



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 14, 2024

Day 25

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 14, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, it being the last sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the King* by Rebecca Lees.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce a number of special guests in the Speaker's gallery today. Earlier this afternoon I was able to meet with the Keep Tobacco Sacred Collaboration, which included a group of young Indigenous leaders whose mission is to reduce smoking and vaping amongst Indigenous youth by engaging their peers about the important role of sacred tobacco and the harms of tobacco and youth vaping. This is a group of passionate young people, and they are known as the Tobacco Warriors. Each Tobacco Warrior comes from one of the three treaty areas within Alberta, and they gather regularly to connect and share experiences and share together sacred tobacco and teachings with knowledge keepers and elders. As role models and change-makers the warriors are playing a key role in engaging and encouraging youth in their communities to learn about the important role sacred tobacco has in their culture.

Keep Tobacco Sacred Collaboration is guided by knowledge keeper and beaver bundle holder Treffrey Deerfoot from the Siksika Nation, is supported by Charlene Bruno from Samson Cree Nation, and they are joined in the Speaker's gallery today by the Tobacco Warriors: Vanessa Kyme-Gilbert from Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Raquel Healy from Blood Tribe, Dillon Campiou from Sucker Creek Nation, Ethan Yellow Old Woman from Siksika Nation, Les Hagen and Angeline Webb and Klevlin Cutknife from Samson Cree Nation. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, I would like to also introduce to the Assembly Ms Rebecca Lees, or Beki, as she's known to many of us around the Legislature, who led us in the singing of *God Save the King* today. Beki has been gracing the halls of the Legislature since 2016, supporting members in the opposition and government caucuses. She's currently working for the independent Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. Beki began singing in church on her family's worship team at the age of six. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you and to all the members of this Assembly two home-schooling families from the great constituency of Airdrie-East, the Schalk and Weening families, and introduce the children: Jonathan, David, Nathaniel, Noah, Madysen, and Carter. Please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to the rest of the members of the Assembly the grade 6 students and their teachers from l'école Meridian Heights elementary school from Stony Plain, which happens to be the best town in my riding. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce both through you and to you some amazing students from the small town of Kinuso. Welcome. Thank you for coming today.

Also, some really great leaders from my hometown of Slave Lake: the mayor, Frankie Ward; Deputy Mayor Shawn Gramlich; Councillor Brice Ferguson; and my good friend Hortense Calisher. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you the executives of Garvi Gujarat Association of Canada celebrating Indian culture, Hindu religion, and heritage: Rakesh Patel, president and founder; Hitesh Patel, VP; Samir Patel, secretary; and, of course, our friend Indra Chaudhury. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly my guest Anjana Babbar and her son Ishan Babbar. Anjana has served Edmonton for 15 years as the founding artistic director at the Jeevan Gopal Dance Academy. I'd like them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Water Management

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The urgency of protecting Albertans and our environment from the devastating impacts of drought and water scarcity demands immediate action, yet the provincial budget's response falls short, displaying a concerning lack of foresight and responsibility. It is alarming that in a 189-page fiscal plan climate change is scarcely acknowledged despite its undeniable role in exasperating our water challenges. The repeated emphasis on infrastructure development through capital funding overlooks the need for comprehensive, holistic, strategic water management approaches that address the root cause of our water crisis. Allocating funds for emergency

response and readiness is necessary but wholly insufficient and unsustainable, and it's an unsustainable response on its own.

Without accompanying policy reforms and mandated entities that prioritize sustainable water management and climate resilience, the UCP are simply choosing Band-Aid applications to a deepening wound. Albertans demand more than reactionary measures and short-term fixes. Albertans deserve forward-thinking and sustainable solutions that prioritize the preservation of our precious water resources for generations to come, not haphazard moratoriums on renewable energy projects.

It's unacceptable for government to default to mandated water rationing during peak heat waves instead of implementing proactive strategies to ensure water security and resilience in the face of climate challenges. The UCP government needs to acknowledge that merely throwing capital funding at emergencies without enacting meaningful policy and strategy is a short-sighted and irresponsible response to tackling our province's water shortage, once again demonstrating incompetency.

Rural High-speed Internet

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, access to high-speed Internet is critical to economic development in our province. It generates countless opportunities for businesses to connect our customers and customers to connect with businesses. More importantly, it's imperative to the education of children in our rural and Indigenous communities, who will become our future leaders and entrepreneurs and, hopefully, so much more.

That's why our government has invested \$390 million as part of the Alberta broadband strategy. This plan will generate \$1.7 billion in GDP growth and create over 1,500 jobs in construction. Mr. Speaker, we've even launched a Starlink pilot to ensure that we have top-of-the-line technology to bring Internet connections to rural areas. For communities that aren't covered by the federal government's universal broadband fund, we have also launched a separate system of funding to ensure that no community is left behind. It will give 120,000 students better access to remote education and 40,000 Albertans more access to telehealth.

1:40

Recently the Minister of Technology and Innovation announced that the government of Alberta and the government of Canada are providing \$112 million to bring full connectivity to 166 rural communities in our province. They range all the way from Siksika Nation, where I believe one of our guests here today is from, to the Peace region, some of them all the way up to my riding of Lesser Slave Lake. Chief Crowfoot of the Siksika First Nation put it best when he said that access to reliable Internet is not just a convenience; it's a modern-day necessity that connects all of us to essential services, education, and each other.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to every Albertan connected to high-speed Internet by 2027. We're on track. We have shovels in the ground. Connections to the world are under way. Thank you.

Crisis in Gaza

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, we have now entered the holy month of Ramadan. To all those who observe this holy month here in Alberta and around the world: Ramadan Mubarak. I, like many of my Muslim brothers and sisters this Ramadan, have a very heavy heart, and what weighs so heavily on all of us is the calamity being experienced by our brothers and sisters in Gaza.

I know that every Muslim in my community is carrying this in their heart because we all see the images. Regardless, one thing that we can all guarantee is that our brothers and sisters in Gaza will all fast even though they have nothing to break their fast with come nightfall. We all know that they will pray their Taraweeh prayers even though there will be airstrikes overhead, because throughout this entire calamity they have been shining examples of people of faith holding steadfast to their hope and belief in God.

Mr. Speaker, a Muslim's duty is to stand up for justice. This isn't about one faith over another. A Muslim's duty is to do what is just because that is what the most merciful Creator has asked of us. Justice has no nationality, no ethnicity, or even religion. Nothing is above doing what is just. People all over the world are watching the images come out of Gaza, and they are calling their leaders to stand for what is just. There is a Hadith of the prophet Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon Him, that if you see an injustice, you must try to stop it with your hand, and if you can't do that, then you must try to stop it by saying something about it, and if you can't do that, then you must at least recognize that it is an injustice in your heart.

Hundreds of thousands of people, not just Muslims, are recognizing that what is happening to the people of Gaza is an injustice. This Ramadan my prayers are for my brothers and sisters in Gaza and the rest of Palestine, and I call on all political representatives to call out the injustice occurring in Gaza today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP record on housing is abysmal. All we need to do is look at . . .

An Hon. Member: Oh, here we go.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I know this is a sensitive issue to many, but all members will know there's a long-standing practice of not interrupting members' statements. It is expected of both sides of this Assembly.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont can begin from the beginning of his remarks.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP record on housing is abysmal. All we need to do is look across the border into B.C. and see the results of their housing policies. Even in this province: four years of NDP rule, so only 1,770 units of affordable housing constructed. At the same time the affordable housing wait-list surged by 76 per cent under the NDP. The current NDP plan would leave more people homeless and would make housing more restrictive and scarce. Over 90 per cent of economists agree that rent control doesn't work.

This government will not allow socialist rent control to rob Albertans of their right to home ownership. We will not allow the same failed policies that destroyed the housing markets of Vancouver and Toronto to be implemented in Alberta. In the past three years this government has facilitated the construction of more rental units than the preceding 15 years combined. Twenty twenty-three was a record-breaking year for purpose-built rentals across the province, and we are on track for another record-setting year.

The Alberta government is investing more than ever in affordable housing. Together with our partners we are investing \$9 billion, and this budget alone saw \$840 million committed. Why would we risk this tremendous work just to implement a socialist rent control scheme? We are not going to take lessons from a party that led a government which saw housing starts plunge by over 10,000. We will not adopt the housing strategies of Vancouver and Toronto, the

cities with the worst housing affordability in the nation. What we will do is get shovels in the ground, get homes built, and as more Canadians come to find the Alberta advantage, we will welcome them with a home.

Thank you.

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

Budget 2024

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this budget does one thing better than anything before, it sets a record for the most broken promises in a single document. This Premier and government went to the public only eight months ago asking for their votes. They made guarantees, they signed commitments, they made promises, but after the votes were cast, we got a look at the Premier's real agenda.

The Premier during the campaign laughed off any idea that they would come after Alberta's pensions. However, the Premier after the election immediately moved to take Alberta out of the Canada pension plan. The Premier during the campaign promised Albertans she would cut their taxes and make life more affordable. The Premier after the campaign moved swiftly to make life more expensive for Albertans while giving her friends raises and arranging for better, higher, more expensive gifts for UCP MLAs. The Premier campaigned during the campaign and promised that she had fixed health care. Nope. The Premier after the election launched a campaign to add even more chaos while failing to address the doctor crisis created by the UCP.

This budget does not address overcrowded classrooms; nope. This budget does not address the health care crisis; nope. This budget does not address the housing crisis; nope. And this budget definitely does not address the 43 per cent of Alberta's highways in poor condition, Mr. Speaker. This budget asks Albertans to do more with less, also throwing out the mandate this Premier campaigned for. Albertans deserve better than this bait-and-switch UCP government budget that acts one way when campaigning for Albertans' votes and then immediately does the opposite right after.

On this side of the House we stand up and hold this government to account, and we will do what we say we're going to do next time we get elected, in 2027. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington has a statement to make.

Government Policies

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This UCP government is not building the schools Albertans need. They're not building the hospitals that Albertans need. They're not investing enough in addressing the rent and housing crisis. They're not investing nearly enough to address the health care crisis, and they're not investing enough to support Albertans during an affordability crisis.

So what are this government's top priorities since being elected? Millions spent on advertising and phony consultations to convince Albertans to let the Premier pull them out of CPP; millions wasted on undoing their failed privatization of the lab system, that caused so much stress and harm to Calgarians; millions spent on a stunt buying medicine that couldn't be used, fighting against cheaper medication that could save Albertans thousands of dollars; more expensive gifts for the UCP; higher salaries for their friends; millions upon millions upon millions promoting the Premier before the last election. These are the priorities of the UCP government all

while some Albertans are choosing between paying their rent and buying groceries, while students are forced to choose between eating and buying textbooks.

My constituents in Calgary-Beddington elected me to stand up for them, to put their interests first. It's a responsibility that I take seriously, Mr. Speaker, and I know it's the same for every single member of this Official Opposition. I hope the UCP knows that Albertans are watching. They know that this government is failing them, and they know that they deserve better. Albertans can't wait for this government to get around to prioritizing their families' needs to ensure that they get the support they need, and they need that support right now. My colleagues and I: we're here to ensure that they get it.

Oral Question Period

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

Prescription Drug Coverage

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this Premier continues to push this misleading notion that the majority of Albertans have full pharmacare coverage. The fact is, unlike what the Premier claims, 75 per cent of Albertans do not have free coverage for diabetes and contraceptive medication. Rather, they pay for that coverage through premiums and copays. To the Premier: as a very basic starting point will she please concede that free coverage of diabetes medication and contraception is different than premium and copay-funded coverage that is paid for out of pocket?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When someone says "a universal pharmacare plan," most people think it is going to cover all of the pharmaceuticals that they need for all of their conditions. A two-condition plan is not a universal pharmacare plan. What we have said, as recently as yesterday, to the Prime Minister is that if they want to work with us to expand our 5,000 pharmaceutical plan to more people, we would be happy to work with them on it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: So the false argument continues.

Roughly 1 million Albertans have no pharmacare coverage in Alberta. They are more likely to be young people, half of whom could benefit from free contraceptive medication. The average woman will spend between \$250 and \$500 a year on contraception, and the cost to our health care system of ending just one accidental pregnancy is over \$2,000. So to the Premier: why is she discriminating against at least half a million Alberta women by blocking this affordability and health care measure?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the members opposite can read through the list of drugs that are included in our pharmacare plan. We have multiple plans, some for those on AISH, some for those with disabilities, some for those seniors, and we have something called nongroup coverage, which anyone can get if they don't have an employer-sponsored plan. In that plan there are 50 different birth control methods. There are also 16 different insulin products as well as nine different products for diabetes. That is the program that we would like to expand.

Ms Notley: And that is the program that is not free.

Over 300,000 Albertans with diabetes do not have coverage, and they are forced to pay over \$5,000 per year for their medication if they can afford it at all. Diabetes Canada estimates that complications from unmanaged diabetes cost the Alberta health care system half a billion dollars a year. To the Premier: apart from the sheer immorality of denying Albertans this life-saving medication, why is she so set against a program that will save people and the province so much money?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I am one hundred per cent interested in trying to find a way to get coverage for 100 per cent of Albertans. We know that there's about 24 per cent of Albertans that, for whatever reason, do not have coverage through a private plan, have chosen not to come into our nongroup plan, or aren't covered by one of our other plans. I want to work with the federal government to find a way to bridge that gap. But I have to tell you that if I went out to the community and tried to pretend that we had a universal agreement with the federal government that only covered two conditions, they would agree that that is not a universal plan. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

Ms Notley: It's the Premier who's pretending that coverage is free when it's not.

