



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 13, 2024

Day 24

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Al-Guneid
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McDougall
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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon is the Assembly's official mascot and Alberta's official mammal, the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, aptly named Rocky the Ram. He was named by students participating in the School at the Legislature program and officially became the Legislature mascot in 2017. Rocky has been a fixture at many Family Day, Canada Day, and other family-friendly events. Rocky loves to help connect people to our parliament. He can often be found engaging visitors, posing for pictures, helping introduce people to public tours, educational resources, and interactive and engaging spaces at the Legislative Assembly visitor centre.

A few interesting factoids about bighorn sheep include that bighorn sheep are gregarious animals, forming herds of around 100 individuals, although they usually organize themselves into smaller groups of eight to 10. They're best known for their affinity of settling disagreements by butting heads. No wonder that Rocky feels so at home here. I ask that you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us in the Speaker's gallery are very good friends of the hon. the Member for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Caitrin and Johannes Junker are very close family friends. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Hoffman: It's my honour to introduce the students from Constable Daniel Woodall school. They're in grade 6. They're with their teacher Craig Schmidt, and I hear that they are smart, funny, talented, and incredibly hard-working from the MLA for Edmonton-South West. On his behalf, thank you so much for being here in the Legislature. Please rise and receive this warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 17 representatives from Team Alberta Crops. This group represents a working collaboration between seven Alberta crop commissions including beekeepers, canola, grains, pulse, seed, sugar beet, and potato growers of Alberta. This team supports and improves the success of Alberta's farmers. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly half the delegation of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, including Shauna Feth, Dana

Severson, Jason Leslie, River McDonald, Robin Bobocel, Pattie Pavlov, Nicole Krill, Marcie Mazurenko, and Dawn LeMaistre. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Naheed Nenshi, three-time mayor of Calgary and, more importantly, my constituent. He is renowned for his public service, gaining numerous accolades such as the World Mayor Prize in 2014, and now he's running to be the leader of Alberta's Official Opposition. I ask Mr. Nenshi to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is next.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Lina Chinchilla. Lina is my bachelor of social work student in my constituency office doing her field placement, and I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce the other half of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. Please rise as I say your names: Chelsea Besuijen, Heidi Dubé, Layne Gardner, Cord Spero, Tanya Oliver, Jon Anderson, Serina Parsons, Kevin Farrell, and Jennifer Garries. Thank you so much for all your service to our province.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly a great group that's come up from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre today under the leadership of Rafael Staudinger, who is the VP of youth on my constituency board. He's brought up several dozen people from the riding. I'd ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Members' Statements

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

Electric Power System

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's electricity future is looking bright. Last week the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, also known as Bill 22, was proclaimed. This will lower Albertans' utility bills and make our grid more reliable by limiting the need to build new transmission and distribution infrastructure and enabling Alberta businesses to build more energy storage and self-supply with the ability to export.

Under the NDP the Balancing Pool lost \$1.3 billion. Our government is standing up for Albertans by following through on our commitment to wind down the Balancing Pool. The NDP failed to address long-term issues in our electricity market and raised costs for Alberta ratepayers. Our government is putting Albertans first by setting a clear and responsible path forward for our electricity system. We took an agriculture-first approach to renewable power development and have ensured that municipalities are included in the process. These new policies were supported by Alberta canola, Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Sugar Beet Growers, reeves from around Alberta, and countless other rural municipalities and

grassroots organizations. We are curbing the impact of economic withholding on Alberta's utility bills, and we are making sure that Albertans can access the power they need when they actually need it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Renewable Energy Development

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, it was amusing to witness the budget pomp and circumstance, but my job was to mute the noise and focus on what story the numbers tell us. The budget missed the opportunities to signal investments in a low-carbon future. We are in a race to attract low-carbon investments. Capital is flowing in places where there is policy certainty and where jurisdictions signal that they understand we live in a climate-conscious future. The budget shows \$12.5 billion in revenue from bitumen royalty. This is impressive, and it also highlights Alberta's revenue diversity problem. The budget lacked financial measures that are almost at no cost to taxpayers such as carbon contracts for difference to show investment certainty, emerging technologies, and to help us diversify our revenue.

M. le Président, la transition énergétique est en marche. L'urgence donc consiste à construire le système énergétique de demain, tout en continuant à fournir l'énergie dont le monde a besoin aujourd'hui. Pour contenir le réchauffement climatique bien en dessous de deux degrés, il faut baisser drastiquement nos émissions. On a besoin d'un futur qui soit sain, vert et équitable. Il faut investir dans l'énergie renouvelable. C'est une option pratique et abordable pour l'Alberta.

Par contre, le gouvernement UCP a décidé de mettre un moratoire sur l'énergie renouvelable. Ce budget est une occasion ratée pour un futur durable. Il faut créer une économie florissante avec de faibles émissions de carbone, et un avenir énergétique propre. Chaque pas compte sur le chemin de la transition énergétique.

Merci et bon Mois de la Francophonie!

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

1:40

Small Business

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was fortunate to be back home and spend time with small-business owners in my constituency. Many stories were not only compelling but heartbreaking: enormous financial debt, feelings of failure, and no longer having a voice. Today I'm grateful to be a voice for hard-working families and small-business owners. On behalf of myself and our government, we will not let history repeat itself.

We're still seeing the terrible effects of the COVID response, including a mental health epidemic, learning gaps, inflation, and continued financial troubles for small businesses. A recent Restaurants Canada report said that more than 50 per cent of food service businesses are either losing money or barely breaking even. The forced closure of small businesses has left a massive hole in society. While members opposite advocated for door-to-door vaccinations, hard-working Albertans were struggling to keep their businesses afloat.

I know too well how daunting it is for affected small-business owners to deal with costs, debts, and big banks. Four years ago today was the last operating day of my business. To this day the Bank of Montreal refuses to meet me in person, look me in the eye to discuss the debt I owe for expanding my business in 2020. Most of the world has moved on. How can Albertans move on when small businesses have been left with an unfair percentage of this burden? Recently I met a restaurant owner who has incurred over a million dollars in personal debt, which he refers to as the COVID tax, not to mention lost revenue in the millions.

