



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, February 29, 2024

Day 21

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

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeschen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC),
Government Whip
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche
(UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)

Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UC)
Notley, Hon. Rachel, ECA, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North West (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),
Premier
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),
Official Opposition Assistant Whip
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, KC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Lang Bawn, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Danielle Smith	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Mike Ellis	Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Mickey Amery	Minister of Justice
Devin Dreesen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Pete Guthrie	Minister of Infrastructure
Nate Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Brian Jean	Minister of Energy and Minerals
Matt Jones	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Health
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry and Parks
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Advanced Education
Joseph Schow	Minister of Tourism and Sport
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Searle Turton	Minister of Children and Family Services
Dan Williams	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Muhammad Yaseen	Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	Parliamentary Secretary for Settlement Services and Ukrainian Evacuees
Andrew Boitchenko	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Grant Hunter	Parliamentary Secretary for Agrifood Development
Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Boitchenko
Bouchard
Brar
Hunter
Kasawski
Kayande
Wiebe

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loyola

Boparai
Cyr
de Jonge
Elmeligi
Hoyle
Stephan
Wright, J.
Yao

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Long

Arcand-Paul
Ellingson
Hunter
Ip
Lovely
Rowswell
Sabir
Wright, J.

Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Dach
Dyck
Irwin
Petrovic
Pitt
Sabir
Stephan
Wright, P.

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Batten
Boitchenko
Long
Lunty
Metz
Petrovic
Singh
Tejada

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Getson
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Chapman
Dyck
Eremenko
Hunter
Long
Renaud
Shepherd
Sinclair

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

Eggen
Gray
Long
Phillips
Rowswell
Sabir
Singh
Yao

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Pitt
Deputy Chair: Mr. Stephan

Bouchard
Ceci
Deol
Dyck
Hayter
Petrovic
Sigurdson, L.
Wright, J.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

Arcand-Paul
Ceci
Cyr
Dach
Gray
Johnson
Stephan
Wiebe

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Member Irwin
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Armstrong-Homeniuk
de Jonge
Haji
Lovely
Lunty
McDougall
Renaud
Schmidt

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 29, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, it being the last sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of God Save the King by Mr. Matthew Bissett.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure to introduce to you a visitor to the Assembly joining us today: the former member of the Assembly for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, the hon. Deron Bilous, who served this place from 2012 to 2023. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [interjections] I didn't realize the former minister brought his whole family here.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I do have a number of guests, so my apologies to my colleagues who are waiting. It is a great pleasure of mine to introduce to the Assembly the hon. the Minister of Finance's family today. All members of the Assembly know the great price that our families pay for our public service, so it's my pleasure to welcome to the Assembly the minister's spouse, Jennifer Horner, and daughter Avery, his parents, Brent and Kate Horner, his brother Brett Richards and nephew Ransom. Lastly, we have his sister Lindsay Douglass and his niece Darcie. I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Lastly, members, I do have a number of other guests who are joining us for the budget today seated in the Speaker's gallery. It's my pleasure to introduce to you the reeve of Kneehill county, Mr. Ken King, who's joined by his wife, Ruth. We also have the former reeve of Mountain View county, Mr. Al Kemmere, who is the current chair of the Olds College board of governors. We have Jeff Kasbrick, the vice-president of advocacy and operations for the Alberta Motor Association. Also seated in the Speaker's gallery are Mr. Craig Loewen and Brett Esslinger, the pastor of Saints Church here in Edmonton.

While it might be budget day for most of Alberta, today is actually Family Day in the Speaker's office. I'd like to introduce to you Julia Koning, who is spending her PD day here with her father, Mr. Andrew Koning, who is an important member of my team.

Before anyone starts to feel too bad for Julia, it was actually her choice to come to the Assembly today. Lastly, a fairly familiar face to the Assembly is my father, who has been spending a few days with his favourite child helping me do some hosting. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. member – and just for members' sake, the clock for introductions begins now. The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, the Deputy Premier has an introduction.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the amazing kids from Menno Simons Christian school and their teacher Erin Folkerts from Calgary-West. I want to thank them for making the trip from Calgary to be here with us today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert. Does the hon. Member for St. Albert have an introduction? No.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two great constituents of mine, Roger and Wendy Wadstein. They're here to see the reading of the budget today.

Also, I do have a favourite guest, my daughter Molly Pitt, who is here. She made provincials for swimming this weekend and is in Edmonton, so she's here visiting us. I'm so proud of her and her accomplishments.

Would you all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the Chamber to introduce to you and through you one of my good friends, Dhruv Sharma. He's a strong advocate and dedicated volunteer for Calgary, and it is my sincere honour to introduce him to you today. I ask that he now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly – although I'm not sure they've made it through security yet – Eric Lowe, president-elect of the International Association of Fire Fighters, local to Sherwood Park, local 2461, and Elliot Davis, now secretary-treasurer of the Alberta Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association. Eric and Elliot, if you are here, I ask you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I do have a group from Sturgeon Heights school, grade 6, and I will have them all stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce both to you and through you Bruce Klaiber of the Legacy Farm project in Strathmore, a monument to our provincial history, and his granddaughter Clara Langen, an incredible young woman and

member of the Minister of Education's youth council. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Jennifer Garries, executive director of the Leduc, Nisku & Wetaskiwin Regional Chamber of Commerce, and the president, Tanis Techer. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you my loving mother, Donna Wright, who has joined us all the way from Medicine Hat here today. Please rise and receive the greeting and welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Hear, hear.
The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, to you and through you, it is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly Rishi Nagar, Jay Chowdhury, and Dharampreet Dhillon from Red FM Calgary. This group is part of Canada's largest South Asian media network, bringing dedication, insight, and a vibrant multicultural voice to Calgary. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce Eva and Brandi Rai. They are two amazing student and parent advocates, mental health advocates, and trans rights advocates. Please rise and receive the welcome of our Assembly.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you two great friends of mine: Jason Foster, who's the director of the Parkland Institute of Alberta, as well as Bradley Lafortune, the executive director of Public Interest Alberta. So glad that they're both here today.

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the members of the Assembly, the outstanding mayor of Parkland county, Allan Gamble, who has now made our attention. He is an amazing advocate for the area and did a lot of work with the firefighting last year. It's an absolute honour and privilege to work with this man. Please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, sir.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take a moment to introduce Marni Panas, who's my good friend and a constituent of Edmonton-North West.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House three guests from Calgary: Mohammad Rashid Khan, Tahir Aziz, Syed Tasadiq Hussain. They are all from my home district of Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir. Rashid Khan is the president for UKPNP, North

American chapter. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

1:40

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you a few folks. I have Sophie Marie Martel, president of the Indigenous Students' Union; Sarah Doll and Holly Nichol, constituents of Edmonton-West Henday; Dr. Kristopher Wells with MacEwan pride centre; Cheyenne Mihko Kihêw from Edmonton 2 Spirit Society. Please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce my good friend from Calgary, Mr. Roy Beyer; Calgary-Lougheed CA president, Darrell Komick; Calgary-Acadia president, Lindsay Davis; and economist, Tanner Hnidey. Please rise.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for introductions, but, with apologies, I do know that the hon. former minister of the Assembly Rick Fraser is here today. If you would like to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly as well.

Members' Statements

Black History Month

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, February is a month that serves as a reminder of the enduring legacy and immeasurable contributions of Black Albertans, from the untold stories of resilience to the remarkable achievements that shape the tapestry of this wonderful province. We bear witness to the remarkable growth of the Black community, emerging as one of the fastest growing communities in our province. This promising presence not only enriches the cultural mosaic of our province but also underscores the indispensable contributions to our economy, our growth, and our social cohesion.

While Black Albertans honoured this month for a very long time, it took 22 years for our province to officially recognize Black History Month. Throughout the month, alongside many elected officials, I joined community leaders, scholars, entrepreneurs highlighting contributions and successes while recognizing the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Whether it is the school gym in M.E. LaZerte high school in my constituency or alongside city council in St. Albert or next to the mayor of Beaumont making the first Black History Month proclamation or next to the high school students and teachers in Sherwood Park or beside the University of Alberta scholars or listening to Calgary's community leaders, this has been a month of celebrations, conversations, and commitments to change.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the month I consistently heard that despite significant progress towards equality, systemic disparities continue to disproportionately impact Black Albertans. As we come to the end of this month, I call on members of this House to fully commit to building a province where diversity is really celebrated, where justice is upheld, and where every individual irrespective of race, gender, or any other background is empowered.

