



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 8, 2023

Day 7

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt
Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
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Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce a number of guests seated in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon. I'd like to begin by introducing representatives of Red Deer Polytechnic. First, we have Stuart Cullum, president of Red Deer Polytechnic; Guy Pelletier, the chair of the board of governors of RDP, vice-president of the Red Deer region for Melcor Developments; Dr. Tonya Wolfe, associate vice-president, applied research, and director of Centres for Manufacturing and Energy Innovation; Richard Longtin, associate vice-president, external relations; Darryl Short, the CEO of Karma Machining & Manufacturing; and David Murray from Steelhaus Technologies Inc. I'd invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

It's also my pleasure to introduce to members a number of folks joining us in the gallery today. They are participating in a full-day public service orientation program which explores legislative budgetary committee processes, enabling each participant to apply their knowledge in their role in the public service. Today is a pilot program, so we thank you for joining us. There are 12 members of the public service here today. If you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

That brings us to member introductions. The Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction has an introduction to make.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Luis Moya from Peru, South America; Vivian Falconer; Sam Falconer; Amira Nally; and my partner, Jocelyn Falconer. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce through you to this Assembly the council for the MD of Big Lakes; Rocky Sinclair, an Indigenous business leader and, more importantly, my uncle; and, last but not least, my wonderful wife, Shantelle, and my beautiful daughters Ryan and Sloane. Please rise and accept this warm welcome.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I would like to introduce from the MD of Willow Creek: Reeve Maryanne Sandberg; Deputy Reeve Glen Alm; councillors John Van Driesten, John Kroetsch, Earl Hemmaway, Evan Berger, Brian Nelson, and their CAO, Derrick Krizsan. Please rise and receive the traditional and warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Aashmeeta Sandhu from New York. She is an anchor, producer, and journalist from Jus

Punjabi TV, the first and oldest Punjabi channel in North America. I ask Aashmeeta to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations has an introduction.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you two incredible Indigenous women here with me today, Azure Johnson from Pigeon Lake, my area, who does some of the amazing beadwork that you see me wearing, and Suzanne Life-Yeomans, the chairman of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you my constituency office team. I have Sunny Johal and Jennifer Hamilton. If you will please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Janine Sullivan, Todd Dettling, and Rob Litzenberger, who are here today representing FortisAlberta, an incredibly important business within our province. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Members' Statements

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

Health System Reform

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been struggling to access the health care services that they need. Across the province we have heard concerns from constituents asking for greater reliability and improved deliveries. I'm happy to say that our government actively listens to all Albertans. We hear the concerns regarding health care, and we are committed to ensuring that we see notable improvements. We are very fortunate to live in Alberta, with publicly funded health care services, but when there are opportunities for improvement, our government will act accordingly.

When wait times for EMS transport were high, we applied a record \$196 million in funding specifically towards EMS over three years in Budget 2023 to hire more staff, provide more ambulances, and implement other key recommendations. When lab service wait times were becoming a problem for Albertans, our government acted immediately. Recognizing that DynaLife was unable to manage growing demand, we enlisted Alberta Precision Laboratories to complete a full transition by the end of this year. Since September wait times for walk-ins and scheduled appointments have been reduced by 34 per cent in Calgary. The current average wait time in the area is less than 30 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, we take health care seriously on this side of the House, and we will continue to improve on it. Refocusing Alberta's health care system is exactly what we need. Not only do we have to provide exceptional services to patients and families, but we must also provide exceptional support to our hard-working front-line health workers. By creating four specialized organizations – primary care, acute care, continuing care, and mental health and addiction –

we can delegate the right sector to provide you the right service when and where you need it. These measures will see AHS shift its focus to be a delivery agent for acute and continuing care services and to allow Albertans timely access to the care they need while ensuring our health care workers receive extra support for the exceptional work they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has a statement to make.

National Indigenous Veterans Day

Member Arcand-Paul: [Remarks in Cree], Mr. Speaker. I have the honour of marking this solemn occasion for our province and our nation as a whole. Today is National Indigenous Veterans Day. It is a time for us to consider the contributions of Indigenous peoples to the Armed Forces and a time to honour the sacrifices they have made. I ask that you accompany me in commemorating the legacy that Indigenous veterans have left in forming this great nation we call home.

Indigenous soldiers have been a part of the Armed Forces since before Canada was a country. From the War of 1812 through to modern-day missions, they have been charged with defending our nation's freedoms, that did not always extend to them. As we pay our respects to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, it is important to remember that Indigenous veterans who returned home found that their battle for rights and justice was far from over at their home fires. Indigenous veterans were often disenfranchised, denied benefits and support services created specifically for returning veterans.

This inequity extended into the denial of housing, health care, and education opportunities. Many found that their homes and land had been seized without their consent. Some Indigenous veterans did not even have the right to vote in the country whose uniform they wore. This is despite the great sacrifices that Indigenous soldiers made. In 1914 at least 4,000 Indigenous people, about a third of the eligible population, enlisted and travelled to Europe for the First World War. Hundreds of them remained there under the poppies of Flanders and those other bloody battlefields.

Over the course of the 20th century up to 12,000 Indigenous people have joined the ranks of the Canadian Forces. My own family have been among them: my great-grandfather Private Marc Calder, who served with CIC; my second great-uncle, Henry Huppie, who served in World War I; and my uncle Scott Critchton, who served both in the Canadian Armed Forces and the U.S. Marines in Iraq. Despite the many obstacles, the stories and teachings of our Indigenous veterans serve as a reminder of the importance of unity. We all have a role to play in working towards a better and more inclusive future.

National Indigenous Veterans Day

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, today is November 8, which is recognized across this beautiful country as National Indigenous Veterans Day. On this day we honour and acknowledge the countless Indigenous individuals who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces. Their sacrifice and duty will forever be cemented in the fabric of this province and country.

Throughout history Indigenous people have faced many hardships. However, they remain to hold a profound legacy of defending this land and its people. Despite travelling far to enlist, cultural and language barriers, and racism when they returned home, Indigenous veterans have continued to protect our rights and freedoms. In honour of Indigenous men and women in uniform a special ceremony was

held in the Alberta Legislature today, and I was so grateful to be able to attend.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, my grandfather, or mushum, Sam Sinclair fought in World War II for the Calgary Highlanders. So eager to defend our country and be a part of something, he actually lied and joined when he was only 16 years old. I'm honoured to speak about him briefly here today. My only regret is that he isn't here to bear witness in person. I do have family and friends here instead.

Sam Sinclair was the president of the National Aboriginal Veterans of Canada and was instrumental in advocating for them to receive proper recognition. He was one of the champions who lobbied and succeeded in getting a national monument for Indigenous veterans in Ottawa that still stands today. One of my proudest moments when I was a kid was watching on TV with our entire school all the Remembrance Day ceremonies. There he was, front and centre, always dressed so sharp in full military uniform. It not only made me so proud; it made me understand the duty of sacrifice that all veterans have made so we can live freely here today. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment was his ability to lead and advocate for poor and everyday people. He had an innate skill to connect with people and make them laugh and collaborate to find common ground in any room.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

Health Care Workers

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, our health care system is in crisis. Hospitals in Edmonton are at 150 per cent capacity. That's 150 patients in spaces designed and staffed for 100. ERs in the cities are overflowing, and rural areas are continuously shut down, all while tens of thousands of Albertans have no access to primary care. Dr. Neeja Bakshi, director for internal medicine at the Royal Alex hospital, said that we've "hit a tipping point" and that the system is now "unsafe. Untenable. Unsustainable." And it's clear who's to blame. From an internal medicine specialist in Edmonton: I've discussed at length with colleagues and leaders at AHS, who are trying their best but receive neither the needed help, attention, nor urgency from the Alberta government, who seem focused elsewhere.

The UCP has spent four and a half years working to intimidate, attack, bully, and micromanage workers at every level of our health care system. Their interference and incompetence have broken the systems we depend on and the people who make it possible. They've driven health care workers away and made it far harder to recruit new ones, and at every step they've denied the very crisis they helped create and are now trying to blame someone else. The reforms were just smoke and mirrors meant to hide the truth till after the election. Any gains they made have evaporated, leaving front-line workers more exhausted and demoralized than ever. The UCP aren't the heroes riding to the rescue of our health care system; they're the villains who blew it up. And now they're set to create more chaos, with plans to add more bureaucracy and seize more control.

So I want to take a moment to speak to all of the Albertans on the front lines, struggling to hold our health care system together. We see you. We hear you. We appreciate and thank you, and we're going to be here fighting for you, for truth and transparency about the challenges you face, for the resources you need, the safe, supportive workplaces you deserve to help you provide the quality of care you got into this work to give. You and the Albertans you care for deserve nothing less.

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The founding families of our province: well, they were a rugged bunch. They were free spirited, and it takes that type of spirit to tackle the province and the elements that they had at the time. Not only did they come together to share their food and their culture and their ideas but also their hopes and dreams. And when they got here, the folks from Treaty 6: well, they reached across the aisle, they shook hands, and they made a plan to make a better province together. So is it any surprise that we are known as the province of the strong and free when these folks came together to build a better place in Canada?

Now, when it comes to the pension plan that we signed on to back in 1966, is it any surprise, knowing the grit and the determination, the spirit of our province and the people that founded it, Mr. Speaker, that we've punched above our weight again and we're contributing way more than others have? Now, like any other contract in negotiations, when you talk about the settled value, you've got cash going in, cash coming out, knowing full well that we've been contributing for years, that we've actually paid more into it than what we've been taking out.

With that, Mr. Speaker, a lot of folks are kind of skewing and muddying the waters out there. Why is it that people across the aisle don't want you to know how much of that value, of that gold, you get? Well, back in my area there's the golden rule: he who has the gold makes the rules. So it seems to make a lot of sense that a bunch of folks that don't want you getting that cash, to have the ability to have negotiations want to make the rules. They want to keep making the rules with your money, and that's the issue.

Thank goodness our Finance minister made that call. He let folks know, out of the Fair Deal Panel, that we were actually considering what this would be. An actuarial was performed, and that's when people started paying attention. Until recently, Mr. Speaker, I can hazard to say that a lot of folks in eastern Canada weren't rubbing their eyes in the morning, waking up, and saying: I wonder how Alberta is doing today. Not until recently. With that, that's why they came out west, that's why they sat down, that's why they're paying attention, and that's why we're talking about killing that carbon tax.

Hinduism

Member Kayande: It's Hindu Heritage Month, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about what Hinduism means to me and why I'm proud of being Hindu, how I believe Hinduism makes me a better person.

If we cast ourselves back more than 2,000 years to the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where a civil war is raging, this war is literally brother against brother. Before battle begins, the prince asks his charioteer, the Lord Krishna, to drive out into the middle of the field to look over the faces of his family, friends, teachers, who he's now at this moment sworn to kill. He looks them in the eye, and he can't do it. The 700 stanzas of the Bhagavad-Gita recount the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna, basically a very, very long pep talk, and the essential question is: how do we live as moral people? What is the right course of action in this moment? How am I to know that I'm doing the right thing?

My practice of Hinduism tells me that the answer is situational. It's specific. It's arrived at only after thinking about it for a long time with calmness, stillness, and detachment. Put simply, my Hinduism informs me that life is complicated and that moral choices are hard. We're all fighting for something. Am I fighting for my convenience and comfort, or am I fighting for the powerless and the voiceless? Spiritually, I can only guess at the right action. That means I don't think about what the ultimate good society should look like. Instead, I think of prosperity as the absence of

injustice, and my practice of Hinduism guides me on that path, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a tabling.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table this report from a number of academics and physicians here in Alberta that reports that the UCP-commissioned review presupposed that there were adverse impacts of supervised consumption sites and explicitly excluded any positive and social impacts of SCSs from its assessment. I'd like to table this for the public record, please.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, on National Indigenous Veterans Day, I rise to table five copies of an article from this morning's *Edmonton Journal* front page featuring Christina Hollingworth, a grade 12 student attending Jasper Place high school in my riding of Edmonton-McClung. Christina has honours grades in school and is also an accomplished athlete and has a passion for singing. She honors her great-great-uncle, World War II veteran Corporal David Keddy, who died in battle...

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

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm here to table a letter that I received from Dawn Allan, who writes in about their deep concerns about the government's attempted plan to take away the CPP from ordinary Albertans and frustration with the public advertising campaign.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time is 1:50. If there are additional tablings, we will return to that after Oral Question Period.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

AHS Board Chair

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, today the Premier appointed Lyle Oberg the executive chair of the AHS Board. Mr. Oberg was the former health care adviser to the Premier when she first began campaigning to privatize health care a decade ago and also a partner in Canada's first private, for-profit hospital, which collapsed under many lawsuits. To the Premier: if she really wants us to believe that her plan does not involve any privatization of our public health care, why would she appoint someone who has spent a lifetime advocating for the privatization of health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, we signed a health care guarantee, and I also signed a \$24 billion health care agreement with the federal government that commits us to upholding the principles of the Canada Health Act. That means no one will pay out of pocket for a family doctor and no one will pay out of pocket for hospital services. Every decision that we make is going to be under the auspices of a publicly funded health care system. There will be no privatization.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in 2020 Mr. Oberg was appointed to the working group that failed to fairly negotiate with our doctors, leading many to leave this province, relocate their practice, and undermine the health care of hundreds of thousands of Albertans. In 1990 he co-wrote a report calling routine mammogram screenings for women under 45 unnecessary, claiming it made no difference to their health. To the Premier: if you want Albertans to trust you, why won't you appoint a chair who is trustworthy?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you there's good reason why Albertans don't trust the NDP. When they were in in 2015, they spent an extra \$3 billion and saw no results.

Ms Hoffman: That's not true.

Ms Smith: No. I can tell you. Hip replacements: they were 204 days to wait; by the time they were done, year 2018, it was 265. Knee replacements: 238 days when they came in, 298 days by the time they were done. I could go on, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the last time Mr. Oberg tried running a private, for-profit hospital, it didn't even open, yet the Premier has entrusted the primary responsibility of running some of our largest hospitals to someone who wasn't even able to organize getting a shovel in the ground. Albertans deserve better than reruns of PC patronage. They deserve a competent leader in charge of their health care. Why won't the Premier appoint a qualified, competent leader? Or is health care failure and incompetence a requirement of the job?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can see that the member opposite doesn't want to talk about their record of failure, and why would they? Cataract surgeries when they came in were at 202 days' wait; by the time they left, 320 days' wait. And MRI and CT scans – it was the same story – 214 days when they came in ... [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: ... 278 days when they left. CT scans, 44 days; 113 days when they left office. That's what the NDP delivered with \$3 billion worth of extra spending: not one bit of service improvement.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Health System Reform

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier can claim integrated health all she wants, but this radical overhaul does nothing but tear our health care system apart. Her own plan details the risk of complete system failure and fractured care. But the UC's plan will not just fracture public health care in Alberta; it will absolutely shatter it. If the Premier wants to refocus, why won't she turn her attention towards hiring more front-line health care workers to take care of Albertans? Or does she believe we already have enough?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Something that the Official Opposition leader and I agree on: let's make sure that resources are going to the front lines. It's the reason why so many front-line health professionals have stood to validate what we're doing today: Elliott

Davis, Strathcona professional firefighters association; Dr. Susan Prendergast, the president of the Nurse Practitioner Association; Dr. Les Scheelar, an anaesthesiologist; Dr. Paul Parks, president of the Alberta Medical Association; Len Stelmaschuk, president of the Alberta Paramedic Association; and even Kerry Bales, who's going to be taking over on mental health and corrections.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier just doesn't get it. Imagine a senior with failing physical and mental health receiving inadequate home care, unable to find a family doctor, on the wait-list for appropriate continuing care. That person's health deteriorates. Once they arrive at the ER, that senior's care will now be managed by at least four separate organizations. How in heaven's name can the Premier expect this senior or their loved ones to effectively ensure they have the care that they need?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we returned the phone calls of the Alberta Continuing Care Association, who, I understand, the member opposite wouldn't even meet with in the four years that she was in office. In fact, Feisal Keshavjee is so enthusiastic about what we are doing. He also, with the Alberta Continuing Care Association, came out as a validator for us; so did Shawn Terlson with Shepherd's Care Foundation. People understand that having a dedicated, focused individual in Alberta Health in order to be able to address the issues of continuing care and home care is the way we'll make improvements.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the UCP's plan on page 16 specifically details selling off continuing care facilities. These facilities, in particular, treat over 3,000 of the most medically fragile seniors spread over 26 communities in Alberta. Earlier today Karen Kuprys, a registered nurse not consulted, said that private care facilities had the worst fatality rates during the peak of the pandemic. Will the Premier commit that under no circumstances will the government sell CapitalCare or Carewest to the private sector?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the reason why you have to look at the most up-to-date information as opposed to a slide deck from two months ago, because we go through a process where we get feedback, and the feedback that we got is that Alberta Health Services should continue to run those two facilities.

I will correct the record, Mr. Speaker. Alberta did very well during COVID. We did not have the same level of problems as they did in Quebec, for instance, and it's because we had ... [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition will come to order. [interjections] Order. Order.

Ms Smith: As the Leader of the Opposition should know, the reason why we did so much better is because in Ontario and Quebec they had four ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

If the Leader of the Opposition would like to ask another question, she's welcome to do so. If not, I'll go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who is on the list.

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask my first question in this House, and I want to give a massive thank you to the front-line health care workers across this province. These incredible health care workers have held the hands of loved ones during a terrifying pandemic. They've taken the brunt of frustration from people being denied access to health care due to a lack of resources. They work in the most

stressful environments imaginable. My question to the Premier is: why doesn't the government respect health care workers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government does respect health care workers. It's because we respect health care workers that we want to improve the system. We don't want them to languish in what is occurring right now; therefore, we have a plan to really refocus the system and empower our health care workers. I've heard from numerous health care workers that they know how things could change, but they're not being listened to, so we are embarking on a journey to listen to our health care workers and provide them the supports and resources they need.

Ms Wright: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the minister actually believed what she was saying, she would have consulted front-line workers before introducing chaotic changes this morning. As registered nurse Anahi Johnson said, and I quote: why wasn't consultation with us done before the decision to entirely overhaul and sell off our health care system? Anahi is a health care hero, and I meet many just like her every day. Why doesn't this government care what nurses like her think?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we're embarking on a journey to put the meat on the bones of this framework. Dr. Susan Prendergast, the president of the Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta says:

The Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta supports the decision by the minister and Alberta Health to restructure [Alberta] health care oversight in the province. The health care system in Alberta is in crisis and new ideas and approaches are required to address current need and to support Albertans into the future.

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, again, if this government cared, they would have consulted front-line health care workers already. Karen Caprice, a registered nurse for three decades, noted just this morning that she's particularly worried about the privatization of continuing care. She pointed out that far more people had died in private continuing care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, and she lamented the privatization of lab services, another disaster we've already lived through under this government. Privatizing health care literally costs lives. How can this government not see that?

2:00

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again they are providing misinformation and fear. That is all that they are doing. [interjection] In fact, Dr. Paul Parks, the president of the Alberta Medical Association, said, and I quote: the Minister of Health has acknowledged that our health care system needs urgent reform; this work will only succeed with the involvement and leadership of physicians; the AMA looks forward to meaningful consultation and collaboration as these reforms are further elaborated. I've committed to that, and I am looking forward to working with Dr. Parks and other physicians.

Ms Notley: You're creating the fear, and you say the misinformation.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted at 2 o'clock.

Ethics Commissioner

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the Premier contravened the Conflicts of Interest Act. Simply put: she broke the law. When a person does

something wrong, they must be held accountable. Preschoolers understand this concept, but the Premier seems to have a little trouble admitting that she made a pretty big mistake. In fact, she is now firing the Ethics Commissioner for doing her job; the Premier is firing people who uphold the rule of law and appropriate use of power.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows full well that this matter has been investigated thoroughly by the Ethics Commissioner, by the Public Service Commission as well, and we've received recommendations, which this party is handling seriously. We found and we were delighted to note that there was no prosecutorial interference in the investigation that the Ethics Commissioner found, and the recommendations that the Ethics Commissioner provided are being implemented. In addition, we're working to ensure that the recommendations made are being acted . . .

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

Mr. Sabir: The Ethics Commissioner in her report, which the minister should read, said that sanctions against the Premier were warranted for her action. She, in fact, said that she reserves the right to make further recommendations given that we should be bringing the commissioner into this House to help determine the appropriate punishment for the Premier's actions. Instead, the Premier wants the commissioner gone because she's afraid of the punishment that might come. Lord knows what this government will do once the commissioner is gone. Will the Premier admit that this is just a disgusting political cover-up?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to a decision made by a committee. That recommendation will come to the Legislature. These committees are independent, they are multipartisan, and their recommendations will come to this Assembly for further deliberations. It would be inappropriate – and I think the hon. member should take note – to speculate on the outcome of those deliberations before they come to this House. This highlights the opposition's lack of understanding in this matter. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: What's really inappropriate is to interfere in the justice system. The UCP has a track record of ousting people that don't bow down to their questionable approach to politics. They fired the Election Commissioner while he was investigating them for leadership fraud. Recently the Premier publicly complained about the Ethics Commissioner. I listened to the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: I listened to that. It would seem she was . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: "Order. Order. Order" doesn't mean get louder; it means get quieter. We'll go from the beginning now.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the UCP has a track record of ousting people that don't bow down to their questionable approach to politics. They fired the Election Commissioner while he was investigating the UCP leadership fraud. Recently the Premier publicly complained about the Ethics Commissioner. I listened to that, and it would seem that she was upset that someone followed their job description. But I will give the Premier another chance today to do the right thing and end this cover-up. Will the Premier reappoint the Ethics Commissioner when her contract is up in May?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the offices of the Ethics Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer are based on set terms. Nobody was fired. These terms are coming to an end in about six months. I think that any good government, at least this good government, thinks that healthy competition is okay. Providing for an open and transparent process is okay. Of course, these individuals are welcome to apply, but the better question is this. Why is that member so afraid of open competition? Why is that member so afraid of transparency? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Homeless Supports

Member Irwin: This weekend two more of my constituents died after fires broke out in their tents. They were people who mattered. They were people who were loved. They didn't deserve to die. They died because they were trying to stay warm in their encampments. As we head into the winter, I fear that without action from government many more people will die preventable deaths on our streets. I'm tired of the spin from the minister. I'm tired of him pointing fingers, blaming everyone else, and refusing to treat this like the crisis it is. This is truly a matter of life and death. I don't want another person to die on our streets, so I'll ask the Premier: how is any of this acceptable?

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any death is tragic, and our hearts go out to the individuals involved and, of course, their families and anybody who has been working with them on the street. This government has taken this issue very, very seriously, particularly the situation that is taking place in Edmonton. We have increased funding to homeless shelters in Edmonton and Calgary by 71 per cent. We have more homeless shelter spaces available in Edmonton than at any time in our history. We are below capacity. There's space for everybody. We've also opened up homeless shelters 24 hours a day to be able to make sure that people can access care immediately here in Edmonton and across the province.

Member Irwin: Given that we need more than mats on floors and given that when the minister of public safety was asked about increasing houselessness in our cities, he responded by ranting about the federal carbon tax and given that when I've asked questions about houselessness and the lack of investment in housing to the minister supposedly responsible, he ends up talking about the Prime Minister and who knows what else – so many Albertans like those on the streets in my riding need help now – I'm forced again to ask the Premier: if your ministers aren't able to answer questions about tangible actions around housing and preventing houselessness, who can Albertans turn to?

Mr. Nixon: Well, I think that maybe the challenge is that the NDP is unable to hear what is taking place. I just rose and said some very concrete actions that are taking place when it comes to being able to care for the homeless. We are working very closely with our municipal partners to be able to create an unprecedented number of spaces to make sure that everybody that is living on the streets has a space to be able to be kept warm and safe. Encampments are dangerous, which is why we have invested in emergency housing to make sure that could take place. As you know, though, Mr. Speaker, we are also investing in permanent housing in a very significant way across the province.

Member Irwin: Given that 118 of Boyle Street's community members have passed away between June and October of this year, the deadliest period since reporting started in 2020, and that Boyle Street's executive director says that this is a horrifying trend, showing us that conditions have not been improving over the last five years of program cuts by this government, and that it's a fact – a fact – that if this government does not treat this like the crisis it is, more people will die on our streets, will the minister take accountability, help the people on the streets by more than just mats on floors, or can we expect more blame and empty promises?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member keeps standing up in the Chamber and saying that the government has cut resources for the homeless. I will try again, and hopefully she will take the time to hear. This government has increased spending on homeless shelters and on emergency homeless supports by 71 per cent. The true reality is that there is not a cut on this side of the House; there's a significant investment to deal with this issue. The mayor of Edmonton has complimented it, the mayor of Calgary has complimented it, and many other organizations, recognizing these efforts. The NDP did nothing when it came to this issue. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Food Bank Funding Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, food banks across Alberta are experiencing increased demand for services. Alberta has seen a 12 per cent increase in food bank usage from last year, and Albertans are becoming increasingly worried about being able to afford healthy, nutritious food. I know the minister agrees that no one should be left wondering where their next meal will come from. Can the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services please tell the House how this government is helping food banks with the increased demand?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. Unfortunately, we're seeing a 12 per cent increase in food banks all across the province directly as a result of the challenges in the food market when it comes to inflation because of decisions that have been made by the federal government as well as global inflation concerns that are impacting the price of food in our province. That's why our government is committed to providing sustainable, long-term funding to our food bank partners. We've done \$26 million of that investment so far, and we're going to continue to stand with food banks across the province to be able to make sure that they are in a position to be able to help make sure that people have food security all across the province.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his hard work on this file. Given that food banks act as a first stop for individuals and families who rely on their services and they're present in communities across our province, from large cities to small communities, and given that they distribute food hampers, collaborate with community food depots, and their meal programs ensure that people receive healthy, nutritious meals, can the minister talk about his commitment to his mandate letter to deliver adequate funding to food banks, how this will continue moving forward?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House already, we're the first government to actually invest money inside food

banks here in Alberta. Now, we're not trying to pay the whole bill ourselves. Our food banks have done excellent work for many, many decades across the province as well as their donors and other aspects of their organizations. We want to come in and support that civil society aspect in our province and make sure that they can succeed, particularly given that we're dealing with an unprecedented inflationary market that is impacting hard-working Albertans. We're going to continue to do that and to be able to make sure those organizations can do the important work that they're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that, besides supporting food banks to help Alberta's most vulnerable, the average family is finding the cost of groceries increasingly expensive and further given that the carbon tax is one of the biggest factors in the increasing cost of food in our society and that Albertans are rightfully worried about how the carbon tax will continue to drive up the cost of food, to the minister: can you please tell the House why the carbon tax is hurting Albertans' abilities to buy healthy, nutritious food for their families?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax, unfortunately, is raising the cost of everything in our society, particularly within the social services sector, and food is no different. All the food within our society comes by either truck, train, or airplane, so when we see the cost of fuel going up, inflation goes up, and the cost of food at the grocery store goes up. We are doing many good things as a province to be able to help with the crisis that we face right now, but what we really need is the federal government to stand up immediately and remove the carbon tax. It's the single biggest thing that we can do for affordable measures. It will reduce inflation by 16 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has a question to ask.

Premier's Appearance on *Tucker Carlson Live*

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As someone who has worked in settlement and immigration services, I know first-hand the benefits immigration brings to Alberta. Alberta is a welcoming place for immigrants and newcomers. But in January the Premier will host a conversation with Tucker Carlson, who believes that immigration divides and impoverishes. Does the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism have a message for Albertans who are worried about the Premier endorsing these hateful messages from Tucker Carlson?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. This government has done so much for newcomers in terms of settlement and integration. We have a program under the Alberta integration settlement program that provides help wherever it's needed to people here in Alberta.

Mr. Haji: Given that Tucker Carlson stated that, quote, our leaders demand that we have a moral obligation to admit the world's poor even if it makes our country poorer and dirtier and given that the Premier will be offering her official endorsement to Tucker Carlson, including these views, and given that we know that immigration makes our province better and stronger, does the minister disagree with Tucker Carlson's claim that immigration makes Alberta dirty?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I agree that immigration and newcomers in this province have added a lot of value to prosperity and economic prosperity and also cultural prosperity of this province, and we will continue to host and welcome newcomers here in this province as we go along. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Haji: Given that Tucker Carlson has described people from Afghanistan as, and I quote, not civilized; he has described Iraqis as, and I quote, semiliterate primitive monkeys; and claimed that immigration is, and I quote, replacement of legacy Americans with more obedient people and given that the Premier will personally sit down and welcome these views on January 24, will the minister rightfully condemn this hateful and offensive talk?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. Our government condemns racism and hate and is committed to promoting and fostering respect and inclusion for all. It is this government that launched the Alberta antiracism... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Yaseen: Mr. Speaker, it is this government that launched the Alberta antiracism action plan, and we also have the Anti-Racism Advisory Council to provide insight and advice on addressing the issue of racism.

United Conservative Party Annual General Meeting

Ms Goehring: Over the weekend we saw the full takeover of the UCP by right-wing extremist group Take Back Alberta. Take Back Alberta now controls the entire UCP board, and the two are now indistinguishable, and Take Back Alberta comes with demands of the Premier. Yesterday the new UCP president said that he expects the Premier to adopt all the party's resolutions as provincial law. Is this government planning to follow the directions from her party and implement the policy resolutions that were passed on the weekend?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As it is the first time that I get to rise in this Chamber and answer a question in question period, I want to say congratulations to you for being re-elected as Speaker.

I will say that I didn't hear a question over there about government policy but, rather, about party matters. What I will say is that we had a historic event on the weekend when we saw 4,000 members of our party show up in Calgary to have their voices heard, because we are a party of the grassroots and we take seriously the concerns of the grassroots, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Goehring: Given that the former Premier Jason Kenney warned that the UCP was going to be taken over by, quote, lunatics and given that the takeover officially happened over the weekend and given the rationale for these resolutions was detached from reality and read more like a list of far-right conspiracies instead of legitimate policy – they include everything from 15-minute cities to attacking diversity in postsecondary institutions to allegations of

stolen elections – can the Premier or any minister over there stand and confirm that they will not implement these extreme policies?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I find it very disappointing that members opposite are going to take the time in question period, the time that is designated for them to ask questions about government policy, to go into party matters. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: I would find it very disappointing if any member on this side of the House called their constituents and voters who voted for the NDP lunatics, Mr. Speaker. How disrespectful. How disrespectful. Let me be very clear . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. You might not like the answer, but he's entitled to give it, and I should be able to hear it.

Mr. Schow: On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously the concerns of the grassroots of Albertans, and we respect their decision whenever they go to the polls, and I wish the members opposite would do the same.

Ms Goehring: Given that the UCP has been taken over by the far right who have demanded these resolutions be implemented, or else, and given that this isn't just far-right conspiracy theories they want implemented; many of them will do real harm to Albertans – these include allowing doctors to prescribe unapproved and untested medication, ending access to harm reduction, and outing transgender kids – is the Premier planning on making government policy by implementing these resolutions from their far-right base that will risk the health and safety of Albertans, including vulnerable children?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise again. I find it very disappointing that on this week, of all weeks, the member opposite . . . [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Government House Leader, from the top.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted by, I suspect, someone that was invited by some member opposite, for the second time, I will say that it is disappointing that the military liaison for the members opposite would be asking this question on this of all weeks. This is the week that we prepare for Remembrance Day, where we respect and show gratitude to those who put their lives on the line and served our country very diligently and bravely.

2:20

But going back to the original point, we're not dealing with party matters in this Chamber but government policy, and this is the government that's leading the country in economic development. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

High River Biogas Facility Application

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposed biogas plant in the High River area symbolizes our government's drive toward

sustainable energy. However, its potential creation has sparked intense debate, with High River residents voicing concerns about its environmental impact, safety, and sustainability for the region. Considering concerns raised by the opponents of the proposed biogas plant in the High River area, can the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas provide an update on the status of the project and clarify whether it falls under the renewables pause, as requested by these concerned citizens?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for this important question. Rimrock has proposed to construct a biodigester facility on its farm near High River. The facility would capture greenhouse gases from livestock manure and food waste and then convert them into renewable natural gas. Rimrock's application is under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, so it is not part of the temporary pause instated by the AUC. This application is currently being reviewed, and a decision has not yet been made.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for her response. Given that the government's commitment to sustainable and renewable energy and, further, given the government's protection of our land, air, and water, could the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas also elaborate on the environmental impact assessment conducted for the project and whether it aligns with these commitments?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are aware of the concerns that some citizens have raised about this project. We take them extremely seriously, and that's why myself, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, the minister of agriculture, and the Premier met with both the proponents and the concerned citizens to hear their concerns. As the regulator my department has a comprehensive review process in place. This is an independent process. I'm not directly involved, but we do have folks within the department looking at potential environmental impacts on air, land, and water.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for her answer. Given the unique ways the government has addressed these concerns, can the minister further explain to the House how the government has addressed these concerns of the local community and ensured their voices are not only heard but well integrated into the decision-making process and guaranteed that transparent steps are taken in determining the fate of the biogas plant?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I noted, my colleagues and I have met with both the proponent, Rimrock, as well as concerned citizens, and our staff is conducting a comprehensive review of the application. This includes expert analysis of the facility's potential impact when it comes to air emissions, odour, waste, soil, industrial waste water, industrial runoff, and groundwater. It will also consider any odour mitigation strategies that Rimrock Renewables may

have proposed. Now, the department sometimes does go back and forth with proponents as they answer these questions. They'll be completing their review as soon as possible.

Funding for Educational Assistants

Ms Pancholi: I've spoken to countless urban and rural school boards, teachers, staff, parents, and stakeholders about the state of Alberta's education system, and it is dire, Mr. Speaker. One of the top concerns: not enough EAs in classrooms. This impacts students with disabilities but also all students as teachers are forced to manage larger and more complex classrooms. The \$42 million complexity funding given out this September to support 63 school boards is a drop in the bucket, and it has failed to make a difference. To the Minister of Education: the UCP's too little, too late approach isn't working, so what's next?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we take classroom complexity seriously, which is why in the previous budget we have provided \$126 million in new funding to our school divisions, so that they can hire additional educational assistants, speech-language pathologists, psychologists, and other individuals to help support our increasingly complex classrooms. That's a priority for this government. We're going to continue our efforts to ensure that our school divisions have the resources that they need to provide all students with a world-class experience.

Ms Pancholi: Given that on an average day right now Edmonton public schools has 100 unfilled EA positions due to vacancies or absences and given that, by the government's own data, EAs earn an annual salary that is below the poverty line and the vast majority of EAs are women who, like most Albertans, are struggling to afford groceries, electricity, and rent and given that the working conditions are getting worse with more complex needs and larger class sizes, can the Minister of Education name one tangible thing he is doing to actually encourage people to want to work as an EA in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Sure. Well, one tangible thing that we're doing, Mr. Speaker, is providing more funding to our school divisions to hire additional educational assistants. As I mentioned, we provided \$126 million that's specifically for classroom complexity. In addition to that, we've also provided \$820 million over the next three years to help manage the enrolment pressure that we're seeing across the province. This funding will go directly to hiring additional staff and support staff. Happy to continue working with our school divisions to make sure that they have the resources that they need.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the Official Opposition launched a survey on albertasfuture.ca asking Albertans to tell us about the conditions and supports in their child's or student's classrooms and the stories are heartbreaking, given, for example, one Calgary parent spoke of their child in grade 1 who has a severe code for disability but zero additional supports in the classroom and given that I've met with EAs who have been in tears because they feel they are not able to provide the kind of support that they know their students need and deserve, why aren't the Premier and the cabinet as focused on improving classroom conditions for Alberta kids as they are on running propaganda campaigns in Toronto?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not true at all. We are absolutely focused on ensuring that students have the supports that

they need. In fact, in Budget '23 we provided almost one and a half billion – we've increased that by 4 per cent in the last budget – for learning-support funding for students with specialized learning needs. That also provided an increase to the full-day rates for PUF by about 10 per cent so that we can make sure that all students have the specialized learning supports that they need. We're continuing to have a conversation as to what more we can do.

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

Agricultural Support Programs

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to express my respect for the farmers, ranchers, and cattle feeders both in the Chestermere-Strathmore constituency and across Alberta, who work tirelessly to support Alberta's economy. This year it's been especially difficult due to severe drought conditions, which have created financial hardships for many. To address these challenges, both the Alberta and Canadian governments are teaming up for the 2023 drought livestock assistance program. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation provide more details about this initiative so Albertans can better understand how it will help farmers?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this very important question. Alberta and this government have been advocating fiercely to the feds for this program since early in July, knowing how important our livestock industry is to this province. I'm now happy to announce that livestock producers in areas suffering from a 1-in-10-year or worse drought who have lost more than 21 grazing days due to that drought are now eligible for up to \$150 per head, and they should go to AFSC's website for more details and to apply.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given that the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership could bring a multitude of benefits to our province's producers, farmers, ranchers, processors, and organizations and further given that many Albertans are in desperate need of the benefits that this program will bring, can the same minister please share when we can expect to see this partnership in action?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another great question. I'm happy to announce that this partnership is already in action. SCAP is a five-year, \$3.5 billion program that generates economic growth in the ag sector. This includes programs like our business risk management programs, the resilient agricultural landscape program, RDAR, on-farm value-added grant program, the water program, and so much more. I advise everybody to look into these programs in the agricultural sector.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that answer. Given that, like with any government program, the application process for Albertans to access much-needed benefits can sometimes be a daunting or confusing task and further given that fast access to the benefits, the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership, will be extremely important to producers, farmers, ranchers, processors, and organizations across the province, can the same minister please share some information on the process for applying for this relief?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The application process varies for each program. For example, producers and processors can apply for grants at alberta.ca/sustainable-cap for SCAP programs. Our business risk management programs, including AgriRecovery, are administered by Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, and producers can apply on AFSC's website or by visiting their local AFSC branch.

2:30

Affordable Housing

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, over the summer I was approached by two separate seniors, constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie, looking for help because they were houseless and living out of their vehicles. The subsidy for seniors requiring housing is insufficient considering the current housing market, and many Albertans are being priced right out of the market. Why is the minister sitting by and doing nothing while the people who built our province are forced to live out of their vehicles?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta will spend close to \$9 billion on senior supports this year alone. We take it very, very seriously, particularly when it comes to housing. Our government has been laser focused on many different aspects of being able to make sure that we get housing built. One of the ones I would like to talk about today is the work that has been done over the last several years to reduce red tape, over 60-some significant measures to be able to reduce red tape in residential construction, which is why we see residential construction up in Alberta, the only place in the country where it is increasing. We're going to continue to do that to be able to make sure everybody has a home.

Member Loyola: Given that housing is a human right and that houselessness is a growing concern in Alberta and across Canada and given that the government has a responsibility to respond to the basic needs and human rights of Albertans and given that the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Edmonton has increased by over 16 per cent between October of last year and October of this year, when will this government finally step up and address this housing crisis, that is forcing Albertans out of their homes?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we are all over this already. Again, housing starts are up, the largest in the history of this province. We're on track to create 82,000 more affordable households across the province. Over the last little bit we've already built 5,000 more affordable units, about triple what the NDP built in their entire time in government, and all of this is at a time when housing starts are down 8 per cent everywhere else inside the country. We're going to continue to work our plan, and we're going to get it done.

Member Loyola: Given that more than 60 per cent of Albertans currently experiencing houselessness have a mental health complication and therefore have more of a challenge sustaining employment and given that this is a cost on the health care system, because those on the street end up in our hospitals with serious complications to their health, and given that far too many of those people in need are waiting for treatment and/or supports, when will this government take responsibility for their inaction, that is threatening the health and safety of Albertans? No more excuses. You've had four years. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. member will know that all questions should be directed through the chair.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, no excuses on this side of the House; a heck of a lot of excuses on that side of the House, because they got nothing built while they were here. I'm proud to be part of a government that's working on the stronger foundations plan to create almost a hundred thousand homes all across this province. We're going to continue to work that plan, and the great news is that it's happening. I want to thank all of the industry, our private-sector partners, municipalities, and everybody who's working side by side with us to be able to build all these homes: thank you very much.

Vaccination Policies

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, we witnessed the highest mortality rates for COVID among seniors at the height of the pandemic, particularly those living in long-term care homes. Now we're hearing reports that these very seniors are denied their COVID vaccines, and when seniors dare to inquire about this, the response is a cryptic: it's up to Alberta Health. Can the minister enlighten us on why she is keeping COVID vaccines out of the reach of seniors in long-term care homes?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that is just not true. Vaccine availability is provided right across the province, and in fact we were making sure that all pharmacies and all homes are able to get the vaccines they require. I think the members opposite should stop creating fear.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that this issue transcends long-term care homes, with health care workers granted the authority to distribute flu shots but not COVID vaccines, and given that pharmacists were given a pay cut for administering COVID-19 vaccinations without consultation from the UCP whatsoever, can the minister shed some light on why her administration is reducing the pay of pharmacists and taking away Albertans' access to COVID vaccines when we are seeing more and more respiratory cases?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pharmacists were receiving an additional stipend up and above what anyone else in Canada was receiving. We were actually looking to align that with other provinces, but in consultation with the pharmacists we have delayed that amount until January. Then it will be a reduced amount and then a further reduction until it is aligned with other provinces. We are looking to make sure that vaccines are available for all who want it.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP withholding life-saving COVID vaccines from seniors while exclaiming that our health care system is in shambles and requires a complete teardown is like taking a wrecking ball to a house and then complaining about the crumbling walls and given that the UCP has created chaos in our health care system, my question to the minister is simple. Why is this government so determined to destroy our health care system?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, that is just not true. We had doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, mayors, our firefighters, our paramedics – they're all excited about the change. They were present with me today. I have pages and pages of quotes given to me. I want to share one with you from Feisal Keshavjee, chair of the Alberta Continuing Care Association.

The Alberta Continuing Care Association applauds the recent health care reforms by the Alberta government and its commitment to advancing health care services for seniors. These reforms align with our mission of creating a sustainable and . . .

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for my first question in the House. A topic on the minds of many Albertans and one that many of my constituents have brought up to me is this government's exploration of a potential Alberta pension plan. Recently the Minister of Finance met with his counterparts across the country, across Canada, to discuss the potential plan and share with them the promise and potential such a plan might have. Can the Minister of Finance please provide the Assembly with an update on the outcome of that meeting?

Mr. Horner: That's a great first question, Mr. Speaker. I was able to make it clear to our colleagues across the country that we are committed that any potential creation of an Alberta pension plan will not leave our fellow Canadians without a stable pension and its associated benefits. I repeatedly have asked Minister Freeland to provide the federal government's opinion on Alberta's asset transfer and to please show their work. I'm happy to say that the federal government has committed to the Chief Actuary to provide a comprehensive analysis of the asset transfer value, and we look forward to that conversation.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you for the information, Minister.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite have stated on the record that they would not listen to the voice of Albertans on a potential Alberta pension plan and given that this government is committed not to move forward without a referendum, can the same minister please outline with this House the role of the independent engagement panel and share the many ways in which Albertans can make their voices heard? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The only one with the call is the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The engagement panel has conducted two telephone town halls, focusing on northern and southern Alberta, and will hold three more this month, which will focus on Edmonton, Calgary, and central Alberta. Tens of thousands of Albertans have participated in this conversation with the panel, and over 70,000 have participated in the online survey. I encourage every Albertan to engage with the telephone town halls and complete the survey. These are passionate Albertans that are passionate about this conversation: Jim Dinning, Mary Ritchie, and Moin Yahya.

Mr. McDougall: Given, Mr. Speaker, that members of the opposition have spent months, even years misrepresenting and spreading fear about a potential APP, can the same minister please share with this Assembly and with all Albertans the potential benefits of an APP so that Albertans may be well informed and equipped to make the best decision for themselves and share how Bill 2 will ensure that the decision ultimately remains in the hands of everyday Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

2:40

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The possible creation of an Alberta pension plan has the potential to keep more money in the pockets of hard-working Albertans, Alberta businesses, and the potential to provide higher benefits for seniors. Recently we introduced Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act, that, if passed, would ensure that Albertans would receive the same or better benefits and would have the same or lower contributions. We have promised Albertans that they

will decide whether or not we move forward with an Alberta pension plan, and the Alberta Pension Protection Act would lock in . . .

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a report written by Jennifer Robson and Lindsay Tedds, *The Canada Disability Benefit: Battling Ableism in Design and Implementation*, just to clarify some of the confusion on the other side from yesterday.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a constituent of mine reached out with questions about the provincial oversight of the homeless shelter funded by the government of Alberta. They lost a beloved family member when they died in the shelter of drug poisoning. I'm just providing the minister's response that there are not standards for shelters with respect to their emergency response across the province.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I stand to table the requisite number of copies of a letter I received from Kent Kirkland, a constituent who is a retired CPA who's deeply concerned and troubled by the false math that the UCP is peddling through their propaganda campaign about the CPP.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I believe the Clerk has some tablings.

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. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act the government of Alberta 2023-24 first-quarter fiscal update and economic statement, the government of Alberta 2022-23 final results year-end report, the government of Alberta annual report 2022-23.

On behalf of the ministers responsible, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act the 2022-23 annual reports for the following ministries: Advanced Education; Affordability and Utilities; Agriculture and Irrigation; children's services; culture; Education; energy; Environment and Protected Areas; Executive Council; forestry, parks, and tourism; Health; Indigenous Relations; Infrastructure; jobs, economy, and northern development; Justice; Mental Health and Addiction; Municipal Affairs; Public Safety and Emergency Services; Seniors, Community and Social Services; Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction; skilled trades and professions; Technology and Innovation; trade, immigration, and multiculturalism; Transportation and Economic Corridors; Treasury Board and Finance.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Turton, Minister of Children and Family Services, pursuant to the Protection Against Family Violence Act the Family Violence Death Review Committee 2021-22 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Sigurdson, Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, pursuant to the farm implement act the Farmers' Advocate

office annual report 2022-23; pursuant to the Agriculture Financial Services Act the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation 2023 annual report; pursuant to the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act the Livestock Identification Services Ltd. report to the minister and summary of activities April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

The Speaker: Gold star to the Clerk this afternoon.

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 2 o'clock the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time that you just mentioned, the hon. Minister of Health was speaking, answering a question from the member from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview regarding Alberta health care and the changes that were announced this morning. The Minister of Health said, "Again they are providing misinformation and fear." At that time the Leader of the Opposition yelled, I believe very clearly: you say the misinformation. Now, there are many ways to skin a cat, and to imply that someone is providing misinformation, misleading the House, or even, dare I say, lying would be unparliamentary. So I would rise on 23(h), "makes allegations against another Member," that this is, in fact, a point of order, and I ask that that member apologize and retract. That member, not the House leader opposite.

The Speaker: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the Government House Leader on the facts but not on his conclusion and interpretation. The minister at the time was accusing the NDP of creating fear and sharing misinformation. The Leader of the Official Opposition was pointing out the UCP is creating fear and spreading misinformation. She was speaking about the government, and I think it was a debate given we were saying the same things back and forth. This issue is obviously very contentious with the health system reorganization, the concerns we're hearing from health care workers and many others. I believe that this is part of the debate, that the two sides may have differing opinions on where the misinformation lies. I tend to side with the Leader of the Official Opposition on this one, but I leave it to your ruling on whether this is a point of order or a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Thank you. Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I was going to remind the House of page 624, chapter 13 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, that the Speaker is unable to rule on comments which they did not hear. But since we have an admission of the facts of what the Leader of the Official Opposition did or didn't say, which sounds to me like they said, "you are creating misinformation," and I have provided lots of rulings around the difference between "you" and "they" as well as "the government" or "members of the opposition," I believe those two things are different, perhaps the same by half.

I think in this case we shouldn't be making accusations about individuals spreading misinformation. In this case the Leader of the Opposition clearly said, according to the Opposition House leader: you're creating fear and you say the misinformation. This would be an allegation against the member, and if the Opposition House Leader would like to apologize and withdraw, we will move on with our day.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the leader I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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, LL.D, 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 2: Ms Gray]

The Speaker: We are considering throne speech replies. Order. Order. I believe the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore is prepared to provide a maiden speech in reply to the throne speech.

2:50

Ms Al-Guneid: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am deeply honoured to stand here today as the elected member from the beautiful riding of Calgary-Glenmore. I'm grateful to the constituents who entrusted me with this responsibility. Thank you to the members who served and represented Calgary-Glenmore before me.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Each one of us decided to serve for different reasons, bringing different perspectives and different lived experiences to Alberta's Legislative Assembly. I stand in this Chamber today because of my deep belief that Alberta's best days are still ahead. I believe in the can-do spirit of Albertans. There is no challenge we have not flipped into an opportunity for the better. In the face of a changing world, we have a choice. We can choose to believe that we must cling to the past, or we can embrace the future with the same enterprising attitude we always have had and seize the opportunity for a better Alberta for all of us.

Over 1.7 million Albertans voted in the last election. Each person marked off their ballot with hope in their heart, hope for a better future for themselves, for their kids, and for their grandkids. It is on each and every member of this Chamber to remember this always: Albertans have trusted us to represent them. We need to work together across party lines, across communities, across backgrounds to create a more inclusive and prosperous province for all.

I learned after being elected that I am the first Arab woman to be elected to Alberta's Assembly. This historic moment is not only a milestone in my life but a testament to the progress of our democratic system. I'm proud to serve with a number of other elected MLAs who have also made history. This is progress and a reminder that we are a province that makes the possible a reality. But it's also a reminder of the work that lies ahead. We should ask ourselves: why has it taken 117 years for this to happen in our democracy, what have been the barriers to entry, and what are the opportunities to bring more representation to Alberta's Assembly? As members we need to work together to make this workplace not only more inclusive and representative of our society but more accessible to mothers and parents with young children, like me and many of us here.

Our Assembly must be as diverse as our province, weaving the expectations and the experiences and the insights of the people we

represent. Each one of us here has a duty to make this happen so that we can legislate effective and impactful policy for all Albertans. Our democracy thrives when we embrace diversity. However, as we make strides toward a more inclusive government, we must also recognize that democracy is a fragile entity that requires our protection.

I grew up in a country where when the ballots were counted, a dictator had won with 99 per cent of the vote. Despite the dictatorship in Yemen, election after election my wonderful parents showed up at the polls and voted because the process mattered to them. While they knew deep inside that their vote wouldn't change the final outcome, they believed they had a responsibility to vote and hoped that one day their children, including me, would see a world where our vote mattered.

Where I grew up, Mr. Speaker, freedom was an elusive concept, and the freedom to speak against the establishment or hold the government to account was out of the question. I learned this lesson in the harshest way possible when my father, who is a physician by training, became a political prisoner for 300 days because of his political views. My experience, you see, is not unique. In too many countries around the world the consequences of speaking your mind, holding the government to account or even having a political opinion can be grounds for imprisonment.

That's why our democracy in Alberta and in Canada matters. We are privileged to live in a democracy. It safeguards our freedoms and allows us to be open in an innovative society where we strive for better. But democracy is fragile, Mr. Speaker and fellow members. As an elected official I strongly feel the responsibility of this institution and the privileges and the responsibilities that come with it. We must never put politics over our democratic institutions, and we must be vigilant of external influences and extreme groups in Alberta that could impact our democracy, rights, and privileges.

We also must be careful with heated rhetoric, misinformation, and extreme polarization in our debates that could alienate constituents and fellow Albertans. I have heard a lot from my constituents in Calgary-Glenmore. Many feel disillusioned with governments, politics, and our democratic processes and institutions. We owe it to them. We owe it to them to make them feel that their voices matter here in this Chamber by elevating the discourse and speaking to what matters to them. We, elected officials and Canadians, must protect the process with all our might and encourage Albertans to show up, vote, run, and be part of our democracy. The process matters.

The people I serve come from diverse backgrounds, but they also share a concern for the planet. Our democratic system allows them to elect leaders who recognize the urgency of addressing climate change. I want my children, your children, and your grandchildren to enjoy long summer days outside. I want us to protect Glenmore park and all the green spaces that Albertans enjoy every day in our urban and rural areas. I want more hiking, camping, and biking days outside and less smoky days spent inside. I want our children to see our majestic glaciers and fresh snowfalls in the mountains. I want less dry land and more farmland for wheat, barley, and canola. I want our children to experience the full splendour of the Rocky Mountains, from our turquoise lakes to the larches that turn gold in the fall. We cannot let them inherit burnt down forests or coal mined mountains.

Mr. Speaker, I spent 15 years in the energy sector in renewables, oil and gas, and the oil sands in Canada and abroad. I have worked for global energy companies and environmental not-for-profits, and I know that Alberta can develop stronger and credible climate policies to propel us towards a future economy and allow us to continue to be leaders on the global stage. We are not on the cusp of an energy transition. We are already living it. The jobs, the

industries, and the livelihoods of our constituents are directly tied to this transformation.

Calgary-Glenmore is home to many professionals, tradespeople, and skilled workers in Alberta's energy sector, specifically in oil and gas, oil sands, and renewables, as well as related engineering know-how and supply chain businesses. They have shared with me their hopes, aspirations, and worries for the energy economy. Many, including myself and my family, have benefited from the prosperity and the career rewards that the energy sector brings. Albertans expect us to have a plan. Albertans expect us to better manage our energy resources. Albertans expect us to prepare for the changing energy and climate landscape and lead Alberta into the future. We must ensure that Alberta remains prosperous.

I want to end by saying that it is people who are leading the work and innovation in Alberta. It is people who will be impacted by the decisions in this Chamber. It is people who are at the heart of this energy transformation. It is people who hope for us to build a future where they can thrive and prosper. We have been elected to represent and to listen to our constituents, to care, to ask questions, and to plan for the future of this province to the best of our ability. We cannot take this lightly.

3:00

I'm really grateful and humbled to have the opportunity to represent the people of Calgary-Glenmore. I thank them for the trust that they have placed in me, and I look forward to working with all of you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I see the Member for Lesser Slave Lake has risen.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me an opportunity to respond to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. It is truly an honour to rise today and deliver my maiden speech in this historic Chamber. It's especially an honour to do so with so many of my family and friends here in attendance but also the tens of millions of people that I'm sure are watching at home.

My name is Scott Gordon Riel Sinclair, and I'm the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake and the 980th Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I'm also the first Indigenous member of the UCP to get elected to this great House. I'm extremely proud to be, and I take the responsibility of being a role model and a beacon of hope for others quite seriously. I look forward to fighting for them and all the people in northern Alberta.

I would like to take a moment and congratulate my two other Indigenous colleagues across the aisle for their election wins as well. We will probably disagree quite often on politics in this Chamber, but I am proud that we are collectively providing a path for others that will follow in our footsteps, because, Mr. Speaker, you can't be what you can't see.

My parents are Gordon and Valerie Sinclair, and they're both here in attendance today. I promise you, Mr. Speaker, if they could, they would cheer very loudly. For those who know me, they know my journey to get here has been both improbable and extremely difficult, but I wouldn't have made it without my loving parents. I often tell people that I had a tough childhood from humble beginnings, but for all the difficulties and struggles we had, our house was often filled with laughter and love. Sorry; it's a long speech, so I've got to try getting through this.

My parents may not have given me everything I wanted, but they gave me everything I needed. My dad was an accomplished boxer along with my grandfather. Both are in the Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame. He was my childhood hero. He didn't just teach me how to fight; he taught me how to be a man. He taught me to speak

clearly, look someone in the eye, shake their hand, and always treat elders with respect. To my mom, who I believe may be one of the strongest people I've ever met, your whole life I've watched as you've always put yourself last and put the needs of your family above your own. I love you, mom. Thanks for teaching me how to love and how to take care of my own family.

Mr. Speaker, the amazing people of Lesser Slave Lake are no stranger to adversity either. I always have been and will continue to be proud to call Slave Lake my home. Even this year during wildfire season I was again reminded of why northern Alberta is one big small town. I witnessed first-hand the compassion and care that folks in our community have always demonstrated and continue to demonstrate to protect not just their homes or livelihoods but their neighbours as well. I watched front-line workers risk their lives all day for strangers they will never meet and then volunteer to put together cots or deliver food or toys at night as well. They look out for each other. That is why it makes it such an easy riding to represent. I also believe it's why they chose me to be their MLA. We share the same values. We try hard. We care about each other.

My hope is that when everyday Albertans hear me speak, they hear a little bit of themselves, or when they see the way I treat people, they see a little bit of themselves. Because it's not just what you say; it's how you make people feel when you say it. Every day I wake up with this naive idea that I can make a difference in someone's life or, quite simply, be a reason they laugh or smile. Mr. Speaker, what the people of Lesser Slave Lake ask for in return is not a thank you or a reward but to be treated both fairly and equitably.

To our fellow Albertans to the south of us in the cities: the north remembers. We believe our roads need to be safer and infrastructure needs to be better to balance the amount of revenue that we contribute to our great province. An easy example of this is, of course, highway 88. This is an important economic corridor, a popular highway used to transport both our natural resources and, more importantly, our families and essential workers. Mr. Speaker, I've heard people say that the Clearwater region is one of if not the most profitable oil plays in North America. My constituents are very grateful for all the jobs and opportunities that it continues to provide folks in and around our communities, but we feel highway 88 is long overdue for a much-needed upgrade. After all, a life in northern Alberta is worth just as much as a life in Edmonton or Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, another of the major challenges the people of Lesser Slave Lake face is affordability, brought on by the ridiculous inflationary practices of the Liberal-NDP alliance. I believe it's worth mentioning the incredible failure of the federal government and our Prime Minister on this issue, but we shouldn't be surprised that Justin Trudeau doesn't understand affordability. He grew up in the lap of luxury. He's never had to make some tough decisions regular Albertans are being forced to make because of their cost-on-everything carbon tax, contemplating, deciding between hockey equipment and mortgage payments, between braces or utilities, or perhaps even between groceries and medication.

Our UCP government will continue to fight for Albertans and ensure this Prime Minister stays in his own lane and stays out of our way. We will continue down a path of sustainable economic growth and untap and embrace all of the potential this beautiful province and its people have to offer. Mr. Speaker, I understand that Justin Trudeau was even given a traditional Indigenous Sarcee name which meant one who keeps trying. Well, after eight years of empty promises and photo ops, I'd like to quote one of my favourite leaders, the wise and powerful Master Yoda: "Do. Or do not. There is no try."

Our government believes in not just reconciliation but reconciliation. I'm very proud of the work the Premier and the Minister of Indigenous Relations have done on meaningful progress for Indigenous people, including tripling the AIOC budget from roughly \$1 billion to \$3 billion. The best is yet to come, and I'm excited to be a part of a government that doesn't just talk about these things; it follows through on them.

I also think it's important to mention that in my riding we have the highest percentage of Indigenous people in the province, including 14 Indigenous communities. A quick hello or [Remarks in Cree] to my 11 First Nations: Woodland Cree, Whitefish, Lubicon, Bigstone, Peerless Trout, Loon River, Sucker Creek, Swan River, Kapawe'no, Sawridge, and Driftpile. Thank you. A quick hello as well to the three Métis settlements: East Prairie, Peavine, and Gift Lake.

Mr. Speaker, Lesser Slave Lake is one of the most diverse areas in our great province. We're proud to be considered oil and gas country, but we also have forestry, agriculture, and tourism, just to name a few. But I cannot mention my riding without giving a shout-out to its amazing group of small businesses and nonprofits. These people often wear many hats, not because they want to but because they have to. I would also like to thank Mayor Frankie Ward from the town of Slave Lake, the High Prairie town council, the MD of Lesser Slave River, the MD of Opportunity, and the MD of Big Lakes county.

I've often repeated the age-old phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child," because Slave Lake was that village, and I was that child. So much to the chagrin of the people in this Chamber, I'm going to rattle off as many names of my village that I can because I want to share my election victory with all of them: Shawn Gramlich, my brother-in-law and oldest friend and the single biggest reason everyone here must put up with me for a minimum of four years, and thank God for the green phone; my mother-in-law, may she rest in peace, for always making me feel welcome in her family's home or sending me a box of groceries my last year of junior hockey in Yorkton because she knew I wasn't getting enough to eat; Duane "Wild Horse" Hangartner; Sarge; Shelley and Shayne; Bob and Char Jensen; my sisters Kacey and Jess; my brother Kelly; Benny and Lori; Uncle Daver and Auntie Julie; Auntie Wanda and Uncle Leonard; Uncle Joey and Auntie Theresa; Uncle Alex; Uncle Rocky; Auntie Choox; Auntie Poops; Jackson; Damon; Caleb; Sheldon; Weslyn; Jannah; Kelsey; Ryan Sinclair, Blair Sinclair, Brad Sinclair, Cody Sinclair – maybe just all the Sinclairs, Mr. Speaker – Stephen Bezan; Hortense Callisher; Judy Finkle; my old friend Elroy and all the people at the box factory; Ricky from New Jersey; Ray Stevens, attorney-at-law; Darryl Marcoux; Brent Hill and Blacchy; Jared; Robin; Loggie Perogie; Brad Yarosh and Ghosty, may he rest in peace; Darryl Garon; Tommy Gunn; Jayme; Dustin; Brian Carleton; Mr. Bartlett; Mr. Turnbull; Hugh and Dale McEvoy; Patty and Dustin Ghostkeeper; Michael Loroff and all the Loroffs; Les Price; Darby; Ronnie; Chad Bowers; Trish; Britt; Linda; Marilyn Dawson; Sonya; Colten; Ann; Barry; and Gordon.

Not to mention the best teacher of all time, Mr. Brett Arlinghaus, who was my grade 6 teacher that toured me through these very halls 28 years ago, who took the time to challenge me with extra work, to expect more out of myself, and to not settle for anything less than my best effort. But he still made school goofy and fun. He encouraged me to balance listening to the genius of Beethoven and Mozart with the genius of Pearl Jam and the Tragically Hip, to read *Flowers for Algernon* in my spare time but still enjoy the pleasures of Wrestlemania SummerSlam, Shawn Michaels, and Bret Hart, to suggest for and support me to run and win my first election for class president, and to compliment me for answering trivia questions on Alberta politics and history in these same halls of this stoic building.

3:10

Mr. Speaker one of my favourite songs is *Wonderful* by Everclear. Although I love to sing karaoke, two-step, and jig, I assure you that none of those are happening today. I need to specifically mention the lyrics.

I go to school and I run and play
I tell the kids that it's all okay
I like to laugh so my friends won't know
When the bell rings I just don't want to go home

These words really defined a dark and difficult time in my teens. It's amazing how long-lasting and impactful a great teacher's reach can go to saving a child's life and steering them out of darkness.

To my friend and mentor Darcy Haugan, may God rest his soul, who decided he would swoop into my life and provide me the opportunity I was dreaming of for as long as I can remember, a dream where he didn't just pick me to play hockey in the SJHL; he arguably saved my life again. One of the many legacies Darcy left behind was his unwavering commitment to investing in kids' characters and values rather than their pedigree and talent. The world could use a few more Darcys, and I'm thankful for knowing him.

Mr. Speaker, there is an underdog kid out there, watching or listening, Indigenous or not. If you feel underprivileged, invisible, or maybe even unloved, then you must know that I'm not just like you; I am you, and I'm telling you not to give up. I'm living proof that it can get better. If I can do it, you can do it.

When someone tells you that you are great, believe them and work hard proving them right. If someone tries to get in your way or bring you down, work equally as hard proving them wrong. But you will need to work for it. The world isn't fair, and no one's going to give it to you. The happiness or the next successful opportunity you seek is often, in my humble opinion, cloaked in both adversity and sometimes even despair. Please do not let your failures or struggles define you and weigh you down. Instead, wear them like battle scars and use these moments as motivation for your next victory. I know that any accomplishment, championship, success, or win that I've experienced has tasted even sweeter because of all the losses, struggles, and challenges I endured along the way.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, to my beautiful wife, Shantelle, and my two daughters, Sloane and Ryan. To my wife, Shantelle: thank you for everything. Thank you for being the best mom and holding our family of weirdos all together. Every day I wake up in the morning and hope that you don't come to your senses or that your eyesight doesn't come back. Building a life with you has and always will be my greatest accomplishment. I am a better man because of you, and I'll always try my best to make you guys laugh and to make you proud. As I like to say, if you can be anything in life, please be funny.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate. Is that okay? That's what I was told to do.

The Acting Speaker: I will disregard the motion. It came in too late. We'll go to Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so very grateful and honoured to be the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I stand before you today with immense gratitude for the support which I received during the election from the many dedicated volunteers and activists who gave of their time and, of course, the voters of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for placing their trust in me. That collective effort by everyone involved from nomination right through to the end of the election – doors knocked, leaflets dropped, phones called, and signs installed, all those

incredibly important conversations – is a testament to the strength of our democracy and a testament to what can be achieved when people work together.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is a gem of northeast Edmonton. This is a place that is firmly rooted in the land of Treaty 6 and Métis Nation 4. The people who live, work, and play here have a deep sense of place, links to history and their ancestors, and an immense gratitude for the community which surrounds and supports them. It's an area which is about heart, relationships, connection, and community. Its eastern edge runs along the banks of the North Saskatchewan River, and because of that, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is home to two of the best parks anywhere, Hermitage and Rundle park. There are picnic areas, boat launches, cycling, running and walking trails, dog parks, swimming, family centres, golf, and even Frisbee golf, which I am no good at.

If you happen to visit either Hermitage or Rundle park on any given weekend day, you'll see and hear laughter, people, families, dogs, soccer games, events, and fundraisers, and on a lovely fall or spring day you might just see a classroom or two exploring some of the trails that Edmonton's river valley is so very famous for.

If there's any sort of dividing line in the riding, it's the Yellowhead, highway 16. That's the road that often carries folks back and forth to work, sometimes near and sometimes far. To the south of the Yellowhead lie the communities of Bergman, Abbottsfield, Beacon Heights, Beverly Heights, and Rundle Heights, and to the north you'll find Belvedere, Homesteader or Belmont, Overlanders, Hermitage, Bannerman, South Clareview, and Hairsine. Each one of these neighborhoods has its own feel, its own sense of where it fits, and its own understanding of just how important its community is in what makes northeast Edmonton so very, very special.

Beverly is located south of the highway. Many folks take pride in the fact that their family has resided in this former coal mining town for generations, and many folks take an awful lot of pride in their Ukrainian roots. Cheremosh makes its home here. Parts of the area feel very much like a small town, and if you walk down 118 Avenue on a lovely Tuesday in the summer, you'll pass by mom-and-pop stores, the farmers' market, bakeries, restaurants, pharmacies, and the Samale Inn, to name a few.

Clareview, to the north of the Yellowhead, may be a bit younger than Beverly, but it very much shares that same spirit. During the 1987 tornado folks in Clareview came together to support and care for one another, and that sense of care and focus on community remains. It's there that you'll find the Clareview rec centre, the Edmonton Soccer Centre, which I have to say has the coolest floor ever, the Clareview Skatepark, green spaces, walking paths that link one area to another, and of course Sobeys, one of the many important community hubs.

Community is the reason why this riding is home to active community leagues, seniors' organizations, and faith groups. It is also why the area is home to not one but two libraries and a number of little libraries. Community is also the reason why the Beverly Business Association and the Fort Road Business and Community Association work so very hard to promote not only their members' businesses but also their vision for the area, a future firmly focused in that place and on its community.

Community is also the reason why Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is the home to many nonprofits, not-for-profits, co-operatives, and other organizations that have long served the people of this area. It's the work of those service providers and agencies like Wecan, Candora, the Tegler Youth Centre, the Abbottsfield Rec Centre, and C5, among many, many others, which serves to underscore another facet of reality of life in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, that sometimes things can be really tough for folks, and these days it seems things are getting only tougher, particularly for those who

experience any level of vulnerability. These organizations provide services and programs that are essential.

For example, Wecan has served the area's job seekers for 30 years. Generations of workers have been helped by them. Now, however, when their community needs them arguably the most, they are struggling to acquire sustainable funding, and this is an issue not only for Wecan but for many other similar community service organizations. This is something this government could choose to remedy.

3:20

My route to elected office was somewhat circuitous. I've been a secretary, an assistant manager in a store, a stay-at-home mom, a day home mom, and a single mom; I've been a singing and piano teacher, a student, and last of all, for the last 24 years, a teacher. I'm a mom to two daughters, Sarah and Megan, and a grandma to four. I am also Keith and Kathy Wright's daughter.

When I was a child, politics was a daily occurrence. My parents were both politically active. We talked about what was happening in the world. We talked about social justice and the need for change, change that always puts people first; that idea of service and the important role that government can play in making people's lives better; the importance of public health care and public education and the difference they make; as well as the consideration of the effect of one's actions on all those future generations.

Those talks with my family and my extended family – those sometimes heated talks owing to just a few differences of opinion now and then – those conversations about all those things that matter, conversations at supper, during backyard family gatherings, conversations with my incredibly strong mom and my grandmother spurred me into action and landed me on people's doorsteps, talking to folks in support of candidates.

But the act of becoming a candidate itself took a bit longer to get to. What propelled me forward finally were two very specific things. As a teacher I watched four years of cuts decimate early education. I was assistant principal at Beacon Heights the year pre-kindergarten was cut and thousands of educational assistants were fired. Three schools in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview lost their pre-K program.

As an assistant principal I saw the aftermath: increased complexity, students without the supports they need, the refusal to fund for enrolment growth, school staff trying to do the very best they can on behalf of students every day because they care and because it's what they do all the time. But because those supports aren't there, because there aren't enough teachers and EAs, what we are seeing is a negative, long-lasting effect on kids, parents, and school communities. Education is the great equalizer. It must be funded appropriately.

I also saw first-hand what was happening in our health care system as my mom went in and out of hospital and finally into home care and later palliative care. The nurses, doctors, and other health care workers were, to a person, fabulous, but this government and its creeping steps toward privatization and the offloading of services let my mom, my dad, and, quite frankly, my entire family down.

Publicly funded and publicly delivered health care is what Albertans expect, and, Mr. Speaker, that is what the people of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview expect and deserve. Those are the personal stories I've shared with folks on the doorsteps this past May.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, just like the province, is also an incredibly and increasingly diverse place. It is home to people who work incredibly hard. These are workers who work in the oil patch, in education, in health care, in administration, in retail, in restaurants, in fast food. They are proud of the work they do to

support themselves and their families, but right now as we grapple with this affordability crisis, they are struggling. They are struggling to pay rent, to buy groceries, to pay for their children's school fees, to find a job that can provide more than just adequately for their needs. They expect their government to do better.

As MLA I'm thrilled to follow in the footsteps of all of the past MLAs from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, people I have the deepest respect for, but most particularly: Ed Ewasiuk, Ray Martin, and Deron Bilous. Their combined commitment in advocating and working on behalf of those hard-working folks who call northeast Edmonton their home paved the way for progress and growth in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. It is not an exaggeration to say that without their support and guidance, I wouldn't be here today.

Certainly, when I first began teaching music at both Beacon Heights elementary and Sifton school all those years ago, I could not have imagined that I would find myself years later representing the voices of not only the folks of those two fabulous communities but the entire riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview itself, yet here I am.

So let me close as I began, with an immense gratitude to all those who helped me get here and who continue to lend me their time and effort. I wish I had time to mention all of you by name, but to our mighty Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview team, those lovely and amazing folks who dedicated their time, who spent so many hours working for that better future, who canvassed when the temperatures were absolutely horrendous; to my family – my mom, my dad, my daughters, and my grandchildren – know that I hold you in my heart. And to the folks of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, please know that I will strive to represent all of you in the very best way I can.

I'm going to close by saying something that I've often said at functions, just before we all sit down to eat. We are thankful for these and all the good things in life. We recognize that they are a part of our common heritage and come to us through the efforts of our brothers and sisters the world over. What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all. To this end, may we take our share in the world's work and the world's struggles.

Thank you.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 3 Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate November 2: Hon. Ms Schulz]

The Acting Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: A little inside joke there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise so I may speak to Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023. One might think that during a toxic drug poisoning crisis that amounts to a public health emergency that the government would take every action possible to save lives. But instead of passing legislation to – I don't know – address wait times for treatment, expand opioid replacement therapies, improve health care for people who use drugs, or deliver on permanent supportive housing, instead we have a bill that is purely technical in nature. It's a housekeeping bill, and that's important.

But Alberta and jurisdictions across this country are losing people at truly staggering rates. Six people a day, Mr. Speaker, from January 1 to August 31 of this year; 1,262 Albertans have died as a result of a toxic drug supply. We are on track to surpassing a truly tragic record. So it's understandable that many and perhaps even most Albertans are asking us, their elected officials and health care providers, what we're doing about it. What are we doing to save lives? I've said it once and I will say it again: at the end of the day, if we're not doing all we can to save lives, then why are any of us here?

Instead, Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, amends a piece of existing legislation from four years ago to recover costs from a scenario that peaked more than a decade ago. I would argue that the current circumstances of the drug poisoning crisis have moved well past the subject of this bill, and though the bill is necessary, it will absolutely do nothing to help people suffering today.

So let's unpack what this bill will achieve and what it will not achieve. What does this bill do? It makes a largely technical amendment to a bill brought forth that received royal assent in December 2019. The bill was actually part of our party's campaign platform in 2019, and we had actually been discussing the merits of this even a year prior. It confirms alignment with legislation in British Columbia, the aim of which is for governments to recover costs for health care provided to patients that resulted from wrongful conduct of manufacturers, distributors, and their consultants.

I'll summarize that all for you. Back in 2018-2019 the government of British Columbia decided to recover health care costs by beginning a class-action lawsuit against the manufacturers, distributors, and consultants of opioids and many other prescribed medications.

3:30

The original legislation, back in 2019, basically allowed for Alberta to join that class-action lawsuit. Much as we had talked about as a caucus and when we formed government in 2018, we recognized the incredible damages that were being done by opioids and what had become a terribly misleading campaign launched by the manufacturers and distributors of that drug and recognized that there was, in fact, a way to hold those manufacturers to account.

It's really important to note that this act is, in fact, about the campaign. It's not about the molecules in question; it's about what ultimately was a deceptive marketing campaign. It misrepresented that opioids had a low risk of addiction – I've lost my notes here – and that it did not have some of the truly fatal side effects that we came to see over 10, 15, 25 years ago, when it first began.

In fact, this amendment allows for two class-action lawsuits. As I mentioned, it is almost entirely technical, and it is housekeeping. B.C. had the legislation. We passed our legislation. The federal government wanted to join this class-action lawsuit, but B.C. had to change their legislation again, and now we have to follow it once more. That should probably bring an end to these various amendments of this act because there will be certification hearings in November and February of next year that verify that this is, in fact, a class-action lawsuit that is legitimate and has grounds. It doesn't judge the merit of the case, but it does in fact confirm that we have met the threshold for this class-action lawsuit.

But, as I mentioned, this does not address our current crisis. It does hold manufacturers to account, it does hold consultants to account – and that is incredibly important – but it does not address the nature of the current crisis. What we were seeing was an ultimately fatal campaign that downplayed the addictive qualities of their medication and the impact of a two-decades-long campaign that woefully understated the risks of OxyContin and oxycodone and others that led to millions of lives lost or destroyed across

Canada and the United States. It was an era of corporate greed, lax regulation, and fraudulent practice that truly destroyed a generation, and it can never be allowed to happen again, and on that point the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction and I agree.

A couple of other points I think are important to note. The class action excludes Purdue Pharma, which is perhaps a company that may come to mind in this conversation, the reason being that Purdue Pharma offered a \$150 million settlement to British Columbia and to the class-action prosecution, and they settled. Purdue is actually excluded from the manufacturer/distributor class-action lawsuit. I think it is important to note that the remaining defendants on that class action are not as big as Purdue. Though there aren't specific numbers in terms of the estimates that might be recovered as a result of that class action, I worry that it will be woefully inadequate to in fact compensate governments and families and communities for the loss that these medications, in fact, inflicted.

We supported this bill, as I mentioned, in 2019, and it was a part of our 2019 platform, but unfortunately the impact on the current drug supply and the public health emergency that we are in will be very low if not negligible.

So this is what the amendment act is, but I think it's important to discuss what it is not. Let's look at Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023, what it doesn't achieve, in many cases with truly fatal consequences. One, it does not enhance or expand current programming such as drug-testing kits, life-saving Narcan or naloxone kits. It doesn't expand existing programs such as the narcotic transition services or opioid agonist therapies or virtual opioid dependency programs, all programs that seem to me to be part of the spectrum of this government's highly touted Alberta recovery model, because these are, in fact, programs that exist currently, albeit terribly limited, with incredible and kind of baffling barriers to access.

On one point, actually, I want to mention that the virtual opioid dependency program and the drug overdose recovery system, that allow for people to call in and have somebody on the line if they're using drugs by themselves, require cellphone coverage. There are big portions of our province that have very shoddy if not zero connectivity. What are those folks supposed to do? Unfortunately, given the limited data that is currently available, I think the uptake of those programs has been quite slim.

The bill does not address the often immensely complex, concurrent, and compounding physical and mental health issues experienced by people with substance use disorders. It fails to address a toxic drug supply – this is really important – that has created what by any description would qualify as a public health emergency. Members in this Chamber were sounding the alarm when two people a day were losing their lives. We're up to six, yet we still have a government that is refusing to recognize that their current approach is not working. So I rue the fact that those numbers may very well continue to climb. It does not direct funds to evidence-based, proven harm-reduction programs and services that save lives. It does not guarantee that the funds recovered will be used specifically and exclusively for treatment or detox.

Contrary to the minister's opining last week, it absolutely does not suggest that we are entering a new opioid crisis as a result of prescribed opioid replacement therapies like methadone or hydromorphone. For the last five months, five and a half months I have done a truly deep dive into my file, and it has been an absolute honour to meet with the front-line responders, with the people who use drugs, with the people who love those people, with the health care providers, with the academics and the decision-makers that have this incredible decision-making power and influence. Opioid replacement therapies save lives, and to villainize all prescribed

opioids, as the minister has been inclined to do, misses the forest for the trees.

What we have here is a lawsuit and an amendment act that allow for us to continue to participate in that lawsuit, that was about a fraudulent marketing campaign that misled prescribers and the people who were prescribed those medications to believe that what they were taking was not addictive and that it was okay. I'll repeat: this is not about the molecules of those substances. To conflate the two means that we are denying critical, life-saving treatments for people who so desperately need it. Targeting the prescriptions is dangerous, and we have seen currently with the narcotic transition services, for example, that the government has demonstrated really significant overreach into the practices and the prescribing protocols of health care providers, that is in fact impeding their ability to do their jobs and to do no harm and to save lives.

Six people a day, Mr. Speaker. Good people use drugs, bad drugs kill good people, and I want the needless loss of lives to stop. Each of those deaths was preventable. They are Indigenous folks dying at completely disproportionate rates. Members of reserves that are losing 10 people and more in a single weekend can hardly catch their breath for the grief. They are teenagers taking what they think is something pretty benign and dying alone in their family home on a weekday because what they took had trace amounts of fentanyl. They're tradespeople whose pain has become unbearable, and they just want it to stop.

3:40

Yes, they are the men and women that perhaps many members in this room are currently thinking of when they walk downtown or they're going to an event down at the Hyatt in Calgary. They're folks who haven't got anywhere else to go. They are wrestling with a brutal addiction, and they've lost everything. They've lost their jobs, their families, their health, their hope, and I don't want to lose any more of these people.

But when we insist that recovery, whatever that means to this government – I think there's some ambiguity in that – is the only answer, the losses will continue to mount. Every single one of these lives was worth saving. Albertans who use drugs deserve our care, consideration, and compassion. It is imperative that Albertans not be duped into believing that this government's response to the drug poisoning crisis is one of compassion no matter how often they may refer to it as such. When you're offered an ultimatum, that's not compassion. It's unkind, and it's even cruel.

Let me tell you what that ultimatum is. Currently, if you are someone struggling with substance use disorder, you can get support if you are repentant and want treatment. Anything else, and you have to jump through phenomenal hoops. You have to travel across town, you have to access space that may not always be accessible, and that is not compassion, Mr. Speaker. If a person doesn't access treatment voluntarily, they may be forced to access it instead.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was a nurse for over a decade, and throughout my career one of the hardest things I ever had to witness was the devastating effects of the opioid crisis. It feels like we've been fighting an uphill battle, caring for those who suffer from the disease of addiction while also supporting their loved ones. The societal, physical, and emotional cost is staggering.

I remember when opioids first started becoming popular in the medical world. They were hailed as miracle painkillers, able to provide relief to those suffering from chronic and acute pain. But we weren't fully aware of the lurking shadows behind them – that,

of course, being their powerful, addictive nature – and before we knew it, a crisis was upon us.

Alberta saw this, and in a move to hold companies accountable for the part they played, a law was passed. This wasn't about pointing fingers but about seeking justice. These drug companies, with their vast resources, made and promoted these opioids, and they need to take some responsibility. With Bill 3 Alberta is looking to reinforce our stand against these companies.

Now, this isn't just about the maker of the drug; it's also about the distributors, the sellers, and even the consultants. Everyone involved should be held accountable. In my time I've seen ERs brimming with opioid-related emergencies, ambulances and paramedics are constantly being called out, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath these alarming numbers lies the actual cost: broken families, lost jobs, derailed dreams, and monumental strain on our health care system.

You may have heard of the legal battles unfolding; it's a lot like David and Goliath. Alberta, together with other provinces, is seeking justice from massive pharmaceutical companies. Some settlements have already occurred, like Purdue Pharma company Canada, and while the money would help, it's not just about that. It's about acknowledging the wrongs, learning from them, and creating a safer future.

So if Alberta does get compensation, where would it go? Into healing. It would be channelled back into our health system. As a former nurse I dreamt of a world where everyone had access to addiction treatment, where rehab centres were plentiful, and where "support" wasn't just a word but an action. As someone who has personally felt the heart-wrenching pain and turmoil of having family members entangled in the claws of addiction, I wish the world could be devoid of the very concept of it all. Bill 3, in return, might just bring us one step closer to my dream.

The world of drugs is vast, and, yes, illicit ones like fentanyl are wreaking havoc, but remember: many folks, like my friends and family, started with legal prescription painkillers, and once they were hooked, they sought more potent stuff like fentanyl.

While we handled the immediate threat, we can't forget where it began. Some argue that these drugs can be used safely. From where I stand, having watched too many tragedies unfold, I know that there is no foolproof way to dance with danger. Opioids, whether they're from the street or the pharmacy, have taken too many lives. We need to move forward with the utmost caution.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has developed the Alberta model, a model of recovery based on the belief that recovery is possible and that nobody should be left alone on the streets to die or suffer from the disease of addiction. Alberta's model continues to lead North America in supporting those suffering from this deadly disease because our government believes that every Albertan suffering from addiction deserves an opportunity to recover. That is why our UCP government has added more than 10,000 annual addiction treatment spaces since 2019. It is also the reason that the UCP government removed the \$40-per-day user fee for treatment, because we believe that no finances should ever be a barrier to recovery. Furthermore, our UCP government is also building 11 brand new recovery communities across our great province.

Since all sides of this House voted in favour of the original Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act in 2019, I'm optimistic that this bill will have the same support. We're in the midst of a storm. While it's easy to feel overwhelmed, measures like Bill 3 give us hope, hope for accountability, for a better health care system, and for a future where the word "opioid" doesn't send chills down my spine. Facing the damages of addiction, it is essential for all of us to unite in empathy and action, understanding that it's not just about confronting a disease but about rebuilding lives, families, and communities for a brighter tomorrow.

Let's support our government's effort. Let's support Bill 3.
Thank you.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first time actually rising in bill debate this session, so I must, of course, thank my incredible constituents in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and all who've supported me. I'm just so proud to represent my riding. Many folks who were in the previous Legislature know that often throughout the pandemic every time I would rise, I would give a shout-out to front-line workers. I think we need to acknowledge that we are still in a pandemic, so a shout-out to those on the front lines in harm reduction, in retail, and especially in health care, many of whom we're hearing from right now, who are incredibly concerned about this government's plans to blow up health care.

Before the Speaker gets worried about me, I will speak to the bill, Bill 3. You know, I have to first note that I'm truly grateful to our critic for Mental Health and Addiction, the Member for Calgary-Currie, who just spoke prior to the last speaker and who's taken on this file, one that I'm incredibly passionate about. She's doing an amazing job. It's an issue I talk a lot about in the Legislature, and I shared that with that member when she was elected. I actually invited her to come to my riding and to not only meet with folks working in the area of mental health and addictions and harm reduction but to also walk the streets with me and to talk to folks who are unhoused, many of whom, not all but many of whom, are also struggling with mental health and addictions. So I'm grateful to her for taking that time, and I know that we've got more meetings planned as well.

Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023, a small piece of legislation here, will expand legislation. As previous folks have spoken about, it was first passed in 2019, when Alberta announced that it would join a national class-action lawsuit launched by the province of B.C. against opioid manufacturers and distributors. This legislation will make pharmaceutical consultants who advise those manufacturers, wholesalers, and distributors subject to potential legal proceedings. It will also clarify the definition of opioid product and amend the market share formula reflecting the different roles of manufacturers and distributors to better calculate damages if they are awarded.

3:50

We know that in 2022 Purdue, which was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Currie, was one of about 40 manufacturers and distributors that were named in the class action. Of course, they proposed about a \$150 million settlement to federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Discussions are still happening. What's so interesting about Purdue is that we know, when we trace back the history of the opioid crisis, more commonly referred to as the drug poisoning crisis now, that it's most linked to the beginning of Purdue's distribution of OxyContin. You know, drug companies like Purdue began telling the medical community that opioid drugs had a low risk of addiction, and health care providers started prescribing them at much higher rates. The data shows that, and that's according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

This legislation, Bill 3, is in line with changes made in other jurisdictions. We know that B.C., Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia have already similarly amended or moved to amend legislation to broaden their own legal claims. You know, I understand the need for this bill. I absolutely get it. It's highly technical, as my colleague noted. Holding manufacturers accountable for their role in the opioid crisis and the drug poisoning crisis is absolutely necessary,

but it won't do anything to address the serious crisis that we're facing today. It won't save any lives today.

You know, I hope the minister is listening because at a time when deaths are higher than ever, what an opportunity for this minister to be transformational in his approach. He could truly take this opportunity with a piece of legislation. He could truly take tangible action that would save lives. Instead, we have the piece of legislation before us.

As I've said many times in this Chamber, I see every day the impacts of the drug poisoning crisis in the neighbourhoods that I represent. I would ask the minister, you know, maybe he would like to join me in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and just see how many folks are struggling just 10 or so blocks east of here. We could walk Chinatown, through Boyle Street, through McCauley. [interjection] I hope that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland will rise and join debate today if he's going to be heckling me in what I think is a pretty serious matter.

We could walk through those neighbourhoods, and we could walk through other areas. We could visit folks living in encampments, and we would see people struggling. He would see folks using as well. But he would also see the value of harm reduction and the incredible work being done by groups like Bear Clan Patrol, Water Warriors, 4B Harm Reduction, just to name a few, and by advocacy groups like Moms Stop the Harm, that are stepping up to just try to do all they can to fill the gaps that aren't being addressed by this UCP government.

You know, in June 2021 myself and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, we stood with representatives from Moms Stop the Harm and with front-line health care workers, and we called for an evidence-based emergency plan because at that time, again, in June 2021, this was a crisis. Four Albertans were dying a day. Four Albertans dying a day. So we called for immediate action. We called for an expansion of supervised consumption services. We called for a number of steps that would immediately make a difference on the lives of the people that we represent.

Four Albertans a day. It was a mind-blowing number back then. We urged the government. We told them, we warned them that more people would die, and we were right. Now, two years later, six Albertans are dying a day from the drug poisoning crisis. It's not too late. It's not too late to change course. We can't bring those people back. I know we can't. But we can take action, and we can do it today.

I want to share some numbers. Between October 2019 and August 2023 there were over 5,700 deaths due to opioid poisoning. What's interesting, though, is that 332 of those deaths were identified as pharmaceutical opioid poisonings, and 5,384 were identified as nonpharmaceutical opioid poisonings. Based on that data from the Alberta substance-use surveillance system, only 6 per cent of all deaths since this legislation was introduced have been due to pharmaceutical opioids whereas 94 per cent have been linked to nonpharmaceutical drugs. So, of course, that data suggests that the government's legal action against pharmaceutical companies may not actually, as my colleague so aptly stated, effectively curb opioid-related deaths because, as we see, the predominant cause of these fatalities appears to be nonpharmaceutical in nature.

Again, we get the need for this piece of legislation, Bill 3, but I'm hopeful – and I don't want to presuppose what could be coming in this Legislature – that this is just one step in a much larger plan that is absolutely needed to address this crisis.

I know I've talked about numbers, but this is about more than numbers. These are real humans. I could stand and I could speak to you about the folks in my constituency who've passed away from the drug poisoning crisis. Every year on International Overdose Awareness Day, August 31, there are a number of community members who gather. I started going to that a few years ago, and it

was a fairly small crowd. In the last number of years the number of people attending that event has just absolutely ballooned. People I spoke to this year, I try to just ask them, you know: what brings you here? Nearly all of them: because they lost somebody in the last year. These are more than just numbers.

Like I said, I could share with you countless stories. I think of the example of Clifford Mitchell, who was a mushum. He was a grandfather who passed away in Kinistinâw park in 2021 in my riding in the Quarters area. He passed away with two other men. They died in the middle of a public park in Edmonton. Clifford's daughter, Naomi Johnson, stood with us two years ago, and she said: how is this possible that my father, the grandfather to my kids, could pass away in a public park due to a drug overdose with no one there to support, no one there to respond? She said: substance use and mental health disorders do not discriminate when claiming their victims; it can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, religious affiliation, or socioeconomic class.

Of course, I talk a lot about the folks who are on the streets and who are living rough, who've lost their lives to drug poisoning. But as we know, there are a whole lot of people from all backgrounds who are dying. As I've said many times, that number just continues to grow.

I mean, many of you have heard me speak at length on this topic here in the Legislature. I don't know how many times we can stand and we can urge this government to do the right thing. I've stood many times and said: it's not just the moral thing; it's not just the right thing to do. There's an economic argument, the costs on the health care system. I've said the same thing when we talk about permanent supportive housing.

There are countless examples in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood where folks who are struggling with addiction are supported. They're provided wraparound supports. It's a great example, Ambrose Place. The Member for Calgary-Currie and others have joined me to visit Ambrose Place. There are solutions. The data is clear that Ambrose Place saves lives, and it saves money. We know the solutions, but this government refuses to act. When given a chance to invest in permanent supportive housing – two years ago the city of Edmonton asked them for a measly \$9 million out of a multibillion-dollar budget to just house some of the hardest to house folks, some of the folks who have been struggling with addictions their whole adult lives. They refused. They refused to give that small amount of money, and this is the track record we've seen with this government. I hope that they'll listen because we can't afford another death on our streets.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise to speak to Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023. As I consider the reasons for this legislation, I reflect and ponder on the kinds of lives that have been impacted or even destroyed by the opioid epidemic that has devastated our communities. This bill is not just about the unfortunate souls that we increasingly see on the streets of our inner cities and rural communities, or the thousands that have died from overdoses, or the black market in crime that the demand for these highly addictive drugs has stimulated. All these victims are sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, siblings and friends, all individuals with dreams and lives to live, people like us.

4:00

This bill is quite personal to me as someone who has seen first-hand the horrors of addiction and the effects that it can have on the family and loved ones of those who are struggling with addiction. I would like

to share with you and all members of the Assembly, if you'll indulge me, the reason why I so strongly believe in the need for this bill to pass. I want to share with you a story of a very close family member, an energetic and vivacious 50-year-old Catholic school teacher I knew quite well, who sought professional medical help for a chronic pain issue and was initially prescribed Percocet and then increasingly stronger oxycodone doses and finally fentanyl.

Opioids like Percocet, oxycodone, and fentanyl are not appropriate for long-term treatment. They are highly addictive, and as time goes on, the body builds a resistance to such medications. This results in an eventual and predictable need for more or stronger doses to provide the same degree of pain relief. However, because of the addictive qualities it is extremely difficult to get off the opioid in favour of other, more benign pain medications.

With stronger and more powerful opioid doses come several negative side effects that make normal productive living increasingly difficult and eventually impossible. Because of her addiction and opioid side effects this intelligent, formerly active schoolteacher came to a point that she was forced to take early retirement. By the time she was 60, this otherwise physically healthy woman was required to move into assisted living to manage her opioid addiction and its consequences. The final 25 years of her life, years that should have been spent enjoying her family and friends and travel and other retirement benefits, were instead dominated by isolation, the consequences of addiction, and the management of the side effects of the opioids. The life of a good woman was irreparably damaged and compromised by an industry that promoted and promulgated a drug that was known to have this consequence.

Consider now that literally millions of people like this former schoolteacher have had their lives ruined because of inappropriate and excessive prescribing of opioids like oxycodone, pushed by a segment of the pharmaceutical medical industry that knew better, that knew the damage that was being caused. There must be consequences for all of the lives that were prejudiced or worse and the constant cost to government to address the damage done unto our societies.

Mr. Speaker, this schoolteacher's story isn't unique. Thousands of Albertans feel the pain of addiction, and every year, tragically, we lose more Albertans to the deadly disease of addiction. For those who are struggling with addiction to opioids that pharmaceutical companies pushed on our society, for those who have gone through addiction and have recovered, and for those who have been tragically lost, it is our utmost moral duty to do everything we can to ensure no Albertan will ever again be caught in the claws of addiction.

Mr. Speaker, as far as opioids are concerned, that means holding accountable those who have caused this crisis to take place in the first place. That means holding to account the opioid manufacturers who worked hard to promote their drugs as a harmless way to treat pain. This means holding to account the wholesalers and distributors who flooded the market and our hospitals with the addictive and deadly substances. Of course, this also means holding to account the consultants who provided advisory service to opioid manufacturers and their wholesalers and distributors. These people all insisted that opioids were no different from other medication for treating pain. They said the opioids were harmless. They said that opioids were safe. As we have found out, nothing could be further from the truth, and the time has come for them to take responsibility.

These proposed amendments in Bill 3 further strengthen our legislation that was originally passed unanimously in 2019 and would align Alberta with other provinces, including British Columbia, who have adopted similar legislation. Furthermore, the proposed amendments would bolster Alberta's position in any legal

recourse taken against those responsible for the opioid crisis, which has caused pain and suffering for so many Albertan families.

While this would be a key step to ensuring justice for the Albertans who have been affected by opioid addiction, it is also critical that we as a society ensure that we are supporting those who are battling the disease of addiction. That is why our government has taken multiple steps towards ensuring that Albertans have access to the resources they need. Since 2019 we have added 10,000 new treatment beds so that 10,000 more Albertans can get the help they need and deserve. We have removed the \$40-per-day user fee for addiction treatment as the ability to pay should not determine the care we provide to our most vulnerable. We have introduced the virtual opioid dependency program, which allows same-day access to life-saving treatment, available anywhere in the province. Furthermore, we are building 11 recovery communities for free, long-term treatment throughout the province, including four being built in direct partnerships with First Nations.

While other jurisdictions, even Alberta's previous NDP government, have focused on failed policies like safe supply, we have restored hope by prioritizing treatment and recovery. Mr. Speaker, the crisis of opioid addiction has been a scourge on our society now for decades, and it is more important than ever that we form a united front as a nation. Addiction knows no boundaries, so I call on all members of the Assembly to come together, as we did for the original legislation in 2019, and vote unanimously in favour of the next step forward towards justice for all those who have been affected by opioid addiction.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta is committed to building a province where people can thrive. We believe that no matter the background, Albertans can and should have access to the necessary resources and support to live good and fulfilling lives, lives where they have access to quality education, health care, and job opportunities, lives where Albertans can work, buy their own homes, start a family, and engage with their community. We want to see all Albertans happy and healthy, but that is being directly challenged by the ongoing opioid crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot begin to express the pain my constituents are facing due to opioid usage throughout our communities. So often opioid addictions go under the radar. Individuals don't like to talk about the devastating reality that opioids and other drugs cause some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society. Opioids don't discriminate. They don't just affect those living on the margins of society; they work their way into the everyday lives of many individuals we pass on the street and aren't always easy to detect. We may not always notice their presence, but I know from the many concerned calls, e-mails, and meetings I've had with my constituents that nothing good comes with opioid addiction.

Opioid addiction is not just a minor inconvenience in people's lives but affects more than the user. Opioids have caused thousands of deaths, torn apart families, caused children to be parentless, and left communities in shambles. This is exactly what our government is working to stop and why I rise in the House today to speak to Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023. This important piece of legislation aims to amend the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Act, which passed unanimously in 2019. The proposed amendments would strengthen Alberta's case against opioid manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and their consultants to hold them accountable for their actions, the actions that led to the current opioid crisis more than 25 years ago.

Opioids are not a harmless way to treat pain. The promotion of highly addictive substances should come with proper warning and education, yet neither was included. Beyond this, the manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and consultants took no responsibility for the issue or the damages that they caused. Holding the perpetrators of harm accountable should not be controversial. Creating policies that enable addiction does not do anyone good. It is not compassionate. It is not kind. It is not right. We must instead get to the heart of the issue, find solutions that will last, and help those who are struggling.

Addictions should not be managed; they should be treated to get those vulnerable out of their binding grip. A safe supply does not solve the problem. A safe supply does not help people get out of addiction. Safe supply increases access and enables the further use and abuse of substances. This is why instead of implementing policies such as safe supply, we are offering people a way out of addiction. This is why I encourage all members of the Assembly, especially those opposite, to showcase their support. This crisis is a nation-wide crisis and has cost the health care and lives of many Albertans and insurmountable family fractures throughout our country. Our government will not stand with irresponsible marketing ploys taken by those who profited from the widespread production and unnecessary distribution of opioids.

4:10

In addition to holding the perpetrators responsible, our government has developed a recovery model that leads our country in caring for those suffering from addictions. Since the United Conservatives gained power in 2019, we have added more than 10,000 annual treatment spaces, and I'm so proud of that. This is another 10,000 more Albertans who are getting access to necessary support to pursue recovery. The NDP might try to swear the public into believing that they have compassionate governance for those battling with addiction, but during their four years in power they placed no focus on building capacity for treatment. For four years those suffering from addiction were left waiting for help that was not available. For four years the NDP were not able to effectively solve or treat the opioid crisis.

Our UCP government has removed the \$40-a-day user fees for addiction treatment because no one's financial situation should restrict their recovery. We have created the virtual opioid dependency program, that allows for same-day access to life-saving treatment for someone suffering from opioid addiction. This program has connected thousands of Albertans with access to treatment medication, helping more people get healthy. We are also creating 11 recovery communities throughout our province to provide long-term treatment at no cost for thousands of Albertans. Four of these facilities have been built in direct partnership with First Nations, including the Blood Tribe, Siksika, Tsuut'ina, and Enoch Cree Nation. We are so proud of these partnerships as we can access the specific needs of their communities.

Our government has contributed significant funding to these essential recovery programs, but we believe that Albertans should not have to bear these costs alone. If passed, Bill 3 will help ease this burden by holding the manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, consultants, and other actors involved financially accountable for the damages that they have ensued. Albertans should not have to shoulder this cost alone when there are so many other key players responsible for the creation of the opioid crisis. Mr. Speaker, this is why I support Bill 3.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and speak to Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023. Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude and thank the constituents of Calgary-East for re-electing and giving me this humble opportunity to represent the voices in the community once again.

Mental health and addiction has been a growing concern that many constituents in Calgary-East have voiced, and I'm proud that our government has prioritized mental health and addiction and will continue to increase funding. This means more recovery communities to heal from the addictive nature of opioids; better access to addiction treatment; more resources available to mental health centres in Edmonton, Calgary, and the whole of Alberta; and access to detox and recovery services. Our government is the first to really place our focus and our priority on mental health and addiction, and I'm pleased that the government of Alberta intends to bolster its case against those who have contributed to the development of the opioid addiction issue by enacting Bill 3. Technical changes to the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act will provide supports for recovery and make further investments to benefit the province.

Mr. Speaker, the opioid addiction crisis began in the late 1990s with the high rate of opioid prescriptions for acute and chronic pain. Opioid manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and marketing misrepresented the harmful effects and addictive nature of the medication, which is leading to overprescribing of these medications, which creates addiction. This resulted in thousands of lives lost and substantial cost to the health care system. According to estimates from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction opioid usage and other drug use cost the Alberta economy more than \$7 billion annually just in 2020. The public health care system accounted for a sizable percentage of this expenditure, around \$2 billion. Although these expenditures have not been determined, it is anticipated that they have gone up as the opioid addiction concerns have grown over the previous two years. About 200 opioid-related occurrences are responded to by ambulances in Alberta each week. In the first half of 2023 alone there were over 7,500 ER visits and over 2,500 hospital admissions brought on by the opioids.

Mr. Speaker, the high rate of opioid prescriptions led to a significant increase of addictions and overdose rates, and many people progress to more dangerous, unlawful drugs, and the cycle continues. Prescribed pharmaceuticals are often used as a currency in seeking out stronger drugs such as fentanyl. Even though pharmaceuticals may not be the leading cause of opioid-related deaths, the diversion of prescription drugs into the community further fuels the addiction crisis. The addiction issue has severely strained our health care system and created suffering for families and communities all over the province.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has made it very apparent that opioid producers, distributors, wholesalers, and other parties will be held responsible for their role in the epidemic of opioid addiction. During the fall 2019 session members of the Alberta Legislature passed the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Act. The passing of this legislation supported Alberta's participation in a national class-action lawsuit against manufacturers and distributors who contributed to the onset of the opioid addiction crisis.

Amendments within the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023, include adding "consultant" to the act to provide a case against those who provide advisory services to opioid manufacturers and wholesale distributors and will allow persons who act as a consultant to manufacturers and wholesalers to be included in the class action; including active

ingredients in the definition of opioid product to provide more clarity that an active ingredient itself is an opioid product; amending the market share for the formula to distinguish between the market share of the manufacturers and the market share of the wholesalers and distributors to calculate damages more accurately if awarded. Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments align with the original act passed in 2019 and provide updates to best position Alberta in any legal proceedings. With these changes we want to make a stronger case for Alberta against producers, sellers, and advisers that fuelled the current opioid addiction problem and the expenses that followed for residents of the province.

Anyone suffering from the fatal disease of addiction deserves the chance to rehabilitate. The Alberta model provides compassionate care to families, communities, and Albertans affected by the devastating effects of addiction. We are working hard to increase capacity and remove barriers so that any Albertans may recover.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, opioid makers, wholesalers, and distributors as well as their consultants worked hard to promote their medication as a safe approach to relieve pain. There were no warnings about the addictive nature of the product, and no responsibility was accepted for the harm they would eventually cause. For far too long the devastating disease of addiction has harmed families and shattered communities. The national issue has claimed lives, and immediate action is required. Alberta is currently a participating member in two proposed class actions, initiated by British Columbia, seeking recovery from opioid manufacturers and distributors as well as, if these amendments are passed, their consultants.

In 2022 B.C. reached a settlement with Purdue Pharma Canada, and as part of the settlement Purdue Canada agreed to provide \$150 million to federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Purdue Pharma is one among more than 40 manufacturers and distributors named in the class action. And in anticipation of the future certification hearings in the B.C. class-action cases British Columbia and Saskatchewan have already revised their legislation. Other provinces are anticipated to make similar changes in order to comply with B.C.'s law.

These proposed changes will only enhance the province's position in any class-action lawsuits seeking to recoup opioid-related health care expenditures and losses. Mr. Speaker, if passed, Bill 3, the Opioid Damages and Health Care Costs Recovery Amendment Act, 2023, will further strengthen Alberta's position in current class actions to recover opioid-related health care costs and other damages. As well, the government has committed that any money owed back to Alberta will be invested into the mental health and addiction system so we can continue to expand our programs and services.

Our government is committed to support those suffering from mental health challenges or addiction in the pursuit of recovery. In Alberta this government has developed a model for recovery that is leading North America in caring for those suffering from the deadly disease of addiction. Since 2019 more than 10,000 annual treatment spaces have been added, which means that 10,000 more Albertans are getting access to support in the pursuit of recovery. The UCP government also removed the \$40-a-day user fee for addictions treatment as someone's financial situation should never be a barrier to recovery. Mr. Speaker, there is so much hope in recovery. As families have watched their loved ones suffer from addiction, recovery allows people to rebuild lost relationships and retain as a strong member of a community.

The government is committed to removing barriers at every level, which is why I wanted to mention the virtual opioid dependency program. This is a program that allows same-day access to the life-

saving treatment for someone suffering from opioid addiction. This is available everywhere in the province and has already connected thousands of individuals with access to treatment medication. We have 11 recovery communities throughout the province. These world-class facilities will provide long-term treatment at no cost for thousands of Albertans and have also been a strong way to partner with the Indigenous communities. In addition, recovery communities that provide long-term, holistic-living addiction treatment, like those in Red Deer and Lethbridge, were the first to open their doors this year, with more to follow in 2024.

Mr. Speaker, holding manufacturers and distributors accountable is an important step in recovering the damages that the opioid addiction crisis has had on our health care system.

Four of these facilities are being built in direct partnership with First Nations, including the Blood Tribe, Siksika, Tsuut'ina, and Enoch Cree Nation. We have welcomed these investments because they know it's what their community needs. These investments have cost our province significantly, but we support them because it is the right thing to do.

Albertans should not have to shoulder this cost alone, especially when others are responsible for the creation of the opioid addiction crisis, especially when we are considering the cost on our health care system as well. It is important that these costs are recovered and individuals are supported in such crises. Mr. Speaker, that's why I will be supporting Bill 3, so that our government can continue to provide support for recovery and make further investments with the dollars ordered back into the province.

Everyone is capable of recovering from the injury of addiction. The road to rehabilitation is unique to each individual and is determined by their specific requirements. Alberta is committed to providing a variety of addiction treatment options. Albertans may take the route that is best for them. For 24/7 support call the addiction helpline at 1.866.332.2322. Let's start the pathway to recovery.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

[Debate adjourned November 7: Ms Ganley]

The Acting Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak to Bill 4 at this time? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Sorry, sir. You can go next.

Mr. Getson: Ladies first.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you so much. I appreciate that, Member. Yeah, the kindness just overflows right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to my first bill in debate. I'm very excited about this opportunity.

Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, is kind of a conglomerate of changes that will be made to a few other acts. I'll just start by reiterating some of the things that my colleague shared yesterday. We are pleased to see the fuel tax pause extended. Albertans are facing a cost-of-living crisis, and movements like this do help to address that crisis. We have long supported the fuel tax pause, and we were the voice behind its extension back in 2022, so it's nice to see it reflected in legislation today. The fuel tax should

be paused until inflation levels stabilize, however long that takes, because it really is going to help many Albertans who are living paycheque to paycheque and hundreds of thousands of them that are on the brink of homelessness. This pause will help them to keep a roof over their heads and choose food and utilities, rather than having to choose between the two.

I did want to rise today to speak mostly to the amendments to the Tourism Levy Act. As everybody knows, I live in the most beautiful riding in the province. [interjection] That's a little jab over there to God's country on the other side of the House. I do live in the most tourism-popular part of the province. Over 5 million people a year, Mr. Speaker, visit the Banff-Kananaskis riding to partake in a whole array of outdoor recreational activities and cultural events, and it is my pleasure to be their MLA. Changes to the tourism tax levy directly affect many of my constituents, not only as being a major tourism destination in the province but also having economies that are largely founded on tourism. The communities of Banff and Canmore are almost entirely dependent on tourism as economic revenue for those towns. So changes to the tourism levy have the potential to really directly affect the communities that I represent.

4:30

In Bill 4 the changes to the Tourism Levy Act will repeal changes that had required online brokers to collect and remit the tourism levy instead of the hosts, so the changes in this bill, as I understand it, now go back to making sure that the hosts of short-term tourism accommodation will pay that levy instead.

Through conversations with tourism stakeholders in Banff-Kananaskis I have come to understand that the changes in this bill reflect requests that they have put forward, so that is also a positive thing to see. It is nice to see that changes in legislation are being put forward that address concerns that stakeholders have discussed with the government. It did take a few months for those consultations to happen, but that's okay because summer was a long time of us being out in communities consulting with folks.

As with most pieces of legislation, the proof is really in the pudding, as they say, and it really depends on how these things are rolled out and implemented. I can appreciate that not everything is in legislation and that some pieces will need to be in regulation. I will be looking very specifically for how and when and how often the levy will be remitted from hosts and making sure that the process by which hosts can remit the tourism levy is user friendly and easy and equitable and makes sure that everybody who hosts tourists, whether that's through an online marketplace or a hotel or a more formal business, has a way that they can pay the tourism levy that is easy.

We also need to have some transparency around what happens to that tourism levy once it is collected. Transparency in how revenues are gathered and spent, I would just offer, has not necessarily been the strong suit of this government over time, particularly with things like the Kananaskis conservation pass, which, in effect, is another tourism levy that dramatically affects my riding. We saw the Kananaskis conservation pass being collected, but it wasn't really reported on how that money was spent, so I would like to see that improved. While that may not be reflected in legislation, that will be something that I will be advocating for.

The original Tourism Levy Act was implemented with the intent of ensuring that those dollars were going back to tourism, destination marketing organizations like Travel Alberta or like Tourism Canmore Kananaskis that work to draw people to that specific tourism attraction or that specific part of the province. That has not been completed as of yet. I'd really like to see – I mean that could be an amendment in the

act, that the tourism levy revenue is generated and directed towards destination marketing organizations. That could be in the act.

The current mandate letter for the minister of tourism does talk about assessing the advantages and disadvantages of having the tourism levy invested in tourism-related growth initiatives and making recommendations. I'll just take a minute right now to share some of those advantages.

Basically, Travel Alberta is a destination marketing organization; they have been for a very long time. It has been their job to tell the world about why Alberta is so great and why people should come here for their holidays. Recently, however, Travel Alberta has expanded their mandate to include not just destination marketing but also to include things like small-business grants to help small businesses in communities develop products and initiatives that can bring more tourists to Alberta to enjoy this great province that we have. One very significant advantage of directing the tourism levy to organizations like Travel Alberta is that there is now this avenue for that funding to help support small business to succeed.

Canmore and Banff, Mr. Speaker, are communities made up mostly of small businesses. The innovation in the tourism sector is awesome, and it's something that we should always be encouraging to flourish. It's incredible to me to see how many people just carve out their own little unique niche in the tourism offer to take people around and show them the amazingness that Alberta has to offer. That is small business that we need to foster and help grow across communities in Alberta.

Travel Alberta also is on the precipice of releasing a strategy for tourism, hopefully very soon, that identifies 10 tourism destination zones. Canmore and Banff are a legacy zone because we've been doing tourism for 130 years, but there are many other tourism development zones that do not have the same experience. Again, directing the tourism levy to Travel Alberta will help those rural communities build their tourism offer so that maybe they don't need to rely on coal mines as their only source of economic income. I just had to throw in coal because, you know, it's kind of a thing.

I really would like to see that loop closed a little bit more. The other piece about this tourism levy change is that it is retroactive. I just have some questions around wanting to understand: how much money for the tourism levy did we miss out on while we hadn't closed the loop on this process of gathering the levy from hosts, and what will the process look like to collect that levy retroactively? How will we make sure that we bring our tourism businesses and hosts of temporary accommodations up to speed with paying the tourism levy?

The other piece of this that I want to share with other members is that Travel Alberta is not the only destination marketing organization in the province. Travel Alberta helps smaller communities that maybe don't have their own destination marketing thing. Canmore has Tourism Canmore Kananaskis. Other smaller communities have their own branches of tourism. These organizations operate independently of government and independently of businesses, and their sole job is to help create a draw for their community for tourists to come to their communities. This tourism levy is supposed to be going to them. When I talk with people at Tourism Canmore Kananaskis, funding is always a challenge for them. They never have the funding that they want to truly sell the destination on the global scale, and that's Canmore. You don't really have to sell Canmore, but they're still strapped in trying to find the funding to do that. So making sure that that tourism levy gets back to those organizations, I think, is really critical.

I'll just close with some final thoughts about the importance of tourism. Tourism in Banff and Canmore alone generates 2 and a half billion dollars for the Alberta economy every year. This is not

a small industry. Tourism is massive, and it is growing. So how we support rural communities to develop their tourism offer is not only a nice thing to do for small business; it's actually critical to the economic success of rural communities.

The other thing is that how we manage and plan for tourism is also critical. In the Bow Valley we have learned that you can welcome the world, but if you don't have the roads and the water treatment and the businesses and the restaurants and the hotel rooms for the world to enjoy, you're not ready. Travel Alberta has a responsibility to work with communities to grow their tourism sector in a way that they're not counting their chickens before they're hatched, so to speak.

We need to make sure that we strategically plan for tourism. This bill sets us up to do that, but it doesn't quite go far enough. We need more strategic direction in tourism planning and management across the province of Alberta.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah?

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. Yeah, we do. I had another thought, and now it's gone. Shoot.

I guess, just in closing, the changes to the Tourism Levy Act as proposed in Bill 4 are great, and they are steps in the right direction, but it doesn't go quite far enough to give our tourism industry the security that it needs to truly grow and flourish moving forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Good. Thank you.

The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

4:40

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I really like getting to know the new members both on our side of the aisle here and across from the other side. The last member, from Banff-Kananaskis: beautiful part of the country. You've got the skies out there. You've got the parks. You have the mountains and some beautiful lakes, but you don't have a lake that was blessed by the Pope. There's always one thing you fall a little short on. It's pretty country out there.

Hats off to the folks, too. I spent some time out in that member's area, there, in the summer. It was the first time, as my daughter had pointed out, that we had taken a vacation in about three years. This is on Bill 4, by the way, Mr. Speaker, if you're following along to see where I'm going with this. I'm going to wheel on back there.

I did spend some time up there with the folks over at, I believe it's called, Rafter Six Ranch and resort. I spent some time with the ponies out there. If the member hasn't spent some time with those constituents – I imagine she has; she's nodding; she sure does – those are some great folks, and I would adopt them in a heartbeat. They're God's country worthy.

Mr. Speaker, again, thanks to the member for the comments back and forth. I look forward to maybe having a coffee with you one day, furthering that discussion.

It's a pleasure to rise today and talk to the bill at hand, which is the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, so Bill 4 for us here. The purpose of the Tax Statutes Amendment Act is to ensure that the laws remain clear and consistent. The amendments aim to modify various parts of the act in the province such as the Fuel Tax Act, the Tourism Levy Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act – how many times can I say “tax act” in a row? – Alberta Corporate Tax Act.

On the fuel tax pause. What we're up to: our government is committed to keeping life affordable as much as possible as we can for all families in Alberta so that our economy can continue to grow and prosper. In June our government kept our campaign commitment to extend the fuel tax pause until the end of this year. The pause saves Albertans 13 cents every time they fill up their

vehicle, and now we're updating the legislation that will align with the tax pause.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't explain the background on some of that. Obviously, we've been hit with the carbon tax or the carbon levy, I should say, because, again, you're not supposed to tax a tax, but you can tax the heck out of a levy. That poor thing keeps hitting everything, and there are only so many levers that we have over here as the government that we can try to off-set that for the affordability, and that was one of the items that we managed to do. With those items it's also tied to the fuel prices in that context as well, but at least we can do something with those revenues to try to off-set and try to keep it more affordable.

Bill 4 would retroactively legislate the extension of the provincial fuel tax pause to the end of 2023, which reflects a decision that we announced here earlier this year. We're keeping that commitment. This includes legislation essential for the fuel tax pause to help our government formalize our commitment to keeping life more affordable for Albertans. Again, sometimes it seems like a death by a thousand cuts. There are only so many levers that we can pull, and we're trying to do everything that we can to recognize the challenges that, quite frankly, everyone's having up there with the affordability issues. The extension of the fuel tax pause ensures economic relief for Albertans and is in line with our government's commitments to maintain affordability. Do you see a trend line there, Mr. Speaker? It's because we honestly mean this one, and we're doing what we can.

On the Tourism Levy Act – oh, my back gets sore sitting down so much in here; I don't know how anyone else is doing – additionally, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act would include amendments to the Tourism Levy Act. These amendments would include implementing a new framework that would address the complexity surrounding the collection and the remittance of tourism levies by online brokers. These changes align with industry concerns and streamline the process, making the system more efficient for everyone that's involved.

Again, Mr. Speaker, coming back to that comment of, you know, death by a thousand cuts and efficiencies, if we can debottleneck and try to reduce some of these items, that helps everyone in that industry. Again, collecting tax: nobody likes to do it, and if you have to, let's at least make it efficient so you're not wasting everyone's time on that one.

Alberta has a booming tourism industry, and these changes will allow the industry to continue to prosper and even grow. One item that the Member for Banff-Kananaskis and I are in one hundred per cent violent agreement with: tourism often gets overlooked as an economic engine. I'm going to regale a little bit of an item here. The way that I kind of see the tourism industry and how it relates to economic corridors: those economic corridors, when we're talking about those conduits, if you would, for commerce and trade, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, are one hundred per cent inclusive of tourism.

I have this little theory myself, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if you share it. I honestly believe that Mickey Mouse and Tony Soprano are the same person. They're little gangsters, you feel good about them, and they clean you out every time you go there. Now, I can say that full well. I haven't met Tony, but I absolutely have met Mickey. When I take my kids down to Disneyland and we go on a ride – the way they've got this set up is that you go on the ride, you have that experience, and your endorphins are up. Everyone is pumped. It's a great time and everything else, and when you get off that ride, you're so pumped up that you want to try to remember it. For whatever reason it is, natural instinct, you go through that darn little gift shop, and, sure enough, you spend another 15 or 20 bucks to grab that little toy. And the first thing that they do as soon as

you're exiting that gift shop: there's a little finger sending you somewhere else. You're heading off to the next ride.

So the concept that we could probably start using is traplining a little bit better through the province, not just within our own constituencies but sending them to the next ride. When I'm in here shamelessly saying, "God's country," it is to facilitate that same conversation, to get folks talking about their areas – their gift shops, if you will – the attributes that they have, and how we can send that foot traffic around or send that message out.

One of the things that we have to be cognizant of, too, is that when we start talking poorly, whether it's by accident or through partisan types of conversations, that's what the world sees. What we have to do is be loud and proud here, as all Albertans, all strong and free – the same flag, same colours – and promoting each one of our communities to the other and making sure that we do a good job of that regardless of which side of the aisle we happen to sit on. Again, to the member, through you to her – and others are nodding in the other aisle – we've got a lot of attributes that places around the world are envious of.

When I was recently over in Germany talking about the energy file, I had my phone out sitting in a cafe, showing folks in Berlin what we had here, and they couldn't believe these types of areas. One lady said to her boyfriend: this is prettier than your homeland of Austria. I take that as a high compliment in high regard.

Back to Bill 4 here, because the member from Calgary is obviously getting bored with talking about her province. That was the whole idea, to make sure that we can make the tourism industry help out with that tax act on there as well. Now, on the personal income tax portion of it, Bill 4, if passed, would also include impending changes to Alberta personal income taxes, as I'd mentioned. These changes would align our legislation with federal legislation to ensure the eligibility criteria for the tax credits remain consistent across the federal and provincial systems, trying to get alignment between there so that you're not dropping pennies to pick up dollars, so to speak.

The alignment simplifies the tax system and prevents confusion, which ensures a smooth approach to the tax credit calculations, again, trying to find those efficiencies, making sure there's alignment, Mr. Speaker, in that regard. I know you've talked to me many times before on your personal income tax, how frustrated you were that those didn't have any alignment, so hopefully this will help you out, too. I'm trying to get the Speaker to smile; it's not working. He's as solid as a rock over there today.

The corporate tax points. The proposed amendments in the Alberta Corporate Tax Act are crucial for maintaining provincial policy and providing clarity to business, again, making sure that we have the clarity and that everyone kind of knows what the rules are and it's predictable. Rectifying the formula for calculating the innovative employment grant benefits for associated corporations is pivotal and ensures fairness and accuracy in grant allocation, stimulating research and development while addressing the unintended loopholes.

Again, one of our members is a tax lawyer. They love those loopholes, and here we're trying to close as many as we can over on this side of the bench at this time, where we're at in our careers, to make sure that the taxpayers out there get the best bang for their buck, so to speak.

In conclusion, the amendments included in Bill 4 represent our government's dedication to be fair, efficient, and responsive to the tax policies. They directly respond to the economic uncertainties and the administrative complexities faced by individuals and businesses across Alberta right now. These changes are to set the stage for a more efficient and equitable tax landscape. The proposed amendments are not only administrative adjustments, but they also

streamline the process, so looking for those efficiencies, rectifying inconsistencies, providing clarity, and fostering a robust economic environment for our province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we all love the province. There are little things that we can do along the way. There is no one silver bullet, and sometimes you just need some little administrative touch-up like Bill 4 does. That might go a long way to meeting the needs of my colleagues, the Member for Banff-Kananaskis from across the way, too. I hope my arguments were extremely compelling, especially the one where my constituency is called God's country. I know she'll get it, too. I encourage the members opposite as well that if they would be kind enough to vote for Bill 4, we could help out a bunch of Albertans in a number of areas that I think would go a long way to getting things moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today for the first time in the 31st Legislature to speak to a bill. It's my privilege to do so, to represent for the third term the fantastic residents of Edmonton-McClung in Edmonton's west end. I might remind the Member for Banff-Kananaskis that although she has the mountains and probably the most attractive tourist destination in Alberta, we have the largest and most effective and most attractive non-mountainous tourist attraction in Alberta, that being, of course, West Edmonton Mall in my riding. Be mindful that when it comes to Edmonton-McClung, as the transportation critic I'm certainly making sure the world knows that all roads lead to West Edmonton Mall.

4:50

With that in mind, though, Mr. Speaker, Bill 4, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, is more than a housekeeping bill. As we talk in this Legislature about bills, they sometimes are described as housekeeping bills, but they have an impact and they're important, and this bill is no different than others that have been described as housekeeping bills before. Now, as others have mentioned, we are pleased to see the fuel tax pause extended. We worked to have that extension back in 2022, to have that pause extended, and we support the move to continue that.

As far as the bill goes with respect to the short-term levies that are regulated as part of the Tourism Levy Act, it amends chapter 5 of the *Revised Statutes of Alberta*. While it's important, of course, to ensure that the retroactive levy collection is part of this legislation, I think it's also very important to make sure that the operators are given proper notice. As was mentioned by one of our other members in debate earlier on this bill, there's going to be a requirement that those operators need to have a reserve fund saved up in order to have that money available to pay it on time. That's not something that every small-business operator necessarily finds easy to do, so I think that it's important that all the operators receive good direction that there's a way that they have to go ahead and save up so that they have the cash on hand to cover that levy when it becomes due.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, we need to do more than just housekeeping with respect to the whole range of impacts that short-term rentals have on the housing market in general and as it relates to the tourism industry as well. I am concerned about the impact that the short-term rental market has in neighbourhoods maybe like those that surround West Edmonton Mall. I know that many people have travelled abroad or even across this country,

into the United States, and may have booked, like myself when I was travelling in Australia and New Zealand, a private bed and breakfast, or private B and Bs, which were homes that were operated by individuals who may have lived in them or, for the most part, didn't, but they were embedded within communities.

I often thought, as I rented these overnight stays, what the neighbours would think about these homes that were short-term rentals. They were in a community where people were raising families, so every night there would be somebody new staying in that short-term rental, the traffic from people all over the world. It's not something that we should forget about when we're talking about regulating short-term rentals and collecting the revenue that there is to be had from them, making sure they pay their fair share so that hoteliers such as West Edmonton Mall's Fantasyland Hotel and others can compete effectively but also protect and preserve the integrity of the neighbourhoods where these short-term rentals right now are found.

There are good questions to be asked, Mr. Speaker, about whether or not these short-term rentals should be permitted in communities which are normally reserved for single-family homes or for long-term residential dwellings. That is one thing that I hope to see a lot more discussion about, beyond what is in this bill, Bill 4, around the whole concept of short-term rentals and where they should be able to exist and what part of the market they should be able to occupy when it comes to a level playing field and their competitiveness with the regular hotel market. I look forward to more discussions on that. We need to do more. There are implications for our housing market, and people who live beside a short-term rental, I think, would have a lot to say about where they belong and where they shouldn't be allowed.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll say that West Edmonton Mall may not have the mountains that we see in Banff-Kananaskis, but there is a significant attraction there, with practically a small ocean under a large dome, and it's always going to be developed into something new. I know the major roller coaster is disappearing, but it's going to be replaced with another huge attraction. Stay tuned, and take one road that leads to West Edmonton Mall soon.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 4, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. the Minister of Finance to close debate should he wish to do so.

Mr. Horner: Waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 5

Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate November 7: Mr. Horner]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has 14 minutes remaining should he choose to use it. It would seem he doesn't.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow has risen.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm back again talking about Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. The important thing about this bill, the key, critical thing is that, basically, it means that the UCP are removing all salary restraints for Alberta's boards and commissions and opening the door for massive and shameful misuse of taxpayers' money under

previous Conservative governments, including the scandal at the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation.

Instead of caring about regular Albertans who are struggling to pay rent and buy food, the Premier and this government are giving the highest paid executives a raise that they don't need. We'd rather see new schools to address overcrowding in growing communities, more doctors to keep our families healthy, and real action on the housing crisis, yet this is a bill that specifically allows uncapped compensation to make the government's best friends richer at the expense of working Albertans, who pay the taxes to support all this.

The bill will repeat the protections that were in place that led to the scathing Auditor General's report in the early 2000s on excesses in agencies, boards, and commissions under Conservative governments. RABCCA, the law that is being repealed by this bill, was actually set up as a consequence of 30 years of Conservative government pork-barrelling, that the Premier at the time, Jim Prentice, had the opportunity to stop and did not, and you'll remember that he lost an election because of that.

This bill will also set the stage for unbalanced collective bargaining as ministerially appointed employer associations will collectively bargain on behalf of all employers. This is really a substantial threat to the livelihoods of front-line health care workers, who, frankly, have been asked to deliver more and more and are facing more and more challenges in the practice of their livelihoods yet have seen their purchasing power, you know, like, really harmed significantly by very high inflation over the past few years. In the midst of a health care crisis there is also a crisis amongst front-line health care workers for their own families and how they take care of themselves, and this bill, unfortunately, likely will make that whole situation significantly worse.

5:00

This is from the same government that took away the right of employees to band together for collective bargaining purposes. So employers can now band together to suppress wages, but employees have a much harder time working to increase their own standard of living. It's frankly antiworker in a province of hundreds of thousands of government employees and health care workers, where the economy depends on the spending of those workers in order to, you know, create jobs in retail, create jobs in restaurants, in order to create economic growth. Instead, this is a bill that actually delivers potentially \$400,000, \$500,000, \$600,000 salaries to highly paid executives and members of agencies, boards, and commissions.

I have some questions. Which worker associations did the government consult with? What were the results, and is the minister prepared to make the results of those consultations public?

The government has exempted portions of this act from the Regulations Act and the need for transparency through publication. It's actually very interesting because the minister, I believe, in introducing this legislation, commented that it was very similar to British Columbia's framework that's used for non-union compensation. In fact, when I looked at this, that doesn't seem to be quite correct. I think there was an inaccuracy there. The B.C. government actually has a substantial burden of transparency and is required to make their compensation plans public to an extent, and their mandates are also public.

Here's an example of the public-sector bargaining mandates and agreements starting in 2022. This is the shared recovery mandate from the British Columbia government.

The Shared Recovery Mandate applies to all public sector employers with unionized employees whose collective agreements expire on or after December 31, 2021.

Negotiations are focused on providing a fair and reasonable offer to public-sector workers that includes significant inflation protection, while ensuring that government has the resources to continue to invest in building a stronger province for everyone.

Key priorities of the 2022 Shared Recovery Mandate include:

- Protecting the services that people in British Columbia depend on
- Improving health care and preparing for future needs and challenges
- Supporting a strong economic recovery that includes everyone in B.C.

Elements of the 2022 mandate include:

- Three-year term
- General wage increases.

And it goes through schedules and a negotiable flexibility allocation that is tied to those increases. This is something that's on the website that, you know, I can just read to you.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There's no commitment that I could see within this bill for a similar level of transparency. Unfortunately, what that means, then, is that this is all kind of done in secret, because, obviously, where there is no transparency, there are instead secrets. Employer associations are banding together and creating a situation where they have compensation plans that are not adequately disclosed, so that means that people just don't know what to expect.

There are portions of this act that are exempt from the Auditor General Act, and I have questions about why that would be. Why are there significant portions of this act that the Auditor General is not required, in fact not allowed, to investigate as part of their office?

Which failed candidates and former ministers should we expect to see appointed to these new associations and councils? I kind of want to know. Will the minister go through a public recruitment process for these associations and councils? You will recall that the NDP in its term in government revamped the selection of agencies, boards, and commissions and made sure that they were selected on the basis of merit. Sadly, those commitments were taken away, and unfortunately now this is once again an approach for that, in which . . . [interjections] It's unfortunately the case that now we can see perhaps that agencies, boards, and commissions will be filled by people who are perhaps not as representative of the people of Alberta as the members of my caucus are.

An Hon. Member: You're right about that.

Member Kayande: Excuse me? [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please direct your comments through the chair.

Member Kayande: Apologies. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. This is the spiciest. Let's reset.

Member Kayande: This act will do two main things. It will repeal the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act and enable the minister to create new directives to guide agencies, boards, and commissions and other public entities. This new act is enabling legislation, contains no limits or restraints. The new provisions will apply only to non-union employees.

This act does nothing right now. It will not help with attraction or retention as the current compensation structure will remain in place perhaps for years, depending on how long the future directives and subsequent frameworks will take to develop.

The minister could in his first directive provide sweeping exemptions from the hold-the-line rule. The minister says that his office is overwhelmed by exemptions. Most of these come from postsecondaries, are related to administrative leave, relocation, and severance. All the guidelines will be in the hands of the minister.

No legislation will be binding on employers or employer committees, councils, or associations. Again, this is another place where this framework is substantially different from the British Columbia framework and, in fact, so different that it seems to me that the two are entirely not comparable.

The minister will determine the membership of employer committees, councils, and associations. Employer committees and associations will be involved in and the associations will be responsible for collective bargaining. This is actually a substantial threat to the livelihood or the ability of workers to have a good life in working their jobs and working their livelihoods. If the similar thing that was done with regard to graduate students' associations, for example, is followed upon, in which the universities were allowed to band together but the student associations were not, it takes an already asymmetric situation that is in favour of the employers and makes it even worse and tilts the balance further against workers.

5:10

It exempts a number of directives from the Regulations Act. The most notable difference between this and RABCCA is that employer associations will create their own framework within a directive; that is, more power is placed in the hands of employers through the creation of their own committees, associations, or councils, which are appointed by the minister. It's really important to point out that there was nothing in RABCCA that prevented the government from adjusting frameworks in that act, so this isn't a requirement, to repeal RABCCA, in order to create more compensation flexibility. Instead, the statement of wanting additional compensation flexibility appears to be a Trojan Horse to allow the repeal of RABCCA, thereby creating the potential for the shenanigans that, sadly, we saw many years ago.

What do some of these shenanigans look like? Well, let's take you back to 1992. I remember this because that year expenses caused outrage after taxpayers ponied up more than \$1.3 million to finance living allowances for MLAs, including some who lived less than a 30-minute drive from the Legislature Building. I remember that because I lived in St. Albert, where Dick Fowler was my MLA at the time. I remember that I had the same commute on the bus to the university for which . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 5? The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak about Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. If implemented, this bill is sure to make positive changes within Alberta's public sector. Bill 5 is a testament to the UCP government's commitment to providing a fair and efficient public-sector workforce. The UCP government has been committed to ensuring that hard workers are valued and recognized as such. With the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, fairness and justice will be a top priority within our public sector. That means hard-working Albertans will be paid according to their work. We will ensure that people are paid equally and fairly and that individuals doing the same job are paid the same regardless of irrelevant external factors.

Alberta is home to world-renowned public organizations that are staffed by equally talented public servants. In order to ensure that

these organizations can recruit the highly specialized prospective employees they need, the province must be able to offer these individuals competitive and suitable compensation, and if passed, Bill 5 aims to do just that. If passed, this bill would protect non-union employees at entities currently governed by the reform of agencies, boards, and commissions compensation regulation by ensuring strong government oversight and creating a specific and equitable standard in terms of compensation.

The UCP government is committed to Alberta residents. We're looking out for every Albertan, and we are devoted to providing a workplace environment that reflects that. I know many people who work in the public sector, and I've heard their horror stories about unfair treatment. This bill is a promise to tackle these issues. We're keeping public-sector employees accountable, which will lead to improved services and better work environments. It looks out for workers that are overlooked within our work environments.

The Public Sector Employers Amendment Act is not just to improve working conditions; it is a dedicated piece of legislation to ensure safety for non-union employees working in health care and postsecondary institutions as well as certain public agencies such as Alberta gaming, Special Areas Board, and more. This model will provide co-ordination with the government's direction in regard to compensation for non-union employees. It will help reduce barriers and challenges that public-sector employers have been facing for many years. By implementing this model, Alberta employers will be able to retain more staff and recruit more workers, providing opportunities for all Alberta residents. With enhanced transparency and accountability within the public sector, we would be able to better understand how the public sector functions, which would only be a benefit to us. It will provide a way for us to enhance working conditions and equip us as the government with the tools we need to better serve our citizens.

We must recognize how non-union Alberta employees benefit our economy. This timely legislation, if passed, would finally do this. We want to validate all Albertans who work hard to provide for their families and contribute to our society. All working Albertans have the right to be treated fairly in the workplace, and this proposed legislation aims to achieve just that by ensuring employees who work comparable jobs earn a comparable wage.

The UCP government recognizes the working Albertan, and we want to ensure that our public sector remains a pillar of strength, dedication, and service that benefits all Albertans. We're working towards a prosperous future. We're laying the groundwork for our future generations. We're thinking ahead and ensuring provisions are taking place to serve all Albertans.

And to the non-union workers serving in the public sector: we recognize your hard work and dedication. We see the integral roles you play in every one of our lives, whether it is through health care and education or the other necessary public services you help to provide to Albertans.

With Bill 5 we're making an active commitment to continue to recognize your roles within our beautiful province. As the Member for Calgary-Lougheed I want to express my gratitude for what you do. I urge all members to remember that we are here to serve our constituents and to serve all Albertans. This piece of legislation will only be a benefit to our residents. It will ensure that those working in public sectors and non-union employees are fairly acknowledged for their positive roles within the Alberta economy. Make the right decision, and vote for Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very excited; this is the very first time I rise in debate. I shall begin. As a result of that, I will begin by admitting that I am not yet an expert on the minutiae of bills, so I was very grateful for the briefing that myself and my colleagues were offered last week when the bill was introduced. I do, though, as a result of that briefing, have a couple of wonders. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Sorry, hon. member. It seems this House is trying to break you in. Not welcome.

The hon. member.

Ms Wright: Thank you. I do, though, have a few wonders, concerns, and questions about Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. To begin, my understanding is that this act is supposed to be essentially about and concern non-union public-sector employees, the need to co-ordinate compensation through groups, and the need to allow for salary and compensation growth to keep pace with economic conditions and inflation. It also appears to be about the need to recruit and retain workers. The act is one which appears to concern specialized roles for the most part, and it has some idea to provide for a comprehensive focus on all those compensation systems and processes.

However, given the reasonable nature of making sure a worker's compensation keeps pace with inflation, I am wondering why, then, this act also includes the repeal of the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act, why this government felt that was necessary since the repeal really only seems to apply to those at the top of the salary chain rather than those on the bottom. My understanding was that the original purpose of RABCCA was to make sure folks weren't taking advantage of privilege, of position through exorbitant and out-of-whack salary or benefits or things like flashy cars or evenings out.

To me, if the point is to create some sense of fairness for those in the public sector, it's curious that this government would repeal an act which was designed to make sure fairness in salaries existed. However, I suspect that the purpose of the repeal of RABCCA is not just about the recruitment and retention of public-sector workers. In fact, I probably shouldn't use the word "worker" because, again, I'm concerned it's not really about the workers, regular Albertans, at all. It's only about those who exist far above the regular workers' pay grade, and in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview the average salary is a whopping \$66,000 a year.

Certainly, given today's announcement, which further explained the disaggregation of our health care system, I may be beginning to understand what lies beneath Bill 5. I suspect there are many, many folks who will need to be hired and those who will need to sit on one of the many associations, committees, or councils which are yet to be established.

5:20

Madam Speaker, this bill is being presented during the time of a massive affordability crisis. I know the residents of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview would much rather this Assembly focus on the actual issues of the day. Act on that affordability crisis. Act on the housing crisis. Act on the lack of EAs that exist in our schools. Listen to the health care professionals like the nurses we listened to today. Listen to the folks who work in continuing care like the health care attendant that we listened to today. Now, I certainly don't want us to launch ourselves into another time of massive disconnect between compensation for folks on the lower end of the pay scale, those closer to minimum wage, and those on the opposite side of that same scale. That was the reason for RABCCA in the first place.

This new act is enabling legislation. It appears to contain no limits, no restraints. My read of the act says that there's an incredible amount of discretion that exists in the hands of the minister. One question I will be asking – and I'll ask it now just because I can – has to do with assurances. What assurances can we expect? What regulations, what ministerial orders are going to come down that we can expect to see that will guarantee pay and compensation grids for those who serve on those employer committees and associations will actually be reasonable rather than point to those massive, out-of-whack, absolutely unreasonable pay increases that we saw before RABCCA?

Now, another question that I have, perhaps more of a bit of a worry, a concern, has to do with a matter of employee pay. I wonder: given that all those committees and associations will have scope to establish salary grids for their collective employees, does this act then open the door to, say, an employer association or a committee doing a comparison, looking at salaries between different jurisdictions for workers like health care aides and then perhaps noticing that a health care aide in one province gets paid a couple of dollars less than a health care aide does here and then say: "Hey, all my lovely board and committee people, look at this. They get paid \$2 an hour less. I think that our health care aides, to achieve parity with people in those other jurisdictions, should also get paid \$2 less"? That's instead of the increase in pay these workers absolutely deserve.

Now, given that there are numerous references to employees not being subject to collective agreements, those who are out of scope, one could be forgiven for thinking that this act has nothing to do with public-sector employees who belong to a union except I think it probably has ramifications for union workers, too. For example, the need to allow for salary and compensation growth to keep pace with economic conditions and inflation: quite frankly, that sounds great. If I'm a union employee and if I haven't gotten a raise for the last five years and if I'm looking at a potential year-over-year inflation rate that exists somewhere around 15 per cent, then I suppose that if the particular employee association that I'm affiliated with is giving that 15 per cent raise to other folks, then I'll be getting a 15 per cent raise, too, and I think that would be great.

That is why this is exactly the type of legislation where government should be consulting with unions. Unions, too, are major stakeholders. Public-sector employees who are union members could, as I just noted, be affected by everything that is in this bill. Unions should have been consulted about this framework, but perhaps, once again with this government, that wasn't something this government considered when the bill was originally written.

What I would also be interested to find out more about is how that consultation is working. Which groups were consulted, which worker groups were consulted? And, more than that, I'm really looking forward to hearing which groups are going to be consulted from this point forward. Which worker associations are going to be consulted? Which unions are going to be consulted?

[The Speaker in the chair]

This bill also provides government and employers with the benefits of a central bargaining table for employers without the same benefit for employees. This is because all those employer committees, associations, and councils are being created at the discretion of the minister, which are created by the minister, establishing one or more committees to collect collective bargaining and compensation information, "coordinate collective bargaining, and develop, support and monitor the implementation of compensation and bargaining strategies." It also adds in employer associations, which also allow

for the minister to establish employer associations to co-ordinate compensation for non-union employees, collective bargaining, human resources, and other matters, including consultation with employer representatives.

There's lots of collective bargaining going on here. Yet those these associations that are about to be set up are exempt from the fiscal administration act, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act, and the Auditor General Act, and I'm wondering why. Why would all that important oversight not be included? Why would that level of transparency be lacking in this bill?

With the establishment of those employer councils, public-sector employer councils, which allow for the minister to create a council to advise and consult and any other function assigned – those words struck a chord with me. Any other functions assigned. It's probably because of all the secretarial work I did. Any other functions assigned: it means the power lands squarely at the feet of the minister, and since the minister has such latitude, whatever the minister wants, I suspect, the minister gets.

Curiously, though, there is no such similar provision for workers. The act does not provide employees, whether or not they are unionized, with access to a similar central framework. Now, employer associations will create their own framework within a directive. Again, that means that even more power is placed in the hands of the employers through the creation of their own committees, associations, or councils, with these bodies being appointed by the minister. The minister, again, has total discretion. This is lopsided, and this is unfair, and this isn't the way that this government should be bargaining and setting the salaries of its workers because the workers' voice is clearly missing from the equation.

Consider, if you will, that there is a meeting of one of those central tables, one of those employer central tables. They're talking about salary grids for their employees. Does one employee go in? Do five employees go in? Do 50 employees, 300 employees go in? Will they bring other unions with them if there are other unions involved in their workplace? Who exactly will they be bargaining with? Will there be separate union locals needing to enter into the bargaining even with those non-union public-sector employees?

Again, Mr. Speaker, if a collectivity of employers, will unions or employees respond with a collectivity of unions or employees? Where's the central table for employees? Where's the union? Where's the workers' voice in setting a framework? As my colleague so ably noted, which workers did the government consult with when they were planning this bill? What were the results, and when can we expect those results to be shared?

I worry and I wonder and I have questions about why this bill seems to establish one set of rules for employers, those folks the UCP will be appointing to all of these brand new committees and associations, but somehow forgets to establish similar processes for employees and those who represent and work with them.

For all those reasons, then, Mr. Speaker, I urge the members of this House to vote no on Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. Is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to speak to Bill 5, the proposed Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. This bill aims to streamline and harmonize government direction for compensation of non-union employees

across the public sector for the benefit of all Albertans. By replacing the current outdated model for regulating non-union compensation, we can alleviate some of the challenges that public-sector employers have been facing for years in recruiting and retaining staff. The current regulations do not account for inflation or evolving labour market conditions, which severely limits these public-sector bodies and their ability to serve Albertans. It's time for a change.

One of the major goals of our government is to ensure that Albertans remain competitive on a world stage while providing every Albertan with a level of service that they need and deserve. To this end, Alberta's public organizations, including postsecondary institutions and health care services, are recognized world-wide. The sustained quality and accessibility of these organizations is a key factor to ensuring Alberta remains competitive with the rest of the world in attracting and retaining talent while ensuring the services Albertans rely on can be maintained and improved into the future. For this to be possible, it is imperative that the province be able to offer appropriate and competitive salaries to our non-unionized public-sector employees. That is why Bill 5 is focused on making it easier to ensure that non-unionized employees receive comparable pay for comparable work. By ensuring fairness, we will be able to create improved work environments and better retain the skilled and talented employees we need.

5:30

It is also just as important to create a level and flexible and responsive compensation system for public-sector employees. Public organizations often have specific needs and face circumstances which are unique to them. Oftentimes in various parts of the province different local priorities will arise. By introducing greater adaptability in the compensation system, we will enable these organizations to account for the needs and dynamics of their local communities as well as their specific organizational and operational needs. This will ensure that decision-making around compensation accurately reflects the situation on the ground. That way public organizations will be better positioned to provide efficient and effective services to their local communities.

I'd just like to talk a little bit about Lakeland College and some of the problems that the old RABCCA created. It was set up so smaller institutions like Lakeland College had a different pay range than larger institutions, and Lakeland then became essentially a stepping stone or a farm team for the big organizations. It really impacted the succession planning they had for people working their way up through the system because large institutions could just afford to pay more.

The other example of a flexibility problem. There was one example where there was a dean of one of the departments. There was another department that they wanted that person to take care of so that they could do both, and they would wind up spending less money. But in order to compensate that person to be able to go and do that, they would have had to go outside the range, so it wasn't allowed. Then they were forcing them to hire two people, two deans for two different departments. Those are some of the problems that it created. In the end we worked hard and got an exemption for that. I think the Finance minister at the time was signing a lot of exemptions, which is an indication of how out of whack it was. Those are some of the problems that were created.

While localized autonomy and adaptability is a key focus of this bill, we are also seeking to continue strong oversight under the new compensation system. In addition to maintaining the critical checks and balances that currently exist, we will ensure accountability and appropriate compensation practice by introducing a new flexible governance model for non public-sector compensation. This will

allow Alberta's government to maintain the strong fiscal oversight that Albertans want to see and will ensure that the tax dollars of hard-working, everyday Albertans, like my constituents in Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright, are being spent wisely.

The government of Alberta is dedicated to working collaboratively with public entities to deliver the best results for Albertans. Through Bill 5 we are encouraging public entities to work with us in developing compensation plans that work best for their respective organizations. The new government's focused approach, which I would like to note only applies to non-union compensation, seeks to strike a better balance and provide the elected government with more flexibility to act on behalf of Albertans in response to the changing and emerging circumstances.

I want to take some time to thank our public-sector employees for their hard work and dedication. The work that they do is critical to providing Albertans with the services they deserve, and it is important that we recognize them. I look forward to our government's continued work with our non-unionized public-sector employees as we work towards a better future for our public sector and for all Albertans. By ensuring increased fairness and compensation, increasing flexibility and adaptability of local public bodies, strengthening oversight, and encouraging collaboration between organizations and Alberta's government, this bill will lead to a more efficient and effective public sector that can meet the needs of all Albertans, like my great constituents in Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright, Mr. Speaker.

In the interests of these great Albertans I call on members of the Assembly to vote in favour of Bill 5. Together let's ensure that Albertans have the services they need.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise for the first time in this House on bill debate on Bill 5, Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. Thank you.

This is a bill in which we are removing all salary restraints for Alberta's boards and commissions. This is the same plan that resulted in a really gross misuse of taxpayers' money under previous Conservative governments. This act does two key things. The first is to repeal a really excellent piece of legislation called the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act – it's a mouthful – and the second is to enable the minister to create new directives to guide agencies, boards, and commissions. I'll just touch briefly on the latter, which is really a consolidation of control in the minister's office. Kind of a big-government approach because all the guidelines for these agencies, boards, and commissions will be in the hands of the minister, and no legislation will be binding on employers, employer committees, councils, or associations.

But to return to the main point, the first point, the repealing of the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act. To refresh my own memory on the introduction of that act, I read a 2016 *Edmonton Journal* article, and I will table this article tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. The article is titled Province Introduces Legislation to Regulate Compensation of Alberta Government CEOs, published on May 19, 2016. From the article now, this is a quote from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

"We are undertaking this action so we can get good information and be able to set a framework in place that we believe is in the best interest of taxpaying Albertans, but also in the best interest of the work" the agencies, boards and commissions are doing.

The article goes on to note that

If passed, it will allow the government to set or limit compensation of designated executives through the establishment of salary ranges and policies around benefits, bonuses and severance.

Well, it did pass, and we saw meaningful changes made in executive salary structures on these government agencies and boards. Yes, it's true that some people had to learn to adjust to a mere six-figure salary. I was curious what those salaries actually look like today. The member opposite who introduced this bill did so in the House yesterday with a claim that the existing legislation is restrictive – I mean, I would kind of hope so – and that it prevents institutions from attracting qualified staff.

"What kind of paltry salaries must be on offer for these positions?" I wondered. What does a director at the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission make? Well, it turns out it's well over a quarter million dollars. That one rings in at about \$350,000. At Alberta Innovates a VP will pull in \$250,000 and a nice \$40,000 benefits package. An AESO VP makes a cool \$400,000 but only \$30,000 on that benefits package, folks. These aren't even the highest salaries at these organizations, where a CEO making upwards of half a million dollars a year isn't unheard of. To be honest, Mr. Speaker, reading through the sunshine list was hard for me.

In my riding of Calgary-Beddington I'm talking to folks who are making salaries much closer to the provincial average. I was curious about that, so I browsed through the average median salary of the folks that I'm more likely to rub shoulders with. A plumber can pull in around \$70,000 a year – pretty good – a paramedic around \$90,000. A postal worker – and this is not an easy job by any stretch. Like, I cannot be the only person who turns into an indoor cat as soon as the first snow flies. Now, that postal worker is clearing under \$60,000. A civil engineer – the folks who make sure that the infrastructure of our lives stays standing – has an average salary of \$92,000. These jobs all require hard work. They require education. They require training, dedication, and the pursuit of excellence.

5:40

You know, another article, and this is one I read today. This was a CBC article just published last week on November 1. Again, I'll table this article tomorrow in the House here. This article was titled New Bill Could Change Compensation for Alberta Public Sector Executives, Non-union Staff. Now, in this article the minister explains that the request he gets for more money comes particularly from postsecondary institutions. These are the institutions where we saw some of those executive salaries creeping up into that seven-figure range before the introduction of the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act.

I've spent a bit of time on campuses recently. I had a chance to do some visits over the summer and into the fall. I really love connecting with students and getting to be back on the campus of my alma mater. One thing that I didn't hear from that population was a lot of concern about the salaries of the executives. What I heard were concerns about the rising cost of tuition. It's not clear how jacking up the salaries of university executives will address that. I heard about record high rates of food bank access for grad students. I heard about struggles to find housing.

At the core of the problem with this bill is that it simply isn't focused on the real needs of Albertans, the people who come into my office, who write me letters, who stop me in the Superstore aisles. I can't go grocery shopping without getting dressed anymore. These people are not talking to me about executive salaries at boards, agencies, and commissions. They are talking about pensions, though. They're telling me loud and clear about how they want their retirement to be secure. They're talking to me

about housing, right? They're seniors who are on fixed incomes, who are facing rent increases of \$200, \$300, \$400 a month, the kind of rent increases that mean that all luxuries are being stripped from their lives. Vacation plans are cancelled. No little extra treats at the grocery store; no little block of brie anymore. The winter boots have to last another and then another and then another season. You know, families in my constituency and certainly all of Alberta want to see the government bring forward meaningful solutions to make life more affordable for them, not to make life more affordable for hand-picked board members.

I also want to raise that money really isn't the only thing and is perhaps not even the most important thing to motivate workers. Some of you will know about this, certainly my colleagues with a background in psychology. It's called self-determination theory. Self-determination theory is a framework for understanding human motivation. What it says is that we have three main psychological needs to support optimal motivation in the workplace, and those three things are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. That's having a sense of control and choice, feeling capable and effective in the workplace, and feeling connected and valued.

When we are solely looking at compensation for these roles at agencies, boards, and commissions and not the workplace culture, I really have to ask myself: who are the people we want in these roles? Who should be running the show at our institutes of higher learning, at organizations like Alberta Innovates? Do we want people who are seeking out challenges, people who want to flex their capabilities, people who will learn and grow and foster environments of continuous learning and growth, or are we simply looking for people who want a fat paycheck and a cushy benefits package?

I would just like to end with a few numbers here because these are some numbers that I think should be higher on the priority list for this government rather than the sky-high rates they're paying their buddies. Fifteen dollars: that's the hourly minimum wage in Alberta, unchanged since the Alberta New Democrats heard the needs of Albertans and gave them a much-needed raise; \$84,000, that's how much you need to earn in Calgary to be able to afford to pay rent; \$553,000, that is the average home price in Calgary. With prices like that, only the board members whose pockets you're filling can afford them.

Thank you, everyone. I would really encourage the members in this House to vote against Bill 5, Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023.

Thank you for your time.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is on his feet.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. Now, Mr. Speaker, if I offered you a job that paid you \$500,000 a year to do zero work for two years, you would be a fool not to take it. You would be a terrible manager of the public purse if you offered executives that worked for you that kind of pay package, and that is exactly the kind of pay package that the University of Alberta president received when I was Minister of Advanced Education. In 2016 Indira Samarasekera earned over \$500,000 for doing zero work at the University of Alberta. In 2017 she also earned over \$500,000 to do zero work at the University of Alberta. Now, why is that the case?

Well, the practice of paying university presidents grew so out of control under the PC government that these kinds of fat pay packages were routine for university presidents, and it was so obscene, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Alberta threw the PCs out on their behinds

in 2015 and elected a government that committed to bringing in fair public-sector compensation, and in fact we did that.

Now, it's interesting to hear the members for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright and Calgary-Lougheed talk about leveling the playing field: oh, we're only going to be allowing universities to compete with other universities for attraction of the top talent in the country. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The maximum salary for the University of Alberta president and the University of Calgary president right now is \$558,750. That's right on the government's website, and that is the pay package that I brought in when I was minister. That is more money than the president of the University of Toronto makes. That's more money than the president of McGill University makes. That's more money than the university president at the University of British Columbia makes. In fact, at \$558,750, the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary presidents make more money than any other university president in the entire country.

What is this government saying to the students at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary? That their tuition has to go up so that presidents' pay packages can go up, Mr. Speaker, and that is not fair. How much are they likely to go up? Well, we only have to look to the past, and I will refer again to Indira Samarasekera, who, when she left the University of Alberta in 2015, earned more than a million dollars. That is more than the president of Harvard University makes today. The sixth-ranked university in Canada was paying their president more than Harvard University. Let that sink in for a minute.

The members opposite are saying: "You know what? We need to go back to those days. We need to make sure that our university presidents can earn a million dollars a year." What's even more offensive than that is that not only was she making a million dollars a year, but when Indira Samarasekera renegotiated her contract with the University of Alberta in 2010, she worked into her contract not only a million-dollar pay package but a \$200,000 profit on a house that she had bought four years prior. When she moved to assume the presidency at the University of Alberta, she bought a house in the neighbourhood for \$750,000, and when she renegotiated her contract with the University of Alberta in 2010, she sold it to the university for \$930,000, a tidy profit of \$200,000 that didn't even show up in her annual compensation. That's on top of the million dollars a year that she took home from 2010 to 2015. And that's exactly the kind of compensation that these guys want to bring back. It is shameful, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

Now, I also want to remind members, because the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed were saying: we're only making it fair for hard-working Albertans. Well, Mr. Speaker, I just looked through the annual compensation list for Athabasca University. Now, former president Peter Scott made almost \$400,000 a year, which is weird because he didn't even live in Alberta. He took the job at Athabasca University and never set foot in the province. And that is, again, the kind of pay packages and the people that this government wants to hike, all while raising tuition by 30 per cent. The University of Alberta has had their budget cut by \$400 million; they could afford to buy 400 presidents for that much under their new pay package.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I've been spending a lot of time on campus, as my friend from Calgary-Beddington has as well. You know what the average grad student makes at the University of Alberta? Two thousand dollars a month. It's \$24,000 a year. That's one-twentieth of the salary of the university president. And unlike the university presidents, the grad students are the ones who do the real work around the universities. [interjections] Yeah. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the call. I invite other members to join in the debate when it's their turn.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Grad students work long and hard hours. They're TA-ing. They have to do lab work in a lot of cases. They are the ones who are burnishing the reputations of the professors who employ them. It's unfair. I think that every time a Nobel prize in chemistry or physics is handed out, the recipients don't always acknowledge the grad students, who are doing the real work in those labs, that earned that work. But grad students only got a 1.5 per cent pay increase in the last year at the University of Alberta. One point five per cent.

You know, I've got a friend who's a grad student at the University of Alberta right now. She just moved into a basement suite in Bonnie Doon. Now, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, there is no better place to live than the neighbourhood of Bonnie Doon, but for the privilege of living in a basement suite in Bonnie Doon, she is paying almost \$2,000 a month. On her grad student salary, that leaves her \$400 a month to cover groceries, transportation, clothing, all of the other expenses. Now, how is it fair that a grad student who's earning \$24,000 a year only gets a 1.5 per cent pay increase while this government is bringing in legislation that is going to give somebody who's already earning \$558,750 a year potentially a 100 per cent pay increase? That's not fair, and I can't believe that the members opposite can stand up with a straight face and defend the kind of pay packages . . . [interjection] I recognize my friend from Edmonton-Glenora.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I've taken some time to reflect on the good work that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did when he was the Minister of Advanced Education, and I certainly appreciate the work that he did to try to reflect the values of Alberta's NDP in the compensation packages we had for postsecondary executives. I'm hoping that maybe he can also elaborate on some of the things that he and the NDP government did that maybe the UCP government might want to do to address affordability for the students on campus since they're so concerned about the affordability of executives making over half a million dollars a year.

Thank you very much to my hon. colleague for the work he's done on this file in the past, and hopefully he can give some ideas to the current government to help make sure that postsecondary students, including the grad students who are TA-ing and RA-ing right now, could have done to help them make ends meet in, of course, a very difficult economic time, which we're in right now, in the province of Alberta. Through you, Mr. Speaker, of course, to my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Glenora for that question. When I was Minister of Advanced Education, I worked hard to protect the pocketbooks of students. We froze tuition for four years when we brought in our tuition compensation law. When we brought in our tuition framework in 2008, we made sure that tuition increases could only increase with the cost of living and only with consultation with students.

We also required that universities provide transparency around the mandatory noninstructional fees that they brought in. Transparency, Mr. Speaker, that the former Minister of Advanced Education, who's now the Education minister, refused to enforce. In fact, we heard loud and clear from the University of Calgary Students' Union over a number of years that they never got transparency on the mandatory noninstructional fees that students at the University of Calgary were faced with.

Not only that, but as Minister of Advanced Education I was happy to keep student loan interest rates at prime rate, saving students who took out student loans thousands of dollars over the term of their loans. This minister jacked up interest rates quite unfairly on student loans. He should be ashamed of himself. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but for the Alberta student grant program, he just arbitrarily decided to halt payments because it was in too high a demand, and he ended up not spending \$16 million that he had set aside in that, much less promised it to the students of Alberta. I can assure all members of the House that when I was minister, we spent all of the money on student aid that was allocated . . . [interjections] That's right. We did. Exactly. Yeah. I hear from the member . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I appreciate that the hon. member, my good friend and colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, evokes a certain level of reaction from some members of the Assembly. He's still entitled to the call, and he's the only one that has it.

Mr. Schmidt: If my friend from Fort McMurray knew so much about Alberta universities, why was it that he got his law degree from Bond University in Australia, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. I have a very difficult time attaching the relevance of where the hon. minister's degree was to this particular piece of legislation. Perhaps if the hon. member stayed to the debate before the Assembly, the decorum would also improve.

The hon. member has the call.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm interested in nothing more than decorum. [interjections] I am interested in nothing more than decorum.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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