What happens when we turn around and there are no small businesses left? We become a bleak existence run by large corporations. As MLA for Calgary-Lougheed I will continue to advocate for hard-working Albertans for a diverse economy, vibrant communities, and a thriving province.

Thank you.

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

School Construction in Calgary

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the NDP 244 schools were built or modernized; 244. It's a record that this side of the House is proud of. We are proud because we actually focused on building schools as opposed to putting up signs in empty fields or issuing press releases promising schools that weren't ready, like the previous Conservative governments. We did this because on this side of the House we know that supporting students is one of the best investments that a government can make.

That is why it is so disappointing to see this UCP government so undervalue Alberta students, especially those in Calgary. The Calgary board of education has added 13,000 new students over the past two years, enough to fill 22 elementary schools. But this budget only builds one new school in Calgary, just one for the largest school board in western Canada, serving 125,000 students.

Albertans deserve better. Students, parents, teachers deserve a government that will commit to investing in them, building them the schools they need so that students can get a world-class education. They are not getting that from the UCP, who have been laser focused on meddling with Albertans' retirement, hiking their friends' salaries, getting bigger and more expensive gifts for themselves, and more. It is disappointing, Mr. Speaker, but Albertans see that this government is not interested in keeping their promises to build schools or supporting Alberta families otherwise.

But let me assure these families that I'm joined by 13 other fantastic MLAs from Calgary who will not stop standing up for the students and teachers who deserve so much more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Support for Families

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents have always been the primary caregivers of their children, full stop. Even the United Nations say that they recognize that parents are responsible for the upbringing of our children. I couldn't agree more with that statement. I also couldn't disagree more with the NDP's desire to drive a wedge between parents and their children as it's related to health care and education decisions that are made in their day-to-day lives.

Our UCP government values strong families and the essential roles that they play in our society. I support this as a parent of two young daughters, Amelia and Charlotte, and I couldn't be more proud of them in all that they do today. Parents should be involved in the upbringing and education of our children. I can't believe that there are some who see this to be a controversial problem within society right now. This is why it pains me to see the radical left trying to politicize the empowerment of parents, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to stand with my United Conservative caucus and the Alberta government in supporting families and the well-being of our children. On this side of the Chamber we will never apologize for supporting caring parents, and we can do this while supporting our children and youth.

This is a crucial and just path, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to be on it. I know my colleagues are proud to be on it. And to the parents and families out in Alberta: we stand with you and won't let you down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Affordable Housing

Ms Goehring: Five hundred and fifty: that is the number of Albertans going to be added to the rent supplement this year. While I'm happy for those Albertans, I'm deeply disappointed that the minister would insinuate that this is a real action fix to the affordability crisis. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans go home after a day of work and look at their bank accounts, feeling hopeless. They don't have savings because that is a luxury that they can't afford under the UCP. What costs do Albertans cut when they are down to the essentials? Mortgage or rent? Utilities? Gas? Medications that would be free if the UCP government stopped fighting with the federal government? Groceries?

We have asked this government time and time again to pass the housing security act to help these Albertans. What have they done instead? They brag about how they are fixing the housing crisis even though they can't meet the housing targets that they created. Albertans do not think the UCP is fixing the housing crisis. Albertans who just got notice of a 50 per cent rent increase are not thanking the UCP. Albertans who are worried that they will never own a home are not writing the minister to tell him: keep up the great work. Albertans who are trapped in a cycle of nights in shelters and days on the streets are not happy with the Premier. Albertans who have lost their homes because the mortgage became unaffordable due to the cost-of-living crisis are not phoning the minister to say: hey, thanks for all those housing press conferences.

I know this because they tell me and my colleagues every day how scared and tired they are. They tell us they are in desperate need of support, and they send us the cold-hearted response e-mails that they get from the UCP when they e-mail about the housing crisis.

Albertans are frustrated because the UCP would rather pick fights than fix problems. The housing security act would actually help Albertans, but again this government would rather pick a fight than pass a bill. Albertans need us to step up. Why is that so hard for the UCP to understand?

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Bill 11

Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise here today to introduce Bill 11, the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

This legislation is about two things: protecting the safety of Albertans and helping augment front-line policing. The new legislation, if passed, guarantees that offenders out on bail are held accountable with the use of electronic monitoring to track them. Second, it guarantees the creation of a new, independent agency police service. The new agency enabled by this legislation would perform policelike functions done by the Alberta sheriffs, continuing the work in augmenting the current policing model.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Labour Supply

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it's now clear there wasn't a single UCP campaign promise this Premier ever intended to keep. During the campaign the Premier promised \$1,200 cash for 14,000 people, explicitly including health care and child care workers. However, what the Premier introduced yesterday helps 2,000 people, not 14,000, uses complicated tax credits instead of cash, and excludes health care and child care workers. To the Premier: why is it so hard for her to keep even the simplest of promises?

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

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member opposite is talking about the Alberta Is Calling tax credit, which is actually more generous than what we were thinking we would put in place, at \$5,000, because that's the feedback that we heard; that would be enough to be able to incentivize the skilled workers that we need to come to Alberta. This is phase 1. We have 2,000 spots. We're looking forward to seeing people come and take advantage of that tax credit because we've got a lot of construction that we need to do. With the conclusion of this Dow Chemical plant, we need 6,000 to 8,000 additional workers, and this is going to help with that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised 14,000 spots. The only thing that's changed is that we've gone from what the Premier said she'd do to what she's actually doing or, once again, not doing. Of course we need skilled trade workers – of course – but this government needs to give their heads a collective shake if they have forgotten Alberta's desperate need for health care workers. To the Premier: she made the promise during the campaign because she knew Albertans understand the need for more health care workers, so why abandon these Albertans and her promises now?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite constantly talk to us about making sure that we're building enough houses to keep up with growth. That's one of the things we're doing. That's why we're prioritizing the skilled workers, to be able to build the houses. In addition, in the meetings that I have had with my fellow first ministers, we have come to an agreement not to try to poach each other's health care workers because every Premier across the country and every health care system is facing the same challenge that we have. Once we begin to stabilize our system and we see stabilization across the other systems, then we'll be able to expand the program further.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that other provinces are right now aggressively putting resources into recruiting health care workers and child care workers. In B.C. they're offering up to \$30,000 for nurses. In Ontario their strategy includes \$5,000 bonuses for personal support workers. But here in Alberta: uh-uh-uh. The UCP government just can't be bothered. To the Premier: instead of a competitive plan to recruit and retain health care workers, why is she only offering those Albertans who desperately need them another set of broken promises?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been re-elected for eight months. I know that maybe it's surprising to the members opposite,

