



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 15, 2024

Day 38

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 15, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by the Philippine Madrigal Singers. I invite you to participate – or don't – in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

[Standing ovation]

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's a great pleasure to introduce a special visitor seated in the Speaker's gallery today. The grand chief of Confederacy of Treaty Six, Cody Thomas, has joined us. He is joined in the Speaker's gallery today by Kayli, the executive director of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, and Josh Burger, grand chief liaison. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I assume that private members' business this afternoon will be to move a motion that the Philippine Madrigal Singers will only be able to sing the anthem from here on out.

Today we were led in the singing of *O Canada* by the Philippine Madrigal Singers. They are visiting all the way from the Philippines and will be performing in Edmonton and Calgary this week as part of their Canada-wide tour. There are concerts tomorrow and

Saturday, and I understand, if you're hoping to attend, the Saturday concert will be a real delight.

The singers are one of the world's most awarded choral groups, consistently winning the top prize in the most prestigious choral competitions. In fact, they were the first choir in the world to win the European Grand Prix for Choral Singing twice and the first to receive the BrandLaureate premier award from the Asia-Pacific brands foundation. In 2009 they were declared as UNESCO artists for peace. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, it's also a great pleasure to introduce two family members of a member here in the Assembly today. Gordon and Valerie Sinclair are the parents of the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake. It was a pleasure to have you here. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Lastly, from me today, the Bangla-speaking diaspora throughout the globe are celebrating Pohela Boishakh, the Bengali New Year. The Bengali language is among the six most spoken languages in the globe and plays a key role in building rich cultural heritage. Today we have community leaders representing six different nonprofits from across Alberta commemorating the occasion. They are the Edmonton Bengali Association, the Bangladesh-Canada Association of Edmonton, the Bonga Society of Alberta, the Krishti Bengali Cultural Society of Edmonton, the Ethnic Synergy Association, the Bangladesh Heritage and Ethnic Society of Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has two school groups joining us today.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students of Kildare elementary school. I have 68 of them in the members' gallery and 30 of them in the general public gallery. I ask the students and educators to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you my constituency office manager, Sarah Mejia. She does an amazing job serving our community. I would ask her to rise to receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you Mr. Barry Shaw and the students from Robert Warren school, who are visiting all the way from Calgary. Mr. Shaw was one of my elementary school teachers and has shaped thousands of lives throughout this province. I'm honoured to have him here today along with his staff and students. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, did you have an introduction? Go ahead.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to once again welcome the renowned Philippine Madrigal Singers and alongside them their choirmaster, Mark Anthony Carpio, and also the Edmonton organizers: Mila Bongco-Philpzig, Kehrl Reyes, and their entire team. Please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce Marilyn Dennis. Marilyn is a board trustee with the Calgary board of

education and also chair of the Alberta School Boards Association. She is joined today by Dr. Vivian Abboud, executive director of the Alberta School Boards Association. I want to thank them immensely for their advocacy and their partnership with government. I ask that they rise and be recognized.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you three amazing guests here today: Elder Charlie Fox, Elder Theresa Strawberry, and Kayla Coleman. We all attended the honouring spirit Indigenous students awards ceremony this morning. Thank you for being here, and please rise and receive the warm welcome.

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

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students of Princeton school. I ask the students and the teachers to rise up and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Annalee Nutter. She's the superintendent of the Fort McMurray public school district. Thank you for your more than two decades of experience and service to the public schools. Thank you, and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four individuals whose contributions are invaluable to the community. First, Mr. Syed Naqui, president of the seniors multicultural association of Alberta. We also have Imran Hamid, Muhammed Rizwan, and Hussain Ali Bokhari, four incredible volunteers and community advocates. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you two of my guests who have come all the way from Calgary to be part of Pohela Boishakh, Bengali New Year. Rozina Mina helps with newcomer settlement in Calgary, and her son Masrur is a student at the university. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you some people from Slave Lake and Calgary: Shawn, Frankie, Jared Patterson, and Brent Erich.

I'm also super grateful to have my parents here today, Mr. Speaker, Gordon and Valerie Sinclair, and my good friend and neechie, brother, Grand Chief Cody Thomas from the Treaty 6 confederacy, all of them here to support me and hear me speak today.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has a statement to make.

Family Justice Strategy

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a good day for Red Deer. This morning I joined our Justice minister in Red Deer. We announced expansion of the family justice strategy into Red Deer. That is good news. The family justice strategy is good. Our laws can be confusing. The legal system is daunting for Albertans seeking to resolve family matters. Separation, divorce, or child support can feel overwhelming. Access to justice needs to be better.

Alberta's government is investing \$8 million to support Albertans with these needs. The family justice strategy provides Albertans with more resources, more mediation and family counselling, more pathways to resolution. The strategy was first introduced in Edmonton and Calgary last December. It is helping, Mr. Speaker. The family law strategy is now expanding, with \$3 million to support families throughout central Alberta. Moreover, \$5 million is to support more rollout of these services. The strategy will expand to more communities in Alberta.

This family law strategy can empower families to find peace and resolution with less cost and time in a complex legal system. Mr. Speaker, families are the foundation of society. Families need to be supported, yet no family is perfect, because none of us are perfect. The increase to the family justice strategy provides more hope to families in hard times.

Thank you.

Bill 18

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this Premier and her government have lost the plot. Their proposal for legislation that will block Alberta's cities and towns from receiving federal funds means that Albertans will now lose out on even more of their own tax dollars. Alberta's long history of battling with Ottawa has traditionally been about our great province receiving far less back in federal government spending than our taxes send to Ottawa. Now the UCP proposes to solve that imbalance by making it worse. Only this government would be foolish enough to think that if someone shortchanges you, the way to fix it is to throw the change you did get on the ground, walk off in a fit of rage, because that'll show them. Albertans want a provincial government that gets our province its fair share from Ottawa, not one that throws up barriers, rejecting our own tax dollars from coming back to benefit our communities.

When the UCP broke their key election promise of an income tax cut, they were telling Albertans that this government is not interested in helping out with family budgets during this cost-of-living crisis. Now the UCP's plan is to make the crisis even worse. By needlessly blocking federal program funding from reaching Alberta's cities and towns, the Premier and her UCP team will have forced municipalities to raise Albertans' property taxes to make up for that gap. Making Albertans pay twice for municipal programs is no way to stick it to Ottawa. With this new plan the only ones the UCP are sticking it to are the Alberta taxpayers. Erecting barriers to federal government spending in Alberta shows that when it comes down to helping struggling Albertan families, this Premier and her government have completely lost the plot.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has a statement to make.

Member's Response to Comments in Chamber and on Social Media

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address inappropriate and inaccurate comments made towards me in this House and on social media, shared by members of the opposition and others. The past few days have been extremely stressful. As a result of these inaccurate comments and posts, I've received threats of violence, racist insults, attempts to assassinate my character and, even worse, question my ancestry. This has triggered me and opened old wounds of trauma that I thought I'd left behind.

One post stated: he may be Indigenous on the outside, but with his actions, the fact he is a Conservative, has a White wife, he seems like an Uncle Tom. One even said that I'm going to get scalped. Another person said that one hero with a scope is all that's needed. Another said: this guy should be dragged in the streets as an example. Some of these same insults or worse have been previously levelled at me when I was younger from parents, coaches, and even my own high school teacher. Despite this, Mr. Speaker, I choose not to let any of these moments define me. I've got big shoulders and thick skin, in fact, a lot thicker the last few years, which my wife and my suit buttons can both confirm.

The context of my comment last week to the Member for Calgary-Acadia came from her insensitive and sarcastic remarks the day before regarding our government's Bill 11, intended to improve police response times in rural and Indigenous communities. I would caution that all members in the House treat every Indigenous issue with the same level of compassion that I try to.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, for anyone keeping score, I am the son of a residential school survivor, I am First Nations, and my treaty number, if anyone is curious, is 4500363701.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Government Policies

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, after five years of UCP government life is getting less and less affordable for Albertans. They lifted caps on insurance and utility bills almost immediately after getting elected. As a result, Albertans pay the highest auto insurance in Canada. As a result, Albertans' utility bills climbed by 120 per cent last year. This government took hundreds of millions from Albertans by deindexing the tax code. They took millions from AISH recipients and seniors by deindexing their benefits. They refused to act to address skyrocketing rents, and instead of cutting taxes like they promised in the election, the UCP chose instead to hike taxes and fees on Albertans. This is where the UCP showed their utter disregard for the concerns of Albertans.

At a time when it is getting hard for Albertans to afford a home, when people are living with their parents or grandparents because they can't afford to purchase their first homes, at a time when we hear this worry from so many families, the UCP decided to increase fees on housing by 160 per cent. That's right, Mr. Speaker. During an affordability crisis, during a housing crisis the UCP decided to increase taxes on housing. Over the next two years the UCP's dream-killing housing tax will take \$136 million out of Albertans trying to buy a home.

The UCP was elected promising to cut taxes, make life more affordable, and to listen to Albertans. Instead, they broke virtually every single affordability promise that they made. I'm honoured to stand in this Chamber and represent the people of Calgary-Elbow, who have been let down by this government, who promised to make life affordable, only to add costs and barriers. My constituents and all Albertans deserve better.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Bill 18

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this Premier seems to have forgotten that Albertans democratically elected their local leadership to run their municipalities. They may be statutory creatures of the province, but they still represent the priorities of the constituents who elected them. She's also forgetting it's her cuts and downloading that have municipalities looking for money. To the Premier: we know that historically she doesn't do well on locally elected boards, so can she tell us why she's now acting like she was elected mayor-in-chief? Did we miss an election somewhere where that happened?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point I was raising last week is that the Prime Minister has a big job to do, which is running the country, and he should stop trying to do the job of Premiers. The Premier's job is to make sure that every municipality is treated fairly. That has not happened. We have eight municipalities who managed to use their connections to be able to get grants – and good for them – but the conditions attached to it are causing big problems in their backyard.

An Hon. Member: You're causing the problems. Your government, your policies, your problems.

Ms Smith: Just ask anyone who's gone to the blanket rezoning meetings. I can tell you that they didn't ask for that from Quebec when they signed a deal, and that's what we're looking for, the same treatment as Quebec.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't actually care about jurisdiction when it comes to getting the help that they need. Alberta's housing crisis is worsening. Municipalities and the people who need homes will take the help from wherever they can get it, even from the feds, but the Premier thinks that if she doesn't get the credit, Albertans shouldn't get a home. To the Premier: why won't she just get out of the way or, better yet, match the federal funding with real money instead of press releases about something that may or may not happen 10 years from now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member of the opposition seems to have forgotten that there are more than eight municipalities in Alberta. In fact, there are over 350. If they each had to work to sign a bilateral agreement with the federal government – fingers crossed they were going to get money – there would be a lot that would be left out, as is the case right now. In Quebec, in British Columbia the federal government came to the table as adults, negotiated an arrangement so that the provinces and the federal government would go out together in announcing support. We are absolutely open to doing the same thing.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, it's not just municipalities the Premier is going after with her bill. Lesley Thompson lives with type 1 diabetes and is the cofounder of Pump 4 Life Alberta. She knows what she's talking about when she says that this bill threatens

free access to otherwise costly diabetes medications and supplies. With her gatekeeper-in-chief bill the Premier would be blocking access to free essential health care. To the Premier: after sparking outrage with their cancellation of the insulin pump therapy program in '22, why is the UCP going after these very same Albertans once again?

Ms Smith: You know, Mr. Speaker, I look at it the other way, that if the federal government comes to the table dealing with us in good faith, we can actually end up with more dollars going into the vital programs. They know how to do this. They came to the table on the health care deal. We negotiated a 10-year deal plus four additional bilateral deals. It would have been absurd if they had tried to do a workaround and go to each individual hospital to cut a separate deal. They wouldn't have done that. Why is it that they're doing it on housing? It's because it's political. We're not going to stand for it. We want to make sure that every municipality is treated fairly, and that's why they have to negotiate with us.

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

Federal Postsecondary Research Funding

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the deal. The Premier's gatekeeper-in-chief bill is going to make it harder to get federal dollars, taxes Albertans pay, back into Alberta. The world-class researchers at Alberta universities are another group she specifically targeted. She clearly doesn't know how any of this works. To the Premier: there's no evidence that the arm's-length expert researchers who approve federal grants are ideologically driven, so will she admit that the only ideological imposition she's really concerned with is her own?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, it just so happens that David Staples wrote a column on the 12th entitled Mega-intellectual PR Machine: Professor Blasts Gigantic Funding of Trudeau Liberals Climate Narrative. In fact, what he says is that you do have to wonder why the federal government . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. the Premier is the one with the call.

Ms Smith: This is Sylvain Charlebois, a professor in agricultural economics: "You do have to wonder why the federal government has poured so much money into these institutions. What are we getting out of it? Are we getting debate? Are we getting information? Are we getting good science, or are we just getting research to support the government's agenda?" That's the reason we're concerned.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as one observer said, "Back off or I'll shoot myself in the foot" is a strange way to teach Ottawa a lesson. It's neither responsible nor competent. While the Premier claims she's attacking Ottawa, it's only Albertans who will get hurt. Alberta institutions get over a billion dollars a year in federal research funding. To the Premier: will she backfill every dollar in research funding that her gatekeeping loses us, and if she does, why are Albertans being forced to pay that bill twice?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, in fact, think that we're going to find all kinds of areas that we need to invest more research dollars into. I can tell you what Professor Charlebois has said, that there has been no research work on whether the carbon tax has cut emissions, no research work on whether or not we're seeing every step of the tax causing an increase in the price to grow and sell food,

no research on whether the tax is making the food industry less competitive. These are the kinds of things that you expect academic institutes to study, and if they don't, we have to find out why.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this UCP government just doesn't know what they're even trying to do here. The Advanced Education minister says that none of the current academic funding would be problematic, but the Premier claimed on the weekend that they're all driven by federal ideology, so she's going to step in. Neither of them ran on a policy of interfering with academic freedom in the province of Alberta. To the Premier: how can she not understand that this ill-informed power trip is going to drive both money and some of our best minds out of the province for generations to come? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely ran on making sure there was robust, free debate at universities. We passed a policy saying that we expect the Chicago principles to be followed at universities. As a result, we expect that there's going to be robust discussion on all sides of the debate. If we're not seeing that, then we have to step in and make sure that there's balance. Absolutely, we're going to make sure that research is funded in a fair way and that all perspectives are heard. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

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

Wildfire Season Preparation

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is April 15, the day the UCP promised Alberta would be fully staffed with wildland firefighters. Alberta is now under a wildfire advisory. A record-setting drought is gripping our province, and we need action. The government has been fully aware of what wildfire season could bring for months, so they do not have one excuse for understaffing or undertraining wildland firefighters. To the Premier: has Alberta reached full staffing capacity, like the government promised, and how many of these firefighters have been deployed?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we can say that our wildfire team is in place and working hard right now. This year to date we have had over 200 wildfires. There's only, I think, a dozen of them still on the books right now. We do have our crews in place, and they've been working all winter. So for the opposition to suggest that our wildfire crews haven't been working is very disingenuous, and they're trying to create alarm with Albertans. We're trying to create calm, and we have. We're not here spreading fear, like the NDP are; we're here doing the job that we're paid to do, and our wildfire fighters are doing their job. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the promise by the government was April 15, fully staffed up and fully deployed, yet this minister can't respond to that question, and 53 is the number of active wildfires currently burning in Alberta today, and just last week the first evacuation happened in Enoch – however, municipalities and Indigenous communities have made it clear that they feel there's a lack of information sharing about fire preparedness and safety from

this government. This is unacceptable. To mitigate the risks, access to information and clear systems to communicate for local residents are critical. To the minister: why are these groups seeing that it's not prepared?

2:00

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, we are prepared. The wildfire teams are actively working right now on the fires. We've had multiple fires already this year. Again, these people are putting these fires out. Again, it's disrespectful to the people, the good, hard-working men and women in wildfire and the people of Alberta that help work with our wildfire teams putting out these fires. Again, we have a total of 12 current active wildfires from this year. We have a total of 54 active wildfires, not 53 as the member suggested, but this number changes all the time. Our people are prepared. They're working now as we speak.

Ms Sweet: Banff national park, Bashaw, Camrose, Leduc, Spruce Grove, Clearwater, Brazeau, Cypress counties, Fort Saskatchewan, Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, Ponoka, Strathcona county, Sturgeon county, Morinville, Drayton Valley, Cochrane, Redwater, Rimbey, Taber, Waterton Lakes national park. I could keep going, but all of these regions and more are currently under fire advisories. It's only April 15. Seeing as today was the day wildland firefighters were supposed to be ready to go and hired up as per the minister, how many firefighters, dispatchers, and support staff are currently deployed, and how many more are waiting to be trained?

Mr. Loewen: Again, Mr. Speaker, our wildfire teams are working right now. They've worked all through the winter, like I've said. There's training that's been going on all through the winter... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I had no problem hearing the question. I'm having some challenge hearing the answer.

The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Our teams have been getting prepared all winter long. They've been working all winter long, and they continue to do the good work they're doing. We'll be bringing more teams on track as we go. Last year we had 35 Indigenous teams. This year we have 40 Indigenous teams. We brought on an extra hundred firefighters on our contracts. We brought on more teams working full-time, and they're doing the job that they need to do.

Hospital Construction in Edmonton

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Edmonton-South are waiting longer and longer for essential medical care because of this government's broken promise to build the south Edmonton hospital. Despite campaigning on building it, this government now has a litany of excuses to justify their broken promise. They claim there was no business case: false. They claim that there was no need in the south, also false. Will the Minister of Health explain why this government is failing the people of south Edmonton?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know I've said this over and over again, but I'm happy to repeat it. In fact, the truth of the matter is that when the members opposite did bring it forward when they were in government, they did not have a business plan or any other plan. It was very political in nature. The reports that I've had presented to me all indicate that a hospital is not required

in the south but, in fact, in another part of Edmonton. We're going to continue to make sure that we have services for south Edmonton.

Member Hoyle: Not only did the minister break the UCP's election promise to build the south Edmonton hospital, but the Premier responded to worried Edmontonians by telling them that if they need hospital care, they can drive to Red Deer. Edmonton will be short over 1,500 hospital beds. The closest hospital for south Edmonton is the Grey Nuns, which opened in 1988 and is at a hundred per cent occupancy rate. Can the minister stand in this House, look into the camera, and apologize to my constituents for the UCP's broken promise to build the south Edmonton hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are planning to build a Stollery children's hospital, a stand-alone Stollery children's hospital, which I know the members opposite are fully supportive of. I've heard them say so just last week, that they're supportive of this because of course we have the Stollery children's hospital spread over four different sites, 11 different programs. They need to be under one program, and that would also allow additional spaces. We also have the Royal Alexandra redevelopment, the WestView health centre, the Strathcona community hospital, and we're developing a plan for the whole province.

