



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 11, 2024

Day 22

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

### First Session

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

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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)  
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Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)  
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de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)  
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(UC)  
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Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
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Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)  
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(UC)  
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Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
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Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)  
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Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
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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

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Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
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Brian Jean	Minister of Energy and Minerals
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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
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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

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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.

Monday, March 11, 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 interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

### Mr. Guy Boutilier

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, please remain standing as we recognize the passing of former member Guy Boutilier, who, sadly, passed away on Friday. The hon. Mr. Boutilier served as the Member for Fort McMurray from 1997 to 2004 and as the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo from 2004 to 2012. As is our custom, we will pay fuller tribute to him when his family members will be able to join us, but in a moment of silent prayer or reflection I ask you to remember the hon. Guy Boutilier as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

It being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by the Strathcona Christian academy grades 5 and 6 choir. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

### Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!  
True patriot love in all of us command.  
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,  
Il sait porter la croix!  
Ton histoire est une épopée  
Des plus brillants exploits.  
God keep our land glorious and free!  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

### Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

**The Speaker:** The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be seated upon Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We also acknowledge that the province of Alberta exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I do have a number of visitors and guests today, so I hope that you'll bear with me. I'll provide permission for my colleagues to please take their seats as we continue.

It's my great pleasure and honour to introduce to Members of the Legislative Assembly – earlier today I had the opportunity to enjoy a courtesy call as well as a lunch with the high commissioner for

India. He and his spouse are joining us. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining the high commissioner today is the consul general of India in Vancouver. Please welcome him to the Assembly as well.

We have a number of visitors visiting us today from Woodland Cree First Nation, beginning with Chief Isaac Laboucan-Avirom, councillors Joseph Whitehead Jr, Frank Whitehead, Derek Auger, George Merrier, and the director of lands and consultation, Jenna Strachan. I see that you've risen. Please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker is very popular today. He has many, many friends in the gallery, including a former member of this Assembly, the hon. Kyle Fawcett. He served as the Member for Calgary-North Hill from 2008 to 2012 and as the Member for Calgary-Klein from 2012 to 2015. I ask that you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I think we can all agree, hon. members, that this Assembly is better when there are kids choirs who are here joining us. Our national anthem today was sung by the choir for Strathcona Christian academy elementary in Sherwood Park, grades 5 and 6 students who are part of the spring choir. They will be singing at six different events this year. They're accompanied by their teachers. I ask that you all rise and receive a very special warm welcome here to the Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** For my last introduction today it's my pleasure to introduce members of the public service who are joining us in the gallery. They are participating in a full-day public service orientation program which explores legislative, budgetary, and committee processes, enabling each participant to apply their knowledge to their role in the public service. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Ms Goehring:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you 35 incredible visitors from Edmonton-Castle Downs who are part of the Edmonton home-school program. I would ask all my visitors to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Haji:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students from Father Leo Green school. I ask the students and their teacher, Myane Lachance, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-South West.

**Member Batten:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to welcome through you and to you the lovely children from Edmonton-South West from Joan Carr school. Please stand up and receive a warm welcome.

**Mr. Lundy:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce a grade 9 student from Leduc, Cole Newman, accompanied by his grandmother Shelley Gilpin.

I would also like to introduce a group of Edmonton residents who have come to show their support for private member's Bill 204: Sheila Phimester, Ildiko Jones, Kathy deWinter, Jeff Johnson, Allie Behiels, and Hali Kaur. I ask you to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly my son Kelly and his wife, Stephanie, from Grande Prairie. I'm so happy that you can join us here for a couple of hours. Please rise and enjoy the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright, followed by the minister of children's services.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Thank you. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly good friends of mine from Saskatchewan, Orville and Theresa Bilous, great conservative fundraisers and organizers.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of children's services.

**Mr. Turton:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members of the Assembly Kevin Bird, superintendent of Northern Gateway public schools; Tammy Charko, student support facilitator; and my long-time friend Paul Jespersen, the assistant principal of Onoway junior and senior high school. Please, if they could rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Seeing none, I beg the indulgence of the Assembly for a message on a very special day.

1:40

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Commonwealth Day Message from the King

**The Speaker:** One Resilient Common Future: members, that's the theme of the 2024 Commonwealth Day, which is celebrated on the second Monday in March each year. Today is the Commonwealth's 75th year, and we are one of 56 member nations that recognizes that we are stronger together, unified, specifically in difficult times for our global society, representing more than 2.5 billion people collectively in some of the richest and poorest countries in the world. It is interesting to note that 60 per cent of those people under the age of 29 are in the Commonwealth. We need to reach those people in ways that matter to them. The traditions of our parliament are important, but they will be lost unless we continue to foster ideas that build connections in our digital world.

His Majesty King Charles III, in his message recognizing this day, speaks to the focus on young people: their creativity, innovative skills, and hard work. He says, "Their energy is transforming approaches to development, technology and preserving and restoring Nature and will, I hope, help to shape and safeguard [that] common future." Members, copies of His Majesty's speech are on your desks along with the message from the Commonwealth Secretary-General. May we, too, summon the energy to transform and safeguard a common future.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a statement to make.

#### Job Creation

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard for months about difficult economic times headed Canada's way due to global

politics, reckless spending in Ottawa, runaway inflation, and interest rates being cranked up by the central bank. Alberta, however, is rising above it once again.

On Friday Stats Canada released their monthly job numbers for February. Across the country there are about 40,000 new jobs. Over 17,000 of those were in Alberta alone. That means 43 per cent of all jobs added last month were right here in Alberta, and we have less than 12 per cent of the population. Most impressively, almost 16,000 of those jobs were full-time, which is great news for Alberta families. These gains were seen in important categories like women and youth employment and in high-value, high-paying sectors like tech, wholesale and retail trade, and construction. But we're not standing idle. We will continue working aggressively to recruit more skilled workers and attract more students into the trades. These professionals will help build out infrastructure and address housing demands to meet record migration to this province.

This growth is no fluke. Investments like Dow, De Havilland, and, on Friday, Fortinet are flowing into this province because of this Conservative government's business-friendly policies. While the NDP continue to lean into job- and investment-killing increases to the corporate income tax, we have maintained and bolstered the lowest tax environment in Canada. We're bringing more companies here, not driving them away. We have a diversifying economy that has seen major investments in tech, film and television, agriculture, science, and energy. Investors are also attracted here by our highly skilled workforce and exceptional lifestyles. It's an Alberta advantage that is reinforced by a responsible budget and will continue to fuel this province as the economic driver of Canada.

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

#### International Women's Day

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Friday was International Women's Day. This is a day of activism and celebration that belongs to all those committed to women's equality. I used this time to reflect on how I might inspire others to understand and value women's inclusion so we can build a better province. I also proudly thought about how my colleagues are contributing to the vision and what it means to have women with a seat to make decisions at the table in politics.

First, there was the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who had a powerful vision of a gender-diverse team, and here we are, an Alberta NDP caucus with more than 50 per cent women. This vision also led to the very first Cree woman and the very first Black woman elected to this Assembly, and these women on this team have done historic things to make Alberta a better place. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought forward a historic motion to include a land acknowledgement in this Chamber. I am grateful for the Member for Calgary-Bedlington for her bill to address class sizes that would benefit our children; the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who is working so diligently as an advocate for affordable housing for all Albertans.

And while this government refuses to fund or support our caucus's call for universal prescription contraception, today I am proud to be on this side of the House, that celebrates, supports, and recognizes all women: trans women, gender-diverse women, and, unlike the statement made in the Chamber previously, women with or without uteruses, for whatever reasons that may be. All Albertans, women know that the Alberta NDP will stand with them and advocate for them. We see you, and we celebrate you.

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

### Rural Alberta

**Mr. Wiebe:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta plays a huge role in making Alberta the great province that it is. I want to recognize the farmers and ranchers who work hard every day to provide us with the food we eat. From the wheat fields that stretch as far as the eye can see to the cattle ranches that dot our landscape, rural Alberta feeds not only us but people across Canada and around the world. Thank you for keeping our plates full.

It's not just about food; rural Alberta is also a treasure trove of natural beauty and outdoor adventure. Our countryside attracts tourists from far and wide. These visitors bring money into our Grande Prairie and area economies, supporting businesses and creating jobs. So when we support rural Alberta, we're not just helping farmers and ranchers; we're also boosting our tourism industry and strengthening our economy as a whole.

Community is especially strong in rural Alberta. People know their neighbours, and there's a real sense of belonging. The sense of community is something that we should cherish and nurture because it's what makes Alberta feel like home.

But rural Alberta faces its own challenges, too. Access to services like health care and mental health support can be limited. There are challenges with rural crime and infrastructure issues, like road maintenance, that can pose a real problem. That's why it's so crucial that we support our rural communities and invest in the resources they need to thrive. Further, it's through funding for infrastructure projects supporting local businesses or initiatives to improve access to health care and mental health services. We must ensure that Albertans living in rural communities get the support they need and deserve.

Let's celebrate rural Alberta for all it brings to our province: the food on our tables, the beauty of our landscapes, the sense of community, and the economic contributions. Thank you.

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

### Ramadan

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to mark the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, which started today. Fasting is an essential part of this month and Islamic way of life. It's a practice in self-restraint and involves abstinence from food, drinks, and other essential needs from dawn until sunset. It's a practice to humble oneself and a time to reflect on one's relationship with the Creator and creation. I recognize there is a huge diversity within the Islamic faith traditions, spanning over continents and centuries, but fasting is fundamental and practised by Muslims world-wide. It brings people, communities, and Muslim umma together as one. Family, faith-based gatherings, community gatherings, and communal worship are a huge part of Ramadan.

Mr. Speaker, Ramadan is also a time for meaningful reflections. It encourages us to look out for those who are less fortunate among us, to reach out to our neighbours, sick, and elderly, and to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those around us.

This year Ramadan celebrations are overshadowed by the crisis in Gaza, resulting in thousands of deaths and injuries and many more unable to access basic amenities of life or safe shelter. We can all agree that civilians, women, and children should never be targeted, taken hostage, or subjected to violence or collective punishment. This war needs to end. I reiterate our call from last October for an immediate ceasefire. Canada must do all it can to protect and preserve human rights, uphold international humanitarian laws, ensure humanitarian assistance for those in need, and to help

bring lasting peace in the region. Mr. Speaker, this crisis is also contributing to Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-Arab hate. This is unacceptable. We must stand together against hate in all forms.

With that, Ramadan Mubarak.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

### Personal Income Tax Rates

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, a promise made is a debt unpaid, or, with this Premier, a debt unpaid and increased. Last election she promised Albertans a big tax cut in January. She broke that flagship promise in eight months. Then, in a taxpayer-funded infomercial, she promised part of that tax cut in 2025. Eight days later her budget broke that promise, too. Eight days. That's a record. To the Premier: at this rate why should Albertans trust that a promise she made in the morning will last till even the end of that day?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier has risen.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government remains committed to implementing the tax cut, which will be an 8 per cent rate on income below \$60,000, delivering \$750 in tax relief for each individual, and it will be fully implemented in time for the next election. Unlike the members opposite, who implemented a new tax, a carbon tax, an increase on corporate income tax, an increase on personal income tax, and racked up \$80 billion worth of debt to boot, which we are now seeing roll over, which is increasing the amount that we have to pay on finance charges – those are some of the reasons why we have to be more cautious.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier claims she broke her promise to Albertans because of volatile oil prices and interest rates, but projections for both are the same now as they were in May, when she first peddled this bill of goods. This UCP government had full access to public finances officials then, so claims to be unaware of fiscal projections either rest on dishonesty or incompetence. To the Premier: will she admit that the UCP campaign promise was a lie at the time?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things, of course, that is unpredictable is the number of people coming to the province and, as well, the overall inflation rate. Those are two things that we have to be mindful of. The number one promise that we made to Albertans was that after years of NDP deficits, racking up debt, we were going to run balanced budgets. So we have taken a prudent approach to make sure that we see what those costs are going to look like over the course of the next year, what those revenues are going to look like over the course of the next year, and we'll be implementing that tax cut before the next election.

**Ms Notley:** Well, no one believes that, Mr. Speaker.

Now, her taxpayer-funded infomercial also promised annual contributions to the heritage trust fund. Separate and apart from the merits of doing that when we're dangerously behind on building hospitals and schools, it's her promise. Eight days later her budget failed to deliver on that one, too. To the Premier: how much did her infomercial cost Albertans, and will she apologize to them for wasting their money spreading all of this misinformation?

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that explains a lot if the member opposite doesn't understand compound interest and what happens when you reinvest investment income, because that is what will happen. If we had simply reinvested investment income from the time of the earliest contributions, we would already be at \$150 billion to \$200 billion, so that is going to be an essential part. We already started the process. When we came in, the heritage savings trust fund was worth \$17 billion; by the end of this year it will be worth \$25 billion. In five short years we will have already put in \$8 billion, almost as much as the original deposits.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

**Ms Notley:** Well, day to day the story changes.

### Education Funding

**Ms Notley:** Now, when it comes to distinguishing between repeat announcements and actually funding new schools, here's the truth: 60,000 new students are expected in the city of Edmonton over the next decade, but Edmonton public only had one new school approved for construction. Calgary expects close to 6,000 new students next year alone, but the Calgary board of education only got one new school approved for construction. To the Premier: does she think parents don't know the difference between real investments and recycled announcements? Why won't she just do better?

**Ms Smith:** Well, we're doing a heck of a lot better than when they were in. Zero schools were announced in the 2015 budget, zero schools in the 2016 budget. They only had 46 projects in total. We have . . . [interjections]

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

**Ms Smith:** They only managed to start 46 projects; we have started 141 school projects. Maybe I'll just educate them on our process. The first part is that you do planning, then you do the engineering work, and then you do the construction. We have 14 schools in the Edmonton area: six full construction, five design, and three planning.

**Ms Notley:** That answer is so full of untruths, Mr. Speaker. It was ridiculous.

Now, meanwhile she's never seen a bad-news story she can't polish up and sell to Albertans, just like what she just did, but even she admitted the demand for classroom space is way more than she has committed to build, and we know they're also only funding for a third of the number of new teachers needed as a result of increased enrolment. Albertans expect their children's education to be properly funded, but it's just not, so to the Premier: why is she treating our kids' education with such profound ambivalence?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we have 98 projects that are in each of the three different stages. We're going to continue to keep up with growth. We'll probably have to announce a whole lot more as well. We've increased the amount of funding that we have for enrolment. The members opposite must remember that part of the funding change that we brought in was to protect schools as they were losing enrolment. When they were in power, we had 13 quarters of negative growth because people didn't have job opportunity, so they had to go elsewhere in order to be

able to achieve it. We now have people coming into the province. We're going to continue to protect the low-enrolment boards and also fund enrolment growth.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we all want our province to grow, and, at least on this side of the Chamber, we also want our kids to succeed. The future economic success of our province is rooted in the education we are giving to our kids, so to the Premier: why has the Premier taken Alberta from being one of the top-funded provinces per student to being the lowest per capita education funder in the country? Why does she think that Alberta students deserve less than every other Canadian student? Why? [interjections]

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Something we can both agree on, that we have to make sure that we're funding our core programs: that's health care, that's education, that's advanced education. It's why over the next three years we're investing \$2.1 billion to be able to build and modernize schools, construct modular classrooms, support the expansion of collegiate and public charter schools in Alberta. In addition to maintaining the support for those school districts that are seeing declining enrolment growth, we want to make sure that we have a funding model that supports them as well as spending \$1.2 billion on supporting enrolment growth. We're doing it all.

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

### Town Hall in Calgary-Lougheed

**Ms Notley:** Last March one of the Premier's candidates posted a video accusing teachers of exposing children, even those in kindergarten, to pornography. During the campaign the Premier rightly accepted that candidate's resignation, but now the MLA for Calgary-Lougheed is choosing to embrace that former candidate and her unacceptable, slanderous rhetoric. They will be hosting an event together next week. To the Premier: will she ask the Member for Calgary-Lougheed to cancel this event, and if not, why not?

**The Speaker:** I struggle to make the connection between a privately held event and government policy, but if the Premier chooses to answer, she's welcome to do so.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a candidate that's running for their party who says this of charter schools: "UCP paves the way for nutbar religious charter schools and home-schooling that doesn't follow the curriculum. They're trying to create an army of brainwashed, right-wing warriors, and they accuse the NDP of being too political on education." I'm not going to take a lecture from that member. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Ms Notley:** This Premier is leading the government, and these types of slanderous claims made by now her MLA, a government MLA, hurts teachers, hurts parents, and obviously hurts students, and they deserve nothing less than a clear and unequivocal repudiation from the leader of their province, not this distracting stuff that we just saw. Will the Premier accept that it's actually her proposed new policies and rhetoric attacking transgendered youth that have contributed to a culture that makes her caucus feel like this kind of hate is appropriate?



**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, I have said many times that Alberta's government believes that all children deserve our unconditional love and support as they grow and mature. We are continuing to engage on the implementation of our health policies as well as policies involving schools as well as policies involving sport, and we want to do so in an environment that is supportive of all children so that they grow to adulthood and they're able to make decisions that are adult decisions and not make these decisions prematurely.

2:00

**Ms Notley:** I am talking about a government MLA slandering our teachers.

Public education is one of the most important things the province provides. It's the second-largest expense item in our budget, and it makes a difference to our future. Having a member of the government caucus slandering the dedicated public servants who are responsible for our children's education is an abdication of your role. Why will you not cancel this ridiculous town hall by your government MLA?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, our approach in ensuring that all kids are supported includes that we are going to be offering counselling, mental health support, and we believe that every adult in that child's life needs to be involved in these essential parts of their decision-making process. That includes trusted teachers, it includes trusted adults, and it most certainly includes their parents.

**Ms Notley:** Trusted teachers? You don't trust teachers. You're lying about the teachers. You're slandering the teachers.

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

### South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

**Ms Gray:** On the last day of the fall session I asked the Minister of Infrastructure about the UCP's faltering commitment to building the new south Edmonton hospital. The minister told this House, "a new Edmonton hospital is a priority for our UCP government." Apparently, it was as much a priority as their tax cut; just another broken UCP promise. To the minister, Edmonton's newest general hospital opened 36 years ago. With your cancellation of the south Edmonton hospital, how long will it be before Edmontonians get their next new general hospital?

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, a point of order was noted at 2:02. The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure has risen.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Delivering a hospital for Edmontonians is a priority for this UCP government. Edmonton is a thriving community with growing health care needs, and we will be there to ensure timely and quality care. Recently the project completed feasibility as well as functional planning. We continue to work with our partners on health projects like this, including the Stollery children's hospital, the Gene Zwozdesky Centre, the U of A brain centre, all to benefit the Edmonton region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, a new Stollery hospital is vital to Edmonton, but Edmonton also needs a general hospital, and the government using sick kids as an excuse for not doing all of their job is shameful.

Multiple studies in the Edmonton area show that we don't have enough beds now, and it's only getting worse. Not enough beds means patients are crammed into hallways. Doctors are speaking out. Quote: in Edmonton, unfortunately, we can expect more hallway medicine in the coming years and resultant deaths in these hallways and waiting rooms. Minister, why have you failed Albertans by cancelling the needed south Edmonton hospital?

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, building a modern acute-care facility is a complex undertaking. Comprehensive planning and design are critical to success, and a new Edmonton hospital will be amongst the largest infrastructure projects in the province's history. Infrastructure engaged with Alberta Health and AHS to determine the scope and budget to be at \$5 billion, and this pushed the limits of our fiscal capacity. A shift in strategy was necessary. Hence, we moved forward with the planning of the Stollery children's hospital. We continue to correct the mess the NDP made of this and other projects.