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

Renewable Energy Development

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Alberta Utilities Commission's brief pause on renewable energy project approvals comes to an end. Seven months ago the pause was implemented for

one simple reason. We need to ensure our electricity grid is reliable, affordable, and developed responsibly for years to come. Albertans were issued a stark reminder on the importance of grid reliability in January, when the province narrowly avoided rolling blackouts in minus 40-degree weather.

Our government listened to Albertans' concerns and has set a clear and responsible path forward for renewable project development. With these new changes Alberta will continue to attract new investment in the renewables sector while protecting the environment, agriculture, and Albertans' property rights. Like the Premier said: we have a duty to protect the natural beauty of our province. You cannot build wind turbines the size of the Calgary Tower in front of a UNESCO world heritage site or in front of our many historic landmarks or in your neighbour's backyard.

The members opposite would have you think this pause caused investment uncertainty, but the numbers tell a different story. Last year more than 92 per cent of Canada's overall growth in renewable energy and energy storage capacity happened right here in Alberta. The number of new renewable project proposals seeking approval doubled throughout the pause, and they will continue to grow thanks to our unique deregulated electricity market, our competitive tax system, and our government's commitment to reducing economic barriers.

Alberta's energy economy is the envy of the world, anchored, of course, by the world's third-largest proven oil reserve and an abundant and safe supply of natural gas. This baseline of energy production will allow us to continue to integrate renewable energy projects into our electricity grid, and the new guidelines announced today will ensure that this is done in a responsible and prosperous manner.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as is required, I believe a translation has been provided for the upcoming member's statement.

Lunar New Year

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, throughout February thousands of Albertans across this province celebrated Lunar New Year. From delicious banquets, boisterous street festivals, colourful cultural performances, and community gatherings, it is one of the most celebrated traditions around the world, marking the first new moon of the lunar calendar and the beginning of spring.

However it is celebrated, the themes of Lunar New Year are truly universal. It is a time for family, community, togetherness, and renewal. In so many of the celebrations I along with my colleagues attended this year, I was reminded of the hard-working and resilient folks in the Chinese community who work so diligently to preserve the vibrancy of our Chinatowns. From traditional clan and fraternal organizations to the local business and community associations, I've been reflecting on the trailblazers and generations of Albertans who helped build this province.

Chinatown has been hit especially hard in the last few years with the impact of the pandemic and the rise of a new wave of anti-Asian discrimination. But despite the monumental challenges, inspiring folks, from community leaders, volunteers, shopkeepers, and young people, have persistently and tirelessly dedicated their time and efforts to making Chinatown a more vibrant and inclusive place not only for the Chinese community but for all Albertans. I am proud to work with and support these amazing changemakers as they work to revitalize such an important part of Edmonton and Alberta.

I would like to invite all of my colleagues in the Legislature to join me in wishing those in the Chinese community and beyond a very prosperous Year of the Dragon. [Remarks in Mandarin]

Wishing you great luck in the new year. Wishing you great fortune. May the dragon and phoenix bring you happiness and well-being. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has a statement.

International Women's Day

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to stand and recognize International Women's Day, which will be celebrated around the world on March 8. Through my volunteer work both here in Alberta and abroad in countries like Tanzania and Bolivia I've witnessed the strength and the fortitude of women. Women are not just passive bystanders but leaders in their families and communities, and women deserve to be celebrated regardless of how they choose to exercise their agency, not erased and referred to as "folks with uterus," as our friend across the aisle has often said in this Chamber.

Alberta has a long and proud history of women leaders, from Louise McKinney, the first woman elected in the entire British Commonwealth, to Violet King Henry, the first Black woman lawyer in Canadian history. We've had three women Premiers, more than any other province, and women have served and continue to serve as heads of some of our largest and most important companies.

But women also serve quietly and privately and in ways that are just as important as lawyers, a Premier, or a CEO, so I want to take a moment to thank all the unsung women of our communities. Thank you to the mothers who have chosen to stay at home and raise the next generation of Albertans and Canadians. Thank you to the teachers, including those who home-school, who have invested countless hours to ensure those same Alberta kids are growing up to be good people and good citizens. Thank you to the matriarchs who provide critical love and guidance every single day. Thank you to the caregivers who have selflessly dedicated their lives to being there for others in their times of need. Thank you to the workers who are breaking down barriers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, film, television, music, energy, agriculture, trucking, the trades, and even politics.

Women are playing a critical role in shaping the next chapter of Alberta's story, and on International Women's Day our government is proud to thank them for everything they do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Government Policies

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, with each passing day Albertans are left wondering if their government is working for them or against them, whether they are committed to getting the best for Alberta or simply rejecting Ottawa just for the sake of it. This began with the Alberta sovereignty act, and, yes, I omitted "Within a United Canada" because, quite frankly, many Albertans are wondering if this government is interested in a united Canada. This act does nothing more than create regulatory and judicial uncertainty for investors and Albertans.

1:50

This continued with this government's pursuit of the Alberta pension plan. Against the desires of the majority of Albertans, this government has chosen to put the secure pensions of Albertans and all Canadians at risk despite the fact that CPP is stable and reliable, with each pensioner receiving benefits based on their own contributions.

We've seen it in the delivery of child care services, with Alberta being one of the last provinces to come to an agreement with Ottawa. Since then this government has been failing service providers and parents and is still not close to a \$10-a-day daycare goal. Instead, the UCP blames Ottawa for the results while other provinces get on with the business of delivering much-needed services to their citizens.

And now we see it with pharmacare. The federal government has proposed a system that would provide contraception and essential medications for diabetes to all Albertans. Alberta has chosen to reject this proposal. Without any negotiation on how it could benefit Albertans, this government does what it always does, simply rejects something outright because they don't like the person who put the idea forward.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for this government to stop their petty disputes with Ottawa and get on with the business of governing and making life better for Albertans. There is an offer on the table to make lives more affordable and relieve anxiety for so many. Act like a reasonable government, sit down, figure it out. It is what Albertans expect and deserve.

The Speaker: I'm sure members will be aware of the long-standing tradition of member statements being allowed to be uninterrupted under any of the circumstances, and I'm sure they'll govern themselves accordingly in the future.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the Official Opposition House Leader has question 1.

Government Policies

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, during last spring's election this Premier promised Albertans a tax cut that was supposed to start on January 1 of this year. They have broken this promise. In the Speech from the Throne last fall her government again promised: "Alberta's government will lower the tax burden for Albertans... saving Alberta taxpayers up to \$750 annually." To the Premier: that tax cut was supposed to come two months ago, so why promise it twice if you were never going to deliver it on time?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has risen.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number one commitment we made to Albertans would be that we would run a balanced budget, and when the budget is revealed a little bit later today, the member opposite will understand why we want to take an extra year to have a little bit of caution, a little bit of prudence, not that we saw any of that when they had the opportunity to issue budgets, where they ran an \$80 billion debt, introduced a carbon tax which they didn't campaign on, introduced personal income tax increases, introduced a business tax that drove business out.

Ms Gray: Nothing has materially changed since she made that promise, and nothing the Premier says can be trusted. Immediately breaking election commitments is cynical politics. In the throne speech the Premier also promised: "Albertans new and old need to be able to rent apartments and homes for their families without compromising their food budget." Since then Calgary has dropped to the second-highest rent increases in the country but only because Edmonton is now first. Great work, Premier. Now, why have you broken this promise and done nothing to help Albertans facing higher rents?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the thing that has changed is that we continue to have an inflation crisis caused by the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa and their reckless spending and the fact that they have a carbon tax, which, incidentally, it sounds like the members opposite... [interjections]

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

Ms Smith: It sounds like the members opposite are having a change of heart about the carbon tax at the federal level. Maybe they don't want to listen to their federal boss any longer. That's the point, Mr. Speaker. We have to make sure that we have a reasonable increase in year-over-year spending to keep up with that.

Ms Gray: More words, Mr. Speaker, without any action.