Member Hoyle: The last new hospital in Edmonton opened in 1988. The NDP took action to address this in 2017. The UCP committed to getting it done until the election. South Edmonton is one of the fastest growing areas, and because of the UCP's delays and denials there are many struggling to access health care. A resident in south Edmonton with a sick child in an emergency can't drive to Red Deer to get care, but that seems to be the only solution this government has. Did this government consider any other options to address the critical health care needs of my constituents in Edmonton-South?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Soon that member with the sick child will be able to go to a stand-alone Stollery hospital. We're committed to getting it done and done quickly.

Mr. Speaker, the other item that the members opposite continue to fail to state is that the cost for a south Edmonton hospital had ballooned to over \$4.9 billion, the most... [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that would actually be the most expensive hospital in all of Canada and would take over a decade to build. We are committed to making sure that Albertans, particularly Edmontonians, get the facilities they need.

Life Lease Housing

Ms Renaud: There are 183 families waiting for repayment of over \$60 million from Greg Christenson Group of Companies. The members of the Alberta Life Lease Protection Society have been extremely critical of Bill 12, saying that it will not help those already impacted. The minister has met with long-time UCP donor and supporter Greg Christenson nine times and with those impacted by these actions only once. On her radio show the Premier finally agreed to meet with this group on Thursday after sustained public pressure. Will the Premier update the House on the outcome of the meeting and details of next steps?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working on getting a meeting date this Thursday and I'd be happy to update the member when we have that meeting.

Ms Renaud: Given that the Alberta Life Lease Protection Society has said that by the time they were offered their one and only meeting with the minister of service Alberta, they were told Bill 12 was already written and given they were told that there would be no retroactive support for the seniors owed their life savings and given that many are worried that Greg Christenson had more influence in drafting Bill 12 than those seniors that actually need help and protection, can the minister tell us and Alberta seniors how many of his nine meetings with Greg Christenson took place before Bill 12 was drafted?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, listen, we are empathetic to the hardship and the financial pressure that these individuals are facing. It's absolutely just horrible that seniors can't get back their life savings from this developer. That's why my department and myself have met, since being sworn into cabinet, 12 times. I was personally at nine of those meetings. I committed in this House that I will continue to meet with that developer and I will continue to put pressure on until every single person has been made whole. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Renaud: Given that 12 meetings have resulted in no help for the group, in 2023 the Greg Christenson Group of Companies opened The Manor in Whitecourt, a private development funded partially by a \$4.75 million grant from the UCP government, can this government tell us how much money Christenson Developments is receiving from the government of Alberta? And can the minister confirm if the government is entering into any agreements with the Greg Christenson Group of Companies while Alberta seniors are waiting for the return of their life savings? They need answers.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, as we've already said in this House, we are not looking to enter into new agreements. But they've also asked if we would renew agreements, and we've said, again, that the answer to this horrible problem is not to evict seniors. The path forward for us is to pass this legislation to make sure that this situation never happens again. In addition to that, we'll continue to work with the developer until all these individuals have been made whole.

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

Tourism Strategy

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a beautiful and diverse province that boasts the most unique experiences and iconic natural viewscapes in the world. From the majestic Rocky Mountains to the rolling golden prairies, Alberta has something for every traveller to explore. Our tourism industry continues to be a key part of our economy, creating economic opportunities for entrepreneurs and communities around the province and allowing us to share our province's story with the world. So as we kick off Tourism Week, can the Minister of Tourism and Sport highlight what the tourism industry means for Alberta?

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

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that hon. member for the question. Through you to her constituents, they are very well represented by her in this Chamber.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, tourism: it means jobs. This tourism boom is great for the province. These are mortgage-paying, grocery-buying jobs for all Albertans and additional revenue streams for communities province-wide. Alberta's growing tourism industry is leaving a legacy of economic opportunity in communities across the province while showing the world that Alberta is the best place to live, to play, and to visit.

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

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that tourism is a major force in Alberta's economy, driving an economic benefit of \$10.7 billion in 2022, and given that while in government the NDP had no plan to increase tourism spending in our province and given that our government has recently released a long-term tourism strategy with ambitious revenue goals that the minister has been clear will unleash our visitor economy's potential, how will the recent release of the tourism strategy continue to bolster Alberta's growing visitor economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to drive Alberta's visitor economy forward, and as we continue to smash records in the visitor spending year over year, we have absolutely no plans of slowing down. We've released a tourism strategy which charts a path towards our goal of growing Alberta's visitor economy from \$10 billion a year to \$25 billion a year by 2035 while creating jobs and economic opportunity across Alberta. Our strategy also supports our Indigenous-run tourism experiences like Métis Crossing and Painted Warriors ranch, experiences that are highly sought after by visitors coming from around the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for his answer. Given that Alberta's government has an ambitious strategy to take our visitor economy to \$25 billion by 2035 and given that this strategy will also increase our competitiveness on the world stage, driving international travellers from key markets such as Asia, Europe, and the United States to explore all that our province has to offer and given that our visitor economy is rebounding and ready to reach new heights year over year, can the minister please tell this House about the outlook for the future of Alberta's visitor economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The future of tourism in Alberta is bright, and the world wants more Alberta: I've heard it first-hand around the country and around the world. Alberta's reputation as the premier destination for travellers is propelling our province's visitor economy to another record year, with the tourism indicators released just this morning showing tourism spending has more than doubled the 2022 figures and surpassed prepandemic levels. That is huge news, and this is great news for all of Alberta. It's creating economic opportunity, diversification, and jobs for every corner of our province.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, the UCP have been going on and on about the lack of a business plan for the south Edmonton hospital, but documents released recently revealed otherwise. A 125-page clinical service plan had already been approved in March 2019 under the NDP government. This plan designed a 436-bed facility to meet the same demand as a 600-bed hospital, focusing on efficiency through integrated services and patient-centred care models. How many excuses will this government make before building the south Edmonton hospital?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know why the members opposite continue to harp on the south Edmonton hospital when, in fact, it would cost \$4.9 billion, the largest amount in all of Canadian history, were we to build it and it would negate all of the other things that we need to do across this province. We are working on a strategic plan for the whole province on infrastructure, and I'll be happy to speak to that as we get that work done.

Mr. Deol: Given that the UCP is slamming the brakes on the south Edmonton hospital project after years of planning and a \$69 million investment and given that the Premier keeps saying that the cost is too much but has no problem cutting \$20 billion cheques for oil companies to clean their messes, Edmontonians are left asking: why does this government value political agenda over urgent health care needs? What will it take for them to realize that Albertans are suffering under their watch?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, to ensure the co-ordinated planning and delivery of capital projects, particularly in the Edmonton zone, Budget 2024 includes \$88 million in funding for integrated health and social infrastructure planning throughout Alberta infrastructure, which includes, by and large, Edmonton. We are absolutely making sure that we will in fact create spaces where needed within the Edmonton zone, and we will make sure that Edmontonians are well served in their health care needs.

Mr. Deol: Given that the UCP is shifting the focus away from essential health care infrastructures like the south Edmonton hospital, despite the existence of detailed business plans, one can't help but question their motives, and given that the storytelling and political agendas are at odds with reality and given that the NDP already did the work and created a comprehensive clinical service plan that was approved before the UCP took government, why are they still dragging their feet on a critical hospital while Edmontonians face prolonged wait times and strained health care shortages?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, I go back to 2017, when the members opposite were in government. They failed to have a feasibility study. They failed to do a business plan. They put forward the south Edmonton hospital when, in fact, the documentation I've seen indicates that it's required elsewhere. That being said, again, it would be the largest, most expensive hospital, a 400-bed hospital for a \$4.9 billion price tag. The people of Alberta want us to make sure that we're getting good value for dollar, and we will do that.

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

School Construction

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spruce Grove composite high school opened this school year at over 100 per cent capacity. With projected enrolment, by 2025 this high school will be over 120 per cent capacity. Spruce Grove composite high school received design funding in 2023 but was noticeably absent from 2024's construction funding list despite completing its design work. This project has been the top priority for the school division for five years now. Why are families in Spruce Grove still waiting for a new high school to be constructed, and how long will it take to actually build?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year, of course, our school boards submit to us their capital requests and needs, and we collect all of those responses and we evaluate them to determine need, of course, and where best to allocate resources and how best to be able to move these projects forward. I'm proud to announce that we do have 98 projects currently in the pipeline, and with Budget '24 we were able to move 43 of those projects forward. Of course, we'll continue to evaluate all of the projects and move them forward when we have the opportunity to do so to make sure that all Albertans enjoy . . .

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

Ms Chapman: Given that high schools across the province have run out of space and given that students can't attend classes in a building design, what is this minister's plan for Calgary board of education high schools given that Sir Winston Churchill high school is at 121 per cent capacity, given that Robert Thirsk is at 102 per cent capacity, given that Diefenbaker is at 117 per cent capacity, given that Nelson Mandela is at 109 per cent capacity, given that Centennial high school is at 107 per cent capacity, given that Joane Cardinal-Schubert is at 100 per cent capacity, given that Western Canada . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, let me just start by saying that the Alberta advantage is back and booming, and we see that as being demonstrated by the fact that people are once again flocking to our province. When the NDP was in power, they drove people out of the province. More so, they actually told Albertans to go to B.C. and look for jobs there. We're proud of the fact that we've reversed that trend. We've fired up the economy, and we've made Alberta a beacon of hope and opportunity once again. We understand that puts pressure on our schools, and we are moving forward to build schools in our communities. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you. Given that half of CBE high schools are at or over capacity and that it takes three to five years to design and build a high school and given that projections are for CBE to add 15,000 new students over the next two years and given that we are talking about CBE – not Calgary Catholic, not Airdrie, not the Calgary metro – Calgary board of education, can the minister explain how, with high schools already bursting at the seams, CBE received design funding for a single new high school?

2:20

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of projects on the way for the Calgary metropolitan area, 18 projects in total. That will add tens of thousands of spaces. With respect to high schools in particular, we approved construction funding for a new high school in Rangeview. We also approved design funding for a new high school in Cornerstone. In addition, a new high school in Aspen in the west of Calgary is also on the way, and a francophone high school is also on the way for north Calgary. We are absolutely committed to building schools in our growing communities, and we will do just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a question to ask.

Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The topic of the day is fairness, as the Trudeau-NDP coalition targets our farmers, who put great, affordable food on tables across this province. The federal carbon tax is forcing Alberta farmers to bear extra costs while offering them absolutely nothing in return. So I must ask: how is this fair to our hard-working, innovative farmers? Could the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance please explain how this newly increased carbon tax is unfairly targeting Alberta farmers in particular?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the member is correct; it isn't fair. I was able to have this conversation many times with the federal ag minister in the previous term. The carbon tax is punitive towards rural Alberta and agriculture specifically, a sector that is built around the margins, that already sees broad consolidation in the space. This accelerates the demise of rural Alberta, of rural North America and the globe. Every part of the chain, every truck that moves a primary product back and forth to the mill, to the city where it becomes its next stage in the product, you see the price increase. It's terrible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta farmers have already been dealing with significant challenges such as drought and further given that expenses dropped onto Alberta farmers from the federal government's short-sighted carbon tax are passed on to consumers through increased prices at the grocery store, could the Minister of Finance please explain how Justin Trudeau's recent federal carbon tax hike is affecting the cost of produce and, in turn, the costs for Albertans putting food on their tables?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Sure, Mr. Speaker. Every electric pump that's powering a pivot in southern Alberta, every electric motor in the mill as we're milling this grain, every truck on the road, every train: at every step of the process we are making food more expensive. That's something that the federal government needs to understand: you're making it tougher for the families that create this food, create wealth in rural Alberta and opportunity to be able to do that. You'll continue to see mass consolidation in the space, and it will put that pressure on every rural town in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many Alberta farmers and ranchers are already contributing to the growth of our agricultural industry by incorporating sustainable practices into their work such as zero-till seeding and adaptive grazing for cattle and given the importance of our vibrant local agricultural industry in both our economy and world-wide, could the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation please explain how our government is supporting Alberta's agricultural industry to contribute to the goal of a sustainable food supply for Albertans to put food on their tables?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government supports producers to enhance the sustainability of their operations through the resilient agricultural landscape program and its four funding categories. Pasture management funds riparian management and rotational grazing, cropland conversion funds intercropping, tree establishment funds shelterbelts and pollinator strips, and the wetland category funds the restoration or creation of wetlands. Our producers here in Alberta already lead the world in sustainability, and this program aids them to continue the great work that they do every year.

School Construction in Calgary

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, the critical need for CBE schools in north Calgary is being ignored by this UCP government. The CBE school capacity by resident school population in north Calgary is as high as 192 per cent. We are in desperate need of schools. This government goes on and on about their plans, and they are just that, plans. But plans do not mean anything if there is no follow-through. We needed shovels in the ground yesterday. How does the minister justify this government's lack of action in building schools in Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. For two years when the NDP was in office, they added zero new projects to the capital list, just to be clear on record. In addition, in Budget '24 we have approved construction funding for the highest number of schools in over seven years. We recognize and we understand that folks are flocking to Alberta once again. This is a strong sign, a sign of encouragement, and we understand that creates pressure on our school divisions, and we will expedite the construction of new schools.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that of the 32 schools in planning, design, or construction in the Edmonton and Calgary metropolitan regions, only five are CBE schools, given that only one of those 32 schools is budgeted for construction of a CBE school, given that the CBE accounted for 25 per cent of student growth for the entire province last year, when is this government going to take real action to help our families in north Calgary and build the schools they so desperately need?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, as I reiterated earlier, there are 18 projects that are moving ahead for the Calgary metropolitan region. Collectively, these schools will add tens of thousands of spaces, needed spaces, for students in the growing communities. It's absolutely vital that we build these schools as quickly as possible. Our government is committed to doing that. As I mentioned earlier, we have 98 projects currently in the pipeline. Forty-three projects have moved forward as a result of Budget '24, and of course additional projects will be able to move forward to construction when those projects are ready to go as well.

Mr. Ellingson: Given that the UCP loves to get on their soapbox and talk endlessly with no real action, given that the budget doesn't include a single CBE school in planning, design, or construction for Calgary-Foothills, given that the CBE made it clear that every school in their capital plan was a priority, given that overcrowded schools mean lower quality education, supply shortages, and overworked, underappreciated teachers, how much worse do things have to get for the UCP to take these concerns seriously and actually get these schools built?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we're moving forward with a K to 4 school in Evanston. We're moving forward with a high school in Rangeview. Another high school in Cornerstone is also on the way. Two elementary schools in Redstone are also being planned. We're modernizing the Annie Gale school. A new high school in Aspen is also on the way. In addition, a francophone elementary school in north Calgary is being planned; a junior high school in Saddle Ridge; and two additional francophone schools, one a high school and one an elementary school, both in north Calgary, are also on the way for Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a question to ask.

Veterinary Education

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused on investing in key industries which support the future of Alberta. Budget 2024 allocates more than \$37 million to the expansion of the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. This investment is part of the nearly \$70 million being spent over three years, beginning in 2022, on this project. Veterinarians don't just take care of our pets but also play a key role in keeping livestock healthy. Their service is essential to ensure the safety and quality of Alberta's meat, poultry, and more. Could the Minister of Advanced Education please explain how this investment will address growing ...

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, on December 1 I was proud to join the University of Calgary to celebrate the groundbreaking on their new veterinary learning commons. We know that veterinarians play a critical role in our agricultural sector and rural economy. That is why we are making a targeted investment of nearly \$70 million to train more veterinarians here in Alberta. The veterinary learning commons is expected to be complete in the 2025-26 academic year, and we will double the medicine training seats from 50 to 100.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that the investment in the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine will double the number of veterinarians graduating in Alberta from 50 to 100 and given that Calgary is seeing an increased demand for housing, which is outpacing the supply of homes available and driving prices higher, and further given that a shortage of accommodation may cause prospective students to struggle with cost-of-living expenses should they choose the University of Calgary for their studies, could the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services explain what is being done to expand housing supply for students in Calgary?

2:30

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. The most important thing we can do is be able to create more homes for people to be able to live in. I'm happy to report that residential construction is up in our province by 57 per cent, and we're on track to double our residential construction capacity this year in Alberta. On top of that and most importantly for students, we're increasing purpose-built rentals. Almost a third of all residential construction taking place in our province right now is purpose-built rentals. The more rental units that come online, the better able we are going to be to keep rent affordable for all Albertans, including students, going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that during their four years of schooling students at the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine will often need to complete off-campus training opportunities – for example, students often enter advanced clinical training internships at veterinary teaching hospitals after they've completed their studies – and given that students will need to find accommodation that meets their needs and budgets during these periods wherever that internship or training may take place, could the same minister please tell the Chamber how this government is ensuring these students can find housing where and when the off-campus work happens?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely with the Minister of Advanced Education as well as with postsecondary institutions to be able to make sure that we can help those leaving postsecondary properties, going on to things like practicums, to be able to have a place to be able to live while they work in all of our communities across the province. The number one way we can do that, though, again, is to increase purpose-built rentals. In the past about 10 per cent of all residential construction was purpose-built rentals; now in Alberta it's about a third of all residential construction as a result of some of the work that we've done around removing red tape and working with municipalities to increase construction capacity.

Hospital Parking for Health Care Workers

Dr. Metz: Every day health care workers risk their own health to care for others, yet the UCP seem committed to making their lives increasingly unbearable. Now nurses and other health care workers face yet another blow from this government, an increase in staff parking costs.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Dr. Metz: Not only are they required to pay more to be able to work, but they also risk receiving higher parking tickets if they're unable to renew their parking when they take an overtime shift. How does the minister justify this cash grab on health workers, who are already stretched thin?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. In fact, the truth of the matter is that Alberta Health Services collects those parking fees to upgrade the facilities that they have and build new facilities. They're supposed to operate that at a cost neutral. In fact, in previous years they were actually at a loss, so it's Alberta Health Services increasing the costs so that they can in fact recoup what they are spending and continue to clean those parking lots and maintain those parking lots.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:32.

Dr. Metz: Given that the minister is justifying a parking cost hike of over 3 per cent due to rising expenses and inflation while nurses are offered a wage increase of less than 2 per cent and given that the minister is ignoring the fact that employee parking rates have soared multiple times in the last decade, it is not just about the expense; it's really about the absurdity of it all. With wait-lists for staff parking spots already stretching over several years in some cases, why is the government heaping yet another burden on our health care workers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to go back to the fact that AHS, in fact, is in charge of making sure that they maintain the parkades that they have and continue to build new ones. They have to recoup their costs. Thus, the increases have had to be added. There has not been an increase in, I believe, eight years on parkades. Alberta Health Services needs to make sure that they are operating at cost neutral. Thus, they have increased those costs recently.