**Ms Gray:** Albertans have never seen a government this comfortable with wasting huge swaths of taxpayer dollars at every turn. From Turkish Tylenol to the energy war room, from the Premier's junket to COP to the labs privatization failure, this is a government . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Ms Gray:** This is a government that is comfortable with vaporizing hundreds of millions of dollars, and now \$66 million have been invested in the planning and site preparation for the new south Edmonton hospital, and with the decision to cancel, time and taxpayer money has been wasted, and the project is only going to get more expensive. We can't afford this fiscal incompetence. Albertans need hospitals built. Why won't your government do the right thing and build the hospital?

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, let's rehash this, because it is worth noting that, yes, the NDP announced the Edmonton hospital back in 2017, but they did nothing with it. There was no feasibility study. There was no business case. There was no planning. There was no budget. In fact, they even went against the recommendation on where the Edmonton hospital should be located. Why would they do that? Because it was a political move. They knew full well that they could not deliver on this project. Our government is taking action to build a winning strategy that works for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

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

### High-speed Internet Service for Rural Alberta

**Mr. Ellingson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2022 the government of Alberta released the rural broadband strategy to connect 200,000 households across Alberta to high-speed Internet. Despite the most recent announcement the government is behind schedule and once again breaking their promise to bring high-speed Internet to Albertans by 2027. It appears the government is behind their target at the midpoint of the program. Will the minister tell us specifically how much progress has been made?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a really interesting file for me. The NDP talking about rural broadband is a little bit hypocritical because when they were in government – and I'm glad you're sitting down, Mr. Speaker – they invested zero dollars in broadband. Zero dollars. This government has \$390 million committed to expand rural broadband, and that's something that I'm proud of, coming from a rural area. But the NDP trying to gain any political points on this topic is just laughable. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Mr. Ellingson:** I guess the Internet was just as used in 2015 as it is today in 2024.

Given that the government's broadband strategy reports that 80 per cent of Indigenous communities don't have access to high-speed Internet, given that several Indigenous communities have been mentioned in multiple announcements to date, will the minister tell us the percentage of Indigenous communities and households that have been connected with high-speed Internet through the strategy, what percentage will be connected in the next two years, and will we achieve 100 per cent access for Indigenous communities? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My father was a math teacher, and zero per cent or any per cent of zero is still zero, so it is interesting that the NDP tries to talk about that they are serious when it comes to rural broadband. They're not.

This government is working with the federal government to make sure that we can get more broadband to rural areas. Obviously, it's a big priority with this government. The federal government standards that they currently have don't work, and that's why we're working with First Nations communities and rural communities to make sure that we can get rural broadband all across this province. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Ellingson:** Given that the strategy targets 100 per cent connectivity by March 2027 and given that, combined, Alberta and Canada dedicated \$780 million over four years with \$250 million to be spent in the first two years and given that we're now two years into that four-year strategy, since this government has only managed to deploy one-third of the funding, can the minister guarantee 100 per cent access by 2027?

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Mr. Speaker, I'll try again on the math. One-third of that funding is still more than zero, which the NDP did when they were in four years of government. This government is obviously committed to rural broadband. We're working with ... [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. the minister of transportation has the call.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're working with First Nations. We're working with rural counties and communities to make sure that we can get the rural broadband that they need to be able to thrive, and it's something that we're going to continue to work with. But, again, the NDP trying to score any political points on this is just a hundred per cent laughable. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

## Postsecondary Education and STEM

**Mr. McDougall:** Mr. Speaker, in today's economy many of the fastest growing and highest paying job sectors require a background in science, technology, engineering, and math, otherwise known as STEM. By supporting STEM education, our government can ensure students are equipped with the skills needed to fill these positions, begin careers, and grow our economy. After years of late nights, essays, and exams students deserve a return on their investment. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how is our government creating opportunities for students in high-demand STEM programs?

2:10

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to share that Budget 2024 invests \$55 million towards a new multidisciplinary science hub at the University of Calgary. This investment will increase enrolment in the Faculty of Science by at least 2,000 seats, which is a major expansion of high-demand programming in our largest city, and it provides additional new classroom, lab, and research space for undergraduate and graduate students. It is an investment in new student opportunities and the economy of tomorrow.

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

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that welcome news. Given that Albertans elected a Conservative government committed to supporting an economy of opportunity and given that Alberta's job market has an abundance of opportunities for STEM graduates and given that provinces with a strong foundation in STEM education are better positioned to compete in an increasingly globalized economy, to the Minister of Advanced Education: how will a multidisciplinary science hub at the University of Calgary support our government's work to address the needs of our job creators? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, investors, business owners, and chambers of commerce have made it clear: Albertans need more STEM graduates. The best way to fill gaps in our workforce and continue growing is to put students in programs that lead to jobs, and that's exactly what our targeted investment at the University of Calgary does. Adding at least 2,000 seats to the Faculty of Science means more graduates with the skills Alberta employers need to fill in-demand careers today and for years to come.

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

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the challenges imposed on students by inflation and the national affordability crisis and given that many young Albertans, including students from my constituency of Calgary-Fish Creek, are seeking educational pathways that lead to good-paying, reliable careers and given that our government has positioned our province to effectively confront these challenges, what is your message to Alberta students looking to begin a new career and start the next chapter of their lives?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Through you, Mr. Speaker, my message to students is that our government cares about your future. Postsecondary isn't easy. Many of you have made sacrifices to earn your credentials, and you deserve to enter an economy that values your skills. That's why we're making investments in the future of Alberta that will ensure students are rewarded for their hard work and can help build

a better tomorrow for the next generation. Alberta is and always will be Canada's land of opportunity.

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

### Grassy Mountain Coal Project

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend the Premier said that the Grassy Mountain mine exploration proposal should be allowed to play out, but it already has. The UCP are having a little trouble accepting this reality, so let me be clear. The Grassy Mountain coal mine project has been reviewed and rejected by both the AER and the federal government. Albertans do not want this mine or any new coal mines on the eastern slopes, and this opposition isn't just coming from the cities; rural Albertans are just as opposed. So will the minister once and for all promise Albertans that this mine will not go ahead?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, this is an application for an exploratory permit. The application itself doesn't deal with any fresh water from any pond or any river or any creek; it deals with a pond from the coal mine itself. What is important here is to recognize that the AER sees with this decision – they're an independent body that makes decisions in the best interest of Albertans based upon the science, not based upon what the member wants, which is political interference on a system that Albertans need to see played out. Albertans have the right to come before a tribunal and be heard, and that's what we're going to make sure happens.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Well, given that the minister himself advised the AER to let the exploration proposal go to a public hearing, I doubt the independence of the AER and given that Northback Holdings has dished out hundreds of thousands of dollars for school lunches to families in the Crowsnest Pass, capitalizing on the affordability crisis caused by this UCP government, and given that it is the job of the government, not major corporations, to address affordability and ensure that Albertans do not have to choose between paying rent and feeding their family, will the minister admit that this government is neglecting to do its job and instead leaving that up to Northback mines?

**Mr. Jean:** No, Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't admit that. In fact, I would say that we are the first government in a little while that actually is doing what's in the best interest of Albertans. You know, when they were in power, what did they do? An NDP minister reached out to as many billionaires as they could find around the world and said: come on; come to Alberta and dig. Not only did they say that, but they said: come and dig on category 2 lands, greenfield land. We're not going to let that happen. This is a brownfield site. This is an opportunity for Albertans to be heard in court and in the process itself, and we're going to make sure Albertans have that right, not like the NDP, who wants to see political interference every single step of the way. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans already had that right, and they voted against this mine so many times.

The Grassy Mountain coal mine will only exist for 20 to 25 years, and given that the Crowsnest Pass communities have real economic opportunity as a tourism development zone that could be a significant economic driver for generations while promoting environmental sustainability and celebrating local culture and given that Northback is putting these communities in an impossible

position, choosing between feeding their kids or protecting their beautiful landscapes and water for future generations, will the minister step up and do the right thing and stop this mine and allow the Crowsnest to develop a truly sustainable economy?

**Mr. Jean:** I have a question, Mr. Speaker. This NDP Party, the NDP when they were in government: why did they invite all of these billionaires from around the world to dig in our pristine landscape? I'll tell you why: because they want to play politics. On one side they want to say, "Dig, baby, dig," and on the other side they want to say, "We're protecting Albertans." We're not going to play games. We're going to stand up for Albertans right across this great province, give them their day before the AER, give them their day in court, if that's what they need, and to be heard, because that's what it's about. Good government doesn't come for free; it's expensive. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

### Personal Income Tax Rates (continued)

**Member Brar:** Mr. Speaker, during the election the Premier promised Albertans a tax cut, but when the time came to deliver, the Premier decided instead to delay. Time and time again this Premier has promised one thing when it's time for Albertans to vote and then taken back her promises when it's time to deliver. To the Premier: can you explain to Albertans why the bait and switch?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We're very committed on this side of the House to implementing the tax cut that we campaigned on. As the budget clearly lays out, we will legislate in 2025. We'll move to a 9 per cent, \$60,000 bracket in 2026 and a full 8 per cent in 2027. While we do that, we're also committed to following the fiscal rules and continuing to balance the budgets of Alberta. That's what Albertans expect, especially in the decent and good years, which is what we just had. We're going to do both at the same time.

**Member Brar:** Given that Albertans deserve a leader whose word they can count on and trust and given that during the election the Premier herself promised tax relief to Albertans, Albertans who are struggling in this affordability crisis, and given that it's been nine months since that proclamation and the only thing that's gone down is the people's trust in the UCP, will the Premier explain why she promised something to Albertans during the election that she was clearly never going to deliver?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, we ran on fiscal responsibility, and that's what we're showing Albertans. That's what Budget 2024 was about; it was about being a responsible plan. We are moving forward with the tax cut. We're going to legislate in '25. It will be fully implemented by 2027, meaning \$750 savings to every Albertan while running balanced budgets, while leaving the retained earnings in the heritage fund to save for our future. We're going to do all of those things at the same time because they're all important and because we can. That's what leadership is. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Member Brar:** Given that during the election the Premier told Albertans that relief was going to be coming immediately, given

that she released a platform that promised that Albertans would pay \$1.3 billion in lower taxes starting this year, and given that the Premier is now telling Albertans that tax relief is now somewhere over the rainbow, does the Premier think that she would still be the Premier if she had been up front with Albertans about her billion-dollar false promise?

2:20

**Mr. Horner:** I can't speak for what the Premier is thinking, but I would say definitely. So I guess I did, Mr. Speaker. Sorry. But I'd say that we're committed to those principles that we ran on. We're bringing forward the tax cut in a responsible way while, I would remind you, we indexed the basic personal exemption in 2023, \$980 million in savings for all Albertans, while we're moving forward with balanced budgets, doing what we can to save, leaving the retained earnings in the heritage trust fund, providing a vision for Albertans so that they can all enjoy the affordability measures that exist. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

### Road Construction in Cypress-Medicine Hat

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans, including myself, are concerned with the state of our important economic corridors and highway safety. In my charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat highway 41 helps us connect to the rest of Alberta, to our beautiful Cypress Hills, and to our American partners in the south. A single-lane highway has become increasingly less safe and has truly become dangerous to travel. Many families, including my own, have had serious near misses travelling highway 41. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: what is our government doing to develop the roads and bridge networks along this vital corridor?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I was honoured to be in the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat's constituency just last week, and we highlighted our \$8 billion, three-year capital plan in this year's budget. I know that that member has been a fierce advocate for important infrastructure projects in his riding, including highway 41. Highway 41 is obviously an important economic corridor to the United States, and we need to expand that economic corridor. That's why this budget before the House actually has planning and engineering funding in the budget to widen highway 41. I know I won't need to convince that member to vote for the budget, but I hope the NDP finds common sense to vote for this budget.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that our government shows commitment to developing roads and economic corridors, much to the dismay of the eco nut jobs in Ottawa, and further given that many new projects have been announced all around this great province to help connect families and businesses and communities together and further given that developing roads benefits all Albertans, can the minister share what our government is doing to address these road upgrades and key infrastructure areas in Cypress-Medicine Hat for my constituents?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister of transportation.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, there couldn't be a more stark contrast between the Liberals and the NDP government in Ottawa and this government. We are actually committed to twinning highway 3. We've actually divided it into eight sections. Construction is actually starting through Taber to Burdett, and the other seven sections are actually in the planning and engineering phase. Highway 41 and highway 41A are in the planning and engineering phase. In Cypress-Medicine Hat there are also dam and culvert conversions and improvements that are happening. But the Liberal-NDP radicals, like Minister Guilbeault, that are saying no more road funding by the federal government: that's something that is appalling and not what we're doing here in the province.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that there's still so much work to be done to connect Medicine Hat's growing aerospace and manufacturing industries to our Canadian and American partners and further given that highway 41 is the fastest way to our southern partners in my region, can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors explain when my constituents can expect to see these improvements on our local roads and potential upgrades to the Wild Horse border crossing?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that very important question. Hopefully, we'll get the votes in this House to actually pass our \$8 billion, three-year capital plan for roads and bridges in this year's budget. There are 64,000 lane kilometres that the province owns, 5,000 bridges, and the Wild Horse border crossing is a priority for this government. Our Premier actually wrote a joint letter of support with the Montana governor to our federal governments to expand this border crossing. It's very important for families in that area as well as goods crossing the U.S.-Alberta border to make sure that we have a border crossing that works for the needs of both our states and provinces.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert has a question.

### Alberta Francophonie Month

**Ms Renaud:** Merci, M. le Président. Après avoir laissé les infrastructures effondrer pendant de nombreuses années, l'UCP a investi deux millions de dollars dans le Campus Saint-Jean. Ça va aider un petit peu. Cela va aider à améliorer l'infrastructure mais ne répond pas aux besoins du financement équivalent pour répondre à la démographie croissante de la francophonie en Alberta. Que fait le gouvernement pour financer plusieurs possibilités d'étude postsecondaire?

**Ms Fir:** Thank you to the member for that question. First off, Happy Alberta Francophonie Month. Joyeux Mois de la Francophonie de l'Alberta. I'm aware the ACFA has submitted a funding request to my office regarding operational support to implement Alberta's French policy. We appreciate their support to get a fair deal from Ottawa for our federal funding under the French language services agreement. Our government is incredibly supportive of our francophone community through both the Francophone Secretariat and by our government's cross-ministry implementation of Alberta's French policy. Budget 2024, if passed, more than doubles funding for the Francophone Secretariat.

**Ms Renaud:** La question était sur le Campus Saint-Jean.

Le recensement 2021 de Statistics Canada nous a été révélé que près de 80,000 Albertains et Albertaines ont le français comme première langue officielle parlée. Avec cette compréhension, la communauté francophone demande au gouvernement pourquoi il ne modifie pas le protocole pour que le drapeau francophone reste pour tout le Mois de la Francophonie puisqu'il est l'emblème officiel? Why not leave the flag up for the whole month of Francophonie Month?

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

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently hosted a kick-off for Alberta Francophonie Month, le Mois de la Francophonie Albertaine, in Calgary with representatives from the ACFA and other francophone community leaders as well as a celebration of Franco Winterfest, and we're planning to host an Edmonton celebration of International Francophonie Day. The member opposite may not realize that with the passing of former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, flags are at half-mast. We look forward, following the official funeral, to then raising the Francophonie flag.

**Ms Renaud:** I hope that will be for the remainder of the month.

Les Jeux Francophones de l'Alberta sont présentés ça fait 32 ans. L'évènement va célébrer la trentième édition en 2024 à Lac La Biche. Il y a environ 600 jeunes inscrits dans les écoles francophones et les programmes d'immersion française de la septième à la douzième année. Ainsi, les Jeux Francophones sont un évènement provincial multisport équivalent aux Alberta Winter Games and the Alberta Summer Games. Why are they not funded properly?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government recognizes Alberta francophones' important contribution. Let's just talk about some of the many improvements we've made to French language services, including by completing the evaluation, review, and update of Alberta's French policy; establishing a French services branch at Alberta Education; providing a full range of career employment information services to support French-speaking Albertans; providing real-time interpretation at court counters and in courtrooms as well as the Alberta Health Services facilities through the language line; and offering an increased number of public engagement sessions with simultaneous translation. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South is next.

### Supervised Drug Consumption Site in Red Deer

**Mr. Stephan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February 16 was a very good day for Red Deer. Red Deer city council voted to get the NDP drug site out of Red Deer. The lived experience of the NDP drug site is division and destruction. They are very bad. NDP drug sites do not free those drowning in the filthy waters of addiction. To the minister: why is recovery better than NDP drug sites? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I think it's important to note that I believe in the dignity of every single Albertan, and I respect that we need to care for them no matter what

state they're in. The difficult and deadly disease of addiction has racked so many different communities and families. That's why we've invested to expand 10,000 new treatment spaces since we got into office, and we removed . . . [interjections] If the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall would listen to the answer, he'd be happy to know we removed an over \$1,000 fee that the NDP left in for access to treatment. We're continuing to make the path smooth . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Stephan:** Given that the NDP drug site increased crime in Red Deer, attracted drug dealers, and destroyed businesses and given that it is a very bad lie to enable individuals to suffer in captivity with addiction and given that it is right to love and support our neighbours to become free from addiction, to the minister: what actions has our government taken in Red Deer to focus on recovery?

2:30

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very true. As much as I appreciate the intention of those who went before us with what was harm reduction, the policy has effectively turned itself into harm production. If you look at places like B.C. and others, it has gotten out of control, and that's why in Red Deer and across the province of Alberta we've taken a different approach. We believe in recovery. We believe that the 75-bed treatment facility in Red Deer and the therapeutic living unit within the correction facility in Red Deer are part of the tool kit that we need in the province to focus on recovery and instead of focusing on facilitation that . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Stephan:** Given that the NDP were very bad when they forced the drug site in Red Deer, ignoring our city council, our families, and businesses, and given that we are going to listen to Red Deer city council, families, and businesses and given that we want recovery and not the NDP drug site in Red Deer, to the minister: what are the next steps to transition the NDP drug site out of Red Deer?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I met, happily, with the mayor and the deputy mayor this morning from Red Deer. We're working on a path forward. We agree that we want to make sure we're focusing on helping those who are most vulnerable in their community. We know the path forward is going to require a cross-section of many tools in our tool kit, that includes a number of different tools, like the virtual opioid dependency program and opioid agonist therapy and a number of many other aspects, with wraparound services to move forward. So I'm very happy to work with the community and with health providers to make sure that we end up with the best outcome for Red Deer. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

### Drug Poisoning Death Prevention

**Member Eremenko:** Well, this is a coincidence: back-to-back questions in regard to mental health and addictions.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is staggering under the current rates of death from a toxic drug supply. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada from January to June of last year Alberta's death

rate was 41.4 deaths per 100,000. That is twice the national average, and Red Deer's is higher. What's more, Alberta's death rate has grown by 24 per cent since last year. Can the minister explain what he is doing to address these horrific death rates in our province? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. It's an incredibly serious topic to understand that what B.C. and the rest of the country has been doing isn't working. Their numbers are even higher than ours, and if you agree that Red Deer has high rates of overdoses and, tragically, deaths, the solution is not to ignore all the evidence and double down on the failed policy, the policy that puts more Albertans in harm's way . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. the minister.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

. . . a policy that the NDP has backed using this term "toxic drug supply," implying that a safe drug supply would be the solution. Handing out drugs to those in drug addiction does not solve the crisis of addiction. Recovery will, Mr. Speaker. We're proud of that on this side of the House. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Member Eremenko:** Mr. Speaker, these are not just statistics. They are people who loved and were loved, and the vast majority of their deaths were entirely preventable because they are not overdoses; they are toxic drug poisonings.