Let me try another one. In the throne speech the government promised to "significantly improve and grow the capacity of our health care system for all Albertans." Mr. Speaker, this government has cut health care to the point where we don't have enough beds for Albertans, let alone enough nurses and doctors for the beds we do have. To the Premier: at this point it might just be easier and quicker if you tell this House and all Albertans which promises, if any, you are actually going to keep.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we have increased spending on health care year over year. We have increased the number of nurses that we have in the system, 6,000 more, actually, than under the members opposite. We've increased the number of paramedics. We've increased the number of doctors. We are working on developing a focused approach on primary care that will bring not only pharmacists but also nurse practitioners into providing health care. So I would tell you that we are very confident that when the budget is revealed, people will see that we care about an investment in health care, and we're going to make sure people have the health care they need. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Education Funding

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent data clearly confirms what Alberta parents, school boards, and teachers have known all along, that despite Alberta having some of the biggest increases in enrolment, the UCP are responsible for a decline in per-student spending. Funding per student in our so-called Alberta advantage was 13 per cent lower than the national average. This is a government that has demonstrated time and time again that they think so very little of public education. To the minister: in the mandate letter from the Premier were the orders to continue underfunding Alberta students?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the statement is just full of rubbish. Our government firmly believes in supporting education across the province, in supporting public education and alternative education programs. We believe that parents need the ability to decide which educational vehicle is the most appropriate for their families. In the last budget we provided \$820 million over the next three years to help deal with enrolment pressure. That funding will be directed to hire more teachers. Of course, we want to see Alberta continue to grow and succeed, and we'll continue to provide support in that regard.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you. This government's policy of chronically underfunding Alberta students and undermining their education and futures simply can't be allowed to continue. Does the minister agree that an honest recognition of this injustice and an immediate increase in per-student funding is needed just to bring us up to the national average? We should be one of the best jurisdictions in the country for students to learn and thrive, so will the minister advocate on behalf of students and get the government to at least bridge the gap?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, yes, our government will always advocate for students to ensure that we have a world-class education system, as we already do. We do indeed have a world-class education system, and we'll continue to ensure that's the case. The members opposite, of course, don't have experience in this regard because when they were in power, they drove everybody out of the province. Enrolment declined, people left, investment left, and the members opposite didn't have these challenges to work with. We are committed to ensuring that all students receive a world-class education.

Ms Chapman: The UCP love to brag about the support they give to Alberta students and teachers, and now we know just how inadequate that has been. We need real investments to make sure that Alberta students are the best, not worst, funded in Canada, which will ensure that future generations are able to succeed. Can the minister assure this House that today's budget does this, or will students have to wait another four years for a government that is interested in supporting them?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, to all students, parents, and families: our government is absolutely committed to ensuring that all students will continue to receive a world-class education. We will do that by ensuring, as is evident in Budget '23, and providing additional funding to support enrolment growth and challenges, by hiring additional teachers, by addressing classroom complexity to ensure that our schools have speech-language pathologists, psychologists, and other professionals to address the complex needs of our students. That is our commitment, and we will continue to deliver on that objective.

Health Care Accessibility

Dr. Metz: Albertans will not get access to quality health care without adequate treatment space, yet unbelievably, despite knowing that construction takes years and that Alberta's population is booming, development of the south Edmonton hospital has been suspended. Building a stand-alone children's hospital is needed, but the celebration is tainted by cancelling the south Edmonton hospital. Can the minister assure Albertans that, unlike her promises on the south Edmonton hospital, she won't break her promise to build the Stollery?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has risen.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't the minister when the south Edmonton hospital was discussed, but I am now, and I'm committed to getting Edmontonians and all Albertans the right care in the right place at the right time. The Stollery hospital is much needed, it's been much needed for a very, very long time, and we are committed to seeing it through. I was happy to announce that we are moving that project forward. All children in northern Alberta will be happy to hear this, as are their families. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Dr. Metz: It was just over a year ago that the Premier declared that there is no crisis in the health care system. Since then we've seen that not only is the crisis real, but under the watch of this Health minister it is getting much worse. ERs were closed for more than 38,000 hours last year, and 60 per cent of family doctors are considering leaving Alberta even though 800,000 Albertans already don't have access to a family doctor. Will the Health minister acknowledge that despite the Premier's claims, there actually is a crisis in health care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely not true. What, in fact, is happening is that we are seeing ER times go down, wait times go down. We're seeing ambulance response times go down as well. We actually have AHS, who hired – just in the last week alone they put out over 700 job offers. We have over 3,500 more nurses that have been registered by the college of nurses, more than 330 more doctors registered by the college of physicians.

Dr. Metz: The UCP has shown that they can't be trusted with our health care system, but today they have a chance to show that they've learned their lesson and will be willing to support public health care, support front-line workers, and end the chaos they've introduced in the health system. Albertans will be watching, Mr. Speaker. Can the Health minister confirm if today will mark an end of the UCP health care chaos and to support public health care, or should we expect more of the same UCP chaos?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that Albertans should watch the budget, because we have historically under our government had the highest increases to health care. Today will be no less. I am looking forward to the budget coming out. I will be happy to share with all Albertans the progress that we're making on health care, because everyone – everyone – in Alberta deserves excellent health care, and that's what we're focused on. Excellent health care and empowering our workforce: that's what we're about. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Daycare Funding

Member Batten: Affordable, accessible, and safe child care is critical for families, but under the UCP far too many Albertans are falling through the cracks. This government utterly failed earlier this year, to the point where the Premier had to effectively fire one of her ministers and reassign responsibility to another. My question is simple. Will the Minister of Children and Family Services apologize to child care operators and to families for the chaos and the uncertainty this government's failures have caused?

The Speaker: The Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to say that our Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade and our Minister of Technology and Innovation have worked together to create a new payment model for child care workers. As of tomorrow they will be getting 80 per cent of the payment that they are owed at the beginning of the month, with 20 per cent as a trailing payment at the end of the month. This is the feedback that we got from daycare operators to be able to assist them in managing their expenses, and we're looking forward to being able to hear the feedback that we get from them.

Member Batten: The UCP failed to properly fund the child care system, and the result was disastrous. We saw rolling closures of daycares and a completely broken payment system that badly impacted child care operators because this government failed to step up. Real investments and proper funding are essential if we want Alberta to get to the goal of \$10-a-day child care, which would make a huge impact on the lives of Albertan families. Can the minister confirm that today's budget will provide all the funding and support that operators and families need? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to tell you that I've been looking at the news stories across the country, and they're having similar problems in every single province – in British Columbia, where there's an NDP government; they're having a problem in Ontario as well – and part of the problem . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Part of the problem is that the federal government has dictated what the year-over-year increase can be in the amount that they are allowed to charge, and because of the inflation crisis created by the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa, they're not able to keep up with their expenses. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Batten: I know that the Premier is not a fan of this program. She once even called it a socialist daycare scheme. I hope that that doesn't explain the reluctance of this government to make real investments needed to get to \$10-a-day child care. The UCP have broken so many promises to Albertans that I hope this isn't one. Can the minister assure this House and all Albertans watching today that this budget will ensure all Albertans get access to \$10-a-day child care?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have created 22,000 additional spaces, and we are well ahead of other jurisdictions. They may want to look next door, in British Columbia, where their NDP cousins have found that there are tens of thousands of people on a waiting list for care. So I feel very confident about where we find ourselves on the pathway to \$10-a-day daycare. It is the agreement that we signed with the federal government, and we're working diligently towards achieving that. We have \$15-a-day daycare at the start of the year, and it's helping parents and families.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's capital city is booming, and since the last hospital was built, in 1988, we have added a million more people to the region. It is the south side of our city that is seeing the fastest rate of growth, and a new hospital is urgently needed. The NDP acted on that back in 2017 by starting work on a new south Edmonton hospital. To the minister: given that your government promised to follow through with the NDP plan to construct the hospital and given that it earmarked funds last year, why the broken promise?

Mr. Guthrie: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP announced the Edmonton hospital back in 2017, and they did nothing with it. They announced it without a feasibility study or a business case, which

are critical to design and budget, another thing that they did not have. Frankly, they did zip and pip because it was announced purely as a political move. Surprise, surprise. The NDP were opportunistic in announcing projects in an attempt to gain public support ahead of an election, knowing full well that they could not deliver. We are taking action to build a health care infrastructure strategy that works.