Dr. Metz: Given that this blatant cash grab exploits Alberta's already exhausted and underresourced health care workforce and given the cost-of-living crisis – this government should not add to the hardships of front-line workers and must prioritize workers over profits – will the minister commit to revoking the parking increase and finding sustainable ways to maintain infrastructure without putting the burden on health care workers who are already struggling?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services approached me with the increases because they needed to recoup costs. They need to build new infrastructure. They need to maintain the current infrastructure. All costs have gone up. There has not been an increase in, I believe, eight years. Alberta Health Services, in fact, needs those dollars so that they can maintain parking and build new parkades for infrastructure as we move forward. They need to be cost neutral, and that's what they're doing. I maintain that AHS will continue to provide services.

Alberta Energy Regulator

Dr. Elmeligi: The mandate of the Alberta Energy Regulator, or AER, is to provide for the efficient, safe, orderly, and environmentally responsible development of energy and mineral resources in Alberta through regulatory activities. It is 100 per cent funded by industry and designed to be an independent body from government, distanced from the politics of the day. Yet the AER fails time and time again to do its job. From the Kearl tailings pond to road reclamation on the eastern slopes, they fail to actually regulate anything. Can the minister explain to Albertans how he will hold the AER accountable for doing their jobs?

Mr. Jean: I appreciate the question from the member, Mr. Speaker. It's true. The AER is doing its job. It's doing the job of the number one energy regulator in the world right now, and that's what most of the world believes, and that's what I believe. Now, it's true that everything can be better. But we are trying to achieve greatness, and in that we are actually bringing the opportunity of eliminating energy poverty to the world. We're doing that by having the best regulator regulating for the people of Alberta, and we're not going to apologize for making sure that Albertans are always number one on our mind.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that the minister and I have different definitions of "the best," I think, given the controversy surrounding the exploration for coal on Grassy Mountain and the existing moratorium on coal development on the eastern slopes – it would have appeared the AER had everything they needed to reject this exploration application – given that coal exploration created hundreds of kilometres of new roads that the AER is supposed to ensure are decommissioned but still sit on the landscape and given that the AER isn't focusing on regulating road decommissioning or enforcing the denial of the Grassy Mountain mine, can the minister still attest that the AER is even a regulator at all when all evidence ...

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I can attest that the regulator is actually focused on the business of arm's-length dealing with the interests of Albertans, not the personal and private interests of NDP appointees during the last reign of the AER. I'm embarrassed to say that there was a quasi-criminal situation going on with the management where they were trying to take advantage of the situation of working for the people of Alberta. We have got rid of those people. We are not going to allow that to happen again. The bad management of the NDP shouldn't be the reputation of the AER. There are good people working in that environment, some of the best in the world, and we're proud of them.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that the Kearl facility leaks continue to be an issue for downstream First Nations communities and given that the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation recently filed a lawsuit against the AER alleging negligence and a failure to live up to treaty obligations in the wake of multiple leaks, given that Albertans from the north to south have clearly lost trust in the AER to do their jobs and protect Albertans, given that the AER board chair recently resigned, why stop there? Can the minister commit to an independent review of the AER and a complete overhaul of their board and executives?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's better late than never, but it would be better for them to keep track. We have done an AER review. We're in the process of making sure we implement some of those changes, but what we are going to do is make sure that we always put people first. The health, the quality of life, and the environment of Albertans is our number one priority, and we're going to do exactly that, but everybody deserves their day to be heard. That's what Alberta's way is. The Alberta way of the rule of law applies to everyone in Alberta, not just NDP friends.

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

Electric Power Prices

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So many Albertans have been feeling that their voices are finally being heard under this government. Many of my constituents in Airdrie have reached out to me with concerns about high electricity prices. Life is becoming increasingly unaffordable due to previous bad NDP policies and our current Prime Minister. Could the Minister of Affordability and Utilities please explain to my constituents why they are paying so much for power?

2:40

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans often pay more on their power bills thanks to higher delivery fees, which fund the construction of transmission and distribution infrastructure.

When the NDP pushed their reckless coal phase-out, they failed to consider how moving from a few large power plants to hundreds of renewable generators would drastically increase the need for new transmission lines. Not only did the NDP's poorly planned coal phase-out cost Albertans \$2 billion up front; they caused significant long-term increases in power bills due to transmission and distribution prices.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the much-needed modernization of Alberta's electricity grid is currently under way and further given the significant cost-of-living pressures Canadians are feeling across the country, could the same minister please explain what measures Albertans will see from our government in order to alleviate electricity costs for my constituents and make costs more fair for all Albertans?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that great question. We have already taken action to lower Albertans' power bills by implementing new regulations to restrict economic withholding, which is estimated to save Albertans a billion dollars on their power bills over the next three years and up to \$8 billion over the next decade. We've also proclaimed legislation that enables innovative nonwire solutions such as energy storage and self-supply with export. Our government is committed to ensuring Alberta's electricity grid is reliable, affordable, and sustainable for generations to come, and we're just getting started.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP government refused to fix electricity pricing when they were in power – it even contributed to the problems that we are facing here today – and further given that this government is seeking to bolster our electricity systems in order to better serve all Albertans, could the minister please outline what plans lie ahead for Alberta's electricity grid to ensure all Albertans have access to reliable and affordable power for generations to come?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our plans to modernize Alberta's electricity grid have just begun, and unlike the NDP, we will continue to put Albertans first as we work to ensure that our power grid is affordable and reliable for years and decades to come. These plans include addressing local access fees, including the regulated rate option; improving transmission and distribution planning, including intertie development; strengthening our electricity supply mix, just to name a few of the items we're working on. You can expect to hear more very soon.

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

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a statement to make.

Pohela Boishakh

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak perhaps for the first time in the House about the new year celebration in Southeast Asia known as Pohela Boishakh. Pohela Boishakh, or Bengali New Year, is the first day of the Bengali calendar. It is celebrated all over the globe on April 14 and 15. This is a national holiday in Bangladesh and is a regional holiday in the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, and parts of Assam. The festival is celebrated by the people of Bengali heritage irrespective of their religious faith. The Bengali language is amongst the most spoken languages in the world, and Bengali Albertans have played a key role in strengthening the rich cultural makeup of Alberta and promoting the spirit of multiculturalism.

The solar new year festival is also known by many other names: Vaisakhi in Punjab and central India, Vishu in Kerala, Ugadi in Karnataka, Puthandu in Tamil Nadu, Ugadi in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Pardon my Alberta accent. Vaisakhi is a historical and religious festival in Sikhism and Hinduism and is observed across Punjab and northern India. This traditional solar new year coincides with the harvest festival. In Sikhism Vaisakhi marks the start of Khalsa, usually celebrated on the 13th and 14th of April every year. This commemorates the formation of Khalsa Panth under Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. This is also a time of renewal and a fresh start. Traders start a new accounting year. Opening the accounting books is called hal khata. In 2016 UNESCO declared the festivity organized by the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka, as cultural heritage of humanity. This festival was a tradition introduced in Bengal during the rule of Mughal Emperor Akbar to time the tax year to the harvest.

On behalf of my Bengali-speaking friends, I wish you and the Chamber a very happy Bengali New Year. [Remarks in Bengali]

Provincial Pension Plan Proposal

Ms Phillips: The UCP government is still clinging to their Alberta pension plan scheme despite Albertans telling them loudly and clearly that they want them to keep their hands off our CPP. Opinion polls show that even UCP members don't support an Alberta pension plan gamble. The UCP's own sham consultation showed Albertans do not support it. The real consultation done by the Alberta NDP shows that Albertans want this idea done away with, but the government insists that Albertans are just looking for more information, that Albertans just don't understand the idea. Albertans do understand, and the only information they're looking for is confirmation that the government will end their campaign to gamble with the retirements that Albertans have built after a lifetime of hard work.

Why is the UCP still so fixated on this idea that they hid from voters during the election? What could possibly be the benefit of forcing this failed idea, time and time again? Well, let's take a look at who benefits: a \$74,000 sole-source contract from a former long-time UCP staffer for the public engagement panel, a \$20,000 sole-source contract for the public engagement panel secretariat, millions in creating advertisements to sell Albertans on giving the Premier control of their retirement, countless dollars spent running a phony consult that the Finance minister refuses to release, and more to come as the government plans their next steps. It's clear that the only people benefiting from the UCP's pension plot are their friends and insiders who are getting no-bid contracts for tens of thousands of dollars.

Albertans are faced with an affordability crisis and deserve to know that their pensions and retirements will be protected. While the government is using this as a ploy to reward their friends and insiders ahead of a leadership review, Albertans know that the only party that can keep their retirement safe is the Alberta NDP.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies in reference to an article I said in answer to a question on balance in universities. It's David Staples' article. 'Mega-intellectual PR Machine': Professor Blasts Gigantic Funding of Trudeau Liberals Climate Narrative.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an e-mail I received from Margaret Brown, a constituent of mine who lost her family doctor. She says that she now joins 2,000 other Albertans who lost their family doctor and cannot find a new family doctor.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the text of a petition that we have called Support Affordable Housing in Alberta. It's urging UCP MLAs to support Bill 205. To date we already have 5,000 signatories, and I'd like to add a whole lot more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung followed by Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an e-mail chain from constituent Dr. Herbert W. Sacks, who is unhappy with the "four anonymous, generic unhelpful responses" from the Premier's office to his concerns about serious institutional discrimination.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a working paper from Duke University and the University of Ottawa entitled British Columbia's Revenue-Neutral Carbon Tax from 10 years ago, suggesting that the carbon tax . . .

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 1:51 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Yes, I did, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted I rose on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). While the Premier was answering a question from the Leader of the Opposition – it was the first question of the day – the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford could clearly be heard from our side, saying, "you're the problem," referring directly to the Premier. I believe that this is language inappropriate for this Chamber, and I believe it's a point of order.

2:50

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I did not hear this language used in the House, so I will leave it to you, whether you did hear that or not.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and while the Blues do not attribute such comments to that member, they certainly do include: "You're causing the problems. Your government, your policies, your problems." I would suggest that such language, personalized like this, does rise to the level of a point of order.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:32 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, the Member for Calgary-Varsity was asking a question to the Minister of Health, and at the end of the question – I believe it was the first supplemental – the member said something to the effect of, without the benefit of the Blues: why is the minister intent on making lives increasingly more difficult? This is a comment that was directed specifically at the minister. Again, without the benefit of the Blues I don't have the exact language. If the Member for Calgary-Varsity had said something to the effect of, "your policies are making" or "what you're doing as a government," referring to the policy specifically, that certainly would not be a point of order. But suggesting that the minister herself is intent on making life more difficult for Albertans I believe is a point of order. It's unparliamentary language under 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe this is a point of order just based on the language I have in front of me, but I do not have the benefit of the Blues. I believe the member may have said: yet the UCP seems committed to making their lives increasingly unbearable. And I believe that's the section that the Government House Leader has raised a point of order on, in which case we are talking about the government, the UCP, and certainly intending to talk about policy. But without the benefit of the Blues I don't know if there may be more to this than what I have in front of me, and I leave it to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate with respect to the point of order?

I do have the benefit of the Blues. While I am unsure of what the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity said immediately prior, it is possible that this was the opening of her remarks, when she said, "Every day health care workers risk their own [lives] to care for others, yet the UCP seem committed to making their lives increasingly unbearable." She goes on then to talk about the challenges that health care workers face and then gets to the discussion around increased staff parking costs. I would say that the hon. the Member for Calgary-Varsity didn't refer specifically to the minister, in this case to the UCP. I do, however, in light of my caution last week, wish that perhaps she could choose other language more specific to policy as opposed to broad strokes of what one group does or doesn't want to do and tie this much more to a discussion around policy. I'm convinced that the level of decorum would continue to increase if that is the case. Having said that, this is not a point of

order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded with the cautionary note.

Hon. members, that concludes points of order, and that brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 204

Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Leduc-Beaumont has the call.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to speak for third reading of Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023, I would like to once again summarize the impetus and importance of this legislation.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I know this House has heard these considerations before, and I'm sure my colleagues will provide further input later today, but I feel it is important to provide a recap as part of third reading for Bill 204. As the debate on this bill has proceeded, I remain steadfast in my belief that this bill is fully considered, well reasoned, and will be a useful and necessary piece of legislation if passed.

We have heard many different perspectives and opinions about Bill 204, but the fundamental rationale behind the bill has not changed. Our government is committed to protecting the interests of Albertans. If passed, Bill 204 ensures that the province will have a role in the future of our cherished green spaces and river valleys. Albertans should always be the stewards and protectors of their own backyards. A hostile federal government and faceless bureaucrats in Ottawa, most of whom have never stepped foot in our beautiful province, do not have our best interests at heart as they attempt to dictate terms directly with our municipalities without the province having a voice on behalf of all Albertans.

The intent of this bill is to ensure that the provincial government has a role in any proposed development of a national urban park in any Alberta municipality. This aligns with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs' mandate of protecting the province's constitutional right to oversee the governance of Alberta's municipalities without federal interference. Under Bill 204 the Municipal Government Act would be amended, specifically division 8, limits on municipal powers, section 70, disposal of land, granting cabinet the authority to create regulations outlining specific requirements before municipalities and the federal government could create a national urban park in Alberta.

The current lack of legislation means that a municipality and the federal government could bypass the province entirely in striking an agreement to create a national urban park. This loophole must be closed to protect our province's autonomy and ensure that Albertans' voices are heard loud and clear in this process. The proposed amendments to the Municipal Government Act provide a prudent way to ensure provincial participation in any proposed national urban park development. Why is that so important, Mr. Speaker? Well, it's because we know that, meanwhile, the federal government continues to encroach on our provincial rights and jurisdiction. Bill 204 will ensure that Albertans' voices will be the ones who make decisions about our river valleys and green spaces.

Albertans have seen this federal government's egregious overreach and policies negatively impact their family and

livelihoods. From continuing to jack up the carbon tax, which is, of course, a tax on everything, electricity regulations that would literally leave Albertans cold and in the dark, or a punitive emissions policy that is a de facto production cap, this federal cabinet has continued to make decisions that make life harder for Albertans. They have earned no licence, social or otherwise, to make decisions on behalf of Albertans about their land.

I'm also happy to continue to speak to some of the ongoing considerations related to Bill 204. First off, Bill 204 is not about controlling the conservation process. Stewardship and environmental considerations will remain top of mind for green spaces and river valleys across the province.

I would also like to reiterate the importance of collaboration with our Indigenous partners. Working closely with our Indigenous partners is, of course, a key priority for our government and will continue if Bill 204 is passed.

Additionally, this bill is not about exerting unilateral control over municipalities; rather, it is about fostering dialogue and partnerships, ensuring that decisions are made collaboratively and in the best interests of all stakeholders involved. This is not about provincial control but, rather, about ensuring a provincial voice on behalf of all Albertans.

3:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, the opposition has claimed that Bill 204 is not needed because there is other federal legislation in place that speaks to consultation with the provinces. But looking at the Liberal-NDP coalition's policies on energy, their past ridiculous claims of building no new roads and net zero in under a decade, can Albertans trust the federal government to do what's best for them? Could we even trust the federal government to follow their own legislation? Of course not. The opposition might take this disastrous federal government on their word, but we know better. Besides, the existing federal legislation is not clear how provincial input will be captured. If anything, Bill 204 would help the federal government ensure that provincial consultation is valid.

Additionally, as stated numerous times, it is important to highlight that this bill is not just about Edmonton although, clearly, Edmonton is a municipality that has had the most relevant conversations with the federal government on a potential national urban park. But I can't help but think about the numerous and varied urban areas across the province where federal intrusion would be unwelcome, including, of course, in my riding of Leduc-Beaumont.

Finally, there is nothing about Bill 204 that would prevent federal funding from being made available for use in Alberta's green spaces and river valleys unless, of course, any potential federal funding would be withheld out of spite by the federal government because Alberta is unwilling to give control over to them. Well, I guess that could happen, but we will not be bribed by a federal government as corrupt and hostile as this one and one that keeps trying to impose their destructive agenda and assert control over provincial matters.

Mr. Speaker, I was recently at a community event and was given the opportunity to answer a question about why I put Bill 204 forward. I didn't provide a lengthy list of strong reasons that the bill was important, nor did I unpack the many benefits that Albertans can expect to see under Bill 204. Rather, I asked the audience a simple question: what right do Justin Trudeau and Steven Guilbeault have to tell any of you what you can and can't do in your river valleys or how you can enjoy the outdoors in your communities? Of course, there was no answer from the audience because there is no good reason that Albertans should accept that kind of control from this federal government. In fact, the last two people on Earth that I would want telling me how I could enjoy my time outside in nature would be Justin Trudeau and Steven

Guilbeault. Dangerous green ideology and eco radicalism have no place in Alberta's green spaces, and Bill 204 will help keep it that way.

As I come to the end of my remarks, I think it is most pertinent to once again reflect on the urban outdoor area in my home community that I spend the most time in, Lake Telford in Leduc. Whether it's biking, jogging, or just walking around the lake with my wife and friends, it is a special place in the community that truly brings out the best in everyone. From kayaking and canoe races to playing host to our friends at the Special Olympics, Lake Telford is truly a special place. I often thought about Lake Telford when I was considering this bill and how important it is that the province and Albertans and the residents of my riding would have a say if the federal government ever tried to establish a national urban park. Just as that's important for my riding, it's important to all ridings in this province, and that's why I would ask that each and every member of this House please support Bill 204 so that we can stand up to Ottawa and protect our river valleys.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member. Just for clarification the Member for Leduc-Beaumont is moving third reading of Bill 204?

Mr. Lundy: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others that wish to speak to Bill 204? The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise again to speak some of my thoughts and concerns about this bill during third reading and to have time once again to explain why I am in opposition to it. This bill, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023, in my view, unlike my colleague across, is an unnecessary bill. At the outset, I am going to state that not everything has to be legislated, and on occasion, if you're unhappy with the turn of events, it's helpful to speak to the folks involved to see if that turn of events can be, well, changed.

I certainly understand, from listening to folks across from me, that one of their primary concerns is that the provincial government is being listed within the list of partners involved in the discussions, particularly in terms of the Edmonton urban national park, as an interested observer. Now, what I'm assuming is that an observer in a meeting, say in a planning meeting, does just that: they observe. They have an opportunity to listen, to take notes, and to report on where the focus of that committee or group seems to be, where they might be headed, and the like. There is no workaround, and the province is, in fact, at the table. I'll also note, having been an observer in meetings over the lifetime of meetings, that that doesn't preclude having conversations before and after with the other participants involved.

I just want to recap the history of this particular project for just a moment. On March 14, 2022, Parks Canada issued a news release stating that Parks Canada and Partners Take First Step Toward Creating a National Urban Park in Edmonton. Mr. Speaker, at that time there was a commitment to work with the city, with Indigenous partners, and with others. It was noted at that time in the release that a national urban park in the Edmonton region would mean better access to quality green space for Edmontonians and [would indeed] promote better mental and physical wellbeing as people [would be spending] more time in nature.

Also, it would

create jobs, strengthen the local economy, and compliment [of course] the City of Edmonton's [and the surrounding areas'] tourism.

Quite frankly, I'm not sure how one could argue with that.

In terms of what Parks Canada actually does, it's much like one of our provincial agencies that we have here in Alberta. It's an independent organization that reports to government through the minister. Certainly, when you peruse the Parks Canada website, you come to a page that's entitled the National Parks System Plan, and on that page you find a discussion about the importance of national parks and what they represent. It says that "national parks are established to protect and present outstanding representative examples of natural landscapes and phenomena that occur in each of Canada's unique natural regions, as [defined] in the National Parks System Plan." It's also to protect "the ecosystems of these," as they term, "magnificent natural areas and [manage] them for visitors to understand, appreciate, and enjoy in a way that doesn't compromise their integrity." Mr. Speaker, the other thing that the national parks system plan also says is that it "identifies each of Canada's unique natural regions," protection, if you will, of "a representative sample of each of these landscapes." That's the "framework [that] has helped guide the expansion of the parks system."

In addition to that, of course, when they are evaluating new sites, they talk about a number of factors before they decide if they're going to proceed with a new national park, urban or otherwise. They discuss areas of cultural significance. They discuss underrepresented natural regions in the system, biodiversity, ecological processes, landscape connectivity, whether or not there's the support of Indigenous communities and governments, and the support, of course, of any relevant provincial or territorial governments. Mr. Speaker, that is, in fact, what Parks Canada does. This is an organization that is, in fact, all about collaboration in service to everyone across the country.

As noted earlier, national parks make an incredible difference to local economies. They increase jobs. They increase tourism because they increase visitors, and those visitors in turn have a positive impact upon local economies. In this case it would have a positive impact upon the local economy in Edmonton. All the while Parks Canada, in addition to what I've already talked about, works to conserve and restore the land with local partners.

In terms of other urban national parks that have come to the fore, that conservation and restoration absolutely happens in those spaces as well. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the experience with Rouge national urban park, which is a national urban park in the middle of Toronto, speaks to a place where protecting and conservation is, in fact, top of mind. Again, going to their web page, they certainly have basic information about the park, where it is, how to stay safe. They talk about how Parks Canada is committed to providing visitors with exceptional outdoor experiences. There are links to guided walks, bulletins. There's also information about the park itself, the nature of it, the background nature, the science of it, the culture, the history, but also they speak a great deal about stewardship and management and how important that is in addition to Indigenous connections. Quite frankly, that's absolutely fabulous. Should the planning progress in the manner in which it should, it's exciting to think that Edmonton would be home to such a place.

3:10

At this point I do need to say that if or when Edmonton or any other place in Alberta is, in fact, home to a national urban park, that doesn't mean the federal government will be in charge. We can see this simply through the pattern of engagement and collaboration that Parks Canada works within as not only part of its mandate but also its stated values as well. In the case of Rouge national park they've created a really wonderful partnership. They do indeed manage the park, but they also manage that park with all of the partners that they have accumulated over the last decade or so. That includes municipalities – a number of municipalities – Indigenous

partners, schools, environmental groups, local farmers, and even the Toronto Zoo. Mr. Speaker, this is an organization which, in fact, values collaboration, and that's because that's what the partners agreed to.

Edmonton isn't the only place in the country where Parks Canada is looking at communities. Parks Canada is looking at Halifax, Montreal, Saskatoon, Victoria, Windsor, and Winnipeg. They're all at various stages in the process. In fact, in Windsor folks have agreed upon something different, and they've agreed upon that because they've actually been collaborating with each other. That collaboration has created a different sort of governance structure. Just last month the Caldwell First Nation and Parks Canada reached an agreement to explore shared governance of the proposed national urban park in Windsor. Mr. Speaker, this is a massively important thing. They say:

The Memorandum of Understanding is the result of over a year and a half of discussions between Caldwell First Nation and Parks Canada.

As they note:

it is a significant achievement for the members of [that nation] who were once forced off their lands and gives [Caldwell First Nation] an opportunity to have a voice in the protection and management of the cultural and natural heritage at the proposed national urban park in the Windsor area.

Certainly, I think that tells us that there is indeed a pattern of collaboration and engagement within Parks Canada kind of in the bowels of what the Parks Canada Agency Act actually is. Together they decide if and how a place will join the Parks Canada family and become a national urban park. If so, they join a legacy of protection, of conservation, of rehabilitation. National urban parks: the idea of them is shaped by the local area, by the folks who are in that local area, by context, by relationship, by culture, by the traditional use of the land. Parks Canada and its partners do indeed work together to develop a shared vision, and quite frankly I really appreciate that idea of a shared vision.

Quite frankly, I can see nothing but good coming out of the proposal. Certainly, as a representative, as someone who comes from northeast Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, we too have got a beautiful new third fabulous park from which to choose. I'm calling it sort of part of the mighty triumvirate. We have a new park that forms a third part, as I say, of a mighty triumvirate. It begins with Rundle park, goes through Hermitage park, and now kind of bridges that rural and urban landscape that people have talked about. There's an event centre, hiking, cycling, and eventually the plan will be to build a bridge between the Edmonton side and the Sturgeon county side. It would be fabulous if some of the protections afforded through a national park were given to this new northeast valley park as well. That would ensure continuity and collaboration for many, many generations to come.

I do need to add, Mr. Speaker – and this has come up both in debate and in conversation – that the city won't be handing over the river valley to the feds, the federal government, in this case. Neither Parks Canada nor the federal government will be, in fact, in charge of the park. This isn't overreach by the federal government; this is simply Parks Canada doing its job, Parks Canada engaging with local community partners. However, given other recent events, announcements, speeches, and bills which have been introduced, I'm thinking there's a pattern of the government kind of feeling a wee bit left out. That is what has created the pattern, and it's a pattern that shows collaboration isn't the goal. It's getting back at Ottawa, it's us versus them, and that is not in the best interests of Albertans and certainly not in the best interests of those folks who live in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

The bill is unnecessary. Collaboration is still possible, and I would urge this government to do what's best for folks and do that instead of this wholly unnecessary legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there others wishing to speak? The Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. I am going to start off today by speaking about a distant cousin of man's best friend, the dog; wolves. The grey wolf is a canine located in North America and Eurasia. Like people, wolves organize themselves into nuclear families and have highly social behaviour. Wolves like to settle in one place and put down roots in a home. They are highly territorial, establishing large territories to ensure that they can hunt enough food for their pack and their young to survive. On average wolves' core territories are a size of 35 square kilometres. They typically will only leave their territories in times of famine or if other wolves are breaking away from the pack.

The most notable and important characteristic of wolves, Mr. Speaker, is their specialization in pack hunting. Wolves use their numbers to great success when hunting large prey. A pack of 15 wolves can take down even a moose. By banding together and working for the good of the whole, they are able to conquer challenges and opponents which they could never face down on their own. A lone wolf would get trampled and easily put down by an adult moose, but together they are stronger and can face it. In the same way, the federal government seeks to divide us, making us weaker and not able to stand up to its overreaches.

When our provincial government and municipal governments are able to stand together at the table to negotiate, we are stronger, Mr. Speaker; we can ensure that Alberta's place as equal partners in Confederation is secure and that the Trudeau federal government is not stepping into jurisdiction that is strictly provincial. Bill 204 would ensure that the province is able to have a voice at the table regarding any proposed creation of a national urban park in our province. Together the province and municipalities are stronger during any negotiations with the federal government, as can be seen in Quebec.

In January of 2023 wolves in Yellowstone national park were able to band together and win a fight against a grizzly bear. The wolves, despite their smaller size, were able to win against this fearsome and larger opponent. We need to support this legislation so that our province and our municipalities can do the same. This is the purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, to protect the role of the provincial government in any interaction between municipalities and the federal government in creating urban national parks so that we are stronger together.

The Trudeau-NDP alliance has been overreaching into provincial jurisdiction in so many ways for years, trying to divide our province and weaken our strength. From the oppressive carbon tax, which raises the price of everything, to the no-more-pipelines bill, which tried to prevent us from developing our natural resources, this federal coalition of chaos, as it's been called, Mr. Speaker, is very, very bad. Our government needs to step in and protect Albertans from this federal government's failed policies, and Bill 204 is just another example of our government doing just that.

I myself am an avid outdoorsman. I love our parks and often can be found in them or in nature, enjoying the beautiful outdoor spaces which our province has in abundance.

This bill does not look to take full control of the process of creating national parks, nor does it seek to prevent their creation. What Bill 204 would do is ensure that the province has a seat at the table to defend the interests of Albertans and prevent federal overreach into something which so many Albertans, including myself, enjoy, our parks. Think about it, Mr. Speaker. Who would you rather have making these decisions? Some bureaucrats from Ottawa, who may never have set foot in Alberta, or the Albertans who live here, understand the needs of fellow Albertans, and know what is best for this great province?

Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, is an example of us fulfilling the mandate which Albertans elected us for. It is a rejection of federal overreach into Alberta. Together, like wolves, we can stand strong against overreach into our province, ensuring that the well-being of Alberta and Albertans is always the highest priority in any decisions made surrounding the creation and development of a potential national urban park in Alberta. That is why I will be voting in favour of this bill, and I would ask all the members of this House to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

The Acting Speaker: Good. Thank you.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Edgemont. Thank you very much.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 204, the municipal government amendment act, 2023. I will say matter-of-factly that I oppose this bill, and I hope that my colleagues on this side of the aisle and across do the same. It's disappointing to see a paternalistic response from the provincial government in introducing Bill 204. This bill undermines the participation and input of the Treaty 6 and the Métis nations.

The river valley has historical importance, and it is defined with its lifestyles and traditional practices of Indigenous people who lived in the area long before the beginning of colonization and long after. It played a key role in farming, harvesting, fishing, and hunting of food and in the collecting of medicine. Archaeological evidence of Indigenous people along the North Saskatchewan River goes back thousands of years. The importance of this land and its protection now cannot be understated. I'd love to know when the Member for Leduc-Beaumont consulted with the Treaty 6 and the Métis nations, and if he did, when did those consultations take place?

In the postwar era, as urban growth and subsequent planning of the city grew, one particular area of the river valley came under threat. One of my favourite parts of the research when I was looking up this bill was that primarily women land protection activists took up the sustained protests and petitioned to save the ravine. The most well known was the organized activism of the Save Our Parks Association. This group included Anne Packer and Margaret Chappelle. It was the activism of women in Edmonton who protected the river valley so that many people now can continue to love it today.

Their activism principally took two forms, protesting and petitioning. Protests typically took place in what were perceived as vulnerable areas such as the MacKinnon ravine, but they targeted the broader freeway plan, with protesters' signs, which I just love, like Treeways Not Freeways. These activists gathered enough signatures to force a plebiscite in 1965 for city council's decision to proceed with the construction of Capilano Bridge, which was the stretch across the North Saskatchewan River within Capilano ravine to the east of the city centre.

The Save Our Parks Association also co-ordinated a petition against the plan to put a freeway down Mill Creek ravine, recording some 14,000 signatures. I love that this group of women

acknowledged that engineers may be qualified to plan the building of freeways at the lowest possible cost, but they argued that engineers are not professionally qualified to assess the human values that cannot be measured by means of a slide ruler and a calculator. It is these human values that should be guiding us right now as we decide many decisions with bills and motions here in the House.

The emphasis on recreation and leisure connects it to a broader urban reform movement emerging in this period that was characterized by middle-class efforts to protect favourite areas within an urban landscape. Coverage of the group tended to dismiss the activists as housewives and homeowners, whether or not they included as many men as women. The group's operating norms shared much with other women-dominated activist groups of the era.

The needs of children was one of the arguments levelled by Edmonton activists. This rings so true even when we are here in this beautiful building, that the needs of our next generation should be at the forefront. Both male and female activists argued that parkland was necessary to provide recreation and character-building zones for our younger generations. Demonstrators carried signs reading, "Roads in the valley, kids in the alley," a phrase that underlines a parent's view not just of the necessity of parkland but also the risks of roadways. Nothing like mom and dad energy.

Today the river valley is still the heart of the city. Indigenous people, Edmontonians, and tourists all use this valley. I hope that the opposition, made up over here of 50 per cent women, will be heard today as we oppose this bill. Protecting urban green space in Alberta is critical to tourism and the environment. Upon the recommendation of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo I've added a regular exercise regime and enjoyed the time of walking and exploring the Edmonton river valley and loved the opportunity to be in the largest urban parkland in Canada.

I love that this group of women acknowledge – oh, no. Sorry; my papers fell before I went to speak.

Did you know that it has over 160 kilometres of maintained pathways and has 20 major parks? My mom told me that the Edmonton river valley has always been the centre of life in Edmonton. Is this the bill, though, that Edmontonians want? This bill is being pushed forward by a member that does not represent the city of Edmonton. Did the member do consultation with Edmontonians on this issue?

As I prepared yesterday to speak to the bill, I realized that when I walk in the river valley, hopefully today after the afternoon session, I need to take a step back and remember the rich history that is located on Treaty 6 territory. I need to remember and reflect on its history. While I see individuals running and walking their dogs, those majestically climbing all of those stairs, you know, some people connecting with their friends while they're out having a walk and a talk – I love seeing the active lifestyle of Edmontonians – we all need to remember the history while we're down there, what a rich history the area holds, but we need to remember the colonization, the fur trade, the industrialization, the environmental protections, and the land reclamation.

Does the provincial government not also want to honour and respect the role the river valley plays and has played for thousands of years in the lives of people living near it and travelling along it? Protecting this area, the foundation of the city, and the history of this country is critical. Did you know that on this land there was a trading fort just below the Alberta Legislature Grounds, just down the stairs from this Chamber?

I am proud that the Alberta NDP supports the city of Edmonton's work to designate this land and their efforts to work with Indigenous

partners about the best governance models and practices for the national urban park. If it were to be created, it would protect this parkland and provide access to federal funding for upkeep and protection and cost Albertans nothing. The national urban park plan supports principles of reconciliation, conservation, and reconnection with the land. These parks are city based and supported by Parks Canada. Why should the UCP government have to have power over this as well? It is a plan that is run through Parks Canada in partnership with Indigenous people. It would conserve nature, connect people with nature, and advance reconciliation of the Indigenous people.

Another fun fact. In early 2022 Edmonton and Parks Canada entered into a formal agreement that stated that they would explore the possibility of creating a national urban park in the Edmonton area. Why does this government need to be in charge of whether or not a municipality can pursue a national urban park designation? Did the member consult with the city of Edmonton?

This UCP bill only creates an additional level of bureaucracy where one is not needed. Why is the UCP government misrepresenting the National Parks Act and the process? This bill suggests that this province is not already part of the process when it is. This bill is just adding more red tape. The government says that this bill will make sure Albertans have a say; however, the national urban park plan will have a robust consultation. Passing Bill 204 would kill this idea because of the red tape that is created, so it actually will limit public consultation. Why is the government doing that? Did the member consult with any of the involved stakeholders? We have seen so many bills come forward and statements from the other side of the UCP's worry about federal interference, so why is everyone comfortable interfering with municipal jurisdictions? Is Bill 204 beginning an unnecessary and troubling precedent of provincial interference in the independence of municipal governments?

Anyways, as stated, for all of these reasons, I will be opposing Bill 204. I suggest, when we're all done here, we take a nice little walk in the beautiful Edmonton river valley and reflect on the cultural history of the area.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? I'll recognize the minister of family and community service.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very happy to speak to this bill put forth by my good friend over in Leduc-Beaumont. First of all, I'd just like to say how much I appreciate all the work that he's done meeting with residents throughout the capital region as well as so many residents throughout Edmonton itself about the merits of the river valley and this bill and why he deemed it was so important for him to put this bill forward that we're talking about here today.

3:30

I've heard a lot of comments from members opposite about perhaps why this bill is important and maybe why the member felt it was important enough to put forth. For myself, I've been here in the Edmonton area almost since 1995. The river valley has a very, very important place in my heart. It was almost 23 years ago that I actually proposed to a wonderful young lady at the pyramids in the river valley, and she's still with me. God bless her. As most people know, I married way out of my league.

The river valley is such an important place for myself. I know that in my early '20s as newlyweds we would frequently go rollerblading throughout the river valley, across the bridge, across to the Kinsmen. We participated in all kinds of activities: the driving range at Victoria park for many, many years. The river valley was an important place where my wife and I, you know, grew together and grew up together. We bring our kids there frequently

from Spruce Grove. Many friends and families from the capital region all visit that. I don't think anyone will discount the importance that the river valley has to the city of Edmonton or the countless residents that call this area home. That's why I think it's so important that this bill was put forth.

As many of us stand here in this Chamber, we talk about our personal experiences, about what brought us here. A key part and the reason why I came to this Chamber, why I decided it was important to represent my home of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, really has to do with local government, the power for local decision-makers to be able to make the decisions within their respective communities without interference from other levels of government.

Fourteen years ago I made another important decision when I decided to run for city council in Spruce Grove. I thought it was important as someone that was raising my family in that community. I wanted to have a say. I wanted to have a say that would help make my community a better place to live. That's why, after door-knocking that entire area and the blessing of my family and my young son, who was four at the time, I decided to actually run myself. Over those three terms on city council I realized the importance of local decision-making, about making sure that local decision-makers have control over how communities are planned and governed. For me, that was a key reason why I wanted to go in. It continues to drive me to this day.

When I looked at the decisions put forth by city council in Edmonton, it's no surprise that so many residents in urban Edmonton itself had so many issues about this. I'm happy to see so many passionate members coming here today and over the last couple of weeks because they want to have a say in ensuring that local decision-makers remain the important aspect of that decision-making process within their community. We don't need to be able to delegate that power, that decision-making power to Ottawa, thousands of kilometres away, Mr. Speaker. It's important that these decisions that are made in terms of the parks and in terms of what types of services and abilities – we want to make sure that the individuals in Edmonton itself, the people that call this area home, can actually make those decisions accordingly and react to what the electorate wants. To me, that's extremely important.

In the conversations and the speeches that I've heard from many members opposite, we've already heard about their personal desires to see expansion of national overreach into areas such as Mill Creek ravine or up in the northeast corner of the city or elsewhere. It's continuing to expand. Mr. Speaker, I'm not willing to not step in the way and ensure that Ottawa does not have a huge say in the affairs of the city of Edmonton.