Given that prior data show that First Nations people in Alberta have disproportionately higher opioid use rates and given that this government cancelled specific data collection concerning opioid use by First Nations people and refuses to implement a system of race-based health data, what is the minister doing to provide women, 2SLGBTQ communities, racialized and rural communities culturally appropriate access . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, we are funding and paying on-reserve for four recovery communities within First Nations; NDP, zero. They left in place a \$1,200 fee for women, for visual minorities, for those who are vulnerable, and they had to find that whilst in addiction in order to get the saving grace of recovery. Let me translate what the toxic drug supply crisis means. It means they believe safe supply, drugs funded by government, should be pumped into our communities. This government will not stand for it. We believe in the dignity of Albertans. We believe they deserve an opportunity at recovery. We believe . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Member Eremenko:** From January to November 2023 1,706 Albertans died due to a toxic and unpredictable illegal drug supply, and there is still one month to go in the calendar year. Given that this government has clearly picked a lane and invested heavily and almost exclusively in residential treatment facilities and given that for far too many recovery communities are inaccessible, with long wait times, and they increase vulnerability posttreatment, will the minister recognize that recovery is different for everyone and that focusing exclusively on in-patient residential treatment programs is costing lives? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, we have chosen a lane, and it's not the B.C. model of downtown Vancouver. We have chosen a lane, and that is partnering with partners for, yes, residential treatment but then also virtual opioid dependency programs, treating more Albertans than we've seen in any part in the past. Members opposite are willing to scream and yell, but we will not bend to the bullying. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mr. Williams:** We will not bend to the bullying of members opposite because too many lives are in the balance. Mr. Speaker, we will not facilitate addiction. We believe in the dignity of every single Albertan, and that's why recovery is the only alternative. We understand that addiction ends in one of two ways, and we believe recovery is the best path out. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

### LGBTQ2S-plus Student Supports

**Member Tejada:** It has been reported that a number of teachers in the Red Deer Catholic regional school system have been directed to remove pride materials, only refer to students by their legal names, and report any instance where a student might disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to administrators. Teachers are being told that a presentation is coming, but they're forbidden from sharing pictures of this presentation. If true, these directives being imposed behind closed doors are very concerning. Can the minister confirm if he is aware of these directives, and does he support them?

**Member Irwin:** Wow. Marlaine should answer.

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. My team had an opportunity to contact the board earlier today. It's our understanding that these are not new directives. No new directives have been issued. There's been no request to remove any pride material or anything of the nature. And, of course, we continue to work with all school divisions to ensure that all students have a safe, caring, and welcome environment at schools.

**Member Tejada:** Given that this directive would include such things as banning safe space stickers, which teachers use to show their students that their space is safe and welcoming, and given that directing these stickers to be removed sends a very serious and backwards message to students at a time when we should be striving to create more safe and welcoming places for students, does the minister agree that this is an overreach, and will he support our call to reverse this directive, which could negatively impact students that are vulnerable and all students?

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

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're still gathering more information, but from what we understand at the current moment in time, no new directives have been issued.

**Ms Renaud:** No new directives?

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Member Tejada:** Given that in 2014 the Premier made a speech describing her meeting with members of a gay-straight alliance where children were worried about the consequences of being outed before they were ready and said that, quote, we need to respect that in the case of these mature youth this really is a case of life and death for some of them, and given that this directive would force teachers to out students to the administration, does the minister agree with this policy being put forward, or does he agree with the words of the Premier, that we should respect the rights of these kids to be who they are, and will he demand that this directive be withdrawn immediately?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Rinse, repeat, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, as per conversations that we've had with the Red Deer school division, no new directives have been issued. No one has been directed to remove pride material from any of the schools or anything of that nature. We're still gathering information from the school board to ensure that all policies that school divisions make of course are in compliance with provincial legislation. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

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

### Support for Small Business

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's small businesses provide jobs, goods, and services for our province. Over the last four years we have seen both the resilience and the closure of many small businesses. Albertans were all asked to do their part. Thousands of small businesses did their part, but many were not able to withstand the costs that were forced on them when the world shut down. Today small-business owners carry massive amounts of pandemic-related debt. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: how is our province showing that we value and support our small-business owners?

2:40

**Mr. Jones:** This government is committed to supporting our entrepreneurial and innovative small businesses as they form the heart of the economic engine of Canada. Our government provides a range of supports for small businesses, including access to advice and coaching, training, information and financing, and related to market expansion. Our government will continue to work with small businesses to ensure that the province's business climate supports their growth now and into the future. The parliamentary secretary for small business will be consulting with small-business owners across Alberta to hear how we can better support them and remove barriers to their success.

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

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is known for our entrepreneurial spirit and for being the heartland of economic diversity. Stats Canada estimated in 2022 that nearly 98 per cent of businesses in Alberta are small business. Given that in 2022 over 10 million Canadians were employed by small business according to Stats Canada and given that our government supports all businesses, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: what current initiatives does our government have in place to support small businesses across the province?

**Mr. Jones:** We have many resources available to small businesses, including our Biz Connect services, which help entrepreneurs access supports and local resources; the Canada-Alberta jobs grant; our Business Link program; and Futurpreneur. When small

businesses needed our government, we were there with fuel tax relief, electricity rebates, and \$670 million in small and medium enterprise relaunch grants. We're always going to be there for small businesses because they drive our economy.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his response. Small-business owners' mental health has decreased significantly compared to the last year. According to a recent survey nearly half of all small-business owners have expressed they have faced numerous mental challenges in the past year. Given that our government is acting on a campaign promise committed to ensure that Albertans have access to mental health care when and where they need it, could the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction share some supports that are available for struggling small-business owners?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It is incredibly prescient that he add this as his question when it comes to small business. We know how very important mental health is for all Albertans, especially those who take the burden of starting a small business and running and working in small business. Our government used to not have a Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction before we got in in 2019. We now have a full ministry, and I spend 1 and a half billion dollars in supporting Albertans with mental health and addiction challenges. So if you're looking for support, you should talk and reach out; 211 is available for anybody as a resource all the time for access. Counselling Alberta: we've doubled the funding for same-day access to counselling supports if you struggle.

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

### Members' Statements

(continued)

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

### Kassandra Gartner

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today under the shadow of a profound loss. On Saturday, February 24, a pillar of my community and a close friend of mine was tragically killed in a hit and run in southeast Edmonton. Kassandra Gartner served as an award-winning executive director of the Fort Saskatchewan Nourishment Centre. In this role she was not only my friend but also an ally. In 2021 she and I worked together to secure nearly \$700,000 for the Fort Saskatchewan Food Bank from the community facility enhancement fund. This is just one example of the leadership that kept so many in my community from facing the reality of hunger. None of this would have been possible without her tireless effort. Kassandra was the kind of woman to help someone in need no matter what day or what the hour was.

The story I think of which best exemplifies her took place this past December. In the days between Christmas and New Year's, when many Albertans spend time relaxing with family, Kassandra once again showed her selfless attitude. I picked up a call on one of those days from a woman in crisis who had nothing to feed her children. I knew immediately who to go to for help. I called my

friend Cassandra. The very same day Cassandra not only packed a hamper of food for this woman but delivered it personally to her that night.

All over Alberta similar stories are unfolding every day. The volunteers that keep the doors of food banks open not only keep people fed but also bring our communities closer together. This should be a moment to appreciate ever more deeply the beacons of selflessness like Cassandra. We will never know those beacons once they are extinguished.

I'd like to thank all listening to this statement today to remember Cassandra Gartner for the wife, mother, sister, daughter, and friend she was. Friends like Cassandra are rare gems in our lives, and she will leave behind boots that are impossible to fill, Mr. Speaker.

### Transgender Youth Policy

**Member Hoyle:** Mr. Speaker, this UCP government is very good at fighting: fighting with doctors, fighting with nurses, fighting with teachers, fighting with energy experts, and now they're fighting with children and parents. They're choosing to pick a fight with parents who have every right to provide their children with appropriate and timely gender-affirming care. In case my colleagues across the aisle have forgotten, gender-affirming care is a fundamental human right. It is critical for the mental and physical well-being of transgender and gender-diverse youth. We know that denying access to appropriate health care not only contradicts established medical consensus but leaves gender-diverse youth at elevated risks for adverse health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide.

I've heard from parents and teachers in Edmonton-South who are alarmed by such a drastic move. They, like so many others, are just trying to do the best they can to support their children and respect their autonomy. This draconian proposal infringes on the autonomy of families. It interferes with parents who just want their kids to be safe, healthy, and happy. They should have the right to make collaborative decisions with their child in consultation with their doctor regarding health care.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, these types of hateful policies are based on misinformation, and they have no place in Alberta.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The hon. Official Opposition House Leader, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I table five copies of an *Edmonton Journal* article titled Shelving South Edmonton Hospital Means More Hallway Medicine, which I referenced in my question today.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise and introduce five copies of a letter written by the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights, Canada's leading registered charity working to advance the right to adequate housing. They've written a letter in support of my Bill 205, and I urge all members in this Chamber to read it.

Thank you very much.

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

**Member Ceci:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to table five copies of two letters received recently. One is from Rachel Hamilton on February 3. She wrote this letter in response to the Premier's office letter, that she looks at and says there are all sorts

of problems with the Premier's response, and she goes through all the arguments. She provided me with five copies of that letter, where she disagrees with the policies with regard to anti-trans views that the Premier's office has communicated.

2:50

The second one, Mr. Speaker, is to me from a constituent named Janice, who is a senior, who is experiencing a 70 per cent rental increase to her single-room apartment, and she is saying that she will soon be homeless if there are not rent controls or some other method of . . .

**The Speaker:** Are there other tablings? Seeing none.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act Budget 2024 ministry business plans, Budget 2024 government of Alberta 2024-27 strategic plan.

**The Speaker:** At 2:02 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

### Point of Order Parliamentary Language

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that these days I keep the points of order in my jacket pocket because I need them close by. We're calling so many points of order on the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. In this case, at the time noted, the Premier was responding to a question from the Leader of the Opposition, at which point the Leader of the Opposition said, "You're lying about the teachers." I rise on 23 (h), (i), and (j), makes allegations against a member, imputes false or unavowed motives against a member, and uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

This is most certainly not that member's first day in the Chamber. In fact, each day that we sit here, we draw closer to that member's last day in the Chamber, and it is not uncommon for that member to use the term "lying." It is certainly against protocol in this Chamber, and I would encourage that member to apologize and, in the few days she has remaining, refrain from using the language going forward.

**The Speaker:** The Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find that some of the language that the Government House Leader is using is inflammatory and unnecessary during a point of order and really lacking in class today. That being said, the language around "lying" was unparliamentary, and on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I will apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

### Statement by the Speaker Electronic Devices in the Chamber

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I would like to bring to your attention the memo from the hon. Speaker dated February 21, 2024. If you've been a member of the Assembly for any period of time, you've received numerous memos, and I'm sure that every time it



comes – you drop it on the ground because of your care and consideration for it – you read it with bated breath. I would like to draw attention to page 8 of the memo, specifically section 20, about the use of electronic devices in the Chamber.

Except as listed below, the use of a Member's computer [or] tablet (e.g., laptop, Surface, iPad) or a Member's smart phone (data only) is permitted in the Chamber any time during [the] morning, afternoon or evening sittings except: during Oral Question Period . . .

The memo does go on to provide a small clarification, that says:

[a member] may use their mobile devices during Oral Question Period but [may] only use them as reading devices . . .

My sense is that unless you're providing a question or a member's statement during the daily Routine, there is no need for the use of an electronic device in the Chamber as per the long-standing tradition of the Assembly.

I would also like to provide some further caution to members who may like to decorate their individual laptops or otherwise, as it's reasonable for the Speaker to assume that that would be the use of a prop, which would be wildly unparliamentary. I encourage members who may have stickers on their laptops – I can see none of the content other than I see many members in the Assembly with stickers on those laptops – to govern themselves accordingly in the future.

Ordres du jour.

## Orders of the Day

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

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

[Debate adjourned December 4: Mr. Sinclair speaking]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there is a total of 71 minutes of debate left for second reading of Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake was on his feet when debate concluded, and he has seven minutes remaining should he choose to use it. The hon. the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand before the House today again to voice my unwavering support for Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. This crucial legislation, spearheaded by the wonderful Member for Leduc-Beaumont, aims to shield our provincial land from the overreach of Emperor Trudeau's imperial government, allowing Albertans to have a say as to what goes on in our own backyard. Currently the federal government is able to bypass our provincial jurisdiction and collaborate directly with municipalities to establish national urban parks. This lack of provincial involvement not only undermines the sovereignty of our province but also neglects the voice of Albertans in decisions that significantly impact our communities.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 204 serves as a crucial safeguard against federal overreach by granting our province a rightful say in the establishment of national parks within Alberta's borders by requiring provincial consent for such initiatives. This legislation restores the balance of power and ensures that decisions align with the interests and aspirations of all Albertans. In essence, this bill empowers us to

actively participate in shaping the future of our province without interference from the federal government.

As an Indigenous person myself I am acutely aware of the importance of preserving our national heritage and respecting the wishes of our Indigenous peoples. Historically, Indigenous communities have faced marginalization and dispossession of their ancestral lands due to government action, which is why it is imperative that Alberta's Indigenous communities have the right to participate in decisions affecting their own lands.

Madam Speaker, despite the claims of members opposite our government is proud to be a collaborative partner with Indigenous groups, meeting with leaders in the community to hear their voices and recognize their concerns and enabling real reconciliation by helping historic land deals through the AIOC, that this government just increased to \$3 billion. Alberta is leading the way and is light years ahead of the rest of the country.

Quite frankly, many Indigenous peoples and many other Albertans are tired of the Trudeau government and this – excuse me. In fact, I grow tired of hearing Trudeau talk about supporting Indigenous communities with no real action. Albertans are tired of this imperial disaster of a government, Emperor Trudeau and their CEO, Jagmeet Vader. I know, Madam Speaker, there's a job opening for a new regional manager from the other side, but Albertans know they still report to their CEO, Jagmeet Vader, and the rest of the champagne socialists on the Death Star. In fact, I grow tired hearing Trudeau talk about supporting Indigenous communities with no real action. I'd like to remind the members opposite that if the federal government actually cared about Indigenous people, there would be clean, drinkable water on all reserve lands across the country, their environment minister wouldn't be putting caps in place to limit the economic prosperity that Indigenous people are finally a part of with the wonderful deals that our AIOC is making.

As opposed to this performative but ultimately unsubstantial so-called support from Trudeau, our government is focused on real representation and real action for Indigenous peoples and all Albertans across our province as we continue to walk the walk with our Indigenous partners. Our government's strong commitment to supporting Indigenous communities is exemplified throughout Bill 204. Just recently, with the guidance of the Enoch Cree people, our government helped open Big Island provincial park, demonstrating our promise to honour Indigenous heritage with Indigenous communities and working hand in hand so our province can observe traditional Indigenous territories and ensure that decisions regarding land management reflect Indigenous values and priorities.

The continued success of this government's collaboration with Indigenous peoples highlights the effectiveness of local engagement and provincial leadership, setting a precedent for the importance of provincial involvement in park creation, as proposed in Bill 204. By empowering our Indigenous communities, prioritizing provincial autonomy, and investing in provincial parks, our government has demonstrated our dedication to serving the interests of Albertans and safeguarding our province's natural beauty.

3:00

Bill 204 also serves as a legislative reinforcement of these principles, ensuring that Alberta remains in control of the decisions that directly impact our lands and communities. The NDP have also stated that this bill is unnecessary, that it will create an extra layer of bureaucracy where one is not needed. Of course, the members opposite don't see the problem of giving up the land to Trudeau's federal government. Despite the NDP's assertions, Bill 204 does not aim to increase bureaucracy or create red tape; it aims to require

provincial involvement in the national park process, the bare minimum we could ask for when the federal government wants to control part of our land.

We are the entrusted stewards of Alberta's lands and resources, and only we are positioned to assess the implications of park creations on local communities, economies, and ecosystems. In my view, Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, adequately addresses the problems of federal overreach by granting necessary provincial oversight in national park creation.

This bill also aligns perfectly with this government's mandate to support Indigenous communities and include them as collaborative partners, like we have in so many other ways, including them in the recovery process, including them in helping build roads, which I am so proud that our provincial government has just invested \$8 billion in while the environmental minister from the federal government says that he's not building roads anymore. We're going to continue to work with Indigenous people on health care and prioritize provincial autonomy, exemplified by initiatives like Big Island provincial park and other park investment projects.

Despite the opposition's claims, Madam Speaker, provincial involvement ensures accountability and local expertise in the process of founding national parks. Creating a national park is a huge responsibility, and Alberta deserves a spot at the table in those discussions. Let us support Bill 204 to uphold Alberta's sovereignty and protect our national heritage for generations to come.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023, which is before us. I will oppose what's before us, as this side will, because I don't believe this overreach by the provincial government is necessary with regard to the way that national urban parks are formed. Someday there might be a poli-sci class that looks at the previous speaker's words in this House and parses those for the inaccuracies that obviously are being communicated by that member with regard to what's before us.

The latest thing that I heard that was inaccurate was, you know, that the federal government will own these lands. That's not on the boards. That's not what's going to happen. The lands will still be in the ownership of the city of Edmonton. It's not changing. What could change if the provincial government got out of the way of the city of Edmonton is a great deal of money coming to the city of Edmonton for the utilization, the opening up of those lands, the providing of programs, which would be a great thing for a beautiful 160 kilometres of maintained pathways and 20 major parks that are in that area.

You know, I utilize the parklands or the river valley. I guess that's more accurate: the river valley. I run down into it and along it and out of it on a daily basis when I'm up here in Edmonton, and I see many, many other users doing the same thing and all sorts of other ways of recreating or just enjoying the river valley when I'm here. I've been here in summer, I've been here in winter, and been here all through the seasons. Edmontonians really love and enjoy their river valley.

It's historic. Everybody who's been through it or read history books knows that not only has it been a conveyance of people over the millennia in terms of the beautiful river, but it's also been a place where natural resources have been mined. I'm speaking specifically of coal mining, that many places along the river you

can see there are old mines or former places where that resource was dug and provided the first home heating after wood was used. It provided the first heating that allowed the city really to get bigger and grow and become a beautiful place it is today.

The bill that's before us, Bill 204: you really have to wonder what problem the government is trying to fix. I think we heard from the previous speaker a little bit of that. When reviewing the *Hansard*, we can see that the minister got up and spoke to it as well as other members of the government party. What the minister talked about was ensuring that the federal government stayed out of the city. The minister talked about: "Bill 204 will safeguard our province and our citizens from federal overreach" – it's like the previous speaker was reading *Hansard* as well – "by protecting and defending Albertans' interests in national urban parks program discussions." That kind of language, obviously, is meant to speak volumes about what the provincial government believes about the federal government even though the federal government wouldn't own these lands, has worked with the city of Edmonton for about four years on this project, has involved the provincial government.

The minister went on to say, when he had the opportunity: we're only there to observe; we're not there to get involved; we're kind of watching everything. But that doesn't have to be what the provincial government has as a role. They can be stakeholders, and they could have been at the table as more than observers. They could have made sure that the interests of the provincial government and all the citizens of Alberta were being understood and checked off and verified.

The misinformation coming from the other side also went to the point of saying that the provincial government would be cut out of any discussions, that the federal government doesn't have to involve the provincial government. But my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis made significant pains to talk about the National Parks Act, which speaks to the involvement of a "government of the province in which the lands to be included in the reserve are situated [and] has agreed to their use for that purpose." So, really, I guess the straw horse that's being put forward by the provincial government members on the other side is, you know: we'll be cut out of this; we want to be involved, but they won't let us. Well, that's not how the National Parks Act works, nor will it work in the way that the provincial government seems to think it will. That's not the case.

What is the case is that national urban parks and being involved with them will provide finances that are there from the federal government in terms of putting together, I think, seven national urban parks throughout the country. And why wouldn't Edmonton's river valley want to be in the centre of all of that in receiving funds?

Another member of the other side talked about how if we pass Bill 204, we'll force the federal government to come to the table and to give us our due not only in parks but in all sorts of other federal-provincial relationships. I don't know about that member who talked about forcing or kind of making sure that the federal government comes to the table and provides every per capita dollar that they're required, but I do know that you can probably get further with a lot of – what's the saying? You can get further with honey than you can with vinegar. So participating in these discussions and making sure that the citizens of Alberta are represented is probably a better way to go forward with this discussion than saying: no; municipalities all across this province have to follow our proposed national urban park plan amendment, which is here, that changes the Municipal Government Act with these four points under 70.1(1), (2), (3), and (4).

3:10

You know, the city of Edmonton probably is about – is it 900,000 people? Somewhere around there: 875,000, 900,000. In the greater region there's probably about 1.25 million people. That population is bigger than probably five or six provinces and territories in this country of Canada, so to suggest that Edmonton can only co-operate with the feds if the province lays out the kind of structures for that to happen really doesn't recognize the situation, that this city has great governance capabilities. It has great governance. It's got a population that supports it in terms of agreeing with the direction of the council and the mayor. They are bigger than six or seven provinces and territories and have great capacity to plan their future and have planned their future to this extent. So to suggest that they really don't know how to do this is not correct. They certainly do know how to do the planning for an important thing such as the national urban park in the Edmonton valley.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to rise once again in this Chamber and speak in support of a bill that protects the interests of our province and all Albertans. Bill 204 is another great piece of common-sense legislation that puts Albertans first, and I could not be happier to speak in favour of it.

Time and time again the federal government has proven that they have a difficult time staying in their lane, and I'm not surprised that the members opposite are opposed to this bill. They would hate to go against the NDP caucus's leader in Ottawa. So let's be honest about what this is. Parks Canada is a federal agency, and it has begun a new program, the national urban parks initiative, to try and establish a network of urban green spaces in Canada's largest cities as national parks, and one of their potential locations listed is Edmonton.

Current circumstances allow the federal government to bypass the province and work directly with municipalities on national urban parks, but if passed, Bill 204 will take the necessary steps to address this and protect Albertans' voices in decisions regarding their urban green spaces. Bill 204 would amend the Municipal Government Act under division 8, limits on municipal powers, section 70, disposal of land. This will ensure that Alberta's provincial government remains an active partner among a variety of stakeholders in the conversation about Alberta's urban green space.

Madam Speaker, Trudeau and his continued mission to further encroach into the lives of Albertans is ignoring the voices of us in this matter. That is why Bill 204 is a necessary piece of legislation to make sure Albertans will be heard loud and clear. This is not just a hypothetical concern, either. Last August the city of Edmonton council voted 10 to 3 in favour of moving forward with a plan to potentially establish a national urban park in Edmonton's river valley. This is not what Albertans want. From my experience leading a municipality as a former mayor, I can attest that this is not the approach Albertans want. This process currently ignores the voices of Albertans and diminishes the province's ability to manage its own lands and resources effectively. What happens in our beautiful river valley warrants careful consideration and consultation with all stakeholders, including provincial authorities, to ensure that the best interests of all Albertans are upheld.

Madam Speaker, this past May Albertans voiced their opinions when they re-elected a United Conservative Party government with a clear mandate to stand up for Albertans and protect families and communities in this province from the relentless and unwanted

intrusions from Justin Trudeau and his Liberal-NDP alliance in Ottawa. This is exactly what Bill 204 aims to do. The goal of this bill is to simply minimize the influence and overreach of the federal government into provincial matters, especially regarding our beautiful and cherished green space and river valley. The city of Edmonton is currently in discussion with Trudeau and his out-of-touch Liberals about that plan. If successful, it could place large parts of Edmonton's river valley, the very heartland of Alberta's capital city, under the jurisdiction of Parks Canada and Trudeau. As if it was not already bad enough that Trudeau and his cronies want to increase taxes on Alberta's food, fuel, and basically everything else with the introduction of carbon tax and demonize our province with legislation like Bill C-69, also known as the no-more-pipelines act. Now Trudeau wants to take over Edmonton's river valley, too.

The current lack of legislation makes it possible for Ottawa to engage in these conversations while completely ignoring our provincial government, which is the loophole that needs to be closed. Mayors and councils across Alberta are aware of the importance of maintaining the authority and jurisdiction of our provincial governments. To bypass the provincial government in decisions regarding urban green spaces is out of line and undermines the principles of federalism that our country is built upon. The federal government needs to stay in their lane and respect the authority and jurisdiction of our provincial government. Despite what the members opposite's side of this House may say, Bill 204 does not bar the federal government from engaging on or developing a national urban park, nor does it seek to give the provincial government unilateral control over the best conservation plans, municipal green places in the province. But, simply put, Bill 204 ensures that these kinds of decisions can no longer be made without formal provincial involvement.

Some members opposite may say that this bill is unnecessary, but that's simply not the case. In fact, a recent visit to the city of Edmonton's website illustrates just how real this is. On the list of partners involved in the conversations around the creation of a national urban park in Edmonton's river valley, the government of Alberta is nowhere to be found. Quite alarming, Alberta's government was listed as "interested observer." This is unacceptable and represents how serious the current state of legislation is. The federal government needs to stay in their lane and respect the authority and jurisdiction of our provincial government.

In conclusion, I would again encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill and protect Alberta's rights to autonomy over its own urban areas. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

**Member Batten:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in opposition to Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. When I first read the proposed bill, the first thing that struck me was a question, and that question was: is there not enough work for the provincial government to do already? Education, health care, housing, cost of utilities, to name a few: these are vital issues and responsibilities of the provincial government to Albertans.

I was at a community event in Calgary-Acadia this last weekend, a beautiful event where community members gathered, engaged, and tried to find solutions to some of the common problems they're facing. Now, let me tell you, we discussed housing, domestic violence, resources for families, resources for immigrants and new Canadians. We discussed mental health, that component of trying to maintain connections in a community in a time of great struggle. We discussed Canadian and Albertan laws, how to interact with law

enforcement, the judicial system, and the rights of their children here in Alberta. We also discussed the beauty of this country and our province. We discussed the need to care, nurture, and preserve this natural beauty. At no point did anyone inquire about giving more power to the provincial government. Not one.

So I took a look at the history of this urban park so that, you know, we're all on the same page, and let me just remind everyone of the time frame and the work that has already been done. In 2020 Parks Canada announced the intention of creating national urban parks in Canada. The whole idea was to support conservation, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation. These parks are meant to provide accessible educational opportunities for folks to immerse themselves in nature and to advance reconciliation in collaboration with Indigenous partners.

3:20

Now, as we move on – 2021 – the collaboration between regional municipalities, the city of Edmonton, Treaty Six, and other parties showed significant support and, at around the same time, also received a generous \$130 million from the federal government to move forward. In 2022 the agreement between the city of Edmonton and Parks Canada occurred. There was a draft policy made for review. The city of Edmonton created a stakeholder advisory group and a partners governance table and undertook some public engagement.

That brings us to 2023. The prefeasibility phase was completed and presented to Edmonton city council, who then voted to move it forward pending approval from Parks Canada, and these timelines were presented to the city of Calgary. Now, in November of last year, so 2023, this bill received its first reading, where its purpose was to shift decision-making to the provincial government even though these agreements are between Parks Canada, federal, and the city of Edmonton and other partners, like municipal.

Now, I don't know about you, but this timeline reminds me of a childhood story involving a hen, some bread, and other farmland animals. In short, there's a hen who finds some wheat and wants to make some bread. This hen asks all the other farm animals if they would like to help plant and harvest, you know, and then eventually make the bread, but no one was interested. Then, once the hen herself had done it, made this gorgeous bread from the wheat that she had found, she once again asked if anyone would like to help her eat it. This time all the farm animals were excited to participate. Now, this story has many different versions as an ending. The ending I'm most familiar with is the one where the hen, after being asked to share the bread, says: no, absolutely not. The farm animals had numerous opportunities to do the work, but they chose not to until the bread was ready. So what's that connection to this bill? Well, given the years of work that have already been put in, the collaborations already made, and the funding already promised from the federal government, I feel like it's pretty obvious. Now, I would never refer to this government as farm animals, but in the context of this story: coming to the table to reap the benefits and not do the work.

In closing, this bill is yet another provincial government overreach and a need to seize control where they are not wanted. This bill isn't for Albertans, and it isn't about Alberta. I encourage all members to vote no to Bill 204.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am absolutely thrilled to rise on Bill 204, which was brought in – oh, I was looking for him – by our Member for Leduc-Beaumont. He's one of our new

MLAs fresh off the election. Absolutely. Folks in his area gave him the accreditation that he deserves, and he happened to draw a bill. First out of the gate, first session, first everything else. Now, that's a pretty rare thing to do as members opposite, as new private members. If you get a chance for a private member's bill, make sure you relish it and put something relevant forward that hopefully everyone in the House can pass. That's what I'm looking for today. I'm looking for support from the members opposite for this wonderful bill that we have.

**Member Irwin:** If you'll support mine.

**Mr. Getson:** Well, you know, we might be able to make a deal. We might be able to make a deal. It's not too late in the day.

So here's what we're looking forward to, Madam Speaker. We're looking to make sure that the federal government doesn't overreach into provincial jurisdiction under the guise of protecting the environment. Now, not that the Liberal-NDP alliance hasn't done that before; this isn't their first foray into this area. They continue to do it.

Now, I heard the members opposite talking about relevance and how there was no one that ever reached out to them. Well, I can tell you full well, Madam Speaker, that my constituency, better known as God's country, literally has Edmonton on the doorstep. St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Morinville, to name a couple of the great ones, and Edmonton constituents – you know what happens when they pick up the phone and they can't get a response from their Edmonton councillor or from their NDP MLA because they seem to get a little tone deaf for anybody else that has it? They pick up the phone and they reach out to me, and a number of those folks are sitting up in the audience here today. Those folks do have a voice, and those folks that have a different opinion than some of their MLAs – because unfortunately the toughest part that private members are going to find out when you're elected: you represent the folks that are from your party. You represent the folks that voted for you. But the most difficult part they might have to pick up: you've got to represent the ones that don't vote for you or didn't vote at all. You have to put on that hat and have to put on that lens.

Now, functionality – like, drop the ideology for a sec. Functionality of how the country was supposed to work: it's more like a sibling relationship or a marital type relationship between the provinces and the country itself as the state. There are well-known jurisdictions and there's a little bit of grey area, and every time there's a grey area, if somebody doesn't raise their hand, it's like a fumble on the field; somebody's got to scramble for it.

But what is really neat is that when it comes to municipalities, it's more like a – and I'm going to use a scheduling terminology, so no one gets upset. It's more like a parent-child relationship. The Municipal Government Act literally is authority that's been given by us in this House as the province. We're not looking for new powers. It's already in our wheelhouse as per the Constitution, as per the arrangement of how Canada is supposed to function. We've already allowed that. We've given it on the Municipal Government Act for those specific areas. So it's more of a relationship along there. You're getting it down to the folks in those areas as municipal partners who are more boots on the ground that can deal with those items and those elements.

Now, what's happening here: the federal government through their little bad neighbour policies of overreach and everything else they've done over a number of years keep poking their finger across the fenceline. They're trying to manipulate that, and they're trying to do an end around. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont was obviously receiving those same phone calls that I was from very concerned – and rightly so – constituents that were seeing this

happen. Again, as MLAs we don't know what we don't know. I don't attend every Edmonton council meeting. I don't go to the local things. I don't necessarily engage with all the councillors in those details, nor do I on every single detail when it comes to some of the bylaws. But those constituents – one taxpayer, Madam Speaker, and one constituent, regardless of which level of government: they do. And they had raised an alarm on it.

So here we are. Bill 204: a common sense way of making sure that the federal government does not have those overreaches, does not go in behind the scenes, does not stir the pot, and does not start pitting us against our municipalities and not in the best interests of our constituents. So it isn't about getting more power. We already have the power. It's talking about doing the right thing for Albertans, respecting the Constitution, and, quite frankly, staying in our own lanes or our good fence policy, making sure that those fences are clear. If there's any ambiguity, there's not going to be a bunch of people stumbling and fumbling the ball down the field. It's going to make sure that we're actually doing the right thing. We're actually standing up for these folks.

Bill 204, if passed, would amend the Municipal Government Act under division 8, limits on municipal power, section 70, disposal of land. Again, well within our wheelhouse. This is not a grab for power. It's doing what's right for Albertans, making sure that we don't have these wedge items, making sure that we have this property for a long time to come. Mending the Municipal Government Act, section 70, is the most prudent way to ensure a provincial role in any national urban park development as such development directly aligns with the roles of the provinces described under the section. Not a bogeyman policy, Madam Speaker.

Federal intrusion. I even have a heading. Normally I don't use speaking notes, but I wanted to get some of these items, and I know the members opposite are enthralled with this speech. I compel you: absolutely, please pay attention. It's going to end real quick. [interjections] Thank you, sir. Really appreciate it, Minister. Recently, Trudeau's federal government has become increasingly hostile to Alberta – no kidding. Have you heard that? On only one file? That's the problem. It's not just on one file. It's on a multitude of them, continually sticking their fingers across the line. Alberta's desire and best efforts to create an equal and fair partnership in the Confederation: Madam Speaker, we're trying to hold the country together. We're working on so many levels, and we have so much support despite what some of the mainstream media might say. We're not pushing things apart. We love this country, and we're working with our partners on all different levels to make sure we maintain that, as our founding fathers had intended. The best way to run it was by the Constitution and how it's set up, so every time we start overreaching and doing that, we're messing up a really good thing.

While there can be benefits to national urban parks, it's crucial that Ottawa's influence in our municipalities is minimized. Again, baiting Albertans to play off one another. You know, divide and – what's that other word? Oh, right – conquer. That's a mainstay that has been done for years. Instead of having us fighting amongst each other, we can start putting some policies to get that clear, linear, line of sight towards these items. Currently, the city of Edmonton's website: government is listed as an “interested observer” in the partner committee that's been formed in discussions about the proposed urban park. The bill is intended to ensure Alberta's provincial government plays a central role amongst interested stakeholders in the national park plan. Again, not just as a gentle observer; off to the sidelines. Again, understanding the MGA is underneath us, we absolutely have to be at that table. There is no way you should be pushing something through without making sure

all stakeholders are involved and the applicable levels of government and authority are there in the room.

3:30

We supported municipalities in developing and protecting their river valleys and lands. However, with the current lack of legislation it's possible for municipalities and the federal government to complete a bypass around the provincial government and strike an agreement to make it national. So it's a loophole. We want to close that thing. Nothing worse than being part of a relationship and then getting cut out in the cold and then having those same constituents that we're responsible for and not being able to represent them as things were intended. Oh, and by the way, a little add-on for you: the whole conservative program is what kind of formed the national parks in the first place. We've been doing conservation forever. Ducks Unlimited is one of those things.

**Mr. Nixon:** Teddy Roosevelt.

**Mr. Getson:** Absolutely. Yeah. The minister makes a really great point down there. We've been doing it for years. Here's a real tidbit, too. We like the environment because that's where we work, live, play, and raise our families. Did it for years. The river valley is an absolute gem, again, within the province of Alberta.

Just looking at my notes, Madam Speaker, to make sure I haven't missed anything. I think I've covered most of the high points. I don't want to chew up all the shot clock. I do want the members opposite to have a chance to respond. I do want them to have a chance to, hopefully, vote in favour of this private member's bill because it's done with the best intentions at heart, not only for Edmonton but for all the rest of the province as well. Again, hats off to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, first out of the gate to do this with such a big, spirited heart, obviously, taking up the phone calls from the folks in Edmonton and surrounding areas about their concerns. For the folks in Edmonton and Calgary and all the other ones where you don't have a Conservative MLA, if you still have concerns about doing the right thing for your province, we're definitely there to pick up your call.

There is a counterpoint and a counter message that shouldn't be politicized at all, but it should be considered for the next generations to come in the land of the strong and free, Alberta. Let's keep it that way. Let's vote for Bill 204. Let's make sure that our kids have the parks and the land and the authority and everything that they need and deserve and that we respect the Constitution.

Again, Member for Leduc-Beaumont, thank you so much for doing this. I know my great-grandkids will appreciate it and the folks upstairs that are watching us here today.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Member Hoyle:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I rise to speak on Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. Bill 204 seeks to amend the Municipal Government Act, and I must say that I am absolutely against this bill because within the discourse we're discussing, it has nothing to do with protecting Alberta's parks.

You know, ironically, as it was just brought up from the member opposite, I am happy to serve those who voted for me and those who did not vote for me, and I'm very actively doing that. I received an e-mail, actually, from a UCP voter, and he was adamant to say that he did vote UCP, and he said, quote, that this bill is creating an additional layer of bureaucracy where one isn't needed, that it is stifling economic development that comes from tourism. He's worked in the industry for over 25 years and says that this

government should be focusing on the key issues at hand and not trying to meddle in other levels of government that can absolutely govern in this space.

At the centre of this discussion is the Edmonton river valley, a true gem of our city enjoyed by many folks from all walks of life in various communities. You know, I've had the pleasure of fund raising and building development within the Edmonton river valley, within Hawrelak park, and spent many years actively fund raising for the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. That's just been a wonderful contribution from my part, and I've enjoyed that for many years. Like so many Edmontonians, some of my family's most enjoyable memories are when we've spent time in the river valley together taking in the vast beauty that we are so privileged to have here in Edmonton. We're also so incredibly lucky to have park space that we can use throughout the entire year, and as we see more challenges resulting from climate change, it is critical that we do all we can at all levels of government to protect spaces like the Edmonton river valley.

The UC government, of course, is touting their idea that the national urban park program is an attempt by the federal government to encroach on provincial jurisdiction, but, Madam Speaker, this simply isn't true. The National Parks Act has a requirement for approval from the province in order for a national park to be created. While the UCP are steadfast in taking any and every chance to fight with the federal government, the fact remains that Parks Canada isn't mobilizing some sort of mad dash to take any available land and incorporate it into its park system.

As has been mentioned in this Chamber before, it takes an immense amount of time and effort to create a new protected area, and throughout that period of time every single stakeholder with an interest in those lands is engaged in the conversation, whether that be private landowners, various stakeholder groups, environmental groups, industry, recreationists, and various jurisdictions that have an interest in those lands, whether that be municipalities, provincial government, and, in the case of national parks, the federal government.

The designation of a national urban park involves multiple rounds of public consultation, so it's not possible for a national urban park to be created in Alberta without the input of Albertans. Moreover, the city of Edmonton made it clear that land would remain in municipal hands and that there would be no land ownership transfer to the federal government. So while the minister has previously stated, "these models open the door to potential federal overreach that would undermine Albertans' autonomy when it comes to our province's parks, public lands, and outdoor spaces," the truth is that this is just another front on the UCP's battle with Ottawa.

Bill 204 isn't protecting Edmonton's river valley. This is the UCP government wanting to make it clear that municipalities would have to go through the province in order to pursue a national urban parks plan. They're preventing the creation of a national urban park for the benefit of Albertans without their direct input, which at this point seems par for the course, Madam Speaker. I mean, I'm not sure how many times my colleagues and I have had to point out that this government seems truly uncomfortable with actually consulting with Albertans. As it stands, the bill serves as a response to the city of Edmonton's decision to have the Edmonton river valley classified as a protected parkland and gain access to federal funding for its upkeep.

Quite frankly, it's confusing to see this government's sudden interest in Edmonton's river valley. Why is this government interested when they haven't been for so long, and why now are roadblocks being placed to this open public process? In 2020 Parks Canada announced it would develop policy and programs that

would support the creation of national urban parks in Canada. These parks would be created under three guiding principles of supporting conservation in urban areas, including biodiversity protection and climate change mitigation; increasing access and providing opportunities to learn about local nature and culture; and advancing reconciliation by working in collaboration with Indigenous partners.

While municipalities were previously free to work with the federal government to propose and work to create national urban parks, this bill would give the UCP government the power to determine the condition for these agreements. While this UCP government worries a lot about federal interference, why is it so comfortable interfering with municipal jurisdiction?

Edmonton's river valley is North America's largest stretch of urban parkland. It encompasses over 7,300 acres, including 22 major parks, dozens of paved and natural trails, and amenities. A fun fact I recently learned is that that is almost 10 times bigger than Central Park in New York. If you talk to any Edmontonian, they will tell you that the Edmonton river valley is truly the pride and joy of our city. From the nature it is able to sustain to its recreational use all times throughout the year, the river valley has provided all sorts of experiences in our city. In the summer residents in Edmonton-South float down the river quite regularly; folks may be surprised to know that. Whether you walk, kayak, canoe, cycle, or paddle board, there is something for each person to enjoy.

3:40

Located on Treaty 6 territory long before paved trails and picnic sites, the North Saskatchewan River valley has been home to the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Dene, Saulteaux, Anishinabe, Inuit, and many others. This area provides healing for many people, whether it's having critical conversations with loved ones about our connections to these lands or medicine picking through the various trails and nearby waters or receiving traditional healing from Indigenous elders' *oskâpêwis*. Edmonton's river valley not only tells a story of active lifestyles of Edmontonians; it tells the histories of Turtle Island, colonization, the fur trade, industrialization, environmental protectionism, and land reclamation.

The national urban parks plan supports principles of reconciliation, conservation, and connection with the land. Protecting an area at the foundation of our city and the history of this country is critical. These benefits of designating the river valley as a national urban park include federal funding for ecological protection, habitat restoration projects, research studies, and parks programming. It also provides opportunities to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through fostering Indigenous stewardship connections to the land and water and promotion of Indigenous voices and stories.

Madam Speaker, when did the Member for Leduc-Beaumont consult with Treaty Six and the Métis Nation on Bill 204? How many of those consultations actually took place? The national urban park program also fits within a bigger conservation project by Parks Canada to preserve 30 per cent of land, inland waters, marine and coastal areas by 2030, which aligns with the views of many Albertans that we need to do more, not less, to protect our park access and spaces. In fact, polling done in 2022 showed that 78 per cent of Albertans support the creation of more parks to protect habitat for wildlife. Quite frankly, this is needed considering this government's abysmal track record on parks, eroding the trust of Albertans in 2020, when it tried to remove protections from 173 parks and recreation areas.

Most importantly . . . [Member Hoyle's speaking time expired] Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and support my colleague the Member for Leduc-Beaumont and his private member's Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. This is the bottom line. Justin Trudeau and his Liberal-NDP alliance in Ottawa have just been trying their very best to bypass the province and infringe on areas that are within the jurisdiction of all the provinces and particularly in this one, Alberta.

Well, Madam Speaker, this is exactly what my colleague's private member's bill is desiring to do. Private member Bill 204 aims to protect the role of the provincial government in any interaction between Alberta's municipalities and the federal government regarding the proposed creation and development of any national urban park in our province. While this bill specifically applies to all municipalities in our province, it does specifically address what we are seeing from the Trudeau-NDP alliance in Edmonton in particular.

Currently the city of Edmonton is in discussion with Parks Canada regarding the potential for establishing a national urban park in Edmonton's pristine river valley. As it stands, circumstances allow the federal government to bypass the province and work directly with municipalities on national urban parks. Up until this point on the proposed national urban parks in Edmonton the only way that the provincial government has been invited to participate in the process was under the role of interested observers. Does that sound like a fair and equal partnership, Madam Speaker? I would say no. Is this being done because the federal government, in fact, does not want to involve the provinces in these discussions, despite saying the opposite? To me, this obviously appears to be the case.

My colleague's private member's Bill 204, if passed, would not prevent the establishment of a national urban park. It would also not pursue unilateral provincial control over the stewardship and development of green spaces in the province. Under Bill 204 formal and legislative provincial involvement would be required. It would ensure that the provincial government is invited to the table to participate in this dialogue along with a variety of other stakeholders and Indigenous partners, thereby fostering collaboration and allowing the province to play an integral role in the process.

Albertans have some very clear and legitimate concerns about the current way that negotiations are proceeding between the federal and municipal governments without the Alberta government as an equal partner in the process. These concerns centre around the current lack of transparency surrounding the proposed policies, the proposed governance models, and the ownership structure. These are all very valid concerns that all Albertans share. Since Albertans are the primary users of these lands, shouldn't Albertans be the primary decision-makers behind how these spaces are used, Madam Speaker? We know that unless the ground rules are clearly established, Justin Trudeau and the NDP's boss in Ottawa, Jagmeet Singh, will simply continue to intrude in provincial matters. How do we know this? Well, because Justin Trudeau has done this time and time and time again.

Our United Conservative government was elected on a mandate to protect Alberta's interests and shield Albertans from federal encroachment in provincial matters. This aligns with the Minister of Municipal Affairs' mandate of protecting the province's constitutional right to oversee the governance of Alberta's municipalities without federal interference, and this bill aims to exactly do that. Bill 204, if passed, will make sure that the provincial government plays a key role in the development of any national urban park in a municipality within Alberta and amends section 70 of the Municipal Government Act. It would ensure that

the province is invited to the table to discuss matters related to the province's jurisdiction, and we would be happy to participate in those discussions. Madam Speaker, it is unacceptable that there is currently a loophole that allows the federal government to completely bypass the provinces, and this bill would close it.

Albertans are proud of the vast landscapes and green spaces, in particular the cherished Edmonton river valley, the longest continuous stretch of urban parkland in Canada, stretching from Devon all the way to Fort Saskatchewan. These green spaces are important, and we as Albertans do love our green spaces, and this is what we are standing for. Over 7,300 hectares, or 18,000 acres, of land in total, 22 times larger than New York City's Central Park, are within our river valley in our capital city. Furthermore, over 150 kilometres of maintained trails for Edmontonians and visitors to enjoy each year, all year round, make for one of the crown jewels of our province here in this city, a province with a significant number of pristine landscapes and natural features in every corner of our home. These are all important aspects of being Albertan and loving our landscape. There are areas of the river valley where you could be walking your dog or riding your bike on a trail and can easily forget that you're in the middle of a city with over a million people.

Our United Conservative government absolutely respects and supports the preservation of the natural green spaces within our municipalities. If this Trudeau-NDP alliance truly wants to better our province and protect our beloved Edmonton river valley, why don't they just include the province in the discussions and invite us to the table? That's all we're asking for, Madam Speaker. Who knows our parks better than those that have been in our own backyards? I believe it is in the best interests of Albertans to continue to access these spaces and by keeping the decisions related to their development and administration in the hands of Albertans as well. This way, it is up to us to decide what's the most beneficial use of our urban green spaces, because it is us and our visitors who have the privilege to work, live, and play in them.

What's very fascinating as well, Madam Speaker, is that we also have an incredible record of protecting our green spaces. This includes a very fascinating – and the member opposite needs to have some of her facts updated. There is a Big Island provincial park, which was added to our parks system by the provincial government in February this last year through an order in council.

**An Hon. Member:** Really?

**Mr. Dyck:** Really. Thank you.

This is, of course, managed through a tri-government partnership with the Alberta government, the Enoch Cree Nation, and the city of Edmonton. I'll just point out that there have been Indigenous land conversations on this park and that it is this government doing that work. We are partners, and we want to continue to be partners across municipalities.

3:50

If this Chamber decides to pass Bill 204, it will ensure that our province's green spaces, our province's urban areas, our province's river valleys continue to be within the jurisdiction of Albertans and ensure that we will always be in control over these beautiful spaces, not politicians in Ottawa, not the Trudeau-Singh alliance. This, Madam Speaker, is about Albertans. It's about standing up for Albertans. It's about doing the right thing. This is one of the reasons why I'm strongly for and I will be voting for my colleague the Member for Leduc-Beaumont's private member's Bill 204 here today, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. I hope all our members in this entire

Chamber can stand up and choose to oppose this alliance between the federal government and municipalities and include the province's role as a third partner in these conversations. I am very proud to stand up for Alberta's jurisdiction and constitutionally protected rights here today as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

**Mr. Ellingson:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. Let me be clear. I am not in support of this act.

We've heard from many of my colleagues on this side of the aisle about the importance of the river valley to Edmontonians and Albertans. We've heard from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, talking about the relationship her people have with this land and this place as a gathering place, as an important place for economic, social, and cultural connections, a place our Indigenous families hold dear. First Nations and Métis people have been a part of the engagement process in discussing the possibility and merits of assigning national park status to the Edmonton river valley. To run roughshod over this process, to with blunt force disregard these discussions and the opportunity to protect their land is, quite frankly, disrespectful.

Today we're talking about a national park in Edmonton's river valley, but Bill 204 would prevent any municipality from engaging in these conversations. We're talking about sweeping aside efforts of reconciliation with our Indigenous communities to engage in good faith with municipalities and the federal government and the provincial government in setting aside land that is important to them. If our Indigenous communities are seeking collaboration in protecting areas with deep cultural significance to them, why does this province feel they have the right to stop them?

We've heard the Member for Banff-Kananaskis inform us that this legislation is redundant, that the National Parks Act already requires consultation and permission from the province to create national parks within their boundaries. We've heard from the members for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and Edmonton-South and others on the meaning of the river valley for them and the residents of Edmonton, for their friends, their family, the importance of the North Saskatchewan River valley, its historic, social, and cultural importance.

A national park would help to conserve this place, connecting people with nature and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous people. A national park would bring with it federal funding to conserve and protect the area. A national park would attract people to this beautiful city, international visitors that are already coming to Alberta for our parks. Knowing that there is a national park in Edmonton might result in tourists destined for Banff or Jasper spending some or more time right here in Edmonton. The national park might result in enhanced efforts for urban and downtown revitalization in Edmonton.

Very recently our Premier suggested elected officials and governments should be held to account when they pass legislation that is in contrast to what they campaigned on. Correct me if I'm wrong, Madam Speaker, but I don't believe that this was a campaign promise from the UCP or the Premier. Instead of spending time in this Chamber discussing legislation that would be a meaningful impact on issues most important to Albertans – health care, education, access to housing – we are here debating legislation that the people of Alberta didn't ask for, just like they didn't ask for Bill 2, Bill 5, or Bill 8. They are not asking for these changes to the Municipal Government Act; they're asking for the province of

Alberta to meaningfully participate in the process and engage with the city of Edmonton, the residents of Edmonton, the Métis Nation of Alberta, First Nations, and the federal government in designing the North Saskatchewan River valley as a national park.

It isn't federal overreach when local communities are coming together and asking for it. In the summer of 2023 Edmonton city council voted 10 to 3 to move forward with this plan, 10 councillors that were duly elected by the residents of Edmonton. The last time I checked, the residents of Edmonton didn't elect a single MLA from the governing party, and I'm certain the members opposite did not engage Edmontonians on this issue.

Recently this government stood supposedly to protect pristine landscapes in Alberta, yet here they are standing against protecting the North Saskatchewan River valley. This government didn't campaign on this. These are not issues demanding our attention.

I ask the members opposite to listen to the residents of Edmonton, their duly elected council, the Métis Nation of Alberta, and Alberta's First Nations and vote against this act. I ask the members opposite to work with the people in supporting them to achieve their own outcomes in protecting this beautiful river valley for generations to come. I ask the members opposite to vote against this legislation as it is redundant. I ask the members opposite to not turn down \$130 million from the federal government in conserving this beautiful land. I ask the members opposite to stop looking for a fight with Ottawa everywhere they look and work with Albertans for the betterment of Alberta. I ask them to vote no to Bill 204.

If we listen to these arguments, please vote for the people of Edmonton. We heard earlier a member talk about how we're here to govern for the people who have voted for us and the people who voted against us. There are people who voted against you in the city of Edmonton that do not want Bill 204. I ask you to listen to those voices, those people who didn't vote for you who you still need to govern.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Direct your comments through the chair, please.

**Mr. Ellingson:** Please, Madam Speaker, I do ask the members opposite to listen to all Edmontonians and all Albertans in making this decision, in voting against Bill 204. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there other members wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I just have a few moments to make comments on this bill. I mean, clearly, it is not focusing on the best interests of perhaps one of the best assets we have here in the river valley but, rather, this obsession that this UCP government has about picking fights with the federal government. These discussions to enhance our river valley have been ongoing – to build the park, to build facilities, to build recreation facilities not just for Edmontonians but for Albertans as well – for a number of years, and then suddenly this UCP government jumps in and creates a false fight or the idea of a fight just because the federal government is involved.

If they want to be part of building this city and building up our river valley for recreation opportunities, they can make investments in our parks. They can make investments in recreation facilities all across this province and stop cutting these places in urban areas, not just in Edmonton but in Calgary and in Medicine Hat and in Red Deer and all of these other places that they undermined with this budget that they just dropped last week.

This whole idea that we're doing here today is diversion from the real focus, which is that this government abdicates its responsibility to govern this province properly, and for anybody to say anything



besides that, to talk about their fight with Trudeau or whatever they talk about over there obsessively, is a diversion from their responsibility to actually do a job here in the province of Alberta.

I know as well that there are many people that have always been knocking on the doors for urban development for residences and for commercial development in our river valley, and I would like to hear someone from the other side there declare unequivocally that they are not speaking through a back door for further urban development in our river valley, because that's not what Edmontonians want. We fought successfully against it time and time again, and I can always smell a developer behind some of these insidious sorts of vague things about, you know, our river valley and how it has to change somehow. It changes. It changes through developing and building the park system that we have there, that everybody enjoys equally and has equal opportunity to do so, not with this diversion sort of a sideline fight with Ottawa that this government brings up every Monday, it seems like.

4:00

You know, I can set my clock; on Monday I guess it's going to be the, you know, Trudeau alliance and whatever these guys talk about, right? Get back to doing their job, Madam Speaker. They need to get back to doing what they're supposed to do. Yes, we could fight with Ottawa, but we need to develop this province first and foremost. That is our main responsibility here in this Chamber.

We know as well that this government has a very bad habit of leaving money on the table just because it smells somehow of a federal investment in the province. They say, "Oh, that's something from the federal government," and they have to put in matching funds in order to activate those funds for us to spend for the benefit of Albertans, and always, again, for the sake of bluster and whatever it is that fuels these guys politically, we end up leaving millions of dollars on the table for child care, for health care, for education, postsecondary education. All of these things left, you know, because these guys choose to fight the federal government on these spurious missions.

I would wonder, you know – let's look at some of the other federal programs. I mean, what's next with the UCP government? Are they going to fight the Canadian Army from coming in because they are part of the federal conspiracy?

**The Deputy Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt, but the time has come for the mover of the bill to close the debate.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Clearly, the love of the federal government from the opposition knows no bounds. Although I would suspect we are safe from the Canadian Army here in Alberta, we might not be safe from the Trudeau-Singh alliance, but that's another topic.

Before I dig into my remarks here, I want to thank the guests for sticking around so long. We don't often see folks who stick it out for the debate, so I definitely want to acknowledge them. These are concerned citizens who came to me, and they wanted to support this bill. They understood the importance of it, and they understand that the federal government does not have our best interests at heart through the national urban park program across Alberta.

I am formally proud to rise and to conclude debate on second reading of Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. I would of course like to thank all members for their input and consideration. After listening carefully, it is my view that this is a necessary and prudent piece of legislation. As we have heard, there are numerous land-use, conservation,

environmental, funding, recreational, economic, Indigenous, and commercial considerations that all need to be fully considered when we talk about future development of our green spaces and river valleys in Alberta, but to me this list just underscores the importance of working together in partnership and for the province to be included.

If passed, Bill 204 ensures that the province will have a role in the future of our green spaces and river valleys. Albertans should always be the stewards and protectors of their own backyards. A hostile federal government and faceless bureaucrats in Ottawa, most of whom have never stepped foot in our beautiful province, do not have our best interests at heart as they attempt to dictate terms directly with our municipalities without the province having a voice on behalf of all Albertans. Madam Speaker, that's what this bill is about. It's about ensuring a provincial voice and a provincial role in these discussions.

I'd like to take on a few myths that we may have heard during our debate. This is not about unilateral control over our river valleys and green spaces. This is about moving forward in partnerships, and I'd like to speak about two particular partnerships. One is, of course, with our Indigenous partners in our Indigenous community. We value the insights and perspectives of all our Indigenous partners in these important conversations. Their voices must be heard and respected as we navigate discussions surrounding the creation of future parks. We recognize their deep and historical connection to the land.

I would also like to talk about our partnerships with municipalities across the province. Despite what the members opposite say, this is a piece of legislation for the entire province of Alberta. This is not targeted at the city of Edmonton. This will be enforced across the land, and it's important to understand that we're going to protect all Albertans and make sure they have a voice when we talk about the development of national urban parks in Alberta.

Of course, I do want to recognize and acknowledge the many inspiring stories that have been shared about the importance of our river valleys and our green spaces. Like many of you, I've spent a lot of time in our river valleys and green spaces, including the Edmonton river valley so close to this Chamber. I've had the opportunity to run and to bike and to listen and learn in that river valley. I appreciated hearing the importance of that from the members opposite and from my own colleagues. Again, I think this just underscores the importance of having a provincial role, because it is so important to all of us.

I understand that on the other side – we sometimes use "the Trudeau-Singh alliance," and then they laugh like it's a punchline, but it's really damaging to this province. I noticed that the Member for Calgary-Acadia had a laundry list of concerns that she said that her constituents talked to her about. Well, I must have missed the part where it was mentioned that it was federal overreach that has caused the vast majority of those concerns. Maybe they didn't mention that to you. We have a federal government that is harming Alberta, that is looking to insert themselves across our economy, across our province, and they're looking to create damage.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:07 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Ellingson	Hoyle
Batten	Elmeligi	Irwin
Brar	Eremenko	Kasawski
Ceci	Gray	Tejada
Eggen	Haji	Wright, P.
Totals:	For – 45	Against – 15

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a second time]

### Bill 205 Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023

**Member Irwin:** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise to move second reading of Bill 205, Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023.

If passed, Bill 205 will amend three pieces of legislation: the Residential Tenancies Act, the mobile-home sites act, and the Alberta Housing Act. This is my first private member's bill, and after nearly five years of having the honour [some applause] – thank you – of being an MLA and serving the wonderful people of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, it is truly an honour to be able to present this bill. Of course, some of you may know that there are limitations to what I can do in a private member's bill. My dream world would be: you know, let's build a whole heck of a lot of affordable, accessible housing. I can't do that in a private member's bill, so I'm doing what I can within those parameters.

Since being appointed the housing critic and meeting with so many people, hearing from so many stakeholders, so many of my constituents, having done so much reading on housing, I've learned a great deal about the financialization of housing, housing really being viewed as a commodity instead of a basic human right. I can say that on this side of the House we truly believe that housing is a human right. It's clear that there's a housing crisis. It's absolutely clear that we need more supply. No one is disputing that.

But let's look at the data. We've just got the latest rental numbers from Rentals.ca, which tracks rental rates in major centres across Canada. For nine consecutive months Calgary was at the top of the list for highest increasing rents all across Canada, and then Calgary was replaced with Edmonton. So for the last couple of months Edmonton and Calgary have been at the top of the leaderboard, and this isn't a leaderboard that we want to be at the top of. For the second straight month Edmonton was a leader for rent increases among the largest cities, with an annual growth of 17.3 per cent; 17.3 per cent. Calgary, like I said, remained in second place, with asking rents for apartments up 10.6 per cent annually. Of course, Edmonton and

Calgary don't have the highest rents across Canada. We know that cities like Vancouver and Toronto are at the top of the list. But the troubling trend is that rents are rising so fast, and it's a trend that many analysts will say doesn't seem to be changing at all.

Here's where we have an opportunity with Bill 205. It's why we're calling for temporary rent caps for two years at 2 per cent and then two years at inflation, and this is aligned with what we see in other jurisdictions. It presents an opportunity, an opportunity to address skyrocketing rents, an opportunity to let renters catch their breath at a time when so many of them are struggling with the cost of food, the cost of transportation, gas, utilities. The list goes on. It's not a radical idea to want to have restrictions on how much rent can be raised, and, despite what some on that side of the House might say, dismissing it as a socialist idea, rent caps or some form of rent control are in place in many other provinces, including the not-so-socialist-led province of Ontario. [interjections] Of course, that same minister who's heckling me a little bit right now inaccurately labels it "rent control."

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Many would argue that this isn't rent control at all; in fact, it's rent stabilization. Joshua Evans, a professor of human geography specializing in housing at the U of A, was quoted in *Ricochet Media*. He notes that my bill is actually what's called rent stabilization, a moderate form of rent regulation that allows landlords to maintain a rate of return on their investment while protecting tenants from rent gouging. He goes on to share that my bill "is not some wild, radical proposal to freeze rents, and eliminate any and all profit from it." He says that it's actually quite "far from that." Maybe one day. But this is rent stabilization at a time when we have a lack of any sort of regulations on rent increases.

In Alberta we know – we all know it in this House – there's no limit on how much a landlord can increase the rent. I want to quote from the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights. They're an organization working to advance the right to adequate housing.

4:30

They note that

a lack of rent regulations combined with decreasing vacancy rates is incentivizing landlords to practice rent gouging, charging rents far higher than what is necessary to cover their expenses and make a reasonable profit. As a result, stories of renters facing untenable rent increases of up to 50 per cent abound.

They go on to say that

lower income households, particularly people living on fixed incomes, simply cannot absorb this level of spending increase. As a result, more and more people [face] economic evictions and are at increased risk of [houselessness]. The housing crisis in Alberta requires urgent solutions. While supplying more housing is essential, new housing is not going to be built today, and in the absence of robust affordability requirements, it will not be affordable to most Albertans.

They conclude by saying that

establishing a temporary rent cap and vacancy control will ensure that rents are fair for existing and new renters, while putting a stop to rent gouging until more permanent, affordable housing solutions are available.

This is about fairness. This is about keeping Albertans in their homes. It's about addressing increasing houselessness as well. Higher rents mean more tents. According to a report published by the University of Calgary School of Public Policy more than 115,000 Calgarians living in 40,000 households are at risk, high risk, of falling into homelessness. The current annual income needed to afford average rent in Calgary right now is about \$84,000. Contrast that with the median income for a single parent in Calgary,

only at about \$74,500. That's according to this government's most recent data.

I spoke with so many folks in consultation on this bill, and I didn't just speak with renters although I did talk to a lot of them. In fact, I spoke with one economist who I expected to be fully opposed, as many who dismiss rent control will say that economists hate it. But what she said was surprising and reassuring. She noted that while typically, you know, such a market intervention might be objectionable to many, we've got a clear example in which the market is broken, and it's not going to fix itself if we can draw anything from the trends that we've seen. She notes that the market only works under a very prescribed set of assumptions, and that has been broken. So that's some food for thought.

Keep in mind that this debate, as many of you know, has been a long-standing one. Ten years ago, in 2014, as rents were rising sharply, then Premier Jim Prentice rejected calls for rent control, and just like today Calgary had among the lowest vacancy rates and the highest rental costs in the country. Prentice's argument was that the market would solve the problem. Again, many would point out: well, the market won't solve it. As *Calgary Herald* reporter Don Braid points out, Prentice's argument today is weakened by postpandemic inflation and by economic disruption.

This brings me to another point, the whole, "Oh, we can't intervene in the free market" argument from the other side. Well, at the risk of feeling like I'm going back to teaching social studies 30 in Bawlf, Alberta, I'll go here anyways. We don't have a purely capitalist society. Sorry, friends. Governments, even super conservative ones, intervene in the market all the time. I can point to countless examples, but here's one, a more recent one: automobile insurance caps. The UCP reintroduced a cap on the price of auto insurance in 2023. That's the same cap that former Premier Jason Kenney had eliminated months after the 2019 election. My point here is this. The UCP government were willing to recognize the need for market intervention for a cap in one area, so surely they could recognize the need for them in another, seeing how rapidly rents are increasing here in Alberta.

Before I run out of time, I'd like to also talk about the other section of my bill. The other section of my bill calls for the need for greater transparency and accountability when it comes to affordable housing targets under the Alberta Housing Act. Again, the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights supports this section of the bill, noting that

this will ensure that sufficient affordable housing is produced to meet the needs of Albertans in core housing need. Alberta [as many of us know] has one of the lowest levels of social housing stock in Canada. In addition to building more social housing [which we're all calling for] to meet current needs, reporting requirements would . . . hold this government accountable for maintaining its existing stock of social housing.

We need more housing. I can't say it enough. We need more affordable, accessible, and safe housing, but until we get there – and you've got my commitment; you've got our commitment that we won't stop pushing on that – we can take action now through Bill 205.

I'm not naive. I'm not telling any of you that rent caps will solve the housing crisis. They won't, but they are one thing we can do right now to take action, a tangible measure that will help countless Albertans in the immediate. I don't want to be standing here in a few years with little housing having been built, with rent in Alberta at par with the highest cities in Canada, with rates of homelessness skyrocketing, with more and more of my constituents on the streets. I don't want to look back and say: "You know what? We could have done so much more."

I'm going to urge the members opposite to stop and to truly think about this bill. If you won't support it, what will you say to struggling renters who are at risk of losing their housing?

Thank you, friends.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Madam Speaker, how much I wish we could go back to the days when the NDP weren't just full-blown socialists. I mean, Deron Bilous, wherever he is, must be just freaking out that his party would come into this Chamber and present rent control as a way forward. It'd make Joseph Stalin blush, how much this NDP wants to go down the road of communism in our province. You know, Minister Bilous, when he was the minister, made very clear that the NDP would never do this. But times have changed, and I guess the fact is that even when Nenshi gets here and changes their colour to purple and changes their name, we're still going to see a socialist party across from us. It's staggering to see that.

You know why? This type of legislation is going to hurt Albertans. Now, the NDP doesn't care about that. We'll talk about that in a minute. The hon. member quoted some studies. I'll give you a couple of studies, which I will also table tomorrow inside the Chamber, Madam Speaker, but first of all is this: 93 per cent of economists surveyed agreed that a ceiling on rents reduces the quantity and the quality of housing available. Recently a Stanford study found that rent control in San Francisco reduced rental supply, led to higher rents for future renters, created gentrification, and reduced housing options for all but the wealthiest people. We also have numerous studies, that I will also table, that have shown that rent control incentivizes higher income earners to stay put, reducing the availability to lower income earners, and another study which shows that rent control can lead to the delay of housing stock due to the lack of funds to maintain rentals.

In fact, in St. Paul, when they adopted rent controls in Minnesota, multifamily buildings plummeted by 47 per cent while in Minneapolis and across the United States they went up by over 11 per cent, because rent control does not work, Madam Speaker. It means that there will be no incentives to upgrade homes. People will live in rental units of lesser quality. It reduces the availability of homes to lower income earners. It causes prices of rent-controlled units to fall below market. It causes older buildings not to be maintained. It discourages supply; it's the biggest thing that it does. It provides higher rent overall.

Now, case in point would be Toronto or Vancouver, where we do see astronomical rents – the hon. member referred to that – all have little types of rent control. So if this was going to somehow reduce rent, it would work in places like Toronto and Vancouver. It's had the opposite effect. In fact, Vancouver is so expensive right now, Madam Speaker, that people are living in Calgary and commuting by airplane to go to school and work in Vancouver. That's what that hon. member would like to bring forward in this Chamber. It's outrageous, and it's very unfortunate that the NDP would break that promise and that they went down this road.

Now, let's talk about what we're doing. First of all, when the NDP were in power, when they were in government five years ago . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Oh, those were the dark days.

**Mr. Nixon:** It was dark.

. . . the affordable housing wait-list increased by 76 per cent under their watch, Madam Speaker, and they only built 1,770 units of affordable housing during their time in government. Now, I want to be clear. When I talk affordable housing, I'm talking about government-subsidized housing. You see things like that in seniors' lodges, different types of low-income circumstances where we pay

rent incentives to be able to help individuals make rent. But the NDP made 1,770 units in their four years. It's astronomical the difference between the governments.

Now, I am a minister for a government that is very much committed to being able to increase supply when it comes to this issue because that's how you solve the problem: you increase supply, you bring affordability back to the market. We are in the process – I've said it in the Chamber many times – of investing \$9 billion between now and 2031, Madam Speaker, to create another 13,000 units of affordable housing – I will talk about what we're going to do with the market in a minute – including \$840 million that I just announced this morning.

4:40

Now, Madam Speaker, the NDP created 1,770 units in their time in government. We came into 2019 during that same period of time, during an economic downturn, COVID, other things that were taking place, and created 5,000 additional units in that period of time, are on track to create another 13,000 additional units, and the number that I announced this morning will bring 5,000 on over the next three years. That is a significant investment, and that's a lot better than killing the entire market and making everybody homeless.

The other area where we continue to spend money on – and the NDP say it's not important, but it is. We're investing a quarter billion dollars – it's significant money – in rent supplements to help Albertans make rent payments that find themselves in areas where they don't have enough of their paycheque to be able to pay rent. That is the best way forward, to help supplement rent, not kill the market. Remember, you have to solve the problem. You can't put your head in the sand like the NDP. The NDP's theory is to attack landlords. Well, they're just not going to build homes anymore, Madam Speaker, which means people will be homeless, which is ultimately what the NDP's goal clearly is. They want to make more people homeless. If not, why would they bring this in?

Now, that quarter billion dollars plus the work we're doing through our stronger foundations plan, Madam Speaker, creates households for 82,000 Alberta households, which would have multiple people living inside the programs. Now, that's a stark contrast, the NDP, who want to make it that there's no rental housing and make more people homeless and not invest in it – and they've shown that they can't, which is why wait-lists went up underneath their watch – to our government, who continues to invest, including even this morning, as I said, with another \$840 million investment that I announced this morning.

That's on top of the significant investment we're already doing in affordability: \$5.1 billion to help individuals deal with affordability. This government has led the most of any province in the country, something that the NDP certainly did not do. As I said, we created 5,000 new units since 2019, in that last term. It's like three times the amount that the NDP did. But, to be clear – to be clear – we can't solve the entire housing problem. We're short of almost 150,000 houses in this province. So we can't solve that problem completely with affordable housing. We've got to get the market to work. We've got to make sure that the dream of home ownership doesn't leave, which is what will take place underneath the NDP.

You know, Sweden did this experiment that the hon. member is pushing for, and one of their famous economists came out – happy to table this, too – who's not exactly a right-wing guy, pretty left-wing, and said that the single biggest thing you could do to destroy a city is to bring in rent control. And then he said: no, except for one other thing, which is to bomb it. That's what that hon. member wants to bring in.

Now, we are also focused, as I said, on the market, being able to reduce red tape, work with our municipal partners to be able to deal with zoning issues and other components like that, and it's working. We have the highest residential construction rates anywhere in the country. Everywhere else in the country it's going down, and more importantly, we have record amounts in Edmonton and Calgary of purpose-built rentals, the highest amount since statistics were kept in our country taking place underneath the leadership of this government, and that member wants that all to stop and bring in rent control to make more individuals homeless.

In fact, one-third of the construction that's taking place in the residential construction market right now is purpose-built rentals. That's how we're going to get to a higher supply. That's how we're going to solve this problem. This brings supply back in line inside the market. The NDP want us to go down the road to places like Toronto or Vancouver, where you see astronomical rents, or, worse, in places like New York, where it has absolutely devastated – devastated – those economies. Madam Speaker, I urge every member in this House to vote against that member's bill and to make sure that we send a message that we are going to actually solve the housing problem.

Now, I just laid out what our plan is, which is significant investments in housing, in rent supplements, in reducing red tape to be able to make sure that our market can do the job that it is doing already in record ways, and making sure more people can have homes and bring in rent stability to the market. What is the NDP's plan? Well, their housing critic has shown now what their two plans are. First is, with this bill, attempt to bring in rent control, which is going to reduce the market, make more people homeless, make people's rent go up, make it harder for individuals to get homes, and absolutely destroy the market and make more people homeless.

And then what is their second plan when it comes to housing? The hon. member, the NDP's critic for housing, has already shown it. It's to make them live in tents, Madam Speaker. That's what she wants to do. She wants to make them live in tents.

**Member Irwin:** I support my constituents because I care about people. You should try it.

**Mr. Nixon:** She stood up and protested as the police tried to help people inside encampments in this city, Madam Speaker, where they were dying.

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

#### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Mr. Schow:** Madam Speaker, while the hon. minister was speaking and making what I thought were some excellent points about the pitfalls of rent control and how much of a disaster it would be, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said: because I care about people; you should try it. Now, that would be certainly a comment directed specifically at the hon. minister of housing, suggesting he does not care about people. This, for sure, rises to a point of order, 23(h), (i), and (j), which would be imputing false or unavowed motives. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood knows very well, not being her first day on the job, that decorum is something that we all should embrace in this Chamber, and I would encourage her to retract the comments, apologize, and espouse a better level of decorum in this House.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I rise to defend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Certainly, in the context of what the speaker was intending, you can see that the speaker is purposely trying to inflame the House around this issue and making up quite a lot of statistics on the fly – right? – that defy both mathematics and logic and gravity, I would say, and at the same time moving off the topic that we are debating here, which is looking for temporary rent relief in the midst of record-high rent increases in both Calgary and Edmonton. In the spirit of looking for sober and careful debate, considered debate, which Albertans expect, I would hope that we could see on both sides that measured tone that could bring about something that could help everyone here in the province and not just yell at people.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, I actually think there have been some great points made on both sides of this. In fact, it's been very difficult to hear the minister, who naturally has a quite commanding voice in this House, over the screams and shouts of other members in this Assembly. So let's take this opportunity to dial back the temperature here and continue with the last 43 seconds of debate.

#### Debate Continued

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Madam Speaker, I can assure, through you to Albertans, that we will not let the NDP's socialist plan to make more people homeless, to bring in rent control, to make them live in tents where they burn to death and are being abused by gangs going through, no matter how much they yell at us in this Chamber. I urge all of my colleagues to vote against the NDP insanity, and I suspect most of their members won't even show up to vote for this because even they don't believe in it.

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

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today in the Assembly to voice my support for Bill 205, the Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023. I'll begin by saying that housing is a human right. To put it simply, Albertans are in the midst of a housing crisis, and they need our help right now.

In my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview more and more we are hearing from constituents who are suddenly facing a real precarious housing situation and a situation that's come about because of things they cannot control, things like unexpected rent increases, utility costs, food prices that rise every month, clothing and transportation increases, and these are just for the basics, Madam Speaker. Folks are stretching their household budgets to the breaking point. For instance, we know that in February Edmonton led with a 17.3 per cent annual growth in rents, and for a person whose wages haven't or have barely kept up with inflation, that 17.3 per cent is a number folks are quite simply not going to be able to meet. My constituents are asking for action by this government, and they are hoping that this government will see them and hear them, recognize their need, recognize the urgency, and do something that will actually make a difference to their lives right now.

We know that there are many people – individuals, families, seniors – in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and all across this province who are struggling to pay their monthly rent. Some of those folks are people who are on what seem to be indeterminable wait-lists for affordable housing. They may be seniors who fear that

another rent increase will make it impossible for them to stay in their home, perhaps a home that they've had for decades.

Madam Speaker, in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview there are constituents like a mom and dad with five children for whom rent has recently become unaffordable. There's a grandma who's taking care of a grandchild and just needs a safe, affordable place for both of them. There's a fellow who's dealing with a serious illness and is now living on a fixed income, and all he is looking for is a home that he can afford. There's a new-to-Alberta young man who heard about Alberta Is Calling. He found himself a job. He arrived here with hope, but now he has no place to live. There's a woman in her mid-50s who was laid off after a lifetime of work and contributing to everything that's great about this province and suddenly finds herself dealing with a rent increase that's just simply unaffordable.

4:50

There are too many constituents to mention who are having to choose between making the rent and paying for essentials like medication. All these folks just want a nice and safe place to live, an affordable place they can call home, a place they can make their home in, a place where they can stay, a place they can depend upon at least one thing to remain steady, and that would be the amount of money they're paying every month in rent.

In the midst of an affordability crisis this legislation, Bill 205, the Alberta housing security act, provides a way forward, but not just that. It provides hope. I think back to the time when I was a single mom, not that long ago, going to university, heading to the bank with my kids, who were looking forward to getting some new clothes at Zellers, only to find a really unwelcome surprise, that there just wasn't enough money in the bank account to buy those clothes. Once the sum total of money I had in my account was \$3, not even enough to cover my monthly bank fees.

Now, as a single mom at that time I was actually extremely lucky and privileged because my landlords were my parents. At the time I had access to yearly student loans and grants and child support, and I managed to find two part-time music-teaching jobs, sometimes three, but even with all of that, there were still too many months when getting to the middle, much less the end, of the month after paying all the things I had to pay – insurance, school fees for all three of us, rent, groceries, and daycare fees – meant that we were existing on pretty much nothing, just like that month when I only had those \$3 in my account.

This was because my income, Madam Speaker, such as it was, was still many thousands below the poverty line for a family of three. There is no way that I could have borne any sort of increase at all, much less the substantial rent and other inflationary pressures that we know folks are faced with these days, every day, month after month, year after year, and had I been living in, say, an apartment with my kids those days, I would have been spending far beyond that vaunted 30 per cent that's recommended as a portion to spend of one's income on housing. I absolutely would have been on those wait-lists for subsidized housing, and I absolutely know I would have welcomed rent caps.

All those years ago, Madam Speaker, my children and I deserved an affordable and safe place to call home and so do all Albertans who today are renters. This legislation is urgently needed. Even a cursory search of nonsubsidized rents in my riding points to rents for two-bedroom accommodation somewhere between \$1,300 and \$1,600 a month. In order to afford that \$1,600, it means you should be earning about \$65,000 a year. That's more than many of the residents in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview make.

For many, particularly during a time when wages and wage increases have not kept up with inflation, that is simply beyond their reach. This bill, the Alberta housing security act, not only provides

for temporary rent caps, but it also requires government to set housing targets and increases reporting requirements to make sure we meet those targets right across Alberta. This means that every year the government would need to work to set a minimum number of affordable housing targets for the year. In order to make sure Albertans know what those targets are, they'd not only be published on the website but then would be noted in the ministry's annual report. All of this would give us a really good sense of what housing is actually available, what the situation is, what the trends are over time, and would allow us to plan. Beyond that, it's the temporary emergency cap on rental increases that will provide relief to everyday Albertans like those folks in my constituency.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, I understand that people often have strong responses to the idea of rent caps. We know that rent caps alone won't solve the housing crisis, but what they will do, as mentioned by my colleague earlier, is they will provide immediate relief for hard-working Albertans. There's much research that's available to us from other jurisdictions and their experiences. We know that in Manitoba there was a study that said that the evidence just didn't exist that the program had a negative effect on the supply of rental accommodation. There are also plenty of examples that talk about the very real risk for folks in jurisdictions without rent caps.

In New Brunswick, for example, a few years ago they found themselves in a very similar situation to what we're facing today. Affordable housing was really hard to come by, and that meant that folks like a pensioner mentioned in a news article from September 21, which I'll table tomorrow, who found herself in a situation where her rent would almost double and was looking at having to move – she was looking at having to move from a place which had been her home for decades. For a while, in fact, New Brunswick did have rent caps in place for '22. They came at 3.8 per cent. But in 2023 the government discontinued them, and according to a news article from just this year folks continue to deal with rent increases upward of 20 per cent.

Thinking back to that situation I was in not that long ago, I cannot imagine having to find my way through a 10 or 20 or 30 per cent or more rental increase even when given warning of that increase. It would have meant to me and my girls what so many folks end up doing: yet one more move away from schools, away from friends, away from family, away from work. Another risk, another part of life that just makes it so hard to make ends meet.

Not having that temporary rent cap puts folks into a precarious housing situation, one which, given our lack of affordable housing supply, increases the risk of homelessness. Rental caps do not deter development. They do not make the rental market worse. They do not mean that landlords won't do just fine. Rather, they work for the people they are intended to work for, and they can work well, particularly when they're part of other reasonable affordable housing measures and plans. They provide relief, a sense of stability in what can sometimes be an unstable, really fragile world, and in the midst of a housing crisis like the one Albertans are faced with today, they are indeed a reasonable first step toward meeting that crisis.

It is our collective job and our collective responsibility to make life better for all Albertans like that senior in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, like that young man who came to Alberta looking for a job, like that family of five. This is our job as legislators here in Alberta, and that is what Bill 205, the housing security act, aims to do. I urge and I'm proud to support all of my colleagues to support this bill as well.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Bill 205. I don't see the hon. member. Are there others? Oh, I do see the hon. member. The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to encourage all members of this House to oppose Bill 205. While it's true that there are many Albertans and Canadians feeling the effects of housing affordability and the affordability crisis in general, there's no doubt that the primary proposals put forward under Bill 205 would make the situation worse. Specifically, our government will not support rent control. It is a policy of failure that will curtail housing supply at the very moment it is needed most.

Before we consider some of the examples of why rent control is and will always be a failed, damaging social experiment, it is very important for this House to consider how we arrived at this housing affordability crisis in the first place. Federal fiscal policy under Justin Trudeau's Liberals has been disastrous for Albertans and Canadians. Reckless, out-of-control spending, the printing of money, little or no accountability over billion-dollar programs, not to mention a regime tainted by scandal and controversy have all led to record deficits and soaring inflation, inflation that can only be tamed by the rise of interest rates that have hurt so many Albertans and Canadians over the past year. These higher interest rates have placed upward pressure on both homeowners and renters from coast to coast and, of course, right here in Alberta.

The cherry on top of this housing affordability crisis created by the Liberal-NDP coalition: a carbon tax. Not content to simply impact housing costs for everyone, the Trudeau-Singh coalition government ensured that the affordability crisis would impact every aspect of Canadians' lives. Was it not enough that people were struggling to pay their rent? They needed to make sure that people couldn't afford their groceries and energy bills, too? This Liberal-NDP government has failed Albertans tremendously and caused the worst affordability crisis in generations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, no one should be surprised that a Prime Minister ...

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time allotted for debate for this item of business has concluded.

## 5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

### Wildfire Impacts

505. Mr. Getson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to

- (a) recognize the significant health, economic, and environmental impacts on Albertans resulting from Alberta wildfires; and
- (b) introduce a bill to amend the Forest and Prairie Protection Act to increase the penalties for committing an offence under that act.

**Mr. Getson:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today, and I have another motion to put on the table here. I had a chance to do one last session, which was Motion 501, regarding economic corridors, and I can tell you folks full well and members that are private members: as a private member these motions in here count. Obviously, right now we've got Transportation and Economic Corridors written right into a ministry. We have 11 ministers that have economic corridors written into their mandate

letters. So what I'm hoping to do is to do a two-for-two and do something now to address the issues that we've had with wildfires.

If I can, Mr. Speaker, I'll read into the record here what Motion 505 is, and then I'll get into the whys and wherewithals and some of the rationale for it. Looking for support from members opposite and, obviously, the members on this side as well so that we can do something as private members here and do some good business.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to

- (a) recognize the significant health, economic, and environmental impacts on Albertans resulting from Alberta wildfires; and
- (b) introduce a bill to amend the Forest and Prairie Protection Act to increase the penalties for committing an offence under that act.

Now, there are a lot of TED talks out there, and they talk about how the best, effective way to get to folks is to talk about the why, and the why really comes down to the heart. It comes down to how you convey yourself, how you have those conversations in person. Let me tell you a little bit about the why. Last year in my constituency – I'm very honoured to represent several counties all at the same time. I grew up out by Chip Lake, out in that area there. I'm very happy to represent the folks on this side of highway 22 on the east side. But I grew up with a lot of the folks out in the west side of there as well, so all the way basically up to the mountains, up to Jasper itself, and back this direction.

Last year during the forest fire season we had to displace towns. Evansburg and Entwistle: they got displaced a couple of times. We had to move folks when the fires were hitting in that area. We displaced all the seniors, that I have a real soft spot for, obviously, our elders in our community. They displaced back to Wildwood, and then later on that night, 1 in the morning, we had to displace them back. Now, put this in the context during the election when we're having that, we're literally trying to manage a ton of these things at the same time. The concern that was out there – and honestly a lot of really good folks stepped out of their comfort zone. A lot of folks stepped in to help. There were a ton of the folks that were north of Wildwood there, the farmers that were out there cultivating fields, working and trying to integrate in with the forest fire operations.

The look and the fear and the terror in people's eyes, especially the seniors – you're pulling them out of their beds at night. You're literally displacing them, and you're trying to move them again and handle them a second time. I was very moved by a lot of the folks that were working with the seniors, the health care workers and the folks that do the caregiving there. At the same time that we're literally out there, they're getting calls to evacuate their own homes and houses, and they're staying with the seniors. They want to make sure those little old seniors got on the bus first. The Minister of Forestry and Parks at the time came out there as well. There was no political requirement to be there. It was literally being there with folks in the middle of the night to try to help them out. They then displaced back to Edson, and a few days later all of a sudden Edson had to be displaced and to push them back into Jasper. Some of the access and egress routes that typically would have been contemplated were under fire. We couldn't move people where we were at. We had a bunch of folks come into Edmonton and people scattered throughout the province.

The environmental impacts. I don't think anybody can forget last summer with the forest fires. It wasn't industry that was causing all the air pollutants. I mean, you look outside today: we've got industry running flat out; everyone's running their cars, and vehicles and buses are going. We've got what would arguably be the heavy emitters, the heavy industry. We still have clean air. Not

when those forest fires take off, Mr. Speaker. We literally had people that had asthma conditions or anything else. They were housebound at that time. And it doesn't stay within our boundaries. It doesn't stay isolated within those areas, so we literally had all that smoke, all those pollutants, and everything else rolling all across the place. It's incomplete combustion. If you look at all the NOx and the SOx items that are in there, the noxious gasses and fumes, it's absolutely gross. You would never see any of this coming out of a tailpipe. Not to mention the impact on wildlife.

If you've never been around these forest fires, seeing it on the news does not do it justice. Like, even when it's off miles in the distance, you've got a lot of concern. Growing up in that area, again, coming back to dealing with a lot of those seniors that were elders and, you know, had volunteered their time for all different organizations, whether 4-H or the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts or any of those local clubs, to be in that position to try to help them and comfort them at night: it's all we could do. And out of the Villeneuve Airport we had sorties every day that were flying out of there to bucket operations and to try to do that. We didn't have the air coverage that we needed. You couldn't be everywhere at once.

Typically in forest seasons you've got coverage from each one of those counties, and you've got coverage from the department of forestry. The issue we had was that so many fires were happening all at the same time that those folks couldn't provide coverage to their neighbours, and that's where everyone was literally caught on their back feet. The concerning part of this is, quite frankly, Mother Nature isn't the problem. Mother Nature did not cause the majority of those fires; well north of 60 per cent of those fires were caused by humans. If we look at our averages, Mr. Speaker, it's about 67 per cent that are typically caused.

Here's a wild stat. This stuff, it just drives you bonkers. If I'm looking at CO<sub>2</sub>, a lot of the members opposite and fellow members here, we're addressing our carbon output, so let's think of it on average here. You've got about 20 to 100 tonnes of carbon that's produced for every hectare that's burned. Last year we burnt 2.2 million hectares. That's around 133. I mean, you look at the numbers on here: it's astounding, right? Like, you've got 133 million tonnes of carbon that just went out there. It is the absolute worst polluter that we have in our entire province and, I would propose, in Canada itself. Statistically speaking, the numbers are low. We've got about maybe 1 per cent of the entire global output in carbon except when it comes down to forest fires.

The significance of recognizing the issues and the harms and the facts of forest fires when I looked at this, when it came down to some of the penalties, if I'm out there causing fires either on purpose or absolute gross negligence, the worst fines that I would get under the act as it sits right now, maximum, if I'm the most egregious individual that caused one of these fires that caused harm, lives lost, homes lost, everything else, the worst thing: all you could stick at me, Mr. Speaker, is two years or a \$100,000 fine, which is the cost of about a, you know, decked-out, shiny Z71 pickup. That's all I can do. If you're a corporation, maybe a million bucks. That's it. That's all we have. If I were an industrial polluter, completely different. Again, I would propose to the group here that it's looking at the environmental impacts with the lens it deserves.

There are lots of ways of preventing forest fires. You know, you look back as kids: only you can prevent forest fires. Well, that's part of it when you look at the high percentage of folks doing that. The other one that's bonkers: you start looking at some of the stats here. Going back to 2018, we have 59,000, so let's say 60,000 hectares; 2019, 833,000 hectares; 2020 – here's one that should jump right off the stats for everybody – 3,000 hectares. We get back to 2021, we're at 52,000; 2022, 130,000; and then last year, 2 million. Sixty per cent of 2 million: isn't that an easy number to fix?

There's a small percentage of those that are caused by humans or that are caused on purpose, but everything else that we can do, everything else that we can prevent will literally save lives, save the environment, and do the right things. I honestly believe that as private members we get a chance here to look at what is within our wheelhouse, what legislation that we can ask the government to change to start it. It's not all of it. We still have to do the night attack helicopters. We still have to look at integration. We still have to know where we're putting our boots on the ground. We still need to collaborate better. We need to throw some cash at it, but I will tell you one hundred per cent that anything that you can do towards adaptability and resilience is going to be way more cost-effective than any tax that you can try to tax people with into compliance. Looking at these two items: making sure that we look at the environmental issues with forest fires the same as we would with industrial polluters and making sure that when folks cause harm to this extent, that it's considered in that same light.

We lost lives last year, lost a lot of homes, and folks are going to lose the ability to insure their properties. I can go on with a number of items. I'm really looking forward to some of the debate here. I really hope that everyone here can park any partisan items. It's something that we can do to try to impact as many people as we can. Help our friends and neighbours within the province and also across the border, and please take our lessons learned. Other jurisdictions have higher fines and rates for this; they look at it differently than we do. We've just got to pull up our socks, quite frankly, and modernize that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll allow the next person to get up, and I'm looking for you to support this motion, please.

5:10

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, I might have missed it at the beginning of your remarks. I don't think that I did. I just need you to say that you move Motion 505. I thought you were about to say it and then you didn't, but if you can do me a favour and just say, "I move Motion 505," we'll make sure it's on the record appropriately.

**Mr. Getson:** Mr. Speaker, you didn't miss it. I'm sorry. I jumped right into the hearts and minds thing of how this is compelling. I would like to move Motion 505 for consideration and, hopefully, for everyone to agree with.

**The Speaker:** You don't get another 10 minutes.  
The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Indeed, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the opportunity to say a few words around this motion. Certainly, I would underline the importance of us doing something about this upcoming wildfire season. We all know of and lived through the record-breaking fires that we had last year, more than 2.2 million hectares of forest burned, 10 times the five-year average, 48 communities evacuated, as you mentioned, hon. member, a number of places in Parkland county and further west into Wildwood and so forth. I drove that way last summer as well and saw how the fire skipped the road. You know, people had to move fast. They had to evacuate. It was, quite frankly, a disaster.

So, you know, we want to mitigate these things in the broadest possible way. Certainly, you know that our caucus is interested in working collaboratively to ensure the safety of Albertans, their property, and, of course, the health of all Albertans because, of course, as the hon. member just mentioned as well, the smoke knows no boundaries. We saw Alberta wildfire smoke moving across western Canada and down through the States, and it was like something we've never, never seen before.

We did, a couple of weeks ago, when we were here before the budget, try to get an emergency debate going on this same topic, and the government did reject that, but here we are, with a motion that we would like to see augmented and strengthened in the broadest possible way with unanimity coming from these individual members to the government to urge action on this imminent threat of wildfires. So I do have an amendment to this motion that I want to pop out straight away to allow people to digest and within this short period of time, hopefully, come to consensus.

**The Speaker:** If you just want to pass it to the pages, they'll get me a copy, the table a copy, and then I'll ask you to proceed in a moment.

**Mr. Eggen:** Yeah. Okay. Sounds good.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 41(5.2), as it isn't necessarily a regular occurrence for an amendment to be moved, Standing Order 41(5.2) says:

An amendment to a motion other than a Government motion, moved after the motion has been moved, must

- (a) be approved by Parliamentary Counsel no later than the Thursday preceding the day the motion is moved, and . . .

I can see that Parliamentary Counsel approved this amendment on March 7, 2024.

- (b) be provided to the mover of the motion no later than 11 a.m. on the day the motion is moved.

I was not provided notice that notice had been provided. That's not to say that it hasn't been, but I'll look to the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland to see if notice had been provided by 11 o'clock this morning.

**Mr. Getson:** Yeah. My understanding is that it had been provided by 11 a.m. So unlike last time – they didn't provide notice when I had a motion – they followed the proper procedure this time.

**The Speaker:** They have followed the appropriate proceedings. I would consider this amendment to be in order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thanks. Mr. Speaker, do you want me to read the . . .

**The Speaker:** Please.

**Mr. Eggen:** Okay. Basically, there are two elements to this. My abridged version. First of all, I move on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, as it happens, that Motion other than Government Motion 505 be amended (A) by striking out "and" at the end of clause (a), and (B) by adding the following immediately after clause (b):

- (c) implement a comprehensive long-term strategy for managing forest and prairie fires outside of the forest protection areas, as defined in the Forest and Prairie Protection Act, and
- (d) acknowledge that climate change is causing a significant increase in the frequency and intensity of forest and prairie fires.

These two elements, Mr. Speaker, I think, you know, help to strengthen this motion and to provide some context, and indeed they work sort of in concert with what the member is bringing forward in his motion in that it talks about having a more comprehensive plan. We didn't just come up with this ourselves. We in fact had the Parkland county advocating and the Rural Municipalities association saying basically that fire seasons start earlier, last longer, hit more areas. We all know that. Large fires forced, for example, many millions of dollars of damage and people out of their homes. The Parkland county Mayor Allan Gamble said that



Parkland county faced an out-of-control fire last year, evacuation. Entwistle burned for two months.

We need to protect residents from the fire and to protect residents outside of just the poorest protection areas. We see that that is one place, but, you know, fires don't know boundaries, legal jurisdictional boundaries, and they burn where there is combustible material. Mr. Speaker, this is a great chance for us to move, as I said, in this amendment by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, to manage prairie fires outside of the forest protection areas. I think this is a very important distinction to make, and indeed those are the areas quite often that are adjacent to towns and municipalities and, you know, human habitation that is under threat by fires every season, right?

There are lots of ways to approach this. We think – and I think the majority of people living in close proximity to forested regions outside of the forest protection zone are demanding this level of protection, too, which we can do. I mean, you know, certainly we're not going to end this forest emergency through this Chamber, but we can certainly help to mitigate and to increase safety for Albertans.

The second part of this amendment that I have here – I mean, this is a very friendly and constructive amendment, we can say, Mr. Speaker, as well. I mean, certainly it's not trying to undermine the spirit of the motion. The second part is to "acknowledge that climate change is causing a significant increase in the frequency and intensity of forest and prairie fires," a very important element to dealing with this circumstance head on – right? – to say that, you know, we have drought, we have unseasonable weather. We're all experiencing that, and the drought protracted over many seasons. Even with a bit of moisture that we may have received in the last couple of weeks – right? – it doesn't mitigate the ongoing changes due to climate change. For us to look for the source of ways to help to resolve this issue or to increase the health and safety of Albertans, we have to acknowledge that this is a big factor. As the hon. member mentioned, we do have fires that are started by human activity. I mean, these are obviously fires being started by human activity in terms of climate change – right? – human-activated climate change, so for us to be honest about that I think is a good starting point.

You know, certainly we can increase fines for people that start fires. Certainly, we can help to have bans, like road bans and fire bans and things like that, but we also need to look at the larger issue and deal with that in an honest and constructive way, too.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment to the motion is, you know, as I say, with the best intentions possible, and I appreciate the member bringing forward this motion because we were trying to lay the ground for this a couple of weeks ago and for many months before, talking about building up our capacity to fight fires, and this is a way, through this motion, that we seek to amend for the best interests of all Albertans.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on amendment A1. The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for a very, I believe, from-the-heart approach on trying to make this better.

**Mr. Eggen:** And the mind, too.

**Mr. Getson:** Well, we'll get to that.

One of the items that the member brought up was, obviously, looking at a more robust and enhanced plan that was proposed

earlier in the House. I believe the minister had addressed what the plan is.

5:20

I really appreciate that he had mentioned one of the counties that I get to represent with Mayor Gamble, Parkland county. Obviously, they're right in my backyard, literally. Part of the items and concerns that they had at the time, I mean, if you go back to the wayback machine, was prior to the information that was released by the minister, some of the lessons learned in the town halls that we've had, and then the integration for the new firefighting season. So I believe that part of the amendment, as well intentioned as it is, has already been addressed in that item.

The second part is, without wanting to boil the ocean on a number of things, the climate change item. I, too, love statistics, so a technical background, engineering background, looking at some of the items and the drivers. Moreover, being a farm kid, we take our rain gauges really seriously. We take the temperatures really seriously. We track that data. If anybody wants to go and look at this, there are a couple of really great sites. Environment Canada, obviously: you can look at each weather station, and you can look at the trend lines for it. Also Alberta. Now, Alberta Environment itself goes back into the 1800s when they first started measuring all the climate issues, quite frankly, rainfall and temperatures and average mean.

What jumped off the page at me, again, coming back to 2020: we only had 3,000 hectares that were under forest fire, of which 88 per cent were caused by humans, 12 per cent by lightning. And I look at 2023: at least at this point 61 per cent; 4 per cent are still under investigation to see if they were of that arson type or nefarious by nature or anything else. Only 35 per cent, roughly – so let's say 30 per cent if we're splitting numbers here – were caused by Mother Nature. What was the difference between those two years? If the argument holds true, there would have been a massive climatic shift between 2020 and 2023. That does not take place.

Looking at the temperature, the weather, the humidity; looking at the precipitation and everything else, these are nominal at best. Looking at our trend lines over the last 30 years, they're nominal at best. Everything is within a median. To put it in perspective, Mr. Speaker, I'm 50 years old. I can remember three Christmases at least that were brown Christmases. I can remember one. It was Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, and my dad and I were out putting fence on fence posts, restretching wire in T-shirts. I've got the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti remembering similar things in those events.

I can remember full well being up in Athabasca, and my son was all of about two years old playing in the backyard because there weren't any snow piles, and it was black dirt that we were going to do some landscaping with. And then two years later we were building massive forts in the backyard, and we couldn't do that. Being in the pipeline industry, travelling across North America on these linear projects, I had a lot of experience of looking at weather conditions in the wintertime, because when we built right-of-way in muskeg, you're looking at those freezing conditions and you're highly monitoring breakup conditions.

With that, although the members are very much, I think, coming from their hearts in the right place, coming back to the logic and the mindset of saying that climate change is causing this, and we need to acknowledge that literally three years ago we jumped at a time where there was no climatic difference, no massive, measurable, quantifiable climate change between 2020 and 2023. The crux of the problem comes back to people, Mr. Speaker. It comes back to how we manage and address these fires. It comes back to putting the lens on it, that I believe it deserves, of looking at it as other

industries and having the punishment suiting the crime, so to speak, in that regard. I believe it comes down to a lot of education.

If we get those two elements right, as I've kind of put in my motion, I think that we can go a long way towards enhancing those firefighting programs. I think we can go a long way towards those collaborations. I think we can go a long way toward where we have our wildfire groups come into place because we're putting all of the relevant items in the right place. Again, looking at adaptability and resilience and making sure that we have the right tools for the job to do it and we have the right mechanisms in place. With that, I'm encouraged with the amendment, but unfortunately I would encourage my members not to vote for the amendment, and I would really like to get back on the main motion. If others wish to carry on and have the debate, I'm of course at the whims of the Assembly, as it were, Mr. Speaker.