Mr. Deol: The UCP Party ran a campaign on this promise.

Mr. Speaker, any good government should identify the needs of its citizens and address them. Given that the land is sitting idle and the people are struggling to access health care and given that yesterday the minister boasted about how beneficial the new Stollery was going to be, why is this government breaking its promise made by the Premier to the people of Edmonton to build the south side Edmonton hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province has more than 40 health projects under way in our province, with over 75 schools in development or construction. Our commitment to building infrastructure here in Alberta is evident. What I am curious about are the positions taken by the NDP candidates running in their leadership race, because I am absolutely confused. Are they trying to back up on their previous record? Are they trying to back out of their current policies? It seems the opposition is realizing the merits of Conservative policies and are attempting to disguise themselves. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, another trait of a good government is how trustworthy it is, and given that our growing city needs health care and given that this government doesn't bat an eye cancelling this and pausing that, I will ask a simple question again. Will today's budget reverse your bad decision and recommit to building that south Edmonton hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have an NDP Party that is trying to distance themselves from the mother ship. We have candidates that are calling for the elimination of the federal carbon tax, which – I'm so surprised. [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, this is really hard to comprehend, considering that they invented the retail carbon tax. Alberta's NDP introduced the first retail carbon tax in all of North America, and now, in an affordability crunch, they're trying to say that it hurts Albertans. At least they've recognized the errors in their ways.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Renewable Energy Development

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you google "Canada," one of the very first pictures that comes up is of Lake Louise, one of Alberta's many breathtaking viewscapes. Alberta attracts visitors from across the world to view our province's many natural wonders, most commonly found in the foothills and the Rocky Mountains. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: what is this government doing to make sure that our province's protected

areas and pristine viewsapes are not disturbed by wind turbines the size of the Calgary Tower? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that terrific question. Our iconic viewsapes are synonymous with Alberta, and to make sure that they can be enjoyed for generations to come, our government is establishing a 35-kilometre buffer zone around these areas, where new wind projects will no longer be permitted due to their vertical footprint, and other proposed developments may be subject to visual impacts. That's what a responsible government does to make sure that we can develop well and enjoy our viewsapes forever. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that agriculture is one of Alberta's largest economic drivers, allowing our rural communities to thrive, and given that Alberta's farmers and ranchers are putting high-quality, affordable food on tables around the world, to the same minister: please tell this House how these new rules will work to ensure Alberta's world-class agricultural lands are protected from renewable developments that would otherwise sterilize them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture is at the very heart of our province. Yesterday our government announced changes that will protect our native grasslands, irrigated land, and productive agricultural lands from reckless development. Our farmers and ranchers put affordable, high-quality food on tables around the world, and we're making sure that they can keep doing this for years to come while our government continues to ensure our electricity grid is reliable and affordable.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that these renewable developments are almost exclusively built in rural areas and given that the potential side effects are disproportionately felt by our rural residents and given that our rural municipalities are best positioned to advocate for their residents and the local community, I ask the same minister to please tell this House how these new rules will include municipal governments in the approval process for renewable generation projects in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The RMA and its members have been advocating to be included in this process for decades. It's why our government has listened to them, and that's why they will now automatically be granted the right to participate in the AUC's approval process. We also made sure that municipalities won't face financial barriers by making them eligible to request cost recovery. I am proud of the numerous municipalities around the province that have voiced their support for yesterday's announcement, including Vulcan county, Mountain View county, Cypress county, and the county of Forty Mile as well as many more.

Energy Industry Property Tax Payments

Mr. Kasawski: Rural municipalities are facing \$43 million in unpaid property taxes owed by energy companies for 2023. Energy companies have now accrued over \$250 million in unpaid municipal taxes. Liens and licence limitations are not getting the job done, and all the while the UCP are dramatically cutting local government funding to municipalities. All operators should be expected to pay their taxes and be accountable to pay what they owe to municipalities. What is the minister doing to get our municipal partners the property taxes they are owed?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member probably knows, a couple of years ago we added a new piece of legislation to give them the authority to collect in court. I worked with my colleague the minister of energy, and the AER put in directive 067, which limits the company's ability to transfer wells if they're behind in their taxes. Everybody has to pay their taxes. We worked hard with municipalities to make it better, but our work is not done yet. Those that don't want to pay keep finding new ways, and we will keep finding new ways to put a stop to this bad behaviour. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Kasawski: Good news, Minister.

Given that the UCP won't help municipalities to develop tax revenue from new energy projects because they don't like the way wind turbines and solar panels look – different strokes for different folks; am I right? – and given that rural municipalities are owed over \$250 million and given that tax revenue that municipalities could earn from planned solar and wind projects is over \$250 million per year, if the minister won't help these municipalities get the money they're owed and won't reverse the cuts, will he at least support those who want renewable projects in their ridings?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong on all counts. We have already helped the municipalities go to court. We have already helped municipalities by making sure they can't transfer wells if companies are behind on what they owe them. We will continue to work with them.

They're wrong. We've got record development, record applications to build renewables here. The folks have got to keep up. I would just recommend the folks on the other side take a subscription to Google because they don't know what's going on. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. member.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, I love your pro-renewables approach.

Given that this government is determined to methodically download their responsibilities to municipal governments and given that they are using their power as the provincial government to financially constrain their municipal partners, is it the minister's plan for rural municipalities to have them run out of money and dissolve, or will he commit that this \$250 million tax bill will be paid by the end of this year?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, we've been working very hard to keep municipalities viable. The hon. member should know that we just put in place the local government fiscal framework, something municipalities have been asking for forever, where their revenue goes up with provincial revenues and down with provincial

revenues. In fact, they've changed that to make sure that the percentage is 100 per cent of the difference. We're working very hard, very close, and the hon. member should stay tuned for today's budget. He might find something in there that is good for municipalities. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Prescription Contraception Access

Ms Hayter: This government has blocked access to prescription contraception three times in the span of a year. For a person paying for birth control, this is \$600 that they could have saved this year if the UCP had just stepped up and done the right thing. I know that Albertans overwhelmingly support pharmacare. It is essential health care, and it's long overdue. This government wants to disadvantage women. Is it not the government's responsibility to support all Albertans?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that Alberta gets its fair share and that we get a good deal. We're not alone in that. In fact, the Alberta Pharmacists' Association today, in the response to the national pharmacare plan announcement, said, and I quote, that the Alberta Pharmacists' Association believes that pharmacare funding should be transferred directly to the province to ensure alignment with existing programs, improve access, and provide coverage to those Albertans in need; there is little to no direct engagement with pharmacists who play a primary role in administering and co-ordinating drug plans.

Ms Hayter: Given that British Columbia already has universal access to contraception and Manitoba announced that they intend to do this, too, and given that almost 180,000 people have received free prescription contraception since B.C. offered it in April, where is the advantage to young people that will be able to get free birth control everywhere else in this country except for Alberta?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite doesn't know that our plans already cover 50 oral contraceptives, intrauterine devices, and emergency contraceptives covered in our . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should become informed about what our plans actually do cover. In our pharmacare plan here in Alberta we provide over 5,000 drugs, including diabetes medication, including birth control and contraceptives. We have a great plan. If the feds want to opt in, they can give us more money to it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:20

Ms Hayter: Given that the UCP seems to think that birth control is a luxury item while we are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis and given that the rest of the country has said loud and clear that prescription contraception should be free and given that Albertans who use birth control are currently paying more than \$10,000 over their lifetime out of their pockets for contraceptive products, why is the minister refusing life-changing measures like a contraceptive pharmacare plan, that would take an immense financial burden off the shoulders of Albertan women?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again the members opposite are trying to make, you know, lemonade out of lemons here. This is a bad

plan in the sense that the federal government is not acknowledging our current plans. We already have a pharmacare program. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I had no problem hearing the question, but I am having a hard time hearing the answer. The minister is entitled to give it.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, even the Canadian Chamber of Commerce has issued a statement saying that a single-payer pharmacare program would actually leave many Canadians worse off. A majority of Canadians are already covered by employee-sponsored drug insurance plans that give them faster access to more medicines than what a single-payer system would provide. Plus, public systems typically offer less access to new drugs.