Provincial Police Agency

Ms Notley: Now, another day, another broken promise. Before the election the Premier promised she would not pursue a provincial police force. During the election the Premier promised she wouldn't pursue a provincial police force. After the election the Premier promised she would not pursue a provincial police force. Yet, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier's government tabled legislation to – wait for it – pursue a provincial police force. To the Premier: is there a single, solitary promise that she will ever keep?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the members opposite want to defund the police. On this side of the Chamber we want to give enhanced coverage for the police and enhanced coverage for policing in communities, and that is exactly what we've done. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Smith: Maybe I'll just educate the members opposite. Our Alberta sheriffs are responsible for courtroom security, prisoner transport, Legislature Grounds security, support units dispatch, commercial vehicle enforcement . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. You might not like the answer, but the Speaker is entitled to hear it.

Ms Smith: . . . fish and wildlife enforcement, safer communities and neighbourhoods, executive protection unit, judicial security officers, surveillance, sheriff's highway patrol, interdiction unit, the rural Alberta provincial integrated defence force.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, quote: we are deeply concerned and perplexed about the announcement laying out the groundwork for a new independent police agency. That's from the National Police Federation. They went on to say that this bill appears to be, quote,

yet another attempt to force an unwanted and expensive police change on taxpayers, and by "expensive" they mean hundreds of millions of dollars per year. To the Premier: why is she breaking her promise and pushing through this expensive new policing scheme?

Ms Smith: Let me continue: fugitive apprehension sheriff support team, street-level patrols and enforcement, enhanced bail monitoring such as ankle monitoring, deployment as police of jurisdiction in certain circumstances under a provincial state of emergency.

It took me two answers to go through all of the policing functions that our sheriffs already do, which is why, from a governance perspective, when you have a policing agency doing policing services, they have to have proper policing oversight which is a separate civilian agency – that is, a commission – to be able to provide that governance. That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as one expert said after looking at the legislation, if it walks like a duck, you know?

Now, Mr. Speaker, the RCMP's contract is good through 2032, so what's the rush? The RCMP is not alone in their concerns. The Alberta municipalities and the RMA have spoken out against this scheme, and Alberta sheriffs also want answers. To the Premier: why bring this bill forward if you have no intention of creating the police force, and why create a police force that nobody wants?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We embedded the sheriffs in Edmonton. I can tell you that Calgary said: where are our sheriffs? So people do want the sheriffs on the street.

Unlike the members opposite, we recognize the valuable policing service that the sheriffs perform. We want to acknowledge that they are police when they are doing those policing functions. We want to govern and regulate them in exactly the same way as the Calgary Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service, the RCMP, with that kind of oversight. That is going to augment safety. It's going to augment our services. That is something that we ran on because we don't believe in defunding the police like the members opposite do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

AUC Inquiry Report Recommendations

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Utilities Commission report has finally been made public. The government has been sitting on it, turns out, since January. It's the kind of report that would have been really useful for the public to have when this government released their new renewables policy last month. The thing is that it contradicts just about all of the UCP's fact-free, urban legendesque talking points. To the Premier: why didn't she just come clean about the AUC's findings back in February, when she announced her latest restrictive policies against renewables?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that if you put acres and acres of solar panels on fields that could be used for irrigation, you cannot run pivots on those fields and you cannot grow agriculture. That happens to be true. It also happens to be true that if you put up wind turbines the size of the Calgary Tower within a couple of kilometres of our beautiful UNESCO heritage sites like Waterton Park and Banff and Jasper, it really does interfere with our viewscapes and our scenic beauty. Those happen to be absolutely true.

Ms Notley: Well, the report is very clear. They say that there is nothing but subjectivity and uncertainty in the definition of what a pristine view is and that the biggest threats to category 2 agricultural land are oil and gas development and urban sprawl; renewable development will impact less than 1 per cent of the same category 2 agricultural land. To the Premier: if the government insists . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Ms Notley: Thank you. If the government insists on regulating renewable energy in this way, why not at least follow the AUC's recommendation to do so equally for all impacting industrial activity?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no universal definition, it is true, but the U.K. has put through a definition and parameters. The United States has put forward parameters. Australia has put forward parameters. We heard loud and clear from people who are impacted by these installations that they wanted us to put forward similar policy. I understand from my Affordability and Utilities minister that the map will be coming out this afternoon, so I will leave it, once it comes out, for the public to judge whether or not we got it right. I think we did.

2:00

Ms Notley: They'd be better able to judge if these folks hadn't tried so hard to hide the report.

Now, it also warns that nothing should be done to restrict investment or create uncertainty. But from the moratorium they announced last summer to the latest misguided group of restrictions, uncertainty seems to be this government's only goal. Renewable energy projects supplement Alberta's current energy development and ensure Alberta will continue to be a leader into the future. So why are this Premier and her caucus so insistent on killing that important future energy industry in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it amusing; the member opposite talks about creating uncertainty in the electricity business when she didn't campaign on phasing out coal, then came through with a plan to phase out early, costing Albertans billions of dollars with no actual plan for how to build baseload power in order to be able to replace it so that we wouldn't have blackouts like we almost had on January 13. We had a six-month pause. We are open for business. Solar and wind are welcome to invest in our jurisdiction.

Government Advertising

Ms Gray: Quote: you should not be able to use taxpayer dollars for blatant partisan advertising in advance of an election. End quote. Those were the words of this Premier back in 2012 rightly expressing outrage at the tired old PCs using Albertans' money for partisan advertising right before an election. But like so many of the principles this Premier once clung to, it crossed the floor to stand with what it once opposed. Yesterday Albertans learned from the Finance minister that this UCP government spent nearly \$10 million in pre-election advertising. My question to the Premier is simple: why did you change your mind about campaigning with Albertans' money?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's rich coming from the members opposite. If they want to talk about government advertising

campaigns, we went through this fully in estimates yesterday. Looking back in the historical record, seeing the 9 and a half million dollars that they spent to beat Albertans over the head with the carbon tax that they did not discuss with them before the election, it's absolutely rich that they come in the House and say that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Horner: As I was saying, the 9 and a half million dollars that the members opposite, when they were the government of Alberta, spent on the carbon tax advertising campaign, on a tax that they didn't discuss with Albertans before the election. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Gray: Let me help the Finance minister. We are talking about pre-election advertising, and the leader of the Wildrose, back in 2012, once called it outrageous that the government would use \$1.3 million on pre-election advertising. She went on to call it an abuse of tax dollars. But last spring the now Premier spent nearly 10 times that amount on pre-election advertising. One has to imagine what the 2012 Wildrose leader would say to this Premier today. Can the Premier tell this House when she embraced the PC culture of entitlement and the shameless abuse of money?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, even looking at the budget of CPE, communications and public engagement, when the members opposite were government: looking at a budget that was around \$57 million a year. And you look at what this government has spent over the last term. All of the budgets in between \$32 million and \$35 million: very consistent. And the advertising campaigns, as I went through with the members opposite: 40 different campaigns. We spent about \$22 million on affordability measures. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Gray: The Finance minister seems unable to have an honest conversation about pre-election advertising. Back in the day, when the folks over there had a shred of respect for Albertans' money, Rob Anderson and Bruce McAllister, former Wildrose MLAs turned political staff in the Premier's office, accused the PCs of treating tax dollars as their own campaign piggy bank before an election. Fast-forward, and these same people . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The Official Opposition House Leader is the only one with the call.

Ms Gray: Fast-forward, and these same people spent nearly \$10 million of Albertans' money on partisan ads before last year's election. Will the Premier listen to the advice of her top advisers and herself and admit that she doesn't respect Albertans' money?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it would be funny if it wasn't sad; \$9 million spent on an advertising campaign to beat Albertans over the head with the idea that they should love . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, \$9 million to beat Albertans over the head with the idea that they should love this tax that wasn't discussed with them before the election and that now most of the potential new leaders of this party across the aisle from us have said that they no longer support. What did it do? It legitimized it across the country, across Canada, making life less affordable, and we'll see it go up again April 1.

Foreign Qualification and Credential Recognition

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, the UCP government passed the Fair Registration Practices Act in 2019. In 2020 the government opened the fairness for newcomers office. The purpose of this office was to work with the regulatory bodies to streamline, simplify, accelerate assessment of qualifications by eliminating barriers to registration, particularly internationally trained Albertans. Apart from one self-administered survey that was conducted four years ago, will the minister agree that the government is failing internationally trained Albertans?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for that question. I'm very pleased to talk about the work that we've done on this particular file. When we were first elected in 2019, we were the first government in history to actually do some intentional work on underemployment. We passed the fair registrations act, we opened up the fairness for newcomers office, and we have done some incredible consequential work. In addition to that, there are so many other elements of this particular program that I'd be happy to speak about.

Mr. Haji: Given that this government spends close to half a million dollars annually on this program and given that internationally trained Albertans continue to face unfair barriers to registration within professional occupations and given that the government documents prove that the application process time is taking longer than it was prior to the creation of this office, will the minister do the right thing and admit that the foreign credentialing processing time is not getting better? Yes or no?

Mrs. Sawhney: The fairness for newcomers office is a small office, but it's a mighty office, and they have made a dent in terms of the number of individuals who have actually accelerated the credentialing process. I am pleased to say that we have moved the needle on this file. The time has reduced significantly, and certainly there is a lot more work being done in Advanced Education and in skilled trades and professions to make sure that we are accelerating the credentialing process.

Mr. Haji: Given that many internationally trained professionals responded to Alberta Is Calling and given that internationally trained professionals continue to face barriers, facts are facts. Given that Alberta has a lower retention rate of skilled workers and skilled trades than British Columbia, than Ontario, than Quebec, and than most of the Atlantic provinces, can the minister stand up and explain why Alberta's retention rate is so behind other provinces?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, we're seeing record numbers of people moving to Alberta of all skill sets, and we're going to see even more of that because, of course, we're coming forward with Alberta Is Calling with an attraction bonus for people in the skilled trades from across Canada. We're 20,000 short today. Why? Because we have so much economic activity, so much opportunity for Canadians to participate in, and we're going to continue to foster an environment that attracts businesses and people in record numbers, much to the chagrin of the opposition. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, rural crime rates remain high, and police services in rural communities experience long response times due to the geographical realities of our province. Last year the Minister

of Public Safety and Emergency Services promised Albertans a zero-tolerance approach to crime, and it appears that approach is becoming a reality. Albertans have the right to feel safe in their homes and communities. To protect that right, our government's approach to public safety has been changing. Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services tell this House how our fight against violent criminals is evolving here in Alberta?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. I think we all know this, and I think we all can agree that the Liberal-NDP alliance has made Canadians less safe in Canada, let alone less safe in Alberta. There are offenders that are being released with little to no consequences. There is no place for criminals right here in Alberta, and that is why we are actually taking action. Our courts need to have the additional tools in the tool box to mitigate the problems that have been created by this NDP-Liberal alliance. That's why victims of sexual violence, victims of violent crimes – we're going to have uninterrupted 24/7 monitoring guaranteed.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that news. Given that this monitoring is going to be essential moving forward and that officers are operating in the same environment as police and they are subject to the same level of oversight and accountability, given that the new approach for policing our province would create a civilian oversight board for the independent policing agency, providing a similar kind of governance that exists for municipal and First Nations policing services, can the minister of public safety explain why we need a civilian oversight board and how it would work?

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the members opposite are not interested in accountability and transparency, but that's really what we're trying to do here. As the Premier has already previously indicated, there are roles being done by the sheriffs that are policelike roles. I know that in their minds they either want to defund the police or they want to have control over the police, but not on this side of the House. We want to have an arm's length so that we can have accountability and transparency, and that's precisely what we're going to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that many people are fearful of being victimized during day-to-day life, it is clear that deterring violent crime, especially on the part of people out on bail, is essential for maintaining safety and stability on our streets. Given that Albertans deserve to feel safe in their communities and be protected from repeat violent offenders being released and reoffending in our communities due to a failed federal catch-and-release bail system, to the same minister: why is electronic ankle monitoring essential to the plan of maintaining order on our streets?

Mr. Ellis: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we're having to respond to, again, failed Liberal-NDP policies. They have, again, made Canada

less safe, as I previously indicated, but we're not going to sit idly by. This is why we're going to have this electronic monitoring, because – you know why? – we need to protect victims of crime; we need to protect victims of domestic violence; we need to protect our community at large. Until we get a new federal government, which, hopefully, is on the way, we're going to do whatever we can to keep Albertans safe.

Rental Housing

Member Batten: Since the new year more and more Calgary-Acadians are reaching out to my office in desperation because they can no longer afford the rent. It has become the top issue we hear about. People in Calgary-Acadia are facing rent increases of \$400, \$500, \$600 a month when they're already just scraping by. In many cases rent has become more than 70 per cent of their income. Why isn't this government doing everything to ensure that Albertans can afford to have a home in our province?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report again that we still have the most affordable rent anywhere in the country. Earlier today I was with the mayor of Edmonton, in fact, announcing 300 new units of housing in the Leader of the Official Opposition's constituency. This will continue to provide housing. I'm also happy to report to the House that in the last three years alone we've seen more rental properties built than in the last 15 years combined, which confirms again the approach the Alberta government is taking to invest in affordable housing and to make sure our industry that can build houses is working.

Member Batten: Speaking of rentals, given that large companies are buying up older rental buildings to profit off skyrocketing rents, especially because Alberta is one of the few provinces with no rent control regulations, and given that the residents in those buildings, many of whom are independent seniors, are now forced to rely on social services like the food bank, why won't this government support Bill 205 and keep Albertans housed and able to support themselves?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we will not support the NDP's plan to bring in rent control because it does not work. It will make more people homeless. There are communities in our country that do have rent control. You know what they are? Vancouver and Toronto. Look at them to see how well that works. So if that's what the hon. members want to do: not going to happen with this Conservative government. Instead, we're going to focus on strategic investments and continue to make sure that we have record-breaking construction numbers to be able to build all the homes that we need. I'm happy to report that we have record numbers again this month, and I know we're going to continue to because we're going to continue to work hard at it.

Member Batten: Given that Calgary-Acadia constituents and people from across the province are being forced to move in with family members, skip meals or medication, or try to find jobs in their retirement years just to pay for rent and given that the minister's rhetoric has done nothing to address the housing crisis growing under his watch, what is the minister doing today to protect people from the UCP's rent affordability crisis?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, that hon. member's party saw affordable housing wait-lists go up by 70 per cent under their watch, and they only built 1,700 units of affordable housing. This government has already built 5,000 since 2019; 13,000 more are coming along the way, but on top of that, tens of thousands more houses entering our market to be able to make sure all Albertans

can have an affordable home. We're doing all of that without destroying the economy like the NDP want to do. We're going to continue to get that job done, and Albertans can rest assured that the NDP are gone.

Provincial Police Agency (continued)

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised time and again that she wouldn't introduce a provincial police force. She wouldn't do it, she wouldn't campaign on it, and she removed it from the Justice minister's mandate letter. So why has this government broken its promise and introduced an Alberta police force which no one is asking for?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I will continue to say this again: we are trying to augment and support our municipal police forces right here in Alberta, from the RCMP to the city of Calgary to the city of Edmonton to all mid-size municipalities that have asked for extra help. We all know the devastation that the NDP-Liberal government has done on Canada when it comes to crime. We are trying to do what we can, and I can tell you right now – and the Premier has listed all of these wonderful duties that these officers do – these are policelike functions. They need an arm's length, and that is precisely what we're going to do.

Mr. Sabir: Given that municipalities and Albertans have been clear that they do not want a UCP police force and given that the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas said that a police force is, and I quote, not something that has really come up on anyone's doorstep as I have travelled Alberta, end quote, can the minister explain why they have broken their promise yet again, ignoring the will of Albertans and introducing another pet project of the Premier, a UCP police force?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier has risen.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you. I mean, that number is completely out of touch, because I can tell you that policing comes up all the time. It doesn't matter if we're talking about large cities, mid-size municipalities, RMA: they sit there and say that we need law enforcement. That's why we have unprecedented support. In Budget 2024 we provide an additional \$20.9 million to communities covered by provincial service agreement. Mr. Speaker, we are supporting our local RCMP. We're supporting the Calgary Police Service. We are not on the defund-the-police bandwagon, which I could say most of the members opposite are. We need law enforcement, we respect law enforcement, and on this side of the House we're going to continue to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the only government which has defunded police is the UCP government and given that the UCP loves to waste money fixing what isn't broken, like the CPP and RCMP, rather than fixing the crisis they created in health care, for affordability and housing and given that the RCMP union says that they are quite deeply concerned and perplexed by this move and the sheriff union says that they're quite disappointed by this move, will the minister admit this government loves to break their promises to Albertans and no one is asking for a UCP police force?

Mr. Ellis: You know, I know the members opposite like to say things that are not true, and then they say it enough times that a certain portion of the population tends to believe it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Ellis: But the reality is, Mr. Speaker, I myself spent 10 years on the streets of Calgary as boots on the ground. I suggest the members opposite try to disconnect themselves in some way from the unions and actually speak to the boots on the ground. When you talk to the actual sheriffs, when you talk to the people in the community, I can tell you that they want police. I, quite frankly, don't care what the uniform is. When somebody calls 911, we're going to make sure an officer shows up regardless of what the members opposite say. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

2:20

Agricultural Societies

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, agricultural societies of Alberta have been playing important roles in our communities for over a century, with the first dating back to 1884. Given that there are over 290 volunteer-driven, locally operated ag societies in Alberta and given that as many as 52,000 volunteers support the work, helping to operate more than 900 facilities and given that their events draw as many as 1.6 million attendees annually, to the minister of agriculture: can the agricultural societies of Alberta count on the continued support of the government of Alberta?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Ag societies help communities across Alberta thrive by providing events, volunteer opportunities, recreational facilities, and so much more. Alberta's government recognizes the hard work that goes into all of this, and we're incredibly grateful to the thousands of volunteers that make it possible. I'm pleased to share that Budget 2024, if passed, will continue to provide stable funding to support ag societies with operational and capital expenses.

The Speaker: The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has focused on capital funding for ag societies in recent years, including the agricultural societies infrastructure revitalization program, awarding \$2.48 million for 34 projects across the province and given that in addition to operating facilities, ag societies contribute to scholarships, grants, and other funding projects and host a variety of sports, cultural, and recreation events, partnering with groups like 4-H, to the same minister: is there a plan in place to ensure both capital and operational funding is increased to keep pace with rising inflation?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you for that question. I was thrilled to see so much interest in our new capital grant in 2023, and I'm pleased to inform Albertans that Budget 2024 once again commits another 2 and a half million dollars for the agricultural societies infrastructure revitalization program. This program supports major facility repairs so agricultural societies can continue enhancing Alberta's rural communities. Both our capital and operational grants are predictable annual sources of financial support for our hard-working agricultural societies, and we're proud to continue with this support.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that agricultural societies play such a foundational role in the training, safety, and maintenance of our rural communities, contributing back at least \$3 for every government dollar invested and given that valuable programs like 4-H and Open Farm Days are crucial aspects of educating our next generation, to the same minister:

how can we ensure that ag societies will continue to be valued and acknowledged contributors to our communities for decades to come?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you again to the member for the question. Ag societies have an established history as the heart of Alberta's rural communities. They even predate the founding of this province. Last September it was my honour to recognize the contributions of ag societies by designating September 21 as Ag Societies Day here in Alberta. There isn't a month that goes by where ag societies don't leave a positive impact on our communities and our agricultural sector, and by observing this day each year, we can ensure all of Alberta knows it.

On behalf of this government: thanks to our ag societies and the volunteers that support . . .

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

School Construction in Calgary-North East

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community of Redstone is one of the fastest growing communities in Calgary. Our biggest school board, the Calgary board of education, received one single school in this year's budget plan. The children of Calgary Redstone deserve to have a school in their community. The minister even visited the Calgary community but, quote, was not asked to commit to building a school, unquote. Will the minister explain why the children of Calgary Redstone have been left behind and left out by the UCP, or does he just not even care?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, the community hasn't been left out at all. I would encourage the member to let his constituents know that three projects in his riding are moving forward. A new K to 12 school in Cornerstone has received design funding, a new K to 4 school in Redstone has received design funding . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: . . . and a new K to 6 school in Redstone has also received design funding. I'm very happy to tell his constituents that our government is moving three priority projects forward for them and for their neighbours.

Member Brar: Given that the minister stood in an empty field with the people of Redstone while continuing to stall the project and given that the children of Redstone, Calgary, have been waiting for construction, looking at future school site signs for far too long, will the minister commit to finally building the school and fully fund the project?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, Budget '24 demonstrates our government's commitment to moving three projects in the member's riding forward. We have provided design funding for a new high school in Cornerstone, design funding for a new K to 4 school in Redstone, and design funding for a new K to 6 school, also in Redstone. I will wait to see whether the member opposite supports this budget so we can move those projects forward.

Member Brar: Given that the children in my community are travelling an hour each way every single day to school and back, passing the empty field where their promised school is supposed to be and given that families invested in their community, purchased homes, put down roots hoping they could send their children to school in their own community, why does the Education minister continue to ignore Calgary-North East? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the member opposite wasn't listening. We are listening very carefully to the needs of the folks in northeast Calgary, and that's why we are moving three projects forward in the riding of the member opposite. I hope to see whether the member opposite will be voting in support of Budget '24. I hope to see his support so that we can . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, our government has their interests at heart, and that's why three projects are moving forward, as I've mentioned. Again, I hope his constituents are watching to see how he votes with Budget '24 and whether he'll support these projects moving forward. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Sporting Event Hosting

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, as Calgary's Snow Rodeo concludes its hosting of the prestigious 2024 FIS Snowboard Halfpipe World Cup, Alberta reflects on the impacts of this exhilarating event on our province's sporting landscape and economic prosperity. The conclusion of this successful half-pipe world cup at Calgary Snow Rodeo demonstrates that Alberta is Canada's premier destination for hosting sports events. Can the Minister of Tourism and Sport provide insights into the immediate economic benefits realized from hosting such a high-profile international event, including the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Minister of Tourism and Sport and the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that hon. member for the question. The people of Calgary-Fish Creek are well served by him as their representative. I think it goes without saying, but the economic impacts of these events are massive. From the beginning of 2024 we have announced that we are going to be hosting not one, not two, but 12 major international sporting events. That's right. What a time to be alive. All said and done, these events are going to combine for an economic impact of over \$100 million. I repeat: \$100 million. More good news for Alberta. It's a great place to be. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the achievement of hosting 48 of the world's best snowboarders and welcoming approximately one thousand in-person spectators to Canada Olympic Park in Calgary this winter and given that beyond the excitement of the competition the 2024 FIS Snowboard Halfpipe World Cup undoubtedly left a lasting impact on Calgary's economy and sports community, can the minister elaborate on the benefits anticipated from hosting these events, particularly in terms of promoting Alberta as a prime destination for future international sporting competitions?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, when people come to Alberta, they see the rich landscapes, the beautiful viewscapes, and they know that no one does it better than us. The world comes here, and they want to see more, and word spreads quickly. We have world-class facilities in Nakiska and WinSport, and I can tell you that you pair

that with the warm hospitality and the love for sports that Alberta has – Alberta's athletes, the coaches, the visitors: they're going to be checking their calendars to see what we're hosting next because, I'll tell you what, the world is watching.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the recent conclusion of the snowboard half-pipe world cup, the international speed skating union speed skating championships, and the Scotties Tournament of Hearts and given Alberta's long and rich history as a host of major sporting events, can the same minister outline how the success of these events will help attract continued investment in Alberta's sporting infrastructure, enhance Alberta's reputation as a hub for athletic excellence, and foster sustained economic growth across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, once visitors get a taste of Alberta, they always want more. It's a known fact that every member in this Chamber can agree on one thing for sure, that Alberta is the best place to live, to play, and to visit. With the success of these events it's going to spark desire within. Our ski hills are starting to build even more technical tracks that will stand out on the world stage, and our arenas are looking for opportunities to set themselves up to host large events like hockey games, figure skating, and even curling matches. This will truly set our province apart from the rest of the competition, leaving organizations wanting more Alberta to host their events right here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a question. [interjections]

Order. Order. Order. We save standing ovations for Rocky the Ram. [interjections] Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is the only one with the call.

Grassy Mountain Coal Project

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I were capable of feeling humility, I would have been humbled by that response.

This government loves nothing more than ignoring facts. What else could explain the revival of the Grassy Mountain coal mine project? The fact is that this coal mine has been determined by numerous scientists to be dangerous with its toxic materials and detrimental effects on the environment. Experts in law and policy have all declared the project legally dead. Will the minister finally drive the nail in the coffin of this project, say no to the Grassy Mountain mine, and leave the eastern slopes alone?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the weird fascination with coal is for the NDP party, but in B.C. the number one exporter in North America is Vancouver, run by an NDP government. When this party, this party across the way, was in power in Alberta, they invited billionaires from across the world to bring their technology and bring coal mining into not just Alberta in brownfields but in category 2 lands, in greenfields. Now, I can't imagine a more backwards situation than the NDP actually sticking up for the environment based upon what they've done in B.C. and Alberta.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that it's Pi Day and the minister seems to be serving up a bunch of cow pies in his last answer and given that a panel of a dozen experts have debunked the Grassy Mountain coal mine's alleged minimal impacts, successful mitigation plans to

work with toxic chemicals, and economic benefits to conclude that the project was not in the public interest and given that Albertans have repeatedly been vehement in their disdain for this project, will the minister add the results of this panel to his reading list so that he can learn the facts and put this unwanted project down for good?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this is an application for an exploratory permit. Now, I know the NDP on the other side think that they should be able to say yes and no to every single project that they deem worthy, but we believe that Albertans deserve the rule of law. They deserve the opportunity to be heard. We're not going to block Albertans from having their say on this exploratory permit that plans to use water out of a coal lake. The NDP have this file so backwards that they should just leave it alone. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that they're exploring for coal and given that Albertans have concerns about the regulatory processes for coal activities and that coal policies apparently can be easily overwritten by a letter from the minister when they are meant to be legally binding and given that these are the same results from the government's own Coal Policy Committee consultation, what more will it take for this government to end the Grassy Mountain coal mining project for good and give Albertans what they want?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans want is the truth, and the truth is that the NDP in B.C. is at record levels of coal shipping all over the world. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Jean: No matter where the NDP go, they always do the same thing, Mr. Speaker. They tell people to come in and dig coal. They say: let's export coal in record shipments. That's what the NDP's record is on coal.

This particular exploratory permit, Mr. Speaker, is in a brownfield, a brownfield that, when they were in power, they did nothing about. We're going to fix it. Albertans deserve their day, and they deserve a government that sticks up for them and for water and air.

School Construction in Edmonton-South

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton-South is the fastest growing area in Edmonton, and our schools are seeing class sizes of 30-plus students. Monsignor Fee Otterson is a K to 9 school in my riding that has been over capacity by an average of 158 students annually while this UCP has been in government. This is simply unacceptable. Why are this minister and government failing to keep up and address the issue and change with some action?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to announce for the residents of the member's riding that two new schools are coming to that member's riding. It is critical for us to build schools in our growing communities, including in the member's riding, and we'll be doing precisely that.

Member Hoyle: Given that Corinna, a mother and parent in Edmonton-South, wrote to me with concerns that her grade 8 student will start high school next year, a year earlier than scheduled, to address this government's shortcoming in supporting schools that are over capacity and given that students and staff and families in my riding deserve better than this, can the minister provide a real and clear answer on why he has not stepped up and supported overcapacity schools like Monsignor Fee Otterson?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, a new K to 9 school is coming to Heritage Valley. A new K to 9 school is also coming to Hays Ridge, both in the member's riding, and right next door the new K to 9 school in River's Edge and a new K to 6 school in Glenridding Heights have also received design funding. Four projects are moving forward in south Edmonton.

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, it needs to be addressed now.

Given that Sarah, a parent at Monsignor Fee Otterson, shared that her kindergartner . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Hoyle: . . . may not have the opportunity . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I get to decide when you go next. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Given that Sarah, a parent at Monsignor Fee Otterson, shared that her kindergartner may not have the opportunity to go to school in their community and given that the next best option is to send her child to school and all kindergartners to another riding, can the Minister of Education explain why parents should need to consider sending their kindergartners a 35-minute bus ride to another journey in another riding and this government is not doing what it said it should be doing?

Mr. Nicolaides: Kindergartners should not have to do that, and that's why we're building two new schools in the member's riding, Mr. Speaker, to get it done. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Wildfire Season Preparation

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring's wildfires had devastating impacts on my constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and on the rest of Alberta. Instead of enjoying the normal summer activities, many Albertans were displaced and worried about the wildfire season. Our government has declared wildfire season early this year to better direct resources to existing wildfires. To the Minister of Forestry and Parks: what else is our government doing to protect Albertans from wildfires?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We did declare an early start to the wildfire season to help better position our resources around the province. Along with starting the wildfire season early, we have extended contracts for fireteam crews from 93 days to 123 days. Should Budget 2024 pass, we will be hiring an additional 100 wildland firefighters. We'll increase training, incident management teams, and communications. We are also signing agreements for more helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and heavy equipment. I was just at one of the warehouses in the hon. member's area to announce a new technology we'll be using in this year's wildfire season. This tech will help our crews to work at night, when fires are more subdued. We're making changes that will make a difference.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that last year foreign firefighters had to be recruited to assist with firefighting and fire prevention duties and given that

we're grateful for those who worked on our front lines to fight the wildfires and further given that we're preparing for another wildfire season ahead of us, can the same minister please share with us what technologies and practices our government is investing in to fight future wildfires?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, through you to the member, thank you for the question. Budget 2024 will invest an additional \$151 million over the next three years into wildfire preparedness, prevention, response, and mitigation. This additional funding will enhance firefighting capacity with increased wildfire resources such as personnel, aircraft, drones, and night-vision technology. Aerial operations are integral to firefighting efforts, and increased budget funding will enable the province to add two additional night-vision helicopter contracts as well as two new air tanker group contracts. Budget 2024 will also add additional drones for aerial surveillance. This isn't just additional money; it's valuable assets on the ground.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister. Given that these new drones and helicopter contracts are a great step forward to protect Alberta families, individuals, and businesses from the impacts of wildfires and further given that Budget 2024 focuses on the investments and hiring of new firefighters, to the same minister: what safeguards is our government putting into place to alleviate the pressures of wildfires?

Mr. Loewen: Thanks again for the question. Our number one concern is the safety of Albertans, their homes, and communities. Mr. Speaker, we have always invested in preparation for wildfires. Our new community fireguard program is designed to increase the likelihood of containing a wildfire, reduce losses, and improve the safety of firefighters. In some cases community fireguards can also be designed to support livestock grazing operations as a tool for maintaining long-term vegetation management and fireguard effectiveness. The FireSmart program helps communities and residents manage and reduce the threat of wildfire through public education, development, and vegetation management. We have made many changes in response to last year's unprecedented season to help protect Albertans and our communities.

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 12, Consumer Protection (Life Leases) Amendment Act, 2024, sponsored by the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings?

Member Irwin: Yup.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. I rise to table copies of more e-mails from Calgarians struggling with skyrocketing rents as well as a comprehensive study from CMHC that found no evidence of a negative impact of rent controls on supply despite what this minister continues to claim without any supporting evidence. I would like all members of the House to read these tablings.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seldom find myself nodding in agreement when reading a column written by Keith Gerein, but I was this morning, and I table his column titled Edmontonians Are Right to Be Sick About How They're Being Treated, an article about the refusal of the UCP to build a new hospital.

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. Mrs. Sawhney, Minister of Advanced Education, pursuant to the Land Surveyors Act Alberta Land Surveyors' Association report of the annual general meeting, 2023; pursuant to the Architects Act Alberta Association of Architects 2022 annual report; pursuant to the Regulated Forest Management Profession Act Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals 2022 annual report; pursuant to the Chartered Professional Accountants Act Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta annual report 2021-2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are no points of order today. Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 10

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move second reading of Bill 10, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

This bill consists of key legislative amendments which, if passed, would implement key policies included in Budget 2024. Proposed amendments would attract new workers to Alberta to take up in-demand trade occupations, promote investment and further boost industries, provide more flexibility within the Alberta fund, create new revenue to support public services for Albertans and look out for their health. Together these measures would ensure continued momentum in our economy and support for Albertans now and into the future.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

These amendments send a strong message to investors about Alberta's business-friendly environment. While Alberta's strong economy and competitive business environment continue to attract people, labour shortages have lingered, especially in the skilled trades. Amending the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to introduce a one-time \$5,000 refundable tax credit would help Albertans and Alberta businesses prosper. We want employers to use the attraction bonus as part of their hiring strategies.

Amendments would also streamline the process to widen the film and television tax credit program's application window to attract new types of productions like game shows and reality TV. Keeping our province as a destination of choice for the film and television industry is important for jobs now and into the future. Notably, these changes would provide consideration for filming in diverse parts of Alberta like rural areas and smaller communities where a boost in job numbers provides a big impact to the local economy.

We also want to continue supporting agriculture, one key economic driver in Alberta. One way we're looking to grow this industry is to make changes that would expand the agriprocessing investment tax credit program to registered partnerships. Using a single application and investment plan rather than multiple applications would save time and get applications processed faster. That way, this program could continue attracting more large-scale investment.

Another issue we're tackling is planning for the future needs of our province's growing population. Alberta is projected to surpass 5 million people in the next two years. Alberta's government is raising land titles transfer and registration charges to help keep up with the future needs of our province's unprecedented population growth. The additional revenue will also help to support the efficient, modernized operation of the land titles office. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will still pay the lowest overall cost to register mortgages and transfers. In fact, it's over 40 per cent lower than the next lowest province, Saskatchewan.

To support Albertans' health, we're increasing tax rates on cigarettes and smokeless tobacco, which would be authorized retroactively. It also aligns with the tobacco and vaping reduction strategy, which supports taxation as an effective and proven tool to discourage consumption.

Lastly, three amendments are proposed to the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act. The first is to streamline mid-year government reporting. The department would report on the current year, dropping the three-year outlook that is always updated just a few months later at budget. That would mean budget preparations such as consultation with other ministries could begin earlier. Our commitment to fiscal reporting, as recognized by credit-rating agencies like S&P Global Ratings and DBRS Morningstar, would remain timely and transparent.

The second proposed amendment is to exclude the Alberta carbon capture incentive program from expense limitations. This is currently the case for the Alberta petrochemicals incentive program. Extending this change to ACCIP would make it easier to provide grants to emerging innovators. New projects come online throughout the year, making it difficult to budget a set number. Having this support in place would help ensure Alberta's economy and our efforts to reduce emissions grow without delay.

The last amendment would be to exempt the Alberta fund from the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act in-year spending rule. Having more time and flexibility to decide when to deploy this funding would give government greater decision-making capacity. A capacity that would only be exercised during a surplus ensures that responsible fiscal management will continue to be maintained. Ultimately, when this funding is used, it would support current and future Albertans.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, these amendments come at an important time for Alberta and Albertans' futures. To that end, I am pleased to move the second reading of Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading, Bill 10? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for introducing this piece of legislation and just offer a few comments in response. The Finance minister has outlined all of the things that this bill does. It's hard to cover the thoughts that I and my caucus will share on all of these things in 15 minutes, so I just want to focus on two of the primary concerns that I have with this piece of legislation, the first being the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus that the government is setting up. The second is the reporting requirements and the expense limits that the government is setting for the Alberta carbon capture and incentive program.

With respect to the Alberta Is Calling program my colleagues and I were quite disappointed to read this piece of legislation, when it was introduced, to find out that even though the Premier had promised in the election campaign last year that she would be providing some kind of financial incentive to attract health care workers and early childhood care workers to our province, the minister who introduced this legislation has said that those people won't be included in this bonus. That's a huge setback for the province of Alberta when it comes to attracting and retaining much-needed health care workers.

We've seen in British Columbia just recently that the government there has offered nurses attraction bonuses of up to \$30,000. Now, true, Mr. Speaker, a \$30,000 bonus is probably enough to cover one month's worth of rent in Vancouver, but it is a much more substantial cash incentive than what the government has on offer, and it's certainly much more than what the government is offering health care workers, which is zero. That combined with the recent revelation from leaked documents from AHS that the government has imposed a hiring freeze on health care workers within that organization means that this government is really not interested in attracting or retaining health care workers in the province at a time when they're very desperately needed, and that's a really incredibly disappointing thing to see.

You know, the minister has said that construction trades seem to be the most important thing that Alberta needs to deal with, and maybe we'll get around to attracting health care workers at some time in the future. I don't know how much more desperate the situation needs to be before the government takes action to start to meaningfully attract health care workers to our province, especially when other provinces are really rolling out the red carpet and paying substantial sums of money to attract health care workers to their province.

It's also concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that – you know, I can see the reasoning behind offering a one-time bonus to health care workers who are primarily paid out of the public purse. It's the responsibility of any fiscally responsible government to manage its budgets. Perhaps offering high wages over the full length of a contract of a health care worker is not something that the government can afford to do right now, but this one-time bonus is something that they are willing to put in. It doesn't make sense to me, though, that we are subsidizing private corporations to attract people here to this province. Why is it that the government doesn't want to do anything to attract public-sector workers here to the province, but they're rolling out the red carpet in big gobs of cash for people who will work in the private sector?

Now, I have no doubt that the people that they want to attract are in demand, Mr. Speaker, but why is it the government's responsibility to attract them when it should be the private sector's responsibility? If companies need these people so much, why aren't they the ones offering the financial incentives? Why does it fall to the taxpayers

of Alberta to subsidize profitable corporations who need to hire these people when that is properly the responsibility of the companies themselves, who, I might add, will benefit from the labour that the people that we are attracting through this program will provide?

It doesn't make sense to me, Mr. Speaker, and my concern is that this will be an excuse to let private employers off the hook when it comes to paying fair wages to their workers, that it will reduce the incentive for private employers themselves to pay workers what they fairly deserve. I think that's the question that private employers need to ask themselves: why is it that more people aren't coming to Alberta to work? Is it because their working conditions and their pay isn't enough to attract them here and maybe private corporations, the people looking to hire these skilled trades, should do more themselves before coming, hat in hand, to the government asking them for a handout?

It's a little bit frustrating, Mr. Speaker, that this is a government handout to profitable private companies when, you know, the economy is firing on all cylinders and corporate profits are higher than they've ever been before. This seems, to me, to be an expenditure of \$14 million that isn't warranted right now, and had the government spent \$14 million attracting health care workers and people who would work in the public sector, that would be a much more fair expenditure of public dollars.

It's with this idea of bailing out profitable corporations that I also have concerns with what the government is doing with regard to the Alberta carbon capture and incentive program. Now, in November of 2023 the government announced that they were going to be developing this program, which gives a 12 per cent grant to companies to develop carbon capture and storage programs. That's on top of the already billion or so dollars that the government has spent through the ministry of energy on developing carbon capture and storage programs. That's on top of the hundreds of millions of dollars that the government has spent subsidizing carbon capture and storage programs through the TIER fund and Alberta Innovates. And here we are with a bill before us that will exempt the Alberta carbon capture incentive program from the spending limits that exist for things like health care and education, AISH payments, or housing: all of those urgent needs. Here we are again subsidizing profitable corporations to do something that they should be doing on their own dime.

Mr. Speaker, it was really concerning to me that the CEO of Cenovus was quoted in a news article that I read the other day, was asked about the investment tax credits that the federal government is supposed to create for carbon capture and storage programs. Now, when the federal government introduced that program, they estimated that the incentive, the investment tax credits, would cost the public purse around \$5 billion, but the Parliamentary Budget Officer did a review and found that actually that investment tax credit could cost billions more, \$6 billion or \$7 billion. That's the federal investment on top of the billions of dollars that the provincial government has already put into carbon capture and storage. The CEO of Cenovus said: that's not nearly enough to actually get us to spend a dime on carbon capture and storage; we need more money.

Well, how much more money do they need, Mr. Speaker? Apparently, the answer to that question, from the government, is: as much as you want. That's what they're doing here with this bill. They're lifting the expenditure limit on the carbon capture incentive program so that it's not subject to the same kind of spending limits that every other government department and program is subject to, and that's not right.

3:00

We know that the companies that are most in need of carbon capture and storage are also the most profitable. Cenovus and CNRL and Suncor: they're all making record profits. They are the most profitable companies in the history of capitalism, yet they cannot find a spare \$14 billion to build their own carbon capture and storage program. They come like beggars to the provincial and the federal governments, with their hands out, and expect the taxpayers to foot the bill.

The people that I represent don't think that that's fair. There's nothing for them. There's no government assistance in this bill even though the government promised it in the election, not that I'm a big fan of income tax cuts, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I'm quite happy that the government broke that promise because it was a ridiculous promise to make to the people of Alberta. The people of Alberta rightly expected, given what the Premier told them during the election campaign, that more affordability help was on the way, and there's nothing in this bill to help them out with the cost of their utilities, with the cost of their rent, the cost of their groceries, the cost of gas, their car insurance. There's nothing here to help them out with that, but the most profitable companies in the history of capitalism get extra billions of dollars on top of the \$7 billion that the federal government has given them and the billions of dollars that they've already got for carbon capture and storage.

I want to add, Mr. Speaker: what kind of value are we getting for our money that we're spending on carbon capture and storage? The minister of energy continually reminds us that since 2015 Alberta has captured and stored 11 million tonnes. That's approximately a million tonnes a year for carbon, and we've already spent billions of dollars. That's over \$1,000 a tonne. The carbon price right now is \$65 a tonne; it's going up to \$80 a tonne. These guys lose their minds that the price of carbon is going up to \$80 a tonne, but they're happy to pay the most profitable corporations in the history of capitalism \$1,000 a tonne to reduce their carbon emissions. That doesn't make economic sense.

It's offensive to me, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite continually lecture us on how fiscally irresponsible we are and how little we understand how economics work, but they turn around and happily spend over \$1,000 a tonne for industry to reduce their emissions. Imagine what we could actually achieve with emissions reductions if we spent those billions of dollars helping you and me and average Albertans reduce their emissions.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I went through the process of renovating my house to net zero over the last year so that my house no longer emits carbon emissions. I'm very happy about that fact, but I had to foot the bill entirely on my own. I'm happy to do it. I think it's the right thing to do, but it would be nice if the government were willing to offer me a fraction of the financial incentives that they're offering to companies like Suncor and Cenovus to reduce their carbon emissions.

By the way, if the government were able to help me out, I wouldn't have to pay utility bills anymore. Mr. Speaker, as part of my net-zero renovation I'm now generating my own electricity through solar panels. Now, I expect that I'll probably be lynched for saying that I have solar panels by members opposite who, you know, think that solar panels are evil, but I can look forward to at least 50 years of free electricity now that I've installed these solar panels.

Imagine how many thousands of Albertans could benefit from having free electricity if the government took this money from the Alberta carbon capture incentive program and actually spent it on average Albertans to put solar panels on their houses and reduce their emissions and save them money on utility bills. We don't have

to save Cenovus any money. They're doing quite well, thank you very much. We don't have to save Suncor any money. They're doing quite well, too.

But Albertans are struggling. They cannot afford their electricity bills anymore, and they certainly can't afford to make the investments that they need to make to retrofit their houses or switch to a low-carbon form of transportation, and they would certainly appreciate a little bit of government help. That's what I'd like to see in this bill or some initiative from the government in the future, just a fraction. What if we took a billion dollars and gave it to average Albertans to reduce their electricity costs, reduce their transportation costs, permanently, I might add?

That's the benefit of solar power. For a one-time investment you eliminate your utility bills permanently. For a one-time investment in an electric vehicle you eliminate your gas, your fuel bills permanently. These are the kinds of things that make fiscal sense and that Albertans are asking for. They're not asking for these billion-dollar handouts to the most profitable corporations in the history of capitalism, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it was interesting, Mr. Speaker, to sit through estimates with the Finance minister at committee yesterday morning when he was asked why the government is backing away from its promise to reduce tax increases. He admitted that that promise would cost \$1.4 billion and that they couldn't afford it right now. But, apparently, when it comes to carbon capture and storage, they can write a blank cheque. How is that fair, or how is that fiscally responsible?

I'm really concerned, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to find ourselves with a mid-year fiscal update or the annual report next year that shows that the government is actually billions of dollars in debt because they haven't properly budgeted for or limited the expenses that they're going to make on this Alberta carbon capture incentive program.

The budget documents themselves say that they expect \$35 billion worth of investments in carbon capture and storage to be made over the history of this program. Well, that's \$4 billion at 12 per cent. That's over \$4 billion that the government is expected to make on this program, but they have no idea when they're going to make it or how much it's going to cost, and they don't care. So it's a little bit hard to swallow, Mr. Speaker, that the minister pats himself on the back for presenting a balanced budget when he's bringing forward this Bill 10 that basically eliminates his ability to make sure that the budget is balanced because they're committing themselves to uncapped expenditures on this incredibly rich subsidy program for the corporations that need this help the least.

It's going to be interesting to see how the members opposite go back to their constituents and the people who voted for them thinking that there was going to be help on the way when it comes to affordability and tell them: "No. You know what? We couldn't afford to give you a bit of help with your electricity bills. We couldn't afford to help you with your grocery bills or your fuel bills. We decided to spend that money on carbon capture and storage programs for the most profitable oil companies in the province. Sorry." That's not what people want.

You know, the frustration in this province is palpable. People understand that the economic system is rigged against them, and they're tired of it. That's some of the populist anger that the Premier and her cabinet like to tap into from time to time, but then they turn around and do this, and people get more upset. Eventually the people of Alberta are going to realize that the people who are tapping into this populist anger are actually the ones who are responsible for creating it in the first place, that it's a government like this that is making the problem worse through these kinds of private subsidies for companies.

I urge all members to vote against it. Thank you very much.

3:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is always a pleasure to rise and speak in this Chamber. I stand today to express my support for Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, which will address key priorities outlined in Budget 2024.

Firstly, I would like to applaud the Premier, the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance, and all the ministers for coming up with a budget that aims to strengthen our health care and education, build safe communities, and manage resources wisely to support a growing Alberta. This budget builds on Alberta's strong foundations and continues to position the province for further diversification and growth. Through this government's fiscal responsibility during the past four years supports and relief to Albertans during the time of high inflation were made readily available without incurring debt.

Speaking of debt, Mr. Speaker, through this government's proper management of provincial finances we are now able to reduce and pay down the provincial debt, which was never done by the members opposite during their time in the government; what they did was to accumulate more debt. The members opposite were not even able to balance their budget, and it seemed that they never intended to balance it, as could be noticed from their continuous assertion of spending more. They also drove away job creators and billions of investments when they imposed tax hikes and the provincial carbon tax.

On the other hand, this government has planned to balance the budget from day one of assumption of office, and it is a wise and thoughtful plan to eliminate the largest deficit in Alberta's history. A balanced budget will give us the ability to reduce our debt-servicing charge and pay down the debt. With an estimated \$6.4 billion in surplus cash projected at the end of 2023-2024 and with half of that being used to pay off maturing debt, we are making sure that the future generations will not have to pay a debt that they did not incur.

When the previous government started to assume governance of the province, debt servicing was under \$800 million a year, and when they were ousted from office, it grew to about \$2.3 billion a year, an amount that could have been spent to support hospitals or schools, other public infrastructures and services. As this government pays down the debt, Mr. Speaker, we are able to redirect the debt-servicing amount to more useful services that Albertans rely on, including health care, infrastructure, social programs, child care, and education.

Budget 2024 is another opportunity for this government to create and build investments in Alberta's future, with a forecast surplus of \$367 million and robust economic activity poised to again lead the country in economic growth. Surpluses of \$1.4 billion and \$2.6 billion are forecast for 2025-26 and 2026-27 respectively.

Mr. Speaker, through the well-thought-out strategy of the government and by giving importance to responsible fiscal management, our economy is showing encouraging and continuing growth, but there is a lot more to be done to further diversify and strengthen our workforce, grow our resources, and extend the needed help to all Albertans. Alberta's government has put the province on a more sustainable fiscal trajectory, creating expanded financial capacity, resulting in additional government revenues. Among other things, Bill 10 would exclude Alberta fund spending restrictions, allowing for greater flexibility in spending decisions while ensuring a balanced budget each year. Also, this bill will

exempt the Alberta carbon capture incentive program from expense limitations, supporting the emerging carbon capture field and aiding in Alberta's economic diversification and emission reduction efforts.

Mr. Speaker, these changes would allow the government to capitalize on new and emerging opportunities while still complying with the fiscal framework. The job-creating corporate tax introduced by this government is proving to be a more sensible approach than the increasing of taxes imposed by the previous government. Through this approach it is estimated that for fiscal year 2024-2025 there is about \$2.1 billion more in collection of annual corporate tax revenue at an 8 per cent rate than at the 12 per cent rate in 2018-2019 imposed by the members opposite, demonstrating the huge investment framework established since this government took office.

As multibillion-dollar investments have started to come into Alberta, Mr. Speaker, it has been forecast that Alberta will again have outstanding economic growth this year. In December last year Amazon Web Services opened its second cloud computing hub in Calgary with an investment amounting to \$4.3 billion while Infosys and Mphasis opened their tech hubs in Calgary in 2022 and together will create thousands of jobs in the province. RBC has also established a tech hub in Calgary with about 300 jobs while EY created a new finance hub with about 200 jobs in Calgary, impressed with the talented workforce. Early last year Appexus Technologies opened its new Canadian headquarters in downtown Calgary, creating 125 jobs in the process. These are just some of the many investments creating jobs in Alberta and boosting our economy. As an effect, we saw an additional 84,800 jobs over the last 12 months. More than 85 per cent have been full-time positions.

Additionally, Alberta got off to a strong start this year with an increase of 23,800 full-time jobs in January, and in the same month Alberta's employment numbers went up to 3.5 per cent compared to January 2023. Then last month Alberta job creators added 17,400 jobs, which maintains Alberta's job market to be one of the best in Canada. Our competitive tax rate, highly skilled workforce, abundant natural resources, and world-class education system mean we will continue to be the economic engine of Canada.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government's ongoing work on current and longer term labour market challenges includes supporting Alberta's workforce through responsive training and employment programming, attracting talent, and creating a labour force to meet the demands of our province's growing economy. Also, Bill 10 carries the amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act which will fulfill a promise to attract skilled workers, addressing labour shortages, especially in the skilled trades.

It implements the Alberta Is Calling attraction bonus, a one-time, \$5,000 refundable tax credit aimed at attracting out-of-province workers to Alberta to work in the skilled trades. It will also establish some of the criteria needed to qualify for the bonus. It is a great initiative that helps in filling labour shortages in the skilled trades. Bill 10 also provides \$10 million for the program that can support 2,000 workers in receiving the tax-refundable bonus.

This bill will also amend the Film and Television Tax Credit Act by widening the film and television tax credit program application window, creating greater administrative flexibility and enabling productions to get their tax credit earlier. These changes will ensure the program has clear rules, proper oversight, and less red tape. This program has been successful in attracting film and television productions to Alberta, and with the changes introduced by Bill 10, it will ensure that the program remains competitive, which makes

our province continuously the destination of choice for the film and television industry.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, an Alberta-shot TV series was the most-searched-for TV show world-wide on Google; it is none other than the hit series *The Last of Us*. Also, Alberta was showcased in different Hollywood movies, including *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* and the movie *Let Him Go*.

Bill 10 will make it easier for registered partnerships to apply to the agriprocessing investment tax credit program for a nonrefundable 12 per cent tax credit when they invest at least \$10 million to build or expand an agriprocessing facility in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, Bill 10 will also allow a registered partnership to apply using a single application and a single investment plan for a combined investment of at least \$10 million rather than each corporation in the partnership submitting separate applications and investments. These initiatives will show that Alberta is a friendly and competitive place to do business and create new jobs in food and agribusiness.

Alberta's government is also setting new records for spending in health care through Budget 2024, which amounts to \$26.2 billion, an increase of \$1.1 billion, another record-high investment into the Health ministry to continue building a stronger health care system. Albertans need a strong health care system with the capacity to manage extraordinary surges and provide an excellent standard of care to all. That is why the government allotted \$3.6 billion over three years in capital funding to maintain or expand health care facilities throughout the province. This record investment also ensures Albertans across the province have access to the highest quality and most modern services our health care system can provide.

In ensuring the success of Alberta's future leaders, Alberta's 2024 budget brings another historic investment in education. This year Alberta will spend about ... [Mr. Singh's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to speak.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon in the Assembly to respond with some remarks to the Minister of Finance's proposed Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, which is an omnibus bill which brings forward a number of enabling measures, which, of course, breaks a lot of promises and increases costs in many ways to Albertans. That was not something that was expected if one listened to the Finance minister during the election campaign. However, that's not a big surprise to us on this side of the House, where we expected broken promises and increased taxes even though that was the opposite of what Albertans were promised in the last election campaign.

There are a number of elements to this omnibus bill, Mr. Speaker, which I will touch on. I won't touch on everything but certainly on some of the things that popped up to me, that struck me as a little bit odd in the first place, and I know that constituents of mine are asking this as well. This has to do with why we need to be paying people \$5,000 as an incentive to come to Alberta. I remember that in the boom period in the middle '70s, early '80s, people were flocking to Alberta because of the rapid rise and growth of the oil sands industry. Of course, housing was in a tight situation – it was a big crunch there – but other things were done then that made it easier for people to come to the province and attract them to the province.

It certainly wasn't a \$5,000 bribe to come to the province that got people here. They came for other reasons, and they knew that when they got here, there was going to be some benefit in terms of finding

housing and so forth. I remember that back then there was no need for Alberta to make a call and bribe people with \$5,000 gifts. In the '80s and the late '70s the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation had grants for housing, for people to buy a house. There was a program. It was actually assistance with the federal government as well in large measure, and it was MURB, multi-unit residential buildings, tax breaks.

Builders would construct, basically, town homes, condominium town homes, on a massive scale so that people would have a place to live when they got here. Those are some of the things that perhaps are lacking in this burst of public money going to folks, \$5,000 to bribe people to come here, when in fact when they get here, they're finding that there's no place to live that's affordable, that their kids don't have a school that they can go to, and that the hospitals have got a lineup at them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was unfortunately having to spend a fair bit of time visiting family members in the Misericordia hospital in my riding recently, and I know that there are some things that were done there that were great. I mean, we initiated, when we were in power, a new emergency department, but there are things, short-sighted things, that are lacking there that would give pause to one considering moving to Alberta such as the total lack of a new CT scanner for that emergency ward that was built. The people there, the nurses, tell me there's a 20-minute walk from the new emergency ward to the CT scanner, which is actually one that keeps breaking down on a regular basis.

3:30

You know, to attract people to this province, as the Finance minister wishes to do, by paying \$5,000 is probably an admission of a lack of other incentives that would normally be provided by a government that had the foresight to realize that people who are coming here need a place to live, an affordable place to live, and that the basic fundamental services of the province – your education system and your health care system – are the real main attractions.

Of course, we all know, Mr. Speaker, that people across the country and around the world, frankly, at postpandemic – there's a demand for workers to be in every province, not just tradespeople but health care workers as well. There's an open competition. That response the government has made, by the Alberta Is Calling \$5,000 bribe, is a simple solution, but it's not necessarily the fundamental change that's going to attract people to the province. That is by investing in our health care system, investing in our hospitals, investing in our education system so that our schools are not overcrowded. You know, those schools and those buildings, those structures: although they're crumbling and failing and need to be replaced in a lot of cases, they also need people to staff them. You want to attract people to come and staff those places, but you don't need to necessarily spend \$5,000 to do it; you need to have them realize that they're going to be able to have a place to stay and a place to educate their kids when they get here.

I know that there's a portion of the new emergency ward, a brand new \$80 million emergency ward in the west end attached to the Misericordia hospital, that is unopened, unused, underutilized because of staffing shortages, Mr. Speaker. When people hear those kinds of stories from people who may have already migrated to Alberta from other parts of the country – they say, "Well, you know, I brought my child with me to the province of Alberta, but my child had appendicitis, and we had to really be concerned about it because they had to do a CT scan to figure out what was happening, but it was a 20-minute walk down a crowded hallway in the bed to make sure he could get a CT scan to determine whether or not he had appendicitis" – that would freak out any parent. They thought they were coming to a province that was ahead of the game with respect

to public services and hospitals and education; then they find out that we're deficient.

We're speaking, in this budget the Finance minister brought forward, about not having a debt. There's a small surplus. Well, Mr. Speaker, the definition of debt includes a lot more things than just simply not having a budgetary deficit on an annual basis in a particular budget. Debt also is deferred maintenance on highways. Debt is hospitals that haven't been built in 50 years in this province. Debt is schools that are in need of being built, hundreds of them. This government boasts about building a few schools here and there. We did 244 school projects, either new builds or renovations, during the four years that we were in power, yet the government is proud of the dribs and drabs that they're coming forward with, leaving a huge deficit every year in schools construction.

Now we find the Edmonton south hospital is paused. That's the government term for "putting a stick in the spokes of." It may never get built, when we're begging for hospitals. Like, people will look at this and then hear from people who have arrived from other parts of the country and realize that we haven't built a hospital in over 50 years in the city. That's a scathing embarrassment to me and to others who want to say, you know: you should come to Alberta and bring your family with you even if that child of yours has a health condition that may need hospitalization from time to time. You're going to have to add the corollary: by the way, you do want to maybe move closer to hospital X than hospital Y because it actually has some capacity once in a while.

The whole concept, Mr. Speaker, of bribing people with \$5,000 has my constituents shaking and scratching their heads and saying: "What in the world do we need to do that for? Why on our own merits are we not able to attract people to this province without bribing them with \$5,000?" Surely to goodness we can do things that will attract people by having our health care system or having our education system, having available housing, affordable housing in place. That's going to be what has attracted people in the past, and that indeed is what we should be doing now to make sure that people choose us here in Alberta rather than other parts of the country or other parts of the world.

As I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, we're in a huge competition for people, for skilled people in every profession and every trade. It shouldn't be specific that we're certainly only looking at attracting tradespeople, as this bill attempts to do. It has specific measures so that tradespeople are paid a bonus to come here if they stay a certain amount of time, but they certainly have left out any particular incentive for people who are in the health care profession while at a time that a new emergency ward in Misericordia sits partially unused because there's not enough staff. There is difficulty getting those staff. So the priorities of the government are certainly lacking.

I want to shift my attention now to something else that actually is a disincentive as part of this bill, Bill 10, that the Finance minister has implemented, and that's an increase in the fees to the land titles transfer and registration of mortgages. Now, I think both sides of this House will agree, Mr. Speaker, that one of the biggest drivers of economic activity and economic development in the province or any jurisdiction is the housing market. People will buy houses and buy properties, and businesses who build warehouses and so forth are those that drive the economy. If you do anything that creates a disincentive to that industry, you're hurting a multitude of other people down the road. For example, of course, if you buy a house and you're looking at buying furniture, you may end up, if it's a used property, buying renovation materials and so forth. I know the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just spoke about doing a retrofit on his house so that he could have solar panels and use off-grid energy.

I mean, that type of thing is also an expenditure that people will make, and they do so when they can afford the down payment and to make the purchase that they'd like to make, whether it's a condo or townhouse. That purchase is something that's calculated by a family or an individual who is really looking with a fine-tooth comb at what their affordability level is. Even if you're coming up with a 5 per cent minimum down payment, Mr. Speaker, on a half a million dollar purchase, it's 25 grand. I always used to inform my buyers, when I sold real estate for over 30 years, that you needed then – it was, like, 10 years ago or so since I last sold – an extra \$2,500 to \$3,000 on top of your down payment to close the transaction.

What this Bill 10 is doing, Mr. Speaker, is adding on that average \$500,000 purchase about \$650 to that buyer's cash requirement to close the transaction. That's a big chunk of cash. If your total closing costs were \$2,500 to \$3,000 before, now you're adding 650 bucks onto that, plus the 5 per cent down payment at a minimum. That is going to cause that individual perhaps not to be able to get the property that they really need or maybe not to go ahead with the transaction at all.

Mr. Nally: Three thousand dollar closing costs?

Mr. Dach: It's a disincentive. The members opposite seem to think that adding additional costs onto a transaction is something that one shouldn't be considering, but it is. Every statutory cost that you add is a disincentive to making a purchase.

The economic driver that the real estate industry is to the Alberta economy and every economy is something that you should treat very, very carefully, and arbitrarily going ahead at this point in time when we're in an affordability crisis in Alberta is something that the government should not have gone ahead with. Like, why now? The minister in his opening remarks, Mr. Speaker, said earlier in the House that it was to help keep up with the population growth. I don't quite understand that logic, how the increase in fees on registration and land transfers somehow keeps us up with population growth, but we can maybe get him to clarify that later on in debate on the bill.

3:40

Also, the minister said it was helping to generate revenue to invest in a land titles system. Now, while I agree, Mr. Speaker, that over time the land transfer system has been starved of funds, even notwithstanding the fact that it does generate over \$120 million in revenue, it still is something that should never have been done at this point in time because it was not something necessary. It's low-hanging fruit. They're doing it because they thought they could.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The minister of jobs, trade, and economy. Close?

Mr. Jones: Different order. Close enough, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise that the NDP are confused that our government continues to promote Alberta to other areas of Canada and the world. After all, they consider Alberta to be embarrassing, and they suggested that Albertans and our workers move to other jurisdictions to find meaningful employment. That resulted in the loss of about 183,000 jobs and tens of billions of dollars of investment flowing to other jurisdictions.

But that is the dark history that we have moved past. Here we are today with a booming economy, the fastest economic growth in Canada, and, along with that, the fastest population growth, which, again, when you hear the comments from the opposition, you'd think that everybody hates Alberta, but the numbers continue to say

the opposite. I'd just encourage the members of the opposition to cheer when Team Alberta is doing well. I certainly do.

An Hon. Member: Woo.

Mr. Jones: Woo. Yeah.

The attraction bonus: why are we doing it? Well, it's very simple. We have a shortage of 20,000 skilled trades as of Q3 2023, and that skilled trades gap is forecasted to widen or increase over the decade because – why? – we've attracted tens of billions of dollars in new job-creating investment. We also need to build houses for Albertans. We need to build hospitals. We need to build schools. In fact, the NDP every day this session has been asking us to build houses, hospitals, and schools. Well, I need to bring in more skilled trades workers to do all of the above, and that is why we've put in place the most generous attraction bonus: \$5,000 tax free to off-set the reasonable moving costs of skilled trades workers who are ready to run from moving places like Ontario and B.C.

And that's another important point, Mr. Speaker. We're also increasing our pipeline, our ability to produce skilled trades workers, but of course, as the NDP may not have realized, it takes time to train workers. To address the needs of today and get ahead of the growing gap tomorrow, we need to bring in fully trained skilled trades workers today. That's the thought, that's the premise behind why we're attracting skilled trades to build schools, hospitals, job-creating investments, and housing.

We're also doing other things in Bill 10. We're responding to, really, stakeholder feedback to improve the film and television tax credit program. Obviously, this has been a very successful program, bringing some of the largest productions in Canadian history, like *The Last of Us*, to Alberta, but every program has room for improvement. We heard that there were some concerns over the principal photography requirement in that you had to apply for the program before commencing filming. We're looking at changing that so that you can apply for the program up to 120 days after you start filming in Alberta. That's to match other jurisdictions. It's a quality of life improvement.

We're also looking at enabling the issuance of annual tax credits as opposed to one lump-sum tax credit in the final year once all deliverables have been submitted. This is another quality-of-life request from industry. They wanted to receive their money and more align to when they incurred the expenses, and that seemed reasonable to me, so we're looking at making that change.

Another thing that we've seen with the continued execution of this program is that the vast majority of the activity of the film and television tax credit has occurred around the Calgary area. I certainly believe that for the long-term health of the film and television industry in Alberta we want to see that broaden to areas outside of Calgary, to rural and remote Alberta, so we're putting in what I would call a rural sweetener, where productions that spend 75 per cent or more of their time or production costs in rural or remote will qualify for the higher 30 per cent tax credit rate. We're also making some other administrative changes, again, quality of life for productions accessing the program, and we're looking to expand the eligible genres. The thought there is that we have film and television infrastructure that we'd like to see used in the winter months, again, so that workers can have meaningful work in this sector year-round, which I think is good for the continued success of our film and television sector.

That's kind of the rationale there. I don't think there's anything to be upset about here. We need skilled trades workers. We need what they bring to Alberta, which is the ability to build everything that we use on a day-to-day basis. We recognize that there are moving costs associated with that, and we're happy to off-set that

because, frankly, we will recover that in one year from their income taxes. These are highly paid individuals who will be very productive, I can tell you, over the next 10 years in Alberta, building tens of billions of dollars of infrastructure.

Thank you for listening. Happy to address any other concerns in the future debate here.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
The Member for Sherwood Park has risen.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to stand, I think for the first time this session, and speak to a bill, so speaking to Bill 10.

An Hon. Member: Front bench.

Mr. Kasawski: Right? It's different, a different view.

The priorities of the government get expressed through the budget, so it's an opportunity to talk about incentives. Happy to do that. One of the things that stands out to me with the UCP is that, in their united form now, what they are struggling with are some of the comments and promises made by the front bench versus what might be felt and desired in the caucus. One that's really stood out to me is that drive towards a carbon-neutral economy by 2050, which I fully support. I think it's a long-shot goal in terms of, like: it's aggressive, it's challenging. We're talking about 26 years away, but I'm happy to have been in enough meetings now where the energy transition has been talked about openly, which I think is really important for all your members to sort of embrace and think about. How did Mister Rogers say it, Mr. Speaker? If you can mention it, you can manage it. So I am happy that we're working on managing it.

Coming back to the priorities in the budget. Working towards a carbon-neutral economy by 2050, I would have expected to see more incentives in this budget. One example I'll just go to is the geothermal industry. I'm not an expert in geothermal, but I do know there are some exciting companies in our province that are trying to make a go of it, I've heard, with maybe challenging economics. You know, what I think about with geothermal is that it is the one renewable energy we drill for. We have exceptional skills in drilling in this province. We have probably over 230,000 conventional wells that have been drilled, so I think we have a skilled force of workers here that could work on geothermal if there was an incentive for companies to develop geothermal projects here.

There is a 12 per cent investment tax credit for some other industries, but those don't seem to be in place for geothermal. You know, if I was to ask a question, it would be: before we bring forward the closure on discussion of the budget, is there an opportunity to look at a 12 per cent investment tax credit for geothermal? I think it can stand beside the Alberta petrochemical incentive program, the Alberta carbon capture incentive program. Both have gotten a 12 per cent investment tax credit, so if there was just a single structural investment tax credit or some incentive for geothermal, I think we could go from having three companies that are operating in this space to having 300 companies that are trying to operate in this space or companies that are growing at an exciting rate. Have you considered any incentives for geothermal? That is the question that I would like to bring to probably about three or four ministers in the entire cabinet when we look at this budget. Then bringing it into Bill 10, would there be an opening and an opportunity to bring an investment tax credit in place for geothermal?

When I look at geothermal and think about it in terms of its opportunity, it's not going to interfere with anybody's viewscapes in a way different than traditional oil and gas. I think when we think about how deployable it is versus something like small-scale

modular reactors, we should be excited about the opportunity to go through an iterative process with not just pilot projects but with a full-on program that would compete with what we're seeing in the United States, with their . . .

3:50

An Hon. Member: IRA.

Mr. Kasawski: . . . Inflation Reduction Act, it's called. Thank you. Yeah. It's never really caught on. I know that there are going to be people out there that are technical experts in this – that's not me – but I just know if we could look at the opportunity for geothermal in this Bill 10 to go along with carbon capture and our petroleum incentives, we should see growth and opportunity in this province that would be, I think, very exciting for an industry that would need it.

Another thing that kind of picks up with me on the priorities – and it's something I'm probably always going to bring forward – is the industry advocacy, the line item that is for what we call on this side of the House the war room. That's going to get \$27 million this year. You know, its success stories include the *Bigfoot Family* controversy, working to lobby the Nanaimo city council last year on its adoption of natural gas, things that aren't necessarily, I would say, priorities for Albertans. We take that \$27 million, and we weigh it against some of the other line items in our budget, and I feel like there are a lot of opportunities for comparison that I think most Albertans would probably say: I would rather spend more on this than the war room.

Wildfire management readiness. We've got \$2 million dedicated to that. I feel like for public safety and emergency infrastructure, we could be looking at more that we could spend in that area that would prepare us versus the \$27 million that we've talked about for industry advocacy. In my own riding of Sherwood Park the courthouse planning has been pushed back a year. That's \$1 million, but I know that that is a project that's a priority for Sherwood Park. If they compared it versus the \$27 million, they would say that \$1 million probably doesn't sound right.

Again to my constituency and the Strathcona community hospital. Planning has been pushed back, but it's \$1 million versus the war room. Again, not showing priority from the government, when they're going to spend that money on advocacy. I haven't seen a lot of results for it that show me that it's getting anything more. I think that we probably are better to just keep our focus on our petroleum marketing.

When I look into, like, agriculture, natural resources, and business development, the Aboriginal business investment fund, which I think is an amazing initiative: \$10 million only versus the \$27 million that is being spent on the war room. The ag societies. We talked about ag societies today, their infrastructure revitalization. In a previous career I spent my time going into communities like Sandy Beach and looking at their arenas that were built in the 1970s, really from a community initiative, that all need to be replaced and rebuilt. There's only \$3 million going into revitalization of these ag society buildings, which really would benefit from more investment from our government to show that we want to grow rural communities and give them that exciting infrastructure that helps them attract new residents, take some pressure off some of our other growing, mid-sized cities.

One of the things that stood out to me when I looked at the budget was the clean Hydrogen Centre of Excellence. Especially in the Alberta Industrial Heartland there is a great deal of excitement about the hydrogen road map. It's interesting that we've spent about \$8 million a year in previous years, but this year we're only going to be spending zero. Zero dollars are going to go towards the clean

Hydrogen Centre of Excellence whereas in 2022 we had mapped out \$50 million towards that, and we have not spent it all. That is an area where I feel like there are higher priorities for our government to focus on.

In the family social supports and housing, affordable and specialized housing is getting \$12 million this year, Mr. Speaker. We know housing is important. We need more nonmarket affordable housing in this province, and \$12 million for affordable and specialized housing versus \$27 million for the war room does not seem like a good priority. Children and Family Services is getting \$3 million this year, but that's a cut from \$7 million of last year. I don't know why we're giving less money to Children and Family Services. The Lethbridge supportive housing for chronically homeless is \$8 million this year. I think Lethbridge deserves more money for supporting the homeless population there.

One that really stood out to me – because I learned last night that the mapping of our population going towards 2040 is that 26 per cent of our population is going to be senior. We're going to have 26 per cent of our population being seniors in this province, and I don't think that we are doing enough to address the housing needs and the different lifestyle needs that are going to be coming to our population, for a huge portion of our population. Last year we had spent \$31 million on seniors' housing development and renewal, but we've cut it this year to \$5 million. Considering the baby boomer population that is continuing to age and that we are heading towards a population where, you know, 25 per cent of our population is going to be senior by 2040, we should probably be getting ready with investment now.

In arts, sports, and recreation, I noticed that the community recreation centre infrastructure program is only getting \$10 million. I feel like that's an area where we could be helping, again, to grow our communities. We're trying to attract a lot of families to this province. Especially when I think of the Alberta Industrial Heartland, we have the \$11 billion investment going into the Dow Path2Zero, and we could use more infrastructure for those families.

In Municipal Affairs, which is my focus as a critic, public library services are getting \$39 million, which is great. But, again, I compare that to this \$27 million that's going to advocacy in the war room, and I think if I flip that over to the libraries, how much better our communities would be. There is a new initiative for growing municipalities, which is \$20 million, and it feels like an opportunity. It's just trinkets, really, compared to the infrastructure needs of municipalities, who bring in \$2.5 billion in provincial revenue for the province by collecting it through municipal taxes but are only getting \$722 million back in terms of their local governance fiscal framework.

And, lastly, I think I'd like to delve into the Alberta Industrial Heartland Association incentive. That's \$8 million this year versus the \$27 million for the war room. It's actually not going to do a lot. I've gone to the minister before and had some good discussion on preferential lending rates for municipalities, but my own municipality brought up this \$8 million and what we're going to get for it. The province supports, you know, municipalities' collaborative approach to regional economic development, like we have in the Alberta Industrial Heartland. It's been the first designated industrial zone in Alberta, and it's having great success. It spans five different municipalities. In Budget 2024 we've allocated \$8 million to this zone, and I learned that \$8 million is going to be going towards a water intake. A water intake, Minister, is going to cost about \$175 million, for an industrial water intake off the North Saskatchewan River. We're putting in \$8 million to leverage that into a \$175 million project. Effectively that other \$170 million is going to have to come from the municipalities.

When the municipalities look at their borrowing cost for a \$170 million project, the \$8 million is not even going to cover their borrowing costs. Even if they could improve the lending rate by half a per cent for municipalities so that they didn't have to go to commercial lenders, they would be able to save \$20 million over the lifespan of a project, like, over a 20-year amortization of a project for a water intake. So I ask for priorities when we're looking at Bill 10, if we could look back at preferential lending rates for municipalities because they will benefit more from that. Especially if you look at the Alberta Industrial Heartland, then they would benefit from even that \$8 million offering. It would be a welcome addition or amendment or change before we come to a vote on this to see that we can look at preferential lending for municipalities as an incentive for the infrastructure development that they require.

Mr. Speaker, how am I doing for time?

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Fifty-two seconds.

Mr. Kasawski: A great time to wrap it up. Thank you.

In conclusion, for priorities that we look at with the budget, I want to let you know I support public education, support growing municipalities, because they are the economic engines of our province, and the incentives that are in place for municipalities that are missing for geothermal would be welcome additions to Bill 10.

Lastly, a group that has come to me is the growers of Alberta, and what the growers of Alberta are missing is long-term permanent research. The program was axed in 2020 by this government, and the growers would like to see long-term permanent research so we can continue to grow our agriculture industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there others who wish to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak this afternoon regarding Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. I've gone through this omnibus bill and looked at all of the different sections that are impacted, and there are just a few that I'd like to focus on today.

First and foremost, I'd like to talk about the Film and Television Tax Credit Act. I have to say that having been an advocate for the culture sector and film since I've been elected and working very closely with film and television in the province, it's wonderful to see additional support coming, too. I know that while I was the critic in the last session, we did a lot of work trying to get this government to understand the importance of more than just the big films that were coming in, the Netflix films and movies. So it's great to see that there's this kind of extension. I'm proud to say that I was part of having this government listen and pay attention to those that are in film and television.

I'm disappointed that there is no digital media tax credit. I know that that was something that was being advocated for and, I believe, promised by this government in the last term. Hopeful that perhaps that would have been included in this considering that they had brought it forward and mentioned it, and it's not in here. Happy to see that film and television has got some more enhancements and that there's some strategy working alongside with them. Disappointed that the digital tax credit does not appear despite being promised.

Mr. Speaker, that's definitely been a theme under this government: promise made; promise not kept. We've seen it over and over from this government. When we're looking at the legislation that's come before us, I can tell you that my constituents

were really, really hopeful that perhaps this budget would be the budget that really provided some sort of affordability assurances. Some of the promises that this government had made prior to the election were making sure that there would be attraction bonuses. Specifically, they mentioned child care workers, health care professionals, and labour. It's a spoiler, but all of those commitments were not kept, and promises were broken.

I know that there's a lot of concern happening right now with what's happening in our health care system. We look at incredible wait times in emergency rooms all across the province. Some have rolling closures, which is absolutely not acceptable. Many, many, many Albertans do not have a family doctor. That is a major concern. What that means is that people are accessing emergency rooms because they can't get in to see a physician. It means that people are going without health care because they don't have a family doctor, and it means that by the time they finally get to see a family doctor, unfortunately, the wait times for specialist services have grown so much that their needs aren't being met in an appropriate amount of time.

I believe that every Albertan deserves access to health care. They were promised before the election that there would be an attraction bonus to health care professionals. This bill, which is, like I said, an omnibus, does not do that, which is really, really concerning, not surprising, because the theme is: promise made; promise broken. People in my community, in Castle Downs are really, really upset that they don't have access to doctors. They're upset that to get certain surgeries is years. Now, I can say that there was some hope that was provided in what the Premier and her colleagues were talking about in the election, that they had these promises, these incentives, but it's really upsetting to see that they weren't kept in this budget.

When we look at Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, there are some things that are pretty concerning when we know that Albertans are struggling in an affordability crisis. The fact that Bill 10 raises taxes on buying and selling a new home with changing the fees that are charged for land titles – so many Albertans are so excited to be able to eventually afford a new home. Unfortunately, with the way that this government has not supported Albertans in this affordability crisis, many can't afford it. But when you finally get to that place where you have your down payment, you have the home of your dreams – maybe it's your starter home, your end of waiting and of renting – and you're excited to get into this new home and then you find out that the Land Titles Act is actually increasing costs, it's really, really upsetting.

I know that when I was going through my divorce and took on the land title – it's not just buying and selling homes; it was getting my ex-husband off the land title and me being the sole person on the land title – there was a cost to that. As a single mom with three kids that's a big cost. That is not something that Albertans should be expected to be paying right now. I think that there are many other ways that this government can look at supporting Albertans, and I don't think this is one of them. Saying, "You know what? You are buying or selling a new home, and we're going to charge you more money for that land title" just doesn't make sense. It shows to me that this government simply is not listening to what is happening to Albertans financially.

When we have a government that is so out of tune with what is actually happening, it's concerning. We had an opportunity for Bill 10 to provide some real support, supporting health care professionals, child care workers, but we don't see that. What we see are a lot of things where we're being told: "This is what we're going to do. It's not part of the legislation. It's going to be done in policy. Just trust us."

Well, that is something that is quite laughable, Mr. Speaker, because one thing that this government has done is shown that they can't be trusted. They make promises and then break them, so why should we now trust that they're going to do things in regulation? If it's not transparent and in this Chamber, where we're discussing it openly, what kind of record do they have to show Albertans? "Just trust us": it's quite concerning.

I know I was really excited to learn that there would be some sort of incentive to bring trades to the province. Two of my children have worked in oil and gas, in the trades. I'm very proud of the work that they do. Over the years there's been a need for them to perhaps get an additional trade, transition out of their current trade, go into a new one, get a different ticket, and there's no incentive for that to happen if you already live in the province. One of my children: he is an insulator, a ticketed insulator, has worked up in Fort McMurray, wanted to get an additional trade of rope access. For my son, who has been born and raised in this province, is a fourth-generation insulator, there's no incentive for him to get an additional trade. That, to me, is absolutely confusing. Having someone move into the province: they get an incentive to come in here and do a skilled trade.

4:10

One of the things that this piece of legislation does is that it doesn't actually identify what those trades are. It says skilled trade, but what is a skilled trade? Well, the minister says that it might be some of the things like crane operators, electricians, heavy-duty mechanics, welders, and pipefitters; it would likely include that. Well, I think those in the trades that are considering coming to Alberta would like to know now what those trades are, not "likely," not "trust us; it'll be in the regulations." When you're talking about enticing people to come to the province, I think you should be as clear as possible about what those trades are because there are a lot of them, Mr. Speaker. There are a lot of trades that are very specialized and very needed, yet they're not named in the legislation. It's once again one of those things: we're going to give trades a bonus, \$5,000, but we're not going to tell you what they are. It doesn't make sense to me.

The other thing about being in a family that has trades: trades are unpredictable. There's something that happens at job sites where you're working and for whatever reason you have to be shut down. It's not a consistent 12-month employment contract; you kind of go when the work is available. So one of the things that is confusing is that they have to have a situation that's secure and stable for a full year to get that tax credit. Well, being in a family that has relied on trades, that is something that is guaranteed not to be stable. It is not a guarantee that you have a one-year job. You might have different contracts. There might be a break in that service. Accidents happen on work sites. Some of these skilled trades are very dangerous, and every day you hope that your loved one goes to work, is safe, all the standards are met, and they come home. But we've seen over and over in this province where, unfortunately, that isn't the situation, that workers are injured and sometimes killed on work sites.

Now, when you have a catch that you have to be employed for a year – they move their whole family here. They come for this incentive. Something that is out of their control happens: they're laid off, the work shuts down, there's some sort of concern, a permit wasn't provided on time. All of these things happen in the trades daily, so to have this caveat that they have to have secure and stable housing for one year to get the tax credit is not an incentive. Anybody that works in the trades knows this, and I'm confused why this would be part of one of the stipulations of this tax credit.

The other thing is working full-time. That's the other credential requirement for this. What does that mean, working full-time? If you have . . .

An Hon. Member: Forty hours a week.

Ms Goehring: I heard a member yell it, but it's not here in the description. It would be nice to have it in the bill. I'm glad that they have an awareness of it, but it's not in the bill.

So we look at what that means. Let's say that we have a pipefitter who's got two tickets. He's a pipefitter and a welder – right? – comes to Alberta, takes a job as a pipefitter. That job, for whatever reason, ends prior to the 12 months. They get a job as, let's say, their other trade. If they're working consecutively for a year but in two different trades, do they qualify for the tax credit, if they're switching trades within that? I don't know. There's no incentive for someone who's in Alberta switching trades to be eligible for the tax credit, so my assumption would be that if you're coming to Alberta and you switch trades, you're no longer eligible for that tax credit.

I think there's too much red tape in this piece of legislation that creates – you know, for a government that talks about reducing red tape, there's a lot of red tape building in this piece.

The other thing that they're talking about here are occupations that are deemed to be in shortage. Who's determining that? I know that when *The Last of Us* came to the province to do their filming, there was a huge shortage of carpenters, and the Alberta film industry was looking all over the place to find carpenters to come in to help with that film. They were at a place where they couldn't do it. Is that a shortage? Who's to decide?

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to rise.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for letting me speak to some of the issues related to this budget. I'm not going to talk about health care this time. One of the things in this budget that particularly concerns me is the removal of incentives to recruit child care workers. We are really desperate for child care workers throughout this province. It's certainly been one of the issues right within my riding of Calgary-Varsity, where lack of child care resources has been just a major problem. I'm going to talk a little bit about a pretty specific situation within my riding that highlights the lack of child care resources and how I was hoping that this deficit of child care workers would have been addressed in Bill 10.

Within my riding, which encompasses the University of Calgary, Foothills hospital, Alberta Children's hospital, which has a large number of workers in those big facilities and a lot of the surrounding community, including in some of the nearby constituencies such as Calgary-Bow, who live within our communities in order to work there. Yet to get on the wait-list for the University of Calgary child care, which requires you to either work there or be faculty at the university – it has over 300 children, and that's the shortest wait-list of child care. Other facilities tell parents that they are going to be waiting three years to get their child in or their children in. When you go on a wait-list, you also have to pay a fee per child. Some of these families have three children, and they're on seven wait-lists, and they're paying a fee to be on the wait-list for all of these facilities because they're desperate to get in, to get child care, daycare for their families.

Now, there was – and it still operates until tomorrow – a child care facility within what was formerly the Smart Technologies building in the midst of Calgary-Varsity, right next door to the

university. The Smart Tech building was purchased by the government of Alberta and turned into a charter school hub. The parents in this facility – and there are 150 children that will be moving to alternate daycares next week, or some of the parents have chosen to remove themselves from the workforce because they can't get child care. This facility had an excellent child care run by a private operator, educational facilities. They've got staff that have worked there for seven years, the same staff, in this facility. The first notice was back in February or March of 2023, when the parents were informed that this was purchased by the government of Alberta and that they would have to be leaving in August of 2023 because they were being evicted, basically; their lease was up.

4:20

Between the very organized group of parents and the company that was running the child care, there were many attempts to try to find alternative space and develop alternative space, but of course finding space and getting development permits: everything takes a long time. The place that they were working on – in the end, they were unable to do that. The families and myself are all grateful that there was some assistance by some of the members in government to help extend that lease; that is why the lease was extended to the end of March. With it being a temporary extension, it really changed the clock, but the challenges of finding child care have continued, so some of these families are going to have to be driving 20 minutes each way beyond their usual commute to take their children to other child care facilities.

The workers are all losing their jobs. They'll be placed in other child care facilities run by the same company, but of course now they have to find – you know, they may not be living close by. They're pretty low-paid workers. The families are just left with nowhere to go, going onto these very long lists. Now, in the searches of what's happening for child care, they've learned that these issues are maybe tighter in this community than in many. However, this is a problem that's everywhere, and there are facilities that cannot even open because they can't staff them with child care workers.

We are aware of another one of the new developments in our community that's going to be starting to open and have child care spaces as of August of this year, but they're very concerned about whether they will have workers to fill the spots. So I really feel that we need to be looking at this and finding incentives for bringing in more child care workers. In addition, I'd like to ask the government to consider some of the challenges particularly around perhaps keeping this very facility open. The parents have worked very hard and come up with some challenging solutions that turned out not to work.

The charter school hub itself is unable to sublease space to them because the rules around what they can lease to is only to other charter schools or to facilities that would provide food to children. There's no ability to put daycares within a charter school hub. This would require changes to their leasing agreement with Alberta Infrastructure. I would like to say that considering changing these rules and including a further look at trying to build daycare into some of our primary schools would be a huge advantage to parents and the community, especially if they're schools that there's maybe a little bit of space in for a daycare.

A few hundred feet from my home is a school in Calgary-Varsity that is a francophone school and has a daycare in it. It has been exceedingly well received and popular because of the convenience for parents to have their children all in one place, so I would like to ask that there be consideration given to considering the allowance and the ability and providing some support to consider the possibility of daycares within schools.

Also, you know, if there's any way of quickly looking at whether things could change for this current daycare that is within the charter hub school, these parents would come back in a minute if their space was not turned into something else. The understanding is that there are no other charter schools planned yet to be moving into this space, yet the daycare is going to be renovated and taken away from being a daycare by September with no other tenants coming in. In this crisis situation do we have to renovate the space? Do we have to change this, or can we please change the regulations so that they could sublease to the existing daycare?

I mean, this really comes down to what's not in the budget, particularly as recruitment of child care workers was a big part of what we were aiming for.

Mr. Kasawski: I heard about three years from a councillor in Calgary. That's brutal.

Dr. Metz: Yeah. Three years to get into a child care space is terrible.

I don't know the story of every family on this list. That's a lot of families, but I do know that one of the fathers is a nurse and is going to stop working because it's just not possible to get reliable child care for their young children.

I wonder where I'm at for time. It looks like I've pretty much eaten up the clock here.

The Acting Speaker: Three minutes.

Mr. Getson: Don't stop now. Go to the bell.

Dr. Metz: Go for three more. Okay. Let's go to the middle.

I realize that with child care workers, just like many other workers across the country, we're talking about maybe stealing from other provinces, but child care workers don't have to come from other provinces; they can come from other countries. I'm hoping that we will have a good strategy in place to bring in workers and incentivize them to come to Alberta rather than to other provinces and that this will help our economy. We know that having adequate child care allows workers to get good jobs, full jobs in our economy, and we know the importance of good child care for the development of children. It is the most critical time of their life, and we need to be able to recruit the correct workers so that they can come in and support our kids.

I know that this is a challenge throughout the province. It's an issue that all parents and grandparents like myself need to be thinking about. It's really an economic issue, having child care available. I urge the government to consider these things: a recruitment strategy for child care workers, considering looking at whether they could help parents by bringing more child care into schools, and looking at changing the rules for this particular charter hub so that the daycare doesn't get removed and can actually come back in a few months and function as a daycare.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, members. It is 4:30. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 18, at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 31st Legislature - 1st Session (2023-2024)

Activity to Thursday, March 14, 2024

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

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

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

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

First Reading — 10 (*Oct. 30, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 57-58 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft.*), 96-97 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 145-47 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 147-54 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on December 7, 2023; SA 2023 c6]

Bill 2 — Alberta Pension Protection Act (Horner)

First Reading — 89-90 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 154-55 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 274-85 (*Nov. 21, 2023 aft.*), 336-43 (*Nov. 23, 2023 aft.*), 394-400 (*Nov. 28, 2023 aft.*), 424-30 (*Nov. 29, 2023 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 522-30 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft.*), 552-59 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve., passed*)
Third Reading — 565 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve.*), 583-90 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on December 7, 2023; SA 2023 cA-29.5]

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

First Reading — 22 (*Oct. 31, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 90-93 (*Nov. 2, 2023 aft.*), 180-87 (*Nov. 8, 2023 aft.*), 272-73 (*Nov. 21, 2023 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 307-09 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 334-36 (*Nov. 23, 2023 aft., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on December 7, 2023; SA 2023 c10]

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

First Reading — 55 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 159-63 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 155-56 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 187-90 (*Nov. 8, 2023 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 309-13 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 336 (*Nov. 23, 2023 aft., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2023 c13]

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

First Reading — 55-56 (*Nov. 1, 2023 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 156-57 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 190-97 (*Nov. 8, 2023 aft.*), 265-72 (*Nov. 21, 2023 aft.*), 403-09 (*Nov. 28, 2023 aft.*), 430-35 (*Nov. 29, 2023 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 456 (*Nov. 30, 2023 aft., passed*), 519-22 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft., recommitted*), 559-62, 563-64 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve., passed with amendments on division*)
Third Reading — 515 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft., recommitted to Committee of the Whole*), 564-55 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve.*), 575-83 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on Proclamation; SA 2023 c12]

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

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

Second Reading — 157-58 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 313-20 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft.*), 435-38 (*Nov. 29, 2023 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 456-62 (*Nov. 30, 2023 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 462 (*Nov. 30, 2023 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on December 7, 2023; SA 2023 c11]

Bill 7 — Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 111 (*Nov. 6, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 158-59 (*Nov. 7, 2023 aft.*), 273-74 (*Nov. 21, 2023 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 400-03 (*Nov. 28, 2023 aft.*), 423-24 (*Nov. 29, 2023 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 514-15 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on December 7, 2023; SA 2023 c7]

Bill 8 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023 (Amery)

First Reading — 209 (*Nov. 9, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 299-307 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft.*), 438-41 (*Nov. 29, 2023 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 515-18 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft.*), 546-52 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 564 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve.*), 569-75 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2023 c8]

Bill 9 — Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2023 (Schow)

First Reading — 478 (*Dec. 4, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 513-14 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 546 (*Dec. 6, 2023 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 590-92 (*Dec. 7, 2023 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on December 7, 2023; SA 2023 c9]

Bill 10 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading — 673 (*Mar. 12, 2024 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 705-16 (*Mar. 14, 2024 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 11 — Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (Ellis)

First Reading — 685 (*Mar. 13, 2024 aft., passed*)

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

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

Second Reading — 114-25 (*Nov. 6, 2023 aft.*), 234-37 (*Nov. 20, 2023 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division; not proceeded with*)

Bill 202 — Education (Class Size and Composition) Amendment Act, 2023 (Chapman)

First Reading — 209 (*Nov. 9, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 237-46 (*Nov. 20, 2023 aft.*), 358-64 (*Nov. 27, 2023 aft., defeated on division; not proceeded with*)

Bill 203 — Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act (Dyck)

First Reading — 111 (*Nov. 6, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 364-70 (*Nov. 27, 2023 aft.*), 479-86 (*Dec. 4, 2023 aft., passed*)

Bill 204 — Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023 (Lunty)

First Reading — 332 (*Nov. 23, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 486-92 (*Dec. 4, 2023 aft.*), 649-58 (*Mar. 11, 2024 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 205 — Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023 (Irwin)

First Reading — 510 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 658-62 (*Mar. 11, 2024 aft., adjourned*)

Bill Pr1 — St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023 (Sigurdson, L)

First Reading — 289 (*Nov. 22, 2023 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills*), 421 (*Nov. 29, 2023 aft., reported to Assembly; proceeded with*)

Second Reading — 455 (*Nov. 30, 2023 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 515 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 530 (*Dec. 5, 2023 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Dec. 7, 2023 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on December 7, 2023; SA 2023 c14]

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