While maybe members opposite are thinking it's okay to be able to, you know, just give that decision-making ability away, I for one am thankful that the Member for Leduc-Beaumont decided to step up and put forth this vitally and critically important bill, that, hopefully – I don't want to presume the will of the Chamber, Mr. Speaker – will pass and will ensure that the electorate of the city of Edmonton will be able to have a say in how the actual park would be looked after and planned out for many years to come.

You know, Mr. Speaker, many of the items that the members opposite, when they talked in terms of the importance of the river valley, the historical effects, and how important it has been to guide this entire capital region together, from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan to Sherwood Park all the way to Stony Plain – I'm not going to dispute that at all. But why should we give up the decision-making ability about what happens in that park to another level of government thousands of kilometres away? Mr. Speaker, that makes absolutely no sense to me. We can make the decisions here within the city of Edmonton. The residents can, actually. They have the ability. I actually have faith in the electorate and the municipal leaders in the city of Edmonton to be able

to decide what they want to be able to do with the river valley without all the extra, onerous overreach by Ottawa. If it is the will of the electorate, of the general population that they want to maintain one of the largest urban parks in the entire North America, I'm okay with that.

If they wish to also put some limited development to allow greater access and accessibility for residents that may not be able to experience how wonderful the river valley is, then they should be able to do that without having to go all the way to another level of government, Mr. Speaker, to be able to ask for those permissions, because we know that freedom is not necessarily free. It takes time, it takes effort, and if we have the ability to be able to control the management of that pristine park, we should not be so happy to release the authority and the ability to make those decisions on behalf of the electorate.

You know, Mr. Speaker, if you go through the river valley, you see countless families, and contrary to what maybe some, what members of the opposition may feel, it's not just members of Edmonton. The river valley affects everyone. That's why the River Valley Alliance was created many years ago. Even prior, I believe, to when I was in city council, representatives from all the communities in the capital region, again, going all the way from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan – because as a capital region the electorate here: we have a vested interest to make sure that this incredible gem is looked after.

Mr. Speaker, I would just simply ask and urge all members of the House here today again to vote in favour of this bill that was put forth. Again, just the fact that my good friend from the riding of Leduc-Beaumont was able to put forth that bill shows the importance of this bill, that this individual park has to the entire capital region. I appreciate all the due diligence, the communications, the correspondence he's had. I appreciate the countless passionate residents that have come out for so many weeks, listening to this discussion, because they know it's important, because this is a decision that affects not just the status of this wonderful, pristine area for today but for many years to come, because our grandkids will be facing the ramifications of this bill on that park. And we have to be able to decide who should be able to control what happens in that pristine area.

Again I would just like to thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for putting forth this bill. I'd also like to thank all the members that have contributed to this debate, and I would just urge everyone within the House here to be able to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I'll recognize this Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 204, Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. If I may, I'd like to draw references to Canada's first urban national park, Rouge national urban park. Rouge national urban park was established in 2011 and covers 75 square kilometres in Toronto, Markham, Pickering, Uxbridge, and Whitchurch-Stouffville. This is one of the largest urban parks in North America. It includes the Toronto Zoo and is home to active family-owned farms in the Rouge valley. The national park was predated by a provincial park covering approximately half of the current park area. Parks Canada conducted extensive engagement with over 200 agencies and provincial departments as well as 200,000 individuals in creating recommendations for the creation of the park. This was no clandestine operation being conducted under the cover of darkness with no input from the provincial government. It was a process that is and would be followed right here in the North Saskatchewan River valley.

I raise these points, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the history and process in place in establishing urban national parks. It is important to acknowledge and understand this as we debate legislation that will block any urban national park from being created here in Alberta.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to share some of the stories from Rouge national park to gain some insight on the potential significance of urban national parks. Rouge national park includes a Seneca village that is believed to have been established in the mid-1600s. Records of a Seneca village in the area date to 1669 from a French missionary's travels. There was a long period without records of this village. In the 1840s remains were found along the Rouge River, and an Aboriginal burial site was uncovered in the 1960s. Further investigation in the 1990s found decorated hair combs, stone tools, and a drinking goblet indicating European contact with the Seneca villagers. Archaeological work further discovered effigy pipes, burial artifacts, ceramics, and beadwork. Musket balls were also found, indicating that the village had been attacked by Europeans. Through engagement with local Indigenous communities the federal government protected the area through the creation of Bead Hill national historic site. This was then transferred to the stewardship of Rouge national urban park.

Mr. Speaker, we learned from this story that national parks play a key role in protecting both cultural and natural areas of significance. Our urban areas today exist in places that for thousands of years have been the land of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Through the creation of national parks, working together with municipalities, the provincial governments, and Indigenous people, these important cultural locations and sacred spaces can be protected. Further, the establishment of a national park can advance the education of the importance of these sites. More people can learn the stories and the histories of these locations and hear the stories that have been told here from generation to generation.

Mr. Speaker, it is as important to understand the cultural value of a place as it is to understand the natural value of a place. Indeed, they cannot be separated. But there is also much to be learned in the protection of the Rouge valley as a natural place. Parks Canada publishes annual reports on the work being done in the park and in line with the terms of reference between Parks Canada and the Rouge national urban park First Nations advisory circle. Extensive work has been done extending the trail network of Rouge national urban park. This both increases accessibility for all visitors while also keeping visitors on defined trails to mitigate damage to natural and cultural areas. Archaeological work continues with trails developed to enhance understanding of the cultural history and significance of the Rouge valley. Public engagement continues each year to further understand how people use the park and how we can enhance accessibility to the park.

Blanding's turtles have been released into the park, bringing back and stabilizing the populations of this threatened species. Research into the protection of bat species is being conducted in the park. Three species found in the park are endangered. Bats are often referred to as a canary in the coal mine species, with declining bat populations being a signal to the potential for the decline of other species. Seven of the eight bat species in Ontario are found in Rouge national urban park. Barn swallow habitat has been constructed in the park, with staff logging the successful nesting of barn swallows in reconstructed habitat. The population of barn swallows has declined 80 per cent in the last 50 years in Canada. Rouge national urban park is home to over 2,000 species of plants and animals with 45 that have been categorized as at-risk. The park actively works to reconstruct habitat, monitor invasive species, and make roads and trails safer for wildlife.

Mr. Speaker, I share these references, stories, and programming updates from Rouge national urban park so that we might through the course of this debate reflect on the ability of national parks to promote engagement and understanding of the cultural and natural significance of this place, the North Saskatchewan River valley. Bill 204 prevents us from realizing this. It will mute future generations' understanding of this place. It will prevent these opportunities from being explored in municipalities across this great province.

Mr. Speaker, Parks Canada is here to work with Canadians across this country to enhance access to the incredible natural and cultural sites in this country, not to prevent us from accessing those sites. Parks Canada has proven time and again across this country how they're willing to work with provinces and citizens in those places to increase access and increase our understanding of the natural and cultural significance of this place. Parks Canada isn't working against us; they're working with us. By bringing forward Bill 204, if it were to pass, we're restricting our ability to enhance our understanding of this place and gain the support of Parks Canada in doing so.

Mr. Speaker, we should be working for the preservation of history, culture, and natural spaces, not against it. We can talk about how the citizens of Edmonton can work on enhancing the park spaces in the river valley, and I think we've seen municipalities working together, but I think what we're hearing now from Edmontonians and from people across the region is that they would like additional help and support in enhancing the work that they are doing. They haven't seen these supports from the province, but they are seeing supports from Parks Canada, and they welcome Parks Canada working alongside the citizens of Edmonton and the other municipalities in the region to make this place, this park, a reality to be enjoyed for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone in this House to reflect on what this bill means for our future here and across Alberta. I encourage the members of this House to vote against this bill and for the significance of the culture and the history of the North Saskatchewan River valley.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

We have approximately two minutes left.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to rise today in this Chamber to support my good friend and colleague the Member for Leduc-Beaumont in his private member's Bill 204, the Municipal Government (National Urban Parks) Amendment Act, 2023. It isn't a surprise for me or any of my constituents in Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul that the NDP-Liberal alliance in Ottawa, led by Justin Trudeau and the Leader of the Opposition's boss, Jagmeet Singh, have once again attempted to bypass the province and infringe on areas that are completely within our jurisdiction of this province.

When you hear the opposition right now, they're saying that by simply saying we want to be involved in the process, it's going to end all park access throughout the entire province. That's ludicrous and – you know what? – it is what you come to expect from the opposition. They make these unfounded accusations, and in the end what happens is that we put fear into people that shouldn't be there. You know what? We'll still have access to it, but in the end Albertans get to have a say.

Now, when it comes down to it, we've got an actual petition put forward by almost a thousand Albertans saying that they don't want this. Where's the NDP petition? Crickets: that's what we get there, no support for that. But what we do see is that the NDP and Justin

Trudeau want to create 35 per cent conservation area in Alberta by 2035, and this is the mechanism they can do it with. We refuse. Bill 204 . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(iii), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont to close debate on Bill 204.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to close debate on third reading of Bill 204, I'd like to talk a little bit about the process and say some well-deserved thank yous to those who have been involved.

I'll start with a confession that I've shared outside of this House but maybe not in here. As a first-time MLA I actually was not aware that private members' bills was a lottery. That was one of my many learnings as a rookie MLA. Of course, I was told that I had Bill 204, and my first reaction was: well, that's a long way from zero or one; what does that matter? Then I came to know how important that drawing actually was.

3:50

As I began to unpack that process, I couldn't have done this without the support of our tremendous caucus staff. They deserve the first thank you. [interjections] Absolutely. In particular, I would like to thank Elina Pachon, Alysha Wishloff, Ella Rausch, and Oguzie Okorie. Their work behind the scenes was invaluable: research, working with Parliamentary Counsel to draft the bill, and just making sure that I had the support I needed to go through the process of tabling the legislation. As elected officials it is truly humbling, the support that we receive from our caucus staff, and I absolutely extend my thanks once again to them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you may have noticed that it's become a bit of a tradition here on Mondays for the gallery to include a group of local citizens led and organized by Sheila Phimester. Well, they are here again today, and I can't thank them enough for stepping up and making sure that their voices were heard in their community. This group has been vocal about the concerns that they saw with the potential establishment of national urban parks in Alberta and were able to collect over one thousand signatures in a petition to voice these concerns. Thank you for stepping up. It just goes to show that citizens can get involved, and it's important to talk to your elected officials, to go out in your community, and to make a difference. Thank you.

I also would like to thank my constituency office staff, Sarah Mejia and Spandy Rimer, whose tremendous work serving our community in Leduc-Beaumont has allowed me the time and attention to commit the effort required to put forward a private member's bill. Now, Mr. Speaker, there's often a good-natured debate in this House about whose riding across the province is the most beautiful. Leduc-Beaumont is not without its charms or picturesque views, but I might be willing to cede on that debate at the risk of starting another, that being that my riding has the best constituency office staff in the entire province. Thank you, Sarah and Spandy, for all that you do.

Finally, I would like to thank all members of the Assembly who have provided their input, added their passion to the debate, or shared personal stories about their connections to our beautiful province. Your perspectives have all been welcome, and that was one of the takeaways as we continued to debate this bill. What was never in dispute was how much we all enjoy the river valleys and green spaces in our own communities and how lucky Alberta is that we have such an abundance of these spaces, which is why, again, I'm so happy and proud that we are putting Bill 204 forward,

because it's going to play such an important role in protecting those spaces.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour and a privilege to table a private member's bill in this Legislature, and I would once again ask all members of the House to support Bill 204. Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:55 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

4:10

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Arcand-Paul	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Batten	Hoyle	Sweet
Ceci	Ip	Tejada
Ellingson	Irwin	Wright, P.
Eremenko	Kayande	

Totals: For – 45 Against – 17

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a third time]

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

Bill 205

Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023

[Debate adjourned April 8: Mr. McIver speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, has one minute remaining.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will try to use that short bit of time to its best use. I've seen worse bills than this in the House but not many. This is honestly – rent control is a pathway towards having less affordable rent, not more. The two cities with the worst problem with affordable rent in Canada are called Vancouver and Toronto, and both ascribed to this failed policy. It's proven and failed for a long period of time. Some folks across the way may rather have people in a tent under the control of a gang member on the street, but on this side of the House we want more . . .

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe I stand on 23(j), nature likely to create disorder. My understanding is that this point of order has already been ruled on historically about the members opposite speaking about the members on this side of the House wanting people to live in tents. My understanding is that you've already ruled this as a point of order and have asked the government side to refrain from continuing to do that, so I would just ask that the government side respect that decision.

Mr. McIver: Has that been your ruling in the past, Mr. Speaker? Well, in that event, I shall save this House some time and apologize and retract for the previously determined unparliamentary phrase that I used.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: You can say that they want to keep them in a camp.

Mr. McIver: Indeed.

Debate Continued

Mr. McIver: Anyways, Mr. Speaker, it's a bad policy. It's a bad piece of legislation. The folks on this side of the House want to look after those that need affordable housing, and this bill is exactly the opposite of looking after those that need affordable housing. Consequently, I will be voting against this, and I counsel other members to do the same.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has the call.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 205, the Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023. I'm proud to stand today in favour of the work done by my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I know that this work was done after much consultation with community-serving organizations and the folks that are impacted by the housing crisis. We heard from settlement organizations helping newcomers, renter advocates, nonprofits struggling with increased demands, and many generations of renters, from students to seniors. I was honoured to attend and hear the stories of everyday Albertans who are struggling to make rent on top of all of the challenges they face with higher utility bills, grocery bills, and everything else that is costing them more on a daily basis.

One of the things that I hold sacred is the fact that my constituents trust me with their stories. I know that these are also shared with the government caucus, and for that reason I urge them to listen to understand, to listen with empathy and with the knowledge that it is within their power to advocate for Albertans in a very material way to provide relief, and to receive Bill 205 in the spirit in which it is presented, which is to say: to serve Albertans and to heed their call for relief in this housing crisis.

In the last few weeks I've heard of several situations where my constituents are feeling the squeeze, are gripped with anxiety at an uncertain future where their rents could suddenly spike out of reach, and some where that is already happening. One constituent was

priced out of his unit and is now couch surfing. A 30 per cent increase made this person go from being housed to being unhoused. He is one of 115,000 Calgarians at risk of homelessness and is already part of a vulnerable population.

In the same building one of our seniors in Tuxedo is on a fixed income at 86 years of age. She's a valued member of her community who is adored by her neighbours. She takes care of her neighbours, and as her mobility wanes, they take care of her. She would love to age in place, but that is becoming increasingly unlikely due to climbing rents and renovictions.

Last week I met with Sjann. She lives with type 1 diabetes and is disabled on a fixed income. She now lives in a province where her government wants to put her CPP at risk – she's 62 – wants to fight the feds on how affordable housing will be funded, and also wants to fight the feds on how medications will get funded, medications that would have helped her have another 25 years in the workforce if she had had them sooner. This government has failed her on multiple fronts, and, what's worse, it's all in the service of picking more fights with Ottawa instead of fighting for the dignity of Albertans.

A mother in Greenview told me about how both parents in her household were working to help pay bills and enrol the kids in extracurriculars so that they could fit into their Canadian community. Now, with a 27 per cent rent increase, the kids are out of their after school programs, and the multiple jobs they work barely help them cover the rent and utilities. Now, on top of all that, they don't get to see their kids as much as they would like. Her desperation and frustration were so palpable. She broke down as we spoke, and my tears soon followed. This is unacceptable.

Another single parent told me of the nightly nightmares he has as he awaited word on his rental situation in case the homeowner sold the house he lived in. He did daily scans of rents in the area and quickly realized that he would be paying more than 50 per cent of his income just for rent if he had to move. For the record, 30 per cent of your income is what is considered affordable for an affordable rent.

4:20

All the while schools in my area are reporting that in addition to breakfast and lunch programs, they need to stock little free pantries before the weekends so that the kids won't go hungry on the days that they're not at school. This is also unacceptable. We live in one of the richest jurisdictions in the country. How is it that affordable housing is not higher on the list of priorities for this government?

When the NDP was in government, we invested an initial \$1 billion in affordable housing in 2017. It was a priority. We accomplished this during a recession. Imagine what a government boasting surpluses could do if they had the political will to do it. The UCP claims that it's building more homes than ever, huge investments into housing, more starts. Well, my question is always going to be: how many of those homes are affordable, and when will they commit to affordable housing as part of a long-term plan?

We know that in my home city of Calgary we have some of the highest rent increases in the country, with Edmonton not far behind. We know that rents for many Albertans are going up anywhere from 20 to 50 per cent and often in multiple hits from one year to the next. Our wages haven't gone up, however; a living wage in Calgary would be \$2,350, nowhere near our current minimum wage of \$15 an hour. And while they feel the squeeze, we are the only province without protections for renters, and now they must survive at the whims of the market. There's currently no limit to how much a landlord can increase rent, only how often they raise it, and this is

cold comfort to most of the people that I've spoken to. They need help from this government, and they need it now.

Firstly, we need more housing of every type. There's no argument there. We need to plan for that. We need short-term, mid-term, and long-term planning.

So what does Bill 205 propose? Far from the usual UCP bluster, this is not a socialist scheme. We're not batting for Trudeau. Bill 205 is a fight for Albertans who need our help and are begging for it. This shouldn't be ideological; this makes sense. So we're calling for a temporary rent increase cap. The housing security act would feature a 2 per cent rental increase cap for the first two years for folks to catch their breath, and then for the following two years the rent increases would be tied to inflation.

We would also be looking at vacancy control. With low vacancies we're starting to see renovictions and inflated prices for vacant units. I was looking at basement units the other day, basement units in unfinished basements, that were going for \$2,000 a month. We want to see some measure of protection for renters from unreasonable rents, and there are some exceptions for social housing that is already built, for co-op housing, which I would personally love to see more of. It's a fiscally responsible model. I personally have lived in a co-op that through sound financial management of people in the community who lived there for decades has beautiful units 30 years after it was created. Why are we not creating the conditions for more of this to happen?

The second part of Bill 205 is housing targets. We'd like to see more transparency on what this government is doing to address the housing crisis. A problem well defined is a problem half solved. We'd like to see the government set targets for affordable units, and I'm just going to say it again: affordable units. Not all units; affordable units. That is what people are screaming for. We want to see them define the kinds of units that they are supporting, that they are building, that they are maintaining, and report back on the results on a yearly basis, including the units that are lost as well as rent supplement numbers.

What is the UCP plan currently? A plan that is consistently falling short of what Albertans need, a plan to fail, or in the words of our Premier: the plans are aspirational. Deloitte reported that to meet the needs in Alberta, we need 44,000 units of affordable housing; the UCP is planning for 31,000. Albertans deserve better than this. They deserve a government that sets goals to ensure that everyone is housed and lives in dignity, that provides protections for renters, and gets to work on making sure that all Albertans are housed.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I'll recognize the Member for Taber-Warner first, followed by the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start today by talking about something we have all probably heard about at some point. I believe it's poignant to the conversation surrounding Bill 205. That is DDT: dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane. DDT is a chemical insecticide which was developed in the 1940s to combat insects. At the time this was very important as malaria, typhus, and other insect-borne human diseases were prevalent. DDT was used with great effort to combat insects and lower rates of these diseases. It was also extremely effective for insect control in crop and livestock production.

Given its great effects and the good intent behind the creation of the chemical, why is it banned for use in so many countries today? This is because despite the good intent by the creators of the chemical it has many negative broad-scale impacts on people and the environment. Due to DDT's abilities to persist in fatty tissues in animals and humans, the persistent use of the chemical led to bioaccumulation. This means

that the amount of the chemical stored in animals would increase as it travelled up the food chain. This led to toxic levels near the top resulting in animals such as eagles, hawks, and falcons having an extreme decline in their population. In humans, Mr. Speaker, studies indicated that the chemical is also associated with muscular dysfunction, inflammation, impotence, birth defects, genetic mutations, and nerve system disorders.

“How does this relate to Bill 205?” you might ask. Our intentions do not always lead to the solutions that we want and can have widespread negative consequences on society. In the same way, Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 suffers from the same shortfalls as DDT did in the past. The intention behind the bill is to lower the price of rent for renters in order to improve affordability and increase their standard of living. The consequences of this bill, however, would be terribly negative for struggling Albertans. If this bill passes, then many renters would find themselves in worse conditions.

Now, let me tell you why this is the case. The first thing we need to identify is the base-level problem that can lead to housing unaffordability. The problem occurs when there are so many people looking to rent and not enough housing spaces are available to them. Essentially, there is an excess of demand and a shortage of supply. Bill 205 would not in any way serve to increase housing supply. It just artificially keeps prices low and would actually disincentivize increases to supply. When prices of any good or service are kept artificially low, more people will want that thing. This is true of everything, including rental units. This increase of demand would come from higher income Albertans who otherwise would have moved out of the rental market but chose instead to stay put due to the decreased prices. By increasing the number of people looking to rent by keeping prices artificially low while not doing anything to increase the number of houses that there are for people to rent, Bill 205 would only damage housing affordability in Alberta.

I want to just state, Mr. Speaker, that recently there was an article in the *Vancouver Sun* that talked about a StatsCan statistic. It said that in 2023 37,650 people moved to Alberta from that province. These are record numbers moving from B.C. to Alberta, and here’s the reason why. It says in this article: because of the low housing costs that we have in Alberta. If we were to follow the NDP strategy, which they have been able to implement in B.C., not only would we actually cause problems for those looking for rentals here; we’d actually chase people out of this province rather than having them come here for the lower housing. When prices of any good or service – by increasing the number of people looking to rent by keeping prices artificially low while not doing anything to increase the number of houses they are in, Bill 205 is going to cause problems for this housing affordability.

4:30

As well, Mr. Speaker, there is another side to this story. When you decrease the amount which landlords can rent a property for, you are disincentivizing them to continue renting out their units as you lower their margins. For builders and developers this means that they are more likely to build housing which does not fall into the category of affordable as they are able to make more money doing that. They are much more likely, if this bill passes, to build housing meant for higher income Albertans, as this sort of build would not be affected by the rent control legislation. This means that the supply of more affordable housing being built would decrease as a result. This as well could further exacerbate the problem, leaving more people without a place to rent and resulting in even higher rental prices for Albertans.

For landlords this artificial lowering of rent prices, especially in a time of high interest rates, can be extremely hard to manage. This would also lead to a decrease in the supply of affordable housing,

creating even more problems in the rental market for renters. Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on increasing the supply of affordable housing for Albertans. By increasing the number of properties available, we will ensure that prices come down in a healthy manner, which addresses increased demand and improves Alberta’s housing market for the future. Our government is also helping in the short term, providing over \$233 million in rent assistance over the next three years to help Albertans who struggle in this to make ends meet.

Our government is working hard to ensure that there is affordable housing for Albertans in an efficient, reasonable, and responsible manner. This bill would do the opposite of that, Mr. Speaker, and I implore everyone in this House to vote against it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I’ll recognize the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak in favour of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood’s Bill 205, the Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023. I do so recognizing that Albertans are facing soaring rents coupled with a lack of housing stock and a government that is just not willing to address the needs of Albertans in the immediate term. This bill includes reasonable and temporary measures to provide Albertans this immediate relief.

My office has been receiving an increased number of people facing threats or actualized evictions. These are the same folks that the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services keeps proclaiming the UCP are helping. While my office does everything it can within its capacity to keep folks housed, it is heart-wrenching when a single mother reaches out to her MLA’s office because things have gotten so expensive because of our provincial government’s inaction that she has had to make difficult decisions to put food on her table, pay for prescriptions that this government is withholding, or be forced to pay for a now unreliable utility bill because this government has prioritized its own arrogance over the well-being of its citizens.

That same mom has been on a waiting list for affordable housing and is not sure how much longer she can wait with her kiddos while costs continue to rise and rise and with a government that is not doing anything to help alleviate those costs, with that same government instead allowing their corporate buddies to take advantage of Albertans. We have a chance now to provide some relief to Albertans through the introduction of Bill 205, the Housing Statutes (Housing Security) Amendment Act, 2023, put forward by my wonderful colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

While we know that the housing crisis has many moving parts to it and that, surely, rent caps will not bring an end to this crisis, it will provide immediate relief to renters in the current market while the province continues to build more housing. It will also ensure that the government has benchmarks both in the short and long term while also demonstrating to Albertans that their government is hard at work to ensure every Albertan has a roof over their heads.

Mr. Speaker, what we are hearing from Albertans is that – and to quote a well-known line – the rent is too darn high, because, quite frankly, it is. The quote has been amended to be more parliamentary, but you get the gist.

I’m one of the very few renters in this House who relies on the rental market for my primary residence. I’ve done so all of my adult life. My partner and I do not have parents who can support us with a mortgage down payment, so it’s very likely that he and I will be renting for the foreseeable future. I’d like to think that I’m a relatively good source on the rental situation, personally, given that

I know the market here in Edmonton. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my rent is not reasonable in this market, but I'm not alone.

Many Indigenous peoples are also subject to the rental market. We do not have the benefit like many of the folks in this Chamber, who own their homes or have rental properties or vacation properties in other parts of the world. You see, Mr. Speaker, we have been impoverished on these lands through government law and policy, and we continue to be impoverished by this government's inaction. The same goes for non-Indigenous peoples, especially folks that have intersectional identities, like being a single, two-spirit mother who is a residential school survivor, whose parents have been forgotten by this government and their predecessors over and over in their time in government.

For example, just the other day I was speaking with a constituent who is a disabled trans man and athlete, who mentioned his concerns about making ends meet on AISH, a fixed income that this government has started clawing back from Albertans in his position. Not only is he worried that this government will take away benefits as a person who classifies as facing significant disability, but he is worried about how he can make the little that he does receive stretch to cover his housing costs along with being able to put food on the table.

This Chamber has heard this debate before, in December 1975, and the government of the day used the exact same arguments that this government is using today. None of the minister's comments are unique, new, or forward looking, namely that the free market will magically put more rental properties on the market, because somehow the members opposite really believe that corporations and landlords will always look out for the best interests of renters and not their own bottom lines, but we all know that this government does not care about renters given their opposition to this bill.

In 1975 this Chamber heard members talk about the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment being, in 2024 dollars, between \$1,003 to \$1,204.46 in Calgary and \$1,089 in Edmonton. According to the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator, the average minimum wage in Alberta at the time, again in 2024 dollars, was \$14.34. Fast-forward to today. The minimum wage is at \$15, and to be clear, this is not to be confused with the living wage, which as of 2023, according to the Alberta Living Wage Network, is \$23.70 for Calgarians, \$22.50 for Edmontonians, \$24.50 for McMurrayites, or \$38.80 for Canmoreites.

For the benefit of the members who might not know what this term means, the Alberta Living Wage Network has defined this term as "the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic expenses and have a modest standard of living once government transfers have been added and taxes have been subtracted."

As for rent today, a two-bedroom in Edmonton is sitting at around \$1,637 a month, with Calgary coming in at a whopping \$2,121 for the same unit per month. In 2024 dollars, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are doing worse today than they were under a Progressive Conservative government in 1975, and this amendment act will provide them with real relief.

But, you see, Mr. Speaker, this debate today is no different than the debate in 1975. In particular, what we all agree on is that more housing stock is needed. Bill 205 will require the government to set housing targets and increase reporting requirements to ensure we are meeting those targets across the province. Setting those goals and sticking to them will help ensure that every person who calls Alberta home can have an affordable place to live, especially as we grow over the next couple of years.

These temporary measures are also intended to be temporary, with a two-year rent cap at 2 per cent, followed by a two-year rental cap tied to inflation. I view this as a very measured and reasonable proposition to balance any concerns that a rent cap would have any negative effect on the rental market. What we are hearing from

Albertans is that they need a government to provide real relief today, not tomorrow; now.

4:40

This is the government of Alberta being given the opportunity to provide temporary assistance to Albertans during an affordability crisis. While the minister opposite lauds his government for increasing the housing stock this past year, I would challenge him with another question: why not embrace and show Albertans the great work that they are doing by committing to Bill 205's call for publishing the government's success in meeting those housing targets? If the UCP is doing such a good job, I do not see why we can't share that information with Albertans. To me that's a win-win.

I urge my colleagues across the aisle to really think about how they can provide low-income Albertans real relief by supporting this Bill 205, because right now their opposition to this bill shows that they do not want to help with this housing and affordability crisis that they have created and are exacerbating by not providing anything but buzzwords when Albertans are demanding real relief.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to raise up a concerning e-mail that I received from a constituent named Sandi:

I have been on the waiting list for low income housing for 3 years and I am no closer to receiving services as I was 3 years ago. I'm 58 years old and have mental health issues and receive AISH and CPPD totalling \$1,770 a month. My current rent will be going up by \$210 to \$1,000 per month at the end of my lease (in 6 weeks). Current market pricing is around \$1,000 for a bachelor suite. So I thought I would look at near market housing, but found out I don't qualify because I don't make enough money! So where do I go? My biggest fear is homelessness, and it looks like I am heading that way very soon. Why are rents able to soar without check in our province?

I feel so transparent and unimportant in the world that I live in. I did not want to end up with mental illness. I just didn't stand a chance. And now I feel like I no longer stand a chance.

Sandi is not alone in her plea for help. We should stand united to help all Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 205: you're going to hear me refer to this as the bill of unintended consequences by the caucus of unintended consequences. I just want to lay the groundwork for Bill 205, because the NDP history in this province is littered with unintended consequences, starting from the carbon tax, the carbon tax that made everything more expensive for Albertans.

The rushed transition out of coal. There was an orderly transition from coal to natural gas that was planned by the federal government, and the NDP had to rush it, and in rushing it, they sentenced every Albertan to higher electricity rates.

The Balancing Pool. As you recall, they cancelled the PPAs of the Balancing Pool. They forgot to read the fine print, and they cost Albertans another further \$1.8 billion, further raising the cost of electricity in this province and sentencing Albertans to higher electricity rates.

Mr. Speaker, the caucus of unintended consequences, the same caucus that is \$600,000 in debt and floundering in the polls, is now putting forward Bill 205, and Bill 205 is going to mean more unintended consequences. Let me tell you about them. I'd like to bring some insight here, specifically why rent controls aren't the solution to our housing issues in Alberta. We know that they aren't the solution because they've been tried, and they didn't work. Back in the 1970s Premier Lougheed brought in some rent controls that did limit rent increases. Those rent controls were phased out in the

early '80s, and it was a good thing, too, because they were proven harmful to the rental market and renters: construction of rental properties dropped, vacancy rates decreased, and fewer units were available for rent. In other words, rent controls didn't work then, and they're not going to work now. They did not solve the problem of making rental housing more affordable or more available. Instead, they created more problems for the rental marketplace.

Just in case you're thinking, "Well, that was the 1970s; this is now," I would say: consider Sweden, Mr. Speaker. Sweden is well known for its modular furniture, but good luck finding an apartment to put that modular furniture in. According to an article by the Austrian Economics Center published about four years ago, rent control in Sweden has failed. Sweden introduced its rent control system in the early 1940s as a wartime measure. Rents are based on the apartment's utility value as prescribed by legislation, which says that the rent should be reasonable or not significantly higher than rents paid for comparable apartments. Rents are collectively negotiated by representatives of the tenants and the landlords.

Yes, that's kept rents relatively flat but at a massive cost. It's completely decimated supply, to the point that in Stockholm, for example, there's an estimated shortfall of more than 25,000 apartments. The average wait time for a rental apartment in Stockholm is more than 11 years, and for more heavily subsidized apartments it's up to 30 years, Mr. Speaker. Yes. That's right. It can take 11 years or more to get into a rent-controlled apartment.

Another article written early this year in *The Hub* speaks of the experience of a Swedish man who waited 14 years for an apartment. Mr. Speaker, this is what happens when government inserts itself too far into the rental market. Now, if we were to proceed with Bill 205, this would become the experience in here. They would go from the caucus of unintended consequences to the caucus of vinyl temporary housing because that's all that would be available on the market.

Now, here in Canada other provinces and territories have widely different sets of rules for rent regulation to respond to their unique and diverse rental markets. Many provinces with rent controls are still experiencing issues with housing affordability. In Alberta our Residential Tenancies Act strikes a balance between fostering a healthy rental market and ensuring adequate rental home availability across Alberta. For example, the act places no limits on how much rent a landlord may charge, but a landlord may only increase rent once every 365 days, either from the date of the last increase or the date that the tenant moves in, whichever is later.

Under the Residential Tenancies Act there are also rules landlords must follow to provide tenants with notice of rent increases so that tenants have enough time to find another place to live if they can't or won't pay the increased rent. For a month-to-month tenancy that notice period is three months and in writing. For fixed or yearly leases the rent can't be increased during that term, but there is also no legislated notice period for rent increases between fixed-term tenancies, nor is there any requirement to renew a fixed-term tenancy. This allows for freedom of negotiation on the terms of a new, mutually beneficial agreement that suits both the landlord as well as the tenant. There's the key word, Mr. Speaker, "freedom."

This system works better than anything out there because it allows for freedom of the marketplace. It ensures that landlords and rental companies have incentive to enter or remain in the marketplace. It keeps them in the business of housing Albertans. It motivates them to build more properties and rent out to more people. That, Mr. Speaker, is the marketplace in action, and that's what we want to continue to foster here in Alberta.

I'll leave you with one more point, Mr. Speaker, and it's about the irony of Bill 205. It's ironic that the opposition members would introduce a bill for rent controls when, as we know, they had a chance to do so as government. If they believe so much in rent controls and their effectiveness, why didn't they amend the Residential Tenancies Act when they had the chance? The legislation was right there, sitting right there in front of them for their entire mandate, and they chose not to do it. Why didn't they go out and consult with housing stakeholders and make changes to the Residential Tenancies Act to bring in more rent control?

We all know the answer to that, Mr. Speaker. It's because they knew then – and they probably know even more now – that rent control doesn't work. Rent control hurts. That's why they didn't amend the act when they were in government, and that's why we can't amend it now. We know what they knew: rent control doesn't work.

Mr. Speaker, I urge everybody to vote against Bill 205.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Currie has risen to speak.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak in regard to private member's Bill 205, the housing security act. I will be proudly standing to speak in support of this private member's bill. Housing is undeniably one of the most critical challenges before us as legislators. It's not unique to Alberta, nor does it respect jurisdictional boundaries. This is an issue that needs all hands on deck. For something that has been identified as a human right, we sure live in a system that leaves housing up to the invisible hand. That doesn't float for me, and I don't think it should fly for Albertans either. I look forward to talking about the reasons why.

4:50

Now, right off the top I find it interesting that the members opposite, I think, have actually confirmed a few cases that we've been making on this side of the Chamber in support of Bill 205. First, a member just a few minutes earlier spoke to the negative impact of market interventions in rents in the absence of new builds. But, Mr. Speaker, we're not suggesting that new builds stop. In fact, we all know that private members' bills can't have cash associated with them. The only folks who can are the members opposite, and time and time again we've heard about the kinds of investments that they have committed to make in Alberta. We're not suggesting those stop; in fact, we want them to pick up the pace. We need that to be accelerated. We need both. We need all jurisdictions, and we need all options on the table.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Further, the member opposite just shared a citation from a report that analyzed Alberta's rental interventions in the '70s. Indeed, it did become implemented in 1976, and then by the early '80s it was removed. But in that very same report, Mr. Speaker, there is a reference to the fact that the negative impacts of this policy are actually negated if not nil if there is a short period of time in which this actual intervention is implemented. Once again, that is exactly what Bill 205 does. That's what it offers, a temporary solution to bring some immediate relief with a clear exit date: four years.

I wonder about whether or not this government wants to be the one at the helm when Albertans just gave up trying, when they gave up having some faith and some hope in home ownership, when they gave up on thinking that maybe they'd be able to move out from their parents' basement. Mr. Speaker, I have a teen and a preteen. I love them more than anything in this world, but I do eventually hope that they leave. I want them to forge their own path, to find

independence, and perhaps to, you know, pick up a vacuum from time to time. I love them dearly, but this is, of course, a really important right for young adults, to be able to leave their home and to forge out on their own. We are taking that away from them as a result of this housing crisis that we currently find ourselves in, and it's indicative of something bigger.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the members opposite love to allude to the forces of the market, but there's something insidious that is happening in our market, where these symbols of success, these symbols of the middle class are becoming increasingly less available to people, so we as government have a responsibility to look at that and to consider what it is that we can actually do. There are a frightening number of people who cannot ever hope for home ownership and who on the opposite end, in fact, are looking at homelessness; 115,000 people in Calgary – that's across 44,000 households – are on the brink of losing their homes. And homelessness is not just the people that we see sleeping rough downtown. They are sleeping in their cars in parking lots. They are couch surfing. They have no fixed address, they have no certainty, and the strain is adding up, and we have got to provide some immediate relief.

It's not the only solution, nor is it a long-term solution. It is a short- and a medium-term solution that we owe to our constituents, which brings me back to Bill 205, a temporary measure, again for four years, that will put a limit on how much rent can be increased: 2 per cent for two years and then nothing greater than the rate of inflation for another two years. I think of the nearly 100 constituents, Mr. Speaker, who have reached out to my office as a result of sudden rent increases, increases of 30, 40, or 50 per cent. We're talking about \$500 or more. Who amongst us can handle that? It is absolutely an unfair thing to ask of a person when they have nowhere else to go and when we have already established that housing is a human right.

I think of a dear constituent in her 70s facing a 33 per cent increase to her rent and feeling like there was nowhere to turn. She didn't want to leave her apartment, that she'd been in for so many years. We've just been talking about the importance of providing stability and predictability for seniors in the life leases conversation, yet here we are with people, oftentimes on fixed income, coming to our doors, coming to our offices and saying: "I have nothing else I can give. There's no more money to give. What am I supposed to do?" I cannot abide just saying, you know, "Them's the breaks."

Bill 205 is offering something tangible. It is offering a real solution for temporary relief so that those people don't need to worry, with anxiety and stress, about where they're going to go next month. Fifty per cent, Mr. Speaker: who amongst us can handle that kind of an increase to our living expenses? There were no protections for my constituent, and I am absolutely positive that each and every one of us in this Chamber has constituents just like her who are panicking. I'm absolutely positive that every single member in these Chambers would rise to the occasion and do all that we can to support people, because that's why we're here. We might have different ways of getting there, but we all, at the end of the day, wake up making sure that we don't have to turn people out into the cold, and that is exactly what's happening in the absence of this kind of legislation.

I know the cases to be made against rent controls, Mr. Speaker. I know the arguments by economists and academics and businesses and landlords. I'm a politician – we all are – and indeed my responsibility is to hear all of those groups, but it is also a responsibility to my constituents, and that is the responsibility that comes before all else. We cannot look exclusively at one argument. We have to look at the social, the health, the community considerations when we fail to actually support people in staying housed appropriately and safely.

So let's look at a few of the most commonly referenced reasons why people argue against a policy like Bill 205. One is that they claim to distort the markets and that that's always bad, but the problem with this argument is that it completely simplifies the many and varied economic factors that influence investment decisions. Real estate investments remain profitable as demand for housing is constantly growing, and demand is higher than ever before. To put limitations on builds exclusively because of these small constraints: I'm just not convinced when it comes to the housing market, as complex and as challenging as it currently is. People might refer to old examples of rent controls that had no timeline or predictability. Again, Bill 205 provides a timeline. It provides predictability, Mr. Speaker.

Lastly, the members opposite may argue that Bill 205 will quash housing supply. As I've mentioned, I have constituents whose rents have gone up by 30 to 50 per cent, and I find it baffling that a landlord, private or corporate or anybody in between, can raise rents with zero checks and balances to such an extreme. There is no doubt that costs have climbed, but 50 per cent? Tenants are being charged what the market will allow, and where there is no ceiling in sight, what will we do as legislators to prevent people from being evicted into homelessness or to sleeping in a van or couch surfing? To be clear, homelessness is not just the visible rough sleeper. It's the person with no fixed address, no stability, and no certainty, and we have got to do better by those folks.

On top of inflation and the rising cost of groceries and utilities and gas and in the absence of a tax break that this government promised in the last election, people are stressed to the max, Mr. Speaker, and I really don't blame them. But don't take my word for it. Don't take the word of my constituents for it. There are some pretty clear reports out there, again, that speak to just how serious this housing crisis is and just exactly what we need to be doing to support it. I reference, for example, a CMHC report from 2023 and Abacus Data, both with an abundance of information that demonstrates that we have got to be doing more. I encourage the members opposite to choose to do more.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), I think, if I'm correct, the time for consideration of this legislation has concluded for this afternoon.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Federal Carbon tax

509. Ms Pitt moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Lieutenant Governor in Council to, in accordance with section 26 of the Judicature Act, refer to the Court of Appeal of Alberta the question of whether the federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act remains constitutional in light of the federal Governor in Council's recent exemption of only one type of carbon-based fuel, home heating oil, from the legislation's application, resulting in an inequitable and disproportionate application of the legislation in different regions of the country, making indefensible the argument that it is a law made to address a national concern as a valid exercise of Parliament's peace, order, and good government law-making power under section 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to be able to move Motion 509. I think the motion is fairly straightforward, and I think many Albertans would agree. I stand

before you here today to address this issue that disproportionately affects Alberta families and calls into question the very notion of fairness and equity for all Canadians, really.

Motion 509 calls upon the esteemed Assembly to urge the Lieutenant Governor in Council to refer to the Alberta Court of Appeal the constitutionality of the unjust federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act. This short-sighted act, purportedly created to address carbon emissions, has taken an utterly sad, expected turn and now works to specifically target hard-working Albertans.

The issue of constitutionality stems from exemptions made to the carbon tax. While claiming to combat climate change on a national scale, the federal government has decided on a whim to grant special treatment to one particular type of carbon-based fuel, home heating oil. This exemption directly affects Albertans, many of whom rely on lower carbon emitting alternatives such as natural gas, found here locally at home, for heating their homes. Because of this exemption Albertans are unfairly burdened with the full, unyielding weight of the carbon tax while others enjoy a discount despite using a higher emission heating fuel for their homes.

This targeted disparity breaks down the very foundation of equity and fairness upon which our great nation should operate. The ramifications of this inequitable application of the carbon tax extend much farther beyond mere economic concerns. For the average Albertan already grappling with the soaring cost of living, this unjust taxation just compounds the financial strains that we are all experiencing. As the carbon tax continues to rise, most recently with the astounding 23 per cent hike on April 1, which is no joke, hard-working families are forced to divert more of their hard-earned wages towards padding the federal government's pockets.

This is particularly egregious when considering that Alberta is already making significant strides towards reducing carbon emissions. This unequal, unfair, unjust impact of the carbon tax on our province not only penalizes responsible behaviour but also threatens the livelihoods of countless Albertans that are just struggling with this unending inflation crisis. All of this headache just because Trudeau chose to exempt one type of home heating from the carbon tax.

Motion 509 takes a critical step towards rectifying the injustice of this tax by calling for a thorough examination of the federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act's constitutionality by urging the Lieutenant Governor in Council to refer this matter to the Alberta Court of Appeal. The Alberta government seeks to challenge the very legality of an act that discriminates against our great province.

This motion is not about seeking preferential treatment for Alberta. It's not. Rather, in its simplest form, it's a simple principle of equality which is woven throughout our nation's Constitution. It is about holding the federal government accountable for its targeted – no question about that – unprecedented actions against Alberta and ensuring that all Canadians are treated equally under Canadian law.

Alberta's commitment to environmental stewardship is not just a promise. Our commitment is backed by real action and a concrete road map for the future. We are on track to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, thanks to the technological advances and strategic investments in carbon capture and reduction initiatives. However, the federal government's decision to impose a heavy carbon tax, with selective exemptions, directly chips away at our progress, diminishing the significance of others. It is a slap in the face to a province that's worked tirelessly to balance economic prosperity with environmental stewardship. Alberta is the leader, make no mistake. We absolutely refuse to be penalized for our dedication to innovation and sustainability.

This unfair tax must come to an end. If this government succeeds in challenging the constitutionality of the federal carbon tax, we would not only be fulfilling our mandate to lessen the carbon tax on Albertans but also protecting our province's autonomy from federal overreach, which is very important. This tax, which greedily – greedily – pilfers an average of over \$900 from Alberta families annually, even after the so-called rebate, which some of you received today, which cuts short of achieving any kind of relief in your home: this is \$900-plus that could go to groceries, could go to rent, but it just vanishes from the pockets of Alberta families without a trace. By resisting the federal government's unending reach into our affairs, we can teach Justin Trudeau to respect our provincial jurisdiction. Our mandate has never been more clear. It is our job to put more money back into the pockets of hard-working Albertans and to defend our province against the very unwelcome and constant intrusions from the Trudeau-NDP coalition of chaos.

It is interesting to note that other federal environmental policies have been ruled unconstitutional, meaning there is precedent to challenge the carbon tax. Last October the Supreme Court delivered a resounding victory for Alberta, for Albertans by ruling that the federal government's Bill C-69, also known as the no-more-pipelines act, exceeded its constitutional authority. This decision further confirmed Alberta's provincial autonomy and showed the limits of federal power in controlling resource development projects within our borders. Similarly, in November the Federal Court of Canada issued a ruling in favour of Alberta, deeming a federal order declaring plastics as toxic to be unreasonable and – you guessed it – unconstitutional. These legal victories exemplify the importance of defending provincial jurisdiction and challenging federal overreach.

Just as we have successfully fought back against unconstitutional environmental policies in the past for Alberta and for Albertans, so, too, shall we continue to resist this imposed carbon tax brought on by the federal government that is causing so much harm to Alberta families and Canadians in general. Motion 509 is not merely about challenging the constitutionality of the federal carbon tax. This motion shows our strong commitment to justice, to fairness and autonomy for the people of Alberta. We refuse to be treated as second-class citizens in our own country. We're unfairly subjected to unjust taxation and inconsistent exemptions that favour Canadians in other parts of the country. This motion is a wake-up call for all Albertans to unite in defence of our constitutional rights and freedoms. Let us stand together and demand an end to this backwards, haphazard, and unconstitutional tax.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, today we debate Motion 509, an absurd motion that wants Alberta to go back to court on the federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act, or the GGPPA. I'd like to remind the UCP government to review the ruling from the Supreme Court of Canada; precisely, Reference re Impact Assessment Act, 2023, SCC 23. Alberta would face a challenge in court because this act has been deemed constitutional already, and the home heating oil exemption is temporary. The federal government can remove it any time.

5:10

Now, it is truly unfortunate that the federal government chose to undermine its own climate policy by announcing a three-year carbon tax exemption for home heating oil. You either have a policy that applies to all Canadians or not. That was a misguided decision by the federal government. At the same time, the UCP government is wasting our time here relitigating what was litigated already and upheld by the highest court of Canada. It is wasting resources and taxpayer money. It is theatrics for their social media clips.

What is comical here, Mr. Speaker, is that the UCP cabinet can refer these questions without a resolution of the Legislature. Section 26 of the Judicature Act actually says,

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may refer to the Court of Appeal for hearing or consideration any matter the Lieutenant Governor in Council thinks fit to refer, and the Court of Appeal shall hear or consider the matter that is referred.

Section 26 is broad and has prescriptive power. This motion is not needed, so why is the UCP pulling this political stunt at the Legislature today, wasting Albertan taxpayer money?

Most importantly, has the government actually sought legal input on this adventure? Because this motion contains an error in that there is more than one form of exemption already under the GGPPA for carbon-based fuel, like farm gas. This act exempts fuels used in tractors, trucks, and other farm machinery from the fuel charge. The UCP has clearly not sought a legal opinion before pulling the stunt today.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is really rich that the theatrics are happening this week. It is the anniversary of the UCP's so-called climate plan. Last year, prior to the May election, the UCP conveniently released an aspirational so-called climate plan with a 2050 target, with no budget and no implementation plan. It is as aspirational as the Premier's aspirational health care delivery.

So let me get this straight. For a full year the UCP did not put this so-called climate plan into action, yet they want to repeal the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act that addresses climate change. In fact, they sabotaged one of Alberta's advantages with their ill-conceived moratorium on renewables. How fitting, Mr. Speaker.

A reminder to the members opposite: Alberta introduced carbon pricing in 2007, way before the GGPPA came into law in 2018. In 2007 Alberta was the first jurisdiction to introduce carbon pricing for industry, the main mechanism to reduce emissions from heavy emitters, now managed through the technology innovation and emissions reduction regulation, TIER. A quick history lesson for the UCP: prior to the formation of TIER, former Premier Stelmach brought in the specified gas emitters regulation and then sat on it for eight years until the Alberta NDP government did the hard work of consulting with industry, the public, and experts to modernize it into the TIER system.

Let's not forget that the UCP also withdrew the Alberta climate leadership act, that actually had an exemption period for small oil and gas, and crashed them into the federal carbon price, giving up Alberta's control over the carbon pricing policy and the revenue that comes with it. To be clear, the UCP jeopardized Alberta's position by not having a plan. They jeopardized that revenue. They took a made-in-Alberta plan and nicely handed it all to Trudeau. Maybe we have the UCP-Trudeau alliance here, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I know this is news to the UCP caucus that the UCP government increased the industrial carbon price to \$170 per tonne by 2030 to match the federal government. This is the UCP's carbon pricing policy. In fact, it is time to provide more clarity around TIER beyond 2030 to add investment certainty to our oil and gas sector and other heavy industries. The UCP needs to provide investment certainty.

But we know that none of this is the UCP priority. Some of the TIER revenue is spent on the UCP's energy war room, and general revenue – we learned at the supplementary supply debate from the economic recovery support – will also fund the UCP's energy war room. That's two ministries funding the useless, unaccountable energy war room. That's two ministries funding propaganda instead of delivering on a serious climate plan. That's two ministries wasting taxpayer money and industry-driven revenue instead of incentivizing technologies and attracting low-carbon investments.

Mr. Speaker, this government complains a lot without proposing solutions. This government could actually get to work and come up with a meaningful climate policy, negotiate with the federal government, and put forward a credible Alberta plan for emissions policy equivalency. I challenge this government to come up with a serious made-in-Alberta climate plan. I challenge this government to stop blaming everyone, Ottawa, and everything like they blame the sun and the wind for the UCP rolling blackouts. I challenge this government to come up with actual solutions that will help Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's families are struggling with costs of living, paying more for utilities, insurance, housing, tuition, and more. This ideologically driven government probably doesn't know this, but Albertans receive the highest federal rebates in the country. A typical family of four gets up to \$386 directly in their bank accounts four times a year. That's \$1,544 a year. Why does this government want to deny Albertans these rebates?

I challenge this government to come up with its own solution that will lower emissions, keep life affordable for Albertans, and address climate change. Climate change isn't going away. This summer will bring drought, record wildfires, and extreme weather, and we will probably see more damage in our infrastructures and natural environments.

Mr. Speaker, one has to ask: if the UCP is going to oppose climate policies, then what do they offer? This is a waste of time and a waste of taxpayer money. We cannot support this motion as is, and we would like to propose an amendment to this motion. I would like to move on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods that Motion Other than Government Motion 509 be amended by adding . . .

The Speaker: Sorry to interrupt. We're just going to stop the clock here real quick for you. If you can – you presumably have a bunch of copies there.

Ms Al-Guneid: I do.

The Speaker: If you pass that to the page, we'll get one to the table, one to me, and one to the mover. Then, as soon as those three bodies have the amendment, I'll ask you to proceed.

Hon. members, pursuant to Motions Other than Government Motions, with respect to these motions being amended, standing orders require that notice be provided to the mover of the motion prior to 11 o'clock on the day of the motion being moved. I look to the hon. Member for Airdrie-East for confirmation that that did happen. I have received confirmation.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods that Motion Other than Government Motion 509 be amended by adding:

and only after the Attorney General presents to the Assembly an opinion on the likelihood of success in relitigating the constitutionality of the federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act

immediately after "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Lieutenant Governor in Council to, in accordance with section 26 of the Judicature Act."

Can I continue?

5:20

The Speaker: You have about 45 seconds remaining if you want. You are also happy to conclude your remark.

Ms Al-Guneid: I'll conclude it.

In conclusion, clearly this UCP government is neither serious about addressing climate change nor attracting low-carbon investments by putting TIER revenue into the war room and not coming up with real policies on climate and attracting low-carbon investment nor preparing Alberta for the future. It is very disappointing, and we cannot support this motion as is. I would like to end with that.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the amendment that we just received from the hon. opposition member to Motion 509. First, I want to take this opportunity to commend the Member for Airdrie-East on her proposed Motion 509. I know her constituents are particularly proud of all of the work she is doing, as are all of the members on this side of the House. The work that you have done, hon. member, in representing their best interests is truly noteworthy.

As for the amendment from the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods, Mr. Speaker, frankly, the amendment is absurd. The amendment suggests that the opposition members will support Motion 509 only after the Attorney General presents to the Assembly an opinion on the likelihood of success in relitigating the constitutionality of the federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act. It suggests that the NDP actually have the slightest bit of interest in pursuing litigation to defend this province's constitutional jurisdiction and the best interests of Albertans if the opposition gets to see a privileged legal opinion and only if they get to see a privileged legal opinion. Then they apparently will support litigation against the big bosses in Ottawa.

Yet the speaker before me and the one before her, Mr. Speaker, spent their full 10-minute period of time disparaging the efforts of this government in defending Albertans in court all across the country in the various interventions in the various cases that we've advanced. Nobody knows if the opposition is coming or going, and that's why they sit on that side of the House. Since when, exactly, have the NDP ever cared about litigating to protect Alberta from federal overreach?

Let's compare track records, shall we? This government immediately saw the fundamental and inescapable deficiencies in the Impact Assessment Act, the no-more-pipelines bill, and took the federal government to court. That law was fundamentally found to be unconstitutional because it improperly intruded on the provincial heads of power set out in sections 92 and 92A of the Constitution Act. Where were the NDP when we were advancing that case? Radio silence and discouragement, disparagement, and defeatist attitudes.

Then when the Supreme Court of Canada agreed with us that the Impact Assessment Act's designated project scheme was unconstitutional, this was a huge win for this province. It was a huge win for Albertans, Albertan jobs, the Alberta economy, and Alberta's future. When the federal government continued in spite of the Supreme Court's ruling and attempted to enforce those unconstitutional provisions on a purely provincial Ontario highway 413 project, our government spoke out against it and immediately sought to intervene in support of provincial jurisdiction once again, Mr. Speaker.

When the single-use plastics were banned by the federal government, we saw the same story unfold yet again. The de facto leader of the members of the opposition, Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister Trudeau . . .

Mr. Getson: Trudeau.

Mr. Amery: Yes, chief government whip.

Prime Minister Trudeau decided to declare plastic-manufactured items such as straws and takeout containers as harmful.

Mr. Getson: Very bad.

Mr. Amery: Very bad.

This is insanity, and anyone with a semblance of rational thought can see right through that. Somebody needed to do something to overturn this ridiculous federal cabinet order, and you would expect all members of this House to rise and to tell Ottawa that that was unacceptable, that impacting Alberta's economy, Albertan jobs, and Albertans in general was unacceptable. We immediately joined litigation against the plastics ban, and then we won, Mr. Speaker. Why? Because it was simply not reasonable to say that all plastics manufactured are toxic, plain and simple. If that litigation hadn't happened, the ban would have had wide-ranging impacts and consequences on Alberta's economic interests.

Where were the NDP when we were advancing the toxics ban case? Where were the NDP when tens of thousands of jobs and \$18 billion of investment capital were at stake, Mr. Speaker? This time it was even worse than radio silence from the dimly lit side of this Chamber; they were cheering on the plastics ban. The NDP have been long-time supporters of a nation-wide ban on single-use plastics in this country. When the bosses in Ottawa, whether it is Trudeau or the central party leadership, take action, the Alberta NDP fall in line every single time.

Another prime example is the federal firearm ban, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Oh, don't get me started.

Mr. Amery: Let's not get started with the federal firearms ban, friends.

When the federal government unilaterally and without notice decided to arbitrarily redesignate certain firearms as prohibited, they paved the way for countless law-abiding Albertans to suddenly become owners of illegal guns, once again, with an amnesty period that expires in 2025. Now, this government, Mr. Speaker, the folks that sit on this side of the House, believe that law-abiding gun owners should not be unfairly targeted and punished by our federal government. We are intervening in this litigation, and we will strongly advocate to protect Albertans from bumbling regulatory disasters.

But what does the opposition say when things like this happen and impact Albertans in this way? Not a word, Mr. Speaker. They couldn't be bothered to utter a single word in support of the thousands of lawful gun owners in this province. For the NDP to suggest that they really just want to see a legal opinion from me and then they will support this motion is absolutely absurd.

Ms Sweet: But we believe in you.

Mr. Amery: I am certain that the hon. member believes in me, but I do not believe in them, Mr. Speaker.

I can only presume that the only reason that the NDP could possibly want to see a legal opinion would be to oppose any such legislation, as they've always done before, Mr. Speaker. They can't argue with their track record. Time and again they take Ottawa's position over Alberta's; they take Trudeau's position over Alberta's; they put radical ideology ahead of objective reality. A visionary once said that when someone tells you who they are, believe them. Frankly, I don't think that the NDP can help themselves.

Let's look at this amendment on a practical level. I am not the lawyer for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. As Attorney General I am the lawyer for the government of Alberta. It is my practice, and it will always be the practice of every single Attorney General in this province going back for decades, to never waive the solicitor-client

privilege and confidentiality of internal legal opinions. It is a bad precedent to set. That advice is solely for the eyes of government, so why, Mr. Speaker, would I ever deviate from a long-standing best practice and tradition and disclose a legal opinion to an opposition that has never supported this government's actions or the desires or wills of Albertans? They have never supported our litigation. They do not support Alberta's constitutional jurisdiction from federal overreach.

5:30

Of course, Mr. Speaker, while I continue to be happy to receive the guidance and the support and the advice of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, through the motion as it is written, I cannot consent or recommend that the members of this House support the amendment as proposed. I am firmly opposed to this amendment and ask all members to vote against it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others on amendment A1? If the hon. Member for Airdrie-East would like to speak to the amendment, she's welcome to do so. I'm not sure if . . .

Ms Pitt: No. I'd like to vote on the amendment.

The Speaker: Okay.

Are there others wishing to speak to the amendment?
Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are back on the main motion, Motion Other than Government Motion 509. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 509. I have watched for a number of years now the hon. members across the way, when they were on both sides of the aisle, read rote talking points from prepared text. There does not seem to be any evidence of anyone speaking extemporaneously. They simply repeat the same claims over and over again in some sort of rehearsed recitation. We are well into reruns at this point.

This does not really qualify as debate. It barely qualifies as public speaking. It barely rises above jejune, monotone incantation at this point. The most interesting it becomes is imperious platitude. It is agita for endless politics of grievance. This is a great loss, in my view, Mr. Speaker. It is a great loss to the members themselves, who could learn great skills in learning to sharpen their arguments. It's disappointing that over the nine years I have been here, there have been fewer and fewer members that have taken advantage of the opportunity they have to practise the very old arts of rhetoric and oration. This is the place to learn how to sight-read the new sheet music. Instead, they play the same three chords of the same four old hits.

The great literary critic Lionel Trilling once wrote that ideology is not acquired by thought but by breathing the haunted air.

Of ideologies, Trilling wrote that

ideology is not the product of thought; it is the habit or the ritual of showing respect for certain formulas to which, for various reasons having to do with emotional safety, we have very strong ties of whose meaning and consequences in actuality we have no clear understanding.

Let us begin, then, our conversation on the subject of carbon pricing by grounding ourselves in some incontrovertible facts that bring me no emotional safety whatsoever. They bring me neither pleasure nor satisfaction. They are simply facts. The first one is that, ideologically speaking, carbon pricing is a Conservative idea and

policy. The first Prime Minister to make a spirited argument in favour of carbon pricing on the international stage was when Stephen Harper in his first big speech in Berlin, Germany, in 2007 pledged to reduce Canada's emissions, using a system of pricing, carbon offsets, and trading, by 20 per cent by 2020. If we are talking about taking marching orders from Ottawa, I would have taken that marching order from Ottawa because we are not at that 20 per cent. Mr. Harper then further pledged to reduce Canada's emissions by 60 to 70 per cent by 2050, which is, in fact, a more ambitious goal than I believe the one that we have now.

Conservative market-minded politicians have supported carbon pricing above other alternatives due to its low cost to the economy. Here we can cite the first jurisdictions to bring in carbon pricing at the provincial level: B.C. under Gordon Campbell in 2007, Ed Stelmach in Alberta in 2008.

We can now take up a few of the oft-repeated claims by the other side. It was quite easy to take up these arguments because there are very few of them, and there haven't really been a whole lot of attempts to intellectually engage with the arguments. Well, the Premier did before she came here. She said it on video – there is always a video – but she has since abandoned that.

One, the claim that carbon pricing does not reduce emissions. This is false. Canada's emissions have fallen, perhaps not as far as we would like them to, but they have. It is estimated that in 2030 the carbon tax will be responsible for reducing annual emissions by somewhere between 19 and 22 megatonnes. In the meantime GHGs in '21 were 8.4 per cent lower than they were in 2005, not Stephen Harper's goal but a reduction nonetheless.

Two, carbon pricing increases prices. We often hear this claim without evidence. According to a late 2023 study by a University of Calgary economist the carbon tax accounts for a .3 per cent increase in food prices. That's 30 cents on a \$100 grocery bill. The Bank of Canada found a .15 per cent effect of carbon pricing on inflation. The parliamentary budget office found that 80 per cent of households get back more than they pay in. We can note all of these things dispassionately. We don't have to engage in hyperbole. We could even conclude that carbon pricing remains politically undesirable, but we should make those conclusions in the context of a defensible, factual appraisal of the situation.

Third, we hear that carbon pricing remains ultra vires despite the Supreme Court's finding that part 1 of the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act does meet the national concern test as climate change is, by necessity, the court concluded, a matter of national rather than purely local or provincial concern. The head of power under which it operates, the peace, order, and good government section of the Constitution, is appropriate and sufficiently narrow for the purpose of pricing combustion fuels. Further, nothing in the court's ruling indicates that exemptions built already into the act – that is to say, the farm fuel exemptions, which are broad – take away at all from further exemptions that could be made under the act. So we find ourselves with this motion, which uses the occasion of a clearly silly political move by the federal government to engage in the usual arguments and revisit the same four pages of argumentation now boringly central to the discourse of this Chamber.

On the matter of the Atlantic provinces' exemption for home heating oil, well, I think that we have a rare occasion of convergence and agreement between the two sides of this House. It was not very good politics. Neither, too, was it particularly good policy. I'm not going to indulge in too much punditry – that is a dangerous land for a politician to roam around in – but a pause on the April 1 increase for everyone and an increased Atlantic rebate modelled on the rural rebate premium would have likely headed off much of the national confusion and anger at the time. That is not where we are. They did not do that. The Liberals announced \$2.5

billion last week for artificial intelligence, and one has to be at least comforted that they are trying to create at least some form of intelligence in Ottawa. That is not my joke; I absolutely stole it from a Radio-Canada comedian I heard yesterday on the radio. His timing was probably better than mine. But bad politics and even bad policy should not be met with wasteful legal misadventures, and this is where we come to this motion.

There is no doubt that Executive Council can go to the Alberta Court of Appeal with a question as to whether the new facts make the previous decision irrelevant. The Alberta Court of Appeal would have to answer that question, and then that could be appealed back to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court of Canada could then decide whether to take up the matter or not. According to Eric Adams, a University of Alberta legal scholar, there would be very little appetite, quote, for the courts to do so within a handful of years of a particular judgment.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't really serve much purpose to run to the courts when a duly elected government does something you do not like. It actually has to be unlawful. We live in a democracy. If you don't like something, you vote the people out and replace them. And with what exactly? The question before Canadians is, of course, well, a number of things. Chiefly among them, I think, for Albertans is whether, if there is a change of federal government, part 2 of the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act is retained. Are we repealing the whole thing, necessitating contracts for difference being negotiated as we speak in order to guard against the political risk to the balance sheets of industry posed by a Poilievre government? He hasn't said. It will be up to Canadians to press him for answers on those questions. That is how democracy works.

This UCP government is far too quick to pick fights and waste money. There's an old legal saying that if you don't have the fact, you argue the law, and if you don't have either, then you pound the table. This latest motion calls for us to waste money to pound the table, to indulge in kabuki theatre of picking a fight. It is tiresome and unserious, particularly when it is paired with zero effort to regulate electricity prices, car insurance costs, jacking up taxes on buying a new home, four years of failure to index the personal income tax code, allowing school fees paid by parents to balloon out of control, tuition costs, and so on.

It is for that reason that I will be opposing this motion. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to participate in an important aspect of our democratic process, the chance to debate and discuss policy, to represent our constituents and do what's best in their interest. I've waited in this House for a year for the opposition to vote against the NDP mother ship in Ottawa; I just didn't expect it was going to come on this motion. Today's *Globe and Mail* article *The Carbon Tax is Almost Dead*, and NDP Leaders Are Helping to Kill It – I just didn't think they were going to vote against the mother ship on this.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax has never been in the best interests of my constituents of the charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat, yet it seems to be a bad joke that goes on repeat. On April 1 the NDP-Liberal coalition increased the carbon tax once again, this time by 23 per cent, now the fourth increase to date. The disastrous fiscal irresponsibility of the eco radical policies of the NDP-Liberal coalition has been hurting and dividing our country now, and it started here in 2015, when the failed NDP Alberta

government brought in Canada's first carbon tax, something they did not campaign on.

Mr. Speaker, unchecked and out-of-control spending from the federal government has caused inflation to skyrocket, made worse by the compounding impacts of the carbon tax, a nonsense wealth grab that does not affect all Albertans or Canadians equally. I know my constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat have been sharing their worries about the affordability crisis, and Albertans everywhere are feeling the same effects caused by the ballooning costs of everything due to the carbon tax. All Trudeau does is blame someone, anyone but himself, and then goes on yet another vacation.

Seventy per cent of Canadians, seven Premiers, including our own, have stood up to the federal government and opposed the carbon tax hike. It's a strong message, and it comes from all sides of the political spectrum, yet Justin Trudeau isn't listening. The Prime Minister is refusing to meet with the Premiers because, and I quote, he's already met with them on this topic. This meeting happened in 2016, Mr. Speaker. It's now 2024, and none of the Premiers that were at that meeting are still in office. This is an unacceptable affront to the democratic values that have held our country together for two centuries and which our country was founded to protect.

Instead of listening to the voices of 70 per cent of the people and 70 per cent of the leaders from across the country, this Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, is acting like a petty child and refuses to listen to any opinion that disagrees with his own or the ideology of his globalist cronies. Mr. Speaker, we're asking for constitutional boundaries, but right now the federal government is acting like that's too much of an ask.

Logically looking at this, it's clear to everyone that the carbon tax achieves nothing but higher costs. It doesn't reduce emissions. Just this year the parliamentary budget office expects that the carbon tax will cost Alberta families over \$900 more, far above and beyond the rebates they will get back.

Another point of concern is that it disproportionately affects the application of the carbon tax across Canada. The equal impact to all Canadians was one of the cited reasons for upholding the tax when it was previously challenged, when it reached the Supreme Court. The recent decision to give Atlantic Canada a cut on the carbon tax for home heating oil undermines the argument by the federal government that the carbon tax is a law made to address a national concern as a valid exercise of Parliament's peace, order, and good government's law-making powers under section 91 of the Constitution Act of 1867.

Justin Trudeau has been playing politics with affordability and Albertans' quality of life for far too long. If this really was about the environment, then the federal government should be following what Alberta has been doing here. We've made significant progress in emissions reductions without compromising jobs or hurting industries that have created so much wealth and prosperity across our country.

This was done with technology, not taxation. I'll say that again: technology, not taxation. This is even something that our U.S. partners to the south have been looking to Alberta, to follow suit with our approach. We're working towards carbon neutrality by 2050 through technology and investments, including through our technology innovations.

This is not the first time that the federal government has punished hard-working Albertans through their policies. Last October the Supreme Court sided with Alberta and ruled that the federal government's Bill C-69 was unconstitutional. Again, in November the Federal Court cited that the no-more-plastics ban was deemed unreasonable.

Ever since the United Conservative government was elected in 2019, we've been calling on the NDP-Liberal coalition to abandon

their ridiculous carbon tax policies and ideology. Motion 509 serves as a critical step towards addressing the concerns raised by Canadians and Albertans regarding the federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act. By urging a review of the constitutionality of this legislation, particularly in light of the recent home heating oil exemption, this motion aims to ensure fairness and equality in the implementation of carbon pricing from across the country or question whether it's still valid. The scrutiny is essential to safeguarding the interests of Albertans and all Canadians.

Motion 509 also provides an opportunity to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the carbon tax in achieving what its intended goals are. By examining the effects of recent challenges, including the exemption of home heating oil, the federal government has to look at the valuable insight to the real-world implications of what the carbon tax measures actually achieve. They have to recognize that these policies are hurting Canadians first and foremost, and they will never achieve what their intended goal is unless their intended goal is to make everything more expensive. With Motion 509 our government continues to call on the federal government to eliminate this tax and work with us as we develop and deploy clean technologies to reduce emissions and keep Canadians working.

I also call on the members opposite to do what they should have done with our previous motion on this topic, that aimed to scrap the carbon tax, and side with Albertans and get this wealth redistribution scheme axed once and for all to bring a real impact to affordability for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in support of Motion 509. Alberta should appeal the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act to the Court of Appeal, and the carbon-loving, NDP-Trudeau lovers across the aisle should support this motion as well.

Mr. Speaker, the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act is a rotten law, and rotten laws produce rotten results. The corrupt and rotten result here is that Trudeau decided to go vote buying and give special treatment to the Maritimes for their rotten law. Because this is a rotten law and Trudeau is a rotten politician, he is able to abuse the rotten law for his attempts for rotten vote buying. Will it work? I do not know, but he is false, and people do not like fake.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta does not have hydro. We do not have nuclear. The Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act hurts Alberta more than any other province. Trudeau knows this, and if this hurt Quebec, there would be no carbon tax, and we would not have this rotten law.

The Alberta Court of Appeal ruled that the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act was unconstitutional. Here's a quote:

Conspicuous for its breadth, the Act allows the federal government to intrude further into more and different aspects of lawful daily life, both personal and business. Nor is there anything in the Act limiting what the federal government can choose to levy in the future both on people and industry. The minimums of today are not the maximums of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, they were right; a law that is open ended and largely subjective is at great risk of abuse.

5:50

They called it the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act, a constitutional Trojan Horse. It is a constitutional Trojan Horse because it allows the federal government to do indirectly what it cannot do directly, attack and hurt Alberta. The Alberta Court of Appeal saw this, that the act could be abused and leveraged by an immoral and corrupt government, and, Mr. Speaker, the Trudeau

Liberal-NDP axis is a morally and fiscally bankrupt government. They are corrupt. They have used the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act to attack Alberta and give relief to their political friends. Their moral authority for the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act is gone.

The majority of the Supreme Court of Canada, in their 6-3 decision, were wrong. Perhaps they were not alive to how this law would be abused by an immoral and corrupt government. But, Mr. Speaker, nobody is perfect. That includes justices of the Supreme Court. It is important that there is humility. This law should be appealed to the Court of Appeal now that we have lived experience in how this law has been wrongfully abused for political gain, and the Supreme Court should act in the public interest and strike down this very rotten law.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for Airdrie-East to close debate. The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I conclude, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues who provided thoughtful insights into this debate, who are standing up for Alberta, for Albertans. This is an important step in defending our rights and freedoms in this province. That's what Motion 509 will help to do, outline the strong importance of the issues that we're currently fighting for.

Motion 509 represents a landmark opportunity for us to defend the rights of Albertans in the face of this unequal, unjust, and unnecessary tax. The heavy impacts of the federal carbon tax on our province, coupled with thoughtless exemptions that completely ignore the notion of fairness, demand our immediate action and attention.

Mr. Speaker, maybe it's because I am a middle child and I am used to unfair and unjust things growing up, but by standing in support of this motion – my mother is watching – we send a clear message to Ottawa that Alberta will not tolerate being treated unfairly or having our autonomy trampled upon by the federal government. The time is upon us to protect the livelihoods and the well-being of our constituents by challenging unconstitutional policies and advocating for fair treatment for Alberta. We will stand up to the bullies in Ottawa.

As representatives of the people of Alberta it is our duty to ensure that our province receives fair treatment from the federal government. We refuse to accept a situation where Albertans are unfairly burdened by the full weight of the carbon tax while other Canadians enjoy exemptions. Through Motion 509 we're standing up for Albertans and demanding accountability from our federal government. We are making it clear that Alberta will not be sidelined or taken advantage of and that we will fiercely defend our rights and interests against federal overreach. By upholding the principles of fairness, we are not only fulfilling our responsibilities as elected representatives but also safeguarding the prosperity and the well-being of our beautiful province.

In this Chamber we are bound by a duty to advocate for the best interests of the people that we represent. Our commitment to this mission is tireless, and we will never falter in our defence of Albertans, whether it's challenging unconstitutional policies, defending provincial autonomy, or demanding fair treatment from the federal government. It's a shame that we have to do that, by the way. We will always stand firm to Trudeau's backwards policies. Our province is more than just a few lines on the map. It is home to hard-working individuals, families, and communities who deserve nothing less than our full support.

To the people at home: as your elected representatives we are trusted with defending your interests, protecting your rights, and ensuring that your voices are heard loud and clear. No matter the challenges we face,

rest assured that our government will always be on the front lines fighting tirelessly for Albertans. Let us remember that our actions today will have far-reaching implications for the future of Alberta. By supporting Motion 509, we show our commitment to justice, fairness, and the protection of provincial autonomy. Let us stand together as representatives of the people and send a powerful message that Alberta will not be silenced.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 509 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:56 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schulz
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Sigurdson, R.J.
Bouchard	Loewen	Sinclair
Cyr	Lovely	Singh
de Jonge	Lunty	Stephan

Dreeshen	McDougall	Turton
Dyck	McIver	van Dijken
Ellis	Neudorf	Wiebe
Getson	Nicolaides	Williams
Glubish	Nixon	Wilson
Guthrie	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Horner	Pitt	Yao
Hunter	Rowswell	Yaseen
Jean		

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Arcand-Paul	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Batten	Hoyle	Tejada
Ellingson	Kayande	Wright, P.
Eremenko		

Totals:	For – 43	Against – 13
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 carried]

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 6:14 p.m.]

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