Aquatic Invasive Species

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, Gull Lake is an important resource throughout the communities of Lacombe-Ponoka and the entire province. However, invasive species are threatening this delicate ecosystem. Native to eastern Europe, zebra and quagga mussels can cost millions of dollars in damages and are virtually impossible to eradicate once introduced to a water body. Given that the zebra mussel is provincially recognized as a freshwater-dwelling invasive species, to the minister of the environment: what is the status of aquatic invasive species like the quagga and zebra mussels in our provincial waterways right now?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member for the important question. The member is correct; our province and others face a real risk from aquatic invasive species. They can be easily introduced by boats and other watercraft moving from province to province. Once inside our borders, species like the quagga and zebra mussels can cause massive damage not only to our waterways but also to irrigation infrastructure. Estimates suggest that invasive mussels and other aquatic species could cost us \$75 million annually in maintenance costs if widely established. We have to protect these dangerous aquatic invasive species from getting a foothold in our province, and I'm proud to say that our lakes . . .

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that the main method of introduction for mussels is through watercraft transportation and given that under current legislation the minister can appoint a series of individuals to conduct inspections and ensure proper checks are conducted on boats in transport and given that boating season is right around the corner, to the minister of the environment: do we currently have appointed watercraft inspectors in Alberta, and what are the steps being taken to prepare for this upcoming boating season?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do have an early-detection, rapid-response plan in place should mussels or any other invasive species or plant be found in any Alberta water body. However, protection remains our absolute best defence. Last year our province inspected nearly 9,000 boats, 19 of which had invasive mussels attached. By inspecting these watercraft, we stopped these mussels from entering our waters. Our watercraft inspection and

decontamination programs are already preparing for the upcoming season, and this year we will be doing more than ever. We're looking to expand the number of permanent watercraft inspection stations and add a new roving inspection crew as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you. Given that mussels have already managed to make their way into most Canadian water systems and given that the government is responsible for about a billion dollars in water management infrastructure, including 535 kilometres of main irrigation canals, 1.5 billion cubic metres of storage in more than 120 dams, lake control structures, and pumphouses, to the minister of the environment: do you have an ongoing plan to ensure our waterways and infrastructure remain protected as the threat of these invasive species continues to increase?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again I want to thank the member for the question. We do have one of the most effective inspection and prevention programs in Canada, but I've asked my department to go even further. I'm proud to say that later this year Environment and Protected Areas will be engaging key stakeholders on launching a new provincial task force. This task force will take our invasive species response to the next level, educate stakeholders on this issue, the watercraft inspections program, and explore new ways to expand our work in the future. This is an important step forward, and I'll have more to say on this task force in the coming months.

Renewable Energy Development (continued)

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, we now know who's pulling the strings when it comes to the Premier's investment-killing renewables policy. The Premier met behind closed doors with an antirenewables group that calls climate change an outright lie and called wind development a scam. This group lectured her about why renewable energy should not be developed. We know the Premier heeded their demands, just like she did with the demands of David Parker. To the Premier: who else are you meeting with behind closed doors and letting decide your government's policies for you?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to say that the pause on renewables is over. We have come to a responsible development path forward that puts an agriculture-first lens on all of our lands, making sure that farmers and ranchers have access to land for generations to come as well as making it possible to have a thriving renewables industry, not to mention the increased growth of natural gas, hydrogen, biomass, geothermal, and a tremendous, North America leading energy system. I'm very proud to be part of the government that did that work.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the energy industry is calling the Premier's new rules a second soft moratorium and given that the annual municipal revenue from renewables is projected at \$277 million in the next few years and given that revenue in counties like Willow Creek in Livingstone-Macleod, Cypress county in Cypress-Medicine Hat, and Vulcan in Cardston-Siksika will be lost, will the Premier explain why she is listening to the fringe minority and forgoing revenue that will strengthen Alberta's rural economy?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's ironic that nearly every single one of those counties mentioned supported our decision. It's important to note that the AUC's application list has doubled over the course of the pause, because that's what responsible government does. It increases the attraction for investment, it increases certainty, and that's why we're going to continue to lead not only Canada but North America in our energy development. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the government is now telling Alberta's landowners they cannot legally say no to oil and gas development on their private lands but also cannot say yes to renewables development on their private lands and given that this government is supposedly dealing with renewables liabilities but cannot even estimate oil and gas liabilities hovering around \$88 million, will the energy minister stop taking direction from anticlimax groups and address oil and gas liabilities and protect taxpayers from this looming crisis?

Mr. Neudorf: Again, we are very proud of what we're doing in this sector. We're making sure that we can have agriculture first as well as renewable energy development as well as making sure that our entire sector continues to grow. Alberta will continue to lead not only Canada but North America in responsible development. We are also adding the requirement that these developers put in a security so that if those sites ever reach an end of life, we will have money ready and waiting to do that reclamation, and no municipality or private landowner will be left holding the bag.

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

Affordable Housing

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's population is booming. Canadians from coast to coast are flocking to our province to take part in the Alberta advantage and the boundless opportunities Alberta has to offer. As a result, demand for housing in my constituency of Calgary-East and across Calgary is rising rapidly. Can the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services please share what programs our government has developed to ensure a sufficient supply of housing in Calgary and all of Alberta?

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working on our stronger foundations plan. It will create 82,000 more affordable households in our province between now and 2031. We're also investing a quarter billion dollars . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Nixon: We're investing a quarter billion dollars in things like rent supplements, Mr. Speaker; \$9 billion overall with our partners in our affordable housing program, a sharp contrast from the NDP, whose plan is to force homeless people to live in tents, to make more people homeless, who made the affordable housing stock go down under their watch. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The only one with the call is the Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that affordable housing provides safe, stable homes for families in need, allowing them to use more of their income on their other essential needs, and given that a growing number of my constituents have voiced concerns about affordability and access to housing, can the same minister explain the Alberta government's plans to create more affordable housing in our province?

2:30

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're also focused on reducing red tape, working with our municipalities to bring in more houses, and I'm excited to report that Alberta has the most houses being built in their history. Even last January the city of Calgary, for example, had the highest houses built in a January since statistics were kept in our province while everywhere else in the country house supply is going down. The biggest thing we're going to do is fight against the NDP's plan to bring in rent control, which will make more people homeless and will make sure that our housing stock will continue to go down.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the rising cost of living, higher interest rates, and increasing cost of housing are deepening the calls for action to make housing more affordable and accessible in our province, can the same minister please explain what measures the government is taking to improve the outlook of housing affordability in our province and ensure that Alberta continues to be the best place in the world to call home?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, underneath the NDP's watch we saw affordable housing stocks go down by 50 per cent, which is probably why their affordable housing plan is to make homeless people live in tents. This government has built almost 5,000 new affordable housing units since 2019 and is on track to build another 8,200 affordable housing units while all the time having the best growing housing industry anywhere in the country. Alberta is getting the job done, and we're going to continue to bet on our great province. [interjections]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

A point of order is noted at 2:31.

Transgender Youth Policy

Member Tejada: I've heard from many in Calgary-Klein who are worried about the Premier's close relationship with groups like Take Back Alberta, how she tried to help extremists like Artur Pawlowski with his legal problems, and how she happily sat down with alt-right characters like Tucker Carlson, who, only weeks before he was welcomed to Alberta, described trans individuals as: demented. Will the Premier join me in condemning these statements?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and answer this question from the member opposite. I'm not sure where the member is getting her speaking notes from. Conversations about Tucker Carlson are a little bit stale if you're asking me, personally. This time is to talk about government business. For the members opposite to use this time to ask about Tucker Carlson – and the Premier has also made it very clear that

the goal is to share Alberta's message with as many people as possible, whether they're in Alberta, Canada, or around the world, whether or not we agree with them, and that is exactly why the Premier met with Tucker Carlson. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Tejada: Unbelievable. The Alberta story includes trans people.

Given that this Premier proudly partied with Tucker and given that it was only shortly after she hung out with him that she rolled out her policies which have now been denounced by doctors, teachers, parents, the 2SLGBTQIA community and given that the Premier claims that she consulted and that she knows best, rather than listen to these experts, given that the timing is very suspicious, can the Premier confirm that her dinner with Tucker was the only real consultation?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, again, I do find it disappointing that the members opposite would use this time in question period, to ask questions about government policy, to be asking about something as stale as the Tucker Carlson interview. This was a conversation that we talked about before we broke for the Christmas break. What I will say is that Alberta has a tremendous story to tell, a tremendous story to share. The Premier's job is to sell that story and tell that story to everybody, including here in Canada and the U.S. and around the world, and that's exactly why she met with Tucker Carlson, an opportunity to tell Alberta's story to a lot of people who listen.

Member Tejada: Given that Albertans are struggling with a health care crisis, affordability crisis, and so much more and that this Premier is choosing to spend her time to divide Albertans and spread misinformation and given that her position has been loudly cheered on by Take Back Alberta, who is now taking credit for the policy, and given that the Premier has a leadership review this fall, can she admit that she is securing the leadership needs by putting trans kids and their families in harm's way?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, this is not a time to be talking about party politics; rather, about government business. I do find the insinuation outright repulsive. I find that repulsive that the member opposite would insinuate such matters.

I will say that the government believes that all children in Alberta deserve our respect and our support as they grow and as they mature, and we are engaging on the implementation of health policies around gender reassignment and affirmation that will align with international, evidence-based best practices. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Provincial Response to Federal Pharmacare Plan

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, like so many Albertans, I was shocked when the Health minister announced that she would be rejecting the federal government's plan to provide pharmacare to all of us here in Alberta. Here is a national plan, a plan that has the potential to improve the lives of thousands of Alberta families, including folks in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. In fact, we've already heard this proposal being described by my constituents as a ray of light and a real hope. Why is the minister rejecting the proposed program without considering any of its content and the impact it could have on Albertans?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, it's not actually universal pharmacare. They're only talking about two drug categories, only in contraceptives and only in diabetes. We have a robust pharmacare program here in Alberta, over 5,000 drugs, including contraceptives, including diabetes. If the federal government – and this is the very conversation I had with Minister Mark Holland just the other day – wants to provide us the funding, we will gladly enhance those programs in our province.

Ms Wright: Given that a constituent recently shared her story with me where she noted that her private insurance costs her family \$375 a month in order to access \$500 worth of medication for her chronic condition, given that subsidized premiums work out to a measly 30 per cent reduction in rates and do nothing to help with copays, when will this government accept the fact that enhancing insurance doesn't cut it and that Alberta families need meaningful help, especially during this affordability crisis?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the federal government did table legislation today on a pharmacare framework, and our initial review shows that the bill outlines that the federal Minister of Health may make payments to a province or territory in order to increase existing public pharmacare. We are hopeful this means that the federal government heard Alberta, that they want to help us in our current pharmacare program.

Mr. Speaker, we will always fight for Albertans. What they are proposing has no timelines. It's going to take a long time to get through.

Ms Wright: No timelines, just like the south Edmonton hospital, Minister.

Given that I was an elementary school assistant principal, I know a schoolyard spat when I see one. Given that this government's obsession with the Prime Minister and the federal government is causing real harm to Albertans caught in the middle and given that pharmacare is not an attack on Alberta, when will the UCP government start listening and focusing on the needs of real Albertans and get behind pharmacare so families can get the support they so desperately need?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have not taken the time to look at what actually is going on. We have a very good relationship with the federal government. Minister Holland and myself actually do text quite often and do speak quite often, and we were able just before Christmas to sign the shared priorities agreement. That was worth over a billion dollars to Albertans. You know why? Because we collaborated. We did that ahead of time. This is not happening with this, and they are not collaborating with us as they should. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Foreign Qualification and Credential Recognition

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, under our government Alberta has become a place of opportunity and momentum. Many newcomers have moved here, growing our economy and our communities. This is not a process without its growing pains, as many essential sectors, including health care, are seeing labour shortages. The solution to this could be the new Albertans themselves, as many newcomers have the skills to work but lack the credential recognition to work where they are needed. Could the Minister of Advanced Education summarize the work our government has done to help new Albertans match their credentials ...

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

2:40

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, we understand that beginning a career is a top priority for new Albertans looking to start their lives in our province, and certainly that was the experience of my parents when they immigrated to this country many, many years ago. That's why we're getting newcomers to work more quickly, reducing barriers to credential recognition, and expediting registration of professionals. These are individuals who can help fill critical gaps in our workforce right away. Through our fairness for newcomers office we are working with regulators to help ensure internationally trained newcomers seeking to work will get their credentials expedited.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that credential matching can be a highly technical, very industry-specific process with different regulations based on the industry and given that our high standards are essential to maintaining the confidence of Albertans, could the Minister of Advanced Education offer an overview of the engagement the government has undertaken with different professionals and regulatory bodies to ensure that standards are maintained while streamlining the credential matching processes?

Mrs. Sawhney: That's an excellent question, Mr. Speaker. The fairness for newcomers office continues to collect data from more than 70 Alberta regulators on their credential recognition timelines and processes. This data informs the work with the regulators on reducing barriers and improving efficiency in the system. Compliance reviews were conducted with select regulatory bodies. The fairness for newcomers office is working closely to monitor and ensure recommendations from these reviews are implemented. Additional regulatory bodies are being selected for the next phase of compliance reviews.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her response. Given that obstacles to getting their credentials recognized could dissuade newcomers from moving to Alberta and further given that it has been a priority of this government to attract skilled and talented individuals to this province – hang on; it's coming – could the same minister please inform the House how the work of the government is working to help attract more qualified individuals to support industries experiencing labour shortages?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, there is a tremendous amount of work being done in government to attract newcomers. First, in addition to the fairness for newcomers office, our government also offers the international qualifications assessment service, which completes assessments and issues certificates comparing credentials to Canadian educational standards. Second, the alberta.ca foreign qualification recognition page lists a number of resources to support newcomers, including Opportunity Alberta, a *Before You Arrive in Canada* video to help newcomers prepare for their life in Canada, and so much more information. I would encourage Albertans to check it out.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In light of the Budget Address we will

continue immediately to the remainder of Members' Statements and the rest of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Supports for Seniors

Ms Sigurdson: Today is budget day in Alberta. We already have heard from the Premier regarding what she plans for us, and the news is bad, especially for seniors. At a time of record inflation and population growth the Premier is cutting spending and renegeing on a promised tax cut for those in the lowest tax bracket. Sadly, we've come to expect bad decisions from this government and certainly decisions not based on the facts. Extreme right-wing ideology rules the day here in Alberta.

Another example of extreme right-wing thinking is the government's decision to break their promised investments in making life more affordable for seniors. Seniors were supposed to see \$12 million in lower fees last year. Promise made; promise broken. We will see shortly if the Premier will honour the proposed \$18.5 million in reduced fees she has promised seniors this year. But given all the broken promises we've seen so far, I'm not hopeful.

Governments have choices. The UCP has made several choices that have hurt seniors. They kicked the seniors off their drug plan. They cut the seniors' benefit. They cut funding for senior drivers' medical exams. They terminated the Seniors Advocate and closed the office, meaning advocacy and support for seniors is gone.

Besides these specific attacks on seniors, all Albertans have been negatively impacted by the affordability crisis. Under the UCP utility rates have skyrocketed, car insurance has escalated, and groceries are through the roof. Alberta has a housing crisis that impacts those on limited incomes the most. Continuing care accommodation fees have increased, and the UCP wants to gamble away the CPP. Despite the Premier's troublesome foreshadowing, the UCP can still do the right thing and properly fund public programs for inflation and population growth. Let's hope the UCP cares enough to not leave seniors behind in this budget.

The Speaker: Hon. members, for the benefit of all members, for your information's sake, we will have a short recess prior to the Budget Address and after the daily Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader is rising.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, sponsored by the President of Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(3) I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of the 2024-2025 main estimates schedule.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I have the requisite number of copies of research based here in Alberta, hot off the press, demonstrating that 86 per cent of Alberta teachers say that classroom complexity is much higher than it used to be, and 62 per cent report higher class sizes this year under the UCP government.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 2:31 a point of order was called and has subsequently been withdrawn.

Hon. members, that brings us to Ordres du jour. In order to allow adequate time to prepare for the Budget Address by the hon. the President of Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House will stand recessed until 3:15. Please return to the Chamber by 10 minutes after 3.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:47 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Administrator, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2024-2025 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the '24-25 government estimates.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Administrator transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

The Administrator transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

Government Motions

Budget Address

27. **Mr. Horner moved:**
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the government's 2024-2027 fiscal plan and move Government Motion 27.

Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour to rise in the Assembly today and present Budget 2024. As a third-generation Alberta rancher I come from a long line of Albertans who have for decades witnessed the highs and lows, the booms and busts, and the ongoing evolution of a province that I believe has always been the best in Canada. I also come from a long line of Albertans who believed it was their duty to serve others, with a great-grandfather who served as a Senator, a great-uncle who served both federally and provincially, and a cousin who also rose in this very room to present a budget a decade ago. Public service is near and dear to my heart. My family instilled in me a sense of duty to others. They led by example, showing me that there's no work more rewarding than making life better for others.

This government is committed to making life better for all Albertans, those who have been here for decades along with those who have chosen Alberta as their new home. Budget 2024 is a responsible plan for a growing province. It's founded on our duty to make decisions that strike the right balance. That means spending on the important programs and services and infrastructure that Albertans deserve and expect. It also means putting money into

savings when we can and ensuring the next generation is not burdened with more inherited debt.

Mr. Speaker, we've developed this budget at a time when things are looking good for Alberta. Our economy is leading the country. Businesses are growing and creating jobs, and those jobs are providing good wages for Albertans. But it's when times are good that we must be mindful and responsible. It's in the good times that we're most tempted to put off preparing for the hard ones. It's an age-old problem, a trap our predecessors fell into, and one this government refuses to repeat. Albertans have told us that they're tired of the roller-coaster ride, a cycle that saw overspending by past governments in boom times, followed by hardship when the boom was over.

3:20

Many Albertans have also shared their thoughts on where we should spend, like Wanda, a single mom from Devon, whose main priority is her daughter who has disabilities; like Gail from Edmonton, who is concerned about the upcoming wildfire season; and like Mike from Calgary, who shared his thoughts on establishing sustainable energy for the future. Every Albertan has thoughtful, valid concerns. We have heard those concerns, and we've made responsible choices.

In the end, I'm proud of what we've accomplished. Budget 2024 is responsible. It's a budget that strikes a balance. It addresses the needs of Alberta families, builds and protects safe communities, manages our resources wisely, and supports businesses that are the backbone of our economy. At the same time, it's built on our fiscal framework, which ensures paying down debt remains a priority. This is a budget based on the same priorities held by many Albertans who create their own household budgets, Albertans who have also had to make tough choices to take care of the needs of the family, make their mortgage payments, and hopefully save for the future.

Budget 2024 is a responsible plan that invests in the public services that Alberta families and communities rely on, like strong health care and education. It provides a helping hand for those in need, especially in these days when affordability is top of mind. It invests in public safety and in the schools and other infrastructure we need for growing families, and it ensures communities have the resources they need to face what will likely be another tough wildfire season.

Budget 2024 also maintains Alberta's competitive advantage by continuing to attract business and investment. It supports the creation of good jobs for hard-working Albertans, and it works towards sustainability as more and more people choose to call Alberta home. To be sure, Mr. Speaker, newcomers are flocking to Alberta in record numbers. Alberta remains the most attractive destination in Canada for people looking for a great quality of life, good-paying jobs, and a favourable cost of living.

In the 12 months preceding October 1, 2023, our population grew by about 195,000 people, more than 4 per cent. That's the highest annual growth rate we've seen since the early '80s. We're seeing more people choose Alberta as a place to raise their families. Why wouldn't they? We have jobs. In 2023 Alberta's economy gained 90,000 jobs. We continue to build on that growth in 2024, adding over 10,000 jobs in January.

These jobs pay well, and in Alberta more of those earnings stay in workers' pockets. Our government has made it a priority to make life here affordable, and one of the most effective ways to do that is by keeping taxes low. Today Albertans and Alberta businesses continue to pay the lowest overall taxes in the country.

Mr. Speaker, to build on Alberta's already strong personal tax advantage, government intends to introduce a new personal income

tax bracket of 8 per cent on the first \$60,000 of income. As we implement the new tax bracket, we must proceed in a responsible way. Based on the current fiscal plan the government expects to implement the tax cut over two years. Albertans will see the full impact of the new tax bracket in 2027.

Alberta is also a place where businesses can succeed, create good jobs, and continue to build up our great province. Businesses thrive here. That's no accident. Our government has established the most business-friendly environment in the country, with the lowest general corporate income tax rate in Canada. At 8 per cent it's 30 per cent lower than the next lowest province. Alberta also has no payroll tax and no capital tax, all of which continue to attract investment, including in Alberta's tech and innovation sector.

Alberta's tech sector is booming. Last November two think tanks, StartupBlink and Startup Genome, named Calgary the 12th fastest growing technology ecosystem in the world. We've attracted companies such as Amazon Web Services, which recently announced the completion of its western Canada infrastructure region, the largest tech sector investment in Alberta's history. De Havilland Aircraft continues its expansion into Alberta. The company recognized our major Alberta advantages. It moved its head office to Calgary in 2022 and earlier this month announced it was adding to its expansion with the purchase of Field Aviation's Calgary manufacturing. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that ATB, Alberta's largest financial institution, is positioned to declare \$100 million of dividends to the province annually starting in '24-25. These dividends will increase the province's available cash and highlight the value ATB provides to all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2024 builds on Alberta's economic momentum. Families, businesses, and investors are choosing Alberta because we are well positioned for future success and sustainability. We are Canada's economic engine. The Business Council of Alberta says that our province is starting 2024 in a position of relative strength compared to the rest of Canada. We are once again forecasted to be among the national leaders in economic growth, but getting here hasn't been easy.

Last year we legislated a new fiscal framework to guide how we spend and save taxpayer money. The framework calls for us to balance the budget, limits increased spending, and requires us to use half of any available surplus cash to pay down debt. Alberta's commitment to reducing debt and to increase savings and bring the province's finances into the black are not going unnoticed nor unrewarded. Last year credit-rating agencies like S&P Global Ratings and DBRS Morningstar upgraded Alberta's credit rating, recognizing the progress we have made with our finances. More importantly, the debt we've repaid won't burden our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, we've paid down billions of dollars of debt, but we're not out of the woods. Challenges lie ahead that are putting pressure on the province. Higher interest rates mean our debt-servicing costs continue to rise. Anyone who has had to refinance a loan or a mortgage recently knows first-hand that the money they're now spending on higher interest rates can no longer be spent to provide for their family's other needs. For our government this means the money that we're forced to spend refinancing the debts left by previous governments cannot be spent on the needs of Albertans. Alberta is in a better position than the rest of the country and better than when we took over from the last government, but we are not immune from outside factors that challenge our economy and challenge us as we strive to do what's responsible and what's right for Albertans.

Alberta is growing. Fiscal responsibility matters even in good times, especially in good times. Strong stewardship has helped us get to our strong economic position now and will keep us secure in

the future. Strong stewardship has helped us get to our strong economic position although we have challenges that lay ahead. We are in active collective bargaining negotiations across the province's public sector, including teachers and nurses. This means balancing our ability to invest in programs and services with fair and competitive compensation for workers. Strong stewardship will also position us to better deal with ongoing challenges like the pressures of a growing population on housing supply, our health and education systems, and other public services.

On top of pressures like debt, public-sector collective bargaining, and growth, Alberta faces challenges from outside the province. Geopolitical risks, including uncertainty from the layering of harmful and foolish federal policies, are preventing Alberta's economy from reaching its full potential and holding back investment and productivity gains not just in the province but across the country. Rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that our government will continue to fight for what's right for Albertans because we know that what we're doing is working. Budget 2024 is a testament to that.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that once again our government has achieved a balanced budget. [some applause] That deserves an applause; I like that.

Budget 2024 includes a forecast surplus of \$367 million in '24-25. This is due in part to our government's focus on responsible fiscal management and our responsible choices to invest in the areas that Albertans have told us are important, like health care, where Budget 2024 is investing more than \$26 billion. This is the largest health care budget in our province's history. This investment will increase Alberta's health care capacity, improve primary health care, reduce wait times, grow the workforce, and advance the health care action plan.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, we are modernizing Alberta's primary health care system by investing \$475 million to ensure Albertans have timely access to the health care they need when and where they need it, especially as our population continues to grow. This investment will improve access to family physicians and help develop a compensation model for nurse practitioners, who can play a significant role in improving timely access to health care.

We're investing significant dollars to increase access to medical education in rural and Indigenous communities and to increase the number of family medicine and general physicians across the province. Mr. Speaker, we know smaller communities need improved access to doctors, which is why we are providing \$26 million for the University of Lethbridge rural medical teaching school to train doctors in smaller communities with the intention that they remain in those communities.

We're also ensuring students of today and tomorrow have access to a quality education in an environment that meets their needs. We want to ensure our schools have the space for students as enrolment continues to grow. Budget 2024 invests \$1.9 billion, including \$681 million in new funding for planning, design, construction, and modernizations of 98 new and modernized schools across Alberta. This includes 43 new projects announced in this budget, creating a total of 35,000 new or modernized spaces.

We've heard from parents, school boards, and teachers that more funding is needed to support growing classrooms, and we listened. The budget includes funding to put hundreds more teachers in those classrooms, and we're investing \$1.5 billion for educational learning supports for vulnerable students, children with specialized learning needs, and other students requiring additional supports.

We heard from industry that more skilled workers are needed, and we agree, so we're investing an additional \$102 million over

the next three years to create 3,200 apprenticeship seats. And to further ensure our province has the skilled workforce for high-tech jobs in an increasingly diversified economy, the budget provides \$55 million for the University of Calgary to add 1,000 spaces in science, technology, engineering, and math programs and \$43 million for NAIT's trades and technology learning facility here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2024 builds on Alberta's economic foundation, the strongest in Canada, but it does not ignore the fact that families in every province, including ours, struggle with affordability, especially when it comes to housing. This budget supports those who need help by providing \$717 million more in capital grants to give more Albertans and their families access to more affordable housing. Budget 2024 invests in safe and supportive communities where every family can feel secure and welcomed.

The three-year capital plan improves emergency response and co-ordination, increases capacity in the province's court system, and invests in crime prevention. The budget includes \$49 million to better support first responders and sheriffs by providing them with the equipment and facilities they need to protect Albertans and will fund 100 police officers to be deployed to high-crime areas in Calgary and Edmonton through the safe streets action plan.

We're supporting the compassionate care and recovery of Albertans at risk of or experiencing mental health and addiction challenges. That includes \$328 million in capital funding to develop recovery communities and mental health facilities for children and youth. [interjections] You can keep clapping while I drink.

Mr. Speaker, the past year has shown us that Mother Nature can also be a formidable opponent. Budget 2024 improves Alberta's ability to respond to extreme natural events such as floods, droughts, and wildfires. That includes \$206 million to enhance the capacity of the province to fight wildfires, including new firefighting equipment. We're working hard to enhance wildfire prevention, preparedness, response, and mitigation tactics; \$75 million in funding over three years will create a renewed grant program to help safeguard Alberta communities from the effects of severe weather events like drought and floods. The program will be a refresh of the Alberta community resilience program and will benefit communities across the province.

This is an investment in Alberta's future. A combination of drier conditions and our growing population is putting greater demand on our natural resources, so we're making strategic investments to promote sustainable growth, protect the ecosystem and natural environment, and ensure uninterrupted access to water for Albertans and Alberta businesses. Water is a critical resource for Albertans, which is why \$238 million will be provided for the water for life strategy and \$206 million for the Alberta municipal water/waste-water program to help small communities build high-priority water supply projects as well as water and waste-water treatment plants and disposal facilities. Responsibly managing our water resources means we can help maximize our province's water supply and make every drop count in 2024.

In total, Budget 2024's capital plan invests \$25 billion over three years in capital funding that will support Alberta's growing communities. That's an investment in not only the public infrastructure we need but an investment in jobs for the folks who work on those projects. Our capital funding will support 24,000 direct jobs and 13,000 indirect jobs across the province.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to diversify, attract new investment, and provide more jobs that keep Alberta's economic engine humming. The opportunities are tremendous here in Alberta as entrepreneurs and builders, businesses and newcomers build even stronger communities, share in our provincial prosperity, and contribute to Canada's economy. Supporting business and investment growth, as

we all know, is non-negotiable because it contributes so much to Alberta's resilient economic landscape.

The Industrial Heartland is the first designated industrial zone in Alberta, spanning five different municipalities. Budget 2024 allocates \$32 million in capital funding over three years to fund the designated industrial zone pilot project, which will construct three new water intakes and associated infrastructure in the Industrial Heartland.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that Budget 2024 strikes the right balance for a growing province. It invests in what's important to Albertans today and works for the future. That's a future where we will be off the roller coaster of booms and busts because we've paid down our debt, saved for the future, and managed our finances responsibly.

Responsible fiscal management is a key priority. As I said earlier, our fiscal framework requires us to use at least half of any available surplus cash to pay down debt. Our framework will require us to reduce taxpayer-supported debt by a forecast \$3.2 billion in 2023-2024. Our government is taking responsible steps to make a stronger and brighter future for Alberta and for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, in 1976 Alberta's government had a vision to save for the future, but that vision was lost somewhere along the way. Now we're taking steps to re-energize the vision of rebuilding the heritage fund into a generational store of wealth for our children and our grandchildren. In Budget 2024 an additional \$2 billion will be deposited into the heritage fund, and it will continue to retain its investment earnings. This will increase the market value of the fund to a forecast more than \$25 billion. With these deliberate and meaningful deposits, the government is embarking on a plan that will return the heritage fund to its original vision of intergenerational equity, impact, and influence. Prior to the end of this year the government will release its long-term plan charting a path to a heritage fund worth between \$250 billion and \$400 billion by the year 2050.

3:40

Alberta will join the ranks of jurisdictions such as Alaska, Norway, and many other resource-based jurisdictions around the

world who boast sovereign wealth funds large enough to replace their reliance on resource revenues. The heritage fund will achieve these goals in a way that is anchored in Albertan values and reflective of our unique character. I have said before that you can't run around with champagne tastes on a beer budget forever. Sooner or later, and probably sooner, you end up with an empty glass, and you're still thirsty. I'm not much for champagne. I'm not much for spending away what you should be saving for tomorrow. That's why I'm so proud to present this budget, that stays true to my values and to Alberta's values.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2024 is a budget with an eye to the future. It invests in the public programs and services Albertans expect. It supports our communities and protects our natural resources, and it continues to attract businesses and investment, maintaining our competitive advantage. At the same time, it stays true to our priority to pay down debt and save for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2024 is a responsible plan for a growing province. It's the budget Alberta needs today while ensuring future generations can live, work, and raise their families in what will continue to be the very best place in the world to call home.

Thank you. [some applause]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The Official Opposition House Leader.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a day, indeed. With that, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 11, 2024.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:42 p.m. to Monday, March 11, at 1:30 p.m.]

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

Activity to Thursday, February 29, 2024

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

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

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

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

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

Bill 2 — Alberta Pension Protection Act (Horner)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bill 203 — Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act (Dyck)

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

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

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

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

Second Reading — 486-92 (*Dec. 4, 2023 aft., adjourned*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table of Contents

Prayers	621
Introduction of Visitors	621
Introduction of Guests	621
Members' Statements	
Black History Month	622
Renewable Energy Development.....	622
Lunar New Year	623
International Women's Day.....	623
Government Policies	623
Supports for Seniors	632
Oral Question Period	
Government Policies	624
Education Funding.....	624
Health Care Accessibility	625
Daycare Funding	625
South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project	626
Renewable Energy Development.....	626
Energy Industry Property Tax Payments.....	627
Prescription Contraception Access	628
Aquatic Invasive Species.....	628
Renewable Energy Development.....	629
Affordable Housing.....	629
Transgender Youth Policy	630
Provincial Response to Federal Pharmacare Plan.....	630
Foreign Qualification and Credential Recognition	631
Notices of Motions	632
Tabling Returns and Reports	632
Orders of the Day	632
Transmittal of Estimates.....	632
Government Motions	
Budget Address	632

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca