



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 27, 2023

Day 13

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
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Hunter
McDougall
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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 27, 2023

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

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

Hon. Members:

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker: Hon. members, upon consultation with members of this Assembly, Indigenous leaders, and the Métis Nation of Alberta and with permission of former Chief Dr. Willie Littlechild in formulating the land acknowledgement based upon the land acknowledgement which he delivers prior to important activities that take place here in the city, the Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated on Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory to the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We further acknowledge that the province of Alberta also exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, November 27, 2023, marks the first time a land acknowledgement has been made as a formal part of the daily Routine as outlined in the standing orders. To recognize the significance of this, we are grateful to have former Chief Dr. Willie Littlechild. Dr. Littlechild is the former chief of the Ermineskin Cree Nation, the former grand chief of the Confederacy of Treaty Six. He's a residential school survivor, lawyer, former Member of Parliament, who spent his career advancing Indigenous rights and treaties both nationally and internationally, including with the United Nations. His leadership with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission raised awareness of the negative impacts of residential schools on Indigenous Canadians, and he has been recognized for his contributions by being awarded the Order of Canada in 1993. Joining former Chief Dr. Littlechild in the Speaker's gallery are Chief Andy Alook of Bigstone Cree Nation and Chief Isaac

Laboucan-Avirom of the Woodland Cree First Nation. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, as you surely know, 2023 was Alberta's worst wildfire season on record. It was only due to the Herculean effort of brave men and women who battled those wildfires across the province that it was not even more devastating. One of those brave men was pilot Ryan Gould, who tragically lost his life on July 19 when the helicopter he was piloting crashed into Haig Lake. With 9,000 hours flying helicopters, Ryan, call sign Panda, was a seasoned wildfire helicopter pilot, but most importantly Ryan was a loving husband of 14 years to his wife, Carlyn, and amazing father to his sons, Gus and Evan, who I had the honour of meeting earlier today. Today, joined by Ryan's father-in-law, Terry Lengwenus, I am honoured to have them in the Speaker's gallery to honour this fallen hero. I'd ask all members to please provide them the debt of gratitude that we all owe this wonderful family. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: It's my pleasure to introduce to all members Candice Ryan, who led us in a spectacular version of *O Canada* this afternoon. She is a recording artist from Edmonton who's been singing professionally for the last 10 years. Currently she is in two bands and has her own podcast. She's a guest host on 840 CFCW and a full-time mom. I'd ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I also have the pleasure of introducing to all members of the Assembly a very special guest with a very special connection to the Assembly; Jeanette Johnson is the niece of former Speaker George N. Johnston. Speaker Johnston served as the member for the constituency of Coronation from 1921 to 1935, and he was the fourth Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, from 1926 to 1935. He was the 138th elected member of the Assembly as a member of the United Farmers of Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, this brings us to school groups.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the grade 6 students and staff of Michael A. Kostek school in Edmonton-South West. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to everyone here in the Assembly the incredible students and my good friends from SML academy in Stony Plain. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you some fabulous students from St. Bonaventure school, here today with their teacher Ms Schmidt and other adults. They are here to participate in School at the Legislature, and I'm really looking forward to all those questions you're going to have for me later this week. If they could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Liza Bouchard, the executive director of the not-for-profit organization Drive Happiness. And joining her is a great constituent from the riding of

Airdrie-East, the vice-chair of Volunteer Airdrie, Leon Cygman. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you the directors and staff from agriculture's biggest industry and, I would argue, one of the most important industries in agriculture, Alberta Canola. Can all of you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly?

Ms Hoffman: I ask that Morgan, Adam, Lena, and Sage rise as I introduce them. The Conway-Kunitz family have been amazing community builders in my neighbourhood. They are students, safety experts, and also small-business owners. Kunitz Shoes has been an Edmonton staple for 40 years. I encourage you to spend some money while you're visiting Edmonton. Thank you all for coming today.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you from the great town of Rocky Mountain House Darby-rae Crouch, a long-time political staffer in this building who left us to pursue successfully education. She's also one of the best rodeo interviewers anywhere in this province, a great champion of our provincial sport. I ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you two constituents of mine, Dr. Rithesh Ram, a medical entrepreneur who opened and operates Riverside Medical in Drumheller, and his chief of staff, Jessica Hansen. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour today to introduce both to you and through you on this historic first day of the land acknowledgement all the chiefs in the gallery but also some personal guests of mine: my uncle Rocky; his friend Landon Jones; and my cousin Brad Sinclair, who was also my junior hockey linemate, and I'm very proud that he's also an MBA candidate for Indigenous leadership. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mental Health Supports for Farmers

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers and ranchers are vital to Alberta's cultural and economic success. They put high-quality, affordable food on tables in Alberta and around the world. It has been a challenging growing season this year for our producers, causing financial struggles and the ever-present stress that comes with this job. Unpredictable weather, animal disease outbreaks, and long working hours are just a few of the challenges affecting the mental health and well-being of farmers and their families.

Depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges can be common when facing stressful situations in every industry, Mr. Speaker. Rural communities are an amazing support for their neighbours, but it's important to make sure that help is available when someone gets missed. The statistics on farming mental health are sobering. In 2021 more than three-quarters faced moderate or high stress and nearly half had anxiety. Alberta's continued support for AgKnow, the Alberta Farm Mental Health Network, is important to further promote mental wellness throughout the agricultural sector. Since Alberta's government launched AgKnow last year, 12 therapists have been brought on, 39 farm families have been provided support, and more than 24 workshops and webinars have reached over 1,500 people.

By investing nearly \$400,000 of new funding for AgKnow, we are making supports more available for those who need it. This funding will build on the work AgKnow is doing to make mental health awareness and mental health services available to Alberta's hard-working farmers and ranchers. To our farmers and ranchers: if you're struggling, reach out. Please visit agknow.ca to learn more about how to access farm mental health supports, resources, events, and research that's available. Both in-person and virtual therapy sessions can be booked, making it easy for farmers and their families to get the help they need. For anyone facing mental health challenges, reach out and call Alberta 211 to get connected with their local supports.

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement by the Assembly

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: [Remarks in Cree], Mr. Speaker. I have asked the page to deliver to Grand Chief Dr. Wilton Littlechild an offering of protocol on behalf of all members of this Assembly. This is our law and our way as Cree people. I appreciate the permission to pass protocol in the Chamber.

This offer to you, Okimaw, is from every one of us who voted unanimously to start weekly sessions with a land acknowledgement after the prayer. We want to thank you and honour you generously for sharing your land acknowledgement with this Assembly. On behalf of all of us we thank you for your right words and all of the work that you have done. Please accept this protocol as token of our appreciation, our respect, our love. The contribution that you have made is quite profound to many of us. [Remarks in Cree]

This morning in Maskwacis, Grand Chief Littlechild and the official bundle carrier of Treaty 6, the beautiful Elder Cecil Crier, lifted the original pipe from Treaty 6 to mark this historic occasion. When Grand Chief Littlechild shared this with me, I was so incredibly moved that this motion would carry such magnitude to be accepted and validated by our spiritual and our political leaders in ceremony.

The magnitude of this motion has been felt across Treaty 6 and across all of our nations in Alberta. I am extremely grateful to all of you, to every one of you, who voted this in, and I am filled with such hope that through respectful dialogue, through debate, and through mutual appreciation of the land that we share, the treaty we uphold, and the common goal of reconciliation, we can continue to make a positive impact on Indigenous people and for all Albertans in our beautiful, magnificent province. Hay-hay. [Standing ovation]

Environmental Monitoring of the Oil Sands

Member Arcand-Paul: [Remarks in Cree] The cumulative impact on First Nations and Métis communities from recent spills, leaks, and unplanned releases from extraction sites upstream from the

Athabasca delta is serious. On Friday the AER announced the Suncor project had been releasing unauthorized surface runoff into the Athabasca for several months due to a faulty valve. This is following, the week before, an AER announcement that Imperial released unsafe water into the Muskeg River due to a faulty culvert.

Earlier this year there were massive tailings ponds leaks at Kearn polluting hunting grounds, muskeg, and bodies of water within Wood Buffalo. Indigenous communities of the Athabasca delta are anxious and overwhelmed by the state of industry regulation in this province and the behaviour of those responsible for protecting the environment adjacent to their traditional territory. The Alberta government and the AER are not meeting the expectations of Indigenous communities.

First Nations leaders were the first to warn us that something toxic was happening in the traditional hunting and fishing territory of the Nehiyaw, Dene, and Métis of the area. The complaints of those hunters and fishermen were heard before any alarms were sounded by industry or agency monitoring systems. Those complaints led to the decision of chiefs to suspend hunting and fishing in the region until trustworthy and impartial testing could be completed. This suspension of Treaty 8 harvest rights is the by-product of the sloppy industrial practices of companies struggling to keep up to the expectations of increasingly overwhelmed and distressed First Nations.

The cumulative impact of ongoing pollution in the region has sounded a horrifying alarm in Indigenous health. Rates of cancer and autoimmune diseases in the Athabasca delta are disproportionately higher amongst Nehiyaw, Dene, and Métis peoples there than anywhere else in the province. Indigenous folks in the northeast have told us over and over again that the scope of the damage interferes in every quadrant of the medicine wheel: the mind, the body, the heart, and the soul.

I have heard them. They want real responses to the concerns on the ground. They want to see reforms to monitoring that incorporate Indigenous perspectives and have issued a series of recommendations. Government and industry need to show Indigenous communities they're listening. I guess it's tough to keep your ear to . . .

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

Volunteers

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many unsung heroes in our communities and around our province. Alberta volunteers give donations, countless hours of their time, kindness, and friendship to their neighbours and are often total strangers without ever receiving any public thanks or appreciation. I rise in this House today to thank and honour the many volunteers and donors around the province, who are making life better for so many Albertans.

I recently met Liza Bouchard, the executive director of Drive Happiness, a nonprofit organization that's been serving the Edmonton zone for the past 26 years. The organization has helped clients in need in 44 municipalities with the help of many other wonderful service providers. This type of volunteer service is an economical option for transportation and a great complementary service to their traditional and/or disability transit.

Many other transit options and programs in my constituency of Airdrie-East were scaled back or closed due to the pandemic, and Volunteer Airdrie, led by our chair Dave Maffitt, stepped up and filled that gap. The drive happiness program hosted by the Volunteer Airdrie Society serves almost 200 clients with 24-hour volunteer drivers to shuttle seniors and those with disabilities to and from appointments in Calgary. Today Volunteer Airdrie has driven over 95,000 kilometres to get hundreds of people in need to critical

medical appointments. Of these trips, almost 70 per cent were needed by dialysis patients in Airdrie, who require treatments almost three times per week. This service is essential while we wait for our hospital to be built.

1:50

Volunteer Airdrie and Drive Happiness play a huge role in addressing social isolation, mental and physical well-being, elder abuse, food security, and housing. They also help to decrease stress for caregivers and families while working with the health care system to navigate clients' needs. Drive Happiness along with Volunteer Airdrie will continue to work with Alberta's seniors to live comfortably in their homes and communities for as long as possible. We take this opportunity to thank both Volunteer Airdrie and Drive Happiness for all their great work in serving our communities.

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to move forward, but this Premier is determined to hold us back. Invoking the so-called sovereignty act is either illegal or a dishonest stunt to claim it isn't. Either way, the Premier's actions will jeopardize investment certainty, weaken the nation, ignore the rule of law, breach treaty rights across the country and here in Alberta, and declare that we're on the wrong side of fighting climate change. To the Premier: why is she putting her own extremist politics ahead of economic common sense?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I see the Leader of the Opposition is, true to form, opposing something she hasn't even read and still has apparently not read. The Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act: it will do none of those things. In fact, what it is going to do is that it's going to push back against a lawless federal government that, incidentally, is supported by her federal leader. She should actually stand with us in making sure that we have affordable, reliable electricity for Albertans. That's what this motion is all about.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, many of those facts are untrue. Misleading Albertans does seem to be par for the course with this government. What is true is that energy experts, investors, and forward-looking Albertans all believe we can and should achieve net zero much sooner than 2050, attracting billions of dollars in investments and creating tens of thousands of jobs. These Albertans know that, like so many of this Premier's claims, they can't trust her information to be reliable. To the Premier: why won't she just stop playing politics and start acting like the Premier Albertans need her to be?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think people would wish that the Leader of the Opposition would stand on their side instead of constantly defending the federal government, that is acting in a lawless way. We all know that net zero by 2035 is simply not possible. Not only has our Electric System Operator said so; the operator in Saskatchewan has said so, the operator in Ontario has said so, our industry leaders have said so. What we are working

towards is net zero by 2050. Indeed, some of our companies may be able to get there a few years earlier, but we need to create maximum flexibility in order to achieve our targets.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, soon Alberta will have the opportunity to tell its story at COP. Instead of attracting international investors in clean energy, this Premier is going to tell them that she doesn't understand the rule of law, she doesn't understand the science, she doesn't understand what's possible, and she isn't taking the threat of climate change seriously. Instead, she's saying she wants to leave trillions of dollars of investment on the table and risk the jobs that would come with it. To the Premier: why won't she just drop this unconstitutional temper tantrum and instead focus on securing Alberta's economic future?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's the federal government that is not following the Constitution, and I would invite the Leader of the Opposition to read the Constitution section 92A, which gives the province exclusive jurisdiction to develop policy and law around electricity generation, transmission, and conservation. In fact, it's the federal government acting in a lawless way; we are standing up for the law. If she has any influence on her federal leader, then she should ask them to abide by what the Constitution says and support us in a target of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050.

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, over the weekend the Premier hid behind the safety of more screened calls, dismissing the real value of in-person town halls about gambling with Alberta's pensions. She claims they lack the, quote, same level of interaction, an odd stance considering the only interaction most Albertans have gotten so far was Jim Dinning yelling at them over the phone. So to the Premier: when will this government step up to the promise of in-person public engagement, or is breaking its promise and avoiding direct dialogue with Albertans the new UCP normal?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very pleased with the first round of consultation. We've had 76,000 Albertans participate in those calls and, I think, close to 100,000 who participated in our online survey, so the level of awareness about an Alberta pension plan has gone very high. It's over 80 per cent. There is still a little bit more work that we have to do on that, so we will be doing subsequent rounds of consultation.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, making 70,000 unanswered phone calls is not public engagement.

Meanwhile we've now seen the UCP's propaganda workbook, and it's nothing more than a guided tour full of fake numbers and biased narratives geared toward a predetermined destination. But Albertans aren't buying it. To the Premier: why won't she stop hiding behind her workbooks and her screened calls and just listen in person to what Albertans have to say? Is she that scared of looking them in the eye?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're hearing from Jim Dinning. He's going to be presenting to our cabinet and caucus, giving us some advice about what the next steps ought to be. There are several areas where Albertans have told us they want more information. They're keeping an open mind until they get it.

We're quite pleased that the federal actuary has agreed to our request to go and do the calculation and look at the legislation and see what they come up with for a hard number. Once we get that, then we'll determine our next steps. But we will be doing subsequent rounds of consultation, and we will work on the time with Mr. Dinning.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, our House leader has already asked this question, but since the Premier prefers to hear it directly from me, allow me to personally extend an invitation to her to attend any one of our town halls in the coming weeks. We'll be in St. Albert on November 30, in Red Deer on December 1, in Ardrossan on December 9, in Edmonton on December 11, and in Calgary on December 14. To the Premier: wouldn't she love to attend at least one of our in-person sessions? And if not, why not? I think people would love for her to come.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had our fill of how the NDP does consultations. When they were in power, they did them by invite only so that they could carefully procure the results that they wanted. We have had a wide open consultation where we call Albertans in five different zones. That's 76,000 people who have responded, and we have 100,000 people who have responded online, and we're going to continue doing more consultation. Future rounds are going to come, and people will have an opportunity to consult with us then.

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

Environmental Monitoring of the Oil Sands

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, announcements from the AER regarding the last two accidental releases of unsafe water into the Athabasca delta were the result of a faulty valve and a crumbling culvert from the two newest plants constructed. Thousands of litres of problematic fluid poured into the Muskeg and the Athabasca rivers because of wear and tear on infrastructure. This was a harmful impact on the environment for wildlife and for the water that people drink. If this all could have been averted with one trip to Home Depot, then my question to the Premier: why did this happen, and who will be held accountable?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Energy Regulator is the independent regulator of our oil and gas industry. They are expected to ensure that all companies and all industries are upholding our high environmental standards.

I do want to point out, though, that during the NDP's press conference today the member opposite did make numerous claims that arsenic, dissolved metals, and other carcinogens were at risk of causing danger to drinking water, wildlife, and people. Mr. Speaker, this is fearmongering and it is emphatically untrue. The drinking water does in fact remain safe.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of Fort Chipewyan experience inflated rates of cancer and autoimmune disease, which is a public health issue that deserves more research and investigation. The cumulative impacts of spills, leaks, and accidental releases into the Athabasca delta increase the likelihood of exposure to these carcinogens. The Albertans in that region are fearful of the patterns of leaks that have occurred over these years. Will the Premier hear about these concerns from

Albertans who are worried about their health and investigate all of these causes appropriately?

2:00

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can absolutely assure this House that the Premier does take any concerns involving tailings ponds very seriously. That is why the number one mandate item in the mandate letter that I received from her was to come up with possible solutions, of course, for tailings ponds in northern Alberta. We will be addressing that, of course, by engaging with Indigenous communities but also with industry and other impacted municipalities. This is very serious. We want to make sure that the water remains safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Energy Regulator is the responsibility of the energy minister and the environment minister and the Indigenous Relations minister, who is supposed to determine if proper consultation occurs in the event of a spill. No consultation was done. In fact, the minister of energy gloated about Kearl's top-notch environmental record on social media and then downplayed the massive spill, the third this year. If the ministers of energy, environment, and Indigenous Relations won't do their jobs, will the Premier stand up and remove them?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Energy Regulator has confirmed that the water remains safe. Environment also monitors water throughout the oil sands areas to ensure water is safe. Of course, we also ensure drinking water is safe and water is safe for the environment. Now, the AER continues to monitor this and all other incidents that involve the release of water. I do absolutely expect the AER to uphold the highest environmental standards and, of course, to communicate with relevant communities in the area as well.

Affordable Housing

Member Irwin: Motels are being booked not by night but by month because Calgarians are out of options of places to live; 115,000 Calgarians are at risk of homelessness. Campgrounds are filling up in late November. That's not normal. For the ninth month in a row rents are increasing faster in Calgary than in any other city in Canada. This government's inaction on the housing crisis is a violation of the dignity of Albertans. To the Premier. This is a crisis. Why aren't you treating it like one? Stop the distractions, stop the fight with Ottawa, and start doing your job.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier is doing her job, which is why Alberta has the most housing starts anywhere in the country. In fact, in Calgary housing is up by 11 per cent, the most in history year to date, and last month alone up by 21 per cent. Of that, over 30 per cent of it is purpose-built rentals, also the most in history. Edmonton and Calgary remain the most affordable large cities anywhere in North America. Now, why is that? Because the Conservatives have brought forward policies to build more homes. The NDP continue to want to cause people to be homeless.

Member Irwin: That's simply not true.

Albertans need housing security. They need roofs over their heads. They need action on skyrocketing rents. They need a government that actually cares. I'm tired of reading news stories every single day about the ways Albertans are being forced to find housing in unlikely places. Motels aren't homes. Cars aren't homes. Couches aren't homes. Campgrounds aren't homes. Tents on the streets certainly aren't homes either. Where is the emergency plan to get Albertans housing security? Surely this government should be working on one right now.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we already have a plan in place called the stronger foundations plan. It's been being undertaken for the last two years. It's a plan that will make sure that we have enough affordable housing and attainable housing in our province by 2031. That's real action taking place already in Alberta, a sharp contrast to other socialist provinces and other jurisdictions. Our housing stock is going up by 40 per cent. It went down by 76 per cent underneath that hon. member's party.

Member Irwin: Albertans can't wait seven years for more homes to be built. They need action now. They're scrambling to find housing and still no help from this government. We're at a point where \$1,300 a month for a motel room is the most affordable option. There are 115,000 Calgarians at risk of homelessness right now. That's more than the population of Red Deer. It's indefensible. It's horrific. It's inhumane. Is the Premier really going to sit there and do absolutely nothing?

Mr. Nixon: I've already said to you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll say it again, that the housing starts in Calgary are up by 11 per cent at the same time as all across the country they're down. Why is that? Because we brought forward policies that have reduced red tape, we've worked with our municipal partners, and we're building thousands of homes all across this province. We're going to keep doing it. I can tell you that we're not going to take advice from those guys because when they were in power, our affordable housing stock went down by 76 per cent. Shame on her. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal (continued)

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta pension plan is a scam. This government wants us to believe that it will have small premiums and big payouts, but leaving the CPP means less bang for our buck. Albertans will pay higher premiums with smaller payouts, and their hard-earned retirement dollars will be at risk. To the Minister of Finance: if this government won't listen to the NDP, will they listen to the Calgary Chamber of commerce? They are saying the exact same thing.

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

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Thank you for the question. I would like to know where they're getting that information from. If you look at what the LifeWorks report showed us, it is that this idea has great potential for the province. The report was clear that it's using publicly available data, between \$260 billion and \$360-some billion. We hope that the Chief Actuary will be able to provide more accuracy as they look into those numbers. But something that is very clear is that Alberta is, in a big way, a net contributor to the plan. We're seeking affordability and sustainability for Albertans. It warrants fair . . .

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

Mr. Ip: Given that job creators across the province are ringing alarm bells, telling the Premier to hit the brakes and let us stay in the CPP, and given that the Premier's hand-picked pension engagement chair Jim Dinning says that, quote, this is not a risk-free proposition and this is not going to be easy to do, end quote, and given that this reckless idea threatens not just Albertans' retirement security but everyone who is in the CPP, will the minister admit to Albertans that the Premier's silly pipe dream is a mistake?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say this. This is obviously a complicated proposal. Does it have risk? There is risk in anything. I would argue that there's risk in having so much faith in the CPP, honestly. What the report has shown is that there are only three net contributors in this large country. I think that warrants some questions from the opposition about the sustainability of the CPP. This is a big question. We've been clear to Albertans that we wouldn't proceed without a referendum, so that's what this is, consultation, not like Bighorn, not like Bill 6. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Ip: Given that the CPP is a massive international investor with half a trillion dollars in assets and \$6 billion invested in Canada's oil and gas industry and given that the CPP brings stability, certainty, and jobs to Alberta economies through the sheer size of their investments and given that Jim Dinning thinks that the CPP is doing an excellent job both in services and investments, does the government simply not understand what a good, stable investment looks like?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear that we take no issue with CPPIB. I think that they're a great investor. They're doing well within their mandate for all Canadians. What this question is asking is: could Alberta do better? With the asset withdrawal that's in the LifeWorks report, could we offer Albertans higher benefits, lower contribution rates? The LifeWorks report is clear that at that asset withdrawal number we're talking about \$5 billion annually staying in the Alberta economy. I look forward to hearing from the Chief Actuary. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East has a question.

Photoradar Use in Alberta

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week was an exciting development with the province moving to end the practice of photoradar fishing holes across Alberta. I have heard from many constituents that are excited about the end of this cash grab. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: how is this government going to ensure that photoradar is focused on actually improving traffic safety, not just revenue generation?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Photoradar is a very divisive policy across Canada, but the core intent of photoradar is to ensure that traffic safety, not revenue generation, is the core premise of it. That is why this government is happy to announce the end of photoradar on the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads, and we will be working with all municipalities, the 26 municipalities that allow for photoradar, and make sure that we end all fishing holes across the province of Alberta. Just a quick,

easy example: the Ray Gibbon Drive overpass. There's nearly a million dollars' worth of tickets being issued there, and that's something that we've now ended.

2:10

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that removing photoradar devices from Edmonton and Calgary's ring roads on December 1 is a strong first step in ending the practice of photoradar fishing holes in Alberta and given that there are almost 2,400 photoradar sites in Alberta, to the same minister: how will the government ensure that we eliminate all fishing holes and bring an end to the photoradar cash cow?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. There are nearly 2,400 photoradar sites here in the province of Alberta, and Alberta is an outlier in Canada. We have actually 10 times the photoradar sites compared to the second highest province in Canada, but a lot of this expansion happened while the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was the Premier of Alberta. Those are dark days from 2015 to 2019. It makes you wonder: had the Member for Edmonton-North West or the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie won that NDP leadership race back in 2014, would we have seen this much overuse in the province of Alberta?

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta is an outlier when it comes to photoradar, with thousands more photoradar sites than any other province, and given that the Leader of the Opposition was one of the most vocal critics of photoradar just two years ago, to the same minister: why do you think that the Leader of the Opposition is now silent when it comes to supporting this important initiative to end photoradar fishing holes in the province?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure why the current NDP leader is silent on issues that affect Alberta, whether that's the carbon tax, the clean electricity regulations, or whatever else their boss Jagmeet Singh tells them to do from Ottawa, but if I had to guess, seeing that the Member for Edmonton-North West got over 1,000 votes in the last NDP leadership race and with the current NDP leader suffering back-to-back election losses, perhaps she's just spending more time looking over her shoulder rather than looking out for the best interest of Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Family Physicians

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this weekend the Premier took to the radio to claim she has no choice but to look for alternatives to family doctors because – get this – they don't want to help Albertans anymore. The fact is the UCP spent three years attacking family doctors, undermining them at every turn. They tore up their contract, cut their earnings, ground them down in the midst of a pandemic until many were forced to close clinics and choose to leave the province or the profession, yet doctors still show up every

day to provide care and save lives. Will the Premier or Minister of Health stand and apologize for suggesting family doctors are to blame and need to be replaced?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that is so absurd. I can't even believe that that came out of the member opposite's mouth. In fact, we value our family physicians. We have been working very hard with the Alberta Medical Association, in fact, recognizing that roughly 18 months ago they signed an agreement that didn't actually prioritize family physicians. We are open to actually working with them to come up with a solution even though that happened 18 months ago. We're going to continue to do what's in the best interests of family physicians.

Mr. Shepherd: No apology, Mr. Speaker. Shameful.

Given that this Premier claimed it is doctors who failed to offer solutions since signing that new contract last year and given I've found that doctors in this province truly care and I know they've offered many good solutions to this crisis and given it was the UCP who insisted on a six-month multicommittee process to recommend next steps but given when that report was released, they instead chose to strike another task force to report in another six months, will the minister admit it's not doctors that are the problem here? It's her government that continues to drop the ball.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we've added 109 new family physicians in the last year alone. We know that more is required, but nurse practitioners offer another option. It's not an either/or; it's an and/and. We need more and/and solutions. We're committed to doing and/and. The member opposite himself said, in fact, I quote: I support the direction they're going in. This was in reference to the nurse practitioners announcement we made last week. Why won't he admit it right now in the House?

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the Premier says that she wants nothing more than to help family doctors see more patients and given that a great way to do that would be to invest in real supports, the model of team-based care that our team has been advocating for for more than a year, and given that instead the Premier is focused on ensuring that she and her colleagues can enjoy more luxury suites, VIP tickets, pricey gifts while voting against legislation that protects access to a family doctor, will the Minister of Health simply ask the Premier to stop suggesting that family doctors are the problem and instead actually support them to help more Albertans get access to primary care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we are supporting family doctors. We have come forward with the MAPS announcement just very recently, where, in fact, we want to stabilize primary health care in the province. In fact, we are going to make sure that we have a strong, sustainable primary health care system in Alberta. We are committed to this. We signed an MOU with the Alberta Medical Association. We're doing the groundwork. We're coming up with a new funding model that actually solves problems instead of creating more problems. We are seeing an increase in family physicians.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Beddington.

School Class Sizes

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overcrowding in our schools is widespread and a great source of stress for families who, among other challenges, may even have to wait to see if their child's name is drawn in a lottery for a chance to attend the same school as

their friends. This is just one of the reasons I introduced Bill 202, the education class composition reporting and standard amendment act. Will the Minister of Education do the right thing for families and teachers and support this important bill?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll absolutely do the right thing, which is to make sure that we're significantly expanding schools in our growing communities, which is to make sure that we are providing the resources that are necessary to deal with increasingly complex classrooms. That includes making sure that we're providing the resources to deal with enrolment pressures and growth. We are absolutely focused on addressing the major concerns that our school divisions are facing because on this side of the House we want to make sure that we keep our education system world class, and we're committed to doing just that.

Ms Chapman: Now, given that some schools have had to resort to putting desks in the hallway to accommodate students crammed in overcrowded classrooms and given that one school in Edmonton is having to consider dropping a grade in an effort to deal with overcrowding and given that the students learning in our schools today are Alberta's future leaders and they deserve a quality education, will the Minister of Education explain to these future leaders why he's afraid to support a bill that would ensure they have the opportunity to receive the best education possible?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, the bill that the member is referring to does nothing of the sort. We're focused on making sure that we provide our students with a world-class education. To do that, we need to make sure that we have a modern and updated curriculum. We're working on that. To do that, we need to make sure that we have adequate facilities and modernized facilities. We're working on that. We need to make sure that our school divisions have the support that they need to deal with classroom complexity challenges and to deal with enrolment pressures. We're working on that. We are absolutely working on the priorities to make sure our children have a world-class education.

Ms Chapman: Given that in 2019 the UCP government chose to stop collecting and reporting data on class sizes in Alberta and given that the government cannot adequately address the challenges in public education unless we are fully informed and given that Bill 202 would require boards to report on class composition, including the number of students requiring specialized support, the number of English language learners, and staffing levels, will the minister at least restore public class size reporting? If not, what is he hiding?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, we're hiding absolutely nothing. While the NDP wants to wrap our school divisions in more reporting requirements and unnecessary commissions and details, we're committed to making sure that we are building and modernizing schools. We're committed to making sure that we are funding classroom complexity. We are funding students who have English as an additional language. We are funding enrolment pressures and growth. Those are our priorities. I'm not sure why the members opposite want to waste time wrapping our school divisions up with additional reporting and red tape. We're focused on getting the job done so that our students can have a world-class education.

2:20

Good-faith Billing by Physicians

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it has come to our attention that Albertans are being turned away from doctors' offices and

specialists because their unique lifetime identifier, their Alberta health number, has been deemed invalid. While it's not completely clear how or why the numbers are becoming inactive, the result is that these individuals are often unable to access proper health care supports. Given that this has been occurring for some time now across the province, to the Minister of Health: are you aware that there are vulnerable Albertans being left without health care access because Alberta Health has invalidated their health care number?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We do recognize that there are a small number of Albertans who have invalid Alberta health numbers. They're deemed invalid, but it is something that we've been working with the Alberta Medical Association on since the fall. We really want to make sure that every Albertan has coverage and has the ability to have health care when and where they need it. We know about it, and we are working on it.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that in the past Alberta Health allowed for good-faith billing, ensuring that doctors could still receive payment after seeing a client whose valid health care status has changed, and given that specialists often refuse to see a patient whose health care number is showing up invalid, further compromising their situation, and given that good-faith billing allows for vulnerable Albertans to receive treatment and for doctors to receive reimbursement, to the same minister: is this government able to ensure that vulnerable Albertans receive the care they need through good-faith billing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, again for that question. In fact, in October I did announce modernizing Alberta's primary care system. We released the reports, and at that time I also indicated that, yes, we would be returning to good-faith billing, in fact, so that physicians could claim for these individuals and that those individuals that don't have a valid number could indeed get the health care they need. We're continuing to commit to working with the Alberta Medical Association to streamline that process, and we are getting the job done.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that the Minister of Health has committed to reinstating good-faith billing practices and given that doctors have been unable to use a practice of good-faith billing in nearly four years and given that there have been similar promises made previously that never came to fruition, do you have a timeline or next steps for when you will be able to reinstate good-faith billing agreements so we can give vulnerable Albertans the health care they need?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Albertans do deserve absolutely the best health care possible, and we are committed to that. So we are working very closely, as I said, with the Alberta Medical Association to streamline that process to make sure that it's working for everyone right across the province. If the

members opposite would just take a moment to listen rather than yell . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Whoa. The hon. the Minister of Health has the call.

Member LaGrange: As I was saying, if the members opposite would take the time to listen rather than yell, the fact is that we are in fact reinstating the good-faith claims as quickly and as efficiently as possible. We recognize the urgency of the matter, and we are on it. Thank you.

Prescription Contraception Access

Ms Hayter: Mr. Speaker, as the UCP government indulges in lavish spending of \$7.5 million on pension advertising, women in the province are facing a lifetime expense of up to \$10,000 for prescription contraceptives out of pocket. A choice needs to be made: propaganda campaigns or women's health. Does the minister of status of women agree that it's unacceptable that women are being forced to pay out of pocket for essential health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government supports protecting choice for women accessing reproductive health care products and services in Alberta. We have coverage for many contraceptive drug and health products. It's provided to Albertans who are enrolled in government-sponsored drug and supplemental health benefits plans. Oral contraceptives, injectable contraceptives, intrauterine devices, and other support for women in their reproductive health care choices are included in these supplemental health benefits.

Ms Hayter: Given that access to free contraceptives ensures that women are in direct control of their health and their economic futures and given that the Alberta cost of living is skyrocketing under the UCP and in an affordability crisis we must make vital medications and treatments available free of charge and given that birth control should not be a luxury item, will the minister support Alberta women and fund prescription contraception?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, Alberta Health supports a variety of initiatives and programs that address matters related to women's health, including coverage for many contraceptive drug and health products that are available to Albertans who are enrolled in government-sponsored drug and supplemental health benefits. Our Premier and our government have very clearly stated that Alberta's government supports protecting choice for women accessing reproductive health care services and products in Alberta.

Ms Hayter: Given that the Premier believes women should pay out of pocket for private insurance, which seems to be the go-to solution for everything, and given that today I will be bringing a motion to the House calling for unanimous support from this House for universal free access to contraceptives, will the minister of status of women champion the motion to support universal free access to contraceptives, or is she comfortable just riding on the UCP's gravy train, leaving Alberta women stranded with a hefty health care bill?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you. Again, our government supports protecting choice for women accessing reproductive health care services and products in Alberta. We have coverage for many contraceptive drug and health products that are available to Albertans who are enrolled in government-sponsored drug and supplemental health benefits, and many other drug and benefit plans also cover contraceptive drugs.

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

Wildfire Prevention and Recovery

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's 2023 wildfire season brought significant challenges to our province. Wildfires require dynamic and adaptive responses and a commitment to improving preparedness in the future. Can the Minister of Forestry and Parks please provide the House with an overview of the government's plans to address the persisting threat of wildfires in the province and ensure the safety of our communities?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our number one priority remains keeping Albertans and our communities safe. Alberta Wildfire has resources strategically placed across the province to respond to any wildfires that may break out in the winter months, and any fires that are burning are being actively suppressed by Alberta Wildfire personnel right now. While October 31 marks the end of our official wildfire season, it's important to remember that wildfires can occur at any time of the year if the conditions are right. As such, I want to urge all Albertans to exercise caution when recreating and enjoying fires in the outdoors.

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that the impact of wildfires extends beyond the immediate danger, affecting communities and households long after the flames have subsided, and further given the substantial economic impact of wildfires on affected communities and households, can the same minister elaborate on the financial supports the government has put in place to assist the affected communities and households to aid in their recovery?

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

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thanks for the question. That's an excellent one. We are working hard to ensure financial supports are in place, but I will defer to my colleague in Public Safety and Emergency Services concerning specifics about disaster recovery programs and other financial supports. What I can speak on, however, is what we're doing to enhance community wildfire resilience for the future. Mr. Speaker, my ministry is committing funds to the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta to administer the community fireguard program. Fireguards are an important tactic in wildfire suppression, and I'm proud of our ministry's efforts to help communities prepare for the future following this unprecedented wildfire season.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that investigating the causes of wildfires is of paramount importance, particularly when arson is suspected as a contributing factor, and further given that the threat of arson not only poses a threat to lives and property but also undermines

community safety, can the minister provide insights into the government's plans for investigating the causes of wildfires throughout the province, particularly any collaborative efforts with law enforcement agencies?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Wildfire investigates all wildfires to determine the cause, and these investigations vary in the amount of time they take. I want to assure the member and all Albertans that Alberta has a nationally renowned wildfire investigation program, and when necessary we work alongside other agencies to determine the cause of a wildfire and take appropriate action. Of the 1,119 wildfires Alberta experienced so far this year, about 60 per cent were human caused, meaning wildfire prevention is a responsibility we all share. We are doing everything we can to keep Albertans and our communities safe.

Health System Reform

Dr. Metz: Our ICUs are full again. Hospitals deserve support from this province. Patients deserve the care they need when they need it, and doctors and nurses deserve a break from this constant cycle of chaos caused by the UCP and the burnout caused by the chaos. Why is it that instead of investing in increasing ICU capacity, the government is dismantling the health care system without even consulting doctors? Informing doctors about changes is not consultation.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite. Great question. In fact, just to correct the record, since March 2023 we've added 171 new permanent non-ICU beds and are planning for additional permanent and temporary bed capacity as needed while increasing staffing capacity; 65 per cent of the patients in ICU are in ICU for health matters unrelated to the current respiratory season. Of course, we are seeing a bit of an uprise because of the respiratory season, but I continue to be told we have capacity.

Dr. Metz: Given that the UCP just announced another change to primary care last week, a change the Alberta Medical Association has said it fears is only going to create more problems, and given that the important work of nurse practitioners is a critical piece of the health care system but a piece that works best as part of a team, why is it that the government continues to ignore experts in health care in favour of haphazard policies for the sake of control and change?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm a little confused by the question. In fact, adding nurse practitioners, giving them the ability to work to full scope, to have the ability to have a panel, will add to the workforce that we have in primary care. It is going to be an additional support for the medical profession. And talking about the team, nurse practitioners are a valuable asset to the team, as are family physicians, as are pharmacists, as are chiropractors, as are other allied health professionals. Working in a team means adding, not subtracting.

Dr. Metz: Given that the government has done nothing but drive the health care system into absolute chaos and given that they have had four years to do the right thing but, instead, chose bad policies, continue to ignore and insult doctors and experts, and appoint the

Premier's friends, will the minister move past the years of chaos caused by the UCP and every single time they ignored the opinions and advice of Alberta's health experts, and when will the minister actually deliver on promises instead of repeating them?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the members opposite that I'm hearing from doctors, from nurses, from nurse practitioners, from other allied health professionals that are excited. They're excited about the changes we're making because finally they're seeing that there's something other than the status quo. You know what? The status quo was not working; it continues not to work. We need to do something different. I am hearing from municipalities. Tyler Gandam, the president of Alberta Municipalities, says: I'm optimistic that Albertans will see the changes announced yesterday start showing up in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Education Funding

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Schools in north Edmonton are struggling to keep up with enrolment. Soraya Hafez school, which opened in 2020, is already over capacity. Christ the King school is also over capacity, resulting in students being forced to move to different schools throughout the north side. Some junior high students are set to attend three different schools in three years. Edmonton-Manning students' access to education in their communities has been taken away due to this government's lack of planning and adequate funding. This minister has had five years to address this crisis. Minister, what are you going to do to keep my students in their community schools?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue the work that we've been doing in the previous budget cycle. We provided preplanning funding for a school in the member's riding. We've put that as a priority on our capital list. That wasn't on the NDP's capital list, but we've put it as a priority. It received preplanning funding in the last budget cycle. As the school division works to get the pieces in place, I'm sure that that project will continue to move through into planning, design, and eventually full construction. We're happy to work with them and move the project forward as is necessary.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister's indication of a new school being built in my riding is not actually factual because it's not in my riding and given that the UCP's increases in education funding are not nearly enough to address the more than two years of significant cuts by this government and given that this government's lack of funding has created larger, more complex classrooms and given that the rate of enrolment is increasing faster than the government is building new schools, why is this government not increasing funding for the needs of students in my riding of Edmonton-Manning?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is absolutely committed to making sure that our school divisions have the supports that they need. In the last budget we provided \$126 million in new funding to help address growing complexity within our classrooms, as well \$820 million over the next three years to support enrolment pressures. We recognize there are some

pressures on our schools and our school divisions. The fact is that Alberta is booming once again. Alberta is a place of destination for people across the country and, in fact, around the entire world.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that not only are schools struggling to accommodate growing class sizes but are unable to provide proper equipment, given that Soraya Hafez school's parents have been holding several fundraisers each year since 2021 in hopes of building their children a playground, given that currently over 500 students spend their recess playing in an empty field, and given that at this rate it will take parents an additional 10 years to raise enough funding for a new playground, why has the community been left to address this gap in planning, and are parents eligible for the CFEP grant on top of all the other funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, community organizations are available and eligible to apply for CFEP funding. In addition, every school project receives a bundle of funding that's available for playground construction as well. The Premier has tasked me with making sure that we're significantly expanding schools in our growing communities. Of course, Edmonton is one of our growing communities, and our government will ensure that we are building schools in those growing communities to be able to accommodate some of the incredible growth we're seeing in this province, which is a sign of Alberta's incredible success.

Recreational Trail Development

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has recently announced a significant investment of \$1 million in funding to enhance nonmotorized trails on our public lands, contributing to the over 4,000 kilometres of provincially designated trails available for the enjoyment of Albertans. This investment is a testament to the province's dedication to sustainable recreation, responsible usage, and environmental conservation. Can the Minister of Forestry and Parks please provide the House with more insight into how this funding will be allocated among eligible projects and community organizations and what criteria will be used in their selection?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government created funding for more recreation and tourism opportunities on public land. Funding will support work by community organizations to ensure Albertans will have many opportunities for recreation. We will also invest in responsible use and protection of the environment on public land trails. Grant funding can be used to build operational capacity through engagement, planning, and administrative activities. Recipients must register under the Alberta Societies Act. We are now accepting applications, and we look forward to reviewing project proposals for next year. The people of Alberta have asked for more and better trails, and we're responding.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of this funding for our trail system and further given that it is evident that these investments align with Alberta's broader goals of promoting tourism, supporting rural economies, and encouraging a healthy lifestyle, could the same minister please share with this

Assembly specific examples of successful past projects or partnerships with community organizations that have thrived under similar funding initiatives, highlighting the positive impact on both trail development and the surrounding communities?

Mr. Loewen: Thank you for that question. Forestry and Parks has been working hard to provide Albertans with more opportunities for recreation on our public lands. One of the organizations who benefited from the funding was The Great Divide Trail Association, which used the funding not only for their trail operations but also to help co-ordinate other projects. Among the many other examples is the Bragg Creek Trails Association, who conducted trail maintenance and upgrades, winter grooming, installed signage, and purchased materials and supplies from vendors. Nonmotorized trails on public land are accessible for many types of use and provide Albertans and visitors the opportunity to experience a range of beautiful landscapes in all areas of the province.

2:40

Mrs. Petrovic: Given the significant allocation of \$2 million to the Alberta Snowmobile Association and the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association in Budget 2023-2024 for motorized trail projects, can the same minister expand on the objectives and goals of these motorized trail projects and how they will integrate with and enhance Alberta's broader trail network and what opportunities these projects will create for recreational enthusiasts in our province?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association and the Alberta Snowmobile Association are the first two organizations appointed as trail managers under the Trails Act. Their objectives and goals are to organize and provide funding to 60 local clubs across the province who help maintain trails on public land. This allocation recognizes the important work the organizations have done and will help protect and maintain landscapes for years to come. Activity on trails provides economic benefits through travel and tourism. Alberta offers exceptional outdoor recreational experiences for residents and for visitors from around the world. Tourism is something that's...

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

Anticrime Initiatives

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the concerns of my constituents and talk about the shootings happening in my riding. The people of Calgary-Falconridge, in fact the entirety of Alberta, deserve to live free from gun violence. One shooting is too many. What is this government going to do to get guns off the streets, away from the hands of children and young adults, and support community members?

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, and thank you very much to the member for that question. Yes, guns are a problem, but the guns that he's referring to are actually coming up illegally through the United States. So we have to make sure that we work with Canada Border Services to make sure that we do not get those illegal guns that are coming from the United States in the hands of organized crime and especially those organized crime members who send those guns to those children. I agree with you on that.

Member Boparai: Given that Calgary has seen multiple gun violence incidents this month, which police have called hallmarks of organized crime, and given that a recent shooting involved a 14-year-old and given that this shooting indicates a systematic failure to support young Albertans and keep them on a healthy and safe path in life, can the minister tell Calgarians what they plan to do to protect our youth from becoming involved in gun violence or organized crime? My constituents are looking for a specific answer.

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Education, prevention, and intervention are certainly some things that are very important, and we've conducted a paradigm shift in what we're doing here in the province of Alberta. No longer will police be seen as an arm of the state; instead, they will be seen as an extension of and a reflection of the community that they serve. Part of that paradigm shift is to understand that the police are there to help people, and that is why both the Calgary Police Service and the Edmonton Police Service and police services right across this province are engaging with people to make sure they understand that police are part of the community as well.

Member Boparai: Given that there are organizations who support youth and do violence intervention and protection and given that these programs could be expanded with robust funding from this government which would help protect children from violence and weapons, will the minister commit to immediately increasing funding to violence intervention programs and youth support programs in the province? We need actual answers.

Mr. Ellis: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, we support youth programs, and we support that by providing funding to police services right across this province. They all have very in-depth youth engagement programs. In fact, I was just recently at the Chief's awards ceremony in Calgary, just this past Friday, and I can tell you that there were probably half a dozen wonderful youths that were given awards for their outstanding contributions. The police service recognizes that they are an important, integral part, and they have engaged with them to make sure that they are understanding that the police are there to help and not to be a part of the problem.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, the Trudeau-Singh coalition in Ottawa is completely out of touch with the everyday reality of Canadians and Albertans. The federal government's carbon taxation policies have triggered an affordability crisis that has increased the cost of everything and has created an undue burden on all Alberta households.

As well, recent revelations that home heating oil has been exempted from the carbon tax, which benefits predominantly Atlantic Canada while Canadians from other parts are made to bear the brunt of the carbon tax, has further cast doubt on the policy's actual intent. Canadians elsewhere deserve fair treatment and similar relief for the heating sources they use yet are not getting the

same exemption. This raises questions about the federal government's promise of a fair and equitable carbon tax system.

The controversy surrounding the carbon tax is further highlighted by the stalling of Bill C-234 in the Canadian Senate. The bill seeks to exempt fuel use for all food production from the carbon tax. Carbon taxation on not only food production but also processing and distribution only serves to increase the price of groceries. The fact that the passage of this bill has stalled in the Senate even after Trudeau provided a carve-out for his carbon tax in Atlantic Canada underscores the fundamental inconsistency in the application of carbon tax policies.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta families are struggling with the rising cost of living. Tax relief is one of the tools available to the federal government, but the Liberal-NDP ideological position and political posturing around the carbon tax seems to be overshadowing practical considerations. This has led to policies that not only lack consistency but have also driven the cost of everything higher. It is time to put a stop to this charade, listen to the people, and axe the carbon tax.

Guru Nanak Gurburab

Member Brar: Hon. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, and fellow Albertans, I rise today with great joy and humility as we come together to celebrate the 554th Gurburab, marking the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the revered founder of Sikhism. This occasion provides us with a precious opportunity to reflect on the profound teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and to recognize the invaluable contributions of the Sikh community to the cultural fabric of Alberta.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji, born in 1469 in Rai Bhoi di Talvandi in Punjab, taught us three basic principles: [Remarks in Punjabi], which means work hard; [Remarks in Punjabi], which means worship and learn; and [Remarks in Punjabi], which means share the wealth. Guru Nanak Dev Ji's teachings are a timeless source of wisdom, emphasizing the principles of equality, compassion, and selfless service. In a world that often grapples with division and discord, the guru's message of oneness and respect for all humanity serves as a guiding light.

Today let us draw inspiration from these teachings and strive to build a society where diversity is celebrated and embraced. Guru Nanak Dev Ji stood against the discrimination of women and wrote [Remarks in Punjabi], which means: why call women bad; from her kings are born.

He was a passionate advocate of protecting natural resources. He wrote [Remarks in Punjabi], which means that he is referring to air as guru, water as father, and land as mother.

Today let us extend our gratitude to the Sikh community for their positive impact on our province and for embodying the principles Guru Nanak Dev Ji imparted. May this Gurburab inspire us to cultivate a society where the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji are acknowledged and practised in our daily lives.

On behalf of the Alberta NDP caucus, to my constituents and all Albertans, I extend my warm wishes for the joyous Gurburab celebrations. Thank you. [Remarks in Punjabi]

2:50

Notices of Motions

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 16, sponsored by the hon. Premier.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve pursuant to section 3 of the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act the following motion.

1. The Legislative Assembly is of the view that

- (a) in accordance with section 92A of the Constitution Act, 1867, the Alberta Legislature has exclusive legislative jurisdiction over, inter alia, the development, conservation, and management of sites and facilities in Alberta for the generation and production of electrical energy,
 - (b) the government of Canada has proposed the clean electricity regulations (the "federal initiative") with the intent of bringing them into force in the near future and may consider amendments before that time,
 - (c) the federal initiative, by its pith and substance, seeks to regulate the development, conservation, and management of electricity sites and facilities in the province for the generation and production of electrical energy,
 - (d) the federal initiative mandates a set of emissions standards and timelines that are unattainable within the context of Alberta's electricity industry and available energy resources,
 - (e) the federal initiative is already having an extreme chilling effect on investment in Alberta's electricity generation industry and, further, is slowing investments in emissions-reducing technology and projects,
 - (f) the Supreme Court of Canada recently issued a reference opinion that the Impact Assessment Act (Canada) is largely unconstitutional as it is ultra vires the federal legislative jurisdiction under section 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867, due to the legislative scheme intruding into areas of exclusive provincial legislative jurisdiction outlined in section 92A, which includes, inter alia, the development, conservation, and management of sites and facilities in Alberta for the generation and production of electrical energy, and
 - (g) the government is actively implementing its emissions reduction and energy development plan to achieve a carbon-neutral power grid and economy by 2050, which is in line with Canada's international commitments but does not align with the government of Canada's arbitrary 2035 net zero electricity grid targets.
2. The Legislative Assembly is of the opinion that
- (a) the federal initiative is unconstitutional on the basis that it is not directed at a matter falling within section 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867, and impermissibly intrudes into an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, namely the development, conservation, and management of facilities in the province for the generation of electrical energy as set out in section 92A of the Constitution Act, 1867,
 - (b) the federal initiative will cause or is anticipated to cause harm as follows:
 - (i) the federal initiative is already having an extreme chilling effect on investment in Alberta's electricity generation industry and, further, is slowing investments in emissions-reducing technology and projects;
 - (ii) the federal initiative proposes to mandate a set of emissions standards and timelines that are unattainable within the context of Alberta's electricity market and available energy resources, and as such the implementation of the federal initiative in Alberta presents a substantial and material risk to the health and safety of Albertans by
 - (A) jeopardizing the safety and reliability of the provincial electricity grid and availability of sufficient electrical energy supply, which dramatically increases the likelihood

of widespread blackouts and brownouts during severe cold and hot weather events stemming from a lack of reliable and dispatchable baseload electricity, and

- (B) jeopardizing the affordable access to electrical energy, and
- (c) the federal initiative threatens the economic well-being of Albertans and the economic viability of the Alberta economy by dramatically increasing the cost of access to electrical energy through mandating hundreds of billions of dollars of public and private monies to be spent within an approximate 10-year period in technologies still under development and yet unproven for the required commercial application and grid infrastructure and services.

And be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Lieutenant Governor in Council to consider the following responses to the federal initiative:

- (a) ensure that the government and any provincial entity defined in the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act, to the extent legally permissible, refrain from recognizing the constitutional validity of the federal initiative, enforcing or aiding in the enforcement of the federal initiative, or co-operating with the implementation of the federal initiative within Alberta in any manner,
- (b) in consultation and collaboration with the Alberta Electric System Operator, the Alberta Utilities Commission, the Market Surveillance Administrator, consumers, industry, Indigenous communities, and other relevant stakeholders develop electrical system reforms necessary to
 - (i) ensure a safe and reliable provincial electricity grid to guarantee Albertans and Alberta businesses access to reliable electricity at all times,
 - (ii) ensure access to affordable electricity for Albertans and Alberta businesses,
 - (iii) work towards a carbon-neutral provincial electricity grid in alignment with the government's emissions reduction and energy development plan through incentivizing the advancement of emissions-reducing technologies and legitimate carbon offsets,
 - (iv) ensure Alberta's electrical generation, transmission, and distribution systems will accommodate the expected high population and economic growth in Alberta over the coming decades, and
 - (v) preserve the interests and value of the capital investments made in Alberta's electricity system by private generators, transmitters, and distributors, enabling continued competition for generation and attracting continued private investment in Alberta's electricity sector (collectively the provincial electrical systems objectives),
- (c) in consultation and collaboration with the Alberta Electric System Operator, the Alberta Utilities Commission, the Market Surveillance Administrator, consumers, industry, Indigenous communities, and other relevant stakeholders explore the feasibility and effectiveness of the potential establishment of a provincial Crown corporation for the purpose of achieving and securing the provincial electrical system objectives.

And be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to use all legal means necessary to oppose the implementation and enforcement of the federal initiative in Alberta, including launching a legal challenge in the Alberta courts and to otherwise advance the objectives and initiatives described in this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. member, it seems to me like you may be wanting to provide some additional comments with respect to the notice that you've provided.

Mr. Schow: I will reread one portion in section (b).

- (b) The government of Canada has proposed the clean electricity regulations (the "federal initiative") with the intent of bringing them into force in the near future and may consider amendments before that time.

The Speaker: For the benefit of the House, while the table has the benefit of the Government House Leader providing a written copy of the notice, the actual oral notice is what becomes the motion, not the copy provided.

I seek clarification. If you'll reread section 1(g).

Mr. Schow: Happy to, Mr. Speaker; 1(g) reads as follows:

The government is actively implementing its emissions reduction and energy development plan to achieve a carbon-neutral power grid and economy by 2050, which is in line with Canada's international commitments but does not align with the government of Canada's arbitrary 2035 net zero electricity grid targets.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

3:00

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to section 19(5) of the Auditor General Act as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I'm pleased to table the results of the office of the Auditor General report in March 31, 2023. Electronic copies of this will also be available to all members.

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

Member Ceci: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from Anne Landry, a 25-year tenant of a Boardwalk apartment. She outlines in her presentation at Calgary city council that she is advocating for an end to housing financialization, a national rent freeze, and an eviction freeze.

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, followed by – actually, I'll take the hon. Government House Leader. Perhaps this is to extend the daily Routine.

Mr. Schow: It is, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the *Calgary Herald* article authored by Deborah Yedlin, the president and CEO of the Calgary Chamber of commerce, titled Clean Energy Regulations Would Carry Huge Consequences for Alberta. Within it she states that the CER's goal of carbon neutrality by 2035 is, and I quote, not . . .

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

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five requisite copies of an e-mail from Chad Milroy, a 22-year-old kidney transplant recipient who is concerned about fragmentation of the health care system. He

requires care from several of the new pillars, including nonhospital specialty care, which is not even mentioned.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I do have a tabling. Pursuant to section 9.1(5) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act I'm tabling six copies of the Child and Youth Advocate report. As required under section 9.1(4), the tabling covers the period of October 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

I also have an additional tabling. In accordance with section 21(1) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act I'm tabling six copies of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report for the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Ms. Fir, Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2022-23 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. There were no points of order today during Oral Question Period, and everyone gets a gold star.

I may also just take this opportunity to remind members that if they are speaking in any language other than French or English, it is not just customary but also required to provide a translation to all members prior to making your remarks.

This brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

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

[Debate adjourned November 20: Mr. Long speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. member has five minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms. Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak to second reading of Bill 202, brought forward by my esteemed colleague the Member for Calgary-Beddington. I'm very thrilled that the member brought forward this private member's bill because it addresses some of the important things that we are all hearing as representatives in this province from parents and teachers across the province. What we're hearing, of course, is that our classrooms are crowded and more complex than they have ever been, and it is severely impacting not only the quality of education that our children are receiving, but it's affecting their long-term prospects, their ability to get the supports when they need them. It's affecting working conditions for EAs and for teachers. This is something that I'm certain every member has heard about, so I'm glad she has brought forward this bill to try to take some steps to address these issues.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Let's go over – Bill 202 does three things, Mr. Speaker. The first thing it does is that it puts back into place the requirement that

existed prior to 2019, when the UCP took over as government, that school boards report to the ministry on class sizes. However, it goes much further than that, because what we've heard consistently from teachers and parents and school boards across this province is that it's not just about the numbers of students; it's about the complexity of those classrooms.

I was thrilled that the member brought forward a bill that requires not just reporting on class sizes but on those elements of complexity in a classroom. That includes things such as the number of students who might be coded, who require specialized learning supports; the number of students who are English language learners or any other language learners; as well as reporting on staff ratios, the number of teachers to students, the number of EAs to students. This is really important because we need to be really clear that it is not just about numbers but making sure that the right supports are in the classroom.

So not only does this bill require that school boards report that information but that the Minister of Education actually make that information available to Albertans. Unfortunately, what we're hearing right now, Mr. Speaker, is that it's really anecdotes. That's what we've had to rely upon although those anecdotes are heartbreaking. But that's all that we have. I think that this has been a cover. By no longer requiring this reporting both to the minister or publicly, what this has done is that this has allowed the government to not really address the true conditions that are going on in schools. They can turn a blind eye and they don't have to answer for it. We're saying that there needs to be transparency and accountability around that.

The second thing the bill does is that it establishes a commission on learning. This is something that actually happened 20 years ago, and we're saying that this needs to be put in place again. This commission on learning would provide recommendations to the Education minister within two years that will look at that reported data and make recommendations around class composition and class sizes.

And then the third thing that the bill would do, Mr. Speaker, is that it would require the Minister of Education to then establish class size and composition standards to guide funding and school capital decisions.

Why is this important? Well, back in September the Alberta NDP opposition launched a class survey to try to get to the heart of what we were hearing from constituents and parents and teachers across the province and to ask them to tell us about the conditions in their child's or their students' classrooms. What we heard was heartbreaking, Mr. Speaker. Of the more than 1,000 responses that we got, more than 50 per cent of the classrooms were reported having 30 students or more, and some of those were much more. We're talking about not just high school classes; we're talking about elementary classes. We're talking about kindergarten classes.

Let me give you an example, Mr. Speaker, of some of the reporting that we got back from Albertans. A parent with a child in a grade 12 class in Fort McMurray with 48 kids in that class is asking: how can they even get individualized support in a class of 48? A parent with a child in a grade 6 class with 35 kids in Elk Island public schools. They can't even afford to hire more teachers. They could, they should, but they can't afford to hire more teachers. A Calgary educator expressed concern. There are 39 students in a grade 10 science lab, which means they can't even perform those labs safely, so they're not performing them at all. That's a direct impact on the quality of education that students are receiving. Another parent in Calgary reported that in a grade 1 class her child has a severe code, Mr. Speaker, but zero support. In Edmonton a parent wrote about a grade 2 child that needs support for speech therapy, occupational therapy, as well as in-class help for learning

and reading; she only gets half an hour of reading support, and that is shared with five other children. These are just some examples.

I have to mention that I've gotten the opportunity to go around the province and meet with school boards and tour schools and tour classrooms across the province, and the conditions are very stark, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity, with the Member for Sherwood Park, to go tour some schools in Elk Island schools, and we got a really good example there of why it's not just about numbers; it's actually about the conditions in that classroom. We visited three grade 2 classrooms, two of which were in the mid-20s in terms of the number of students, one that was a little bit lower, but those kids that had fewer students had higher needs. You could tell the difference. You could tell that even with 20, 25 students the activity, the needs, the demands in that classroom were very high. You just had to stand there and listen to it.

I think we should all be united around the fact and the understanding that we want our kids to have the best quality of education possible. Unfortunately, that has not been the case for the last four years, and now we're going into the fifth year under this government. That perpetual underfunding of education has had a direct impact on the quality of education that kids are getting and how well they'll be prepared for the world after they leave school.

So the reason why I am thrilled that the member brought forward this piece of legislation is because it talks about requiring class size standards and class composition standards to help guide funding. Now, we're not talking about dedicated class size funding, which has happened in the past. You know, under many years of the PC government it didn't produce the results that we were looking for. This is not about saying that we need to have a specialized grant, because, goodness knows, this government loves to create more and more envelopes of funding that create more red tape or more work for school boards to apply for.

No. What we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, the reason why we want these standards is because we want to make it clear to Albertans that in the conditions – if there's true transparency and accountability about the conditions in classrooms, a government should not be able to get away with maintaining flat funding for four years as this government did for its first term. For four years this government maintained class funding to be the same amount – it was flat – despite the fact that every single year since 2018 the number of students in Alberta's system enrolled in classes has gone up. But they maintained it as flat despite the fact that we all knew, we all identified the increased needs that would happen because of the pandemic. We see that right now in terms of the mental health supports that are required, in terms of the complex needs of kids. That was all very clear, but they maintained flat funding.

3:10

With this kind of transparency and accountability, Mr. Speaker, a government could not get away with that because Albertans would be able to see with the data, the clear, transparent data, that the needs are higher, the number of children enrolled in schools is greater, and therefore flat funding is what we always said it was, a cut – a cut – to funding.

The other reason why this is important, Mr. Speaker, is that right now this government continues to play politics in how it decides where it's going to build new schools. We know this because I represent a riding here in Edmonton where Edmonton public schools, one of the fastest growing school boards in the country, did not get one single school construction announcement for three rounds of budget. That is outrageous. That was a political decision, but that wouldn't be allowed – there would be transparency and accountability that the government would have to answer for if

there was this kind of transparency and record reporting as suggested by this bill.

Now, let me keep in mind, Mr. Speaker – I want to highlight that again. In Edmonton public just this year alone 5,000 new students have enrolled since the year before, yet in Budget 2023 this government only announced construction funding for one school. One school. Now, they've created all these other categories, which used to just be part of the regular school capital funding process, to make it look like they're announcing more schools, but preplanning isn't really a thing; neither is design funding. That should be part of announcing that they're going to build schools, but they haven't done that. One school for all of Edmonton in the last three years.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Calgary board of education: 7,000 new students this year, yet in Budget 2023 they announced construction funding for one school. I want to highlight a number that I think is very important, which is that the Calgary board of education has reported that they currently have over 35,000 English language learner students. Thirty-five thousand. That's actually bigger, if you took just those students, than many other school boards in the province. That is a complexity and a need that is not being met by the current government's funding model. We're saying that with this kind of a bill Albertans will be able to know that that complexity is there, that those numbers are there, and they will demand from their government a funding model that meets that.

I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, that, similarly, we know that the government has announced in 2023 and has distributed some additional funding for complexity, what they say is complexity, but what I also know from talking to many, many school boards is that those dollars are just a drop in the bucket; \$42 million per year for all the students in the province. For example, it's just a couple million dollars in some of our largest school boards, and many of those boards are reporting that they weren't able to hire new staff or new EAs with those dollars. No. In fact, they just used it to make up for the dollars that they had already been pulling from other budget items, other parts of their budget to pay for the EAs they currently have.

So we actually have not seen improved conditions in classrooms as a result of any funding because that's what happens when you starve a system, Mr. Speaker. What we're dealing with right now in Alberta is a result of this government starving our education system, failing to build new schools, developing a funding model that actually deliberately underfunds children. It actually does that.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak?

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, I'm here today to talk about the new proposed education law, the NDP's Bill 202. This bill wants to change how our schools manage class sizes and the mix of students in each single class. I do believe it's trying to make things better, but honestly it has some big issues. We're going to talk about those here today, and I want to share why I think this bill might not be in the best interest of our schools and Alberta's kids.

Let's start with what the bill is trying to do. It wants every single class in Alberta to be of a similar size and mix of students, but this doesn't make sense because every school is different. Some are in big cities, some are in small towns, and they all have different needs. A one-rule-for-all approach does not really work for everyone. I see this in our riding. It does not work, so we do need flexibility for our school divisions to be able to make these provisions themselves.

Then there's the money part. This bill means schools would have to spend a lot of time and a lot of money to follow these new rules. This could mean less money for actually teaching kids. It could mean that we would be spending money on following the rules

instead of where we should be spending money, which is on making schools better. We should not be just spending it more on red tape and on paperwork.

First off, this bill is big on keeping track of class sizes. A while ago we did have a program for making classes smaller, but it didn't really work out. After spending a lot of money over a period of about 15 years, things didn't really get better, especially for the little ones in kindergarten to grade 3, so the government stopped this program and let schools decide how to use their money better. This bill simply would take us back in time instead of actually improving our education system. Now schools don't have to report their class sizes, which gives them freedom to do what they would like with their money. This is very important.

This bill wants to bring all that reporting back, but it's just more paperwork. Schools would have to spend a lot of time and resources just to tell the government about their class sizes. But you know what would actually help? Building more schools and hiring more people to work in them. Our government has been working on this, funding new school projects and planning to bring in thousands of new teachers and school staff. This is what really makes a difference to those children's lives, not filling out forms about classroom size but bringing in teachers and educators to be able to teach our future generations. This bill wants to bring back the red tape and bring back classroom reporting. It's a step backwards, pulling resources away from teaching and from learning just to fill out forms and tick boxes.

Then there's the issue of classroom complexity. Classrooms today are a mix of all sorts of kids. Some are new to Canada, some need extra help with learning, and some are still catching up because of the pandemic. The government is already putting a lot of money into helping these diverse classrooms. We plan on spending a lot of money on things like hiring extra helpers and specialists like counsellors. This is a much more practical way to help our kids rather than just focusing on numbers in a classroom.

Now let's talk about the commission on learning excellence. This part of the bill doesn't really make sense to me, but it really misses the mark. While it sounds good on paper, it feels more like a fancy way to avoid making real, immediate improvements. We need action now, which is what our minister is doing, what this government is doing. We don't just need more studies and more reports. Our schools need resources today, not just recommendations for tomorrow. This commission seems more like a delay than a solution, giving the illusion of progress without the immediate benefits our schools really need today.

Also, implementing this bill is going to be challenging. Schools would have to collect a lot of information and keep changing how they do things every two years. This is a lot of extra hardship on educators, and teachers and school staff really should be focusing on what they do excellently well, which we, this government, know: they're very good at teaching. They shouldn't be filling out forms all the time just to keep up with a bill.

Finally, the big problem with this bill is that it can make life harder for students. If schools are busy following slight rules, minuscule details to report a bunch of data, they're going to have less time for teaching. This is the reality. What we should be doing is giving schools and teachers more control over classes, not more rules to follow. The things we're already doing like hiring more teachers and staff, building new schools, and supporting complex classrooms are effective ways to improve education. This bill, with its focus on class size and reporting, misses the mark on what our schools really need and, with its narrow focus on class sizes and administrative tasks, overlooks the real need of our educational system.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that there are two measures that truly make a significant impact in classrooms across Alberta; building more schools and hiring more staff. Over the past four years Alberta's government has approved a remarkable 96 school projects. This demonstrates a strong commitment to enhancing our educational infrastructure. Looking ahead, there's an investment of \$2.3 billion earmarked over the next three years. This is specifically allotted for constructing new schools and modernizing existing schools. This investment is further supported by the announcement in Budget 2023, where supports for 56 priority school projects were made public in that budget. These projects aren't just about improving student spaces; they also play a vital role in creating jobs and supporting local communities.

Additionally, the introduction of the school planning program in Budget 2023 is a strategic move on our government's part. This program serves as a transparent pathway for future school projects, ensuring they are primed for action as soon as they receive the green light in terms of construction funding. To address urgent needs, the capital plan allocated \$93 million over three years, fuelling the continued improvement and implementation of their modular program to tackle the most pressing space requirements across this province.

3:20

Our government's commitment to education is further evident in our Budget 2023, where Alberta's government increased its funding by 5.2 per cent, bringing the total to an impressive \$8.8 billion. This is a substantial investment and is aimed at supporting students, classrooms, and schools throughout our province. With this funding there is an expectation to hire another 3,000 educational staff over the next three years. This includes a diverse range of professionals, from teachers and educational assistants to bus drivers and school support staff. School authorities have projected the hiring of over 2,600 teachers and support staff for the 2023-2024 year alone, which indicates a significant boost in educational personnel across our province.

The Calgary board of education has already set a positive example in this direction at the beginning of the school year by announcing the addition of over 700 full-time teaching and learning staff. This move will undoubtedly enhance support for a growing number of students in the Calgary area. This comprehensive approach underlines our government's dedication to strengthening Alberta's education system, ensuring that it is well equipped to meet the evolving needs of students and communities alike.

While this bill might have good intentions, it's not the best plan for our schools. We need to focus on real solutions like providing enough teachers, building new schools, and supporting classrooms with different needs. This bill, with its heavy emphasis on reporting and standardization, just adds more red tape without addressing the real issues. Let's rethink our approach and continue to work towards an educational system that truly meets the needs of every student in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis has the floor.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a scientist, which means I love data, and there's a reason for that, and I think it's captured really well in this particular bill put forward by my colleague. This bill is really about us creating a better understanding of who our students are so that we can create an education system that addresses their needs. We can't do that based on feelings or assumptions; we need to do that based on data. While I appreciate

the comments just now from the member opposite about how much time and effort it might take to collect this data, I would just like to inform the House that this data is actually already being collected.

I have a couple of letters that have been sent to my office as well as to the minister and to other pertinent members. I have one here from the Foothills school division, that was also sent to the Member for Highwood and to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, because – you may not know – the Foothills school division is this massive school division that encompasses multiple ridings. This letter starts by saying that “the top priority” of the Foothills school capital plan has been a new grade 10 to 12 school with about 1,500 capacity in Okotoks. The reason why this is a top priority is because in 2022-23 enrolment in the existing Foothills composite high school, Alberta high school of fine arts was 1,429 students, or approximately 130 per cent of its intended capacity. This is not a unique story, sadly. Schools are overrun; class sizes are too large. But if we don’t have the data to demonstrate where exactly that’s happening, how do we know where to allocate resources to address the issue?

The other thing that this letter from the Foothills school division also discusses is youth mental health requirements, requiring a comprehensive community response involving the collective of community stakeholders, youth, families, and schools. This kind of comprehensive education, class, and school data would help us to understand what the mental health requirements and capacity requirements might be at various school boards and how we could address those issues. Without the data, we don’t know where to allocate capacity. As a scientist I often want to know what the data says. How do I know where I want to do the next phase of research if I don’t have the current data? This bill is really about that.

Similarly, I have a letter from Rocky View schools, which also went to the Minister of Education in July, that specifically talks about how many of the schools in Rocky View are already over capacity – and I’m quoting from the letter here:

... and our students and teachers are being negatively impacted as a result. We have continued to be creative in how we use our existing space, but the situation is rapidly becoming untenable. Our students come from rural and urban communities, some of which have been experiencing exploding population growth for several years. For instance, Airdrie’s population grew by 14.29 per cent from 2019 to 2023. With population growth comes increased school enrolment. During the 2022/23 school year, the utilization rate for all [Rocky View] schools was 91 per cent, up from 87 per cent in 2021/22. The result is crowded classrooms and the need to repurpose non-instructional spaces into classrooms.

So you can see that this letter from Rocky View schools also highly relies on the data of looking at population growth as well as how that affects classroom enrolment. This letter: Rocky View schools is asking specifically for support to move ahead four projects that were approved in Budget 2023 from the design, planning, and preplanning stages to construction in 2024.

I want us to really think carefully about how data informs our decisions. When we use data to inform decisions, we can have increased confidence in knowing that the decisions and the programs that we are implementing are actually addressing the gap that they are meant to address. Data isn’t just about collecting some numbers and creating reports; it’s actually about making sure that we use taxpayer dollars efficiently, that we have strong programs in place that will get to the heart of the issue. It’s not just about, you know, collecting some numbers and making some graphs.

This is important for me as the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis because I live in the western part of our riding. Those two letters were from schools that are over capacity in the east part of my

riding, but in the western part of my riding, in the communities of Canmore and Banff, I have a very diverse, ever-changing community. With tourism as the major economic driver, we have a lot of new people coming into town to work and set up lives and raise families all the time. What that means is that the class composition is constantly changing because the composition of our communities is constantly changing. This bill would ensure that the schools in Canmore and Banff would report that data back to Alberta Education to make sure that we are getting the supports that we need in our schools.

A lot of people don’t know this, but there are a lot of French-speaking families that live in Canmore and Banff, and you might not know that unless you spent time going to Save-On and listening to all the different languages all the time. Our French community is growing rapidly, but I don’t know how rapidly because we don’t collect and report on that data anymore.

Diverse communities need to collect data so that that data can inform what our education system looks like so that we are best serving students. Let’s not forget that this bill is all about supporting students to succeed in educational environments, and I really think that that is something that all members of this House can get behind. We can all appreciate the need for having strong, robust, accessible, inclusive public education systems in this province. So this shouldn’t even be a bill that any of us have a problem accepting because it’s a bill to make sure that our public education system is strengthened and more robust as we move forward. It becomes more robust by being data informed and evidence based.

The other part of this bill is that it creates an educational commission to basically be the arm that gathers the information, does the research, and creates the recommendations for improvement. I thought that this government was all about new commissions and boards. I mean, I feel like we’re talking about new commissions and boards every five minutes in this House, so what’s one more?

3:30

I mean, you know, we could just create one that will actually do good things, that will actually help us inform and create a stronger, more robust public education system and has standards that are guided by data. Again, this is the critical component, that our decisions in public education aren’t based on feelings or maybe what we heard from one parent or one school board but are actually based on the data that our schools are already collecting. They’re already collecting this data. They’ve sent it to me in these letters. We just need them to report it on a provincial scale so that that data can become more effective in helping inform public education systems in the province.

I think that that’s all I wanted to say about this. I really hope all the members of the House can get behind supporting this bill. I think that it is one that will help to strengthen our public education system by making sure it’s evidence based and data driven.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat has the floor.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with a deep sense of responsibility for the future of our children and the youth of Alberta. As a father of three kids, two of which are in public school, I believe it’s our collective duty to ensure that our students receive the best opportunities and support which will guide them towards success in the years to come.

At the heart of our government’s mission lies the commitment to safeguard the Alberta advantage, something that I take every

opportunity to discuss, especially when it impacts the next generation. Alberta is being recognized as the ideal place to raise a family, start and run a business, and grow your family's prosperity. This has resonated not only across Canada but globally. As our population continues to grow, we recognize the challenges this brings. The concerns are voiced by my constituents.

The bill presented by the members opposite, while well intended, falls short of actually addressing any real needs of Albertans. The opposition wants Bill 202 to appear logical. It focuses on symptoms of the problem but never the root cause. It focuses on programs and analytics that the school boards can and, in most cases, already use to monitor these classroom sizes, but it lacks any comprehensive solution to addressing anything with regard to rising student population.

Drawing from past experiences and revealing its ineffectiveness, we can just point to past attempts with very similar monitoring programs. These were in place between 2004 and 2019, that being the class size initiative. In contrast, our government is taking an Alberta-focused approach to the education of students attending schools across Alberta. We've been actively engaging with our constituents, seeking insight and feedback, initiatives such as adjustments to the curriculum and to the announcements of new schools, highlighting our commitment to adapting to the evolving needs of our education system, and also highlighting local wins in programs such as collegiates, that are adapting to the future needs of Alberta's workforce and students. For instance, in the recent Budget 2023 the Alberta government pledged to support 58 priority school projects. These are the real and meaningful ways, Mr. Speaker, to address the population increase. These investments aim to provide new and improved student spaces, create jobs for our world-class educators, and foster an environment for our students and our future workforce.

The dynamics of classrooms across Alberta have become more complex than ever. There's a variety of needs that students face as well as the staff that need to be equipped to help deal with them, which is why, in my opinion, the only thing that this bill gets right is that our classrooms are growing in complexity. But, again, this bill falls short in addressing any actual issue when it comes to student needs. This includes the needs of newcomers to Canada and English as a second language learners as well as students with diverse needs such as behavioural challenges or those requiring special learning supports that demand additional information from our educators. The school boards, when planning for the year, already have this information.

Recognizing this, our government is supporting action plans as well as courses that will alleviate unnecessary pressures from our educational aides and assistants by addressing root cause issues and not adding unnecessary bureaucracy. One noteworthy example is the classroom complexity grant, which adds approximately \$1.5 billion to learning support funding from Budget 2023. The grant itself amounts to about \$126 million over three years, aiming to address the challenges posed by increasing classroom complexity. It allows schools to hire more educational assistants, increasing their hours, providing additional training opportunities for educational professionals and engaging with specialists such as counsellors, psychologists, interpreters, and even more teachers. By strengthening the presence of our classroom support staff, school authorities become better equipped to cater to students with unique cognitive, social, and emotional needs as well as English language learners. The learning support funding framework is designed to assist students with specialized learning needs, for those belonging to groups requiring additional support from school authorities, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2023 marked a significant step forward with the creation of the school planning program. This program acts as a transparent pipeline for upcoming school projects, ensuring swift execution once formal construction funding is approved. Again, these are steps forward to creating the necessary cure to the root cause. This forward-thinking initiative reflects on commitments to meeting the ever-changing needs of Alberta classrooms and, most importantly, our Alberta students. Again, this is why school districts have the capacity currently to collect this data, even without making it law.

When urgent needs arise, the capital plan steps up to provide \$93 million over three years to support the continued implementation of the modular program, as many members have already stated. This strategic allocation addresses the most pressing space requirements across the province, reinforcing our government's commitment to address challenges in a prompt and effective means. Our government is being transparent and clear about plans to support students. These plans are making an actual difference by hiring the staff we need. We anticipate and look forward to further developments from the Ministry of Education on the upcoming projects in Budget 2024.

The members opposite accuse our government of not caring for the needs of Alberta students. Contrary to those misconceptions, the truth is that in Budget 2023 Alberta's government increased funding by 5.2 per cent, totalling an impressive \$8.8 billion dedicated to supporting students in classrooms and schools across this province. Examples of various grants to support this are the specialized learning support grants; program unit funding; English as an additional language and refugee student grants; First Nations, Métis, and Inuit grants; socioeconomic status grants; geographic grants; and school nutrition grants. Each of these grants plays a crucial role in ensuring that the targeted support is available where it's needed in different segments of school population. This substantial investment carries meaningful impact for all of our Alberta students.

In Budget 2023 this funding is expected to facilitate the hiring of up to 3,000 educational staff over the next three years. This includes teachers, educational assistants, bus drivers, and various school support staff as we look at the number of school authority projects, hiring more than 2,600 teachers and support staff for the upcoming 2023-2024 year alone. One noteworthy success story, as mentioned by previous members, is the Calgary board of education, which at the beginning of the year announced an additional 700 full-time teaching and learning staff, or approximately 23 per cent of the 3,000 total positions mentioned before. Again, this is only one school division. The impact is being seen clear across this province. This substantial increase is a testament to the positive growth we are aiming to foster in our education system.

The members opposite will argue that their focus on classroom size is essential for the needs of students. However, historically proven earlier, it is crucial to note that as of 2019 the class size initiative was discontinued because of its ineffectiveness. It was an approach that did not yield anticipated results then and is unlikely to do so now. It is also noteworthy, again, to state that nothing is stopping this data from being collected by the school boards currently, even without a law. Importantly, the funding allocated for the failed class size initiative did not vanish; rather, it was reallocated, providing additional flexibility and allowing us more effective means to address local priorities. Reports indicated that over a 15-year period starting in 2004, Mr. Speaker, Alberta spent \$3.4 billion on an initiative that failed to move the needle. Particularly impacted was K to 3.

With the grant being reallocated, reporting on classroom size is no longer a mandatory requirement, but schools and districts may do so at their discretion. The change eliminated an administrative

provincial mandate and places the decision in the hands of the school jurisdictions, where it should be. While they may still choose to report on their classroom size averages for public transparency, the government does not enforce our school divisions to this measure. The members opposite may argue that reporting classroom sizes has its merit, aiding school authorities and tracking classroom data to uniform funding and staffing decisions that best suit the needs of the community; however, with great planning and review our local school authorities already have this data and can use it to advocate for their region. Furthermore, it's important to emphasize that this approach is not forced upon the school authorities by the government, but it is still encouraged.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about moving the needle and achieving tangible impacts in the classroom for Alberta students, two measures that we can use are actually going to produce results: building more schools and hiring more staff, not admin but, rather, student-facing educators. Alberta's government has demonstrated its commitment by approving 98 additional projects.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you. I speak in favour of this bill today. As many have already said today, this data is really important. I like to compare it. I know the Member for Banff-Kananaskis has compared it as a scientist to what she valued and how you need knowledge in order to make decisions. I second that. It's the same idea of, you know, trying to have a budget without knowing what's in your bank account. Data matters, and it makes a difference on the decisions you're going to make.

As you've heard me say before in the House, we have 48 beautiful schools in Calgary-Acadia. I have so far toured 14 of them, and let me tell you: each and every one has something to say about how complex their classrooms are, each and every one has concerns that they can't serve their students, and each and every one is really worried about the future for their students.

I need to compare this hallway education we're giving people to the hallway medicine that we're seeing in health care. As a former registered nurse I can speak to the fact that when you've got a patient who's not in your normal space, they simply cannot receive the same care. This would, of course, translate to a student being out in the hallway; they can't possibly receive the same educational opportunities as those inside of the classroom.

When we're thinking about these different things, this is incredibly harmful. We've heard from many parents, many educators how their children, how the kids going into school this year are simply not prepared. We see this huge gap from kiddos who are moving from kindergarten into grade 1. They're simply not prepared. The parents and the early educators are not being supported. Why this is important, when we circle back to why class number is important: it's because in planning, if we plan to actually provide effective and important resources to our students and to our teachers, we need to know what they are in order to supply. This idea, that keeping data or sharing that information that classrooms already have is somehow going to affect or somehow going to negatively impact schools, is simply silly. Knowing how many students you have in a classroom, knowing what they need and being able to adapt to what they need throughout the school year is how we actually provide appropriate, quality education for our students.

I've spoken to many, many parents, and when I've spoken to them, they've shared things like transparency and accountability and how important that is and that when they're talking to their teachers, they can't get that transparency and accountability because they simply haven't the resources to provide even the bare necessities. We're talking desks and chairs in a classroom – right? – things that you would just assume would be there for your child if we were properly supporting our public education system.

I'm a strong believer that every child should have the right to education and that by not simply collecting data such as complexity, we're doing them a huge disservice. We're doing them a disservice now and throughout their entire lives. Early childhood development research clearly tells us that the supports we provide to these kiddos in their early years, including kindergarten through, say, grade 6, makes life-changing impacts both in terms of what they need as they get older but also in terms of what they can contribute to society. So this is really, really important.

When we look at what this Alberta government has done to the public education system, we see very clearly that they have cut funding per student. They have failed to increase their funding based on the incredible influx of children we have into our systems, which means that every child is getting less than they deserve, and that is shameful.

When we talk about the information that schools have and their need and their whole reason for being – people go into teaching because they care about education, they care about children, they care about the future. If we simply provide them with the resources they need to do their job, we're going to see far better outputs.

So things that, you know, I'm hearing from my many, many schools in Calgary-Acadia: they are looking for supports to help with complexity in their classrooms, right? We are talking about kiddos who maybe need an extra educational assistant, but they don't need it in four years; they need it right now. In fact, they probably needed it last year or the year before or all the way back to 2019, when we saw these large cuts made by this government. What they need is a government that takes public education seriously and that will actually fund those resources so that every child in Alberta has the education that they deserve.

The other thing I hear very frequently when I'm talking to parents and when I'm visiting schools is that they are concerned about the quality of education they're receiving, and I agree with them completely. We need to make sure that these kids are provided with the right supports and education so that they can live full lives. But before we can even get into that conversation, we worry because the kids are not receiving the same quality or relevant education throughout Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Bedmonton to close debate on Bill 202.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is no small thing to stand in this privileged position and to have the opportunity to propose legislation that will improve the lives, and in this case educations, of Albertans. One of the downsides to a populist Premier is that her posturing against Ottawa and her willingness to say, really, any old thing that pops to mind on the radio really sucks up all the air in the room. The headlines and the clicks are drawn to that sensationalism, and the result is that we aren't having serious conversations. What is happening in schools and classrooms across Alberta is serious. It's maybe a bit dry for headlines, and perhaps Albertans have even become numb to the subject as it has dragged

on and on over the last five years of this government, lacking any serious attention to the issue of class size and complexity.

This bill does the most it can within the constraints of a private member's bill. It is simply asking this government for some transparency. It's asking for a return to public reporting on class size. Now, we know this is quite possible for school boards to achieve. One of the major urban boards has continued doing this work even after the government dropped the requirement in 2019. This bill is also asking for reporting on classroom complexity. Anyone who has talked to a teacher over the last decade is sure to have received an earful about the challenges posed by increasing complexity in our classrooms. Finally, this bill asks for a commission on learning excellence to gather every 10 years and have these important and serious conversations about class size, complexity, and other issues such as changing technologies in our classrooms.

I'd like to thank my colleagues from across the aisle who took the time to stand up and speak to this bill. Though their debate points were misguided, some were delivered with good intentions. I'll admit to being confused by some of the debate points. One member spoke at length about the carbon tax. I know we can get off on some tangents in here, but that was some impressive stretching to get from class sizes to carbon taxes.

3:50

One member bemoaned how this bill doesn't get more funding into the classrooms or invest in building new schools. Now, some folks are new here, like me, and perhaps didn't quite understand the limitations on a private member's bill. Believe me, if I could have brought a piece of legislation to this House that would have allocated more dollars for education in this province, I certainly would have done so.

The Education minister himself even took the time to speak on Bill 202. Now, he was concerned the timelines on the commission for learning excellence were too long; it wouldn't move quickly enough to be meaningful. If only there was a way we could, say, amend the bill as presented to address that concern. Alas, I fear the UCP is about to quietly kill this bill before it proceeds to that stage.

And as it turns out, that wasn't really the issue for the minister anyway because with his next breath he said that we don't need such a commission; we have a ministry to do that work. Now, from a government that assembles a task force every other month, this was a pretty breathtaking display of hypocrisy. You need to literally wait only five more minutes and we'll be talking about another UCP proposed commission. Maybe they don't bother to assemble a commission or task force if they don't have a buddy who needs a quick quarter million dollars.

Now, this government loves to stand in this House and crow about the success of their Alberta Is Calling campaign. Now, whether people uproot their lives or change their behaviours based on a billboard is debatable, but certainly it is a fact that Alberta is growing, and that growth needs to be accommodated in our schools. This bill is just the first step in addressing how we best support Alberta's future leaders.

This is not about limits or caps. This is about transparency and accountability. This is about collecting good information so we can make good decisions. This is about our kids and how we best support their learning needs. This government needs to let the sun shine in and let Albertans see what is really happening in our classrooms. They won't be happy with what they see, and it's time for this government to face up to that.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:53 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Pancholi
Batten	Haji	Schmidt
Boparai	Hayter	Shepherd
Chapman	Ip	Sweet
Eggen	Kasawski	Tejada
Ellingson	Metz	Wright, P.
Elmeligi		

4:10

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 19	Against – 44
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 202 lost]

The Speaker: Members, please exit the Chamber quickly if you're doing so.

Bill 203

Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to move second reading of Bill 203, Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act.

I stand before you to introduce a pivotal piece of legislation that seeks to bridge the gap between international expertise and Alberta's economic potential. I'm speaking of my private member's bill, Bill 203, Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. Our government has done a very good job of ensuring that we welcome newcomers into the Alberta advantage from the rural renewal stream, Alberta accelerated tech pathway, and farm stream, to name a few. We have done good work, but there's more to do, and this is what this bill is all about.

This bill is more than just a document. It is a promise to the skilled individuals across the globe who look towards Alberta as a land of opportunity, a land of promise that their qualifications, expertise, and aspirations will be met with the respect and recognition that they deserve.

The establishment of the Alberta foreign credential advisory committee is not just an administrative step; it is a bold declaration that Alberta is ready to lead the nation in tapping into a wellspring of global talent. It is about continuing to welcome global talent to join us in the Alberta advantage.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Imagine that you're a nurse, a computer whiz, or a teacher, but you learned how to do your job in another country. When you come to Alberta, you want to work, but you find out that it's actually not that simple. Your qualifications, all your training and your hard work, need to be checked and approved here before you can start working. That can take a really long time, and while all that's happening, we are sitting here waiting when we could really use these people's help in our economy.

This checking and approval of credentialing is important and appropriate, and we want to continue to ensure that people have the qualifications to work in our industries, but we want to speed up that process. This is what Bill 203 is all about, speeding up this whole process. We want to make a new team, a committee, that will take a good look at the rules we have now and figure out how to make them better. It isn't just any committee; it's going to be the first of its kind in the whole country, and it's going to give us an edge over other places. It means that skilled workers could choose Alberta over any other place in the world because we're making it easier for them to get started here.

Bill 203 is about curating a tangible impact in the lives of skilled professionals and, by extension, all Albertans. Think about it. Every qualified professional who settles in Alberta to work is an opportunity to gain for our economy and society. This committee isn't just a panel of experts; it's an opportunity and a catalyst for growth here in Alberta.

As we consider the big picture, when this committee successfully streamlines the process for recognizing foreign credentials, we're talking about a ripple effect of positive outcomes here in Alberta, for instance in health care. Quicker credential recognition means more hands on deck in hospitals and in clinics. This translates to shorter wait times as well as for shorter wait times for medical procedures and better overall patient care.

In the tech sector with faster integration of foreign talent Alberta can continue its climb to be a world-wide hub for innovation. We're on the way to this already, and this bill allows us to draw more talent here. We can see growth in tech start-ups, more jobs in software development, and advancements in digital technology. These aren't just jobs; they're opportunities for Alberta to lead on a global stage.

Education is another sector that stands to benefit significantly. With more qualified teachers and educational assistants from diverse backgrounds our educational system becomes richer in experience and perspective. This diversity of teaching staff can lead to a more comprehensive curriculum and learning environment that reflect the global village our world has become.

The committee's influence extends beyond the most talked-about sectors, like health care and tech. Consider veterinarians, both traditional and in specialized fields. By having a streamlined process for recognizing the qualifications of veterinarians from different parts of the world, we can tap into a wealth of knowledge that continues to drive expanded companion care, lead innovations, and grow technological advancements.

And there's a cultural and community impact here as well. When skilled workers immigrate to Alberta and bring their families, they enrich the cultural tapestry of our province. They bring new perspectives, traditions, and experiences. This cultural diversity strengthens our social fabric, making Alberta not just a place of economic opportunity but also a continued vibrant community.

Our neighbours in Ontario have a similar idea with something they called Bill 6. They wanted a team to look at the rules and see how to improve them for people with foreign qualifications. Now, we did like this idea, but we've tailored this to fit Albertans.

Why is this so important, you ask? Well, by 2030 we're going to need a lot more people here in crucial industries. We're talking about tens of thousands of nurses, IT experts, teachers, just to name a few. These jobs are all very important. They take care of our health, educate our kids, and keep our information safe. Further, to expand our province up to 10 million people by 2050, this is going to streamline those processes in order to welcome people to Alberta to embrace the Alberta advantage.

The buildup of this committee is to have 13 people from different parts of our government, from health, education, jobs, technology, and immigration. This mix is a good mix because it means we'll get a bunch of different ideas and perspectives on how to make things better right across the board.

The Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism will recommend up to four members. This is because they know the ins and outs of people coming to Alberta from other places and what it means to welcome them into our communities. The Minister of Advanced Education may suggest up to four people, bringing the perspective of our universities and colleges into the mix. The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade can add their member, someone who understands the needs of Alberta businesses and the positions that need to be fulfilled and filled across Alberta. The Minister of Health can recommend up to three people, which makes sense since health care is one of our biggest needs and biggest areas where we need more skilled workers across our province. Lastly, the Minister of Technology and Innovation may appoint one person because we want Alberta to continue to be on the cutting edge of technology, and that's what we're trying to do here today.

This diverse group means we've got our bases covered. We're making sure this committee doesn't really miss anything important from different sectors. Every ministry has a unique view, and that's going to be of incredible value as we build this committee. It's about making our health care stronger, which would mean we spend less time waiting to see a doctor and a nurse. It's about growing our tech industry, which means more inventions and more jobs for everyone here in Alberta. It's about making our schools better with more teachers and assistants who bring international perspective to their teaching.

What's more, we're looking at jobs that are in other areas of demand, too. We need managers who can handle our computer systems, principals to run our schools, engineers of all kinds, and health care professionals like dentists and therapists. All of these folks are super important, and right now we don't have enough of them. By making it easier for skilled workers from other places to come and get started in Alberta, we're building a better place for all of us. It's like rolling out the welcome mat and saying: come join us; you'll do great here. We're making sure Alberta stays a great place to live, work, and raise a family, and I would encourage people to come and join us in the Alberta advantage.

By welcoming these skilled workers, we're keeping our workforce young and full of new ideas. We're making sure that Alberta has plenty of reasons to stay and to work here. We're making Alberta a place that doesn't just keep up with the times but continues to lead the way both in Canada and globally. With this bill we're saying loud and clear that we're ready to grow, we're welcoming new folks, and we're ready to make life better for everyone here in Alberta. I'm asking you all to get behind this bill. It's more than just a piece of paper; it's a promise of a better, brighter future in our province and a better and brighter future for every Albertan as well. So let's make it happen. Let's support Bill 203 and show everyone what Alberta is truly about.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to the bill?

4:20

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, it's definitely a piece of paper, to be frank. Bill 203 establishes a committee with a mandate "to facilitate the recognition of foreign credentials," as it states. It defines key terms, establishes the foreign credential advisory committee, and outlines its responsibilities. Here are the three responsibilities that I picked: reviewing legislation and rules related to foreign credential recognition, evaluating processes in other Canadian jurisdictions, and making recommendations to the minister. This is what it says the bill will be undertaking or the committee will be doing. The committee's mandate lacks specific mechanisms to address the intricate challenges associated with this process, which raises concerns about the overall effectiveness. Predominantly, it's a conversation of committee members that are predominantly government appointed. The member just spoke about the diversity of the bill, but I looked into the bill, and there is no recognition or understanding of bringing in regulatory bodies and the roles that they will have. It's specifically government-appointed members of the committee.

I wondered when I looked into it, and I was, like: "Okay. What doesn't exist that this bill will establish? What's the gap that the bill will be filling to address existing inefficiencies for transparency and accountability?" The Fair Registration Practices Act became a law in 2019, that is four years ago. In March 2020 the fair registration practices office was renamed and rebranded the fairness for newcomers office. This actually heightened the expectation of professionally trained newcomers who want to make this province their home. The office is intended to support the minister of skilled trades and professions in administering the act, so one will wonder: when you have that office already that is to support the minister, why will you need to create another committee that probably will not sit and have a conversation on this?

The responsibilities of the office, that was renamed and rebranded in 2020, that were established include working "with regulatory bodies to streamline, simplify and accelerate the assessment of qualifications by eliminating barriers to registration" – that was a key responsibility of the office – helping regulatory bodies, government departments, which includes the ministries that have been outlined here for this purpose, and other stakeholders understand the processes, the challenges that exist now, which exactly is the role of the office; reviewing "registration and assessment practices of regulatory bodies".

That is where the issue is. In my past career I have engaged with quite a number of skilled newcomers who come to the country and face these challenges. That is where the problem is. In terms of the assessment, the processes, and how much it will take and providing a clear pathway for that, demonstrating in terms of creating a dashboard and how much it will create, that is where the problem is, but this committee's responsibility does not have anything related to that. Assisting regulatory bodies in complying with the Fair Registration Practices Act: these are some of the responsibilities that the office has, which was charged with this responsibility to make it easier.

Since 2019 what happened? I have asked this question multiple times in this House. The answer that I have been getting, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has done so much. Without providing accurate information to demonstrate what foreign-trained professionals can – really, how do they get their credentials recognized?

The government undertook a baseline survey to assess compliance and set benchmarks for regulatory bodies in 2020; that wasn't enough. Again the government contracted Deloitte to initiate another review of practices; that wasn't enough. These are some of

the actions that have already been taken. The government now tables Bill 203 to create another body. The fact is that there are other jurisdictions that established similar offices to exactly do the similar kinds of responsibilities, which was to assist the minister in terms of enabling and facilitating for skilled newcomers to have a transparent pathway for their credentials to be recognized. Other provinces provide regular updates and reports on an annual basis that show how the office functions and provides the support needed for foreign-trained professionals as far as credentialing is concerned.

The fact that Bill 203 was introduced to establish a committee is a stark reflection of the failures that are happening within these credentialing processes. The main need for another government-picked body, despite the existence of that office, is quite challenging, and it's quite kind of like – it's time consuming and doesn't deliver anything to the foreign-trained newcomers. These are the times that we need professional, foreign-trained newcomers' credentials recognized so that they can contribute to Alberta's economy.

The member spoke about: the bill attracts more talent. We have quite a number of talents that have already come to the province, but they are having challenges in terms of navigating the existing systems that we have in place. For sure, we want to make sure that we have the standards of practices that are needed. We need to have quality of services. We do need that, but the thing here is that the problem, then, Mr. Speaker, that we have in place is that foreign-trained newcomers don't have a clear pathway to navigate through these. The processes are confusing. There are no clear reporting mechanisms that are in place for the public to know. There is no clear dashboard that will enable foreign-trained professionals to come and understand how much it will take. Whether it is in the health care system or whether it is in other areas where we need more skilled workers, there is no clarity in terms of the processes that are in place for foreign-trained newcomers to go through.

We know on this side of the House – what we believe is that we need to create clear, transparent processes and pathways in place that will provide a faster, efficient way that foreign-trained professionals get their credentials and get to their professions of choice, the professions that we actually need them to be in. The actual work that needs to happen is not creating one committee after another committee or an assessment followed by another assessment. What needs to happen is, like, revamping the Alberta advantage immigration program that exists now and creating pathways for other means. Mr. Speaker, this bill does nothing that is not available now.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to share my comments on Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, and I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Decore for his thoughtful remarks. Let me just say that I do also share his disappointment that the government is, instead of tackling a serious problem, just setting up another committee. You know, I'm reminded of the old joke about the efficacy of committee work, and that joke is that a camel is a horse that was designed by a committee, and that speaks to the kind of outputs that committees generate. They're often disappointing to the public, and I think that we will be similarly disappointed should this committee be established.

When the Member for Grande Prairie introduced this bill, he said – and I'm paraphrasing here – that it's a promise to skilled individuals they'll get the recognition that they deserve. Mr.

Speaker, what a fantastic promise. If only the government hadn't just promised that in 2019 and introduced the Fair Registration Practices Act in the First Session of the Legislature to tackle that problem.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I went back to *Hansard* and saw what the minister at the time had to say about the Fair Registration Practices Act. He said: "Some professional and trade regulators have unnecessarily complex procedures for licensure, which can sometimes cause professionals to spend years jumping through regulatory hoops while their skills atrophy. This legislation will remedy that problem."

That's what the minister promised in 2019 when he introduced this legislation, and here we are, the government admitting failure to deliver a promise that they made to foreign-trained professionals four years ago. Instead of taking meaningful action to actually enforce the legislation that they brought forward in 2019, they're setting up another committee. Mr. Speaker, it's incredibly disappointing.

I thought it would be interesting for members of the House to just look at how the government is doing with respect to the set-up of the fairness for newcomers office, which my friend from Edmonton-Decore mentioned. So I had a look at the 2022-2023 annual report for skilled trades and professions, Mr. Speaker, a ministry that no longer exists. I understand that now the Advanced Education minister is responsible for the fairness for newcomers office. This is an office that has bounced around within government for the last four years, which is already an indication that perhaps the government doesn't take the work that this office does very seriously if they really can't find a permanent home for it.

I was also concerned to see that in the 2022-2023 fiscal year the government allocated almost \$1.5 million to the work that the fairness for newcomers office should be doing, but for some reason it left more than half a million dollars unspent in 2022-2023. Why? You would think that such a significant underexpenditure in an office that was representative of a flagship promise that Jason Kenney made when he ran in the 2019 election should have some explanation in the annual report, but there is none to be found. There is no explanation whatsoever in the 2022-23 annual report about why the fairness for newcomers office underspent its budget by more than a third, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the Minister of Advanced Education can enlighten the House if she stands up to speak to this bill. So that's one flag that was raised.

I went through the rest of the annual report to see exactly what the fairness for newcomers office has been up to over the last year. Well, Mr. Speaker, in 2022-23 they provided a \$200,000 grant to the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta as well as the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta to create something called a triple-track satellite site to conduct competency assessments in Alberta.

I think this sounds like a worthy goal and, in fact, seems to be getting at the issue that the Member for Grande Prairie is trying to get at with the introduction of this legislation, and that is fast-tracking foreign-trained health professionals to work here in Alberta in their field of expertise. But one wonders: why is it that the fairness for newcomers office can't deliver the work that the Member for Grande Prairie says the government should be doing?

It's very concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that in announcing the development of this grant, it doesn't tell us what the goals of the grant are. It doesn't tell us when the people of Alberta can expect to see the outcomes. This was \$200,000 that according to the annual report was given to the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta with almost no expectations. But wait; there's more. That's not the only organization that was hired or contracted to do work with no clear goals, no timelines, and no performance measures. The

fairness for newcomers office is also working with Deloitte to initiate a review of registration practices for four regulatory organizations, including the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta, the College of Physicians & Surgeons, and the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta.

What is the Deloitte review supposed to do? You would think that perhaps there might be some information in the annual report, but, alas, Mr. Speaker, there is none to be had. The fairness for newcomers office doesn't provide any information to the public about what Deloitte is supposed to do, when it's supposed to do it, and how we are even measuring that they've been successful in what they're doing. So I challenge the Member for Grande Prairie, who introduced this bill, to tell us why it is that Deloitte was hired by this government to conduct a regulatory review. They're still in the process of it, they haven't even completed the work, but here we are setting up a committee to also do that work again. Is Deloitte not doing a good job? Should we get our money back? I'd like the Minister of Advanced Education or the Member for Grande Prairie or anybody else on that side to tell us why it is that we are going to be paying twice to do the work of a regulatory review of professional regulatory organizations.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, it's very concerning to me that the fairness for newcomers office has a responsibility to oversee more than 70 professional regulatory organizations. More than 70. How many staff do they have? It's a good question. There's nothing in the annual report. I looked at the Alberta government directory. They have four staff – four staff – to oversee the work of more than 70 professional regulatory organizations. Four staff working full-time can't even begin to address the issues that the government says it's interested in solving with respect to recognizing foreign credentials.

Here we have a piece of legislation that will appoint three times as many members to a committee to do the work of the fairness for newcomers office, that only has four people working full-time. If this government were actually serious about dealing with the issue of foreign-trained professionals who cannot work in their field of expertise, then I think that they would spend less time creating a committee and more time and resources hiring people to actually carry out the work that the fairness for newcomers office was set up to do.

It's incredibly concerning to me that nowhere in the annual report do we have any indication about what the objectives of the fairness for newcomers office are. We don't have any indication of what the timelines are. We have no performance measures of any kind in the annual report. How many foreign-trained professionals are living in Alberta right now who cannot work in their field of expertise? We don't know. The government provides us no data on that. How many foreign-trained professionals have actually been able to go through the licensing process in the timelines that the minister set out when he introduced the act in 2019? No idea, Mr. Speaker. There is no data to be found in the annual report or on the fairness for newcomers office public website.

So I hope that the Member for Grande Prairie or the Minister of Advanced Education or anybody else involved with this work can tell us why this office is necessary when they haven't done the work that they set out to do in 2019. Thank you.

4:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education has risen.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Bill 203, the Alberta Foreign Credential Advisory

Committee Act. This bill represents a major step towards streamlining and enhancing the recognition of foreign credentials in Alberta. It is an initiative that, if passed, will propel Alberta ahead of the curve, attracting and retaining skilled workers vital to our economic prosperity and societal well-being.

The global landscape, Mr. Speaker, is changing, and so, too, must our approach to harnessing talent. Bill 203 is not a stand-alone effort. It builds on the progress our government has made to make Alberta more welcoming for newcomers. Through the Fair Registration Practices Act we established the fairness for newcomers office, as has been mentioned many times today, and that office works collaboratively with the regulatory bodies to ensure regulated professions and trade registration practices are transparent, objective, impartial, and procedurally fair.

This is done by ensuring registration processes meet requirements of the act such as requiring that an interim registration decision be provided within six months of receiving all information required from an applicant to make a decision and having regulatory bodies report on their registration and assessment practices to the Minister of Advanced Education. The fairness for newcomers office continues to collect data from more than 70 Alberta regulators on their credential recognition timelines and processes, and it has been quite successful in the work that it's been doing. This data informs work with regulators on reducing barriers and improving efficiency in the system.

Let's confront the facts presented to us by our labour market forecasts. We face shortages in critical professions, from health care to technology, where the demand for skilled individuals far outstrips the available workforce. Registered nurses, information systems analysts, computer programmers: these are not mere job titles; they represent the backbone of our society. Last month I was proud to announce an \$11 million investment in nurse bridging programs for internationally educated nurses. Through this funding internationally educated nurses will have access to an additional 1,221 spaces at postsecondary institutions. This is so that they can complete programs they need for certification here in Alberta. These are bridging programs. This builds on the more than 600 new seats for registered nurse and licensed practical nurse bridging programs announced in February, and it helps support a stronger health care system for Albertans.

Bill 203 proposes the establishment of the Alberta foreign credential advisory committee, armed with a clear mandate. This committee, composed of diverse voices from various ministries, will review existing legislation, evaluate successful models in other provinces, and make recommendations to the minister. This work, I will note, is beyond the scope of the fairness for newcomers office and, in fact, is complementary of their work. Bill 203 is a proactive measure aimed at making Alberta more prosperous by streamlining the recognition process, particularly in professions facing current or anticipated shortages.

The composition of the committee reflects a strategic approach. Members from the Ministry of Advanced Education will bring insights from our educational institutions while those from the Ministry of Health understand the unique demands of the health care sector. The Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade members will contribute to solutions for labour market shortages, and the Ministry of Technology and Innovation members will ensure that Alberta remains a hub for innovation. Finally, the Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism will facilitate the acceleration of auto-credentialing for workers from diverse backgrounds.

There are many benefits for Albertans within Bill 203. By streamlining the recognition of foreign credentials, we recognize and address labour shortages in critical sectors, alleviating issues like health care wait times. It's an investment in our economic

growth as a more accessible workforce attracts talent to sectors like technology, furthering diversification in a growing sector. Alberta, through this committee, can become the ideal destination for skilled workers globally, showcasing our commitment to cutting red tape while fostering an inclusive society.

Let's briefly acknowledge the potential challenges. The committee's recommendations may not be binding and the panel size might limit stakeholder engagement, yet these are hurdles that can be overcome. The committee's work is an essential step forward, and while it may highlight certain shortcomings, it also presents an opportunity for a proactive improvement. Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 is not just legislation; it's a testament to our commitment to the people of Alberta. It's about ensuring that our province is not just a place to live but a place to thrive.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that these kinds of initiatives are personally very meaningful to me. I often tell the story of my own father, who had a degree from India, the first person in his family to be educated, and he had a dream to become a teacher here in Canada. Unfortunately, due to the complex credentialing process and other factors he was never able to realize that dream. So the work that I do in my ministry is very important to make sure that Albertans who are not able to get into the occupations that they studied for in other jurisdictions have a clear pathway to actually be able to find a way to work in their occupation of choice. This is a province that has offered countless families like mine an opportunity to be rewarded for hard work and perseverance. I was just talking about my father. Despite the challenges he is a very successful man; he just found another pathway.

Every Albertan should be proud of our strong economy and growing population. With these successes come the challenge of ensuring prosperity is attainable for all, including Albertans who have recently arrived. This is an opportunity to once again strengthen the Alberta advantage by making our province a top destination in Canada for skilled newcomers to live, work, and prosper to the greatest extent possible. It's an opportunity to cut red tape, open doors, and take meaningful action to reduce the labour shortage. By passing this bill, Mr. Speaker, we affirm a dedication to a prosperous future where the recognition of foreign credentials is not a barrier but a gateway to a rewarding career.

I urge every MLA to support this bill, to stand on the right side of progress, and to collectively build a stronger, more inclusive Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any others wishing – I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to stand and speak to Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. Certainly, the members on this side of the House and on the other would agree that foreign credential recognition is a critical component of our growing economy in Alberta. We have people coming to Alberta for countless reasons. I would beg to argue that perhaps a committee is not the reason why they would want to come to Alberta; there are countless other reasons why. But without a doubt . . .

Mr. Eggen: They could join the committee.

Member Eremenko: They could come for a committee. Maybe they could qualify for one of the 13 positions that are going to be government appointed without a great deal of transparency around what the criteria would actually be, but I can get into that a little bit later.

Foreign credential recognition is certainly nothing new. In fact, we heard that it was a significant component of former Premier Kenney's interests when it came to campaigning, and I was certainly glad to hear it. Alberta truly is blessed with incredible wealth and prosperity and natural resources and natural beauty that is ideal and envied the world over. Absolutely, when people choose to come to Alberta, we have a responsibility to ensure that they are maximizing their potential, that they are leveraging the experience and the expertise that they bring with them from their home countries to their benefit and to all of our benefit, but indeed there are barriers to leveraging and contributing all that they have to give to our communities.

That was certainly a component in 2019, and as my colleagues down the way have already discussed at length, that was exactly why the act was passed in 2019, that was then rebranded to become the fairness for newcomers office. This was indeed something that was required, but it really does beg the question about what kind of measurement and evaluation was put in place at that time to, in fact, confirm that this office was necessary, was demonstrating its effectiveness, and was demonstrating the outcomes that it was ultimately created to address.

4:50

Now, there's a bit of irony here, of course, that has already been alluded to that I think bears repeating, that just an hour ago we were talking about Bill 202, where the members on the opposite side were commenting on how the last thing that we need is another committee. There is ample work being done in this particular area, in the case of Bill 202 around education, and another committee for the sake of another committee just doesn't really bear the resourcing nor the attention, but here we are talking about a committee to really create a great deal of redundancy, in my view and I think probably a lot of other folks' view on this side of the Chamber, when it comes to doing the work that has already been outlined in previous legislation with the fairness for newcomers office.

Again, I agree with the member opposite, and I thank him for his private member's bill to recognize that Alberta is indeed asking for the best and the brightest from around the world. That is what we deserve, and it's no wonder that people want to come here, but a committee is not in fact going to be what that draw is.

Now, I'd like to speak to a little bit of my personal experience on this front. Prior to the election in May of this year I worked for a wonderful organization that started in Calgary known as the immigrant access fund, and 16 years ago it was a small, scrappy start-up as part of another organization in Calgary that has since expanded to become a national agency supporting thousands of newcomers every single year with the finances required to bridge their foreign credentials and get back to work. Now, there is something that we can get behind. Here is a program that really supports newcomers with exactly what it is that they're looking for – the finances, the support, the systems navigation, the career success planning – that they require so that they can put their incredible skill sets to work on Alberta's behalf and on behalf of their families and of their communities.

It is truly tragic, Mr. Speaker, that surgeons, engineers end up working driving a cab or end up being a porter at the hospital rather than delivering front-line care supports that they are in fact trained to provide, but as a result of the barriers to bridging those foreign credentials they end up having to work far below their scope of practice. Now, there's certainly nothing wrong with those lines of work, but when you have invested so much of your capital, so much of your time and your effort into that kind of an education, to not fully exhaust that skill set when you have chosen to start a new life in Canada is truly our loss.

So it is not a committee that is going to facilitate the bridging of those foreign credentials. It's improved programs and services, additional supports when it comes to systems navigation, additional supports to address the cost of living and affordability concerns that people might have so that they can afford to take that extra time, find that job that is really a perfect fit for them, navigate the system with their regulatory and their professional bodies so that they can get back to work earning the salaries that they should in fact be enjoying as a result of so much time and effort having been contributed to their education and to their work experience.

I can also think of so many constituents; one, for example, that I have been supporting, who just expresses such deep frustration and a real loss of hope about whether or not he made the right choice coming to Canada. That is truly a tragedy, and it is our loss, as I've mentioned.

Now, I have a couple of questions about the committee that is meant to be created as a result of Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. One is: how do we ensure that there is no political interference here? This is replicating a very complex and nuanced set of work that, again, has already been mandated for the fairness for newcomers office, that has 70 regulatory bodies, countless colleges, with a great deal of complexity and nuance within that that recognizes the work of newcomers and the work of particular professional sectors. What is it that this committee is going to provide to the minister that the minister can then action in a way that is not already being supported and provided by an existing office?

Much like the fairness for newcomers office, I have some questions around measurement and evaluation. Again, what measures – what we measure. Oh, what is it? What we count gets measured, and what is measured counts. So we want to make sure that there are, in fact, some of those terms of reference that are established for whatever committee is created by this government so that we can make sure that it is in fact delivering the value that Albertans, especially newcomers who are figuring this new world out – that it is in fact providing the effectiveness that they deserve.

I can't help but raise compensation. We know already, with previous legislation that has already been introduced in this House and in this session, that there is interest in increasing compensation for people appointed to agencies, boards, and commissions. Again, I'm not sure about increasing compensation and the transparency of that practice for this particular committee, but I beg the question about whether or not it's, in fact, necessary and whether it, in fact, justifies the cost.

Lastly, I think that what is really important is that we recognize the good work, the experience, the nuance, the complexity of the regulatory bodies and the colleges that already exist in Alberta. Government policy is a bit of a sledgehammer when sometimes what you need is a scalpel, and I'm not convinced that this type of a committee, with the kind of oversight that would be required of it to be effective, is in fact going to consider the nuance and the intricacies of colleges between engineers or physicians or IT or nurses or any of the other countless regulatory bodies that, in fact, would fall under this particular purview. It is, without a doubt, a concern, and it is, without a doubt, a necessary support that government can provide for newcomers to access and to navigate the system so that they can put their good skills to work. But I am not convinced that this committee is, in fact, the thing to do it.

Lastly, I see a bit of a trend; that is, Alberta is calling, "Welcome" with one hand, and on the other hand we push them away. I want to make sure that when we say, "Come to Alberta; enjoy our lifestyle," you can come and stay.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. Before I begin, I would like to congratulate my good friend and colleague the Member for Grande Prairie for introducing his first bill and thank him for choosing to address this important issue.

As Albertans we are blessed to live in a free society. We value hard work and pride ourselves on skills, training, and abilities. We are self-sufficient people, and we care about supporting ourselves and our families without having to rely on the generosity of others. And we are generous and welcoming people, with outstretched arms for anyone who wants to work hard, earn a living, and give back to our society.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity over the past year to work in our government's response about the crisis in Ukraine, first as a parliamentary secretary for Ukrainian resettlement and now the parliamentary secretary for settlement services and Ukrainian evacuees. In these roles I was focused on ensuring that Ukrainian newcomers to our province are equipped and able to adapt to their new home and eventually support themselves. I am pleased to share with all members of this Assembly that we are succeeding. I've heard from countless newcomers, many of whom have friends and family who have settled in numerous other jurisdictions, and without exception they tell me the same thing: Alberta has the best supports for Ukrainian evacuees in the world. It goes without saying that I'm incredibly proud of all we have been able to do for these evacuees.

[The Speaker in the chair]

What I've found out over the past year as I've done this work is that the Ukrainian people are a lot like Albertans. They value freedom, they value family, and they want to work hard, contribute, and provide for their loved ones. However, despite all the successes of our government in supporting these evacuees, too many of them find themselves unable to do exactly that. Many evacuees from Ukraine are coming to Alberta with specific skills and training that our economy could use. From doctors to welders these newcomers bring many different types of experiences, but when they get here, they find themselves in a country where they may not know the language and a new culture. Having to deal with the credential recognition process is frustratingly complex and often leaves these evacuees waiting for months on end to have their credentials recognized if at all. Instead of finding gainful employment in their field of expertise, where they could support themselves and their families while contributing to the economy and filling a need, they find themselves working lower paying jobs.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but time for debate on this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Prescription Contraception Access

503. Ms Hayter moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider taking the necessary steps to provide universal access to free prescription contraception, including oral hormone pills, contraceptive injections, copper and

hormonal intrauterine devices, subdermal implants, and emergency contraception known as Plan B.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand here in the Assembly to put forth my private member's Motion 503 for universal prescription contraception.

As we sit here in the Legislative Assembly, I hope we can take a moment to reflect on how far we've come in our work towards gender equality and to recommit ourselves to the work ahead. As the Alberta NDP critic for status of women I am proud of the work our movement has done to support women, advocate for women, and work with women, and I am so proud to work with an extraordinary caucus team of Albertan women with backgrounds in health care, education, energy, the law, seniors' care, human rights, conservation, finance, and so much more.

The Alberta NDP caucus has ensured that Alberta women don't just have a seat at the table; on our side of the team we have half the seats at the table. Why is that important? Part of the reason that it is so important is that we ensure that we have policy-making, lawmaking, and decision-making that reflects the real-life experiences and priorities of women. By doing that, we are more likely to focus on making decisions that will improve the lives of women. That's why today I am so excited to bring forward a motion that would otherwise be overlooked but is very important: universal access to free prescription contraception across the province.

It is a motion that benefits millions of Albertans throughout their lifetime, starting in high school and all the way to perimenopausal. When we have access to birth control, it allows us to pursue educational opportunities. This leads to increased graduation rates from postsecondary. Families need to be able to make choices about the sizes of their family so they can provide adequate resources and support for all family members. When we have access to prescription contraception, there is a reduction to child poverty and better outcomes for their families.

In October Dr. Claudia Goldin won the Nobel memorial prize in economic sciences. Her research was on women's workforce participation. She found that when birth control became available, it allowed women the opportunity to create their own identities and avoid early marriages. Additionally, she found that the gender pay gap widened after women gave birth to their first child.

Women should have full autonomy to decide when and if they want to have children. Making sure they have access to prescription contraceptives allows women to have control over their economic future. Caitlin Bloxom, a nurse with Winnipeg Clinic Community Health, says that unplanned or unwanted pregnancies can lead to psychosocial distress and add costs to the health care system, and people have the right to control their bodies and prevent unwanted pregnancies with medications proven to do so.

This motion would remove the barrier of cost for people. I think we can all agree that women deserve quality health care. They deserve health care that is there for them when and where they need it. The Alberta NDP will continue to be a voice for all Albertans to have access to public health care.

Universal coverage for prescription contraceptives will save Albertans money and help women to fully participate in our economy and every aspect of our society. Universal access to free prescription contraception in Alberta will ensure that more women are in control of their own lives and their economic future.

As we are all well aware, Alberta is in an affordability crisis. Cost of living is skyrocketing; it is critical that we are making vital medications and treatments available free of charge. Folks shouldn't have to be making the decision between food, paying their rent, or health care. We are in an affordability crisis, and birth control should not be a luxury item.

Unplanned pregnancies are distressing and can push women into economic turmoil. We can support women and their right to access preventable medications by providing people with free prescription contraception. It'll give them control over their lives and their futures. This will empower individuals to make the decisions for their health and not with the cheapest decision.

Birth control is a top economic driver for women. *Bloomberg Businessweek* stated in 2015 that contraception was the most transformative development in the business sector in the last 85 years. One-third of the wage gains women have made since 1960 are the results of access to oral contraceptives, and while the wage gap between men and women is still significant, especially with women of colour, this must be addressed. Access to birth control has helped narrow this gap.

Birth control advances women's educational opportunities. Being able to get the pill before age 21 has been found to be the most influential factor in enabling women already in postsecondary to stay in postsecondary. The enrolment was 20 per cent higher among women who could access birth control pills legally by age 18 in 1970 compared with women who could not, and women who could access the pill before having decided to pursue higher education obtained an average of one year more of education before the age of 30. Between 1969 and 1980 the dropout rate among women with access to the pill was 35 per cent lower than women without the pill. Finally, young women's legal access to the pill before age 21 led to significant increase in women who were college graduates, and young women with legal pill access were able to both have children and pursue higher education.

Access to contraception has also led to more college-educated women pursuing advanced professional degrees. Birth control has been estimated to account for more than 30 per cent of the increase in the proportion of women in skilled careers from 1970 to 1990. The pill has also been touted as a major driver in women pursuing medicine, dentistry, and law.

Many Albertans do not have health insurance plans, or their health insurance plans do not cover prescription contraceptives like IUD, Plan B, and oral hormone pills. Does the government believe that only people with a robust and progressive insurance plan should get access to prescription contraception? The savings for Albertans without prescription plans from their employers would range from \$240 per year for oral hormone pills and upwards to \$500 for IUDs. For someone buying the pill every month, this program will save them up to \$10,000 over their lifetime.

Based on the costing of similar programs in B.C., the total cost of this coverage to the provincial budget is \$33.8 million per year. Speaking of British Columbia, their government passed this legislation this year, and last week Manitoba committed to becoming the second province to offer free prescription contraceptives. I truly hope that we are the third.

It has been a huge success in B.C., and the cost to the government is relatively small, and the response was overwhelming, so overwhelming, in fact, that clinics were flooded with requests for IUD insertions. This response is the clearest indication that free prescription contraception makes a difference in people's lives.

There is a large desire for these contraceptives, but cost remains often a prohibitive barrier. One clinic in B.C. received 350 calls on day one. That is 350 people whose lives were changed because the legislation allowed them access to contraception they needed for their health and their well-being. In addition to B.C. and Manitoba, these types of coverage are also available in Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., and Scandinavian countries.

This is a good health policy, a good economic policy, and it's the right thing to do. I will always stand up with women, for women and the rights of women. I'm very proud to put this motion forward

to empower Albertans right across our province. Universal contraception will change the lives of women in Alberta. Today we have the real opportunity to be on the cutting edge of women's health policy in this country, to advance women's participation in our economy, to protect women's ability to pursue postsecondary education, to give women full autonomy over their lives, the size of their families, and the future.

If we don't pass this motion, we are running a very real risk of leaving Alberta women behind. When we announced this promise back in March, we were flooded with responses from women telling us that this would change their lives. We have been asked as their representatives to provide them with universal access to prescription contraception. We have the power to do this for them. So it is our duty to pass this motion today and ensure that the cost is never again a barrier to getting contraceptives Albertans need. Put simply, it is the right thing to do and should be supported by every member of this House.

5:10

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-
Peigan.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and speak to Motion 503. I appreciate the importance of supporting the health and well-being of women in our province. Our government has very clearly stated that we support protecting choice for women accessing reproductive health care services and products in Alberta. The fact is that despite the text of the member opposite's motion many health products, including contraceptives, are already covered for a woman in our province through government-sponsored drug programs. In addition, many contraceptive products can be obtained through a prescription written by an authorized health professional and dispensed by a licensed pharmacy. Others, like emergency contraception, do not require a prescription and can be obtained through a licensed pharmacy in consultation with a pharmacist if required.

For intrauterine devices, the physician's fee for the medical procedure is an insured service under the Alberta health care insurance plan. The service is provided at no cost to the patient, and for low-income women in Alberta these products are available at no cost through our health benefit plans, which are in place to support low-income Albertans and their families. That includes women who receive health benefit plans through the Alberta adult health benefit, the Alberta child health benefit, income support, and assured income for the severely handicapped.

Our government recognizes how important it is for women to have access to reproductive health options regardless of their income or their location. Each year on average approximately 15,000 women in Alberta access this wide range of contraceptive health products through government-sponsored health benefit plans. From 2020 to 2023 the government spent \$12.9 million to provide these products to more than 64,000 Alberta women. As this Assembly is aware, Alberta's government provides funding to Alberta Health Services, which is responsible for providing eligible Albertans with access to health care services. Low-cost contraceptives are available at AHS's sexual and reproductive health clinics to women with financial challenges. Free birth control options such as oral contraceptives, patches, and condoms may also be available. Alberta Health, through AHS and these clinics, also provides these options on a case-by-case basis to women facing financial hardship or other vulnerabilities when it is a barrier to obtaining contraception.

Each year Alberta Health Services provides contraceptive health products to approximately 19,000 Albertans. Through these

programs and services women in Alberta already have access to a wide range of affordable and often free reproductive health options. These products and services are readily available to Alberta women regardless of their ability to pay or where they live in the province.

So, as members of this House can see, Alberta women already have broad access to a host of reproductive health options from which they can choose. Wholesale changes to these programs and services are not required to improve access. Now, Mr. Speaker, our government and our partners continue to look at ways to support Alberta women with their reproductive health needs, as we have always done. I encourage members of the Assembly to recognize that Alberta's government stands by women and women's health through existing programs and therefore to not support Motion 503.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Edgemont for sponsoring this motion. It's a very good one.

I have a passion for good decision-making and development of robust policy. A good policy is providing universal access to free prescription contraceptives for all Albertans. It's the right thing to do, it's good health policy, it will stand the test of time, and it is good economic policy. When the government gives a woman the opportunity to make her own decisions about when to have a baby, she generally does a great job of figuring out if she is in a position to raise the baby well.

We can talk about bad policy here in this Assembly. There is so much being offered by this government to address. Removing all salary restraints for Alberta's various agencies, boards, and commissions and giving all the power and discretion on compensation for people appointed to ABCs to cabinet and the Premier: not good policy. Repealing the legislative protections that were in place to prevent the excesses, largesse, gifting, and cronyism that was common under previous Conservative governments: not good policy. The UCP will be unrestrained and less transparent when they appoint their friends and supporters to government-funded ABCs.

An offensive abuse of power by the UCP is changing the Conflicts of Interest Act for MLAs, which currently can only be changed through a transparent process with public input. They will remove legislated limits on gifts that MLAs can receive, and it will also prevent the Ethics Commissioner from proceeding with investigations into MLA activities during an election campaign period.

The legislated limits on gifts to MLAs from a single source is currently set at \$200. This limit is fair. Elected public servants do not need to be lavished with more expensive gifts in order to govern well. Perhaps the government will consider maintaining the limits set on the gifts for MLAs but making an exception to allow the Premier to attend NHL games. While Albertans are facing an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis, the UCP wants to eliminate the limit on perks and gifts.

I am a father of daughters. We cannot continue to tell our daughters that they can pursue their dreams and then put barriers in front of them. Trust our daughters; give them universal access to free prescription contraception. It is the right thing to do.

Many Albertans do not have health insurance plans, not even government-funded insurance plans. They do not have coverage for prescription contraceptives like IUDs or Plan B or oral hormone pills. Why should we leave it up to insurance when we could pass a motion that would save many people thousands of dollars?

The government of B.C. passed this legislation last year. It has been a huge success. This government often references the mining practices in B.C. as the model to follow. Perhaps they could also follow B.C. on this. When B.C. passed their prescription contraceptive bill, the response was overwhelming, so overwhelming, in fact, that clinics were flooded with requests for IUD insertions. The response is the clearest indication that free prescription contraceptives make a difference in people's lives.

There is a large desire for these contraceptives, but cost remains often a prohibitive barrier, so then why is it that this government would consider blocking Albertans from free access to something they desperately want? A nurse in Winnipeg says that accessing prescription contraceptives is absolutely impossible for some. If this is the case in Manitoba and B.C., how can the government stand here and say that there aren't Albertans who have no way to access the contraceptives they need? The solution is universal access. It's what B.C. did. It's what Manitoba is going to do. I understand Ontario is considering doing this as well. It is the trend that we are moving forward with in this country in health care.

Unplanned pregnancies are distressing and can push a woman into economic turmoil. Why would we not support women and give them the right to access preventative medications? Universal access to prescriptive contraceptives is a relatively common practice. Many other countries have it, as the member had mentioned, some of the Nordic countries, other European countries. Alberta is getting left in the dust in terms of supporting half of our population: women.

Polling on free contraception in Alberta is incredibly popular; 74 per cent of Albertans have supported this idea based on a poll by ThinkHQ. Is it not the government's job, then, to represent the interests of the majority of Albertans? Seventy-four per cent is many Albertans that support this motion. Why would you stand in the way? This government has the time to make sure they can access the fancy gifts we've talked about, but they need to work for the people of Alberta that want to have coverage for prescriptions.

I think to my daughters. I think to the opportunities that they have. I want all daughters in this province to have this opportunity.

I yield the rest of my time to whoever's next.

5:20

The Speaker: There's no such thing as yielding time, but I appreciate the brevity.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate today? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and support this motion from my colleague from Calgary-Edgemont. I find it difficult, when speaking to this motion, to separate my personal experience as a woman from just the amazingness of this whole idea here. As a woman I really value this. This is awesome. This could have been really life changing for me. I mean, I guess, arguably, it still could be, but whatever.

I think one of the greatest things about this motion is that it is about putting equity into action. We often talk about the need for men and women and however people choose to gender identify to be equals professionally and to be able to have the same opportunities to succeed in their careers, and this motion is an important step forward with that.

In that line of equity I'll just point out that vasectomies are covered by Alberta Health. The only form of male contraception that is truly, freely available is free, but women have to incur a cost. While some forms of female contraception are covered by health insurance, that really only applies to Albertans who have health insurance and who have benefit plans that cover this specifically.

I think what is difficult here is that the women who fall between the cracks are those who make just enough money to not qualify for low-income supports but who perhaps aren't working in jobs where they have a benefits plan. Potentially they might be making minimum wage, they might not have a large amount of disposable income, and suddenly they're faced with a choice of whether to purchase contraception or food or utility bills or rent or any of those things. When you're looking at the needs of anybody paying their monthly bills, contraception might not float to the top.

We know that this is good policy. We know that this is a positive direction to go in. It is forward thinking. It addresses equity. It makes sure that women can have the same opportunities that men can have, to choose when they want to start a family, and that choice is critical in the equity between men and women and all genders. It is good policy. It's good economic policy. When women can choose when they want to start a family, that means they can choose when they want to stop going to school or start going to school. It means they can choose when they want to stop and start a career. This choice of reproductive health, reproductive choice, basically becomes the essence of female empowerment and allows women to feel like they have control over their reproductive choices and their reproductive health, and that can never be a wrong thing to provide for women.

I also have the same questions as my colleague. Why would we say no to this? This will save women up to \$10,000 in their lifetime. It will benefit millions of Albertans. Three-quarters of Albertans want it. We're here to represent Albertans, so that should be our job. We often treat prescription contraception as if it's a luxury, but for many women it's not a luxury; it is a must-have. It is necessary to live their lives the way they choose to live their lives.

To just put this into context a little bit, my other colleagues have spoken quite a bit about other provinces and other jurisdictions who also have this free prescription contraception, and they're doing it elsewhere. If we want to compete on that global stage, we need to consider doing it here as well. But I also just wanted to acknowledge that this will cost Alberta taxpayers \$34 million a year. We can't pretend like this is free. But you know what else costs Alberta taxpayers \$30 million a year? The environment war room, which is an international embarrassment and has done literally nothing. So apparently we don't think \$30 million a year is a big deal. I'd much rather see \$30 million a year going towards prescription contraception than to a Canadian Energy Centre which has become an international laughingstock.

An Hon. Member: What?

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. That's right.

This motion matters because it advances economic opportunities for women. Access to prescription contraception is also linked to reductions in child poverty. Many of you will remember that when the NDP formed government, we reduced child poverty by 50 per cent. We still have a ways to go as a province to get to the other 50 per cent. We want to make sure that women have reproductive choices and are empowered in their lives to make those choices. This is an important part of that. By allowing access to prescription contraception, we reduce child poverty; better outcomes for women and children by making sure that there are less unwanted pregnancies. That is, I think, an important part of a healthy society and a healthy sector of the population. [some applause] Oh, thank you.

I'm not just a woman; I am also a mother. I have two daughters whom I love more than anything else, really. My husband and my dog come close, but my daughters are pretty great. This idea of free prescription contraception: as a mother this idea excites me. Rather

than us having a difficult conversation as mothers and daughters about what kinds of contraception we could afford as a family for my daughters, we could just have a conversation about what kinds of contraception best suited them and best suited their needs without having to talk about the money. Honestly, having a conversation with your daughters about contraception is not the most comfortable situation, and it's definitely less comfortable when you have to somehow equate it to how much money you have in the bank account. Ultimately, I want my daughters to be able to choose the contraception that works best for them and their needs regardless of how much it costs, but with the current realities we couldn't do that. We did have to talk about money, and that makes that conversation a little more difficult.

Motions like this allow us to focus the conversation on what really matters, which is a woman's right to choose and a woman's right to choose and explore and utilize the form of contraception that best works for her and her needs. I'm proud to stand here today and support this motion from my colleague in Calgary-Edgemont because it's forward thinking. It's what Albertan women need, and it would definitely change the lives of thousands.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: [Remarks in Cree] Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to stand today and rise in support of the motion that my wonderful colleague from Calgary-Edgemont has proposed. I recognize my limitations as a cisgendered man and recognize that we don't have all of the answers, especially with respect to folks with uteruses, and I would be remiss to not have that identification that we also in this motion have to recognize nonbinary and trans folks who still possess uteruses. When we have this conversation about providing services, we have to recognize that some of the most marginalized folks in our community are often those that have intersectional identities. Being a queer man myself and also an Indigenous man I recognize that I come from two communities that haven't always had the benefit of adequate services. This motion, I believe, aims to address that.

I would recognize that the noninsured health benefits that many Indigenous folks do have the option to receive unfortunately don't extend to nonstatus or Métis folks that are also in the same kind of situation with respect to the affordability crisis. Mr. Speaker, we are at a time where things are outrageously expensive, and alleviating one bill from individuals' lives, especially those folks with uteruses, would be an immense help. Ten thousand dollars: I've said multiple figures in this House already about what that kind of money looks like for folks that could use it today, during an affordability crisis.

5:30

We are in a moment where we need to offer real relief for Albertans, and this motion would do just that. We are having conversations about the benefits that a lot of these committees and the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act intend to do, which is provide hundreds of thousands of dollars to people that are already making a lot of money, when the average person that is, you know, living day-to-day with this affordability crisis: they're not seeing that relief from this government. This motion would be a good win for the UCP. It would be a good win for the government to show Albertan women and folks with uteruses that they also matter, that this government is focused on bringing real relief to every single Albertan by taking a bill off their already overloaded plate.

We're not only seeing potential savings in contraception, but we're also seeing potential savings in period care. I am so heartened by the work that municipalities are doing in schools to alleviate this burden. Some really good work is being done here in our own city of Edmonton, where period care is being taken care of, being provided at no cost to women.

In today's day and age when we are talking about menstrual products and contraception, that is an added tax on folks that are born with uteruses, and that is not fair in a society as rich as Alberta. When we have this conversation that the minister opposite mentioned, that this is not an opportunity for Albertans to be alleviated from their already overburdened pocketbooks, from every single bill that has gone up, this would provide them that service. This would provide them the opportunity to be covered under this motion, under this plan.

I am really happy that we're having this conversation, but I'm also really conscious of the fact that I am still a man sitting up and talking about this. I would urge that we have more recognition that there are people with uteruses that need to have real, accessible motions and programs to provide affordable relief to them.

I recognize that we might be close to time, so I would like to defer to the member to be able to have the closing of this conversation. I am very thankful that I am able to rise today to talk about nonbinary and trans folks as well in contemplation of this very good motion that would help bring real relief to so many Albertans – 2.2 million, might I add – so then in that way we can actually have real efforts to address this affordability crisis.

The Speaker: Well, there are approximately 30 minutes remaining in the debate for the motion this afternoon. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? [interjection]

Just prior to me calling you, I should probably find out if there is none, and if there is none, I am prepared to call on the member to close debate.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont to close debate.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to everyone listening to my private member's Motion 503 for universal contraception and to my colleagues for speaking to it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider taking the necessary steps to provide universal access to free prescription contraception, including oral hormone pills, contraceptive injections, copper and hormonal intrauterine devices, subdermal implants, and emergency contraception known as Plan B.

I was so proud when the Alberta NDP announced this as a priority for our caucus this past spring. This announcement was the result of having so many women MLAs as part of the Alberta NDP. As a candidate at the time I was excited at the prospect of joining a team that champions women's rights and economic participation. Make no mistake. When women lead and have a seat at the table where decisions are made, we can and we will make life better for women. Women's needs have been overlooked too long in policy-making, and we are committed to changing this.

I'm very proud to put this motion forward to empower Albertans' rights across our province. Universal prescription contraception is a good policy. It is also an affordable policy, costing only \$34 million annually. When we pursue good policy, it shows young people that we value their contributions to the province of Alberta, that we want to support them to work here. We want young professionals to stay in our province. We want them to come to our province, and having a policy that lowers their monthly costs, like paying for birth control, is smart.

We are in an affordability crisis here in Alberta. The cost of living is skyrocketing. It is critical that we are making vital medications and treatments available free of charge. Folks shouldn't have to be making choices between food, paying their rent, or health care. Birth control should not be a luxury item. Prescription contraception protects the health and the well-being of so many Albertans. It is essential, and it is too often treated like luxury while people are being forced to pay large amounts of money for access.

Passing this motion will stop Albertans from spending unnecessary amounts of money on needed medications and treatments. This motion will save individuals up to \$10,000 over their lifetime. Alberta already covers vasectomies for men. Men have this right to contraceptive health care and this right to control their bodies and prevent unwanted pregnancies. Why can't women have this equal right and coverage? Voting down this motion on the reasoning of insurance is not acceptable. This means the government and their caucus believes that only people with robust and progressive insurance plans should get access to prescription contraception.

I hope that we will follow the lead of B.C. and Manitoba and not want to leave Albertans behind. Why should we disadvantage Albertans? We can be the innovators in access to reproductive health care with this motion, or we can get left behind as provinces move to provide free prescription contraception. The UCP government has spent \$7.5 million on pension advertising alone. Why is it that \$34 million to give all Alberta women and gender-diverse people across the province access to prescription contraception is a bad use of taxpayer dollars? How is this a bad use of taxpayer dollars? I guess a choice needs to be made: propaganda campaigns or women's health. Dr. Rupinder Toor was quoted in CBC last week saying that the good news is that we know the studies have shown that every dollar that we invest in universal contraception can save the system up to \$9 in the public sector.

Reproductive health care is a right. This is a good health policy, a good economic policy. Put simply, it is the right thing to do and should be supported by every member of this House. I hope we can come together and send a clear message to women across Alberta that their health care is a priority. Birth control shouldn't be a luxury. I hope every member in this Assembly will support my motion today.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:38 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Metz
Batten	Eremenko	Pancholi
Boparai	Haji	Schmidt
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hayter	Sweet
Dach	Hoffman	Wright, P.
Eggen	Kasawski	

Against the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Sawhney
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schow
Bouchard	Loewen	Schulz
Cyr	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
de Jonge	Lovely	Sinclair
Dreesen	Lundy	Singh

Dyck	McDougall	Stephan
Ellis	McIver	Turton
Fir	Nally	van Dijken
Getson	Neudorf	Williams
Glubish	Nicolaides	Wilson
Guthrie	Nixon	Wright, J.
Horner	Petrovic	Yao
Hunter	Pitt	Yaseen
Jean		
Totals:	For – 17	Against – 46

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After a long day of hard work from all members of this Assembly, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow, November 28, 2023.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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