With that, thank you again, but I'll be voting against the amendment. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Haji:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard clearly that Alberta needs a comprehensive, long-term strategy for managing forest and prairie fires, but I think there is a need for some sort of background that can help the members in the House in terms of their decision-making as far as this motion is concerned.

This year's wildfire season officially started on February 20 instead of the usual March 1, reflecting the seriousness of the situation due to the drought conditions across the province. Mr. Speaker, 2023 was a record-breaking wildfire season, as the member sponsoring the motion alluded to, with 2.2 million hectares burning across the province. Drought conditions over the past few years have created an environment in which wildfires start and spread easily. In 2023 Alberta saw record-high wildfire activities with 2.2 million hectares of the forest burned. This was a new record, 10 times the five-year average for wildfire. Over 48 communities and 38,000 people were evacuated from their homes. The previous record was 1.3 million hectares, and that was in 1981. Last year the government had to declare a state of emergency on May 6, 2023, as some 122,000 hectares of land burned and over 24,000 Albertans had to flee from their homes.

Mr. Speaker, some of the key facts that I would like us to keep in mind are that the Alberta Wildfire status dashboard was visited 5.5 million times, showing how Albertans are not only concerned but are worried on the consequences of wildfires. The costliest wildfire in Alberta's history was in 2016, the Fort McMurray wildfire, which was estimated to cost about \$9 billion. So the implications are far significant. The estimated insured losses for the Fort McMurray wildfire were nearly double those of the 2013 Calgary floods, showing the scale of damage that wildfire can cause in our province.

The member talked about some of the causes of wildfire, and I will agree with some, but I would like to highlight a few here. In 2023, 67 per cent of wildfires in Alberta were caused by people and 33 per cent were caused by lightning. In contrast, the wildfires caused by lightning were responsible for almost 80 per cent of the total area that was burned. People are responsible for more wildfires, but we have to look at it from the impact. The ones that were caused by lightning have quite a significant impact and implications on people and the environment. No large wildfires that threatened Alberta communities were caused by arson. Few human-caused fires are classified as arson. In 2023, 8.4 per cent of all wildfires were categorized as arson. These wildfires burned 262 hectares.

In the amendment that the Member for Edmonton-North West included, the implication is on the recognition of climate change in the motion, and I would like to highlight a few points around the impact of climate change. Climate change is expected to result in more frequent lightning, and we said that the wildfires that are caused by lightning are the ones that have far more implications in terms of damage. Climate change is expected to result in more frequent lightning strikes, which leads to more fires. Some models and some studies project an increase in lightning fire activity by 24 per cent by 2040 and 80 per cent by the end of the century.

5:30

Higher average temperatures mean longer fire seasons, and studies suggest that western Canada will see a 50 per cent increase in the number of dry, windy days that let fires start and spread. Studies predict, Mr. Speaker, that fires in Canada could burn twice as much average area per year by the end of the century. Drought conditions over the past few years set the stage for a record-breaking 2.2 million hectares that burned in 2023, which was just last year.

We also have to keep in mind that Budget 2024 clearly states that wildfires were caused by drought in 2023, which was in recognition of the implications of climate change as well as the causes of wildfire.

It also has health implications, Mr. Speaker, as a result of wildfire smoke, which is also another consequence that will cost the province not just economically as far as it's going to implicate our health care system. According to an article published in *Nature*, fine particles from the wildfire smoke are very dangerous and "have been linked to increased mortality from cardiovascular and respiratory causes on a local and global scale." In 2020 scientists projected annual Canada-wide premature mortalities attributed to acute exposure to wildfire smoke to be between 54 to 240, and premature mortalities attributed to chronic exposure to be between 570 to 2,500.

The associated economic valuation ranged from \$410 million to \$1.8 billion for the acute impacts and \$4.3 billion to \$19 billion for the chronic implications per year. This is the same order of magnitude as the estimated health impact of diesel and gasoline vehicles in Canada. Alberta and B.C. are projected to suffer the most from wildfire smoke due to the close proximity of wildfire activities to large population centres.

Mr. Speaker, Parkland county is calling on the provincial government to come up with a new long-term strategy, a strategy for fighting wildfires outside of the forest protection areas in the white zone. A long-term strategy is not part of the original motion, and that is why the Member for Edmonton-North West has introduced the motion.

The county's resolution passed by RMA in November 2023 claims that fire seasons start earlier, last longer, and hit more areas than ever before. A large fire in 2023 forced hundreds of residents from their homes and cost the county \$13 million, of which the province eventually stated they would pay 90 per cent of it. Mr. Speaker, we previously called on the government repeatedly to implement preventative measures to limit the damage and risk of wildfires, but the government has not followed. It's great to see this motion that is proposed today. On February 20, 2024, we called on the UCP government to immediately collaborate and work with orders of government, civil societies, and Indigenous communities to prevent the needless loss.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will ask the members in the House to vote for the amendment.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on amendment A1, are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

**Member Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a fisherman in St. John's, Newfoundland, wakes up at dawn and gets ready to head out to sea, the sun has just set within an hour at the western edge of Canada. From east to west this country spans more than 5,500 kilometres in six different time zones. North to south we cover nearly half of the northern hemisphere. Most people in the world love their country. Canadians love their country and countryside. We are fortunate to inhabit some of the most magnificent natural environments in the world, and it is our responsibility to protect this natural heritage.

Climate change, Mr. Speaker, is a threat to our natural habitat. Alberta's climate is changing, and over the past century the mean provincial temperature has increased by 1.4 degrees Celsius, with most of the increase occurring since the 1970s. By the end of this century our province will likely see an increase in temperatures of at least two degrees Celsius, about equivalent to a shift in temperature from Calgary to Edmonton. Depending on the global climate model and greenhouse gas emissions scenario used to forecast future climate conditions, this temperature increase could be as high as four to six degrees Celsius. That is concerning for all Albertans. That is concerning for the entire planet.

Most climate models also project a small increase in precipitation in our province. The projected warming will promote moisture loss from soil and vegetation. This will make Alberta more dry, especially during the summer months. The timing and amount of rain and snow precipitation patterns are also predicted to change, and extreme weather events like heavy rain and wind are likely to become more frequent.

In the past year we have seen that the fire season was unprecedented, being both exceptionally early and widespread. In early May a strong high-pressure ridge, said to be the strongest seen in four decades, created an early heat wave across the west, and in Alberta May temperatures averaged about five degrees warmer than normal, the warmest in 76 years of records. Spring in Alberta was also drier in recent years, and humidity was very low, and that pushed the start of the fire season much earlier than usual. Among the hot spots Edmonton broke records for May, close to six degrees above normal. Calgary had their second-hottest May on record, some 4.5 degrees above normal.

Once ignited, these strong winds fanned dozens of fires in central and northern Alberta, forcing 38,000 Albertans to evacuate by May 8. By May 12 nearly the entire province was under a fire ban, and 19 local states of emergency were in effect. In Edson, Alberta, residents were evacuated on June 9 for the second time in spring. Flames closed several transportation routes, shutting down access to dozens of parks and recreational areas. Fires also halted oil and gas activity, representing nearly 5 per cent of the nation's petroleum production. By the end of May wildfires had engulfed nearly 1.2 million hectares, almost 100 times more than 2022 at that time.

From May 1 to September 5 in 2023 there had been a total of 499 smoke hours, according to weather data collected near the Calgary International Airport by Environment and Climate Change Canada. That's nearly 21 full days of smoke. That is really concerning, Mr. Speaker. We have this UCP government which is not taking the threat of climate change seriously, despite the risk of severe fires in the past year due to province-wide drought conditions. That's not the government that Albertans voted for. That's not the government that Albertans deserve.

5:40

I heard the member today saying in the House that members should represent the constituents who voted for us, and the most difficult part is to represent the people who did not vote for us or have different opinions, and I'm saying this to remind him to represent the people who have a different opinion in his own constituency. Parkland county is calling on the provincial government to come up with a new long-term strategy for fighting wildfires outside the forest protection areas in the white zone. A long-term strategy is not part of the original motion, and this is disappointing, Mr. Speaker. It is disappointing that the member sponsoring this motion isn't even addressing the concerns of his own constituents.

I also heard a member talking about Simon Sinek's TED talk about the importance of "why." I one hundred per cent agree with that TED talk, that the whys should also be addressed and should be at the core of our conversations. The member also should rethink about: why isn't he listening to his own constituents? Why doesn't he agree with the proposal of Parkland county? These whys should also be addressed and answered. This is why I'm very proud to sit on this side of the House along with my colleagues and the Member for Edmonton-North West, who has introduced the amendment to this motion that will address this demand.

We have been calling on the UCP to do the right things for quite a long time, and I would like to share a few of the things that we have been calling on this UCP government with all members of this House so that they can make an informed decision while voting on this amendment. Our caucus has called on the UCP repeatedly to implement preventive measures to limit the damage and risk of wildfires, but this UCP has not followed through. On February 20, 2024, we called on the UCP to immediately collaborate with the federal emergency management committee to create a federal firefighting task force, but the unfortunate part is that whenever the word "federal" comes up, this UCP doesn't like that word, and they start to pick fights with other levels of government. We have also called on this UCP government to work with all orders of government, which is a bit of a difficult thing for them to do but we'll still ask them to do, to work with all orders of government, civil society, Indigenous communities to prevent this needless loss that we had incurred in the past year and years earlier.

We also asked them to support year-round land firefighters to ensure that there are ready and trained boots on the ground for every start of wildfire season. It's very important that there is a government in Alberta that should support the firefighters, because they are our front-line heroes. They put their lives at risk to make sure that we stay safe at our places and the communities that are being evacuated can be at a safe place while they are fighting the fires. So we need to support them.

On February 28, 2024, my colleague from Edmonton-Manning moved with Standing Order 42 wildfire season preparation, which recognized the threat of the current fire season and urged the government to establish a multiminsty provincial fire service advisory committee. That committee would have ensured that the committee includes representatives from key stakeholders and established public awareness and an evacuation safety campaign. Unfortunately, the mandatory unanimous consent was denied by this UCP government.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I urge all the members of this House to please listen to their conscience and vote in favour of this amendment.

**The Speaker:** On amendment A1. The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks, the Member for Central Peace-Notley.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise in support of this private member's motion and, I guess, speak against this amendment, too, at the same time. This motion is important in helping to reduce the number of human-caused wildfires in Alberta. First and foremost, I want to say thank you to Alberta's wildland firefighters and the many Albertans who work to help combat these wildfires across this province by reducing the spread of wildfires and keeping Albertans and our communities safe. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland talked about some of the local people and the work they did on their own land with their own equipment to help protect not only their property but their neighbour's property, and that needs to be recognized.

I want to thank our firefighters for their dedication and hard work and their families for the sacrifices made during the absence of their firefighter family members during the wildfire season. This sacrifice is what makes this motion so important. As many of you know, the 2023 wildfire season was unprecedented in its severity and scope. Hot, dry, windy conditions in early spring gave rise to an uncharacteristically early wildfire season. The number of large-scale wildfires burning across the province all at the same time was a challenge Albertans were facing but not by themselves; other jurisdictions had similar issues.

Despite these realities Alberta's government mounted a response of the size and scope required to help Albertans and our communities. Throughout the 2023 wildfire season Alberta piloted a number of projects to improve wildfire response and mitigation efforts. We incorporated night-vision helicopters – I believe the only one in Canada this past year – and we hope to add two more next year. We extended nighttime operations into our suppression strategy to combat wildfires while their behaviour is typically more subdued. We also offered emergency training opportunities for heavy equipment operators.

Budget 2024 responds to last year's wildfire season, ensuring we have the personnel, equipment, and resources required to protect Albertans and their communities. At the height of the crisis more than 50 communities and 38,000 Albertans were forced to evacuate. It was an incredibly stressful time for many Albertans, and our hearts go out to them. Alberta's government responded by investing more in our province's wildfire management program over the next three years, a 50 per cent increase to enhance prevention, preparedness, response, and mitigation efforts.

During Alberta's 2023 wildfire season about 1,100 wildfires burned more than 2.2 million hectares, leading to the 50 communities and 38,000 Albertans being evacuated. This number is over 10 times higher than the five-year average. Due to the serious effects on Albertans, loss of natural resources, and the risk that our firefighters shoulder on our behalf, Alberta investigates every wildfire to determine cause and point of origin. Every wildfire investigation remains open until investigators have determined a cause or exhausted all current available information, at which time the cause may be listed as undetermined.

Determining the cause of a fire is important. We owe these efforts to Albertans who lost their homes, had their health and freedoms negatively impacted by smoke, or had to evacuate for lengthy periods of time. We've been working for many years to perfect the way we determine the cause of wildfires, and we have investigators in place to determine what ignited these fires. It's not uncommon to see high numbers of fires classified as under investigation. The reason for this is that unless we can determine the wildfire is caused by lightning without any doubt, it is classified as under investigation on the dashboard until the file is closed.

Human-caused wildfires cover several different categories, everything from recreational fires to agriculture incidents and residential-caused wildfires. It is important to take note that human-caused wildfires account for over half of all wildfires annually. Last year it was 61 per cent. Incendiary fires are defined as wildfires that have been intentionally ignited in an area or under circumstances where and when there should not have been a fire. These are purposely set fires but not necessarily intended to cause damage. Arson differs from incendiary fires and is defined in the department's prevention data as a wildfire set intentionally or recklessly to cause damage by fire or explosion to property. The five-year averages from 2018 to 2022 are as follows: about 1,107 total wildfires, 133 incendiary wildfires, and 86 arson wildfires.

While we can't control how many fires are caused by lightning, we can take measures to increase the consequences for those causing wildfires. We know the vast majority of Albertans take dry conditions very seriously and do everything they can to reduce or eliminate any chance of causing a fire, but we need to do even more to make sure everyone knows that if you're determined to be responsible for causing a wildfire in Alberta, you will be held to account.

#### 5:50

If you were to talk with people displaced by wildfires or tour where a family's home was that was burned to the ground, as I have done, or considered the potential for lives and livelihoods lost due to wildfire, supporting Motion 505 would be quite easy to do. The reality is that the toll of wildfire is far reaching and long lasting, and many Albertans still continue to rebuild their lives from the wildfire we experienced this last year. Increasing penalties for everyone who knowingly commits an offence under the Forest and Prairie Protection Act is a way to make it clear that Alberta will treat those convicted of offences very seriously. We need to make it clear that if you push the limits, don't follow fire bans or restrictions, and you cause a wildfire, there could be serious implications for you personally or for the corporation you work for. We need more deterrents for individuals proven to have started wildfire. When you look at the current financial aspects of losing even one family home, current values surpass the amount of the fine by many times. The loss to timber alone can cost our province many times the amount in a single day of burning.

Climate change has been used in the past year to create an all-encompassing explanation for the number of fires experienced in Alberta. Closer analysis shows the wildfires we experienced last year and the dry season we anticipate for 2024 are part of a weather cycle that historically occurs. To singularly blame Alberta's wildfires on climate change and point a finger at the oil and gas industry as a primary cause is irresponsible, to say the least.

When we look at this amendment here – and I understand what the NDP is trying to do. They want to link everything they can to their failed carbon tax. That was part of their climate change action plan that they brought forward when they were in government, and now even some of their leadership candidates are trying to step away from that carbon tax.

I know what would happen if I went into communities that had lost their homes in fires and said – when they asked me, "What are you going to do this year to prevent wildfire?" if I was to say, "I'm going to battle climate change," I don't think they would let me leave the community without being lynched. They would not accept that as an answer. They want answers. They want concrete answers. They want action that they can see. We acknowledge that there are changing weather patterns. We know that this spring we're expecting that El Niño will come to an end. That's been the biggest

reason why we've had this weather that we've had this past year and a half.

The record we broke was from 1981 – so that was 42 years ago – the record we broke as far as the number of hectares burned. We did have some bad fire years. We had 2011, the Slave Lake fire; we had 2016, the Fort Mac fire; 2019, the Chuckegg Creek fire south of High Level. So we've had some bad fire years in the past, but, again, the record we broke was from 1981, over 40 years ago.

Again, when we look at this amendment and how it wants to talk about climate change, I think the people of Alberta want to see action now on how we're going to battle wildfire going forward.

We know wildfires can occur at any time of the year under the right conditions. We know that dry conditions can lead to an increased level of exposed dry grass and vegetation, increasing the wildfire in many areas of the province. Alberta's wildfire management branch is aware of drought-like conditions being experienced by many areas of the province. Wildfire management staff and contracted pilots are monitoring these conditions or planning for regional variability and water availability as we move into the spring at the beginning of the 2024 wildfire season. Drought conditions can cause lower moisture content in trees' needles and leaves, leading to an increased level of small, fine fuels.

We can't emphasize the importance of fire prevention enough this year. Every Albertan can play a role in either preventing or starting to keep wildfire out of our landscape. Taking responsibility for our actions was something I was taught at a very young age, and that is what we are talking about here. We continue our work to spread the word about wildfire prevention, and we are prepared for the upcoming fire season. If firefighters don't have to fight the intentionally set wildfires, they can focus on the ones that we can't control, like those by lightning.

In our commitment to help Albertans and their communities take an active role in wildfire resilience, Budget 2024 allocates an additional \$12 million for the community fireguard program. This funding aims to improve wildfire suppression and containment efforts near communities and reduce the likelihood of damage to homes and property. This is in addition to continued funding of \$9 million a year for FireSmart activities. We've heard from Albertans that they wanted to contribute to our province's wildfire prevention preparedness and response efforts, so we're expanding opportunities for them to get involved in wildfire operations near their communities. In addition to FireSmart principles that everyone can use to prevent wildfires and protect their homes and communities when wildfires occur, there are opportunities . . .

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to standing order 8(3), which provides five minutes for the mover of a motion other than government motion to close debate, the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland to close debate.

**Mr. Getson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was enjoying the debate immensely until the Member for Calgary-North East got up and chastised me for not engaging with my constituents. Let's give that member and a few other ones a little history lesson. I'm the guy that ran against your former ag and forestry minister. I'm the guy that beat him by over 10,000 to 13,000 votes. When he came out this term, he didn't have a spit's chance in a forest fire – let's put it that way – because my constituents don't suffer fools, and you, my friend, are well misinformed. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the chief government whip will know that all debate should be moved through the chair, and when it doesn't happen, decorum deteriorates.

**Mr. Getson:** Mr. Speaker, I apologize again for that, for decorum, but when someone challenges me individually in here and talks of my constituents – he wasn't there with those old folks in the middle of the night when we were moving them. He wasn't there when we were displacing people. He wasn't there. And my constituents do not suffer fools or useful idiots that carry on with somebody else's mandate. Again, good argument and good debate in here, but this one? This one is ridiculous.

What we want to do, Mr. Speaker, is we want to do things that are actionable items that we can do. The folks in my area are the loggers, the volunteer firefighters, the farmers that were dealing with this. This is the message that we took to them, looking for feedback from them. These are some of the tools that we could do. Quite frankly, they wanted to nail some hides to the wall. This is how frustrated they were when it came down to it. Their insurance: they can't get these things because we're not dealing with what we can. Instead, we want to talk about fairy tales and pixie dust and pontificating from the luxury of northeast Calgary. What I'm looking for is some rational thought on how we can physically do something here with the tools that we have.

Very glad for the minister to speak about what we've done so far. Very glad for the minister to speak of what's actionable. I strongly encourage everybody in here for a vote for the motion. Vote down the amendment because it makes no sense with the climate change initiative from what I've heard from some of the debate on that side, Mr. Speaker. I know your constituents are in the same place.

Folks that deal with these wildfires do not live in the big cities; what they get is the smoke from the wildfires. These folks are the ones that are getting displaced. We need to address what's at hand. I strongly encourage everybody to vote for the motion as it was written, and let's get back to things that we can do as private members to address the problems at hand.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the legislative policy committees will convene this evening and tomorrow morning for the consideration of the main estimates. This evening the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Tourism and Sport in the Grassland Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education in the Grassland Room.

Pursuant to standing order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]



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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](mailto:AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca)