dollar that can help them do that. I have spoken to seniors in my riding who face rent increases 50 per cent higher. Again – I need to say this – this is what's leading to the worst affordability crisis that my constituents, that the people of Calgary, that the people of Alberta are facing in the last 40 years, and this affordability crisis is only getting worse.

Mr. Speaker, I wish that there was something that I could point to for my constituents, a government policy that I could point to, some sort of necessity that the government is paying for, some sort of additional factor that can be provided here as a result of this bill that allows me to tell my constituents that help is on the way, that this is a government that cares, that this is a government that's going to make sure that you don't end up homeless because your rent is going up by so much. Unfortunately, there is absolutely nothing here that allows that to happen.

So, like I said, I have questions. I look forward to the debate. I look forward to the views of the members across the aisle, and I have a lot of questions about how this is actually going to improve and impact the lives of the people in Calgary-Elbow in any way.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the previous speaker. Low taxes are about affordability for Albertans, and that's what this bill is about. It's about a campaign promise, that was made during the election, that we're here to follow through on.

Mr. Speaker, with the lowest overall taxes in the country, including the lowest corporate income tax by a wide margin, Alberta's tax advantages over other jurisdictions are clear. It's important we do everything we can to protect that advantage. That's exactly what this legislation sets out to do. If passed, Bill 1 will prevent the government, both now and in the future, from raising income tax rates without getting Albertans' approval through a referendum. This would apply to both personal and corporate income tax rates, giving certainty to Albertans and Alberta businesses alike and protecting them against future income tax hikes. It would also apply to the reduction of personal income tax bracket thresholds and to the reduction of the value of certain nonrefundable personal tax credits, including the basic personal amount, the spousal amount, and the equivalent-to-spouse amount, as those are other major factors that affect how much income tax Albertans pay.

Mr. Speaker, the importance of this legislation truly cannot be overstated, and that's why this government made it a priority coming into the current legislative session. Our low-tax environment is a major reason why we're seeing more people from other provinces and countries choosing to make Alberta their home and more job creators and innovators choosing to invest in the province. In fact, Alberta's tax advantage is so immense that Albertans and Alberta businesses would pay at least \$20 billion more in taxes if we had the same tax system as any other province.

That's a significant number, and it translates into real savings for Albertans and Alberta business owners, allowing them to spend their hard-earned dollars on the things that really matter.

By committing to not raising income taxes and by enshrining that commitment through legislation, we're making it clear to job creators across the country and around the world that Alberta is open for business. Bill 1 would help us continue to roll out the welcome mat for investment in our province and allow us to further our reputation as one of the most business-friendly jurisdictions on the continent.

Mr. Speaker, lower taxes are not an economic experiment, and Alberta is proof positive of their benefit to both fiscal and economic prosperity. Last year, with the lowest corporate income tax rate in the country, we generated the highest corporate income tax revenue this province has ever seen, and our current revenue outlook remains strong. It's also well known that we're generating more corporate income tax revenue now than the previous government did with a substantially higher rate. That speaks to the importance of preserving Alberta's low-tax environment, which this legislation commits to.

As I mentioned, Albertans spend billions of dollars less in taxes every year compared with residents of other provinces. This year a family with two children earning \$75,000 would pay over \$1,700 more in taxes in British Columbia and \$4,200 more in Ontario. A similar family earning \$150,000 would pay over \$5,300 more in taxes in British Columbia and about \$8,900 more in Ontario. Our basic personal amount is also higher than any other province.

4:00

Paying lower taxes means Albertans keep more of their earnings, a fact all the more important given today's affordability challenges. Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 reflects a key commitment our government made to Albertans, to protect them against harmful income tax hikes that would make life more expensive and drive investment away from our province. Instead, Albertans can rest assured knowing that Alberta's government is committed to keeping taxes low and preserving Alberta's low-tax, pro-growth, business-friendly environment. Bill 1 will help secure the future of our province.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any other speakers wishing to speak? The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction? No? Any other speakers wishing to speak to Bill 1?

Do we wish to close debate? Any member wishing to close debate? Okay.

Seeing none, we will call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the debate we've had today. I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 on Monday, November 6, 2023.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:02 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 31th Legislature - 1st Session (2023)

Activity to Thursday, November 2, 2023

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Alberta Taxpayer Protection Amendment Act, 2023 (Smith)

First Reading — 10 (*Oct. 30, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 57-58 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft.*), 96-97 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 2 — Alberta Pension Protection Act (Horner)

First Reading — 89-90 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 3 — Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023 (Williams)

First Reading — 22 (*Oct. 31, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 90-93 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 4 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading — 55 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 5 — Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023 (Horner)

First Reading — 55-56 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 6 — Public Health Amendment Act, 2023 (Amery)

First Reading — 90 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Alberta Health Care Insurance (Access Fees) Amendment Act, 2023 (Brar)

First Reading — 90 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)

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