but it's not usual for one hundred per cent of everything that you have promised to be implemented in the first eight months. We are going to be staging . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: As I explained, we are going to be staging the implementation of our Alberta Is Calling tax credit. The first one is \$5,000. We're looking forward to being able to attract 2,000 workers over the next three years, and there'll be more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has question 2.

Grassy Mountain Coal Project

Dr. Elmeligi: The Minister of Energy and Minerals keeps asserting that the AER is independent, yet he wrote a letter to the AER CEO saying that the Grassy Mountain coal mine should be considered an advanced project. The 2022 ministerial order defines an advanced project as one where a project summary has been submitted to determine if an EIA is required. The Grassy Mountain mines project summary and EIA are from 2015, and in 2021, before the ministerial order, that project was denied. Why won't the minister, who is, sadly, not here today, admit that he made a mistake and just . . . [interjections] What? I am sad he's not here. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Holy.

The hon. member will know that the reference to the presence or the absence of a member would be wildly inappropriate. Of course she wouldn't do that, no matter her personal feelings to the presence or the absence of a member, which is why the disruption has taken place. If you want to briefly conclude your question, I'm sure someone will be happy to address it.

Dr. Elmeligi: My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Why won't the minister admit that he made a mistake and just cancel this mine so we can move on?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the question. One thing that the NDP hasn't quite grasped yet is that there's no coal mine application on the table for Grassy Mountain. There is an application to drill a number of exploratory holes at that site. The application is before the AER and has not been approved as the opposition suggests. The AER will hold a public hearing on the drilling application where Albertans will be consulted. The NDP need to get their facts straight, and they need to quit trying to mislead Albertans. There is no application other than for the drilling, and that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. Well, the minister has met with the owner of Northback mines repeatedly over the last eight months, and shortly after their most recent meeting, on February 8, the minister directed the AER to advance the exploration proposal to public hearing. An investigation found that foreign coal mining companies knew about the UCP plans to rescind the coal policy before Albertans did, and the former minister of environment suggested that water allocations for the Oldman be redirected from irrigation to coal. How can the minister possibly assure Albertans that he has their best interests in mind and not those of a foreign-owned coal company?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. The opposition has got their facts all mixed up again. This site is considered an advanced project by AER. Advanced coal projects are allowed to make applications under the ministerial order. Now, I get a kick out of the NDP. They want us to interfere in some places and not interfere in other places. That sounds like – I don't know – maybe that's saying that they want to inhale and exhale at the same time. I guess that's what they're trying to do. But we're committed to not interfering with this process. This process is already in place. It's the same process that was in place when the NDP were in power.

Dr. Elmeligi: I'm not sure how many times we have to go over it. The mine was rejected. Anyways, Alberta is in a multiyear drought, and even if the exploration proposal isn't drawing new water, a new mine surely will. Research shows that even old mines continue to pollute waterways in the Crowsnest Pass with selenium. Water licence holders are being asked to create sharing agreements, and every Albertan is being asked to reduce water consumption. Our government is apparently committed to drought response, as reflected in the budget. Where is the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas on this issue? Why won't she put a stop to the mine?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate a question on the issue of drought as the drought that we will be facing this year will be extremely serious, and that's why we stepped up to take action early on. It is why we are having those discussions about reallocation and water sharing agreements. Why? Because, quite frankly, in the past, when we were in situations like this, like in 2001, that is what worked to get Alberta and all of our major industries and municipalities through those challenging times. Those discussions are going very well, and I'd also like to reiterate what my colleague just said: this drilling application will not use any water from any river or stream in the foothills. The application proposes to use water from an existing coal mine pond.

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Hayter: Mr. Speaker, a new study by the C.D. Howe Institute has raised serious red flags with this government's attack on the CPP benefits Albertans rely on. The study reviewed the government's own Alberta pension plan calculations and, to put it lightly, found those numbers deceptive. To quote the C.D. Howe report, "The numbers don't add up." It says that there are huge unanswered questions this government refuses to provide Albertans. Why is the UCP trying to get its hands on Albertans' CPP benefits when all the evidence suggests their scheme won't work?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'd like to clarify; it certainly is not a scheme. What we did was RFP a report. It came back that Morneau Shepell was the successful winner, now LifeWorks. We've released that report. The report digs into their interpretation of the federal legislation and what Alberta's asset withdrawal number would be. As the House is aware, since then the Chief Actuary is involved. They've involved three other actuarial firms to look at the analysis of the federal legislation. We expect a number in the fall.

Ms Hayter: The C.D. Howe report says that there are big problems with the UCP's pension rip-off scheme around portability. Right now, when a worker leaves one job and takes another, their CPP benefits are theirs because they earned them. No one knows what will happen to the benefits if someone moves here from another province, because the numbers don't add up, and no one knows what will happen if a worker is employed somewhere else and comes back to Alberta. So with all these unanswered questions, why would the UCP rip Albertans out of the CPP?

2:00

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

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear there's an active ongoing example of how it would work; it's called Quebec. They do this and they have since inception. Labour mobility happens all across the country. People work in Quebec and then they work in other provinces, and the benefits that belong to those people follow them. The same would happen here in Alberta.

