



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 29, 2023

Day 15

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
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United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 29, 2023

[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.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met.

Mr. Anthony Stephen Stiles
March 25, 1935, to April 10, 2023

The Speaker: Mr. Stephen Stiles was the Progressive Conservative Member for Olds-Didsbury from 1982 to 1986. Mr. Stiles immigrated to Canada from England in 1947 at the age of 11 by way of Pier 21 in Halifax. After arriving in Alberta with his family, he completed high school and went to work in a wide variety of occupations, from real estate to sawmill owner to newspaper editor to business owner. After completing a bachelor of commerce degree, Mr. Stiles enrolled in his first class at the University of Calgary law school. He graduated in 1979 and was admitted to the bar in 1980. He went on to practise law in Carstairs. Mr. Stiles remained active in his community as a part of the Carstairs chamber of commerce and as a volunteer firefighter.

Mr. Stiles passed away on April 10, 2023, at the age of 88. In a moment of silent prayer I ask each of you to remember Mr. Stiles as you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a number of visitors today. Please feel free to proceed to your seats, hon. members.

Joining us in the Speaker's gallery; earlier today I had the great pleasure of meeting with the consul general of Vietnam. We had a great opportunity to discuss ways that Vietnam and Alberta can continue to grow and strengthen our relationship. He is joined by a number of colleagues from here in Canada. They are based out of the Vancouver office. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, I have another visitor joining us in the Speaker's gallery. Some of you will know him very well. He's my good friend and former colleague the former Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who faithfully served from 2015 to 2023, Mr. Mark Smith. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a school group, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to all members of the Assembly students from École Ste-Jeanne-d'Arc in the humble riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They

are accompanied by their chaperone, Ms Natalie Harris, and we have 42 students attending session this afternoon. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of this Assembly I have the honour to introduce some awesome grade 6 students from Tevie Miller Heritage school and the Alberta School for the Deaf along with their teachers Paige Greschner and Marg Oevering, and I know there are parent helpers along, too. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has an introduction.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some really fine and special people from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They are all here to mark the 50th anniversary of Cheremosh. I would ask that Mykola, Lisa, Maggie, Ethan, Tammy, Vanessa, and Catherine, who are here from Cheremosh, as well as David from my constituency office please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to the whole Assembly two representatives from the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta, Marian Stuffco and Joy Peacock. Thank you for your strong commitment and support to all registered nurses right across the province. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of transportation has an introduction.

Mr. Dreshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Carol Moen and Chris Nash, two fantastic folks who work for Women Building Futures, an organization that has spent more than 25 years helping Alberta women get into trades like construction and commercial transportation. I would like to thank them for their work and invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sarbjit Singh, who is famous by his social media name Ohi Saabi. He is visiting us from Spain. He is a Punjabi social media tourism influencer and travels all over the globe promoting tourist sites. I ask that Sarbjit please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you two special guests from Drayton Valley. In addition to being a close personal friend of mine, Corey Peebles is the president of the Alberta Hemp Alliance and has put in countless hours to make sure that agriculture in our riding is thriving. In addition, Amanda Fynn is the president of Drayton Christian school. Please stand up to receive the warm welcome from this House.

Members' Statements

Dow Chemical's Fort Saskatchewan Ethylene Project

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, this morning I was proud to join the Premier and a number of ministers in my

constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville as we proudly announced the Dow Chemical selection of Fort Saskatchewan as a site for the world's first net-zero emissions integrated ethylene cracker and derivatives facility. Our government is immensely pleased that Dow has chosen Alberta for this groundbreaking project. This nearly \$9 billion investment in the Dow Path2Zero project stands as the largest private-sector investment in our province over the past 15 years. It underscores the confidence that multinational companies like Dow have in Alberta and affirms our status as the premier destination for investment and business operations in North America.

The significance of this project cannot be overstated. It's set to play a pivotal role in expanding Alberta's natural gas industry, creating thousands of jobs, fostering economic diversification, and solidifying our position as a global powerhouse in petrochemical sectors. Specifically, this initiative aims to decarbonize a substantial portion of Dow's global ethylene capacity while bolstering polyethylene production within our province. The surge in ethylene and polyethylene not only meets market demands but significantly enhances Alberta's export potential, paving the way for increased global market access.

Our province continues to lead on the global stage in emissions reduction, sustainable resource development, clean technology, and innovation. As we maintain our status as a world leader in energy production, we are committed to championing environmental stewardship and technological advancements. Initiatives like the Alberta petrochemicals incentive program and the technology innovation and emissions reduction regulation and our investment concierge services demonstrate our steadfast commitment to this project's success. Our dedication to cultivating a strong workforce through apprenticeship training also underscores our ongoing support for this initiative. Together with Dow Chemical and our collective commitment to innovation and sustainability we are forging a path towards a greener, more prosperous future for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government Policies

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent poll reports that nearly 60 per cent of Albertans are staying home to avoid the costs of socialization. It's being called inflation isolation, and Albertans are experiencing it more than any other province. The UCP claims everything in the province is coming up roses; however, this new poll paints an entirely different picture. I want to make it clear in this House what it's really like for so many to live in the UCP's Alberta.

1:40

Let's describe a few all-too-common scenarios. You're a mom, and you wake up freezing in your home. You've had to turn your heat way down because the utility bill has ballooned in the last year. You live in northeast Calgary with your two kids, and you have to drive your youngest an hour each way to get to a school that's bursting at the seams even though your community has been asking for a school for years. Your oldest son is hoping to start college next year, but you're worried about the massive tuition hikes. And that very same son? The insurance on his car just went up another \$600 because the UCP removed the cap.

Here's another story. You're a father in Edmonton whose daughter is in her 20s working an entry-level job downtown, but she can't afford the rent hike coming her way because the UCP refused to address the housing crisis. She may have to move home,

as will your elderly dad, who needs care but can't access an affordable residential care bed.

People are struggling under the UCP, Mr. Speaker. They feel isolated and unable to make ends meet. Good government aligns their policy decisions with the needs of Albertans. My message to the UCP government is to talk to those everyday Albertans. I urge you to centre their needs and their priorities.

Thank you.

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

Riverview Gas Supply

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to tell of a near crisis from my local constituency, about how Alberta's government stood up to ensure that my constituents in the little hamlet of Riverview would be able to heat their homes this winter.

Riverview, a hamlet with no more than a dozen homes, has been served by natural gas connections for decades. In late 2022 the residents of Riverview were informed by the county that their natural gas connections would end as the industry supporting their private service provider had collapsed. I was contacted by Riverview residents Jamie Pond and Alan Young, dedicated champions of their close-knit community. They had been diligently collaborating with the admirable teams at Apex Utilities to seek a solution, but despite their collective efforts, by last September affordable options had disappeared.

Consequently, I elevated their concerns to the attention of the Minister of Affordability and Utilities. The minister immediately recognized the urgency, promptly presented Riverview's concerns to the cabinet, on which they acted swiftly with a response. As we have shown time and time again, this government will not stand idly by as Albertans are faced with a frigid winter without a means to stay warm. The government of Alberta stepped in to keep the gas flowing, to keep the good people of Riverview warm. Alberta's cabinet acted swiftly and diligently and effectively, decisively to ensure that the people of Riverview received the help they needed.

From the smallest scale, a hamlet with only a handful of homes, to the largest scale, pushing back against the federal government's 2035 net-zero mandates, Alberta's government would not allow anybody to needlessly suffer through unforgiving winters. I would like to thank the minister and Alberta's cabinet for their speedy work on this matter. My constituents and the good people of Riverview are very thankful.

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to calling on the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, a translation has been provided for the words which she will speak in other languages.

Lebanese Heritage Month

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the first-ever national Lebanese Heritage Month, introduced by MP Lena Diab from Nova Scotia. Every November Canadians will celebrate Lebanese culture and the contributions of Lebanese communities to our national fabric. The Lebanese community's contributions in Alberta are immense. They are the business leaders, the small-business owners, the artists, the teachers, the workers, the public health care professionals, and even Alberta's Justice minister is of Lebanese heritage.

Growing up in the Middle East, some of my teachers were Lebanese, and some of the best literary pieces I learned in school were of Lebanese poets and writers. After all, it is Lebanon that brought world giants like Khalil Gibran, whose works have been translated into more than 100 languages, who vividly expressed the

spirit of equality a century ago and said [Remarks in Arabic] I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons in one religion, and it is spirit. [As submitted] Other Lebanese giants include May Ziadeh, Elia Abu Madi, and Amin Maalouf, who now leads L'Académie française en France.

À notre communauté libanaise : votre esprit, votre hospitalité sont très forts. Vous aimez la vie. Vous êtes optimiste malgré les guerres. Je suis absolument fière de votre contribution à notre société ici, en Alberta, et partout au Canada. Vous êtes magnifique.

As the first Arab woman in Alberta's Legislative Assembly I am proud of the Lebanese community, and as Lebanese people say, [Remarks in Arabic] You make us proud; you make us walk proud. [As submitted]

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

Collegiate Programs in Cypress-Medicine Hat

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to express how proud I am of the work being done in the charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. Within the last few years I've seen the incredible work my local public school divisions and the Medicine Hat College have done in partnership. I've seen them helping their students, preparing them to enter and strengthen Alberta's workforce through key collegiate partnerships.

One example, the Prairie Rose school division, offers integrated studies to help students learn real-life skills that both prepare them for the future as well as to enter the workforce. Their many collegiate programs are well suited for young Albertans. These programs teach students the skills and hands-on experiences that prepare them to enter a wide variety of careers and life paths. Whether it's a career as a pilot, a firefighter, in trades, or in agriculture or even as an aircraft maintenance engineer, these students receive training at a high school level to tackle whatever challenges their future may hold. These collegiates are being offered by the Prairie Rose school division and are key in future-proofing Alberta's workforce.

Additionally, these school districts are partnered with Medicine Hat College in a comprehensive way that is evolving with our provincial needs. Mr. Speaker, we are dedicated to helping Albertans and diversifying our economy. This is why we've made significant investments into Medicine Hat College for them to upgrade their buildings and expand their practical nursing program.

Public school districts and colleges like the ones found in Medicine Hat are key to future-proofing Alberta's prosperity as they offer new and innovative ways of preparing our youth and young adults to enter the workforce in meaningful ways.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the faculty, staff, and all the world-class educators for their work in doing what they do to help our future leaders in these collegiate programs. Also, I want to thank the students. Their success is key to keeping Alberta moving forward.

Thank you.

Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, on a summer's evening in Beverly folks can hear high-energy, upbeat Ukrainian folk songs. Those joyful sounds come from Cheremosh. One hundred and thirty years ago Ukrainian settlers came to Alberta and brought with them a culture rich in tradition, a tradition which includes dance, and for over 50 years Cheremosh has been home to world-class dancers, folks who

have become an important part of Edmonton and ambassadors for Alberta.

Cheremosh Way in Beverly is home to the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company, a place where generations of young people have danced. Some stay with the company and become instructors, some go on to become board members, some themselves become parent volunteers, but all pass on important principles of tradition, friendship, teamwork, and the importance of volunteerism. Cheremosh is a family, so much so, in fact, that recently the studio hosted a wedding of two of its dancers.

I recently had the chance to meet some of these young people, and they shared their stories, inspiration that can be found in the determination of a senior dancer making lifelong friendships, experiencing what it means to receive a standing ovation for the very first time. It's not uncommon to attend a Cheremosh event and, after learning only a few steps, being welcomed into their circle. Anyone who's ever had the chance to see them perform knows about that collective energy and spirit, about the importance of the stories that are woven for the audience on stage, all born out of deep respect for history, for joy and love of dance, and for joy and love of Ukraine.

Cheremosh lifts up our community. In 2022 Cheremosh celebrated their 50th anniversary, and today I am extremely honoured to have the chance to recognize those 50 years. Like the hopak, a dance that fills rooms with joy and hearts with light, I thank and offer congratulations to the families, dancers, leaders, and founders of the Cheremosh Ukrainian Dance Company. Congratulations.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, throughout this spring's election this Premier claimed to Albertans that no decision would be made on pensions without a referendum first. Now we have a proposal before this House that commits to a referendum but far too late in the process to actually matter. Put another way, the horse may have already left the barn, so there's no point in closing the gate. Will the Premier commit today that no official notice under section 3 of the CPP act will ever be given before a referendum on the matter is held?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of steps that we have to go through. The first step was releasing the report. The second step was implementing the legislation to assure Albertans that if there was ever going to be a change to an Alberta pension plan, it would be put to a referendum. All the assets would be dedicated to that purpose. The rates would either stay the same or go down, and the benefits would stay the same or go up. That's the purpose of the legislation.

No one is going to move on an Alberta pension plan without the approval of Albertans in a referendum. We're just still doing our consultation to see whether Albertans want to move to that. We finished round 1 of the consultation, and we'll do more.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the legislation doesn't say what this Premier just suggested. So far the Premier has broken her promise with respect to in-person town halls, unbiased consultation, and the responsible use of taxpayer dollars, and now

there's another opportunity for more broken promises embedded in the plan in that it also gives the government the option to ignore the referendum if it is held. To the Premier: for the record will she stand in this House and commit to honouring the results of the referendum?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the only one who said that they'd ignore the results of the referendum is her own Member for Calgary-Elbow, who said that even if Albertans did decide in a referendum that they wanted to have an Alberta pension plan, the NDP wouldn't go forward with it.

We actually trust Albertans. This is why we have given them the information. We are doing the consultation. We have finished round 1. There will be subsequent rounds. We are getting the information collated to see what Albertans have said. One of the things they have said is that they want us to get a firm number, which the Chief Actuary is working on, and as soon as we've got that number, we'll share it with the public.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the Premier's risky plan and the Premier's broken promise on a referendum. In fact, her promises have been broken so many times that, at the very least, Albertans deserve to have those promises reflected in black and white. So Alberta's NDP will introduce amendments requiring a referendum prior to notice being given to the federal government and binding the government to the results of that referendum. Will the Premier support those amendments, and if not, why should Albertans trust a single word she has to say on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Official Opposition loves to confuse the matter on a lot of issues. The reason why we are bringing this legislation forward, putting into law that there must be a referendum, is because there must be a referendum if we're going to have an Alberta pension plan. That's the reason we've put it forward. We would invite the members opposite to support it, and we would invite the members opposite to work with us on continuing to educate the public on the benefits of the Alberta pension plan and leave it to Albertans to decide. That's what we intend to do.

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

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the UCP government has shown time and again that they cannot be trusted. They promised during the election that they had no plans to pull Albertans out of the CPP, but now the UCP is in the midst of doing exactly that. Worst of all, their pension bill allows them to proceed with an Alberta pension plan even if Albertans vote against it. It is nonbinding in their legislation. Will the Premier change the bill to make the referendum results binding, and if not, why not?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, if there are amendments coming forward from the opposition, I look forward to seeing them. I can't speculate on what will be in them, but at least they'd be trying to be a productive part of this process instead of just saying inflammatory things to try to concern Alberta seniors.

Once again, where are we at in this process? An initiative that's come forward that we're actively consulting on now, that we're seeking greater understanding of through the Chief Actuary, with hopes of bringing that back to Albertans and to continue this engagement in the most honest way possible from the government.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. [interjections] Order. Order. Order. The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors will come to order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, honest is not running a multimillion-dollar propaganda campaign on numbers that they know are false. They're spending millions of dollars of Albertans' money to convince them to hand over their retirement savings to a government that doesn't even know how to buy Tylenol. Will the UCP end the propaganda campaign and change their bill to ensure that Albertans are provided with nonpartisan, factual information and evidence during the referendum period so that Albertans can be informed when making any decision?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I could use a Tylenol. I think the Never Democratic Party is very close to entering a leadership race.

Let's go back to how this began, Mr. Speaker. How should a good government proceed with an initiative and an idea like this? An RFP report from one of the most reputable firms across the country in pension and actuarial analysis; update the report with the newest numbers available; release the report to the public, and then begin to increase acknowledgement and engagement with the public; bring back new information when we have it.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the report the minister is talking about has been widely discredited and has no authors on it. No one wants to take credit for the bad numbers. We know the UCP likes to torque questions. Just look at their first survey. It didn't even ask Albertans whether they wanted to leave the CPP. Their latest workbook asks Albertans to disregard their very real concerns about the UCP's scheme to gamble away retirement security. Will the UCP change this legislation? It is before the House, and we are happy to bring forward amendments to make sure the referendum question is debated here in this House.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the engagement process was never meant to be a referendum on whether to have a referendum. But it's interesting, coming from the other side, who've been clear publicly saying that they wouldn't honour a referendum, that they wouldn't acknowledge the results from Albertans. We've been clear on this side that, of course, we would, and that's what Bill 2, that's before the House right now, speaks to, four simple principles: that any government, not necessarily ours or a future government, would need a referendum first; benefits would have to be the same or better; contributions would have to be the same or less; and the entire asset withdrawal would have to be used for . . .

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

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, we've got more e-mails straight from the Premier's inbox from Albertans worried about their pensions being gambled away. One Albertan who e-mailed the Premier wanted to know who this Premier works for because, and I quote, she does not appear to be governing for the majority of Albertans; if she was, she would not be exploring an Alberta pension plan. I want to thank that Albertan for the e-mail and ask the Premier why she won't listen to the majority of Albertans and keep the UCP's hands off CPP.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear that this government must be doing a pretty good job if the opposition is willing to burn their first three questions talking about engagement that is ongoing. We've been clear that it is protected by a referendum on this idea and, I would remind the House, an idea that according to the LifeWorks report has the potential to mean \$5 billion left in Alberta annually in the pockets of every Alberta worker, for every Alberta

business. The only reason that we've brought this forward to the public is because it shows great promise for Albertans and addresses all of the affordability . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: A retired Albertan who is also a UCP member wrote to the Premier asking why her government is, quote, pursuing this pension plan separation policy. He wrote as well that, quote, there are many more important and urgent battles to fight. Mr. Speaker, even UCP members are begging this Premier to focus on something else, to focus on the priorities of everyday Albertans. Why won't she listen?

2:00

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, once again, this is a process we've begun with Albertans. It started with the report. We're now through the first round of engagement: five telephone town halls, reaching out to almost 77,000 Albertans. They launched a workbook last Friday to give another opportunity for Albertans to make sure that the government knows exactly what they think about what they would need to see if we were to try to proceed with this idea. I think we're in a very good place. I look forward to having a conversation with Mr. Dinning soon and to talk to Alberta about next steps.

Ms Sigurdson: Another Albertan e-mailed the Premier on Sunday, September 24, to say, quote: leave pensions alone. Another wrote to the Premier to say, quote: let me be absolutely clear; I do not want a separate Alberta pension plan. And another quote: I'm so very tired of the Premier and her government. The Premier has gotten thousands of e-mails telling her to drop this plan to gamble their pensions. When does the Premier plan to start responding to these Albertans or, better yet, to listen to them?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, any Albertan can be assured that they would have their say before any government were to proceed with an Alberta pension plan. That's what we're doing. That's what Bill 2 says. It wouldn't necessarily be our government; it could be a future government that considers this. The asset can only be used for an APP. We would need a referendum to proceed. The benefits would have to be the same or better. Contributions would have to be the same or less. The only reason that we've got this out in the public sphere to talk about is because it shows great promise for Albertans. I don't know who, on the other side, they're fighting for. Are they fighting for less? Are they fighting for someone that's not an Albertan?

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors are having their say in my riding of Edmonton-McClung. They're saying loud and clear that they don't want to lose their CPP. Seniors in my riding and their grandchildren are very concerned that the elimination of the Canada pension plan will shrink pensioners' retirement income. Seniors worry about not being able to afford to retire in financial dignity, and their grandchildren wonder if they will be able to support their grandparents while saving for an increasingly expensive house or paying skyrocketing rents and tuition. Why is the Minister of Finance ignoring these voices and concerns?

Mr. Horner: We're not ignoring anyone. Affordability issues are a major concern. We can walk and chew gum on this side of the House; it appears that you can't over there if I'm going to get all the questions on engagement. I would just say, Mr. Speaker, that the only reason this has been brought forward is because it shows

promise for Albertans. We've asked the Minister of Finance to get involved; she has agreed. The Chief Actuary is going to dig into it, give us their opinion, as is the Canadian Institute of Actuaries, who is digging into the report right now. If there's new information for Albertans, we'll bring it back to them and continue the engagement.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are saying to us loud and clear on the opposition side that there is no reason to bring this forward. While the UCP relies on biased surveys and screened calls to justify their plot to gamble with Alberta's pensions, the Alberta NDP has a survey that shows 36,000 people responding to it, with 90 per cent opposed. Albertans are speaking loud and clear. This side of the House is committed to holding in-person meetings with all Albertans while that side of the House hides from actually speaking to Albertans. They won't hold in-person town halls. Since no one on that side of the House is listening to Albertans, can the minister tell us who he's listening to?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, any initiative and idea like this is going to take time. It's admittedly complicated, and we need the feds to be involved. We're not racing towards a conclusion like the opposition would suggest should be done. We've asked for more information. The Chief Actuary is getting involved, the Canadian Institute of Actuaries. The Minister of Finance: I look forward to hearing more from her at our upcoming FPT meeting in mid-December. Once again, what are we talking about here? The potential to provide affordability to spur on the economic growth we're seeing in Alberta. This has the potential to be a great thing for the province.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, the UCP is putting Albertans' pensions at risk at a time when they're already worried about outliving their life savings. If an Alberta pension plan is such a popular idea, the government would not need to be spending millions of taxpayer dollars on propaganda promoting their fight to gamble away Alberta's Canada pension plan. Can the minister tell us why he is continuing this propaganda campaign when Albertans have already said loud and clear: hands off our CPP?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the campaign to raise awareness amongst Albertans seems very defensible to me. Why would you not want to activate Albertans' interests, get them to understand more, ask more questions? Very much different than ramming a carbon tax down the throats of Albertans, legitimizing this tax across the country to make life unaffordable for every Canadian, and then following that up with a \$9 million campaign to tell us how smart it was to bring in people from Ontario to change your shower heads and change your light bulbs? Absolutely ridiculous. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Manning and Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Wildfire Prevention and Firefighter Training

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by once again echoing the appreciation for all the firefighters who kept Albertans safe during the fires last summer. There are 68 wildfires burning in the province right now and a reported 41 fire advisories, including the counties of Bashaw, Camrose, Two Hills, Innisfail, Lamont, Leduc, Magrath, and more. This year saw tens of thousands of Albertans impacted by wildfire. Communities were threatened, and people were forced to evacuate. Can the minister inform this House

today how many provincial wildfire fighters are currently still on staff?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Yes, we do have many fires still burning in the province. We've had an unprecedented year across the province with fires. One of the most interesting things is that it wasn't the number of fires per se, but the size of the fires is what's caused such a large amount of Alberta to be burned, 2.2 million hectares. We do have firefighters fighting across the province right now, and they're continuing to do the good work that they do, and they'll continue to do that work until we have those fires under control. When we started this year, on January 1, we still had nine fires left over from last year, and we'll have the same this year.

Ms Sweet: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that I was asking about the number of staff that are currently fighting wildfires in Alberta and the minister refused to answer that question and given that municipalities did so much to step up and protect their residents during the fires this summer – and they will do so again for the next wildfire season – and given that many were taking advantage of the wildfire training offered by the federal government, something that the province has not taken advantage of, and given that we owe it to Albertans to ensure that firefighters have the support, the resources, and the training that they need, why is this government not taking advantage of these training programs?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the question. Again, our firefighters are doing a great job here in Alberta. They've had a year where they've worked exceptionally hard. They've been away from their families and have worked exceptionally well with the wildfires that we've had. Again, we had an unprecedented year. We have the Hinton fire training centre, where we train our firefighters, and they're doing good work there, too. We are increasing capacity this year, looking forward to next year's fire season, to make sure that we're prepared. We know that our firefighters are doing good work, we know that they're working their hardest, and we know they'll continue to protect our homes next year.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that yesterday my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford asked a serious question about protecting communities from wildfires, but instead of answering that simple question, the minister of environment instead chose to try and spin her horrifying and insulting comments regarding arsenic and given that this question deserves more than the minister's spin, I'm going to ask it again. Can the minister of environment explain what the government is doing to protect communities from wildfires? We are in the midst of fire season, so please be specific.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're working with municipalities at this very moment. We're working on plans to make sure that we build bigger and better fireguards for our communities, and we're working with them now. It's actually very important work. When it comes to having fires, when they approach communities, we need to have fireguards that are in place that can help protect those communities. We know that in the past the

communities have built fireguards, but a lot of them haven't been maintained, so we are working hard to make sure that we have a plan, going forward, that protects those communities and makes sure that those fireguards are maintained into the future so that we can protect our communities.

Methane Emission Reduction

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, Alberta industries continue to exhibit world-class leadership in emissions reduction and environmental stewardship. Through unrelenting devotion to innovation and sheer tenacity to make our world cleaner and better, Alberta's job creators continue to blaze the way. Yet we still hear the NDP-Liberal coalition pontificate, shame, disparage, and ignore any success our responsible energy sector achieves in emissions reductions. To the minister of Sunny Ways and Sunny Days EPA: can she tell our obtuse NDP-Liberal friends why they should celebrate Alberta industry rather than disparaging it? [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know the opposition would prefer that we sit back and let Ottawa walk all over us and destroy our economy, but I am here to ensure we make our track record clear and stand up for Alberta industries. For years Alberta's oil and gas sector has led the way on methane emissions reductions. We were the first province in Canada to set a methane emissions target for the oil and gas sector, and we hit our 45 per cent reduction target years ahead of schedule. This goes to show that you can reduce emissions and grow the economy. That's exactly what we're doing, and that is absolutely something to celebrate.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was not surprised to see Alberta officially hit our methane reduction targets three years ahead of schedule. Given that this is a prodigious milestone, a testament to Alberta's world-renowned leadership in emissions reduction and responsible energy development, to our esteemed and venerable standard bearer of environmental aegis: can she please enlighten this House on how Alberta's innovation-driven and cost-effective approach to emissions reductions has been so efficacious?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Now, when we look at Alberta's approach, Alberta's baseline reduction opportunities program reviewed almost 15,000 well sites and facilities and identified opportunities for reducing methane emissions. When issues were identified, our methane technology implementation program has taken action, generating over 16.6 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions reductions to date. This 45 per cent methane emissions reduction target was reached because of our province-led approach that worked with industry, not against them, and we saved industry almost \$600 million compared to the proposed top-down federal mandates.

Mr. Hunter: Given that Ottawa's barmy climate plans have failed to hit a solitary emissions reduction target in their seemingly endless quest to achieve carbon nirvana and given that the lords of the east refuse to stop pushing their punitive methane regulations and given that this same federal government has been overruled twice by federal courts, who have refused their coveted dancing

bear status, to the minister of Alberta's lofty vistas, expansive plains, and carbon-sequestering forest: can she inform our colleagues how she plans to protect Alberta from these potential top-down federal methane regulations?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell all the members this. I assure you we will not back down. Alberta has momentum. From hitting this major methane emissions reduction milestone years ahead of schedule to the ruling against Ottawa's Impact Assessment Act and the federal order on plastics deemed unreasonable and unconstitutional, Alberta will continue reducing emissions and growing our economy, embracing and encouraging innovation without punishing our job creators. That's what Alberta's emission reduction and energy development plan is all about. From methane to electricity to carbon capture, utilization, and storage we will continue to lead the way. Ottawa needs to stay in their own lane.

Former Dometar Site Remediation

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, in 2019 the Alberta NDP government announced a study after an assessment identified the potential of elevated cancer rates for people who used to live near the former Dometar wood treatment plant in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. It's now been nearly five years, and this study has not yet been released. Residents are worried about the potential impact and feel abandoned by this UCP government. Can the minister of the environment please explain why this report has not yet been released, and will she commit to tabling it in this House today?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member opposite for that thoughtful and important question. Environment and Protected Areas has worked with experts and taken extensive steps to safely remediate part of the former Dometar site. We will continue to monitor it closely, of course, in the years ahead. Now, the remediation work removed areas of contamination to improve the quality and safety of the site. Over 95,000 tonnes of soil were removed from the site and taken to landfills for disposal. Our government is focused on protecting the health and safety of all Albertans. We're taking steps to understand more about the factors that may have contributed to higher rates of cancer in the area.

Ms Wright: Well, aside from the fact that I was asking when the report would be tabled, given that Dume Bera, father of three, told CBC, quote, "I worry; I worry every day about my sons" and given that Bera's home stands on the ground of the former Dometar site and given that while remediation work has been approved this month, families worry already about the impacts on their health and in Dume's case specifically the health of his kids, can the minister tell us what is being done to support the families living near the former Dometar site? I'm looking for specifics, Minister.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is a very important question. I do want to reiterate that we are committed to completing the epidemiological study and will release the findings publicly when they're ready so that all of those who are

impacted will know the results. Now, this work was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic as public health staff were redeployed to support that response. An expert epidemiologist at the U of A has been engaged to help complete the necessary analysis, which will be vetted through a scientific peer-reviewed process to then validate the findings. While we don't have a firm date for completion of this work, we'll update our timelines as we know more.

Ms Wright: Given that soil testing has shown that more than 180 samples from 1,500 specimens had levels of toxins exceeding health guidelines and given that families have reported that their children can have struggles breathing and have had frequent hospital visits and given, again, that they feel abandoned by this UCP government, will this government, any minister on that side, commit to attending meetings with my constituents so they can hear directly from those worried families?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that we take very seriously. As I mentioned, we don't have a firm date for completion of the work, but we will update the public as soon as we know more. This is an independent review conducted at arm's length from the government, so we don't have any further information to release at this time, but certainly if families are concerned, they can reach out to my office at any time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis has the call.

Logging in Kananaskis Country

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, over the last few months thousands of Albertans have raised concerns about logging in Kananaskis over an internationally significant trail network and the headwaters of the Highwood River. The Blood Nation and the Iyârhe Nakoda are concerned about impacts to sites of significance and potential burial grounds and a lack of sufficient funding to conduct effective site visits. Yet again this government refuses to acknowledge or even listen to the concerns of Albertans and First Nations. Will the Minister of Forestry and Parks conduct meaningful public consultation and engagement on logging in Kananaskis?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. I think it's important for people to realize that Kananaskis Country is a geographic area. It isn't actually a park itself, but within that park there are multiple provincial parks and provincial recreation areas and ecological reserves. So when we look at Kananaskis, there are parts of that that are multi-use, which includes forestry. That's part of the South Saskatchewan regional plan. So allocated forestry operations do happen in parts of Kananaskis. The process that they go through to create their plans involves public consultation, so the public has had a chance to have involvement in that and will continue to.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that those consultations were clearly inadequate because logging in the headwaters of the Highwood River park or public land-use zone is and has been opposed by residents, municipalities, and stakeholders for years and given that intact forests in the headwaters mitigate the impacts of flood and drought and provide critical habitat for several species at risk and given that protesters gathered at this logging site this past weekend

demanding a pause to logging, is the minister even listening? What is the minister going to do to work with the community and forestry companies to address these valid concerns?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again for the question. Obviously, the forest companies do engage with the public. They take consideration of all the people that contact them, and we do likewise in my Ministry of Forestry and Parks.

We know that proper forest management involves forest harvest. When we look at our forests, a lot have become very old and very dry, and we know that that's susceptible to fire. Actually, devastating fires have happened because of the age of our forests in some areas. When we look at Kananaskis, a lot of those areas were logged about 80 years ago. So a lot of the result is because of forest . . .

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that some of this logging overlaps an internationally recognized and popular trail network in West Bragg Creek and given that the government granted local trail organizations hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Kananaskis conservation pass to build and maintain this network and given that the local community invested thousands of volunteer hours to do so, will the minister admit that this whole fiasco was created by his promising the same trees to forestry and tourism? Does the right hand even know what the left is doing?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again for the question. The member knows that the forest practice that's happening right now is the same forest practice that was happening while they were in power, so this is continuing on. We know we have a world-class organization when we follow international and national standards when it comes to our forestry operations. They do a great job – they do a world-class job – and the members opposite should be proud of that instead of trying to discredit that. We know that Kananaskis is a great place to recreate, but it also has a multi-use, and that's part of the South Saskatchewan regional plan, that was widely consulted on. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Supervised Drug Consumption Sites

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Families, individuals, and businesses are feeling abandoned with the NDP drug consumption site in downtown Red Deer. The NDP drug consumption site has increased crime in Red Deer. It emboldened law-breaking. It has destroyed some businesses. Their drug site produced an exodus of other businesses out of the downtown. To the minister: what are the impacts of NDP drug sites in Alberta?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, while drug consumption sites continue to play a role in the continuum of care in Alberta, I think every reasonable Albertan can agree that drug consumption sites on every corner will not address and solve the addiction crisis we're seeing. What will address and solve the addiction crisis is recovery, recovery for those who are vulnerable, those in need, which is why we've invested in 11 recovery communities across this province, including our first one open in Red Deer, which already has those

in treatment, soon to be in long-term permanent recovery, along with more work with the ODP and others.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the NDP forced their drug site in Red Deer, ignoring city council and the majority of our families and businesses, and given that the lockdown queen MLA will not even say whether she wants her own NDP drug site in Edmonton-Strathcona and given that their drug site is not wanted in Red Deer either, to the minister: will our government force NDP drug sites into communities that don't want them?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that we believe in a model that has recovery at the heart of it. That's why in 2021 we implemented licensing and regulation for any future drug consumption site in the province. Unlike the NDP zero accountability free-for-all that they implemented, we now have an obligation for the providers to work with community and refer to detox and treatment. We also mandate any future site to have extensive community engagement and, of course, good-neighbour agreements before they begin the service.

Mr. Stephan: Given that recovery from addictions is the right way and given that we have invested many millions in recovery and given that enabling addictions is the wrong way and given that the NDP drug sites are very bad, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: if Red Deer wants an orderly transition of the drug site out of Red Deer, will you listen to them?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, if we get serious, direct feedback from a municipality, as the minister and as a government I believe we have a serious obligation to consider what path we have to take forward. The truth is that it is a real tragedy to see members opposite and those who are activists and academics trying to politicize an issue where we know there are only two paths and outcomes to addiction. It's unfortunate that we . . . [interjections]

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

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, it's a tragedy when we know that the outcome to addiction is either the sad death of an individual or the happy, fulfilled second lease on life in recovery. I ask all members of this Chamber and Albertans to join us in the Alberta recovery model.

Energy Industry Emission Reduction Initiatives

Ms Pancholi: Yesterday the environment minister announced that Alberta has achieved its methane reduction target of 45 per cent below 2014 levels. If accurate, this is good news for our province and oil and gas industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Pancholi: So let's give credit where it's due, the Alberta NDP's climate leadership plan. It was that landmark legislation which featured the methane reduction target that the UCP is so pleased that we've met. It also created the industrial carbon pricing system that the UCP has embraced. We're happy the UCP is celebrating the NDP's leadership on climate change, but my question for the Premier is this. When will they stop taking . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Pancholi: My question to the Premier is this: when will they stop taking credit for our work and start doing some of their own?

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

Ms Schulz: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to hear from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud again, who we haven't heard from in a couple weeks in this House, but it's great to get a question from her again.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Ms Schulz: You know, Mr. Speaker, I will say this. I remember very vividly the record of the NDP in the province of Alberta when they chased away investment, they chased away people, they chased away jobs, 180,000 of them. When we look at the NDP-Liberal coalition, I call tell you that they haven't hit any of their emissions targets, but we here in Alberta have. We're going to continue to work with industry and do even more.

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted at 2:25.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the troubling news is that Albertans are having a hard time trusting the AER or the UCP right now and given that recent findings from Carleton's energy and emissions research lab suggest that Alberta's methane emissions are actually 50 per cent higher than reported by the AER and this government and given that this means that Alberta's emissions are significantly higher than B.C.'s oil and gas facilities, what exactly is the government doing to ensure that their data is accurate, build trust in the AER, and make sure that we're not falling behind other jurisdictions to have the cleanest oil in North America?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I would say that, again, the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour, and once again we see the NDP choosing to side with climate activists instead of with Albertans' major industries. Now, we do disagree with the conclusions from that research lab. The report relies exclusively on federal data. They never reached out to the province of Alberta to get any numbers, any data, and of course some of those authors are linked to organizations who want to shut down all of our major industries. I expect nothing less from the members opposite.

Ms Pancholi: Given that on Tuesday Dow Chemical announced it was proceeding with an \$8.8 billion petrochemical project . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Pancholi: . . . and given that this investment is a direct result of carbon pricing and supports like the NDP's petrochemical diversification program and given that this is what the economic future of Alberta could look like if the UCP wasn't so obsessed with picking fights with Ottawa and scaring away investment in renewables . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. member is going to go from the top again.

Ms Pancholi: Given that on Tuesday Dow Chemical announced . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader will bring his caucus to order.

Ms Pancholi: This will be one of the world's first net-zero integrated complexes and given that this investment is a direct result of carbon pricing and supports like the NDP's petrochemical diversification program and given that this is what the economic future of Alberta could look like if the UCP wasn't so obsessed with picking fights with Ottawa and scaring away investment in renewables, will the minister explain why they want to leave this kind of cash on the table when they could be building a clean energy economy today?

Ms Schulz: You know, Mr. Speaker, once again, let's go back a few years to the NDP's record. Their record was one of selling out to Justin Trudeau. We will not follow the same path. We will continue to fight for Albertans and fight for all of our major industries. Instead of chasing jobs, investment, and people out of our province, we are bringing them back in droves. That is because our Premier and our team worked hard to make sure that Dow made their final investment decision to be located here in Alberta, and we know that our announcement yesterday of our APIP program will help to bring even more jobs and opportunity right here at home.

Health Care Professionals in Rural Alberta

Mr. Dyck: Mr. Speaker, concerns regarding the shrinking availability of doctors continue to grow, especially for those living in small northern communities. Given that the data suggests a staggering 79 per cent decrease in family physicians accepting new patients from 2020 to 2023 in Alberta and given that it is evident that we are facing a pressing health care crisis, can the Minister of Health please provide an update on the status of expanded doctor training programs specifically tailored to northern Alberta and what measures are being taken to address this crisis to ensure the residents of northern Alberta have access to primary care?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We recognize recruitment to northern Alberta and rural communities is a challenge. Right now our government is working with the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary to significantly expand the number of physicians trained in our province. A key aspect of the physician training expansion is a partnership with Northwestern Polytechnic to develop a regional hub centre in Grande Prairie that will act as a hub for surrounding communities. This will benefit all rural communities as evidence shows that students who learn in rural areas tend to stay in rural areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. That is great news. Given the unique challenges faced by northern Alberta, including its vast geography, and further given nurse practitioners can play a vital role in addressing the health care crisis in this region, can the minister continue to shed light on strategies to enable nurse practitioners in northern Alberta to expand their rosters and cater to the growing number of potential patients in need of their services?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nurse practitioners are crucial for strengthening Alberta's primary care system. Implementing a nurse practitioner compensation model whereby

they can practise autonomously or in a team will increase needed capacity and, most importantly, get Albertans access to the care they need. We need all hands on deck. Nurse practitioners alongside family physicians play an important role in ensuring Albertans in rural communities and right across the whole province have access to primary care. This is essential for primary care, and we're on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the unique challenges faced by health care professionals in rural Alberta and given the pressing need to ensure continued access to essential health care services for our residents, can the Minister of Health provide insights into the challenges of keeping doctors and nurse practitioners in rural Alberta and what proactive measures and initiatives are being undertaken to both retain health care providers and attract new doctors and nurse practitioners to rural Alberta, thereby addressing the critical health care access concerns in our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Recruitment and retention in rural communities continues to be a challenge right across Canada. In addition to what I've already mentioned, we will also be working with the Alberta Medical Association to stabilize what we currently have and develop a new compensation model for physicians. We're also increasing medical program seats, focusing on rural communities. We remain committed to ensuring Albertans get the quality health care they deserve when and where they need it, because that is so important.

Public-private Partnerships for School Construction

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, P3s are a terrible model for schools, and they are bad for Alberta students. The UCP are planning to build five regional schools using P3s, yet we have been seeing the model fail across the country time and time again. It was terrible for hospitals, bad for the LRT, and it hurts students who won't get to access quality education. Will the minister admit P3s are a bad model and abandon these school projects that will no doubt be a colossal mess?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the opposition are not big fans of P3s, but they are a proven commodity; P3s, that is. They're used across Canada, the U.S., and around the world to successfully deliver projects. Why? Well, because they increase efficiency. They encourage innovation. They improve quality. [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, Alberta taxpayers deserve to get the best value for their investment dollars, and ignoring this tool would be an error. We will not make that mistake to satisfy the NDP's ideology.

Mr. Deol: Given that we all know P3s have a bad track record across the country, with teachers in Saskatchewan unable to open windows or decorate their classrooms, and given that here in Alberta's harsh climate the thermostats in P3 schools did not work, creating unbearable conditions for students and educators, why is

this minister risking the safety of Albertan students and educators by continuing to opt for P3s despite the evidence that they're horrible models? Minister, don't students here deserve better?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The implication from the NDP that P3s are evil is just false. Alberta has a successful track record of delivering through this model. We currently have an award-winning P3 under way for five high schools, all of which will be completed early next year, and this will have created over 1,700 construction jobs and enabled over 6,000 student spaces. In the last 15 years we have awarded upwards of 50 schools this way, and we will continue to look for opportunities to save money. We have an obligation to look for the best value for our investment.

Mr. Deol: Given that even your previous Infrastructure minister last year said that they're bad and given that P3s have an utter disregard for transparency even though they are building critical infrastructure and given that they operate on the taxpayer's dollar but have never once shown public accountability – they even had a giant fence failing on children here in Edmonton as they played in unfinished schoolyards – will the minister stop using taxpayers' money to build schools and schoolyards that literally cause harm to Albertan students?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. P3 stands for public-private partnership, and whenever the element of private comes into play, the NDP can't stand it. They're about state ownership; they're not about being partners with the private sector. Being partners with the private sector would be blasphemy in the socialist world. They want centralized control, one that stifles innovation, reduces . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I really don't understand their contempt for P3s. On this side of the House we are focused on bringing value for money to Alberta taxpayers, full stop.

Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Member Ceci: This government imposed cuts to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts budget in 2020 and 2021, 5 per cent each year, amid the pandemic and at a time when Alberta's artists and arts organizations were at their most vulnerable but also at a point in time when people were relying on the work of artists more than ever to stay connected and feel a sense of belonging and togetherness. Despite Alberta's post-COVID economic rebound AFA funding has not changed. Can the minister explain why she hasn't restored these provincial cuts?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta artists form the basis of our cultural fabric of our province, and our lives are richer when the arts thrive in our province. Through Budget 2023 our government committed \$28 million to funding to support the arts, including stable funding of \$25.6 million to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Member Ceci: Given that AFA funding cuts in 2020 and 2021 haven't been restored – they're stable, but they haven't been

restored – and given that AFA funding has not kept up with inflation, population growth, or the cost of doing business, all of which are additional reasons that point to the need for a stronger AFA funding, and given that talking about Alberta artists is fine, like she just did, but without meaningful increases to the arts funding the diversity of arts will suffer and we'll only be left with touring American shows, will the minister commit to bringing forward increases in the budget?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Arts funding also supports government initiatives such as the artist in residence program and Month of the Artist. I got to view incredible work by Aeris Osborne today at the northern Jubilee Auditorium. We focus on and support artists in this province.

Member Ceci: Given that last week the minister talked about how the federal government wasn't doing enough – that's a bit much when this government's not doing enough – and given that the Canadian government has doubled overall funding for the Canadian council between 2016 and 2021 and in 2018 Calgary's city council nearly doubled CADA's budget yet AFA's budget is lower now than it was several years ago, will this government commit to supporting the arts in line with other orders of government to back up their stated commitment and appreciation of Alberta artists?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, the best way to have a strong arts sector is to have a thriving economy, something members on this side understand.

2:40 School Construction in Chestermere-Strathmore

Ms de Jonge: Mr. Speaker, it's been almost 10 years since Chestermere has had a new school built, and since 2001 Chestermere's population has grown by nearly 500 per cent. Many people have answered the Alberta Is Calling campaign and have been moving to my constituency, but along with this growth comes the need for new schools, and many of my neighbours are worried about their children's education. To the Minister of Education: what's the plan to build much-needed schools in Chestermere?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member for the important question. I want to commend her on raising the concerns of her community. We've met numerous times, talking about the importance of schools in her community. There are a number of projects that are on the docket for Chestermere. In particular, the new K to 9 school with the Calgary Catholic school division received design funding in the last budget. So it's on track, once the design is complete, to be able to proceed with construction funding. In addition, Rocky View school division's K to 9 school also received planning funding. So these projects are well moving forward.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that East Lake school in Chestermere has extreme enrolment pressures, seeing a spike in September enrolment and over two new students a week since, and given that Chestermere high school is at 108 per cent utilization rate and further given that this rapid population growth in my community requires fast action to support students' education, can the same minister please share what is being done in Chestermere to increase learning spaces via modulars?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, one of the things that can be done immediately to help support additional learning spaces is through modulars. In Budget '23 Rocky View school division received three modular units for Chestermere Lake middle school. That's, of course, an interim measure that can be applied very quickly to help expand some additional learning spaces. Our school divisions have recently submitted their asks for the '24-25 year for modulars. Having received those, the Ministry of Education will evaluate those requests and, through the upcoming budget, allocate additional units where necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. I appreciate his advocacy and prioritization of schools in our quickly growing communities. Given education and school capacities are such an important topic to the families in my constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore and further given that those in my community are awaiting updates on the development of new learning spaces in schools with great anticipation, can the same minister please share a timeline for when we can expect to see some new developments in Chestermere?

Mr. Nicolaides: Sure. Happy to, Mr. Speaker. Of course, through the planning process and through the budget process residents of her community can expect to see a little bit more information in the budget this coming spring about whether projects are moving forward and what stages they'll be moving forward in. I ask the member and her constituents to stay tuned to the budget in the spring about the advancement of some of these projects. Again, I just want to thank the member for meeting with me and for raising the concerns of her constituents and advocating for their priorities.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills, I'm pleased to table the committee's final report on Bill Pr.1, St. Joseph's College Amendment Act, 2023, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. This bill was referred to the committee on November 22, 2023. The report recommends that Bill Pr.1 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill Pr.1.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has a tabling.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the requisite number of copies of a statement issued earlier today by the chief scientist for Alberta Environment and Protected Areas. The statement makes a point about water quality in the region of Fort Chipewyan and the municipality of Wood Buffalo. There have been 35 enhanced tests. All met the drinking water quality guidelines, and, importantly, "no exceedances in arsenic have been measured in the drinking water . . . the drinking water is safe."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a True North article from last week titled Alberta's 44 Wind Farms Operating at 0.3% Capacity on Wednesday. It highlights the intermittency of renewable energy and the necessity of reliable baseload power in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies. I'm tabling a letter from Peter Strickland, a professional engineer who wanted to express his opinion about Bill 7.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 2:25 the hon. the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of a Member

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At 2:25 the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas said – and I do not have the benefit of the Blues – in referring to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, “a member we haven't heard from in this House,” and she may have said, “in a couple [of] weeks.” I don't have the exact quote with me. I rise on this point of order under Standing Order 23(h), “makes allegations against another Member,” as well as chapter 13, Mr. Speaker, which I know you're very familiar with, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which reads: allusion to the presence or absence of a member or minister in the Chamber is unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, you have made multiple rulings establishing clear precedent that these allusions are prohibited, to imply that someone has not been in this place and working as an MLA in this Assembly. This accusation that we have not heard from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is unparliamentary and also holds absolutely no credence given that we know that she has debated on multiple bills, that she's raised questions about education funding, funding for educational assistants, medical laboratory services. She has raised issues around new school construction, the enrolment pressures, and certainly made sure that funding for students with complex needs has been raised in this Chamber. The only way that the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas has not heard from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would be if she has not been listening, or perhaps she herself wasn't here. But I would not say that. Certainly not. I think this is a clear point of order, and I ask that the minister be asked to withdraw and apologize.

As I am here speaking of this, I will just also mention, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, through heckling – so I have not risen on a point of order officially, but I will in the future – continues to try to draw attention to the presence and absence of members. I think that the Government House Leader should caution his caucus about what is parliamentary and unparliamentary.

If I may anticipate the Government House Leader on this, I anticipate that we may hear about leadership contestants or other business. This is not *Power & Politics* in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, and I would encourage the Government House Leader to save that kind of rhetoric for the press gallery party tonight.

The Speaker: Sounds to me like we're having a House leaders meeting here at the Chamber, not debating a point of order.

I think it would be advantageous, in light of the points of order that have taken place in the Chamber over the past two days – a point of order was called in the middle of a point of order yesterday or two days ago, it's possible, in which I required the hon. Government House Leader to withdraw and apologize his remarks. But you yourself have identified that you wouldn't say something that you, in fact, did say, so perhaps you can withdraw and apologize and save us the point of order.

Ms Gray: Entirely correct. I apologize.

The Speaker: All right. I consider the point of order point of order dealt with and concluded.

The hon. Government House Leader on the first point of order.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is that like a sub point of order or something? I don't even know, you know. Who knows?

The Speaker: I know they're not allowed.

Mr. Schow: Not my first day on the job, but, you know, every day you learn something new in this building.

I'm not sure if the hon. Opposition House Leader is reading minds or not or trying to, but let's go with her argument with regard to acknowledging the presence or absence of a member. At no point, Mr. Speaker, did that happen today. I have what I think would be unofficial records that would suggest that the hon. minister of environment said: nice to hear from the member again; we haven't heard from her in a couple of weeks.

2:50

Whether the member has spoken a lot or a little, I suspect, is a matter of debate. I mean, the reality is that in this Chamber, when it comes to question period, one could argue, Mr. Speaker, we have not heard from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for some time. There's a reason. We could speculate. Does it have anything to do with that member not being in the good graces of their leader, not getting questions? Who determines the questions? Is it because the member is possibly in Okotoks campaigning for leader? I don't know. It just seems a bit suspicious. But what I would say is that this is not a point of order. This is, rather, a matter of debate, and I would argue that we move on from this.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. The statement that was made by the hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas is: “It's nice to hear from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud again, who we haven't heard from in a couple weeks in this House, but it's great to get a question from her again.” What I will say is that the hon. minister didn't refer to her specifically not being in the House or absent from the House, just that we haven't heard from her in a number of weeks, and, as the Government House Leader has identified, there are a wide range of reasons why we may not hear from a member from time to time.

It is perhaps risky for the Speaker to try to determine what the minister was saying or what she wasn't saying. I am, though, sympathetic to the Official Opposition House Leader's position with respect to our reference books that allude to the presence or absence of a specific member, and a case may be able to be made that the minister was alluding to that fact.

One thing that I will say for today is that when members of the Assembly make effort to get so close to breaking the rule without breaking the rule, what we find is that disorder generally ensues. So

while I won't find this a point of order today, I will provide a significant caution. And while I am on my feet, I too have heard the hon. Member for Morinville-St. Albert perhaps making reference to the presence or absence of members in the Chamber, and if he continues to proceed in doing so, there's a very real possibility that that would also be a point of order.

I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 7 Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: The Minister for Advanced Education has risen.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 7, the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Amendment Act, 2023. As you know, Bill 7 proposes legislative amendments which clarify the use of the software engineer title to help attract skilled tech-sector talent into the province.

Now, I do want to talk a little bit more about this bill, particularly around the engagement piece, and I can say that this bill has been in the works for some time now. My predecessor in skilled trades and professions actually brought this forward initially, and at that time there was significant engagement undertaken with the tech sector, with postsecondaries, as well as with the regulator, which is APEGA, and other members in the engineering community. And what we heard at that time: of course, there were some concerns around safety, but overwhelmingly there was tremendous support from the tech sector, and the underlying, or actually the overlying, message was that in order to be competitive with international jurisdictions, we really do need to make some changes to allow use of the title of software engineer, and of course that is the whole basis of this legislation.

Speaking of being competitive with global jurisdictions, we have heard from so many individuals across the country, across the world in terms of how meaningful and monumental this bill is in terms of attracting and retaining talent and being able to encourage investment into our province.

I did read with interest the amendments that were brought forward from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore and had some time to thoughtfully analyze these amendments. At this point I do want to be clear that we will not be supporting these amendments, and I'll tell you the reasons why.

With respect to the proposed amendment from the opposition, Bill 7 already ensures that those who are not accredited as an engineer cannot practise engineering. Put another way, if a software engineer is practising or applying principles of engineering, that individual does have to be regulated by APEGA.

In addition, when it comes to the safety concerns, this was also a concern that was brought forward by the regulator in their court case against Jobber, and I can tell you that the Court of King's Bench has already ruled against APEGA by having their lawsuit against Jobber dismissed with costs. So those are my comments as they pertain to subsection (3) in the amendment.

As it relates to subsection (4), we have an agreement to work with APEGA, the regulator, and potential other stakeholders to make sure that we bring other changes to the EGPA as required that might give additional legislative authorities to the regulator as they deem fit in terms of trying to enhance their activities around regulating the profession. Because that work does require significant stakeholder engagement, again, engaging with postsecondaries – and by the way, I should mention that we did get several faculty members across various postsecondaries in the province actually demonstrate support for this legislation.

Again, going back to the engagement, we do have to do further engagement with the regulator, with other engineering organizations, with other postsecondaries to ensure what other kind of legislative powers would be sufficient and appropriate to make sure that the regulator has what they need to enforce their policies to make sure that engineers are compliant with the regulation. So those are the reasons why I would recommend not supporting these amendments.

Certainly, I hope that other comments coming from my colleagues across the aisle around their concerns could – they can come to me directly and we can discuss this further. But I do believe that the bill as it stands right now is robust and certainly does meet the objectives of attracting additional investment into this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Calgary-Foothills has the floor.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am disappointed to hear that the minister will not support this amendment. The amendment was crafted with consideration to both APEGA and the software community. We have also been conducting considerable engagement with both the software community, the tech sector, and APEGA. I'm sure the minister is aware that I've been working in the tech sector over the last several years and been a part of many of these conversations about the use of the words or title "software engineer." This amendment does not change the original intent of Bill 7. It does not impact Alberta's ability to attract investment to the province. It doesn't stop the software, the tech sector from using the word "software engineering." That's still all in place. It's just reinforcing and providing clarity to when the practice of engineering is in use.

3:00

This amendment does provide clarification on who is authorized to engage in the practice of engineering. It allows the regulator, also known as APEGA, to confirm if software engineers are engaging in the practice of engineering.

The amendment is meant to address matters of public safety. We heard yesterday from the Minister of Technology and Innovation that there are already standards in place for projects that potentially put the public safety at risk. It could be inferred that other regulatory bodies or indeed individual companies will ensure matters of public safety are being considered in their projects. This results in the minister's interpretation that the amendment isn't required.

However, it is the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act that provides the foundation for those other regulations to do their work. In order for those regulatory requirements – in many instances with those other industries and projects it is a licensed engineer that ensures that those regulations are being met. This practice of engineering will similarly ensure the safety of projects in the realm of areas of generative AI and machine learning, of which we don't yet know the implications of public safety.

This amendment reinforces that role for engineers. It does not prevent the act from doing what it is intended to do, facilitate the recruitment efforts of our technology sector. We wholly understand that there are a number of facilities that need to be put in place for our technology sector to be able to grow as they are trying to do.

So I do encourage the members in this House to support the amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any others wishing to speak? The Minister of Advanced Education has risen.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Chair. I do want to take the opportunity just to address some of the comments made by the member opposite, and I should have been a little bit clearer earlier when I spoke, but I will clarify right now. There is potential that the proposed addition as it relates to subsection (3) is redundant to section 2(1) of the EGPA, which states:

Except as otherwise provided in this Act, no individual, corporation, partnership or other entity, except a professional engineer, a licensee so authorized in the licensee's licence, a permit holder so authorized in its permit or a certificate holder so authorized in the certificate holder's certificate, shall engage in the practice of engineering.

Again, that makes subsection (3) redundant, which is why we are not supporting this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any others wishing to speak? Otherwise, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:03 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

Ceci	Haji	Metz
Chapman	Hoyle	Phillips
Ellingson	Kasawski	Sabir
Ganley	Kayande	Tejada

3:20

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 44
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Any further speakers wishing to speak to the bill, Bill 7?

If not, we will go to the question. I am prepared to call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee rise and report Bill 7.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

Alberta Pension Protection Act

Ms Sweet moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 2, Alberta Pension Protection Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 2, Alberta Pension Protection Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill, if enacted, would not adequately protect Albertans' pensions.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment November 28: Ms Al-Guneid]

The Acting Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak at this time? The Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of the amendment to Bill 2, commonly known as a reasoned amendment, that the bill not be read a second time "because the Assembly is of the view that the bill, if enacted, would not adequately protect Albertans' pensions."

Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with every word of this amendment as proposed given that the bill is problematic for several reasons. Now, the bill itself, that this amendment seeks to hoist, is designed to provide the legislative underpinnings for an Alberta pension plan. This scheme, hidden from the public during the election, will cost a minimum of \$500 million in start-up costs. That's according to Travis Toews, a former Finance minister who in questioning at estimates debate just in February – it seems like a long time ago – confirmed that it would be \$500 million for Alberta to start its own tax collection agency, a requirement for an Alberta

pension plan. Five hundred million. I would encourage members of the House and the tens of people watching on Alberta Assembly TV to contemplate just what we could do for education, health care, housing, other affordability priorities for Albertans with \$500 million.

Now, this bill is, of course, the legislative underpinning for a scheme that is also based on a fake analysis hidden from the public for over two years, the long-promised analysis from consulting firm LifeWorks, which then issued a report without a stated author, which was pointed out in a withering critique by David Carpenter, the former mayor of Lethbridge and a former Conservative of some note. That analysis claimed that Alberta should get \$334 billion of the CPP's asset pool, which represents about 53 per cent, much higher than Alberta's representative population in the CPP, which is about 15 per cent.

The analysis was widely discredited within minutes of its release, but what it did do and the reason why it was released with a \$7.5 million propaganda campaign to back it is that it created dollar signs in the eyes of the Premier and her consigliere Rob Anderson. It aroused dismissal at best and mockery at worst among the public and experts. The LifeWorks report, quote, hinges on a transfer amount that appears to be impossible, said the CPP Investment Board in an interview, adding that the estimate is not grounded in the legislation.

Economics professor Trevor Tombe indicated that the interpretation they used in this report is highly problematic. If you start with \$334 billion, not a reasonable starting position, then it tilts the scales toward concluding that an Alberta pension plan is a no-brainer when it is not. Tombe said that while Alberta's younger population might garner a lower contribution rate, there would be trade-offs. See above, Mr. Speaker, re \$500 million at a minimum in start-up costs for Alberta's own tax collection agency.

Now, a separate Alberta plan would also be more exposed to demographic and economic risk, and contribution rates elsewhere would need to increase among other Canadians to make up for it. The Calgary Chamber of commerce warned that a provincial plan could hurt labour mobility, create uncertainty for business. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business warned of significant risk to small businesses in particular if Alberta moves ahead with creating its own plan.

Now, tilting the scales, as Tombe put it in the 48 hours after the report's release, is about the most charitable phrasing possible for what happened next; \$7.5 million was expended on an ad campaign that just made Albertans more dismissive, more suspicious, and more alarmed at the extent to which the government would simply make stuff up, spend millions on advertising that stuff, and then refuse to answer basic questions about the assumption, the analysis. Then later, after I asked the Finance minister no fewer than six times whether there would even be a referendum, which he would not commit to – so much for all of that chest-thumping about direct democracy. He declined to answer that question when I asked him six times straight.

Then we bring ourselves to a piece of legislation that for this and so many other reasons should not be read a second time, as this amendment proposes, that does not in fact require a binding referendum – not at all – and does not actually safeguard our retirement savings from political interference in the airtight way that they are safeguarded currently in the CPP. Then came the nonconsultation, a survey that did not even ask Albertans whether they wanted to leave the CPP. So we did our own, asking a simple question: do you want to leave the CPP? We have received, as of my last checking, over 40,000 responses, with 90 per cent of them opposed.

The government cannot claim that they have not heard from Albertans. We FOIPed their e-mails over three days in September.

The Premier received 1,400 e-mails about her plan to gamble with our CPP. We are still looking for one that supports the Alberta pension plan. We can only assume that MLAs are hearing the same; we get CCed on their e-mails as well. I have been inundated as the critic on this issue. Every day I hear from Drayton Valley, from Drumheller, from Camrose, from Lethbridge-East.

Then there was the sorry tale of the town halls, which were promised by Jim Dinning before he got mad and blew his stack during a telephone town hall. A grand total of 150 Albertans of some 4.5 million were able to get through to the shambolic town halls, notionally chaired by has-been politician Dinning, and many people just hung up after being yelled at and dismissed and condescended to by him. This process is yet another reason why this bill, that this is supposed to be supporting, should not be read a second time. I'm going to refer to a message I just got within the last 24 hours from a constituent from Lethbridge-East:

Hi. I'm in the east constituency. I was involved in the town hall phone calls. OMG. It was so biased by the panel; it made me furious. I want to stay in the CPP. I am retiring in just over a year, and I'm scared to death about all this. I was so mad that I just hung up. I knew they wouldn't let me get through to ask a question. I have contacted the Member for Lethbridge-East, and his office just sent me a generic info answer. I would like to be involved in your in-person town hall.

Thank you.

3:30

I want to conclude my comments on this legislation, which ought not be read a second time, as this amendment proposes, by highlighting the reasons why Albertans are so vehemently opposed to the so-called Alberta pension plan; the reasons why they are asking for in-person consultation; the reasons why they are so very disappointed that no fewer than two UCP MLAs have jammed out on the in-person town hall in St. Albert, for example; the reasons why Albertans have rejected, now for a generation, this topic being sort of floated, you know, as one of these fever dreams of the firewall. Why hasn't it been moved forward yet? I think often of a quote from Ralph Klein. It was about 20-some years ago when he had a panel that reported in to him on this, and he ended up having to dismiss the idea, that was sort of wafting out of the far-right flank of the party at the time. He said: you don't just do this to piss off the feds; you do it if there's an economic case. Classic Klein, right? And there isn't an economic case, and Albertans know it. They know it instinctually. They know it intuitively.

Consider that the CPP is an internationally recognized investment fund, one of the best-managed funds in the world. Consider that it is, in fact, a gift, that not even all industrialized economies enjoy across the board, to have a portable, universal, payroll-based retirement system that is insulated from political risk, that is invested wisely, that is governed appropriately. We do not realize what we have sometimes, Mr. Speaker, when we have governance that actually works for people, that actually upholds the rule of law in the public interest. Consider that we have this fund that is able to pool risk across demographics, geography, time. Consider that Canadians do not have access to as many defined benefit employer pensions as in some European countries. So it is our CPP, our private savings, and our equity in our homes that we have to rely on into our retirement, and that's if you're lucky. That's if you're lucky. So you understand, then, why Albertans feel so strongly about the very notion of handing our one stable, predictable piece of our foregone income set aside for retirement to a capricious Premier who has already committed to political interference in the retirement system.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have the liberty of time during my remarks to provide a more thorough commentary, and I do know that the

House has already benefited from the erudite comments from my hon. colleague from Calgary-Elbow and others on this topic. I will conclude with this. Some time ago I tabled analysis from the incomparable Keith Ambachtsheer, executive in residence at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto; director emeritus of the International Centre for Pension Management; senior fellow at the National Institute on Aging; and cofounder of KPA Advisory Services and CEM Benchmarking. He has advised countries and pension organizations around the world on pension design and management for over 40 years. In other words, we should heed his words over those of the coterie of self-dealing charlatans surrounding and advising the Premier. Now, the fact is that Albertans, Keith Ambachtsheer argues, would be badly served if their government chose to withdraw from being a provincial sponsor . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Causing Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), in particular the part about language causing disorder. In this Chamber you can't do indirectly what you can't do directly, and to suggest that the Premier is being advised by charlatans, I think, would be, some might say a loose – I would say it's probably closer to suggesting the Premier herself is a charlatan. Over and above that, that kind of language, calling someone a charlatan in this Chamber, probably, in my opinion, isn't something that we should be doing very often. So I ask that you rule this a point of order as it certainly causes disruption, and I think it's language that really isn't appropriate for the Chamber.

The Acting Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it may have offended the Government House Leader, but I don't see a point of order here at all. What the member said is completely in line. I think there are things that they may not like that we say in this House, but it's not unparliamentary, it was not inappropriate, and I don't think that it's a point of order in any sense of that word.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Any others wishing to present?

In this case I will not rule this a point of order. I will caution that the members need to choose their words wisely. Advising the Premier is not calling the Premier a certain category or alluding to that. The way I heard it, I do not consider this to be a point of order.

Debate Continued

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the words from pension expert Keith Ambachtsheer.

The fact is that Albertans would be badly served if their government chose to withdraw from being a provincial sponsor of the globally-admired CPP.

For one, they would lose the value of pooling future economic, financial and mortality uncertainties with other Canadians. They could also lose the value of CPP portability – and hence job mobility – across Canada, and the value of CPP's strong investment and administrative capabilities.

Finally, Albertans risk their own government using the assets of a separate APP for purposes unrelated to backing future pension obligations. There is the real possibility of that

happening, as [the Premier] has already weighed in on the investment decisions an APP should make.

In any event, Albertans would be saddled with the material expense and startup risks of creating a new pension plan that would be challenged to provide benefits equivalent to those of the CPP at a marginally lower cost . . .

Without the unrealistic money grab suggested by LifeWorks, why would Alberta want to abandon a program which is the envy of the global pensions world and replace it with an untested, smaller, more costly alternative that would take years to build and mature?

Now, that is the central question before us and the reason why we have proposed to stop this bill in its tracks, the reason why we have proposed this amendment.

I advise the government to pull this poorly drafted bill and listen carefully to the messages we know that they have received from Albertans. There is an opportunity, in fact, to do so right now. By saving face, they could simply, unceremoniously, very quietly support this hoist amendment. All of this goes away. All of the grumpy e-mails and phone calls and requests for town hall attendance that they will never honour: all of that goes away, and we can all get on to the business of the real priorities of Albertans concerning health care, education, services, and the affordability crisis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill. I think, as my colleagues have laid out so ably before me, that this bill is a terrible idea and that no one ought vote for it and the UCP ought to drop the idea immediately.

Why is it bad? Let's start with three reasons. There are many, but I'm going to focus on just three to try and give my colleagues a chance to get in on this as well. One is that it's a terrible idea. Like, boy, is it bad. The second is that the UCP know it's a terrible idea. How do they know that it's a terrible idea? They actively chose not to run on it in an election campaign. In the campaign, when Albertans had the chance to weigh in on this and many other issues, the UCP denied that they were going to do this. The third is that this is indicative of, I would say, a larger problem, a problem of misinformation being circulated to the population, a problem about, essentially, an attempt to misinform the public and to circumvent democracy. That is all, in my view, extremely problematic.

3:40

Let us start with why this is a bad idea. The first and most obvious is that the size of a pension matters. Everyone who knows anything – if you know one thing about pensions, it's that the size of the fund is relevant. It allows you to spread the risk. It allows you to spread the risk both of, you know, how many people, mortality, retirements, and the general risk of what you're investing in. So the size of the pension is relevant. CPP is performing extremely well; there's no reason to leave it. That's another reason.

I think, you know, the final one worth discussing is the fact that we're attempting to take this otherwise well-performing fund, a fund that has done very well for Canadians – and let us set aside for the moment the ridiculous 53 per cent number because it's absurd, and we'll get to that. There's no real rational reason to do this unless it's sort of a throw to separatist opinions that you feel you ought to placate which, Mr. Speaker, I think we ought not to do. I don't think that those represent the majority interest of Albertans, and I don't think that is what a government should be focused on.

Finally, we are attempting to take this money from an otherwise well managed and large fund that distributes the risk, and we are attempting to bring it back into Alberta and hand it to a government whose history includes betting \$1.3 billion on Trump's re-election, \$1.3 billion of taxpayer money that they then lost, a government that botched lab service privatization so badly that it has had a permanent impact on the health and lives of many Albertans and has ultimately cost extra money to take it out and then bring it back in again because they were literally incapable of doing it properly. Finally, it is a government who wants to give \$20 billion away to oil companies to clean up their own well liabilities. They want to spend the public money on that, essentially shuttling it to their friends. This is wildly inappropriate. It's wildly problematic. These people can't even buy Tylenol correctly. Why would we give them a pension fund?

The next point is the campaign. The reason I think the folks over there, the UCP, know that this is a bad idea is because they actively chose not to run it on the campaign; they denied that they were going to do it. I think that is highly, highly problematic. And now they're trying to claim that, oh, it's okay that they told the population that they weren't going to do this in an election campaign that only occurred six months ago. They're trying to claim that that's okay because they're going to have a referendum. I mean, this is one of those things where it's in black and white in the legislation. How can you dispute it? But, of course, somehow the UCP managed to. So I will read it into the record.

Section 3 of the act: "If the Lieutenant Governor in Council . . ." that's the UCP cabinet, just to be clear, ". . . has specified that the results of a referendum ordered under section 2 are to be binding." If they have specified that they are to be binding: which is to say that it is the choice of the UCP cabinet under this legislation whether or not they will respect that referendum or not. This isn't a case where we have an act that has been brought in to require a referendum or to require them to respect a referendum; it is an act that allows them to maybe hold a referendum and maybe respect the results of that referendum. That is not the same thing at all. So that is incredibly problematic.

Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that we have a history here. We have a history on this matter. The UCP wanted to go to an Alberta pension plan, and then the election campaign was called, and they were like: "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. We're not going to do that. No, no, no. Not to worry. Not to worry, public. We're never going to do that." And then six months later here we are.

Finally, the final reason that this is incredibly problematic is the misinformation campaigns. They launched a survey to ask Albertans whether they thought we should leave the CPP, and they didn't ask the question: do you think we should leave the CPP? Like, never has an attempt to doctor data been more clear than when you run a questionnaire supposedly designed to ask the population if they want you to do something and you don't ask the population whether they want you to do that thing. It's insane. You know, we ran a consultation because, obviously, these folks aren't going to. We've had 40,000 responses; 90 per cent oppose, which is pretty consistent with my experience of talking to Albertans. The survey didn't even ask the question.

And then there's the LifeWorks report that no one will admit to having authored, for good and valid reason. I wouldn't put my name on homework that bad either. Fifty-three per cent; Alberta is entitled to 53 per cent. Like, the thing about this number is that it's not just absurd; it's so absurd that it's, like, actually a bad way to put forward a fake number because it's so transparently absurd that everyone recognizes it immediately. It doesn't take a lot of deep reflection or knowledge of math to understand that Alberta is not 53 per cent of the population of the country of Canada. Like, most people know that. You know, yes, I could cite, as my colleague did,

many economists who have pointed out the reason why this report is absurd, the reason why using this as an assumption to base your math on is absurd. But I don't need to, because I don't think it requires that. I think that people can look at the number and see that it's absurd on its face. So that's incredibly problematic.

And then the government spent \$7.5 million of taxpayer money – taxpayer money – money that is supposed to be used in the public interest to try and tell the public that this number, which the public knows is untrue, is in fact true. It's baffling, Mr. Speaker. It's baffling. To sum up, this is a terrible idea. There's no good reason to do it. The misinformation surrounding this is incredibly, incredibly problematic.

Albertans are in a moment of crisis. Our brilliant public education system has been taken to the point where we now have the lowest per-student funding in the country, in the richest province. Our health care system is crumbling. We get e-mails every day about the damage that the UCP has done and the impact it is having on real lives. People are barely able to afford to pay their mortgage and keep the lights on and put food on the table. They are struggling, Mr. Speaker. People are struggling, and the government should be focused on giving the people of this province the life they deserve: the right to participate in democracy, to have a decent lifestyle that gives their children an education, a roof over their head, food on their table, probably some soccer or hockey practice, and a vacation. That's not a lot to ask. That's what this government should be focused on. Instead, they're focused on misinforming the public, and I think it's shameful. I think every member of this House should vote against this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein to speak to the reasoned amendment on Bill 2.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in favour of the amendment from my colleague from Edmonton-Manning. This bill shouldn't be read a second time because it's clear that many Albertans are being dismissed or left on read by this government. As I've been copied on much of this correspondence, I can attest to the fact that Albertans are telling us loudly and clearly that they want the UCP to stay far, far away from their CPP. I mean, frankly, the volume of e-mails has been overwhelming, and that's not even taking into account the over 35,000 responses that we've received to our survey telling us that Albertans want to keep their CPP. They're rightly worried about this government embarking on a risky errand that cannot be undone.

Here's just a sampling from my inbox.

I'm writing to let you know I'm not very happy with the fact that the Premier of this province and her cabinet have decided to pursue the Alberta pension plan. She never campaigned on this, and – surprise, surprise – they launched this plan. I believe this to be a politically motivated project all about Alberta versus Ottawa, and I'm not really sure why. I've been reading Dr. Trevor Tombe's recent analysis of the APP. For me Dr. Tombe's paper does explain a number of things. I agree this exercise for all Albertans is not worth pursuing. We have much more important issues to address. Looking at a 60 to 70 year involvement of the CPP, and we Canadians have a very robust pension plan with very sound management, oversight and no political management. Given the size of this investment they've done very well, much better than many other investment funds. You only get this when the fund is significantly large.

She goes on to say:

I assume the UCP MLAs aren't saying much. They allow the Premier and the Finance minister to continue to waste this taxpayer money on useless advertisements.

That's one e-mail.

3:50

Next one. This one is from Sonia, who lives in Calgary-Klein. It's my understanding that this is her response to Minister Horner.

Thank you for your response, Minister. It's my understanding that the recent surveys undertaken in Alberta have shown there's not majority support for an APP, which may be irrelevant to the UCP government or contrary to your aim, but it's certainly not irrelevant to us. So I respectfully repeat my question that neither the Premier nor you answered. Why did the survey not include the question about whether we support or don't support the creation of an APP? You've stated that this survey is intended to gather feedback, thoughts, and opinions as they specifically relate to the third-party report. But for some Albertans the current online taxpayer-funded survey will be the only way they engage in having their voices heard with respect to this issue. Where is the opportunity for Albertans opposed to the APP to, before your intended referendum, have their opinions recognized, counted, and transparently reported by your government? Where is the opportunity for Albertans to counter some of the claims made in this report, counter some of the misleading questions by your clearly biased survey? I look forward to your timely response.

I want to do one more. This one comes from Jim in Calgary-Klein.

I cannot overemphasize how wrong a decision it would be for Alberta to pull out of the Canada pension plan, which has much larger buying power. It provides much lower investment management fees and trading costs and has far more research available to it. I used to work in the financial service area for 20 years, including as a stockbroker and as a financial planner. I have considerably more expertise than the average Albertan when it comes to investing. I think us Albertans would be much worse off if we left the CPP, as would my children and future grandchildren. Please stop spending my hard-earned tax dollars to promote this idea. I look forward to a timely response.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, my constituents are hard-working and intelligent individuals asking all the right questions. As I'd mentioned before, the response, frankly, has been overwhelming in terms of the volume of e-mails from folks wanting to stay in the CPP. The responses from this government, sadly: pretty underwhelming. And now what are they offering? A workbook with no clear outcomes other than spending more money – more public monies – to gamble with Albertans' retirement. I strongly urge my fellow members in this House to vote for this reasoned amendment and, if not, to vote against Bill 2.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you. Now, normally when I rise in this House, I begin by saying that it gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to whatever the bill at hand may be, but when I was reflecting on Bill 2, Alberta Pension Protection Act, I found no pleasure in speaking on a bill that sits in such stark contrast to the wishes of the majority of my constituents in Calgary-Beddington. Now, fortunately, today I am speaking to the amendment put forth by my colleague from Edmonton-Manning, an excellent amendment that suggests that we put an end to this terrible idea right now.

We have been tracking the feedback received in my constituency on this office for months. In fact, we even talked to people during the election about this issue.

Ms Renaud: Oh, how unique.

Ms Chapman: I know.

I know the UCP was afraid to do so, and no surprise there. The actions of this government have shown a clear lack of respect for

facts, data, and evidence-based decision-making. I mean, why bother running a campaign platform that tells voters what you plan to do when you are in government when, instead, you can rile up anger and hatred with false narratives about our sexual health curriculum or some fantasy alliance between the Alberta NDP and Ottawa?

In fact, the most ardent support I heard on the potential APP during the election was in the belief that the UCP wouldn't push forward with this terrible idea. I lost track of how many conversations I had with folks who were voting UCP because they didn't believe that they would actually make moves to pull us out of the CPP. It has been wonderful reconnecting with those folks postelection, and they sure do have some opinions to share now that they realize they were played for dupes.

Over the hundreds of conversations I have had on this topic, I can count on one hand how many people were in support of an Alberta pension plan. The ratio on our feedback through my office and our outreach sits at 100 to 1. For every one person who has spoken in support, we have received 100 e-mails, letters, or pop-in visits to my office from constituents voicing their opposition to leaving the CPP.

Just the other week – this was the best one – a gentleman was rushing past our office, clearly on his way to something, but as he clocked the sign and whose office he was rushing past, he hurried over to the door, flung it open, and shouted in: you tell this government to keep their paws off my pension. And I am more than happy to comply with his request.

Now, as my neighbours and constituents grow more and more concerned about this cockamamie idea of leaving one of the top globally ranked pension funds, their focus is shifting to this referendum. I say "possible" because, of course, this legislation doesn't even legislate such a thing. No; we are still in here debating over whether we may have a referendum. We can only hope that the decision to have such a referendum would be rooted in evidence, but, alas, with this government I sense we're more likely to see decisions made on high-level feelings.

The referendum question itself is no small concern, especially from a government who, for all we know, will ask us whether we would like or love to leave the CPP. Now, in other jurisdictions referendums require nonpartisan educational information to be provided on the issue by an arm's-length organization. Here in Alberta: well, I suspect you'll be as shocked as me, which is to say not at all, to learn that the UCP used their majority in a committee to vote against our proposal to include just such information and education for voters in this very bill.

In fact, the UCP is currently spending \$7.5 million of your money to sell you their fantasy pension future where you pay less and get more. Sometimes I feel like I'm watching one of those late night infomercials – I don't think they have those anymore, but back in the day, right? – because I can't keep up with the promises; lower contributions, higher payouts. I think I heard one that promised cash bonuses. Okay. I don't even know what's happening here.

I'd be more embarrassed about their shocking lack of knowledge about how pension funds work if I wasn't spending so much time worrying about the fact that Albertans may be walking into a vote on a very serious issue and they have not been provided with the data and evidence that they need to make a good decision.

I have many more things I could say, but I know that I also have many colleagues who would like to share their thoughts. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the reasoned amendment, the Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 2. This is my first time speaking on Bill 2, the Alberta Pension Protection Act, in the House. Let me say that I cannot in good conscience support Bill 2 without the current amendment put forth by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Manning. Quite frankly, any MLA who does is only looking out for themselves and their party and not Albertans. The retirement security of millions of Albertans is at stake. This bill is nothing but a gimmick and will be put in the shredder the second it is no longer of benefit to the UCP, and Albertans will suffer.

The CPP has provided retirement security and predictable income for seniors since the 1960s and has global praise. We all contribute with the understanding that when it comes time for us to retire, we can expect a steady stream of income where the risks are being managed directly by the plan. It manages about \$575 billion for over 21 million Canadians, making it the country's biggest pension manager.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that many, many, many residents of Edmonton-South have reached out to me vehemently against this bill, to the point that I can share their views for hours and hours in this House. Unfortunately, I'm not afforded that amount of time.

My constituent Viola shared with me that for most Albertans the CPP is their only retirement income source. It's not worth the risk. According to pension experts, pulling Alberta out of the Canadian pension plan is pure spite, Viola says, and there's nothing in it for us Albertans. The risks and added costs are catastrophic. At a time when economic uncertainty and the rising costs of living are impacting every single Albertan, the last thing we need is to gamble away Albertans' pensions.

Another resident in Edmonton-South recently e-mailed me saying that for most Albertans the CPP is their only source of retirement income. It's not worth the risk. According to other pension experts – this person brings it up again – pulling out of the Canadian pension plan is horrific. There's nothing in it for us. The risks and added costs are extremely catastrophic. Sounds similar. Again, a different person. Albertans are concerned with many things. Losing their retirement security is not one of them. The CPP has critical features that will be at risk under any new UCP plan.

The CPP is completely portable. If you move anywhere in Canada for new employment, your earned benefits transfer with you, and you continue to accumulate benefits in your new job in another province. CPP pensions are indexed to inflation. They won't erode over time. We're dealing with an affordability crisis and a period of extreme inflation, which shows us the danger of pensions that aren't indexed. This government has no interest in actually hearing what Albertans want when it comes to protecting their pensions. They cannot even ask straightforward questions in an online questionnaire.

Albertans know that a national CPP is the right plan. Our caucus has heard from thousands of Albertans who do not support a replacement to the CPP, and while the government won't confirm if it will follow through on its promise to meet with Albertans face to face in December to discuss gambling their retirement, our caucus is ramping up our in-person town halls. At our in-person town halls we saw 500 Albertans come out to voice their opposition to leaving the CPP. If this government plans to risk Albertans' retirement savings, they must look them in the eye and explain why.

But rather than have a conversation with Albertans, the government has wasted millions on misinformation campaigns around its proposed Alberta pension plan. Premier Smith won't say what happened to her government's promise to hold face-to-face

meetings with Albertans in December. That's probably because when you're in person, you have to be truthful, have honest facts, and be willing to listen to people in the room, take the heat.

But we're listening. Albertans are being loud and clear. They don't want this government touching their pensions. Another constituent, Ed, said it well: Albertans deserve to retire with dignity – a keyword – we deserve comfort and security after a lifetime of supporting our families, working hard in Alberta, supporting our communities and our province; we also deserve to know our pension funds are not used by this government for financial, risky investments and political gains; Albertans don't want this government playing political games with their pensions.

As another constituent recently told me: I'm worried this government is attempting to establish another funding source for their other absurd plans like provincial police forces; as a 41-year-old Canadian who has contributed to this plan since I was 16, and hard working, I may add, and will be counting on this to support my retirement, I am strongly against this proposal.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that there just isn't enough publicly available data to assess what an Alberta exit would mean. Constituents in Edmonton-South are repeatedly telling me that the case for an Alberta pension is short-sighted, rests on dubious assumptions, including the belief that Alberta could extract concessions from the rest of Canada. I couldn't agree more. As we deal with one of the worst cost-of-living crises in recent times, the best way to protect the financial security of Albertans is to protect the CPP.

Constituents like Ben are telling me that they are proud to contribute to this world-class pension plan. They say: the attempt to turn our retirement benefits into political ammunition is not only disappointing but also deeply concerning; it is crucial that we prioritize the well-being and financial security of all Canadians, across all partisan interests; Alberta's contributions to the CPP ensure a strong economy that benefits all Canadians; I urge you, the UCP, to consider the broader implications of this proposal and to stand up for the interests of Albertans, who value the stability and security provided. Those are Ben's words.

Albertans know that a decision like this requires knowing all the facts. Hundreds of residents in Edmonton-South continue to e-mail me, call me daily to express their concerns that there's no turning back from a decision like this. I recently heard from a young mother who said: the damage the UCP has caused this province already has been so much; pulling out of the CPP will be something we'll never be able to come back from.

So my question is: why didn't the government put any language in the bill about Albertans' best interests, on honouring the wishes of Albertans? Well, maybe it's because you're all out of touch with the priorities of Albertans and only focus on serving your own political self-interest.

Mr. Speaker, the proof is in the pudding. Folks from Edmonton-South: I've said their words here today. There's so much more I can share from residents of Edmonton-South, who are deeply concerned about this bill. I encourage all members to vote in favour of the amendment put forward by my colleague. There are many reasons and more why I cannot support this poorly drafted Bill 2 as it stands.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be supporting the reasoned amendment before us, that this bill, if enacted, would not adequately protect Albertans' pensions. Bill 2, I believe, is not in the best interests of all Albertans, pension seeking or not or working Albertans either. I won't repeat what my

colleagues have listed as the many flaws in this approach for the Alberta Pension Protection Act, but I just will say that being in downtown Calgary, Calgary-Buffalo, the issues that come before me are many, but, you know, people haven't come to my office or written to me and said, "Really wish you'd get onboard" or "We need to change the Canada pension plan."

In fact, the kinds of things that I deal with, with my constituent staff and others in the area, in terms of nonprofit organizations are things like houselessness. Thousands of Albertans across this province are houseless. Many, many, many of them are along the river valleys in Calgary and also here and elsewhere in this province, and they are living in desperate conditions, Mr. Speaker. Instead of the government focusing on that and trying to eliminate houselessness in this province, they're talking about something that Albertans haven't raised, which is the Alberta pension plan.

The opioid crisis, Mr. Speaker, is another desperate condition many people are in, and we know that six Albertans die daily. Instead of focusing on that, this government has again gone off on a tangent and brought the Alberta Pension Protection Act forward when we have more desperate things going on in this province that need attention.

4:10

We have an affordable housing crisis, Mr. Speaker. Instead of focusing on getting thousands of affordable units built in this province, again, the government is focusing on an Alberta pension plan. Instead of protecting our environment and the number of abandoned wells that need cleanup, this government is focusing on something that takes their time and attention away from all of these things. We have a health care crisis in this province, and instead of fixing that, instead of fixing the affordability crisis, that is also in this province, the government is wasting its time going down a road that we don't need to be.

Mr. Speaker, you know, probably some of the argument from the other side is that they can chew gum and walk at the same time. I want them to fix things like those that I have brought up. Albertans want them to focus on the houselessness, the opioid crisis, the affordable housing crisis, protecting our environment, fixing our health care, and addressing the affordability crisis. If they can't do all of those things, why are they even talking about an Alberta pension plan?

You know, I remember that the Kenney administration talked a lot about replacing the RCMP. It was top of mind. It was something they were focused on in wanting to go down that road, to get rid of the RCMP and all this sort of nonsense. That's gone quiet, hasn't it? I don't hear any talk about that anymore with regard to the rural MLAs in this province. I don't hear the government saying, "We're going to get rid of the RCMP" anymore. I just wish they would do the same thing with an Alberta pension plan. Look in the mirror and see what Albertans are talking about. They're not talking about an Alberta pension plan. They're talking about good retirement savings.

One of my colleagues mentioned the portability of the plan. The CPP is portable to 60 countries in the world, Mr. Speaker. That is security for people who move away from this country, this province. They know that they can take their plan with them and that those countries will honour it, because we honour other countries' pension plans.

I just want to conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that I think this is a good reasoned amendment. I wish we could all support it unanimously. I do not think an Alberta pension plan is in our best interests or will ever help Albertans out. Let's stay in the CPP.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this reasoned amendment. There are many reasons to oppose the UCP's plan to dismantle the CPP and retirement security for Albertans: one, it's a bad idea; two, Albertans are opposed to it; three, the UCP knows about it.

My colleague earlier was talking about the UCP's plan to replace the RCMP with an Alberta police force. They have backed off on that. I can tell the UCP members that this proposal is even more unpopular than that proposal. I think it's an opportunity for the government members to accept this amendment, I guess do some face-saving, and be able to attend public events just like normal. There is one event tomorrow in St. Albert, and I do know that no MLA from that region will be able to attend that because it's about CPP. They are afraid of going to face the public on this issue. They are unable to attend events in their own riding on this issue.

This is a good opportunity to do the right thing. Accept this amendment, and focus on things that are more pressing; for instance, affordability, utility costs, insurance costs, the health care crisis, the education crisis, lack of schools, all those things that we can focus on and work together on. This is a proposal that Albertans do not wish this government to pursue. I represent a riding with many senior-serving organizations. I can tell you – and I invite every one of you to come in person there – every single organization is against the UCP gambling with their retirement security.

With that, I will urge all members of this House that it's a good amendment. There are good reasons that this bill not be read in this Assembly at all. Let's focus on issues that are more pressing and that matter to Albertans, and hands off Albertans' CPP.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to amendment RA1?

If not, I will call a vote.

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to the main bill, Bill 2?

Seeing none, I am prepared to give the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance the opportunity to close debate.

Mr. Horner: Waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Bill 5

Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023

[Debate adjourned November 28: Member Eremenko speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak to Bill 5? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 5, Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. The name is quite long and fancy, but in short what the government is doing with this bill is that they are removing all salary constraints for Alberta's boards, agencies, and commissions and opening the door for the massive and shameful misuse of taxpayer money that was seen under previous Conservative governments, including the scandal at Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. So that's their gravy train bill, part 1. Choo-choo-choo.

Instead of caring about regular Albertans who are unable to make ends meet, who are struggling to pay rent and mortgages, who are struggling to keep up with utilities and insurance costs because of

UCP policies, they want to pass a bill here so they can line the pockets of their friends and insiders. That's shameful, and I will be bringing forward an amendment to this bill, of which I have the requisite number of copies, and once it's distributed, I will read that into the record.

The Acting Speaker: The member may proceed with the reading.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move this amendment on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. The MLA for Edmonton-Manning to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 5, Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 5, Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

4:20

As is clear from the amendment, what this amendment is doing is asking this Legislature to not read this bill now and giving government the opportunity of six months to shake their heads and come back after six months, talk to Albertans, and if they still think that this gravy train shall continue . . .

The Acting Speaker: Taking a closer look at the amendment, the member should probably move it on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Manning, as that's the name on the amendment.

Also, everyone in the Chamber should be aware that this is a hoist amendment.

Mr. Sabir: I can say that again for clarity. I did say that I'm moving on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

As you said, it's a hoist amendment, and what it does is that it asks the Legislature that this bill not be read now and we revisit it in six months' time. The reason for that is that what this bill is doing is removing any restraint or constraint on the salaries of those serving on agencies, boards, and commissions.

There was a bill put in place by our government – the then Finance minister worked on it, did consult with Albertans, did consult with people on these boards and commissions – and we did a crossjurisdictional analysis. We put forward a bill, that I believe was supported by the then opposition, that there needs to be a fair constraint on what people on Alberta boards and commissions can get paid.

But this government, who promised Albertans that they will treat their money with respect, that they will not repeat the mistakes of previous PC governments, that they will not get into the same old habits by allowing for those excessive bonuses, pay, and other benefits for their friends and insiders: with this bill they are exactly bringing back that same old entitlement regime that actually cost them government in 2015.

So that's why we are bringing this amendment that this bill not be read, and in six months' time I urge the government side, all MLAs, to talk to their constituents, ask them about what's important to them, and if they hear from somebody that it's important that the UCP gravy train shall continue, as proposed in this bill, then we can revisit this bill in six months' time.

I urge all members of this House to take this amendment seriously and vote in favour of this amendment and vote against the PC-style entitlements that are coming through this bill. Also, I think that will be another opportunity, I guess, for MLAs and ministers to be able to attend events and talk to their constituents on what matters to them. That's why I'm urging all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the hoist amendment as put forward by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Manning, are there any others wishing to speak to the amendment? The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to support this amendment because this bill really will do nothing at this point in time for Albertans. We have several crises on our hands. We have a health care crisis with our system crumbling. We have overcrowded schools, not enough schools. We have many people that have no homes and those in homes at great risk of losing their homes because of both increasing rents and pressure on the affordability of simply living day to day.

I also want to push it forward as it really opens the door to offering appointments and high income in a very potentially distasteful way for Albertans that will increase what people can be paid to be on the many newly created boards and commissions supporting things like the changes in our health care system. We really do not want more of this to flourish. We want to see what it is we're actually creating here so that we have a better idea, during a time delay, as to where this might apply. I'm also very concerned about the secrecy that will be added to this by the exemptions that will allow what we're paying some people to be exempted from this.

But, really, it comes back to the main thing, that we've got a lot of important things to do. We've already heard that the bill to start looking at data on the complement of children in our schools would be too challenging because it's more paperwork when, in fact, we know all that data is already there; we just want to get it out. Yet we're spending our time – our time – looking at something that is not going to do anything for Albertans at a time when we really need it.

Thank you for hearing my concerns. I will sit down.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you.

An Hon. Member: Leader.

Member Irwin: Oh, that's a new one for me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise in this House. Gosh, it feels like a little while since I've had the opportunity to go on a little bit of a rant on a bill that is truly, in my opinion, fully unnecessary. Listen, this government has an opportunity to be transformational, to make tangible change in the lives of Albertans. We're at a time when Albertans are facing an affordability crisis. I've heard my colleagues say it; they've said it far better than I ever could. But let's talk about the priorities of Albertans and the absolute crises that Albertans find themselves in when it comes to housing, when it comes to affordability and so much more.

What do we see from this UCP government? What are their priorities? Bills like Bill 5, that will do absolutely nothing to improve the lives of the constituents who we are sent here to represent. This government should be ashamed of themselves. [interjection] Absolutely. And if they want to heckle, I would love to hear them rise and . . .

Ms Phillips: Defend.

Member Irwin: Defend. Thank you to the Member for Lethbridge-West. That's the verb I was looking for.

. . . defend a bill that their constituents are absolutely not asking for. If they are, I'd love to hear from them. I absolutely would.

Now, I've talked a lot. I'm the housing critic. For those folks watching at home who didn't know, housing is a key priority for me and for my colleagues. We've not seen this many unhoused folks on the streets in Edmonton – estimates as high as 5,000 folks who are unhoused. We've got unprecedented numbers in Calgary as well. CBC News reported just the other day that more Calgarians than ever before are seeking refuge in motels, in campgrounds. Campgrounds are full in late November, not for, you know, mountain retreats; for folks to just have somewhere to live. Shameful.

4:30

Skyrocketing rents for the ninth consecutive month. Calgary has the highest rent increases across Canada. Who's number three? We're number three, Edmonton. Predictions are that those rents, that those numbers are just going to get higher and that both Edmonton and Calgary are going to see even higher increases in their rents.

What an opportunity this UCP government has to truly be leaders when it comes to tackling the housing crisis. I could share with them – and I've shared some examples with their minister, who supposedly is responsible for housing – some tangible things that they could be doing right now to help house Albertans, to help homeowners who are struggling with costs of mortgages. The list goes on. I've got lots of ideas. Our team has lots of ideas.

Instead, we see the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. I could talk about some of the other bills that we've seen as well. What about Bill 3, that spoke to, as the minister would say, the drug poisoning crisis? It didn't. It was a lawsuit. It was very much perfunctory when it comes to – you know, it was; what's the word I'm looking for?

An Hon. Member: Super duper.

Member Irwin: Pardon me? Oh, wow. That's not the word I'm looking for, absolutely, not the word I'm looking for there, *Hansard*.

An Hon. Member: It's very, very bad.

Member Irwin: Yeah. To quote the member from Red Deer or wherever that is: very bad.

Anyway, I'm getting distracted here. Focus. The point being, again, that this government had an opportunity to address what are some of the highest rates of death from the drug poisoning crisis. Six Albertans a day. Instead of making investments in permanent supportive housing, in mental health, they chose not to.

Mr. Nally: Can we talk about Bill 5?

Member Irwin: If the Member for Morinville-St. Albert wants to join debate on Bill 5, I'd love to hear from him. I'd love to hear from him which constituents he's heard from who want to pay their friends and want to give their friends higher salaries, because I don't think he can stand and defend it. That's for sure.

Health care crisis. My fantastic colleague from Calgary-Varsity, who herself has decades of experience – I hope I'm not exaggerating there; I don't think I am; I mean, you do look youthful. Decades – decades – of experience on the front lines in the health care system: she can tell you right now that she hears from health care workers all day, every day. What do folks want on the front lines? They want a government that respects health care workers. They want investments in public health care. They want a strong public health care system. They don't want more bloated salaries for this government's friends.

As my colleague from Lethbridge-West, the opposition finance critic, pointed out, instead of caring about regular Albertans who are struggling to pay rent, struggling to buy food, this UCP government is giving the highest paid executives a raise that they don't need.

You know, I'm curious about this because we've seen, oh, my goodness, well, the sovereignty act – don't get me started on what we've seen from this very short time that we've been in the House – and a list of a whole lot of things that we know Albertans aren't in support of. I can talk about CPP. I can talk about the countless constituents in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood who have made it clear that they want this government's hands off their pensions. [interjections]

Again, it's kind of hard to even hear myself speak with the Member for Morinville-St. Albert chirping at me. I wonder about this government's approach, and I'm fearful that they're hoping that they can get a lot of this gravy train, choo-choo kind of stuff out of the way now, reward their friends, and hope that Albertans will forget. Hope that Albertans will forget. I don't think they will.

You know, we've got the strongest opposition in Alberta's history here to remind Albertans that this isn't what they voted for.

Mr. Schow: Second place still.

Member Irwin: I don't know if we've had an opportunity to hear from the Member for Cardston-Siksika about what he's hearing from his constituents, because I can tell you that we're getting letters from his constituents as well, who absolutely do not want this government to touch their pensions. They absolutely do not have as a priority higher salaries for his friends.

An Hon. Member: There we go. Bill 5.

Member Irwin: That's right. Bill 5.

You know what? I can say a whole lot more on this, but I think I better wrap up because I'd love – I don't know. Have we heard from any members on Bill 5 at all? We haven't. Shocking. When you can't defend your own legislation, you might want to question: who are you here for? I don't think it's for your constituents.

I urge you all to vote against Bill 5 and actually show up for the folks that you're elected for. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will support the hoist amendment. Bring this back in six months. As I spoke to Bill 2, there's a lot of work that needs to be done to address the urgent need many Albertans have who are in crisis for homelessness, the opioid crisis, needing affordable housing, protecting our environment, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

When I was Finance minister, Mr. Speaker, under my purview the agencies, boards, and commissions review took place, and it took about a year to take place. I remember there were three phases to the ABC review, as we called it at the time: the first phase was involving 135 agencies, boards, and commissions that were subject to APEGA, excluding the postsecondary institutions; the second phase was 140 ABCs that weren't subject to APEGA; and the third phase was the 26 postsecondary institutions in this province.

We did that review because the previous government had let the situation spiral out of control. When we became government in 2015, there were university presidents that were making a million dollars, Mr. Speaker, more than the president of Yale, more than the president of Harvard. We thought that was wrong, Albertans thought that was wrong, and it needed to be pulled back. So we

hired a great consultant, and she continued the work at – when I left the position, she was working for the Finance ministry at the time and continued to push that work forward.

I can tell you that the reason we did all of that review of the agencies, boards, and commissions was that we wanted to make sure that they were still relevant to the needs of Albertans and to the specific topic area that they were created for. We wanted to make sure they had governance excellence and that there was fair and appropriate compensation for those who weren't union members, so those who are exempt from unions, and this bill deals with those people as well, those who are non-union members. We wanted to make sure there was fiscal prudence in the kind of delivery of the work that they were responsible for, that there was transparency and accountability because, as I said, things had gotten out of control under the previous PC government.

We wanted to revitalize the board appointment process, which was a great deal of work, Mr. Speaker, because there are hundreds and hundreds of appointments, as you can imagine, to these ABCs throughout government who are affiliated with government. We knew that the previous government, under the PCs, over the many years they were in government had taken a tack of appointing their friends and insiders. It was who you knew that got you an appointment, not what you knew, not what your skill sets were. So we changed all of that. Unfortunately, it's been changed back by this UCP government to again be friends and insiders and who you know.

The last thing I'll say about that process that we were involved in: that was crossjurisdictional. We looked at every province and territory in this country to see what they were doing and to benchmark the compensations for the respective positions, from the top CEO or president to the directors under that person to the vice-presidents, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and all the non-union people who were in the leadership of those places. What we found – and we had brackets for all of those positions. Brackets: they could start at this level. It was up to the agency, board, and commission where they wanted to start the person, but they couldn't go higher than the bracket that we gave them.

4:40

The last thing I'll say is that in doing all of this work, providing all this information in a transparent way, we found that there were 26 agencies, boards, and commissions that were no longer relevant, no longer needed, and we amalgamated them or we dissolved them. That saved us \$33 million, and that was an annual saving.

Mr. Speaker, we did the heavy lifting over a year and a half. We provided guidance, and the agencies, boards, and commissions fell in line with that, the regulations that were under that. I was very proud of the work. It stood the test of time, and now we're hearing that it no longer stands the test of time, that the compensation should be raised. I've looked through the bill. A lot of it is left to regulation, obviously, and we won't know what those amounts are until perhaps the sunshine list comes out, and then we can look back and see the changes that were made as a result of this government, if they get their way.

The last thing I want to just recognize, Mr. Speaker, is that I do note that there's a – people from the other side may get up and speak to this in more detail, but one of the reasons that was identified by a member on the other side that this bill had to go through was that there is, I think it was, a junior college in Alberta, and there was a dean of one faculty who was being asked to or had taken on the responsibility of another faculty in addition to the faculty they were responsible for, so two faculties. And the member stood up and said: you know, it's not fair that the person won't get the necessary compensation to keep them in that position; they may go elsewhere

as a result. But I do note that there are exemptions that can be brought to the minister and reviewed through the Finance ministry and come to the minister for sign-off if the minister agrees, so there are ways to deal with this.

That means to me that we don't even have to do this. We don't need to. We don't need to bring Bill 5 before us. We can deal with this with the current legislation. We can deal with situations that are unique and have to be dealt with to keep people in positions, but they need to come on an exemption basis, not on a blanket raising the amount of compensation everybody gets for an agency, board, and commission because this government believes that they deserve it. We looked at the compensations all across the country. We have ranges that we put in place, and if people get to the top of their range and it's believed that they need to be kept in that position because there's no other person who can do the job, then an exemption can be brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, I won't be supporting the ultimate Bill 5, but I will be supporting this hoist amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this hoist amendment of Bill 5 sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. I note that it could be read a second time this day six months hence, at which point government could come back with a much more careful piece of public policy rather than a wholesale repeal of RABCCA, which is how we refer to the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has just provided the background and the context of how RABCCA came to be and the careful public policy work that it involved in a three-stage review of our agencies, boards, and commissions.

It was based on very specific outrage from the public and a very specific context. I know for me that when I ran in 2015 – and I started knocking on doors, I think, in and around 2013 – this was a live issue for a good 18 months as I talked to people in Lethbridge-West at that time. They were sick of the PC entitlement, of the cronyism of just awarding plum ABC appointments where the compensation appeared to have no real anchor in reality and neither did the competency matrix to friends and insiders, and that was a large reason why the PCs got tossed out on their ears in 2015.

I know for me that I represent one fairly large postsecondary institution and a large number of the faculty for the college, and over at the University of Lethbridge the president was making 700 grand a year, which was – I looked it up at the time – more than the University of Toronto at the time, which was on its face patently ridiculous, and he even knew it. But there had been essentially a bit of an arms race in terms of postsecondary salaries, so that was what his PC-appointed board – the chair of which came in after I was elected to assure me in no uncertain terms that tuition increases were a really good idea. He was a good old Conservative, that guy. But even the president of the university at the time said: no; I understand why you are doing this reform of agencies, boards, and commissions. So did the president of the college. They both got salary adjustments, and they both stayed because they were still being compensated with a competitive package. They were living in a wonderful city with much better weather than Edmonton, Mr. Speaker – I can assure you – and serving a fabulous community, postsecondary and otherwise.

Now, the reform of agencies, boards, and commissions: my hon. colleague explained to us what it actually did in three stages, and this six months provides the minister that opportunity to undertake that kind of careful public policy work instead of throwing all babies with all bathwater out the window and just having a free-for-

all. That's what this is about. It's about everyone all aboard the gravy train. We have named this one of the choo-choo bills, the other one being of course taking the reins off the ability to receive gifts.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I have knocked on doors – and I have for almost a decade now – I've never heard anyone say: "You know what's top of mind? The real pressing thing on my mind is whether a politician can accept an expensive gift or if they can appoint their friends with no limitations on what their salary might be or their competency matrix might be." No one has ever actually asked me that. Mind you, nobody has ever actually said that an Alberta pension plan is a good idea, yet here we are also.

However, a couple of other minor points. Let's not confuse the wholesale repeal of RABCCA with absolutely no guardrails around compensation for agencies, boards, and commissions. Let's not confuse this with the policy of the management pay freeze that was brought in for the Alberta public service and ABCs during the collapse in oil prices. I have heard some spurious comparison made to this. That shows the level of knowledge and that the minister does not know the difference between the two or appreciate the stakes of what he's done with the repeal of RABCCA.

This proposal to repeal this legislation comes at a time when now we can, I guess, pay new AHS chair Lyle Oberg whatever we want. We know that the previous one took a limo from Edmonton to Calgary for a Speech from the Throne, which is ridiculous. One of the reasons why we had to bring in the reform of agencies, boards, and commissions is the sorry and sad tale of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, the AFSC, that we had to disband, after which they took limos from Lacombe to Oilers sky boxes. We paid for it. So we're not going back to the future with this bill in the DeLorean, Mr. Speaker. We are going to be, apparently, well, at least some of us – our government's friends are going to take a limo, and there are absolutely no constraints on any of that with the repeal of RABCCA.

4:50

Let's also talk a little bit about what happened at AFSC. They were effectively taking very lavish trips from reinsurance companies – reinsurance is the single biggest expense AFSC has – and they were flown around the continent by the vendor. Reinsurance is incredibly important to the viability of the corporation should there be successive years of net payouts caused by crop failures. The due diligence on this product of reinsurance needs to be more than: okay; who's going to fly me around the continent? Remember, they were doing all this in the context of closing offices across the province. The CEO of AFSC, before he was fired by the NDP, was making \$600,000 a year and still felt the need to spend the corporation's money on extravagant expenses and take perks from vendors. Again, this is in the context of them closing offices, putting people out of work in small towns and in rural communities, folks who support farmers and ranchers across this province.

I have heard the minister variously claim that he is worried about severely limiting ABCs, especially postsecondaries, and I would argue that after all of those years of PC entitlement and, frankly, just not paying attention and just being completely asleep at the switch when it came to the escalation of pay packages and compensation at the level of postsecondaries, some limits were in order. To reject those limits now without any of the careful public policy work, that was described by my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, is inviting friends and insiders back on that gravy train. It's inviting scandals like the AFSC once again. It is not solving the problem that the minister seeks to solve with some of the very small ways in which there needs to be more flexibility woven into the system.

If that's what this bill did, I would be very inclined to support it. It's not what it does at all. There are no assurances that when we come out at the end of this process, there will even be a sunshine list or transparency on how much these friends and insiders are making and what their perks look like and what the actual limitations are. It is for that reason that I urge members of this House to support our amendment. Take a breather on this one. Go and do some actual work for six months, figure out how to get off the gravy train. If not, then I guess we have our answer, and our answer, Mr. Speaker, is choo-choo.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's going to be interesting here as I rise to speak to Bill 5, the Public Sector Employers Amendment Act, 2023. The Premier and the UCP are removing all salary restraints for Alberta's boards and commissions, opening the door for massive and shameful misuse of taxpayers' dollars seen under previous Conservative governments. Given the ongoing affordability crisis in our province I'm not sure where this government got the idea that a bill like this is a priority and addresses the concerns of Albertans.

In 2017 the then NDP government introduced the Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions Compensation Act, which was focused on regulating executive salaries for those making more than \$200,000 annually and eliminated some perks like retention bonuses and golf club memberships. Look, I enjoy playing golf, but that's a ridiculous perk if you ask me. Our focus was on saving taxpayers' dollars and acting on the concerns that many Albertans had around executives getting perks that most Albertans weren't able to access.

Since then affordability has become even more top of mind in our province. I know my colleagues and I have heard hundreds if not thousands of stories from across the province of families barely being able to make ends meet. Thousands of Albertans are dealing with a grave housing crisis, as my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is very well aware of and versed in. The food insecurity is a big issue for Albertans. As the critic of Advanced Education I know postsecondary students. Oh, my goodness, it's heartbreaking, the stories that I hear every day of them having to go to food banks to get food. It's alarming. They're under great pressure, and thousands more in this province are struggling to keep the lights on.

Instead of caring about everyday Albertans who are struggling to pay rent, buy food, you know, get their education, the Premier and the UCP government are giving the highest paid executives a raise they simply don't need. This government continues to mistreat workers who are at the heart of Albertan society, including health care workers, education workers, many of whom earn less than \$30,000 per year. They are burned out, exhausted, dealing with overcrowded emergency rooms, classrooms, and they have been abandoned by this government. How is removing limitations on executive compensation addressing the needs of these critical front-line workers, Albertans who work hard every day to take care of all of us and their families? It's not a stretch to think that Bill 5 would lead to lower wages for these workers and more money in the pockets of the UCP's rich friends.

You know, this is par for the course, since, you know, golf is a perk, memberships, when we see this government doing all it can to keep the UCP gravy train rolling and rolling and rolling by getting more gifts from their friends and now opening the gates for those making \$300,000, \$400,000, half a million and more dollar salaries per year. Nearly 30,000 non-union employees could be impacted by this bill, including workers at Alberta Health Services;

Covenant Health; postsecondary institutions; Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis; Alberta Innovates; Alberta Pensions Services Corporation; Travel Alberta; and the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board. Seems like most of the economy we're talking about here. So my simple question: who did this government consult with when it determined that removing compensation regulations was a priority, and what were the results?

This government doesn't seem very focused on talking face to face with everyday Albertans, because if they were, they would know that Albertans are looking for relief in this affordability crisis, to make ends meet. They are looking for the best quality education for their kids. And let me make this clear; education is an economic issue. They're looking for access to quality health care when and where they need it, close to home. I know this all too well. Folks in Edmonton-South have been stranded for years. My colleagues and I were talking to those folks every day, and we're listening to their concerns.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, this is just another attempt to consolidate power in the hands of the Premier and her cabinet. All of the guidelines related to compensation will be in the hands of the minister, and no legislation will be binding on employers and employee-employer committees, councils, and associations, and I know this well. I owned a business in the oil and gas industry and hired many.

The minister has said that

inflexible and prescriptive compensation frameworks have restrained compensation with a one-size-fits-all approach for diverse public agencies. This has led to many well-qualified and exceptional workers leaving and finding more competitively [compensation] work elsewhere.

Yet Bill 5 does not help with attraction or retention. The current compensation structure will remain in place, perhaps for years, depending on how long the future directives and subsequent frameworks will take to develop.

What this bill will do is set the stage for unbalanced collective bargaining as ministerial-appointed employer associations will collective bargain on behalf of all employers, and this coming from the same government who took away the right of employees to band together for collective bargaining purposes. This will create chaos in sectors like health care. It will not serve Albertans.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to see new schools to address overcrowding in growing communities, more doctors to keep their families healthy, and real action on the affordable housing crisis. This UCP government is just making the rich richer at the expense of hard-working Albertans. I stand in opposition to Bill 5 as it stands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to the amendment?

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: It being a hoist amendment, if defeated, the question is then immediately put on the motion for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Bill 6

Public Health Amendment Act, 2023

[Debate adjourned November 22: Ms Chapman speaking]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for St. Albert has risen to speak.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak at second reading to Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023. Before I sort of talk about some of the pieces of the bill, since we are just in second reading, I thought I would take some of the new members on a little trip through time back to 2020, the last time that we saw this UCP government, a different iteration of it, try to do a power grab like this.

I'm going to refer to an article, oddly enough by Licia Corbella. She's not a journalist. She's an opinion piece person, let's say. The *Calgary Herald* piece was dated May 13, 2020, and I will table that article tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, the title was UCP Power Grab as Bad as What Trudeau Attempted. It seems like there's kind of a UCP-Trudeau alliance going on. It's like they're trying to follow suit with the federal Liberals. What is this, just to own the Libs or what? I just don't get it.

Anyway, let's just keep going. It seems like the government at the time, the UCP... [interjections] Now, I will encourage the members chirping over there that if they have something to add, I'm happy to entertain the interjection, so go ahead.

Anyway, back to what I was saying. They saw the Trudeau government do a power grab like we have never seen. I think most of us were, like: oh, my God, what is happening down there? But not these guys. They're, like, taking notes: what are we going to do? So, sure enough, the Trudeau minority government in March decided to do a power grab, and this writer with the *Calgary Herald* was very clear. She had never seen this kind of grotesque – “grotesque” is my word – power grab before, ever, until when? The UCP turned up and decided to do their own power grab. Now, that was in 2020. They didn't quite get that one right, they didn't get the next one right, so they're trying again for a third time.

Let me take you back to when the Trudeau Liberals or when the Trudeau government decided they were going to go for a power grab, and they called it an emergency spending bill. Now, this particular iteration of the UCP government has decided they're going to do the power grab before the problem even happens, because, you know, it was kind of a problem before, which is very disturbing.

Anyway, this emergency spending bill, as reported in the *Calgary Herald*, really damaged the role of the opposition. I think we can all agree. The CPC was the opposition at the time; also, the federal New Democrats were the opposition at the time. This writer clearly and rightly pointed out... [interjections] If you've got something to say, stand up.

What they pointed out, rightly pointed out, was that the opposition was damaged in this kind of legislation, as was the entire Parliament. Now, I would hope that all members of this Assembly understand the validity and the importance of this place and the work that we do, except I'm pretty sure I heard the government whip say, when we voted just recently, something like: we could have done this an hour ago. To me, that sort of indicates that he doesn't think debate is important.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you debate is important, and I think legislating or leading or governing by orders in council or by regulations is not good enough. We need to debate that stuff in this place with full transparency, but this is not a government that is interested in finding the sunlight, because they seem to do everything in their power to avoid it.

Anyway, this article goes on. On April 2 Bill 10 at the time was rammed through, called the Public Health (Emergency Powers) Amendment Act, 2020. Here's the difference. This came out April 2, and 23 days later – and I never thought I'd say this in this place – Jason Kenney actually did something that I thought was pretty good. Never did I ever think that I would say that, but I will give him props. Twenty-three days after, because of the public pressure,

he figured out this was not a good thing to do. Now, this government is not that government. I can't even believe I'm going to say this, but if I had the ability to trade, I would. Hard to believe. That is troubling to me, too. Anyway, that went on.

They amended that act, and let me just say that we had actually – now, I know debate might be inconvenient for the members over there, but we actually had a lot of amendments that would have made sense that the Kenney government at the time ended up not adopting. They don't like to listen to them. You probably heard them. Most of them start their comments with: we're not going to take anything from you; we're not going to learn anything from you. But we end up being right a lot of the time. One of our amendments was a sunset clause. Now, the other amendment – I wrote it down – was about publishing the orders on a website that would be available to all of the Alberta public. They didn't choose to do that, either. They are not interested in finding the sunlight.

Anyway, that is a gong show that happened in 2020. A lot of us were here for that. We knew immediately that this was dangerous, that this was bad, that this was antidemocratic, that this was not good. I actually think some of the members on the other side knew that, too, but for whatever reason they didn't have the courage to stand up.

Anyway, we know – we saw this – that the UCP tried to give their ministers more power to make laws during a public health emergency. You know, there was really no restriction on what they could do other than new taxation powers, which is very frightening, Mr. Speaker. I think you'd agree. Like the feds, they tried a massive power grab. They weren't successful because there was enough push-back. They tried it again, not very successfully, and they're doing it again now, and that is alarming to me. This particular bill is, again, the UCP taking care of themselves for the future.

Now, I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I never could have imagined COVID. What we saw and what happened: never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would live through something like that. I think that probably most of us felt that way. None of us saw this coming, yet it came, and I'll tell you I was extraordinarily happy at the time that we were actually listening.

Now, did they get it all right? No, probably not, but I was extraordinarily happy that the people that we were listening to were health professionals, not politicians, because the politicians don't get it right all the time. I think I've demonstrated that already. So I was very happy to listen to the public health officers... [interjections] If you have something to say, stand up.

5:10

Anyway, you know, one of the other things I was going to bring up: I think that just to even measure how not good – and I'm being generous here – this particular piece of legislation is, just take a little bit of time, for the members back there that would rather just heckle, and maybe do a jurisdictional scan and see what the other provinces are doing, what your friends are doing, because they're not doing this. This is a one-off, and this should scare you.

When we start to chip away at democracy and transparency and openness and relying on experts, that's a problem. I don't believe that any of us were elected and sent to this place to make decisions during a pandemic in areas that are not areas of expertise. That worries me. Do I think the government should be able to override decisions of the chief medical officer of health? Well, I don't think I need to answer that question; my comments have been pretty clear. Again, I find it incredibly sad that this is just another bad piece of legislation on a pile of bad legislation filled with bad decisions, filled with lack of information, and that worries me.

I hope and pray that we never experience a pandemic like we did, because it was awful. It was just awful. Far too many people died.

Far too many people are still sick, actually. It has damaged communities and families, and it's awful. I hope it never happens. What scares me is that if it does happen again, if it happens, let's say, tomorrow and this passes today, we have a government that thinks they're smarter and better equipped to make decisions than our experts, who have gone to school and specialized in this for a reason, who take oaths that we don't take. I trust them.

Anyway, I'm going to wrap this up, Mr. Speaker, and let my colleagues also add to the debate on this bill. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Klein has risen.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise in response to Bill 6, Public Health Amendment Act, 2023. What I'm seeing is a bit of a trend here: if you don't like laws, you can circumvent them; if you don't like evidence, you can bury it; if you don't feel like we need transparency, we can do away with that as well; and if we don't want to take the advice of experts, we can take away their power to make decisions over very, very important things like public health.

[The Speaker in the chair]

What I remember seeing in the pandemic, that we were all, you know, sort of forced to live through, was the questioning of decisions on public health, dismissal of advice by experts, and over time, really, a lot of the decisions that were being made around public health being influenced by popular opinion rather than reasonable evidence and medical experts. What I see happening here with this bill is that we are now just kind of taking the covers off. There's no pretending anymore about who should be making decisions on public health.

We know that we have a chief medical officer of health. They have all of the evidence at their disposal. They have the public service at their disposal to make decisions that are in the best interests of Albertans. What I'm seeing here with this bill is that we're handing it over to legislators to make that decision, and that, frankly, is frightening to me. I think we are here to represent people and to be their voice on political decisions. We are not here as medical experts unless, you know, we're the amazing Dr. Metz, who also has that experience.

The Speaker: The wonderful doctor from Calgary-Varsity.

Member Tejada: The Member for Calgary-Varsity. Apologies.

So what I am continuing to, like, ask myself is: where else are we seeing this? Where is the reasoning for giving the power over public health decisions to Legislatures? What other jurisdictions are we seeing this happening in? It makes absolutely no sense to me. Like, we're giving cabinet the ability to override decisions of any decision-maker in the act, and what I'm seeing here is that we have a supremacy clause that also allows the reversal of decisions. So we could actually, you know, be playing the game of asking for the reasoned evidence behind a public health decision that affects us all, and now we're putting in a supremacy clause that allows for the reversal of these decisions by the chief medical officer of health, the deputy chief medical officer of health, the appeals board, inspectors, directors, and even the ministers.

I guess what I'm wondering is: should the government be able to override the decisions of the chief medical officer of health? Should they be able to override the appeals board? Should they be able to override the decisions of the folks that we've entrusted to get the education, to get the expertise to make these decisions? Should this all be decided behind closed doors and not by the people that we

are entrusting to take care of the public? I'm just curious where we would see this ever being necessary.

I'm thinking about the pandemic. Masking, the ability to make decisions around quarantine: do I want that in the hands of someone who is elected or who has a political interest? No. I want that in the hands of someone who has the expertise, has the experience and education to help make the best decisions for the public.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow has risen.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate here on Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023. I want to tell a personal story about how this pandemic has impacted my family, and I want to talk a little bit about my reliance on public health to work so that I can keep my family safe. The pandemic, as all members of this House are, I'm sure, one hundred per cent aware, is like a tornado. It left some houses completely untouched and completely flattened others. By no means was my household the worst impacted, but this is a fact that continues to impact what's going on in my family today.

My daughter is an extremely, extremely high-performing teenager. In 2020, when the pandemic opened, she received an award in her junior high school for student of the year. She as a grade 7 student won a math contest that incorporated the entire school from 7 to 9.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Kayande: Thank you. She's a lovely girl.

And in 2020 is when I came home from a company ski trip and felt the sniffles. This was in early March. By late March the entire household was ill except for my youngest son, who was 10 years old at the time. We got better eventually – it took us a long time – but she did not. It took us about six months more to get a diagnosis of long COVID for her. You know, one of the hurtful things about a long-COVID diagnosis is that there are people who falsely believe that long COVID is a function of vaccine injury. I guess that my child is kind of in a – being possibly one of the longest long-COVID pediatric patients in the world right now, she could not possibly have been injured by vaccines because vaccines were not available when she got sick.

5:20

The impact of this disease on her has been absolutely devastating. You know, she has extreme brain fog, fatigue, does her best, remains high performing, but is now a grade 12 student who will not graduate this year, may graduate next year, has a dream of becoming an engineer, and I don't know how that's going to happen because it is not possible for her to attend school with any sort of regularity.

I took my son out for a run. Of course, parents know that the best way to have difficult conversations with your children is to get them out of the house and have them in an environment where they can't run away or squirm away or avoid attention, and a year ago I could still run a little bit faster than him so I could chase him down if he ran away from me. That is not possible anymore. But I told him, you know: "Look, your older sister may never be better. She may never be able to support herself, she may never be able to work, so I need you to promise me that no matter what happens between you and her, you are going to be there to take care of her when we're gone, because she's counting on you, and you are her family."

He said: "Well, yeah. I mean, I love my older sister. Of course I'm going to take care of her." And I told him: "Look, you don't know what your relationship is going to be like in five years. You are still very young and things change, and if they do, you've just got to remember

that you promised me today, right now, that you're going to look after her." You know, these are the heavy kinds of conversations that maybe many of you who have had chronically ill children have had. "And the other thing I need you to be aware of is that we need to make sure that she's well taken care of. You just need to know that if I'm gone, if I die prematurely, she's going to get all of the money. It's all going to be hers because that's what she needs, and you're going to have to work and you're also going to have to support her if it's not enough."

You know, this is heavy, right? Like, he's running and he's thinking, and he looks at me and he says, "So if I put you in a really cheap old folks' home, is that going to be better for my big sister?" And I'm like: "Yeah. That'll totally help. And what that will help with is that I'll also not live as long, so there'll be more for both of you." And it just gave me some heart and it gave me a little bit of warmth that she's going to have people that take care of her.

I want to be one of those people that take care of her. I am responsible for her getting sick because I was the one that brought the disease home into our household. And what I want from public health, like, what I need from public health is more than what maybe other families need. I need to know – because she cannot get COVID again. She can't. So I have to keep her safe; that is my job. I did not keep her safe in 2020, and my job is now to keep her safe as best as I can, and to do that I need information. I need to know expert opinion. I need to know what the experts are saying at any point in time even though the world desires to move on from the pandemic.

Good Lord, I want to move on, too, more than anything else. I want to move on and have this not be an issue in my life anymore, and I need the help of public health and public health experts to make that happen. I need to know: how much COVID is in the environment right now? How many other respiratory diseases are in the city right now? What does the status of absenteeism in her school look like right now? Those are what allow us to make decisions to keep me and my family safe.

So when I think about, you know, Bill 6, the Public Health Amendment Act, and what it's going to do to reduce the ability of public health officials to communicate the critically important information that I need, Mr. Speaker, I'm worried, and I'm scared for myself. I'm here, you know, as a legislator, in a position of incredible privilege, but I also want to make sure that families like me get what they need from the public health infrastructure, the enviable public health infrastructure that we have built in this province. I'm begging this House: please don't take that away.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 6. In a nutshell, what this bill is about is this UCP government giving itself power to manage any future pandemic. I think it's good to have accountability somewhere, but looking at how this government managed the pandemic, this bill scares many Albertans. For two years the government was not able to figure out who was in charge, at times for months, when the then Premier and cabinet ministers were gone. We were just begging the government to tell us who was in charge of public health. That happened in August of 2022, I believe, when they had the Education minister in charge of public health. As the government during the pandemic they even were not able to purchase kids' Tylenol, and now they want to give themselves power to manage future public health emergencies.

I urge all members to think about it. Health decisions are better left to health professionals, not politicians. I urge everyone to oppose this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or allow the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Bill 8 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

[Adjourned debate November 22: Mr. McIver]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has eight minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others? The hon. the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would definitely like to speak to Bill 8. First, I would like to move on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who made the motion, that the motion for second reading of Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, be amended by deleting all of the words after the word “that” and substituting the following: “Bill 8, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.” And I have the copies.

The Speaker: Excellent. Hon. member, if you can pass that through to the page, we'll get a copy to the table and myself, and then I'll call upon you to proceed with your remarks. Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as HA1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the call.

5:30

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reason that I wish to move on this amendment is because I really feel that we need more time to think about what it means to lose the limits on gifts. Specifically, I want to caution against removing this \$200 limit. There's huge danger in allowing gifts to MLAs, and I offer up my experience of watching right through the entire opioid crisis, which in very large part proceeded because of gifts.

We all know of the opioid crisis. We think we also know of the very sad role that some physicians played in this crisis, and indeed we have Bill 3, which we've also been debating, where we're joining a lawsuit against pharma and others to recover the costs in the health care costs recovery amendment act. This really relates to the methods used by the pharmaceutical industry to incentivize physician prescribing.

Prescription opioids are often a gateway to illicit drug use. Prescription opioids have been involved in about one-third of opioid overdose deaths, and pharma is now being held to account for that, but remember that they're the ones that paid what we might call bribes. Doctors unwittingly, or maybe not so, accepted them.

First, let me say that this pharmaceutical spending works. In a 2019 report the pharmaceutical industry had been spending about \$30 billion every year on marketing. Two-thirds of that was marketing to physicians. It went to persuading doctors of the benefits of prescribing their medications. They largely did this through sales reps who went direct to offices and had face-to-face visits, by feeding and offering swag, and by payments for speeches, food and beverages, travel, and hosting education events. They even marketed Find a Doctor. Now, maybe that might help us here right now in Alberta, but they were of course channelling patients towards the doctors that prescribed their drugs.

The representatives misled the medical professionals about the abuse potential of drugs like OxyContin. During the period of 2000 to 2015 opioid prescriptions and overdose deaths quadrupled. This was due to marketing. Those who prescribed particularly large amounts of opioids were the most likely to be paid at all, and the

top 25 percentile of prescribers got 72 per cent of the payments. Were doctors directly bribed? No. Everything was legal; 54 per cent of the doctors who prescribed to medicare patients prescribed some form of opioids. Again, those that prescribed the most were paid the most by the pharmaceutical industry.

So this cycle developed. You know, your rep comes in, talks to you in the office, tells you this slanted and falsified information, particularly stating how these drugs have a very low abuse potential. You've got patients in pain. Prescribe, and then you get thanked. You go to their conferences, speaking engagements. You get paid more and more, and the more enthusiastic you are by the number of prescriptions and the more enthusiastically you speak, the more you get paid. More and more studies have shown that marketing direct to doctors impacts prescribing. It isn't only opioids, of course. Pharma would not be spending this money if it was not effective.

How does this impact patients? This comes back to this bill. The trust is broken. A patient who goes to their physician and believes that they're prescribing this in their best interest, not just in the moment but in the long term – because many people worried about addiction believed that the doctor was prescribing in their own best interests. Then as the story came out about all of the perks to prescribers, it became clear that maybe that doctor was prescribing in the doctor's best interest. Purdue did not discontinue their speaker program until 2016.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point order is called by the hon. the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23(b). As much as I genuinely do find this conversation interesting about the history of the opioid crisis as it is affecting so many Albertans, I am failing to understand the connection between the opioid crisis, doctors in Alberta, and this Justice Statutes Amendment bill, which would of course be Bill 8.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening to the debate, and there was a very clear connection because this Bill 8 has a provision that will remove the cap limit on MLA gifts. That is in the bill, and what my colleague was talking about was how this practice of unlimited, uncapped gifts has impacted the medical profession and how reps who were selling medicine were providing gifts to the doctors so they can prescribe more. We are in the midst of a crisis, so I think my colleague was about to bring it back to MLA gifts right in time to make that connection clear to everyone in this House. It's not a point of order.

The Speaker: I think that if the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was about to do that, then that probably would be a beneficial thing for all of the members in the Assembly to make sure that the remarks are pointed towards, in this case particularly, the actual hoist amendment which has been moved, not necessarily just the piece of legislation more broadly, as we've now moved on to a hoist amendment, and providing the reasons for which we should not be reading the bill a second time, as is so clearly stated in the actual amendment.

Debate Continued

Dr. Metz: Indeed, I am on my last page. The idea is to bring it back to the dangers of gifts.

The limitation on gifts is particularly challenging. I do believe that we need to not go there, not lose the trust of the public, and not risk what can happen, at first perhaps unintentionally, by allowing these gifts. I will finish off here and state that it is the idea of unlimited gifts that I believe is the issue here.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you. I will support the amendment. I would like six months to be able to ask my constituents if they would like me to have unlimited gifts. I think no one nowhere in my riding would say: yes, Joe; that's a really good idea. Maybe I can't use my own name. Yes.

Ms Phillips: They would call you "hon. member."

Member Ceci: "Hon. MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, we don't think you should have unlimited gifts." There is a prescribed amount. It has been prescribed in the previous act, that I hope continues to stay with us because I think it's clear. It's transparent. I don't know anybody on this side who has had problems with the existing legislation.

The only difficulty, I think, is the government on the other side. They believe that this act should be changed and that it should be set as prescribed amounts in regulation. I don't think that's in the interests of Albertans. My colleague from Calgary-Varsity has kind of outlined a significant similar kind of situation that was set up in the medical profession as a result of unlimited regulation around gifts to members of that profession.

5:40

The six months will give more time to have some sober thoughts about this whole thing, Mr. Speaker. I'm just reflecting on the fact that some of us are going to the press gallery as well later and may be different there in terms of discussions about sobriety. But, for myself, I think the prescribed amount limits here in accordance with regulations and all that sort of stuff are just muddying the waters. It's not transparent, and I don't think that Albertans, when they, you know, get a look at what that might mean in terms of the value of gifts coming to either members or a member's spouse or adult interdependent partner or minor child – I don't think that's in the interests of our work, the trust that the public puts in us, and we should be more sober about this in terms of a delay of this bill before us.

I think that with that said, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down. Thank you.

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

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm most pleased to rise to speak to Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. This bill intends to revise the conditions for members to accept gifts and nonmonetary benefits by removing the statutory limits, allowing the regulations to determine the amount. This also aims to suspend investigations during general elections and introduces a practical consideration. By increasing the value of gifts that MLAs can receive, this government is looking for more ways to keep the UCP gravy train rolling and rolling and rolling. Sadly, we've come to expect this kind of self-serving overreach from this UCP government. Yet Albertans are facing insurmountable challenges right now. Why is amending the Conflicts of Interest Act, specifically regarding gift limits, investigations during elections, a priority over addressing more immediate concerns like health care, housing, and cost of living?

I'm not sure how many times today I'm going to have to say this in the House, but here we go. Albertans are dealing with one of the worst cost-of-living crises in recent years. Groceries are more expensive. Rent is skyrocketing, and many are facing houselessness in this massive housing crisis. Utility bills are becoming too much for many families to handle. Car insurance is increasing exponentially. This week my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora stated how one of her residents had an enormous increase in their car insurance of \$2,000 extra with no accidents or claims. Alarming, to say the least. A recent Statistics Canada survey found that in 2023 approximately 15 per cent of Canadian households had to reduce or forgo expenses for basic necessities like food and medicine for at least one month just to pay an energy bill. In Alberta the number rose to 24 per cent, the highest rate amongst all Canadian provinces.

Albertans need real relief for these daily challenges they're facing, trying to take care of themselves and their families. We see Albertans struggling to pay for bare necessities, to have a good quality of life. Quite frankly, it is an abomination I'm standing up and talking to this bill. These are the most basic things that the government should be getting. I could not in good conscience support this legislation because, unlike the UCP, the Alberta NDP believes in the importance of prioritizing the interests and concerns of everyday citizens over political self-interest. Instead of championing the urgent needs of the people, the UCP seems more focused on indulging in perks like free food, extravagant gifts, and even budget whisky, all at the expense of those struggling to put a roof over their heads and food on their tables.

As the critic for Advanced Education I am particularly concerned how this UCP government is not addressing the core needs of students, who are our future leaders, making sure they have every opportunity to succeed. And might I remind everyone in this House that postsecondary is an economic issue. I will be relentless in doing all I can to advocate for students, who are struggling to pay for their education and their families, and I will hold this government accountable to all Albertans. Unlike the government, on this side of the aisle the Alberta NDP remains resolute in its commitment to standing up for regular Albertans, students, and our future leaders because we see the challenges that they and so many are facing firsthand. We hear it every day in our inboxes, meeting with them face to face. It's constant.

Mr. Speaker, since 2019 the Calgary Food Bank has seen a 140 per cent increase in client visits, and 30 per cent of that increase came in the last year alone. In Calgary in the last year the food bank has seen a 34 per cent increase in working Albertans as clients, people who are working every day and just can't make ends meet.

The Airdrie Food Bank has seen demand increase up to 55 per cent over the last year. Here people who previously used the food bank services only once in a while to get out of a crisis are now using the food bank each and every month.

The same is true at the University of Alberta Campus Food Bank, which is now going through 500 pounds of food per week above and beyond. They struggle to keep up with the ever-growing demand. They regularly serve over a thousand clients a month. This is just alarming.

And the list goes on. MacEwan University's food hamper program has seen a demand jump of 61 per cent this September compared to last year. All this gravely impacts our students' ability to perform well in postsecondary and brings massive levels of worry and mental strain.

This UCP government has slashed funding to postsecondaries across the province, forcing many of these institutions to recoup operating costs through tuition. While they have put a 2 per cent cap in place for domestic students, which doesn't even account for

inflation, by the way, tuition for international students remains unregulated. Make no mistake; this is driving students out of our province. It's diminishing the ability to educate and train a skilled workforce, which is essential for Alberta's economy to thrive.

Taking all of this into account, the UCP government is focused on making amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act so that they can get more gifts. This is completely unethical and in no way serves the needs of Albertans. It means less transparency and more backroom deals. While Albertans are facing an unprecedented affordability crisis, the UCP wants to increase the limit on free perks, gifts, and handouts that benefit them just because they have the power to do so. Instead, folks in Edmonton-South are asking me: how can this government be so out of touch with what our families are dealing with on a daily basis? I've heard from a constituent, Lisa, who told me: the UCP needs to be more responsible with decisions and money as they work for us, the residents of Alberta.

Think of Albertans in high-risk situations as well as the middle class, who are struggling to buy groceries for their families and pay utilities. Work with the money we have, and help Albertans that need it. Look, I can't speak for the colleagues across the aisle, but I know that current gift limits are more than sufficient to act as the representative for my constituents.

5:50

We've had the Premier, who said that this amendment is needed because current rules hamper her government's ability to meet people. Look, I'm not sure when standard meetings became ticketed events, but I would be happy to let members opposite know that it is perfectly easy to arrange stakeholder meetings outside of ticketed events. If they really are unable to co-ordinate in-person meetings without a fee, look, there are many options. You know, virtual meetings: they sure keep costs down. You also don't need a present to secure a meeting.

Bill 8 outlines how investigations by the Ethics Commissioner would be suspended when the writ of elections is issued for potentially as long as the completion of recounts, including legal appeals. While the minister recently said that he didn't believe this bill would keep potentially politically damaging information from voters, there is no doubt that this would hinder transparency.

We have seen this government bend the rules surrounding ethics. Indeed, in May the Alberta Ethics Commissioner found that the Premier contravened the Conflicts of Interest Act over a conversation she had with the Justice minister about a high-profile COVID-19 case 11 days before the provincial election earlier that year. The Ethics Commissioner found that the purpose of this phone call was undoubtedly to influence a decision of the Crown and that the Premier discussing an ongoing criminal case with an Attorney General is not acceptable.

Suspending investigations during general elections is a clever tactic to evade accountability when it matters most. Do Albertans not have the right to know who it is they are potentially electing as leaders in this province? These challenges add another part to the UCP gravy train and are another step backwards to the days of old, when Conservatives and their friends got rich while everyone else suffered.

For this and for so many reasons, I cannot support this shameful attempt from the UCP government to serve their own self-interest at the expense of Albertans. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-South, while I take no position on the passion and the content of your remarks, I do think – and I'd just take the opportunity to help all of the new parliamentarians – that when an amendment has been moved before

the Assembly, it's important that the remarks that are provided are in relation to the amendment that has been moved. Your remarks were a very excellent second-reading speech. In a speech given on a hoist amendment, if a point of order was called, perhaps the Speaker would have been forced to intervene, but I use this opportunity to help us as we all move forward in the 31st Legislature together. It's important that remarks are directed towards the issue before the Assembly, and if you talk to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I'm sure she can give you lots of very creative ways in which you could give the same speech but make it towards the amendment.

I did see the hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade on his feet. I'm not sure if he wanted to still provide some remarks or if he was just looking for an intervention.

Mr. Jones: I was looking for an intervention, but I'll provide some brief remarks.

I just couldn't help but notice that the member opposite was from the lovely constituency of Edmonton-South, and that was the constituency of the former NDP ethics critic, who was of course charged with a crime. As it relates to the amendment on the floor right now, I just wondered if there are any amendments that we could look at that would prevent future NDP ethics critics from potentially breaking the law. I think that would be also beneficial to consider in a future bill, and the Member for Edmonton-South might have some insights into that, coming from the same constituency as the previous ethics critic, who was replaced after breaking the law. [interjections] It's getting loud in here. We want to hear their feedback on the amendment, so I'm going to cede my time here.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington has the call.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Now, this amendment is looking for a six-month pause on this – right? – to be not now read a second time but be read a second time six months hence.

You know, I can say, quite candidly, that when I first thought to seek public office, I thought about what an honour it would be to represent the community I live in, to be able to speak up for those who don't have the same privilege and platform, and to work towards policy that I believe makes a difference in the lives of Albertans.

It really should have, maybe, but it didn't cross my mind that I would have to spend so much time in this House listening to these spurious arguments for why some of our members simply can't do business without spending time at expensive events or in cushy box seats. I find it hard to believe that the members opposite have never considered having meetings over a simple coffee or even in this beautiful building, in which we have free access to a number of different meeting spaces. In fact, I think many Albertans would like to know who the people are . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington has the call.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I do think that many Albertans would like to know which people the Premier is only able to meet with in these private suites and not in the light of day in a meeting room here.

So what does Bill 8 do, and why have we moved this amendment to allow the opportunity for six months of reflection on this bill?

Well, it's because this bill does nothing more than add another cart to the UCP gravy train. You know, not only does this bill lift the legislated limits on gifts to MLAs; it doesn't even set a new limit.

Now, the Minister of Justice has claimed that this change will bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions. It's incredibly frustrating to hear such claims come from the minister because they are not rooted in reality. In fact, in other jurisdictions across Canada gift limits for MLAs are mostly \$250 or lower. That's B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick. You know, the only Canadian jurisdiction to have made a change recently to their MLA gift limits is P.E.I., and you know what that change was? It was to drop gift limits from \$500 to \$200.

The UCP government has its priorities all wrong, and that is why we have moved this amendment. I would like to thank the members for their time on this, and I encourage all of us to vote in favour of the amendment on the floor in front of us.

The Speaker: Are there others on amendment HA1?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment HA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members . . . [interjections] Order. Order. Order.

It's almost 6 o'clock. Maybe we can do this all again tomorrow if the clock strikes 6, or we can call the question on second reading if there is agreement or at least silence.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, 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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