Like I said, we're waiting for more information. We want to see the actuary's opinion not only on the interpretation of the legislation but also on the withdrawal number. Five billion dollars is what the LifeWorks report said that it has the potential to impact Alberta.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans don't want the UCP gambling with their pensions. They want a pension that travels with them from employer to employer even if they step outside of Alberta just to work for one single day. They don't want to juggle multiple pensions. They deserve a well-managed CPP, not one that C.D. Howe Institute says would be unstable if the UCP gets its hands on the fund investment to gamble with on their own pet projects. Why can't the UCP listen to Albertans and get their hands off our CPP?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, like I've said, like we've communicated to Albertans, we've paused engagement because we're waiting on this number. We heard from Albertans. They wanted more clarity. They wanted to know if the asset withdrawal number as depicted in the LifeWorks report was real. I'm very pleased the federal government has engaged with the Chief Actuary, and it feels like we're moving ahead to a place where we'll get their number in the fall. All anyone has ever wanted is clarity around this idea. This idea has been bounced around for a long time. Potential to have \$5 billion: the Alberta economy, Alberta families, Alberta businesses.

Budget 2024

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this UCP budget is built on broken promises. The UCP said anything and omitted everything just in order to get elected. They promised Albertans that they would not go after their pensions and then launched their scheme to gamble for the retirement security in their very first weeks of office. The Premier should have heard Albertans loud and clear by now: UCP, keep your hands off our pensions. Will she confirm that she's heard them loud and clear and back off this brazen pension grab?

Mr. Horner: It feels like *Groundhog Day* in here, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we've paused the engagement. We're listening to Albertans. They're seeking clarity. We've sought that from the federal

government. The federal Minister of Finance has engaged with the office of the Chief Actuary. They're in the process right now with three different actuarial firms to interpret that legislation, and we expect a number in the fall. You know, Albertans should expect that on something of this magnitude we would seek that clarity on their behalf. It's an ongoing conversation.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are facing the worst affordability crisis in a century, and this Premier and this UCP government are just making things worse with a budget built on broken promises. The UCP promised to make life more affordable, yet their budget is filled with increased taxes and fees, and the promised tax cut that was the centrepiece of their campaign is nowhere to be found. Can the Premier explain how Albertans should have any faith in this budget and this government when it breaks every promise that they ever make to the people of Alberta?

Mr. Horner: No, we're not breaking promises, Mr. Speaker; we're keeping multiple promises at once. We're balancing the budget while we're moving forward in a pragmatic way to bring forward the tax cut that was promised to Albertans. The budget clearly laid out that we would legislate it in 2025, that we would move to a 9 per cent, \$60,000 bracket in 2026 and a full 8 per cent bracket in 2027. To remind everyone, the indexation of the basic personal exemption: almost a billion dollars in savings to all Albertans this year.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this budget does not even begin to keep up with inflation and population growth, and we heard it in the budget estimates from the words of these very ministers. Essential services that we all rely on are forced to charge more fees and taxes and cut services. The inevitable result of this budget will simply force thousands of Albertans to make hard choices between buying groceries, making rent, paying their mortgages, or getting the prescriptions that they need. Does the Premier not see the consequences that this broken promise budget is having on Alberta families, or do they simply not care?

Mr. Horner: They got it all wrong, Mr. Speaker. We care so much; we're going to do the right thing. Just like every other Albertan managing their own finances, we're investing for the future while we're managing our debt, while we're prioritizing the dollars that we have into the areas of most need. If you looked at the budget, probably something that stands out to you is the highest per cent increases being in Health and Education, an overall operating expense of 3.9 per cent but 4.4 in both Health and Education, a capital plan that has increased by \$2 billion that is dominated by schools in this year: 43 new schools to a capital plan.

Medical Laboratory Services

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, we recently learned that it will cost Alberta taxpayers \$97 million for the UCP's failed lab privatization project. The DynaLife debacle is just another example of UCP ideological waste. That cost is in addition to the \$23 million spent on starting the superlab and over \$12 million this government wasted to return the site to an empty field. Can the minister be honest and tell us if \$132 million is the final total of wasted tax dollars?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should know that DynaLife had a successful service provided to Albertans in Edmonton and north for decades. In fact, there was no reason when they won the RFP to believe that they couldn't handle Calgary and south. In fact, when it became apparent that there were issues,

we acted swiftly to make sure that we were increasing the services to Albertans, particularly in Calgary and south. Not only did we purchase DynaLife; we also have a revenue stream as well.

Dr. Metz: Given that DynaLife's expansion to Calgary and southern Alberta was a spectacular failure and the UCP's quest for privatization resulted in catastrophic wait times for basic lab services and given that the government cancelled the Alberta NDP's acquisition of DynaLife in 2019, before they went through this disaster of expansion, at a much more reasonable price for Albertans, is the minister willing to accept that we were correct to follow expert advice, or is the embarrassment from public humiliation too much to bear?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, when issues took place, we dealt with them swiftly. In fact, I'm happy to say that appointments in Calgary have increased from 16,766 weekly in May 2023 to 23,445 weekly in December 2023, a 40 per cent increase in appointments. We're going to continue to make sure that lab services across this province are the best in all of Canada. We are committed to making sure that we have what Albertans need right here in Alberta.

Dr. Metz: Given that the UCP cancelled the Alberta NDP's efforts to acquire DynaLife's assets and to improve medical lab services in Alberta, even calling the proposal ideologically driven, and given the UCP's ideological expansion in privatizing lab services just months later resulted in having to purchase this failed system, to the Health minister I ask: has this government changed their mind about this being ideological, or is this just a question of competence?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, having witnessed the members opposite's incompetence during the time period that they were in government, I fully understand how they can be, you know, upset with the fact that we're actually . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that they are upset with the fact that we are actually making improvements within our health . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. This isn't how it's supposed to work: I stand up, there's silence, and then it's permission for everyone to yell at the same time again.

The hon. the Minister of Health is the only one with the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They're upset that we are actually improving services for Albertans right across Alberta, not only in lab services but also in surgery wait times, also in ER and EMS. I could go on and on. We are going to make sure . . .

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

2:10 Homeless Supports

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, homelessness is a grave concern which has been increasingly affecting people in Alberta. We have heard reports of people living in tunnels in the Edmonton river valley, seen the effects of gang-operated drug markets and encampments growing across this province. We've seen police reports of weapons being found when these gang-operated drug markets have been taken down and evidence of significant human trafficking operations. To the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social

Services: how are you supporting individuals as they're displaced from these dangerous encampments?

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we heard loud and clear from the people of Edmonton and the Edmonton Police Service that they wanted to see help when it came to this important issue of encampments. Unlike the NDP, we did not want to continue to force homeless people to live in tents, being abused by drug dealers and others inside these dangerous encampments, which is why we brought forward our navigation centre. Over the last 60 days it has given over 2,000 different services to people that are facing homelessness, bringing them into housing, emergency supports, health care, addiction supports. That is a stark contrast with the NDP, who continue to want to make them live in caves in the river valley. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer and the news on the navigation centre. Given that these gang-operated drug markets represent a serious risk not only to public safety but also to the individuals who find themselves trapped in these encampments and given that the navigation centre has provided vital support to help individuals reintegrate into broader society, finding the financial, health care, housing, and addiction support they need, including support from our collaboration with our Treaty 6 leaders, can the minister please explain to the House why the NDP's plan to keep people in tents . . .

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's pretty clear why the NDP's plan would not work, because it wasn't working. People were losing their lives inside tents. They were being burned to death. They were being extorted. They were being abused. Minors were being sexually sold inside those encampments while the NDP campaigned to keep people in tents in minus 50. Shame on them. We've come forward with a process that cleans up Edmonton. It's removed 129 tonnes of garbage, made it safe to walk the streets of Edmonton, and we did it at the same time as helping the individuals who were in those encampments, and we're going to keep doing it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to that minister for that answer. Given that homelessness and public safety are certainly top of mind in my riding and my hometown of Slave Lake and further given your ministry's funding commitment to our 24/7 shelter operations, for which we're grateful both to you and our Premier for putting our money where our mouth is, and further given that the sites are unsafe environments, often posing a public safety risk to both those in them and the neighbourhoods they establish themselves in, can the same minister please share with us the impact the navigation centre has had on the city of Edmonton?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, almost every encampment has been torn down in the city of Edmonton, and they will continue to be torn down if they're brought up, making the city safer and allowing

Edmontonians to live their lives. At the same time as using the navigation and shelter systems and recovery programs that we have in this province, it's providing real solutions to these individuals. Over the last two months inside the navigation centre almost 600 individuals went through it, received 2,000 different services, including housing, and we're going to continue to do that, unlike the NDP, who want to force them to live inside tents.

Red Deer Regional Hospital Expansion

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, finding a P3 project that has been a success is harder than finding a needle in a haystack. The UCP should have done the right thing years ago and got shovels in the ground on the Red Deer hospital expansion. Will the minister explain to the people of Red Deer why this government would rather pursue risky and ultimately more costly approaches to a project that could have been done by now?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, how ironic that the members opposite are talking about the Red Deer hospital, that they actually took off the capital list during their time period. The people of Red Deer, which I gladly represent – and one of the reasons I'm here today is because of the Red Deer hospital and the fact that the members opposite took it off the list, delayed it unnecessarily. We have not had the services in Red Deer that we deserve, and we are going to get it now. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Deol: Given that P3s are only good for delays, danger, and damages, none of which are things we would want to see in a hospital or ambulatory care unit, and given that the executive director of the Red Deer hospital described this announcement as, quote, disappointing, saying that they do not want the same P3 problems to happen in Red Deer, can the minister assure the people of Red Deer that they will scrap their ridiculous P3 plan and build the hospital like they were supposed to?

Member LaGrange: I can promise the people of Red Deer that we are going to build the Red Deer hospital expansion, a \$1.8 billion expansion, the largest cost of any hospital facility within all of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, because we've been underserved in Red Deer for a very long time. When the members opposite took our hospital off the capital list, that was a disgrace and a disservice to the people of Red Deer. We will not have that happen again.

Mr. Deol: Given that our health care is in crisis, one that cannot be fixed in privatization, and given that Alberta's hospitals are at the brink, duct-taping tarps to walls to fit more patients, and given that the minister cannot name a P3 that has actually worked, should doctors be adding duct tape to their shopping list, or is this government going to actually build a safe and secure hospital that is not a P3? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, when I was a school board trustee, the P3 issue was not the facility; it was the contracts. I'm thankful to the ministers of Infrastructure that have dealt with those contract issues. Now I'm confident that we will build a quality building in Red Deer, a quality ambulatory care centre as part of the \$1.8 billion hospital. I invite everyone who wants to hear about this wonderful project to come to Red Deer Thursday night. There is an information session happening, and everyone will hear about the project. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Support for LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier stated in this House that there is no place in Alberta for hate. She described her government as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA community. All the while she gave the green light to one of her MLAs to host an event with someone who attacked teachers, claiming that they were showing kids pornography. Some ally. If the Premier's words are to be taken seriously, will she just ask her government caucus to actually be allies and pull down the event?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise that the members opposite don't want to talk about government policy because they don't want to get called out for the fact that they have no plan for the future of the province. It's why voters last year rejected them again, for a second time. What they don't want to talk about is this government's incredible record of having 17,000 new jobs created in February, including another \$840 million put into housing to deal with the homelessness crisis. Also, recognizing that Alberta is the best place to live, play, and visit, the members opposite don't want to acknowledge it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Tejada: Unless you're part of the queer community.

Given that this isn't the first event that we've seen of this type and that previously the same member had an event with a member of this Chamber who compared having transgender children in schools to feces in cookies, given that this member also warmly celebrated the Premier's policy changes when it comes to transgender youth in Alberta and given that true allies call out this kind of reprehensible rhetoric – they don't host events giving it a platform – can the Premier confirm if these views guide the direction her government is setting? If they don't, can she just call for it to be cancelled?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, there is no place for hate or intolerance in our province, and Alberta's government stands with the LGBTQ community and Albertans, and we continue . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Government House Leader has the call.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans will continue to be an ally for this community. That's why we have a minister whose mandate letter directs her to work with and support the LGBTQ community and who serves as the community's primary contact within cabinet. The minister is on the ground attending events, making sure that community is being heard, and this government respects all Albertans. [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order.

Member Tejada: Quite a change from what I'm hearing.

Given that on election night the Premier claimed that it was time for us to move forward together as Albertans but since that election the mandate has been to divide Albertans, with the Premier standing by MLAs who endorse this kind of baseless and insulting smear on teachers and comments that are deeply hurtful to the 2SLGBTQIA community, and given that to be an ally, you actually have to support the community, not inflame the rhetoric, will the Premier

stand up, shut down the rhetoric, ask that this event be cancelled, or is the Premier's claim to be an ally just more empty words?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful the members opposite want to talk about election night in 2023 because it was the second time in as many elections that Albertans rejected their policies. If we go back to 2015-2019, it's pretty clear that the NDP screwed up the economy. They screwed up agriculture. They screwed up housing. They screwed up the environment. Heck, they even screwed up renewables. They couldn't balance a budget if their life depended on it. That's why they're in opposition, and that's why they're going to stay there no matter who their leader is. [interjections]

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

A point of order is noted at 2:21.

Electric Power System

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, the federal government's reckless clean electricity regulations endanger our province's ability to provide Albertans with electricity from natural gas generators. All Albertans are now keenly aware of the disastrous decisions from 2015 to 2019 that led to the rapid shutdown of baseload power generation and left our province desperate for the reliable baseload energy we need so that we don't have to worry about rolling blackouts when the sun isn't shining and the wind isn't blowing. Will the Minister of Affordability and Utilities please tell the House whether more baseload natural gas electricity is coming online soon, and if so, how it will make our power grid more reliable?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that hon. member for the question. I'm proud to say that despite the federal government's unconstitutional attempts to stifle our economic growth and endanger Alberta's grid reliability, more natural gas generation is actually coming online. The Cascade power project, for example, will produce 900 megawatts of power, and it's coming online this month. This dispatchable baseload power provided by Cascade will ensure greater grid reliability and continue to lower Albertans' utility bills. That's what a responsible government does for its people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that bringing new generation online increases the supply of electricity and given that increasing the supply of electricity should reduce the cost of electricity and given this government's commitment to ensuring life becomes more affordable for Albertans, I ask the same minister to please tell the Assembly what this government is doing to lower the cost of Albertans' utility bills.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for another great question. Unlike the NDP, who saddled Alberta taxpayers with the carbon tax and millions of dollars of coal phase-out settlements, our government is committed to ensuring

electricity is reliable and affordable. We introduced new regulations that protect Albertans from the impacts of economic withholding, and we have also proclaimed legislation that will enable energy storage and promote self-supply and export. Our government is modernizing Alberta's electricity system and lowering Albertans' utility bills. That's what we do every day.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the minister for his answer and for his dedication in fixing this electricity system. Given that the majority of transmission and distribution infrastructure is actually located in rural Alberta and given that there are fewer ratepayers in rural Alberta to pay for this infrastructure and further given that for the last 18 years there has been no incentive for generators to build power close to where it is needed, does the minister have any plans to alleviate the impact of high transmission and distribution costs specifically on rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to that member for his work for his constituency. Unlike the members opposite, our government truly understands the issues rural Albertans face. That's why over the past year we've been working tirelessly to improve Alberta's transmission and distribution planning, making sure that ratepayers are not left holding the bag. Our new regulations enable energy storage, helping to provide nonwire solutions, and this is just the start of our work to ensure that Alberta's grid is reliable, affordable, and sustainable for generations to come.

Social Workers

Ms Sigurdson: March is Social Work Month, so this is an excellent time to highlight the important work of social workers. Children and Family Services is one of the main employers of social workers, whose work requires a high level of professionalism and mastery to manage complex cases involving children. Previously, human service workers who were hired holding a bachelor of social work degree identified as HSW 5s. Now, HSW 3s are being hired and only require a related degree. How come the minister downgraded the credentials of children's services workers?

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

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take this opportunity to highlight the incredible work that our staff at Children and Family Services do to look after so many children right across the entire province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we're doing everything we can to help support our workforce here in Alberta to make sure that they have the tools to be able to look after those children that are most in need. I'm pleased to say that between 2022 and 2023 more than 450 new officials have come onboard with our ministry. This is going to make such an incredible difference to so many children right across the entire province.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the minister said that they were struggling to recruit registered social workers in the 2023 estimates and given that the UCP government created academic seats when nurses were needed and given that additional academic seats were also created when doctors and early childhood educators were needed, why hasn't the UCP created more academic seats for social

workers so that vulnerable children have regulated professionals caring for them?

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. As I stated, our officials at CFS do such an incredible job looking after children. We have an aggressive hiring policy when it comes to looking for qualified workers because we realize these staff do an incredible job looking after our children that really need all the help that they can get. I look forward to working with the Minister of Advanced Education to look for ways that we can fast-track additional social workers here into the ministry. They just do incredible work, and I'm proud to support them.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that when HSW 3s are hired, they do not need to be registered professionals and given that Children's Services' work involves extremely vulnerable families and should have regulated professionals employed to carry out the significant responsibilities in keeping children safe and given that last year 49 children died who were receiving government support, the deadliest year on record, why is the minister putting vulnerable children at further risk by employing unregulated professionals?

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The death of any child is a horrible event, and my family grieves alongside any of the families affected by any of the children that died while in care. That's why in this budget that we propose in 2024, we have increases to our child intervention budget, and this will help support our workers, support our incredible workforce, so they can continue to do the incredible work that they do to keep our children safe. Every child deserves to be protected and supported, and we have an incredible staff at Children and Family Services that is doing the job.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

Rural Health Care Professional Recruitment and Retention

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's health care is experiencing increased wait times for surgery and critical physician shortages across the province. This is especially true in rural Alberta such as in my beautiful constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. Can the Minister of Health please share with the Assembly what actions are being taken to increase the quantity of family physicians practising in rural areas, and how are we improving the quality of health care for rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Through our plans of increasing the number of seats in nursing and medical programs and forming regional training hubs both in Lethbridge and in Grande Prairie, we are providing more opportunities for students to train outside the metropolitan regions. This initiative will add more than 100 additional Alberta-trained physicians to be ready to practise annually. We remain committed to finding different ways to better serve rural communities and ensure that Albertans get the care they need when and where they need it. We're very committed to this.

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

2:30

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister for that answer. Given that rural Albertans significantly contribute to our province's energy and agricultural sectors and that their health and well-being are essential and given that our government is committed to ensuring that all Albertans in all corners of this province have access to high-quality health care where and when they need it, can the same minister please tell the House what steps are being taken to attract and retain physicians and nurse practitioners in those areas?

Member LaGrange: I'm very happy to do so, Mr. Speaker. A key priority for our government is to address challenges in attracting, training, and retaining health professionals in areas of need. Through the health workforce strategy we are allocating \$158 million to support multiple strategies to recruit and retain health care workers. As part of our MAPS initiative \$57 million is being allocated over three years to provide family doctors and nurse practitioners with additional support to help manage costs to the increasing number of patients that they see. We need to do more, and we are doing more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the minister. Given that Alberta is refocusing the health care system to one that equally supports Albertans and physicians and given that our government is working with the Alberta Medical Association to establish a new payment model that better reflects a physician's time and experience, can the same minister please explain how the new payment model may differ from what is currently in use?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working with the Alberta Medical Association to establish a new payment structure that is better able to support comprehensive primary care. This is in addition to the \$257 million previously announced to immediately support family physicians, which is also in addition to the increases that were recently negotiated with the new contract for physicians with the AMA. By supporting a new payment model physicians will be better compensated for their expertise, and it will also ensure that comprehensive patient care will remain a top priority.

Arts and Culture Funding

Member Ceci: Arts are an incredibly important facet of life we all turn to in some way whether for work, entertainment, or simply joy. However, the UCP have continuously over the last several years slashed arts funding. The funding provided for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in this year's budget does not make up for all previous five years of cuts and is nowhere near what is needed to sustain artists and barely meets the needs of artists after they finish paying for everything else. Can the minister explain why the funding for the arts suffered so dramatically under the previous UCP government?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of arts and culture.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to make the members opposite happy. They were advocating for more funding for the arts and got it but still aren't happy. Let's talk about Alberta artists and how they form the basis of the cultural fabric of our province. They

enhance quality of life, create jobs, and share our unique culture and history, and our lives are richer for their work. Budget 2024, if passed, will increase funding to support the arts to \$33.1 million, including a \$4.5 million increase to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. This is part of a three-year project to bring Alberta's funding to \$40 million, in line with other provinces.

Member Ceci: We added \$5 million in our third year through a recession.

Given that in a recent trip to meet with artists and cultural institutional stakeholders from Lethbridge and southern Alberta numerous calls for additional supports for the arts and arts venues were expressed repeatedly from those in attendance at round-tables and gatherings and given that these stakeholders have expressed a need for a new arts centre in Lethbridge, can the minister acknowledge if she has heard those same concerns and share what plans she might have to address them?

Ms Fir: Thank you to the member for that question. I, too, have had numerous round-tables and met with dozens if not hundreds of artists both via large round-tables and individual meetings. Budget 2024, if passed, makes significant commitments to the arts for all Albertans. Yes. This budget delivers new cultural capital projects in Calgary and Edmonton, and they are for the entire province. Also, I've directed the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to ensure they promote Alberta artists from all corners of our province, including in rural areas, which will allow more projects and more artists from places big and small, for Albertans old and young from High Level to Medicine Hat and everywhere in between. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Ceci: Given that Alberta artists are an immensely talented group who are being undervalued and limited as evidenced from the prior funding cuts from this UCP government and given that a part of the ministry's mandate is to, "improve Albertans' quality of life by growing the province's world-renowned . . . cultural industries, supporting and celebrating Alberta artists and creators," why won't this government help more of Alberta's artists, who perhaps aren't involved in the film and TV industry, share their art with the world? Why is this government inhibiting instead of promoting the work of Alberta's many great artists?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish the members opposite would take yes for an answer. Budget 2024, if passed, increases funding to the arts.

We want to talk about funding. Let's talk about the fact that Alberta is not receiving its fair share of funding from the Liberal-NDP government for the arts in Alberta. Alberta would need to see a 30 per cent increase in CCA funding to align with the proportion of artists in Alberta, and I will keep pressing Ottawa for more funding.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Renaud: Disinformation is costly. We saw that up close during the COVID pandemic. Disinformation is intended to manipulate and cause damage. It's deliberate. People with disabilities are vulnerable to this disinformation. Last I questioned the minister responsible for AISH about the staffing capacity to handle AISH applications because of the leaked e-mails, and the minister said, I

quote: "The NDP, they reduced staff. They didn't provide enough staff for those services. We put in the resources to do that." Will the minister stick to that disinformation or correct the record?

Mr. Nixon: Under this government's leadership we have increased the AISH budget by over \$100 million, Mr. Speaker. We are the only government in Alberta history that has actually followed through on indexation. That government did not. They talked about it, but they never did it. We continue to invest . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, they don't like talking about it, but the reality is that they did not invest in the same way that the Conservative government did in standing up for the severely handicapped in this province. We're going to continue to do it, just like we are on other social services files. And we will not be lectured by them because they failed.

Ms Renaud: Given that the first UCP budget for community and social services, which includes AISH, cut 223 full-time jobs, followed by several more years of job cuts and given that the recent addition of housing and seniors was the only reason there were more FTEs put in that ministry, how will the minister ensure that AISH applications are processed as quickly as possible when the 2024 budget estimates for full-time jobs in a huge ministry is 139 full-time jobs, smaller than when the UCP took it from the NDP?

Mr. Nixon: Well, I look forward to seeing the hon. member in estimates so I can teach her how to read a budget. We are investing in Budget 2024 \$1.65 billion, the highest amount for AISH ever invested, continue to make sure that we go forward with a concrete plan to be able to help those who are under our AISH programs. Underneath this Premier's leadership I'm proud to report to the House through you, Mr. Speaker, that we have the highest AISH payments in the country. That's underneath the Conservative government. And I'll apologize on behalf of the NDP that they never got it done. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Renaud: That is so much baloney.

We understand the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services has grown since 2019 due to population growth, increasing complexity of need, and growing poverty. Given that the leaked AISH e-mail around changes to application processing was concerning and that the new attrition project, which seems to be a focus on widespread file review instead of actual case management, indicates this government is focused on finding reasons to disqualify people instead of helping them, will the minister please explain why the focus seems to have shifted away from the well-being of people?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm very sorry to the people of Alberta that the NDP continue to fearmonger on this issue; \$1.65 billion invested by Albertans: that's going to continue . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nixon: I'm looking forward to teaching the hon. member again about the budget, Mr. Speaker, but I'll let \$1.65 billion and the highest AISH payments anywhere in the country speak for themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

2:40 Regional Economic Development Funding

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Business leaders in my constituency and across the province have historically relied on regional economic development alliances, also known as REDAs, that operate as independent nonprofit organizations, to advocate for and support job growth. The Alberta government recently announced that there would be changes to the funding model to go from direct operational support to project-based funding. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade please explain to the Chamber what this will mean exactly for these organizations?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of my mandate for Jobs, Economy and Trade we've been tasked to collaborate with all economic development organizations across Alberta, including REDAs, on enhancing pathfinding services and other business attraction initiatives for investments under \$50 million. We have a plan to enhance support for our economic development partners and to shift to a more efficient and equitable hub-and-spoke model, with a growing range of world-class tools, resources, supports, incentives, and competitive, project-based funding that will be available to all economic development organizations across Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the answer. Given that our government was elected on a promise of ensuring that tax dollars are used wisely and targeted to areas where they can be used most effectively and further given that these changes are intended to help make the best use of provincial and local resources, can the same minister please share why this change was done and how the Alberta government will continue to support economic development in rural communities?

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hub-and-spoke model will maximize the availability and leverage of our provincial resources and supports, again, for all economic developers. REDAs will be fully supported through this process, including with access to regional economic development specialists; workforce consultants; industry workforce partnership specialists; about six economic dashboards and labour market analysis tools; the northern and regional economic development program, which provides up to \$200,000 in grants; the Alberta export expansion program; workforce partnership grants; a new incentive, the investment and growth fund, which can help them land investments with grants up to \$5 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the answer. Given that there are many REDAs across the province with significant grassroots community and business support, can the same minister please explain how the government of Alberta will be supporting REDAs as they transition to becoming operationally self-sufficient and if they are eligible to apply for other funding opportunities from the province in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. To support REDAs transitioning towards operational self-sufficiency, we will be providing them with up to \$125,000 per year over the next three years in transitional funding. They will also be eligible to access a growing range of economic development supports, the ones I spoke to earlier, as well as additional resources that are under development. This includes partner ministries like the small community opportunity program from Agriculture and Irrigation, which provides grants for nonprofits, Indigenous and small communities to help build capacity in agriculture, small business, and local economic development. I want to be clear that the resources and supports and tools are increasing; they are not decreasing, and they're available to all economic development partners.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. There will be no 30-second break as we will proceed to tablings due to the estimates schedule.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services, followed by the Member for Sherwood Park, possibly.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the latest study from Stanford, as promised the other day in the House, showing the concerns of rent control in the eastern seaboard and helping to call on the NDP to stop their disastrous plan to bring in rent control in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Municipal Affairs told me to get a subscription to Google. It turns out you cannot subscribe to Google; it's accessible to everyone free of charge. I'm tabling five copies of a page from Google's website called How Our Business Works. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two articles I referenced in debate a couple of days ago. They talk about experiences of folks in New Brunswick when there's a combination of rent controls and how rent caps and controls can actually help people.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of e-mails from constituents of Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-Glenmore, and Calgary-Acadia, all urging their MLAs and the minister responsible for housing to support rent caps and to support Bill 205.

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. Nally, Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy annual report 2022-23; on behalf of hon. Mr. Amery, Minister of Justice, the Alberta Human Rights Commission 2022-23 annual report; on behalf

of hon. Mr. Nicolaides, Minister of Education, pursuant to the Education Act the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission annual report 2022-23; on behalf of hon. Mr. McIver, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2023.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 2:22 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order, which has subsequently been withdrawn.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for the consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will continue the consideration of estimates for the Ministry of

Finance and President of Treasury Board in the Grassland Room. The Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the main estimates for Executive Council in the Rocky Mountain Room. Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Technology and Innovation in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2024-25 main estimates schedule the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:46 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	683
Introduction of Guests	683
Members' Statements	
Electric Power System.....	683
Renewable Energy Development.....	684
Small Business	684
School Construction in Calgary.....	684
Support for Families	684
Affordable Housing	685
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 11 Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.....	685
Oral Question Period	
Provincial Labour Supply	685
Grassy Mountain Coal Project.....	686
Provincial Pension Plan Proposal	686
Budget 2024	687
Medical Laboratory Services	687
Homeless Supports	688
Red Deer Regional Hospital Expansion	689
Support for LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans	689
Electric Power System.....	690
Social Workers	690
Rural Health Care Professional Recruitment and Retention.....	691
Arts and Culture Funding	691
Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped.....	692
Regional Economic Development Funding	693
Tabling Returns and Reports	693
Tablings to the Clerk	693

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