



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 6, 2024

Day 46

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,  
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)  
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)  
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)  
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)  
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
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(UC)  
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Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)  
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
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(UC)  
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Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)  
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)  
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Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)  
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)  
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Andrew Boitchenko	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Grant Hunter	Parliamentary Secretary for Agrifood Development
Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Scott Sinclair	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Policing
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### **Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Yao  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell  
Boitchenko  
Bouchard  
Brar  
Hunter  
Kasawski  
Kayande  
Wiebe

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. Getson  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loyola  
Boparai  
Cyr  
de Jonge  
Elmeligi  
Hoyle  
Stephan  
Wright, J.  
Yao

### **Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee**

Chair: Mr. Getson  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Long  
Arcand-Paul  
Ellingson  
Hunter  
Ip  
Lovely  
Rowswell  
Sabir  
Wright, J.

### **Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee**

Chair: Mr. Yao  
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken  
Dach  
Dyck  
Irwin  
Petrovic  
Pitt  
Sabir  
Stephan  
Wright, P.

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Lovely  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring  
Batten  
Boitchenko  
Long  
Lunty  
Metz  
Petrovic  
Singh  
Tejada

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Getson  
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken  
Chapman  
Dyck  
Eremenko  
Hunter  
Long  
Renaud  
Shepherd  
Sinclair

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson  
Eggen  
Gray  
Long  
Phillips  
Rowswell  
Sabir  
Singh  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills**

Chair: Ms Pitt  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Stephan  
Bouchard  
Ceci  
Deol  
Dyck  
Hayter  
Petrovic  
Sigurdson, L.  
Wright, J.

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Mr. Yao  
Deputy Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Arcand-Paul  
Ceci  
Cyr  
Dach  
Gray  
Johnson  
Stephan  
Wiebe

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Mr. Sabir  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
de Jonge  
Haji  
Lovely  
Lunty  
McDougall  
Renaud  
Schmidt

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Rowswell  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt  
Al-Guneid  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Dyck  
Eggen  
Hunter  
McDougall  
Sinclair  
Sweet

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 6, 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 *O Canada* by Ms Jacqueline Biollo. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

#### Hon. Members:

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

### Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

**The Speaker:** The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be 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 further acknowledge that the province of Alberta also exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we have a number of special visitors today joining us in the Speaker's gallery. They are from the Council of State Governments West. CSG West provides state legislators with valuable relationship-building and professional growth opportunities through a variety of member-driven, regionally focused programs and services. Today we are joined by the CSG West chair from Oregon state, Senator Bill Hansell, and chair-elect Representative Mike Yin from Wyoming. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we have a number of guests also joining us here as guests of the Speaker. Today we were led in the singing by a splendid rendition of *O Canada* by Ms Jacqueline Biollo. Jacqueline began singing and performing early in her life and has been involved in theatrical performances for over 40 years. When she isn't singing, she's an adjudicator in the world of theatre, has worked as a street reporter with Arts Talk TV and as a regular political panelist on CTV, CBC, and other national news stations. She is joined today by her son Noah and mom – I'm sorry; I forgot

your name. But please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Lastly, as guests of the Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce members of the public service joining us in the gallery today. They are participating in a full-day public service orientation program which explores the legislative, budgetary, and committee processes. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has a school to introduce.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you 65 students from Good Shepherd school from my constituency of Edmonton-McClung, who are accompanied by grade 6 teachers Jeffrey Fernandes and Thomas Senior and educational assistant Debbie Wiggins plus seven other highly valued parent chaperones. Good Shepherd, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has a school.

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I rise to have us all welcome the fabulous students from St. Elizabeth Seton school. I was pleased to have some time to spend with them today, and their questions are fabulous. They will be much-informed voters. I really appreciate the time that I could spend with them. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you my guests from the veterinary professional community, who are strong advocates for veterinarians and vet techs in Alberta: Dr. Serge Chalhoub, Dr. Kurach, Dr. Bergman, Dr. Weller, Vanessa George, and Pam Cholak. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you the following individuals who attended the veterans mental health summit earlier today: from the Canadian Mental Health Association, Jason Trenholm and Mara Grunau; and from the veterans working group, Joe MacAulay, Rob Sipes, and Tom McIntyre. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you three amazing individuals who made today's veterans mental health summit a success: Teri-Anne Bowyer, Della Burkitt, and Ella Rausch – please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House – and Gerry from the Legion, who also did a great presentation today. Thank you for your hard work on bringing so much focus to this important issue.

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

**Mr. Dyck:** Excellent. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you intervarsity fuel systems. They produce low-carbon synthetic gasoline. They're making just over a billion-dollar investment here in Alberta, coming hopefully soon. I want to introduce their CEO, Larry Parks, and his leadership team, David Young and Deric Orton. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you 20 summer interns who have joined our government this summer to support the vital work that we do on behalf of Albertans. Their commitment, their professionalism, and talent are clearly demonstrating that Alberta's future is bright. I'd like to ask them to please rise and enjoy the welcome from this Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

**Mr. Hunter:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House Edgar Ruiz, the director for the CSG West office; Martha Castañeda, director of policy and international programs, CSG West office; Tim Olsen, director of U.S. and Latin America international relations; Evan Surridge, also in that same department; and Andrew Fisher, director of the U.S. West office. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**Mr. Rowswell:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly from the veterans mental health summit we had today: Chuck Isaacs, the Aboriginal veterans association; the Veterans Association Food Bank Calgary, David Kidd; and from the Legion, Gerry Finlay. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you Chief Billy-Joe Tuccaro and members of the Mikisew Cree First Nation. I had a great meeting with them this morning, and they will be celebrating their 125th year as signatory to Treaty 8 this year. I want to congratulate them on this milestone and look forward to continuing our strengthening relationship. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

### Members' Statements

#### Provincial Passenger Rail Plan

**Mr. Wiebe:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to an important initiative that has the power to shape the future of our province, the development of Alberta's passenger rail master plan. As we build this bold vision, we honour the legacy of our past while embracing opportunities for tomorrow. From the moment the first railway laid its tracks across our province, Alberta has been propelled forward by the promise of growth and connectivity. The iron rails that cross our landscape have been more than just conduits for commerce. They have connected communities, facilitated trade, and fuelled economic growth, laying the foundation for the vibrant Alberta that we know today.

But as Alberta's population grows and our communities expand, we recognize that the transportation needs of our province are also evolving. This comprehensive plan will not only assess the feasibility of passenger rail in our province; it will also identify concrete actions that can be taken now and into the future to build optimal rail systems for Alberta. But our vision extends beyond just infrastructure. We envision a rail network that not only connects major cities but also serves as a catalyst for efficiency, economic development, and job creation. We see a future where passenger rail is not just a mode of transportation but a symbol of progress and possibility.

As we embark on this journey, we recognize that we cannot do it alone. We must engage with Albertans, municipalities, Indigenous communities, and the private sector to ensure that our vision is collaborative and reflective of the needs of our province.

I'm excited to watch this plan take shape and to witness the transformative impact it will have on the lives of Albertans. There is much work ahead of us, and I am confident that together we will build the rail network that Albertans deserve, one that will propel us into a future of prosperity and connectivity.

Thank you.

### Red Dress Day

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked Red Dress Day. This House has heard the history of this day many times, but not once has this House ever acknowledged the women that we know about and who have been reported by media as having gone missing or been murdered in Alberta. Today I want to speak power to the names of those women so we never ever forget them and commit to no more stolen sisters, brothers, and nonbinary kin.

Alannah Cardinal, Amber Tuccaro, Annette Holywhiteman, Bernadette Ahenakew, Bonnie Jack, Brittany Bearspaw, Caralyn King, Chantelle Bushie, Cheryl Black, Christine Cardinal, Cindy Gladue, Deanna Bellerose, Delena Lefthand Dixon, Delores Brower, Desiree Oldwoman, Edna Bernard, Elaine Alook, Freda Goodrunning, Gloria Black Plume, Gloria Gladue, Helene Ratfat, Jacqueline Crazybull, Janice Desjarlais, Jarita Naistus, Jeanette Cardinal, Jessica Cardinal, Joanne Ghostkeeper, Joey English, Joyce Hewitt, Juanita Cardinal, Judy Chescue, Justine Cochrane, Katie Ballantyne, Krystle Knott, Leanne Benwell, Leslie Talley, Linda Scott, Lori Kasprick, Lorilee Francis, Maggie Burke, Marie Desjarlais, Mary Kreiser, Mavis Mason, Michelle Hadwen, Misty Potts, Monica Cardinal, Pauline Brazeau, Philomene Lemay, Rachel Quinney, Rene Gunning, Rhonda Running Bird, Rose Decoteau, Roxanne Isadore, Ruth Cocks, Shelly Dene, Shirley Waquan, Stella St. Arnault, Terrie Dauphinais, Trudy Gopher, Violet Heathen, and all those who remain unreported or unknown. You are all our sisters, aunts, mothers, kokums, chapans, and nonbinary kin. Rest in power.

The work we do must always be to address missing and murdered Indigenous peoples as everyday work. Further, the work we do must include all women, especially trans women. This is nonnegotiable. This includes the work being done through the Premier's Council on MMIWG such as the implementation of the road map, which cannot be done if the government continues to attack two-spirit, gender-diverse, and trans people in this province.

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

### Veterinarians

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 27 was World Veterinary Day with the theme Veterinarians Are Essential Health Workers. The Camrose constituency is home to some of the most resilient, hard-working, and dedicated agriculture professionals in our province. My constituency is also home to thousands of livestock, equine, and companion animals. We are fortunate that the Camrose constituency is home to some of the very best stewards of animal care, veterinary professionals.

Alberta's veterinarians and technologists keep our animals healthy and our food supply safe and secure. They help us manage disease and ensure livelihoods are sustained. There are nearly 5,000 veterinary professionals in Alberta who need our continued

recognition to educate, attract, and retain the best veterinary professionals for Alberta. I have heard the concerns of my constituents who require timely access to veterinary care.

They also want their children to have the chance to pursue veterinary education. I want these things too, Mr. Speaker. That's why I'm proud of our government for supporting the doubling of the seats at the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. I commend Dean Weller, the UCVM dean, for keeping this project on time and on budget. I also want to commend the UCVM team for their work on the student selection process, that provides opportunities for rural students to pursue their dream of obtaining their vet education right here in Alberta. With Alberta retaining 75 per cent of UCVM graduates, it's safe to say that we are on the right track.

I also want to thank the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association for its leadership in attracting an international workforce and creating an expanded scope of practice for technologists. These will be key steps in addressing veterinarian and vet tech shortages.

Veterinary professionals are critical to Alberta's economy. Thank you for the work that you do.

### Life Leases

**Ms Renaud:** In early May 2021 a massive fire ripped through Citadel Mews St. Albert, a huge Christenson building, displacing 160 seniors, many life lease holders. One year later, thanks to excellent reporting by the St. Albert *Gazette*, we learned exactly how those displaced seniors with Christenson life leases were treated. St. Albert life lease holders that moved to other Christenson developments received their money back after many months because they moved into other Christenson developments. Some eventually got their money back minus a huge release fee charged by Christenson because they chose to move elsewhere or into long-term care. Still, the burned-out building sat vacant.

The *Gazette* reported a year after the fire that Greg Christenson said, "We're anxious to get going and we're very close... We didn't think it would take this long, obviously." That was 2022. Here we are in May 2024, three years since the fire, and the developer landlord has not honoured all of the life leases of the St. Albert building and eight other buildings around Alberta. Over 180 seniors have been owed millions for years, and they've all received empty promises.

Sadly, though, the UCP's answer to this evolving housing disaster, that looks alarmingly like a Ponzi scheme, is to introduce toothless legislation that does nothing to correct the harms and the loopholes we continue to witness. No real consumer protection for seniors, only a promise that all will be fixed in regulation. Sound familiar?

The government has met Christenson 11 times, nine times directly with the minister, and after three years of zero progress by this minister we get toothless legislation. Three years later we have weak consumer protection for seniors and poor and lopsided consultation, as evidenced by the legislation.

What should alarm all Albertans: the UCP have made no moves to investigate this long-time UCP donor, Greg Christenson. But my message to all those seniors and families is: the Alberta NDP will not stop fighting for you until each one of you is made whole.

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

### Mental Health Summit for Veterans

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a pleasure to serve as the government of Alberta's military liaison, a role dedicated to

bridging the gap between government services and those who have stepped forward to protect our country and our way of life. The role of the military liaison is one of great honour, but it takes immense and serious commitment and focus. My goal is to do right by those who have sacrificed so much for our province and our country. Since I was appointed to this role, I've dedicated my time to meeting with our veterans, active duty members, their families, and our veteran service organizations from across the province.

Today in the Legislature we held our first veterans mental health summit, with representatives from nearly 20 organizations and from the ministries of Mental Health and Addiction, Public Safety and Emergency Services, and Seniors, Community and Social Services. We met with, listened to, and shared how we as a community are helping to close the gaps in services for our Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans.

Mr. Speaker, when our veterans come home and retire from active duty, there are many challenges that come along with returning to civilian life. Our active duty members and our veterans give so much, and we owe each of them a great debt. There is so much amazing work happening in our province's veteran-focused nonprofits and organizations, and it can still feel hard for some to get connected to the resources they need. That is why this summit was so important. It is about building a stronger community network supporting our veterans. Each veterans group does incredible work. I look to the amazing work of The Newly Institute, who helps with PTSD treatment; Homes for Heroes, who helps provide transitional housing; Veterans Affairs Canada and the legion have many resources and programs in place to help veterans with a hand up to get back on their feet. And there are so many more.

Mr. Speaker, this government remains committed to supporting our veterans, and it is my hope to showcase the amazing work of the organizations that operate in this space.

Thank you.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

### Bill 20

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said just two years ago that she thought our big problem was that, quote, we've centralized all the power in the hands of a leader, end quote. She concluded that because of that, good local decisions weren't being made. To the Premier: what has happened in the last two years? She went from saying that centralized power was the problem to pushing ahead with legislation like Bill 18 and Bill 20 that takes all the power for herself. Can the Premier admit she and her government have become the big problem she once warned about?

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question, and my advice is that the hon. member read the bills. Municipalities have a very important role to play in Alberta. They make important decisions, and bills 18 and 20 are there to make sure that things stay that way. Amongst other things, Bill 18 is to make sure they get the support in Alberta that municipalities across the rest of Canada get, and Bill 20 modernizes and brings up to date several things that need to be improved.

**Ms Gray:** I'm happy to tell the minister that I read the bill, that municipalities read the bill, and it is a power grab.

In the same clip from two years ago the not-yet Premier also said that she admires rural Alberta municipal elections. She said that local elected officials have the best sense of what's going on. She said that they are way more in touch than full-time partisan leaders. To the Premier I ask again: what happened? How can she look Albertans in the eye and not admit that Bill 20 undermines local democracy and takes away local voices? [interjections]

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

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member said that the member read the bill but apparently missed the part where the bill guarantees that local elections will remain local. Even in the big cities, if there is a party, there will be no connection allowed between a provincial or federal . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has the call.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, I know they don't want the answer, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is that the bill makes it clear that the federal and provincial parties can have no connection with a local municipal party, so local elections remain local. Again, I would hope the other folks would maybe read the bill again.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, it's clear how we got Bill 20: the minister and that government are incapable of listening. There was no consultation, and there are no changes to this bill that will make it okay. The Premier is giving herself brand new powers and control, taking democratic rights away from Albertans. To the Premier: she can ignore what we're saying, what municipal leaders are saying, what Albertans are saying, what everyone interested in defending democracy is saying, but how can she blatantly reject the words she said herself? Is there a single statement she's ever made in the election that she intends to follow through on?

**Mr. McIver:** Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member knows that under the Constitution of Canada a hundred per cent of the authority over legislation on municipalities rests with the province. There are no new powers in this bill. There are some changes to the way those powers are exercised. Again, the hon. member . . . [interjections]

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

**Mr. McIver:** Again, Mr. Speaker, I'll request a third time that the hon. member read the bill and actually pay attention to what's in there, because three questions in a row the hon. member has been wrong about what is in the bill. I'll be happy to talk much more about that.

**Member Loyola:** Try reading your own bill.

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie will come to order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Ready, shoot, and then aim: that's the UCP way, but it's no way to run a government. The UCP tabled Bill 20 with no consultations whatsoever. Then the minister went out and tried to defend it over and over and over again. He said that they were just making existing powers – and I quote – easier to access. But now he's saying that they will consult municipalities and amend the bill. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: did he even believe what he was saying to Albertans while he tried to defend this disastrous bill?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised and grateful that the hon. member quoted me accurately. I meant what I said, and at least what I said was accurate. We did two consultations over the last couple of years with municipalities that led up to this bill, and when we introduced the bill, we also committed to consulting on all the regulations with the municipalities. It's a promise we made, a promise we fully intend to keep, and I think Albertans will be well served by this piece of legislation. Remember that the hon. members across didn't do very well when they were regulating municipalities. [interjections]

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

**Mr. Sabir:** Mr. Speaker, the minister could not explain why they were banning automated voting equipment. He couldn't answer basic, simple questions about why they want the power to fire councillors. At one point the minister said, and I will quote him accurately: some Albertans believe they can be a target for fraud. Since the Minister of Municipal Affairs says that he doesn't agree with those people with conspiracy theories, why is he letting them write this legislation?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, you know what's most important about any election, Mr. Speaker? That the public accepts the results a couple of days after the election. Municipalities have such important decisions to make, such important work to do. The best way to make sure that the public respects those . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs is the one with the call.

**Mr. McIver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They don't want to hear. They ask a question; they don't want to hear the answer.

The best way to make sure that the public respects those municipal councillors making those important decisions is to have full confidence that the ones declared the winner are the winner. The time it takes to count the ballots is less important. The cost of it is less important. This is the price of democracy, Mr. Speaker. We support democracy. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Sabir:** Mr. Speaker, vote tabulators were used in the provincial election, too, so backing conspiracy theories against them calls their own government election into question.

Bill 20 is worse than what they say they might change. Municipalities are still worried about opening the door to big money and cabinet getting the power to kick out councillors and nullify their bylaws. To the minister: why won't he just do what he knows has to be done and scrap Bill 20? [interjections]

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

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, in one question the hon. member said that the people that don't like vote counters are conspiracy theorists, and in his next question he says that he doesn't trust the results of a recent election because it had tabulators. It can't be both. The folks over there need to make up their minds, but the legislation is clear.

Let me just say that when they talk about the ability to dismiss councillors, it was the leader of the party across that after the last municipal election was demanding, not the cabinet, that I fire a municipal councillor. They say that they don't want it now, but they sure wanted it a year ago. [interjections]

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

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



### Renewable Energy Development

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Mr. Speaker, it feels like *Groundhog Day*. For months we've told the UCP that their new, vague, arbitrary rules on renewables will impact new investments in Alberta's rural economy. TransAlta announced that it's shelving one project and halting three others due to the UCP's new rules. We told this government they are shaking investor confidence in our province, and we see proof of that in TransAlta's announcement. Can the Premier list how many jobs and how much investment TransAlta's cancellation, caused by this government's random rules on renewables, will cost . . .

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that most of those projects are actually on hold pending the outcome of our restructured energy market, which TransAlta is a big factor in helping us develop, making sure that we get it right. We are listening to industry. They are happy to work with our government. We want to see the right projects go ahead for the right balance for Albertans, to make sure we provide and continue to provide them the most affordable, reliable, and sustainable electrical generation this province can get.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** The UCP pressured the CEO of the independent Electric System Operator to support the UCP's ban on renewables and ordered him to support the minister. The operator's top official was opposed to the UCP's moratorium, saying that it would send the industry into a tailspin and send a closed-for-business message. Yet the Premier said that it was the system operator that asked for the renewables ban. Why did the UCP claim that the operator called for the ban on renewables when that was not anywhere close to being true?

2:00

**Mr. Neudorf:** When coming into this role, I was given a mandate letter to make sure that we worked on the electricity grid and its system. We've talked to all of our regulators, had many conversations with them. In fact, it was the board chair of our AESO regulator that suggested that a pause could be utilized. It's been utilized in many other jurisdictions. California put a one-year pause in place, Ottawa put a pause in place, all to address the same issues that we're finding here in Alberta, to work on reliability, to work on connectivity, and to make sure that we prioritize agricultural lands across the province.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Actually, FOIP documents show that the system operator's board chair, who was appointed by the UCP, pressured the operator's CEO to support the minister to pursue the ban on renewables. The board chair said: "I told him to support the Minister without reservation. Nothing good will happen if the Minister feels that the [system operator] is not behind the decision." The Premier is now claiming the decision was made after five people nodded at her. This would be laughable if it wasn't tragic. Will the government stop making up stories?

**Mr. Neudorf:** Again, we have our mandate in our department to make sure we provide electricity at a sustainable and reliable and affordable level. AESO and the AUC also have their regulated mandates. They did their job; we did our job. They worked with their board chairs. We had lots of conversations to make sure that we serve Albertans. We're doing the work that the NDP failed to do when they disastrously left coal, didn't have a plan in place, and then our system started to go volatile all over the place. We're doing

the work that they failed to do, and we're serving Albertans in the best way we can.

### Bill 20 (continued)

**Mr. Kasawski:** Bill 20 threatens Alberta's democracy, and it's completely unnecessary. Albertans are shocked. Mayors, both rural and urban, feel blindsided, and key stakeholders like Alberta Municipalities and Rural Municipalities of Alberta have been outspoken opponents of this bill. It would seem, from the overwhelming backlash against Bill 20, that the UCP didn't talk to many people before the bill was introduced. Why did the Premier sign off on this poorly thought-out bill? Does she think consultation is not an important part of drafting legislation?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, I'm happy to answer the question again. We did two consultations over a couple of years recently. Mr. Speaker, we continue to talk to municipalities . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. The minister listened to the question. I think it's reasonable that the Speaker should be able to hear the answer.

The hon. the minister.

**Mr. McIver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have committed to working closely with the municipalities on the regulations. It's odd that the member across would quote the president of Alberta Municipalities in a recent press conference. He was asked twice whether the bill should be thrown out, and twice he said no. He said that he would like to see some amendments. We're working with him and other municipal leaders on what those amendments might be, but he made it clear he doesn't want the bill tossed out because there's too much good in it.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Alberta Municipalities called this bill a power grab, and RMA called the bill an affront to democracy. This certainly is not a ringing endorsement from two of the biggest municipal stakeholders in the province. Alberta has over 330 municipalities, and they represent them. Alberta Municipalities have not heard one word from the government on consultation even though the Premier said that they would consult on amendments. They represent 80 per cent of Alberta. Does the Premier think their opinions are not important, or did she not want to hear what they had to say?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, as usual the hon. member is a day late and a dollar short, Mr. Speaker. In the last few days I've spoken with the president of Alberta Municipalities. I've spoken with the president of RMA. I've spoken to the mayor of Calgary. I've spoken to the mayor of Edmonton. I've spoken to the president of Alberta's mid-sized municipalities. The municipalities want a few amendments. We're working with them on those, and we think we're going to land in a good place. The folks on that side should actually listen up, and they might be along with us when this ends.

**Mr. Kasawski:** As of the start of question period they both confirmed they have not had consultation on amendments.

Two years ago the Premier loved to sing the praises of Alberta's nonpartisan municipalities. Today, however, Bill 20 would open the door to partisanship in municipal politics. Summer might be just around the corner, Mr. Speaker, but the last I checked, politicians can't wear flip-flops in the Legislature. Since the UCP refuses to consult with important stakeholders, will the Premier look in a mirror and consult with her past self? Maybe there she'll find a bit

of respect for the great work municipalities do and some good sense to let them do their job.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member again needs to do some research. In the last election a group called Calgary's progressive future gave \$1.6 million to nine councillors. Sure sounds like a political party to me. The *Edmonton Journal* had a complaint in one of their columns about \$58,000 from business to some of Edmonton's incoming city councillors. If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck, it might be a duck.

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

### Wildfire Season Preparation

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I received an e-mail from a grade 6 student named Charlotte at Soraya Hafez school, who's been assigned an essay on bringing hope to my community. Charlotte has decided she would like to write an essay on wildfire and keeping communities safe, so she has some questions for the government. These are Charlotte's questions. To the minister: given that we saw record-setting wildfire last year and are currently experiencing drought conditions, how is the government prepared for this wildfire season as compared to last year?

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

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question, and especially thanks to Charlotte for the question. As far as what we're doing differently this year, we have restarted our fire season early this year. We were prepared earlier by having our crews trained and ready to go. We had a wildfire prevention public campaign to make sure that people know the dangers of wildfire within their communities. We've added additional firefighters going into this season. Again, we've done a lot of different things as we move forward into this season. We've prepared our crews. We've made sure that we've had additional equipment ready to go. Again, we're ready for this fire season.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Charlotte and her grade 6 student classmates are watching virtually today and given that I appreciate the minister working with my office to make sure Charlotte has the answer she needs to write her essay, again to the minister. Given that evacuation is an unfortunate part of wildfire season and given that the previous fire season saw thousands of Albertans sent to emergency evacuation sites, the students in my riding are asking: what will happen to the people who lose their homes, and where will they go? How many people lost their homes last year, and how many have already lost their homes this year?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much, and thank you to Charlotte for that question. Of course, in a critical incident that may take place in the province of Alberta, the province works in co-ordination with the municipality to provide evacuation services, and we can provide financial assistance to evacuees who are displaced from their homes. In 2023, Mr. Speaker, approximately 260 homes were actually damaged or destroyed. This includes homes on First Nations and Métis settlements, and currently, to this date in this fire season, there have actually been no homes that have been destroyed, and that is to the great work of the people at forestry and the great

work at Alberta Emergency Management for the great work they did in preparing for this upcoming fire season.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Charlotte is in grade 6 and she knows how important it is to go to school and given that many students across Alberta have had their learning disrupted due to wildfire evacuations and given that over 12,000 students were learning in new settings after the evacuation of Fort McMurray and over 16,000 students had their learning impacted by wildfire last May, Charlotte asks: evacuations impact students' access to education; how will students who are evacuated be able to go to school? How has students' access to education been considered as part of the evacuation plan?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let me say a thank you to Charlotte and the entire grade 6 class for watching today and being active and engaged citizens. I think that's really important, and I want to thank them for that.

Within the Ministry of Education, of course, our top priority is to make sure that our students are learning at all times. Of course, that can be really challenging and difficult in a wildfire situation. One of the things that we do is that we work very carefully with our school boards, and we do talk to them when there is an emergency to see what options are best, how we can work with them to support learning. There are, of course, online opportunities, there are opportunities with other school divisions, but we do talk with your local school board to figure out the best solution.

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

### 2:10 Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Strategies

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Capital Power announced that it would be stopping its CCUS Genesee project due largely to the federal government's mixed messaging that caused uncertainty across the Canadian market. The emissions reduction potential of these projects was enormous, so it is a shame to see it not go forward because of Ottawa. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: can you please explain to this House how Ottawa's approach to the environment is hurting Alberta's potential?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is exactly right in her question. Alberta is reducing emissions while growing the economy and powering the world. We could be doing even more if the federal government would start helping and stop holding us back. Just as the member said, Capital Power had to stop its Genesee project, a project that could have reduced 3 million tonnes of emissions every single year, but instead of helping, the federal government has rushed to layer on costly rules and regulations while slow-walking the incentives needed for emissions reduction projects in Alberta. They could support us in industry, but instead they delay and scare away the true investments that we need.

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

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal government has missed every single emissions target they've ever set and further given that the federal policies such as the carbon tax and other antiresource legislation are hurting the investments

needed for emissions reduction, can the minister please tell this House what Alberta is doing to push back against the hypocritical climate activists in Ottawa? [interjections]

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

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unlike when the members opposite were in government, we are standing up for Alberta, defending the Constitution, and working to reduce emissions and grow our economy. We've invested more than \$1.6 billion into emissions reduction technology since 2019, launched the Alberta carbon capture incentive program, and have two of the largest CCUS facilities in the world operating right here. We are part of the solution, not just for Canada but for the world. Only the Liberal-NDP alliance would choose to increase energy production in high-polluting countries like China and Russia instead of supporting our Canadian . . .

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

**Ms Pitt:** Mr. Speaker, given that the federal government seeks to impose dangerous rules and regulations on our electricity grid, an unconstitutional production cap, and a ridiculous net-zero vehicle mandate, which will not reduce emissions but will only increase costs for families and businesses everywhere, can the minister please explain to this House how Alberta continues to lead the way on emissions reduction technology and innovation with or without federal support?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is reducing emissions, and we are doing it with made-in-Alberta innovation and expertise while working alongside industry without jeopardizing jobs in our economy and, of course, while supporting our world-class energy industry. For three years we've been waiting for Ottawa to put its CCUS investment tax credit in place, and of course we are still waiting, but companies can go ahead online today and apply for preapproval for funding through our Alberta carbon capture incentive program. We've invested in SMRs, hydrogen, geothermal, CCUS, and more, and later this week we'll have even more to announce.

#### Low-income Transit Pass Program

**Member Ceci:** For the last five years Albertans have come to see that this government doesn't give low-income Albertans the respect they deserve. They deindexed their benefits, claiming it wouldn't be onerous. They changed benefit payment dates, not caring about the impact it would have on household budgets, and only last week the government without warning announced that they would be defunding low-income transit passes, impacting tens of thousands in Calgary and Edmonton, and then after a backlash stated that they would backtrack. Will the minister apologize to those impacted and promise that this will never happen again?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, to be very clear, Alberta's low-income transit pass programs all remain in place. In fact, this government is investing almost 70-some million dollars in transportation initiatives across the cities of Calgary and Edmonton when it comes to low-income transit. However, there were some pilot projects that were taking place both in Calgary and Edmonton that were being looked at. That was a mistake because it would have had a significant impact on the city of Calgary's and the city of Edmonton's programs, which is why I have reinstated that funding

and will work to be able to make sure that it can be maintained going forward. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Member Ceci:** Given that in his initial effort to spin this cruel cut, the minister, in a statement released from his own office, stated that it wasn't his government's job to invest in transit and given that the minister now claims that he was unaware of this cut, given that he stated that he told his department that programs for low-income transit users were one area they could consider when looking for cuts, given that the minister claims that the Premier told him to gut check this decision and given that the minister admitted that he was wrong, what steps has he taken to make sure he doesn't accidentally cut this program again?

**Mr. Nixon:** To be clear, Mr. Speaker, the program in question was a pilot temporary program. Having said that, though, it certainly was a mistake to do that at this time of the budget process because of its impact on cities and the inability of them to be able to prepare to be able to pay for their own program, which is why we've reinstated it for the year. We're going to make sure that all low-income transit pass programs can be maintained going forward, but we will also be doing that in a way that provides permanency to the program and is fair to all municipalities, both rural and urban.

**Member Ceci:** Given that over 100,000 low-income passes were issued in Calgary between January and March of this year and given that the number of passes issued has been increasing to 27 per cent year over year and given that the Premier mused that the program could be phased out, leaving many worried that despite the minister's backtracking on this program it's not safe entirely, and given that Albertans who rely on this pass to get to work, to get groceries, and live their lives deserve clarity, can the minister confirm yes or no that this program will absolutely not be phased out, will continue to be there for people who are low income?

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, I can confirm for sure that our low-income pass programs of the Alberta government are not going to be phased out. These are Calgary and Edmonton's programs that we are providing subsidies for at the moment. We are going to continue working with Calgary and Edmonton about how we make sure that funding can be long term and sustainable for their two programs but also fair to all municipalities, not just our two largest cities. We'll make sure that we get that right, but we will also do it in such a way that we can make sure that both the Calgary and Edmonton low-income transit pass will continue for many years to come.

#### Transgender Youth Policy

**Member Tejada:** Mr. Speaker, the AHS sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, SOGIE, advisory board stands as a vital lifeline for inclusive health care, offering evidence-based recommendations to safeguard marginalized communities. It was a blow when the UCP callously sidelined their input, barreling ahead with harmful policies that will affect transgender youth. How can this government justify its arrogant dismissal of the AHS advisory group's expertise, particularly when vulnerable youth are impacted?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that Alberta Health Services continues to value the voices of all individuals in this group. I will continue to work with AHS to make sure that the voices of all LGBTQ2S-plus individuals are heard and are represented. As we build forward on the advisory councils that are being stood up across the province, we know those voices are important. They will be represented.

**Member Tejada:** More councils, no listening.

Given the shock and disbelief from the SOGIE council in the face of this government's proposed policies for transgender youth one can't help but wonder why the government feels like it can disregard the insights of those most knowledgeable about 2SLGBTQIA-plus needs and given that this government is sidelining voices that are crucial to addressing the health needs of this community and not respecting the lived experiences and expertise of those directly affected, why does the government persist in prioritizing their own agenda over the well-being of Alberta's trans youth?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question. Our government will be working on policies that will create greater clarity around gender-affirming surgeries for minors. This work will support transgender children and teens grappling with the complex feelings and emotions they are experiencing so they can make informed decisions once they become adults. We believe that parents need to be informed and be part of the journey with their young people, so absolutely we are going to make sure that the policies that are put in place respect parents as decision-makers and valuable partners in their children's lives.

**The Speaker:** There are many ways to ask a question without the use of a preamble. I encourage the member to do so now.

**Member Tejada:** Given that the UCP's harmful transgender policies have sparked widespread concern and criticism, particularly due to the disregard for evidence-based guidance and reliance on ideological agendas, and given that this government needs to commit to prioritizing evidence over ideology and commit to genuine consultation with health professionals and advisory bodies – it's time to put the well-being of marginalized communities first, ensuring that policies are grounded in facts and expert recommendations and not political rhetoric – will they step up and do the right thing?

2:20

**Member LaGrange:** We are absolutely stepping up to do the right thing, Mr. Speaker, and the right thing is to look at other countries that have actually looked at these policies and are changing course. I look at the Cass report by Dr. Hilary Cass, that was appointed by the NHS in England, and what they have shown is that, in fact, we have to look at these policies because they are doing harm to young people. They have gone away from providing the hormone therapy for children, and other countries are following suit. They've been on this journey longer than we have.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a question to ask.

### Immigration Nominations and Settlement Supports

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I originally came to Alberta from Ukraine, eventually settling in Parkland county about 20 years ago. I came here to attend a program at NAIT and for the

job opportunities in this province. Today many key sectors face worker shortages, leaving important roles empty. To the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism: what is the government doing to attract new Albertans here to fill these roles?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Our government continues to grow the economy, address labour gaps, and promote Alberta as Canada's top destination for jobs. The Alberta advantage immigration program strengthens and grows our economy by attracting talented in-demand workers to fill our gaps as well as entrepreneurs who want to start and grow a business in this province. We created eight specific streams and pathways to address labour shortages in this province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Alberta can nominate people for permanent residency in our province and given that the federal government determines the number of nominees each Canadian province receives, can the same minister tell this Assembly how this government works to ensure Alberta's allocation of permanent residency nominations? [interjections]

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

The only one with the call is the minister.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for a great question again. Despite our efforts to advocate for increased nominations from the federal government, we were disappointed to find that this year we did not receive the anticipated increase in nominations for permanent residency. In February 2023 we successfully secured a 50 per cent increase to 9,750 nominations. However, the lack of increase this year is unacceptable. We will not waver in our determination to continue pushing the federal government to provide us with the necessary nominations to meet the needs of our province and support our economic growth.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that most Alberta newcomers choose to settle in major urban cities like Edmonton and Calgary and given that the rural constituencies like my own in Drayton Valley-Devon have vacancies that these newcomers could fill, could the same minister explain how the government of Alberta is working to make newcomers aware of the opportunities in rural Alberta?

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

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his advocacy for his area. Rural communities are a critical part of Alberta and its economy. Alberta's government supports rural economic growth by helping address labour gaps to ensure prosperous communities. We have recently created immigration streams such as the rural renewal stream, rural entrepreneur stream in addition to our existing farm stream. Our government is committed to the economic growth of our province by attracting skilled workers and entrepreneurs to every corner of this province as Alberta remains the land of opportunity for us.

**Bill 20**  
(continued)

**Mr. Eggen:** Mr. Speaker, the feedback from across Alberta to this government's authoritarian Bill 20 is clear. Okotoks mayor Tanya Thorn said: I am genuinely concerned about this attack on democracy. Red Deer mayor Ken Johnston: this would take away from the public's right to exercise their own decisions over council and mayor. The mayor of Didsbury, Rhonda Hunter, said: overruling municipal bylaw authority calls into question the integrity of a municipal council. So to the minister: did he actually speak to any of these mayors this weekend to see just how much of a disaster . . .

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

**Mr. McIver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listen, I will say that when the NDP was in government, they actually dismissed a council, and it was overturned in court. When they were in government, they passed a law that they said would take the big money and the dark money out of municipal politics. Ever since then the money has got bigger and bigger and bigger, and now we don't know who it's coming from because it's all going through third-party advertisers and PACs. Those folks over there shouldn't be lecturing anybody on how to make elections more transparent because they missed the mark.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the councillor from Bonnyville said that no one wanted to see this Bill 20, given that the mayor of Diamond Valley called this whole thing very, very scary when a provincial body is coming in with the ability to overrule municipal bylaws, that the reeve of Foothills county asked, "How much overreach does this government want?" why is this minister still proceeding with Bill 20, that has been roundly rejected across the province by mayors, councillors, and Reeves from Alberta communities that they represent?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, our government just put a bill on the table here to overrule Calgary's ability to overcharge on electricity by a great amount, and most people were pretty happy with that. At the end of COVID we had to overrule Edmonton when they decided to be the Health department and add a masking bylaw when the Health department took it off. These are the situations when government will use this authority, and there are two good examples when the population was very much onside. That's the way we intend to use the authority in the future, responsibly, unlike the folks across.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that, clearly, this government has not consulted on Bill 20 – the only voices championing this authoritarian bill are the Premier's pals in Take Back Alberta – and given that this one column has called the bill "the UCP's underhanded and self-interested actions," don't want the UCP to have more power to fire councillors and mayors that the Premier doesn't like, don't want the UCP overruling locally made decisions, why won't this minister turn on his office paper shredder, do the right thing, and shred Bill 20 now?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, you never want to dismiss a council or councillors. We had to do that in the recent past, and I think it's well roundly accepted as the right decision, but when the NDP were in government and they dismissed a council, it was overturned in court. I'm not sure we should be getting advice from the folks across there. They proved time and time again they weren't up to the job; they weren't able to execute on these things

responsibly. We on the other side: we will be much more careful, as we have been, which is why our decisions haven't been overturned and theirs have. [interjections]

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

**Promotion of Alberta's Energy Industry**

**Mr. Sinclair:** Mr. Speaker, just recently this House welcomed President Duda and the First Lady of Poland to discuss European energy security and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. In addition to their visit, our government and our Premier have been proactively connecting with many world leaders and industry leaders around the globe to promote the future of energy production in Alberta, especially important since our out-of-touch Prime Minister says there's no business case to our allies, like Germany, when they come calling for our natural gas. Could the Minister of Energy and Minerals please outline these international partnerships with world leaders and how they're helping to strengthen Alberta's energy security?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, it is true. Alberta has the energy to share with the world. We have low-cost natural gas, we have incredible products like oil sands, yet Canada keeps turning our allies and trading partners away. We can't do that anymore. We have to make sure that they understand that Alberta is energy and energy is Alberta. TMX is good. Coastal GasLink is good. But it's not enough. We need the federal government to come to the table with Alberta, sit down, and let's talk about solutions on making sure that we have a regulatory process and a capital investment climate that the world comes to. Alberta is ready.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta has been a world leader in energy trade, exporting more of our energy resources to the United States than Saudi Arabia, Mexico, and Iraq combined, further given that Alberta has almost 170 billion barrels of proven reserves in our oil sands, five times more than the United States, could the same minister please outline how Canada plans to leverage our international partnerships to export more of our Alberta energy to further support our already booming economy and to ensure we protect all the amazing jobs, especially since both myself and this hon. minister are blessed with oil and gas in our riding? Of course, he already knows the north remembers.

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, the member is right. More Alberta gas and oil to the world is better for the world. Canada has many trading partners that are thirsty for our energy products, Mr. Speaker. We have so many opportunities to bring those products to tidewater. We have so many opportunities to eliminate energy poverty throughout the world. All people need to do is look at Alberta as far as solving that energy solution for the world. Making the world a better place is what Alberta energy can do, and that's what this government, this Premier is going to do, exactly that. The world is better with more Alberta energy.

2:30

**Mr. Sinclair:** Mr. Speaker, given the exciting opportunities and rising demand for lower emissions energy and given Alberta's position as a leader not only in natural gas but also in emergent industries in technologies such as hydrogen, carbon capture, and small modular nuclear reactors, further given that the NDP-Liberal alliance in Ottawa continues to try and destroy our energy industry, which might be the most obvious example of biting the hand that feeds you, could the same minister please tell us how marketing our low-carbon energy resources such as natural gas and hydrogen to

our international trade partners helps our market as a whole? [interjections]

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

**Mr. Jean:** It is true, Mr. Speaker. The mother ship along with the two leaders and captains of the mother ship, the leader of the NDP and Justin Trudeau, have actually tried to destroy our economy through attacking energy, but we have not taken any lessons from them. The Montney formation has enough gas to power Canada for 100 years. We have the largest hydrogen producer in Canada and one of the world leaders in hydrogen. It's an exciting time to be part of the energy infrastructure in Alberta because Alberta is energy, and energy is Alberta. [interjections]

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

**Bill 20**  
(continued)

**Member Loyola:** Bill 20 reads like a playbook straight out of the past, complete with the return of corporate donations. While these contributions are capped at \$5,000, let's not kid ourselves. That's still a hefty chunk of change. Remember when the Alberta NDP banned these donations to curb big-money influence? Well, they're still banned in Alberta's provincial and federal elections, so why the double standard? Apparently, history is not a good enough teacher for this government. Can the minister explain to hard-working Albertans in a time of rising household costs why they should trust a system that seems tailor-made for special interests to call the shots?

**Mr. McIver:** Boy, that was courageous for the opposite folks to mention what they did in office. They passed Bill 1, An Act to Renew Local Democracy, which they said was going to take the big money and dark money out of politics. Mr. Speaker, exactly the opposite has happened: more corporate donations, more union donations going through TPAs, going through PACs. In the last Calgary election \$1.6 million from one TPA . . . [interjections]

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

**Mr. McIver:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Sorry; I couldn't hear you over the heckling either.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that since they did that, the money has gotten darker and bigger. Exactly the opposite of what the NDP promised has happened, and we're here to fix it. [interjections]

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

**Member Loyola:** Given that Bill 20 is a colossal misstep that is less about governing for the people and more about playing partisan politics and given that this bill will turn municipal governance into a chessboard for the UCP's political manoeuvres, how can the minister justify introducing a bill that is less about empowering communities and more about consolidating control all while erecting barriers to democratic engagement? In short, why is this government always prioritizing power grabs over the welfare of Albertans?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, after the last municipal election I can tell you that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo said: voters deserve, frankly, to know who has the deep pockets and indeed has given to these TPAs. The TPAs and the PACs didn't really exist till the NDP made it more possible. They didn't exist. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. McIver:** So remember, Mr. Speaker, that the legislation that's being fixed that those folks across were actually complaining about after the last municipal election – they seem to have forgotten that right now, but the legislation they put in place made the money bigger. They made it darker. This legislation will make it more transparent. You'll know who gave money and how much. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Member Loyola:** Given that with Bill 20 on the table concerns are mounting that local government elections will become a bidding war for influential corporations, sidelining the voices of ordinary voters, and given that this will essentially open the floodgates for big money to dictate the course of our local governance, contrary to the steadfast opposition voiced by Albertans time and time again, why is this government so keen on ushering big money back into local politics, disregarding the clear will of the people? Is it because they realize Albertans have had enough of their antics and now seek to silence them by drowning out their voices with . . .

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

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Speaker, the folks over there continue to ignore the facts. The facts are that in the last election in Calgary: \$1.6 million from one PAC to seven councillors. Sure sounds like big money. Sure sounds like a political party. All the things they say that they don't want, they actually put in place. Somebody's got to fix it. Somebody's got to make it more transparent. That's what we're doing with this bill. The folks over there blew it when they had a chance. This is one on the long list of things that we need to fix that the NDP left in a mess.

**Bill 18**

**Member Hoyle:** Bill 18 was introduced less than a few weeks ago, and we are continuing to see Albertans distrusting and losing hope in their own government. Universities, municipalities, and advocates across Alberta have all condemned this bill. The president of the U of A, Bill Flanagan, stated that the university is committed to truth and knowledge through teaching and research, not being influenced by political interference. Why is the minister ignoring Alberta's experts and their grave concerns?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to speak to President Flanagan last week – in fact, we touch base on a regular basis – and we talked about a number of things that are happening on campus, including the ramifications of Bill 18. I have said many times in this House that we are going to work with the postsecondary institutions as we develop regulations and policy, and we talked about potential exemptions as well. We do have a good working relationship, and we are going to make sure that their voices are reflected as we design these regulations. [interjections]

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

**Member Hoyle:** Given that this bill will jeopardize the basic principle of academic freedom, something researchers and those benefiting from their research rely on, and given that universities would be losing their freedoms and all condemn the direct overreach of Bill 18, stating that they will advocate for a regulatory framework that does not impede the ability to secure federal funding, will the minister drop this attack on academic freedom

now and reassure our world-class universities that they have nothing to fear?

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

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 2:37.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, Quebec has similar legislation in place, and they are number three in terms of getting federal transfers into the postsecondary. Again, we have spoken to the postsecondary presidents and the board chairs all across this province and reiterated that we're going to work together on this. We are talking about potential exemptions. In fact, the Premier and I had conversations about this and how this engagement is going to look like. I have reassured the postsecondary space that, again, this is going to be a collaborative exercise and we are going to make sure that they are more competitive than ever before.

**Member Hoyle:** Given that Bill 18 is not only causing harm to our local universities and attracting negative attention for Alberta from across the country and given that the president of the U of A has said that this bill will directly negatively impact their ability to uphold freedom of expression and conduct independent research and given that Albertans continue to mistrust this government, will the minister stop this attack today and provide hope for universities and drop partisan ideological gains?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, again, President Flanagan and I had a very fulsome conversation. We had a meeting of the minds. There's a lot going on on campus right now, and he is reassured that we're going to work together to make sure that we design these regulations and policies. And not only President Flanagan; I also spoke to President McCauley, President Jayas. We know that we're going to get through this, and we're actually going to take the opportunity to get more federal funding and to make sure that we get our fair share. In addition to the presidents, I also had a chance to talk to the board of governors, and everybody is on point that this is going to be about collaboration and co-operation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has a question.

### Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week marks the Canadian Mental Health Association's 73rd annual Mental Health Week. Like any other ailment, addiction and mental health challenges can have a devastating impact on individuals, families, and societies. People require help, and I'm proud to see our government stepping up with the proposed establishment of the Canadian centre of recovery excellence through Bill 17. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: how do you anticipate the Canadian centre of recovery excellence will impact mental health right across Alberta?

2:40

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the member for that question. It is Mental Health Week, and I couldn't be more proud of the work our government is doing to make sure that every single Albertan gets the help they deserve. Everyone, no matter what you're struggling with, deserves an opportunity at recovery. Bill 17, the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence Act, is a part of that solution. We're going to use

evidence-based policy-making where we can evaluate the programs that we're currently offering and also be able to look at: where do we need to double down on what's working and reform where we have gaps? It needs to be about the data, the evidence, so that we can have the absolute best for Albertans no matter who they are or where they come from.

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

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government has committed to expanding accessible and affordable mental health supports for all Albertans and further given that our government has taken steps to fund more than 10,000 additional addiction treatment spaces right across the province and doubling the funding to Alberta 211, to the same minister, who hails from Peace River: how are our government initiatives helping to ensure more Albertans from across the province have access to the mental health and addiction supports that they need?

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to that member for the question. [interjections] In spite of the members opposite chirping during the question and answer, it's an important topic. No matter who you are, where you come from, during this Mental Health Week you should know that you should have access and do have access in this province to mental health and addiction services. One of the steps we've taken is 211. No matter who you are, you can get access to 211 to immediate, same-day access to counselling, which is something that many people need in crisis situations. We've doubled that capacity. We've also increased capacity for CASA Mental Health classrooms across the province for a preventative piece as well. [interjections]

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

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Given that mental health and addiction concerns persist across North America and further given that the Canadian centre of recovery excellence will allow other jurisdictions to have the opportunity to access our research and findings, reinforcing Alberta's reputation as a national and international leader in recovery-oriented care, to the same minister: will the Canadian centre of recovery excellence improve overall mental health outcomes for people in Alberta and beyond? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian centre of recovery excellence will improve outcomes because we will have the best possible access to information and data across the country. We are going to be able to get access to solve problems, complex issues like mental health and addiction when they co-present. Obviously, prevention as well is important. We need to have mental health information. We need to have Health. We need to have Justice, community and social services along with other stakeholders collaborating together on what is likely one of the most complex policy pieces facing any western nation. The Canadian centre of recovery excellence here in Alberta will be the world leader in that.

**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 Calgary-Edgemont has a statement to make.

### Women's Health Care

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise for Women's Health Week to highlight women's health issues and priorities. We should be encouraging all women in our lives of all ages to prioritize their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. We need to be empowering women to take charge of their health journeys and shine a light on health issues unique to women. I know as the critic for status of women that I will continue to shine a light on women's health issues and use my voice to amplify their concerns.

I truly believe that we are united in our vision of building a cervical cancer free Alberta together. I am hopeful that we will start to hear the timeline of this government for when HPV testing will be available for all Albertans. Alberta women also deserve to have control over their breast health. They deserve the same access to mammograms as all Canadians.

During the fall sitting I put forward a motion to urge the government to consider taking the necessary steps to provide universal access to free prescription contraception, which would have benefited millions of Albertans throughout their lifetimes, all the way from high school to perimenopausal. It was a good health policy, and it's a good economical policy. It was and it is still the right thing to do, but of course the UCP voted it down. Then they doubled down and they blocked access again when the federal pharmacare program was implemented. Not here in Alberta, though.

Universal prescription contraception should not be a luxury item. I am also still waiting to hear what this government is doing to end menstrual inequality in Alberta. Period poverty continues to enforce gender barriers in our province. We need to be having conversations around menstrual equality, not only to set up women and girls for success but so that the stigma around menstruation is no longer taboo. Women and girls are facing barriers that prevent them from exercising their sexual and reproductive rights. Women's health matters in homes, communities, and workplaces. I hope we can all be champions for gender equality for women's health.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of an article published in the *Edmonton Journal* on May 1 titled *Municipalities Blast Province over Bill 20, Arguing It Will Increase Costs and damage our democracy*. I think the title is self-explanatory.

**Member Irwin:** Continuing with the trend for Bill 20, I would like to table five copies of an *Edmonton Journal* article entitled *Alberta Bill 20 'Risks Slowing Down' Housing Development: Federal Minister, and I would urge the minister responsible for housing here in Alberta to read this*.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of

hon. Minister LaGrange, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board 2023 annual report.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:37 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

### Point of Order Exhibits

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, the point of order was called by myself because after repeated reminders from the chair about the use of props, members on the opposite side continue to use props, with regard to stickers on their laptops that are clearly visible during debate. In this instance we had one from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Member for Calgary-Edgemont, and Edmonton-West Henday, all of whom despite their best efforts to cover their laptops find themselves unable. Members on this side of the House have taken your advice seriously; I would ask the members on the opposite side to do the same.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. From my position I was not able to see any props. I do know that the members on the Official Opposition side have been covering all stickers and other items, but I'm afraid I cannot speak to the specifics that have been named by the Government House Leader.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I have provided caution on a number of occasions. It seems to me the solution for this would be for people to take stickers off their Legislative Assembly of Alberta property and not bring those into the Assembly. Then, whether or not people have the sticker covered just right or not, it doesn't become a matter of debate or a matter of a point of order or otherwise. I don't think that it's unreasonable to ask members to remove stickers from property of the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta. This isn't personal property; it is property of the Assembly. I will expect members to conduct themselves as such in the very near future. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

## Orders of the Day

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

#### Bill 206

#### Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024

[Debate adjourned April 22: Mr. Sabir speaking]

**The Speaker:** The hon. member has three minutes remaining, should he choose to do so.

There are 46 minutes remaining in debate on the bill this afternoon. Are there others?

2:50

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Mr. Speaker, the office of the Child and Youth Advocate provides invaluable support in our province when it comes to our most vulnerable members, children and youth. This government has demonstrated time and time again that it is not interested in assisting vulnerable Albertans in our communities. We see the rise in deaths of children in the care of the government. We are seeing attacks on a minority of children and youth in this



province, when this government issued its intentions to attack trans, gender-diverse, and two-spirit children and youth in forthcoming legislation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The collective global community has seen this type of law and policy developed in other democratic jurisdictions in the west, and we are shocked but not surprised that this government of antifa, anti-inclusion, and, quite frankly, lacking any basis in reality would start occupying the field and taking away the rights and freedoms of Albertans in such a magnitude.

But I digress, Madam Speaker. This bill does nothing but create a conflation of the role of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. It provides a referral service to parents and guardians, thereby changing the very nature of this office. The office of the Child and Youth Advocate was not created to provide support to parents or guardians. I'd also challenge the member sponsoring this bill to explain in this House and to Albertans what rights parents and guardians do not already have enshrined under the law. I think it is quite disingenuous to reframe the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, which is already doing the good work, including making numerous recommendations to the government to implement.

What is this government doing with respect to these recommendations from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate? Let me tell you. This government is failing in implementing any of the recommendations from the office of the Child Youth Advocate. This is unconscionable. There have been mandatory reviews into child deaths as old as 2019 that remain in limbo because the ministry has indicated they will no longer provide further updates, and there are well over 20 recommendations coming from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate that remain delayed with an excuse of being "delayed due to the provincial election." Madam Speaker, the election was well over a year ago, and this government has not moved fast enough to address these recommendations. They also include recommendations to deal with the ongoing opioid crisis, that is taking many lives of our children and youth. Instead, this government has backbenchers throwing together bills to change the very nature of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate away from its original intent, away from protecting children and youth and to bring a voice to children and youth in this province.

Madam Speaker, I don't need to always come in here and tell you that my people are dying. They are. Our kids are dying. Instead of addressing the very excellent recommendations being made by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to address this crisis, they are instead playing politics with this bill. They are not addressing any of the issues that presently exist. And who is going to suffer because of this? Children and youth in this province, in particular Indigenous children and youth, as they always have because of every successive Conservative government's intentional ignorance of the needs of children and youth in this province but particularly of Indigenous children and youth in this province. This bill is no different.

The OCYA is not the office of the parent and guardian advocate, and it should never devolve into such a purpose. Doing so departs from the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and, in particular, giving children and youth agency in this province. I've witnessed the benefits of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate first-hand.

Back in my practising days, I've done some agency work with the legal representation for children and youth branch of the OCYA. I've had the honour of bringing the voice of Indigenous children and youth forward in court proceedings. This honour also came with a heavy heart. I've read files for children and youth in care

who have not had a consistent parent in their lives since they were brought into this world. I've been especially touched by a case of a transgender girl whose mother passed and whose father did not want to be involved in their lives at all. This heartbreaking case reminded me of the importance of children being empowered to share their perspective. This young person also wanted to put on the record that she wanted to go back to her family and not in a permanent guardianship order under Children and Family Services. I was honoured to do this important work.

Sadly, the judge did not side with this young person. Even more unfortunately, this is all too common with children in care. This system is broken, and the members opposite want to further exacerbate these problems instead of actually fixing or solving some of these crises. I advocated for this young girl and shared her perspective, not the perspective of her father, who had no concern for her at the time, because he had the agency enough to say no, and the court respected it. He did not need an adviser to do that. To this day I still think about this young girl and whether she has made it, or if she's only become a statistic that this government has refused to address despite ongoing recommendations from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

I also think about the children and youth that I worked with when I worked for the Mabel Arcand Childrens Home on my First Nation when I was a youth myself. I think about the very special voice that they had, the unique experiences that they had gone through, and the legal representation that they had every step of the way. Every single time one of them got a home visit, they were elated. They got to see their kin, their blood, their grandparents, or their mom and dad. What this government does not recognize is that many of our children and youth don't often get this opportunity to go back to their parents, like the transgender girl who did not have parents that would take her in, or those children and youth who have tragically lost their lives to this government's ineptitude in dealing with the opioid crisis, which is disproportionately affecting Indigenous children and youth.

So what will this adviser do to help these children and youth? Certainly, these current guardians aren't resourced well enough either, but we all know this government doesn't care about their well-being either. To vary the responsibility of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate is reprehensible and demonstrates to children and youth in this province that their voice does not matter. This side of the House will continue to stand up for the rights of children and youth in this province, because this bill demonstrates that that side of the House is only interested in ignoring the real issues of Albertans while pushing an ideological agenda and sending dog whistles that reflect nothing but disdain for the most vulnerable members of our society. It is also an overreach of this government into the lives of Albertans, which this government is very good at doing as of late.

Let's also talk about the brass tacks here. We know that this government acts but does not think things through before opening Pandora's box. What money has been allocated with respect to this work? We already know that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate is sorely underfunded. Their current budget of \$16.5 million, which was reduced, actually, from the ask of \$16.9 million for 81 staff by the UCP members of the Legislative Offices Committee, does not include what is budgeted for family resource networks either. Again, this government says that they can walk and chew gum at the same time, but I'd say that they can do neither effectively because clearly they put zero thought into what this overreach, this private member's bill, will cost.

I'd ask the sponsoring member to speak to how this will not create a spend from Treasury with respect to the costs associated with a new advocate through the office of the Child and Youth

Advocate. This bill is creating new offices, new responsibilities, and new needs that the OCYA is already struggling to meet. I need to ask again: why? Why is this government so intent to create havoc when there are next to no Albertans asking for these changes? It is shameful for this government to first go after transgender, gender-diverse, and two-spirit children and youth and to now fetter and effectively take away the voices of children and youth by inserting UCP ideology into the office of the Child and Youth Advocate by creating a parent and guardian adviser. This is an unnecessary bill, and there are numerous gaps that still need to be filled in before this bill should be passed.

It is for these reasons, Madam Speaker, that I cannot in good conscience support this bill, that will fetter the rights of children and youth in this province. In the work that I've done as a lawyer in understanding the law, especially around the rights of children and youth, this bill is a dangerous step in the direction of removing agency of children and youth in this province. I would urge the members opposite to rethink why this government is so concerned with removing the rights of some of our vulnerable members of society. Children and youth deserve good representation, and this bill does nothing more than water those rights down, if not effectively remove them entirely. I urge all members of this House to no longer support this inadequate piece of legislation.

3:00

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm proud to rise and speak in this Assembly and stand before you today. I'm deeply committed to the well-being of families and children across our province. Today I'm proud to speak to Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024. I want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for bringing this forward.

Madam Speaker, family is the cornerstone of our communities. It's where we learn, grow, and find support. Our families provide us with the love, guidance, and stability that we need to navigate life's challenges. Beyond its significance on a personal level, family plays a vital role in shaping the fabric of our society. We know that studies have shown that strong families lead to stronger communities and, ultimately, a stronger nation.

As a parent and grandparent myself I understand the joys and challenges that come with raising children. It's a journey filled with love, laughter, and countless memorable moments, yet it's also a journey fraught with uncertainties and obstacles, especially when it comes to navigating a myriad of government services and programs designed to support families.

Bill 206 is a crucial step forward in our government's ongoing efforts to support parents and guardians in navigating these complexities. If passed, this legislation will establish a parent and guardian adviser role within Alberta's office of the Child and Youth Advocate. This independent adviser would serve as a knowledgeable and support resource, guiding parents on their rights and connecting them with vital services and resources.

In our fast-paced society parents often face challenges when dealing with government bureaucracy, whether it's accessing educational resources, navigating custody disputes, or seeking support for adoption. The road can be filled with obstacles. I know that each of us in this Chamber has known people or seen even sometimes in our own families members struggle with these challenges. From my riding in Grande Prairie-Wapiti to the farthest north and south reaches of this province and everywhere in

between, families across the province need to know that there is support and help where and when they need it.

Bill 206 aims to provide a quick and effective solution to these challenges by creating a centralized point of contact for parent advocacy. The parent and guardian adviser would play a pivotal role in identifying consistent issues affecting parents in Alberta. By listening to their concerns and experiences, the adviser would be able to advocate for meaningful change within the system. This proactive approach would ensure that parents' voices are heard and that their needs are addressed promptly and effectively.

Our UCP government recognizes and cherishes the invaluable role that parents play in their children's lives. That's why we are committed to supporting them and all they can do. By establishing a parent and guardian advisory role, we would be reaffirming our commitment to empowering parents and guardians with the tools and resources they need to ensure that children can thrive.

Madam Speaker, key to this bill is the mandate for the adviser to prepare a comprehensive annual report on their activities, highlighting any systematic barriers identified in public programs and services affecting families' and children's well-being. This accountability mechanism would ensure transparency and encourage ongoing improvements in the support services.

Some may ask: why not create a parental bill of rights? While that's a noble idea, it would require a lengthy consultation process and may not be feasible with a private member's bill. Instead, Bill 206 would provide a practical solution by establishing a centralized point of contact for parent advocacy, addressing consistent issues affecting parents in Alberta and connecting them with important resources.

According to article 18 of the UN convention on the rights of the child parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children. Yet currently Alberta lacks a centralized advocacy point of contact for parents. Bill 206 seeks to rectify this by streamlining access to assistance and ensuring that Albertans are directed to the appropriate resources for addressing their concerns.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 206 and the establishment of a parent and guardian advisory role. Together we can ensure that every parent and guardian in Alberta has access to the support and resources they need to raise a happy, healthy family.

Thank you.

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

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today and speak to private member's Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024. I just want to start out by reading section 15.64 of the act that talks about – actually, no. Sorry. I'll give you the abridged version so I can cover all the content I hope to today.

Let's just talk about the purpose of the adviser, 15.62:

- (a) support families in nurturing, guiding and fostering the growth and well-being of their children,
- (b) support the stability of families as a critical component of a healthy society, and
- (c) carry out the duties described in [the section following] in a manner that ensures that the best interests, safety and well-being of children are paramount.

The list of duties is pretty significant, Madam Speaker. The list of functions is significant:

meet with families to understand the unique needs of each member of the family and provide information and assistance . . . make referrals to organizations, programs and services for families and children, including with respect to mental and

physical health, spiritual support, academic services, human and social services, and language and cultural supports.

This is one person and one position within a much broader office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

I just very quickly pulled up the latest census data that we have from Statistics Canada that tells us about the number of children and census families in Alberta. There are over a million children in Alberta between the ages of zero and 18, and between total couple families, common-law families, and single families there are 702,870 families. Now, that was in 2021, and we know, of course, with the rate of growth that's been happening in our population, that it will be significantly higher.

We are talking about one person, the one parent and guardian adviser who is going to be supporting over 700,000 families. What is this bill actually trying to achieve? I don't think that impact is it. It seems like an outrageous mandate to deliver for one person. I would certainly hope that there would be significantly more detailed information to be coming out in the regulations, but I can't help but wonder: like, what is the actual physical organizational and governance structure of this adviser? Is there going to be a parent or a guardian committee? Is there an advisory council? Is there going to be a series of consultations and travelling town halls, for example? How one person is going to deliver on that kind of duty and function responsibility is utterly beyond me unless they literally know how to stop time, and I reckon that that is not going to be the role of the adviser. How on earth is one person supposed to support that many families in Alberta, who may want to be able to access resources, supports, advocacy, all of the things that we know as parents sometimes we need to be able to access?

I'm curious about whether or not, as has already been mentioned, the adviser is going to be an employee of the advocate, of the Child and Youth Advocate office. I should mention that the UCP-majority committee on Legislative Offices voted to actually reduce the budget for 2024-25 to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, so we've gone from – the proposed budget was \$16.9 million down to \$16.5 million, not changing the number of full-time equivalencies. So, in fact, everybody working in the OCYA is now earning less, and now we've added a different position with an outrageously large mandate. How is the adviser going to actually deliver on any kind of impact and effectiveness on this bill and on this mandate without kind of scooping up some of those full-time equivalencies, thereby undermining and eroding the very important work of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate that, should I need to remind anybody in these Chambers, has the primary mandate of making sure that vulnerable kids are kept safe? That is the job of the OCYA. Now we have incorporated with Bill 206 the interest in having a parent and guardian adviser. Like I said, I'm very concerned that they might take up a few of those 81 FTEs currently within the office for it to move the needle even in the slightest.

**3:10**

Madam Speaker, as I've mentioned multiple times here in these Chambers, I've worked in the nonprofit sector for a long time in Calgary, and I wonder about what it is that is inadequate about the number of organizations that are doing fantastic work on shoestring budgets. If we want to see impact, if we want to see effective results in the funding of how we support families, it's going to be by supporting those organizations that have been around for an awfully long time. Let me tell you – I can reference, for example, just last week. I had a wonderful tour of Children's Cottage, who just opened up a brand new, beautiful location in Bowness in Calgary. Then, the day after, I had a chance to go and see their family shelter over in my riding of Calgary-Currie, the Brenda Strafford shelter.

You know, absolutely, as it should be, these organizations have the well-being and the safety of kids front and centre. But they are powerful and passionate advocates for parents. They recognize that the kind of service that they provide as an organization is as much for the parents as it is for the kids and that happy, healthy, supported parents mean happy, healthy, supported children and vice versa. So none of these organizations take one group and not the other. They think about the family as a whole, those 702,000 families in Alberta with children, who we need to wrap our arms around as a society, not create this kind of polarizing and antagonistic relationship in terms of the kinds of supports that we provide to one or the other.

I wonder if the member opposite who had sponsored Bill 206 has ever heard of family resource networks. Have they ever heard about countless nonprofits like Children's Cottage and Brenda Strafford? Have they heard about AHS and the numerous parenting resources they provide? What about the invaluable Owerko Centre at the University of Calgary or the Palix Foundation's Alberta family wellness initiative? What about the OCYA and, gosh, the office of the Ombudsman, legislative offices that have an accountability to the people in these Chambers to make sure that they are in fact advocating for the benefit and for the well-being of Albertans?

Why do we need something else that in my mind I just can't fathom how this is actually going to deliver the kind of impact and benefit that it is meant to for Alberta families? I could keep going, Madam Speaker. There are so many organizations because raising a family can be tough. The role of one parent and guardian adviser with its kind of, you know, apple pie mandate I just don't think is going to cut it, not when we're talking about the kind of client to service provider ratio of 1 to 700,000.

I want to raise, I think, again a really important piece that my colleague right off the top here had mentioned, which is around the role of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate as a legislative office and just how critical the services are that they provide to Albertans, especially to the families and to the children who are in care of government. It is not just about the children; it's also about their families. It's making sure that we are taking a holistic and comprehensive approach to finding the best solution for everybody that can be impacted by sometimes very dire and very challenging and very sad stories. I think that the OCYA has been doing an absolutely phenomenal job with, unfortunately, fewer and fewer dollars as a result of some of the decisions that have been made by UCP-majority committees. I don't ever want to take away from the very important work that they do.

I have to, then, wonder: what is the purpose of Bill 206? You know, we talk about this in very broad strokes, what family ought to be, the importance of that. Just before constit week we had a very valuable conversation on another motion in regard to how important, certainly, families of all shapes and sizes can be for community, for children. But there is so much that is already being done here, that if we would just respect it and resource it appropriately, we could have such a big impact in the lives of families.

One of them that I also want to mention, of course, is Alberta Ed, right? We have the Education Act, that ensures that schools are a resource not just for the students on a kind of 9 to 5 schedule but also for their families. Imagine what it could look like if we actually appropriately resourced some of those public systems of support to make sure that kids and their families in a community are fully supported with everything they need to thrive.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today in this Assembly in support of Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate amendment act. This is a good bill. I wish to thank the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for bringing this bill forward. I truly care for the well-being of families and children province-wide, and I believe that this bill truly has the best interests of children and families in mind.

Communities develop and sustain themselves around the institution of family. Families provide us with means for love, development, maturity, and support. We all need the stability of a good family to go through the never-ending ebbs and flows of life. We all understand the significance of the family at the personal level. However, collectively we also should note that familial institutions model the material comprising society. I truly believe that the strength of the community and, moreover, the strength of Alberta lie within the foundation and health of Alberta's families.

Many can relate to the challenges, privileges, and responsibilities that come from properly raising our children. Unfortunately, our world has erected obstacle after obstacle which struggling families must overcome. The task of accessing vital government family supports presents a confusing and even potentially daunting process for struggling families. Madam Speaker, Bill 206 will provide a pivotal tool in our relentless ambition to support the parents and guardians of children.

If passed, Bill 206 will establish a parent and guardian advisory role within Alberta's office of the Child and Youth Advocate. This advisory position will function to assist parents, advising them on their rights and enabling them to access support. At present Alberta lacks a central point of contact for parents to reach for advocacy. This creates chaos and confusion on top of frustration.

The task of raising children presents a daunting enough task without the added burden of bureaucratic navigation. This bill would establish this long-overdue singular point of contact to ensure the appropriate direction for Albertans seeking resources. The red tape associated with navigating government bureaucracy presents a daunting and frustrating responsibility for many. Educational resources, legal services, and other services can become frustratingly obscured by forms, steps, and nuisances. If passed, Bill 206 will allow for an efficient and expeditious solution to these challenges through the establishment of a centralized point of contact for parents' advocacy.

Our government understands the pivotal role parents play in the lives of their children, and we have committed to supporting them in all they do through the establishment of the parent and guardian advisory role. This will reinforce our unyielding, steadfast commitment to Alberta's parents and guardians by giving them the right tools for success. This adviser will generate a comprehensive annual report on their activities, underlining system-related obstacles with the framework and interface of public programs and services relevant to the support of families in need. Having the system in place for accountability promises to provide transparency and promote improvement in support services.

3:20

Madam Speaker, article 18 of the UN convention on the rights of the child stipulates that the primary responsibility of raising a child rests with the parents. Bill 206 provides a means to improve the chaotic lives of parents and streamline their activities dealing with the government. It falls in line with our government's commitment to red tape reduction. Like I said earlier, family stability presents a crucial indicator for the overall health of society. Our government stands in allegiance with the families, and we aim to support them for the overall improvement of societal health.

For these reasons, I encourage all members to rise in support of Bill 206. The Child and Youth Advocate amendment act, proposed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, is a good act. This bill will ensure the health and well-being of Alberta's families, who, in turn, comprise a fundamentally crucial component of the fabric of society. Our government promised to create a high-functioning, healthy society when we won the election last year, and by passing this bill, we will take a large step towards keeping that promise to Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 206 although I do fundamentally disagree with the intent of the bill. As many know in this Chamber, prior to being elected in 2015, I worked for 12 years as a child protection worker, working in foster care, working with family support for children with disabilities. At the end of my career, before being elected, I was working with high-risk youth. Many of the youth that I worked with were gang affiliated, sexually exploited, struggling with drug and alcohol abuse, living on the streets or in other homes which I would have to go visit and potentially pull them out of. During that time I was in touch and had constant conversations with the Child and Youth Advocate.

Now, the Child and Youth Advocate has a very specific role in why it is that they exist and why they're an independent office. Their whole intention in the work that they do is to support young people, youth as well as children, who are involved with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, those who are involved in the youth justice system. The Child and Youth Advocate also provides access to legal representation for young people receiving child intervention services, offers education, and conducts investigations in relation to serious injuries that happen or deaths of young people while they're receiving designated services.

Now, the government side and the member who has introduced Bill 206 want to inject a parental rights person or adviser into the Child and Youth Advocate. Let's be clear. Because youth are engaging with the justice system and they have advocates that are working within this organization, in this independent office – there are also lawyers that are attached to this independent office – you cannot have a child or youth being represented and supported through the Child and Youth Advocate's office, that is also going to provide legal representation or support to a parent. You cannot do it. It is a conflict between the justice systems to have the same organization representing both the parent and the child. So that already is a fundamental flaw with this piece of legislation.

The other piece that is the struggle with this legislation is that there has to be some form of involvement within the organization within the legislation, whether it be the Child and Youth Advocate, whether it be the enhancement act, whether it be the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, whether it be PCHAD, which is children struggling with drugs and alcohol. The whole intention of the advocate's office is to advocate for those youth that are intersecting with those pieces of legislation to ensure that their rights are being protected through the process.

So I'll walk you through. Let's say that a parent wants to come to a judge under the province and say, "My child is struggling with drugs and alcohol, and they're a minor, and I want to apply for a secure order under PCHAD," which is protecting children that are engaging in drugs and alcohol. What happens then is that there is an application that has to be made into the courts by the parent or

guardian to basically ask for a secure placement for youth. These can be guardians. They can be children living at home. They can also be – and I've done this. I've had to secure kids under a PCHAD order when I was a social worker, because I was running around the city trying to find them all the time, and they needed treatment, so I would apply. The minute I did that, the Child and Youth Advocate would be involved. There would be a referral to ensure the rights of that child were being protected, because ultimately you are securing a child and locking them into a space. You are infringing on their rights by doing that, so the Child and Youth Advocate has to be involved.

Okay. So if a parent is involved or the guardian of those children is involved, how do you, then, do a referral within the same group or independent office to say, "Parent, you now have a representative" and "Child and Youth Advocate, you're going to represent the child" when they live in the same office? If you want to make sure that parents and guardians have access to information, have access to understanding the legal process of all of these things, you have to put them outside of the Child and Youth Advocate. They cannot live within the Child and Youth Advocate office. It conflicts. You have people giving advice while they're trying to represent the rights of the child. It's why, when people get divorced, they don't go to the same law firm, because you want to make sure your rights are being protected. It's why you make sure kids also have lawyers, to make sure their rights are being protected. So it ultimately creates a conflict.

I appreciate that parents need support. I don't minimize that. When I was a protection worker, I dealt with many parents who needed to understand and needed a support person, which is why as a child protection worker I would refer to a family support worker, or I would refer to an agency within the courthouse that could be there as the advocate on behalf of the parents during the court proceedings or the process. They do exist.

If the members opposite feel that it's not sufficient and that there's a communication barrier and it's too confusing, I don't minimize that. If you funded children's services appropriately, they'd be able to probably provide those services better. If we had more supports in the courthouse to support parents when they were going through these processes, it would make more sense. If they were more accessible to parents if they were going through this system and you didn't have to wander around the courthouse trying to find them or you only had one court worker that works on behalf of the parents in the whole building – that's part of the problem.

Creating a position within an advocate's office whose whole role is to ensure that kids' rights are being protected doesn't make any sense, and kids have a right to these rights. Like, let's be clear. I have rescued and advocated and protected enough kids in this province through my career as a social worker that I believe kids have a right to this. Parents: if they need to be able to understand the system, then there needs to be supports for that to happen.

**3:30**

But, ultimately, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act exists for a reason, and it's because kids are abused. It's because kids can be sexually exploited. It's because they get involved in drugs and alcohol and need to be placed in secure treatment centres and/or into other facilities because of what they're experiencing in their lives, so they need to have a place to go to. They need an advocate.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of the private member's bill to close debate,

I would now like to invite the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul to close Bill 206.

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to give the closing remarks for second reading on my private member's Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024, or, as I like to call it, the Matthew advocacy amendment act. I would like to thank the members who have provided constructive input in an effort to enhance this bill and their recognition of the intent behind it.

Many of us in this Chamber, including both you and I, Madam Speaker, are parents and guardians, and I think that the vast majority of those here recognize the value of having additional resources for them to turn to when they're seeking advice. There is no job out there that is more challenging in these times as raising a child in this world. At every stage in their development we see challenges, from bringing a newborn home for the first time from the hospital to the panic that sets in, the second time, that they are sick, all the way up to their first steps and first words, first days of school, their teenage years, and their progression into adulthood.

Because there is no one-size-fits-all method on how to raise children, Bill 206 would create a much-needed and trusted resource designated for parents and guardians to go to. As I'd mentioned in my earlier speech, the motives behind this bill are based on the challenges that my nephew Matthew and his parents faced navigating the support system after Matthew was diagnosed with severe autism spectrum disorder as a child. It is because of the hard work and dedication of all those around him that impacted his life. We know that this is a wonderful young man, contributing to society today in the best ways he can.

The ability for parents and guardians to navigate the available systems to ensure that they can provide the best care and services for their children can be overwhelming for many parents. I've seen it first-hand, Madam Speaker. I believe that the last thing any of us in this Chamber would want to see is families facing more challenges navigating the system that is supposed to be helping them.

If passed by this Assembly, Bill 206 would create a centralized advocacy resource for parents and guardians dealing with these types of challenging situations such as Matthew's. Currently such a centralized advocacy point of contact for parents does not exist. Bill 206 aims to ensure that parents and guardians have a knowledgeable, supportive, independent adviser to help them through their rights and connect them with important resources. Madam Speaker, I firmly believe that having this key resource available to meet with families to understand their unique needs would prove invaluable over time.

Madam Speaker, I don't think it's a contentious point to make that parents and guardians are the child's primary caregivers. As such, the primary caregiver's responsibility is the upbringing and development of their child as well. As mentioned earlier, I am proud of my nephew Matthew and his parents for the progress that they have made despite the many, many hurdles that they have faced, and I wish for many others – parents and guardians and their children that are facing their own unique challenges – success as well.

I'm very profoundly appreciative to all those who have come to me personally to support my bill and even to those who have had constructive criticism as well. Once again, I humbly have heard my colleagues on both sides of this Chamber and take this back as an important learning and want to work with the concerns that have been brought forward within second reading of the private member's Bill 206, the Child and Youth Advocate (Parent and Guardian Advisor) Amendment Act, 2024. I would like to thank my

colleagues, all of them, for everything that they've said over this last hour and 20 minutes because it's important to recognize that families in Alberta matter to all of us, and the stronger a family unit is, the stronger Alberta is. Madam Speaker, this is speaking with experience with two lovely children, Amelia and Charlotte. I can tell you that we faced challenges, and if we would have had this resource going through when they were growing up, it would have been that much easier for all of us. This is something we can all live by.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I close this debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

**Bill 207**  
**Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education**  
**(Valuing Skilled Workers) Amendment Act, 2024**

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

**Member Hoyle:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very proud to stand and speak for the first time to my Bill 207, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education (Valuing Skilled Workers) Amendment Act, 2024. Bill 207 is a bill that is vitally important to upholding the integrity and safety of our skilled trades. We need to ensure that our skilled trade workers are strongly valued and recognized within advanced education and across our province. After many, many months of consultation with skilled trade workers it is clear that they deserve and need more support, and that's what this bill is designed to do.

Skilled trades play an integral role in the safe operation in industries and the health of the economy within Alberta, nationally, and internationally. Madam Speaker, the stark reality is that skilled trades in Alberta are at risk under the UCP government. We've seen an alarming overall decrease in apprenticeship enrolment numbers under this government. That's because the UCP's current legislation, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, 2021, undermines the trades industry in a variety of ways. Our Alberta NDP caucus voted against the current legislation at all three stages, but the UCP pushed ahead with legislation that had negative impacts on skilled trades across Alberta.

[Mr. Sinclair in the chair]

Bill 207 has three critical components that aim to address these challenges. The first is to bring back compulsory trades. The UCP's legislation makes it so that compulsory certification for certain trades can be removed with a stroke of a pen, a devastating policy to many trades. Any discussion about removing compulsory certification for trades undermines the training and expertise of hard-working Albertans. In 2009 B.C. introduced similar legislation but later walked back their decision in 2022 and reintroduced compulsory trades due to safety issues and lowering of wages. In B.C. the work became piecemeal, and people entered skilled trades tasks without certification. Knowing this, it would be completely negligent for this UCP government to move forward with the same legislation when we've already seen the failed outcome elsewhere.

3:40

Compulsory trades help ensure that workers have the necessary training and knowledge to perform their job safely and effectively and make sure that the general public is safe when infrastructure is built to a high standard. Moreover, without a recognized credential, it can be challenging for workers to transition between employers, and this increases barriers for workers to gain stable employment,

especially for people who already face greater barriers to employment in the trades.

Re-establishing compulsory trades in legislation provides much-needed job security for workers, protecting them from the behind-the-scenes political whims of the government. That's why Bill 207 moves to reinstate all compulsory trades that were removed by the UCP. The need to fill looming gaps in skilled trades labour is growing exponentially. Statistics Canada shows that workers nearing retirement are quickly outnumbering young people entering the labour market, driving up the demand for new skilled tradespeople, and this is incredibly problematic because we have a real need for skilled trade workers in this province.

According to a BuildForce Canada report Alberta will need 14,000 skilled trade workers to support \$22 billion worth of resource value-added projects between now and 2033. We're having to compete with other provinces that are also facing labour shortages as well as international competitors. The Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters estimated that \$13 billion was lost across Canada last year in the manufacturing sector alone due to these shortages. A 2024 outlook survey of Canadian employers by ManpowerGroup found that, quote, persistent talent shortages continue to impede hiring efforts, end quote, with 80 per cent reporting they expect to have trouble finding skilled workers to fill openings this year.

So why is this government not doing all it can to attract and retain skilled trade workers? We know the UCP is notorious for failing to consult with Albertans, whether that's doctors, workers, teachers, and families. The UCP continues to refuse to sit down with Albertans, whom they were elected to represent, and it's resulting in legislation that undermines our workers and everyday Albertans. Until this government heard that I was working on this legislation, they left trade workers out of meaningful discussions related to the industries while implementing policies that undermine safety and world-renowned quality of their craft. Bill 207 will correct this by mandating a consultation process within the existing skilled trades network. This ensures that many changes to skilled trades activities and scope require consultation with a six-member committee equally representing both trade employees and employers.

Currently changes can be made to a trade worker's scope of work without any consultation. This is unacceptable. Trade workers are experts in the field and deserve a voice in decisions that affect the scope and nature of their work. They deserve a seat at the table to ensure all work done in Alberta is under the strictest safety standards. To get more people entering skilled trades, we need to ensure that we're using every resource available.

Skilled trades workers continue to do and have always done amazing and incredible work in union training centres. Clearly, the Minister of Advanced Education is aware and sees the value with that, because on the same day that I introduced Bill 207 and introduced it into the House, she took the idea by introducing a pilot to fund only one training centre that will only potentially create up to 40 new spaces through the international union of operating engineers. This doesn't go nearly far enough.

I've spoken with dozens of industry experts who deliver training programs. They were clear that the designation of union training centres as specific delivery entities within postsecondary will allow them to bring in more apprentices. These experts told me that such a move could double the apprenticeship output annually in Alberta. Bill 207 ensures that union training centres are included in this legislation in very specific delivery entities of skilled trades training.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 207 delivers on an election promise that was made by the Alberta NDP in the 2023 provincial election to provide funding to union training centres, starting with \$4 million a year. Union training centres are a vital piece of the apprenticeship system in Alberta, yet under this UCP government they do not receive any support, unlike other institutions. Ensuring that these training centres are included in the act is the first step towards ensuring they receive the funding they deserve.

Bill 207 is a huge step in the right direction to supporting Alberta's skilled trades. Scott Crichton, assistant business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local 424, stated:

The urgency for such initiatives is highlighted by the projections from BuildForce Canada, which indicate that by 2031 approximately 21 per cent of Alberta's construction workforce will retire. This is a significant turnover and needs proactive work done to uphold and make sure we advance our construction industry. Supporting Bill 207 represents a strategic investment in the future of our workforce and, ultimately, our economy. It's a commitment to growth, diversity, and strength in our trades.

Madam Speaker, we know that the skilled trades are under risk with this government, and we could see that with the decreasing apprenticeship enrolment numbers. Given that the minister saw the utility of parts of Bill 207, I sincerely hope to see her and all the members opposite support this bill in its entirety. Bill 207 is a significant step towards providing tangible and necessary solutions in our . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, can you do me a favour and just say that you move second reading of Bill 207, for the sake of the record?

**Member Hoyle:** I move second reading of Bill 207.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you.

Are there any other speakers that wish to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today with a deep concern regarding Bill 207, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education (Valuing Skilled Workers) Amendment Act, 2024. Before we examine the critical flaws within this legislation, let's acknowledge why it's being proposed in the first place.

The NDP sees us working with unions, and they are panicking. Across Canada we see the rules of politics changing. New partnerships are being formed, and the NDP is being left behind. At the federal level junior coalition partner Jagmeet Singh is in fourth place and fading. We see the same polls as the members opposite. We know that long-time NDP MPs like Charlie Angus and Carol Hughes are choosing to enter quietly into retirement instead of facing defeat. We saw what happened in the last Ontario election, where NDP strongholds in Timmins, in Hamilton, in Windsor – the rust belt manufacturing hub where a Conservative had not been elected since the 1950s – flipped Conservative. Now the NDP sees our United Conservative government establishing a historic agreement with the International Union of Operating Engineers, so they respond with poorly thought through, rushed legislation like Bill 207.

Madam Speaker, the family-farm, factory-floor NDP has become a relic of the past. We saw that when the previous NDP government attempted to impose Bill 6 on family farms and the Albertans who feed the world. Now we're seeing it again with Bill 207. It was only last week that a former elected member of the NDP told trades

workers and apprentices to, quote, stay uneducated and vote Conservative, end quote. Statements like that are insulting. They're damaging to our workforce and directly opposed to the message coming from our government and Conservatives across Canada.

Madam Speaker, an education in the trades is every bit as valuable as a university degree. However, the NDP was right about one thing: skilled trade workers are voting Conservative. As we consider this proposed legislation, it is imperative that we critically examine its potential ramifications for our skilled workforce and the future of our province. This bill proposes amendments to the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, or STAEA, which was enacted in July 2022, replacing the long-standing Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act, or AITA.

Now, let's talk about STAEA. STAEA was informed by the Skills for Jobs Task Force's final report in September 2020. The report recommended that the AITA and its regulations be rewritten to remove barriers to implementing many other recommendations of the task force. The 21-member task force included representatives from industry, labour, community agencies, government, and educational leaders in both K to 12 and postsecondary. The task force conducted extensive engagement – extensive engagement – including six focus groups for students, parents, and educators in Calgary and Lethbridge, three industry round-tables in Edmonton and Calgary with a total of 48 industry stakeholders. A tools-of-engagement package was also used by task force members, including trade union representatives, to engage with their colleagues and professional networks. Fulsome engagement was also undertaken as part of developing the regulations under STAEA. We listened to the task force's advice and the input from engagement, and we took action.

**3:50**

STAEA simplifies Alberta's regulatory framework, reduces red tape, and ensures greater flexibility. While the objectives outlined in Bill 207 may seem noble on the surface, a closer examination reveals significant flaws that could impede rather than enhance the effectiveness of our skilled trades sector.

One of the primary concerns raised by Bill 207 is the reintroduction of the concept of compulsory trades, which it calls fully regulated trades, in which no individual may perform an activity in that trade without being a certified journeyman or an apprentice. However, Madam Speaker, provisions that already exist under STAEA accomplish this objective. Each of these 18 trades has restricted activities, and no one but a certified journeyman, apprentice, or someone enabled by our legislation may perform those activities. In addition, shifting the decision-making for these specific activities into regulation and out of the act also increases flexibility and allows the government to be nimble and more responsive to the needs of the industry. The reintroduction of compulsory, or fully regulated, trades would not only add unnecessary bureaucracy but also undermine the flexibility that our skilled workforce needs to thrive.

Furthermore, the proposed amendments fail to acknowledge the diverse range of individuals already recognized under STAEA who contribute to Alberta's skilled trades sector. Specifically, reintroducing compulsory trades in the manner proposed in Bill 207 will exclude key classes of workers currently recognized under STAEA. This would have a direct and devastating impact on thousands of workers currently fulfilling roles in the skilled trades. Let me just say that again: Bill 207 as it's drafted will exclude thousands of workers who currently have a pathway to work under STAEA.

Who will be excluded? That's the question. Students, including union members, developing their skills in preapprenticeship programming will be excluded. Newcomers with pending

certification applications will be excluded. People working under an authorization used under the act and Albertans working in a mass production environment will be excluded. Workers from all of these categories had pathways to work under the former act and continue to have pathways working today under STAEA, but they will not have a pathway under Bill 207.

Madam Speaker, not only is Bill 207 rushed and panicked legislation; it's completely disconnected from the NDP's own Motion 511. Motion 511 purports to try and make it easier for newcomers to enter our workforce. However, Bill 207 would do the exact opposite by reintroducing compulsory trades. When you look at Motion 511 and Bill 207 together, it looks like the NDP's left hand doesn't know what the further left hand is doing.

Additionally, Bill 207 seeks to mandate formalized and prescriptive consultation processes within the Alberta Board of Skilled Trades. While consultation is undoubtedly crucial, imposing rigid requirements could stifle collaboration and hinder the board's ability to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. Similar requirements under the former AITA were costly, and often committees could not be filled or were filled with narrow skill sets. Under STAEA the Alberta Board of Skilled Trades can meet with a wider range of stakeholders as appropriate, including postsecondary institutions, trade unions, community organizations, and others as they deem necessary.

Now, under the current model in the previous 12 months – this is important information – over 200 industry engagement meetings have occurred, counting over 2,000 attendees, including employees, employers, union members, and training providers. Ultimately, Madam Speaker, the administrative burdens associated with Bill 207's prescriptive committees could slow down decision-making processes and impede the board's responsiveness to industry needs.

Now let's talk about trade unions.

**Mr. Getson:** Let's do that.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Let's do that.

The amendments concerning the role of trade unions are unnecessary. Trade unions play a vital role in our skilled trades sector. The proposed amendments actually risk undermining already existing pathways for union-delivered training. As it relates to the amendments regarding trade unions, in STAEA pathways already exist for delivery of training by trade unions in two ways: first, through a recognition process that the training is equivalent to that of an apprenticeship education program at a postsecondary institution. There are 10 unions actually recognized by Advanced Education to deliver apprenticeship-style education, including the Alberta Pipe Trades College local 488 and the International Union of Elevator Constructors locals 122 and 130, just to name a few. These unions provide training, and Advanced Education conducts periodic exams once a training program is complete. It's a system that functions very well to provide an additional avenue to train apprentices.

Secondly, a trade union can be licensed under the Private Vocational Training Act to deliver apprenticeship education classroom instruction. This pathway ensures apprentices benefit from student protections under the PVTA, and a pathway for designation of the program for Alberta student aid does exist.

Now, as mentioned earlier, only a few short weeks ago Alberta announced a historic partnership with the International Union of Operating Engineers local 955. Through a pilot program funded by Alberta's government, the IUOE will deliver crane and hoist training to apprentices.

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

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy and grateful to be able to stand in support of my colleague's Bill 207, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education (Valuing Skilled Workers) Amendment Act, 2024. Our province has not seen the growth in apprenticeships you would expect as our province has grown by hundreds of thousands of people. We are short thousands of workers, and sadly those shortages will only continue to grow.

We are experiencing current shortages in health care. We know, for instance, about the issue of nurses – LPNs, RNs – who are working short day after day, which, of course, affects them as workers but also affects the level of care provided to patients. We know about shortages of educational assistants and the effects that those shortages have on them in their work environment, their colleagues, and students.

It's important to remember that when there is a shortage of workers in any particular sector, there are far-reaching ramifications, because no matter the work, that person's work experience, that person's working conditions affect their ability to deliver quality work every day. It makes a difference for their mental health, for their ability to apply skills and knowledge, and it makes a difference in terms of their ability to be truly present during that workday. Not only that, but it makes a difference in terms of whether or not they feel valued as an employee and as a worker, and all of that makes a difference in terms of recruitment as well as retention.

This all applies directly to the area of skilled trades. We know that there's a contributing factor, and that is that we are competing for the same workers, which, unfortunately, is a diminishing pool of workers, with other jurisdictions, countries, and provinces. We know we must find ways to encourage young people as well as those looking to make a change to consider a career in the skilled trades. We need to make sure we are not only creating the conditions for folks to want to come to Alberta and then retain them, but we also need to appeal to those same folks as well as current Albertans to help them see their role in potential contributions in this province, to grow interest in the skilled trades as a viable and valuable lifelong profession.

My colleague's bill, Bill 207, is an answer, a way forward, a direction to all of those concerns because it does indeed put the emphasis on valuing skilled workers. There is no doubt that the presence and work of skilled tradespeople contributes to overall economic health and indeed is an economic driver. If we look to Canada's construction industry, for example, we learn that construction is Canada's largest private-sector industry. It's an industry which positively impacts local economies. More than a million Canadians are employed in the construction trade, and many of those folks have called Alberta home for more than a few months at a time. It's estimated that every job in construction will produce seven spinoff jobs in other sectors of the economy. That has major implications for the economic health of not only our nation but our province.

**4:00**

These sorts of statistics give one pause and serve to underscore the seriousness of the issues this bill grapples with, because if we don't do this right in terms of setting the conditions for work, workers and employers alike, there will be negative impacts, and cracks in the system will begin to appear. One of those issues that Bill 207 addresses is the need to expand choices that are available for folks who wish to pursue apprenticeships. As it does so, it keeps an NDP promise from last year's election to ensure that union



training centres are able to work fully alongside postsecondary institutions to provide that training. Apprenticeship training holds the possibility of not just a good, well-paying job but a lifelong, family-supporting career.

Just like Alberta's postsecondary institutions, union training centres have long provided quality training and education for those wanting to become journeypersons and those wanting to pursue red seal or more certification. But as it stands right now, Madam Speaker, the current playing field as it exists in Alberta isn't level. We know that in Canada about 60 per cent of apprenticeship takes place within that union training system though that statistic certainly doesn't apply yet in Alberta. Across the country there exist \$650 million worth of training facilities at union halls and union-operated institutes. A small proportion of those facilities exist in this province, but they do stand ready.

Union shops are a critical vehicle for apprenticeship training, safety training, new credentialing, and industry-standard upgrading. Not only that; we know that apprentices who train through a union training centre are highly likely to complete their education and become a journeyperson. We know that students who do that apprenticeship through that union training centre very much appreciate the experience, appreciate the education delivered, appreciate the one-on-one support available, and also appreciate the increased opportunities for their career. All of this says to me that not only is there value – immense value – in that union training system, but Alberta really does need to catch up with the rest of the country.

Now, when we consider the current and looming shortages, we know that one way to deal with that shortage is to tap into what already exists. That means we should be incorporating union training centres so that we aren't reinventing any wheels; we're just simply relocating them. Union training centres have been operating for a number of years in Alberta. They provide stellar training and support for those who choose to pursue that educational, work-focused route. To put it simply, they deserve to be designated, as this bill notes, as entities of skilled training and programs. They should be entitled to the funding they require in recognition of the education they are already providing to many Albertans, and they should indeed be working alongside Alberta's postsecondary institutions. This bill simply allows that to happen.

Now, there's much talk about parity of esteem with respect to the education of a person with a trade apprenticeship being seen as valuable as a university or a college degree or diploma, the idea that both are and should be held in equal high regard, not pitting one against the other. Both PSIs and union training centres graduate skilled workers. They deliver approved curriculum. They work with the board of skilled trades. Both have a place in building the future.

I liken it to when I chose to do my bachelor of education after degree at Concordia rather than a similar program offered at the U of A. They were similar in nature, delivery, and course offerings, but for me Concordia, with its smaller class sizes, cohort approach, and ability to tailor my practicum, made more sense. I felt comfortable and at home there. This is a similar situation. Not just an either/or; it's an and, an available, exceptionally high-quality offering for students. It's a way that's rooted in skills, competencies, and value.

I am concerned that part of the issue during the discussion that we're going to have over the next few days and weeks, regardless of pilot projects, has in fact been centred around one word: union. Those across the aisle are often fond of throwing the word "union" out towards us as if it's a bad thing, a bad word, except it isn't. Union members and their unions have played an important role in Alberta's oil industry and in this province's economy. In the postwar rise of the middle class unions work and advocate to make

sure workers make decent wages – more than decent wages – and advocate for more job security through processes including collective bargaining. That in turn means more people being able to afford the rent, their mortgage, groceries, and lots of other things. Unions support and advocate and campaign on behalf of their workers and their health and safety, promoting and working for safer workplaces. This is about good-paying, lifelong jobs and satisfying careers. This is also about good pensions when you retire so that you'll be able to continue to contribute and live in dignity.

Regardless of all of that, I detect a, shall we say, generalized reluctance on the part of the UCP to see unions, private and public, as partners in the operations of this province, to include unions as fully as they should be when discussing issues important to their members. That's unfortunate as unions have done so much in the way of contributing to our past, our present, and, undoubtedly, our future.

This bill, Bill 207, provides a much-needed amendment to the act. It's just seeking to extend opportunities for training. It might seem like a relatively small thing, but it is an important thing that will have long-lasting impacts for Alberta, our future, and it will make a difference.

This bill also seeks to fill in some other gaps to the current legislation, and one of the most notable components missing is that of compulsory trades. It was of course included in an earlier iteration, and the current act has decided to use the word "designated" rather than "compulsory," and there's a difference there, an important difference between those two words. Each sets a different expectation for those involved in trades education and the trades industry to follow, because "compulsory" means mandated. It's required by law. It's mandatory. It's obligatory. "Designated," while it appears to be the same, is not. It might give something a specific status or purpose, Madam Speaker, but it doesn't ensure that designation is required by law in all situations. In other words, it provides an out, a loophole.

But the weight of something that's legislated means that optional isn't an option, and in the current act, by using that word "designated" rather than "regulated" and by electing to specify specific trades through regulation rather than being codified in the act, it downgrades the value inherent in those designations. The trades then are undermined.

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

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise, and I'm pleased to support Bill 207, which protects compulsory trades in statute and also includes union trade training centres in the legislation and ensures that they receive the funding that they require. This is important work that has been undertaken by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-South, and I thank her for her commitment to working people and to decent wages and decent working conditions, decent pensions and decent retirements and safe workplaces for all workers here in Alberta.

Now, in 2022 B.C. reinstated the protection of compulsory trades in statute. Why? Because changes that had been made by the right-wing government there back in 2009, analogous to those made by the UCP already here, were resulting in lower wages, less safety in workplaces, and fewer pension benefits.

Union trade training centres make workplaces safer and provide what people want in a trades career. Union membership does this. Access to a good middle-class lifestyle: that comes through decent wages, decent benefits for oneself and one's family, a respectable pension, and a safe workplace. That training, the apprentice-to-journeyperson ratios, the PPE requirements, the hours of work are

always better in a union environment because that is what unions bargain. That's what they use their labour bargaining power for. Unions in the trades bargain for the employer to do what they have to do to deliver a safe and decent workplace. They bargain for that middle-class life.

The extent to which we no longer see these benefits in the economy, no longer feel that we can access those foundational elements of a decent living, the extent to which young people and people of older generations no longer are able to attain that even modest three-bedroom bungalow and a little 10-day vacation: that, Madam Speaker, is the extent to which we have seen the decline of union density in this country and on this continent. Unions allow us to do together what we cannot accomplish when we stand alone, and those are simple things: decent pay, decent retirement, come home alive and in one piece. Working-class folks are not asking for much, but successive right-wing governments, especially over the last 40 years, have chipped away at that foundation and with it the building blocks of civil society, of free time to build community and volunteer, of a secure retirement to enjoy family and community.

Alberta's apprenticeship rates have actually been declining under the UCP, which is an extraordinary development if the performative chest-thumping about the benefits of the trades by right-wing governments is to be believed. Alas, it should not be believed. If it were, there would be more support for students, lower tuition across the college and even the university system, better investments in student housing, more needs-based grants, more support to low-income kids and families right away in high school to make sure that kids get what they need to see any kind of postsecondary certification or education as an option. But all of these items have actually been cut by this government.

#### 4:10

When they get into the trades, where will people work? The government actually has two – they have a number of roles to play, but I've identified two for the purposes of my 10 minutes here. When it comes to large commercial and industrial projects, one is through government's own procurement. Infrastructure projects built by the province should have a scoring criteria for social benefits, and one of those scoring criteria should be unionized trades. They do this in B.C., and they do it federally.

Lest anyone start reflexively bleating and frothing about Trudeau or whatever, just take a beat and realize that Poilievre told the Canadian building trades union in Gatineau last week that public infrastructure procurement should explicitly outlaw temporary foreign workers and work with the Canadian building trades union. So everybody settle down. Unions are good, and even Poilievre is at least pretending that this is the case at least for the time being through to the election. However, he did embarrass himself at the CBTU event. Just to correct the record on the, you know, sort of deathbed conversion, sort of hugging of unions, he got up there and told an anecdote about carpenters. Well, carpenters are not affiliated with the Canadian building trades union. So that was embarrassing for him. The *National Post* reports in an article that I will table later that the reception to Mr. Poilievre was muted at best.

Anyway, the other way that government can help create good jobs in the trades is by having a well-functioning private sector. To do that, you have to be able to plug stuff in, Madam Speaker. You don't have to be the daughter of an electrician, as I am, to know that large industrial projects would like to be able to turn the lights on and do other things involving the electricity system.

Last week we found out that the CEO of the system operator was forced by pressure from the minister to go tell the public a pack of what can only charitably be described as falsehoods, statements that

he did not believe, to say things he didn't think were right or true. The CEO was pressured to do so by the government-appointed board chair, who told him in writing that it would not be well received by the minister if he didn't publicly agree with him.

Why would anyone make a major final investment decision for anything under these economic circumstances? It seems to me that electricians need to work with electricity; therefore, the independent system operator needs to have the right resources in place, the right planning so that we can attract those large projects so that we can put people to work. Since this decision to put a moratorium on new investment in electricity, Alberta has had a massive risk of blackout when it was minus 40, an actual brownout. We've seen massive price spikes, and now we've seen cancelled projects not just in renewables but also in coal-to-gas conversion, CCUS, and hydro pump storage and natural gas itself.

How can any industrial investor trust what comes out of the independent system operator now? If you're a big power consumer, how can you know that what they're telling you about the expected cost of transmission or distribution or even your electricity price itself and how that market is structured – how can you know that any of that is correct or true? How can you know that it hasn't just been made up on a political whim by the Premier's office? Tradespeople need to have a place to work, and large commercial industrial projects are usually that place, and the system has to function. For that system to function, someone has to care about truth, process, the rule of law, science, and an orderly business environment where we make decisions based on facts, not untrammelled nonsense, which is what led to that decision based on new renewable energy.

This bill creates a social and business environment that is welcoming, that creates the right educational opportunities and the right regulatory environment for that piece of the puzzle, for a good life. It is pro union, as I think we should all be.

Madam Speaker, I want to conclude my remarks by expressing my deep thanks to the president of IBEW 424, Mike Reinhart; to my brother Scott Crichton here in Edmonton, in Sherwood Park – I think he's assistant business manager, and he also does a number of functions of advocacy as well both for his members and for all Albertans – my friend Orrie Bliss, who is with IBEW 424 out of Calgary as well. IBEW is a fantastic union who are always ready to get to work for the best interests of Albertans, whether it's in various industrial projects, whether it's questions of diversification and upgrading, whether it's even in advocating, for example, the Trans Mountain pipeline, which they did vigorously. I appreciated that.

It should be remembered that 1 out of 2 linemen who were hired in the late 19th century, when IBEW was formed, died within five years. They worked 12-hour days, and due to the formation of IBEW we now have good pensions, good benefits, decent conditions of work, and people come home alive. There are 780,000 members of IBEW in the United States and 70,000 here in Canada, and we thank them for their tremendous service both in the union leadership and in union membership.

Finally, given that this is a bill having to do with the labour movement, I just want to briefly note some news that I just received, that sister Kim Novak, who is president of UFCW 1516 out of B.C. – she also sits at the B.C. Federation of Labour table – has just passed away unexpectedly, and I want to dedicate my remarks today about the benefits of being part of the labour movement and being proudly pro union to her and to her two small children that she leaves behind. Some of her last tweets were about the organizing work that they did at a Sephora in Kamloops and some of the advocacy that she has done for retail workers for better

wages, more respect in the workplace, better scheduling, and all of the benefits that a union brings to that retail environment.

With that, I conclude my remarks. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak on Bill 207, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education (Valuing Skilled Workers) Amendment Act, 2024. Bill 207 is really rushed legislation from a desperate NDP. As they know already, we're creating 3,000 apprenticeship seats across Alberta, we're making real capital investments to support our apprenticeship education, and we're working – working – with unions to deliver hands-on training. The proposed amendments in Bill 207 reflect a previous legislation that created an administrative burden and reduces our government's ability to respond to industry's needs.

Madam Speaker, we are the party of removing red tape, which is why we created the ministry for it since the very beginning of our first mandate. I suspect the minister would be concerned with this administrative burden and unnecessary barriers that this piece of legislation would create if passed in this Chamber. That's why I believe it's crucial to outline the bill's implications and the potential negative effects it will have on the skilled workforce within our province.

First and foremost, we need to recognize the importance and value of our skilled trades and apprenticeship programs in our province. Every one of these fields is a critical component of our economy and underpins the foundations of Alberta's advantage. Each one of them plays a crucial role in encouraging innovation, growth, and prosperity within our province. You know, Madam Speaker, this is especially more important since I myself hold a fourth-class power engineering certificate. Therefore, these things need to be considered before Bill 207, and I know that I believe they need to be addressed.

One of the main issues that I have for this bill is the introduction of the term “fully-regulated trade.” This should bring terror to every tradesperson throughout the province. More and more government: this is exactly what you would expect from the NDP. Some are speculating that this bill would be looking to shut down our small businesses that are trades related. That would be horrific and have a real impact on my constituency. I'm going to tell you that when it comes down to it, we need more tradespeople, not less. This is just another word for compulsory trades.

This would burden our skilled trade workers and apprentices with excessive red tape that they don't need and, frankly, they don't want. Madam Speaker, this is already accomplished under the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. By replacing “designated trade” with “regulated trade,” more government regulation and more red tape creation is clearly implied.

4:20

The proposed amendments would exclude many Albertans from working within professions. This includes newcomers with pending certification applications, people who have their red seal certificates from other jurisdictions. This also includes skilled trade workers in factory production, assembly operations, natural resource processing. All these individuals would face unnecessary barriers if this bill were to pass, which would be harmful and unwarranted.

In addition, the mandatory consultations that are being proposed for the Alberta Board of Skilled Trades would hinder the board's ability to effectively engage with stakeholders as it limits the types of entities permitted to participate in consultations. That's exactly what you expect from an NDP government or a Liberal

government. They talk consultation, and they're the first ones to run away from it, Madam Speaker. Under the existing Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act the Alberta Board of Skilled Trades can meet with a wider range of stakeholders as appropriate, including postsecondary institutions, trade unions, community organizations, and others they deem necessary.

Our goal should be to foster dialogue in many different ideas, which already is reflected within our diverse and skilled workforce right here in our province. In Alberta the delivery of certain programs by trade unions is already recognized by the registrar for credit towards the apprenticeship education program. Proposing amendments to this effect is unnecessary as the pathway already exists for trade union program delivery.

Recently our government made an announcement with the International Union of Operating Engineers local 955 training trust fund. We are partnering to support apprenticeship education for the crane and hoisting equipment operator trade. This investment of \$350,000 would create up to 40 additional seats for the first-period mobile crane operator training. Currently we have 10 union training providers who have recognition from Advanced Education allowing them to deliver apprenticeship-equivalent training within our province. Madam Speaker, I think the NDP sees that our government is working with unions, and they are panicking. What else could this be? There's no reason for this bill to exist, but you know what? When it comes to the NDP, they're protecting their turf, and they don't need to because in the end we're here to make sure our unions are heard, too.

It is also important that we recognize the amazing progress our province has made in our trade and apprenticeship fields by actively encouraging more students to register in the many apprenticeship programs that we have throughout our province. In Alberta we have 47 apprenticeship education programs within the skilled trades. Under our current Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act Alberta's government is the register for the delivery of apprenticeship education and industry training programming. This allows for our province to register learners and establish learning outcomes and examination criteria. The province also monitors the progress of those seeking to grow within these fields. Alberta also issues credentials to apprenticeship graduates once they complete their respective programs.

Madam Speaker, we have approximately 61,000 registered apprenticeships within our province, which has been an increase of nearly 28 per cent since last year. Through Budget 2024 our government is investing an additional \$24 million per year over the next three years to ensure that more seats will be added to our apprenticeship programs across the province. Through this investment our UCP government is providing an unwavering commitment to the growing of our economy to meet the needs of these sectors to make sure Alberta continues to be prosperous. Our government will continue to cultivate a diverse and growing economy and economic ecosystem within our province.

Although the intentions of Bill 207 seem noble, it is crucial that we recognize the implications and potential consequences of implementing the outlined amendments. Within our province we recognize the importance of Alberta's skilled trade workers like myself and the need of empowering them as we work to ensure a vibrant future for Alberta's economy.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the skilled trades flourish, and I believe Bill 207, if passed, could inhibit the growth of these sectors. That is why I won't be voting to support this bill, and I would encourage my fellow members to do the same. You know, whenever you've got something put forward that is based on ideology, which is what we see repeatedly by the NDP, all we ever hear is the damages from the results of it. We've got the rental caps

that they tried to bring in, but our government shot them down because it damages economies, Madam Speaker, much like what this would do.

We can't allow something like this to move forward because in the end it's going to hamper a system that already has got a lot of strain with the amount of people moving to Alberta for the opportunities we have here. You want to know what? We want to get each and every one of them into the trades program as soon as we can because, I'll tell you, they're valued by Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am so proud to stand today in support of my colleague the Alberta NDP critic for Advanced Education and the Member for Edmonton-South to discuss kind of looking at Bill 207, Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education (Valuing Skilled Workers) Amendment Act, 2024. From the homes that we live in to the electricity that keeps us warm, the work of skilled tradespeople affects every part of our daily lives. Pursuing a career in the skilled trades like welding, plumbing, or heavy equipment operation can be a very lucrative opportunity that offers apprentices a unique way to earn while they learn. Bill 207 supports the trades and ensures skilled trades workers get paid good-paying jobs. You know, in 2021 the UCP undermined the trades by devaluing proper certification. This proposed bill would secure Albertans better paying jobs by ensuring proper certification for skilled workers.

This bill supports the skilled trades industry in three main ways. First, Bill 207 will reinstate all compulsory trades into the legislation, ensuring trades cannot be deregulated by ministerial order. Removing the compulsory certification for trades exposes certified trades workers to unfair competition and devalues their work. B.C. tried this 15 years ago, and it deregulated skilled trades, which led to reduced wages. That's what this bill will seek to fix.

Second, Bill 207 reinstates apprenticeship committees the UCP removed, ensuring trade workers are consulted on any changes that affect their work. Workers deserve a voice when it comes to their work.

Lastly, Bill 207 ensures union training centres are supported as delivery entities of skilled trades training. Union training centres help workers get the education and the skills that they need, but unfortunately the UCP government doesn't give them enough support. The bill would fix this by including union training centres in the legislation as the first step in getting them the support that they deserve.

I urge the government to support this bill and our call on the Minister of Advanced Education to reinstate apprenticeship committees through the board. We are currently facing a shortage in skilled trades workers, with decreased enrolments in apprenticeships, which Bill 207 intends to rectify. If Alberta wants to attract more workers here, we need to start recognizing the special skills required to work in skilled trades, incentivize higher wages, have employment opportunities that will attract more workers here to Alberta.

4:30

A growing number of skilled workers are women. Although they come from different backgrounds and provinces, they all have something in common: they're extremely proud of what they do. The skilled trades have a lot to offer women. This bill would also assist women. We need to be breaking down the barriers to help women thrive in skilled trades. It's always a daunting question: what do I do now? For women graduating from high school and

considering a career change, the skilled trades can take you everywhere: outside the cubicle, across the country, or even into your own business. The skilled trades are among the fastest growing fields in Canada, offering plenty of room to advance and make a good salary. Take it from women who have chosen this career path: there are more opportunities than ever for women to succeed and lead in the skilled trades.

Unfortunately, women are significantly underrepresented in the skilled trades, making up only 4 per cent of workers. Women experience complex and compound barriers to entering the skilled trades. Barriers to enter can include financial barriers or access to education, transportation, or now the tools. They can also include systematic barriers such as racism and sexism or lack of network or connections to help get started. Even if women overcome these challenges, there are also the barriers when they enter the workforce. There was a study recently conducted out of the Ontario labour market partnerships. The research projected that 63 per cent of women in skilled trades reported being told that they didn't belong in the industry, and 76 per cent reported that they were feeling they were treated differently because of their gender.

The obvious solution to filling Alberta's labour gaps is to support Bill 207 and make the skilled trades sector more inclusive, to diversify a traditionally male-dominated workforce. In particular, women have struggled to build successful careers in this industry due to the lack of business infrastructure and the support that considers them.

Due to removing compulsory certification for trades, it exposes certified workers to unfair competition, it devalues the work, and it lowers wages. When we allow uncertified workers to practise skilled trades, it also poses safety risks when carrying out the duties of a trade. This bill would protect trade workers from competing with unqualified workers, creating higher wages and providing job security. Bill 207 will secure Albertans better paying jobs by ensuring proper certification for skilled workers.

I am proud to stand in support of Bill 207 as it represents a strategic investment in the future of our workforce and, ultimately, our economy. This bill is crucial for all of us to support as it will empower our current and future workforce to thrive in Alberta. Alberta's labour market deserves a future where skilled trade workers are valued, protected, and supported. I urge all members of this House to vote yes on Bill 207 and support Alberta's workers and our labour market.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak in opposition to Bill 207, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education (Valuing Skilled Workers) Amendment Act, 2024, proposed by the Member for Edmonton-South. As the representative of Lesser Slave Lake, a community rich in skilled workers, ranging from oil and gas, forestry, to construction trades and everything in between, I feel compelled to voice my constituents' concerns regarding the potential impacts of this bill.

At first glance, Madam Speaker, one might assume that Bill 207 aims to address issues or shortcomings within the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. However, upon closer examination it becomes evident that these proposed amendments would only serve to reduce flexibility and add red tape to some of the highest demand sectors in Alberta's economy. This is certainly a hurdle or a piece of red tape we don't need.

The economy and the industry where I'm from right now are booming. It's what I like to call happy problems. People are struggling right now to find essential and skilled workers for any industry straight across the board. We were joking last week with

some industry owners that finding a truck driver right now is like a free agent on July 1 in NHL season: they can pretty much demand and ask whatever they want and pick their location. These are happy problems to have, and we're grateful for the booming economy and the jobs that come with it in our area, but what we're certainly concerned about in Lesser Slave Lake and area and I think my colleagues across the aisle is creating more hurdles to make this difficult on our wonderful job creators to find good people to work within the industry.

The current Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act is designed to facilitate collaboration between industries, employers, trade unions, postsecondary institutions, and government entities to meet the evolving needs of our workforce. Bill 207, on the other hand, if passed, would impose unnecessary restrictions and bureaucratic hurdles that would hinder the effectiveness of the current legislation.

This reminds me of a meeting I had not too long ago with some of the executives from Northern Lakes College, Madam Speaker. We were lucky enough to have the hon. Minister of Advanced Education come to my humble town to meet with us about this exact problem and challenge and how we are going to find and train more workers. One of the concerns that I brought up in the meeting at the time – and it is one that I still believe is an issue today – is how we're coming up with some practical solutions to be able to find skilled trade workers for a lot of the Indigenous and remote areas, in rural communities in northern Alberta but across this province.

The answer is a difficult one. Oftentimes some of the remote communities travelling from even Woodland Cree First Nation to Slave Lake would be the same as me working in Dubai. It is a complete culture shock and a very difficult adjustment for many to make. If we're going to make adjustments in this area, I would hope that we're making thoughtful ones about trying to find practical and common-sense solutions to be able to put these people to work so that they can get common-sense jobs in the area.

Small adjustments that need to be made inside of our institutions would be, as an example: as exciting as it sounds to be able to be a red seal chef who is cooking a five-star meal somewhere at Fairmont Banff Springs, the practical solution is that when they're out of these programs, they need to be able to get a job in and around their area in order for them to succeed. So we change – there are some amendments, changes to the programming so that you could get a job as a camp chef, for instance, which is maybe a stepping-stone career to something more or possibly becoming an entrepreneur.

Another challenge we face in our area regarding issues like this is the stigma surrounding skilled trades themselves. Our hon. minister mentioned it so eloquently, that there should be no less pride in being a skilled trade worker with a journeyman certificate than it would be to be a doctor with a degree in medicine. My own personal experience of this is that in grade 9 we are made to believe that you have to pick out your courses for the rest of your life. You're either going to take these courses and become a doctor, a lawyer, a pharmacist, or, at that time – and I don't mean to be disrespectful – you're made to feel like you were going to go another route where you were almost like a skilled trades bum.

But I'm quick to remind people that 20 or 30 years ago my humble town of Slave Lake was home to the highest proportion of millionaires per capita in our great province, and I challenge most people I talk to that, I would say, 90 to 95 per cent of those individuals and entrepreneurs started their careers as skilled tradespeople or journeymen. A vision I'd like to have and, I think, many of my colleagues across the aisle is to be able to create an environment where we bridge those two worlds together, where we talk to the kid in grade 10 and say: hey, maybe you could enter the

skilled trades program now, but let's talk about opening your own business as well.

Maybe one day you're a journeyman plumber. Three or four years from now you get your own vehicle. You get a little numbered company. Five years from now you have 10 plumbers working for you, and then at 15 years you have a small successful business and you're helping fund and donate all the little things that make our community grow. We have a baseball diamond in Slave Lake, and along the centre field lines, I always tell people, the billboards that are paid for are Aims Electrical, which is a small electrical business, a small family business. It's Exact Oilfield, a small family business. There are no Walmart, there are no Tesla, there are no Amazon billboards in our small town.

4:40

I'm a little into the weeds here, Madam Speaker, but that's okay. It is important, I think, to mention that when we consider the ramifications of making any changes, we need to consider the unintended consequences of any legislation. We do not want to be a government that creates more hurdles for small-town people. In addition, the proposed changes to the interactions between the government and trade unions regarding apprenticeship, education, and industry training programs are unwarranted. Currently the delivery of certain programs made by trade unions is already recognized by the registrar for the credit towards an apprenticeship education program. Proposing these amendments is unnecessary as a pathway already exists for trade union program delivery.

The red tape that would be added, if Bill 207 were to pass, would only exacerbate the existing shortage of skilled labour in key sectors of our economy, making it more difficult to address employment shortcomings in the future. Rather than supporting our skilled labour force and fostering economic growth, these amendments proposed in Bill 207 would hinder progress and limit opportunities for Albertans. As such, it is imperative that we oppose the bill and work towards meaningful steps that address the needs of our workforce and our economy. Opposing Bill 207 aligns with our government's mandate to reduce red tape across Alberta and support skilled trade workers province-wide. We promised Albertans we would streamline processes and eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles that hinder economic growth.

I've spoken to many Indigenous leaders in my riding, and we talk about common-sense solutions for them. We don't want to create more hurdles for them. We want to create an environment where I discuss with them having their own made-for-them-by-them skilled trades programs, one of which they do a pretty amazing job of right here in the city of Edmonton, called the trade winds program, which I've been lucky enough – and many of my colleagues and, I'm sure, even some members from across the aisle can attest to what amazing things they're doing there. When I first visited them and attended their graduation, when I heard about what they're doing, I'd like to box it up like a franchise and expand it anywhere in northern Alberta because it's a good, common-sense idea with a good chance at a practical solution and finding more skilled trade workers and bridging the gaps for Indigenous and rural communities.

Madam Speaker – just give me a second here; I went a little off script here – through a pilot program aimed at creating up to 40 additional crane and hoisting equipment operator seats, we're also investing \$350,000 to provide expanded training programs and opportunities for these workers. This initiative not only addresses the demand for skilled workers in specific trades, but it also demonstrates our commitment to investing in the future of Alberta's workforce. This government is committed to supporting trades and apprenticeships to meet the growing demand for skilled labour in

our province. With approximately 61,000 registered apprentices, a nearly 28 per cent increase over the previous year, we recognize the importance of investing in apprenticeship programs and creating more opportunities for individuals to pursue careers in the trades. Bill 207, on the other hand, if passed, would impose unnecessary restrictions and bureaucratic hurdles that would hinder the effectiveness of the current legislation.

My constituents are concerned, and for that reason I would like everyone to vote against Bill 207.

Thank you for your time, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the spot in the chair. Have a good day.

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

**Member Brar:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. All economies work because workers go to work. It is the workers who keep the economy working, and without the talent and hard work of the workers we won't have homes where we raise our families, we won't have pipelines built to the tidewaters, we won't have hospitals that keep our society healthy, and we won't have schools that foster our young minds. Their hard work is valued, respected, and cannot be overstated. The concerning part is that their numbers are dwindling, and this needs immediate attention in Alberta. To quote a report from CIBC, Canada's construction workers over the age of 55 are now at an all-time high. Numbers from Stats Canada reveal that Alberta has lost more journeypersons over the past five consecutive years than we have brought in under this UCP government.

A solid education is a vital component that can train the next generation of skilled trade talent. Alberta's construction unions are an untapped resource that can get the job done. Union training centres are world-class, multimillion-dollar facilities that provide some of the best training in Alberta and in the entire country. IUOE local 955's Budd Coutts Apprenticeship and Education Centre and many others across the province have turned tens of thousands of apprentices into skilled journeypersons who have helped build everything from Alberta's oil sands to our pipelines, skylines, roadways, and much more. Additionally, the education spaces and equipment needed to learn the trades at union training centres are fully in place and funded by the unions. Plus, the training is provided to members as well as to other people who wish to join that training. Training facilities like Budd Coutts may still be available for the public to take advantage of and one they can assess on a year-round basis. So, Madam Speaker, it is important that we recognize the importance of these union training centres.

With this Bill 207 there are three things that can be accomplished. First, Bill 207 will reinstate all compulsory trades into legislation, ensuring trades cannot be deregulated by ministerial order. Removing compulsory certifications for trades exposes certified trade workers to unfair competition and devalues their work. B.C. tried to do this 15 years ago and deregulated skilled trades, which led to reduced wages. This is what this bill will fix. It is time for this UCP government to learn from the mistakes of other provinces, other provincial governments. They tried that 15 years ago in B.C. It failed. Now is not the time to experiment with that again here in Alberta. We need to do different. We must do different if we want to achieve better results.

The second thing that Bill 207 will do is that it will reinstate apprenticeship committees the UCP removed, ensuring trades workers are consulted on any changes that affect their work. Workers deserve the voice because they put their blood and sweat into this economy, so it is very important that we consult with workers about anything that will impact their lives, that will impact

their wages, that will impact their livelihoods. But we have the UCP government, that refuses to sit down with Albertans who elected them to represent them and to make the laws that will benefit them. Unfortunately, we have a government that is working to benefit their insiders, that is working to benefit their known people. Bill 207 would fix this problem.

The third thing that Bill 207 will ensure is that union training centres are supported as delivered entities of skilled trades training. Union training centres have helped workers get the education and skills they need, but the UCP doesn't give them enough support. With the rising cost of everything, it is important that we support these training centres so that they can train our next generation that will build Alberta. Unfortunately, the UCP is not doing that. Bill 207 would fix this by including union training centres in legislation as a first step in getting them the support they deserve.

In the previous election of 2023 the Alberta NDP promised to provide training funding for union training centres, starting with \$4 million a year. Not only that; the Alberta NDP also promised that they will invest \$200 million in new postsecondary institutions in Calgary downtown. That would have helped to revitalize Calgary downtown and at the same time connect the students, connect the young minds, young Albertans with industry. That would have helped to create more jobs that would have helped to revitalize our economy. Unfortunately, we are seeing the exact opposite being done in this province.

**4:50**

Madam Speaker, in 2022, after learning from their mistake that they made 15 years ago, British Columbia reintroduced compulsory trades because of safety issues and lowering of wages due to a 2009 legislation that was similar to the current that we have. It is important that we recognize the safety of the workers as well. Workers are not objects. They are human beings. They have families waiting for them at their homes. They have kids who are waiting for their parents so that they can come home on time and they can spend quality time with their families. It is time to make sure that they earn enough money that they can put food on the table, they have some money saved for recreation or a small vacation, and they have enough money in their retirement savings so that they can retire with dignity because they have contributed their entire life in building this province, in building this country, and in building this society as a whole that we enjoy.

Most importantly, they deserve respect, and how we can respect is pretty simple. The starting point of respect is that we can begin by listening to their concerns and then making and enacting laws that will help them to lead a better life. Anything that the UCP has done so far is not helping them, whether it is privatization of health care, whether it is not funding the education system for their kids, and whether it is not providing enough support during this affordability crisis.

The prices of groceries are skyrocketing. Insurance costs have gone up. The NDP government put the caps on insurance rates. This UCP government removed them. The tuition hikes are another big problem that I'm hearing from young people in my own riding, and it is important that we fund those education institutions so that young people are able to access those affordable education systems and get the proper training so that they can enter the workforce and they can contribute to this economy, but we are seeing none of this from this current UCP government.

Recognizing the special skills required to work in skilled trades incentivizes higher wages and employment opportunities and attracts more workers. Removing compulsory certification for trades exposes certified workers to unfair competition, devalues their work, and lowers the wages, and this is not the time to lower

the wages. Alberta has already seen the lowest wage growth in the entire country. It is time to support these workers. It is time to hike their wages. It is time to provide a safe environment for the workers so that they can work safely and earn enough to support their families and be with their families at the end of the day very safely.

Apprenticeship enrolment has been down under this UCP. We have seen that despite the significant population growth in Alberta this last year there are approximately 80 per cent of employers reporting job vacancies in the skilled trades. Job postings in Alberta for the trades are up 13 per cent on a compounded annual average from 2018 until 2020.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's good to be here today on this bright, beautiful day with the warm weather. I'm rising today to voice my opposition to Bill 207, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education (Valuing Skilled Workers) Amendment Act, 2024. This bill is a mouthful. As well, it's a mouthful on how bad it is, so we're going to walk through a little bit of that. But before that, I want to also talk about just where Alberta is already going with our current legislation.

Madam Speaker, you may or may not know that 90 per cent of private-sector jobs in Alberta were created right here in Alberta over the last year. Not only this; Alberta is the only province that has more private-sector jobs than public-sector jobs in our current legislative framework. We're doing a good job. This side of the House believes we're doing a good job, and our tradespeople believe that we're doing a good job as well.

In our current legislative framework we're also getting projects across the line. We've seen TMX just come online. We saw a Dow project just be announced. That's 6,000 jobs, skilled labour, in this current environment. These are some of the successes that we have to continue looking at as we talk about these projects. As well, we have incredible, incredible institutions across this province that are training our trades. We don't want to devalue what they're doing either.

Madam Speaker, the future is very, very bright in Alberta, and we want to keep it that way. We have the lowest taxes. We've reduced red tape. This piece of legislation is only adding more red tape.

Just recently we passed Bill 203. Very thankful for that process. That is for international workers, newcomers to Alberta to be able to come to Alberta, get to work, and be able to celebrate the Alberta advantage here right across our great province. These are the things that our current government is doing. These are important things that our current government is doing, and I believe we need to continue along that vein.

This legislation seeks to amend the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act. While it may seem to offer some commendable things, the amendments outlined in Bill 207 would produce some significant challenges and complications for both skilled workers and industries across our province. Bill 207 aims to amend this act; however, it creates additional bureaucracy and without any real benefits.

Madam Speaker, while on the surface it seems to add some benefit in getting people to work, the reality is that it adds significantly more red tape to the conversation. The new designation of "fully-regulated trades," which would introduce significant red tape for those selected trades, is a concern even in my own area of Grande Prairie and surrounding area. We have significant projects going on. We need more people entering the trades, more access, and more ease of credentialing, still high

calibre but more pathways forward. We don't need more red tape in this. We don't need newcomers not being able to get a red seal. We don't need the limitation of certifications or red seals from other jurisdictions not being able to get into those specific industries. Some of these industries include factory production, assembly operations, and our natural resource processing. This is significant for Alberta. It's significant for my area and significant right across our great province.

To that point, our energy industry is continuing to look to expand. Just the other day we heard that our extraction of energy is looking to, hopefully, double in the future. Well, we need more people working in the trades, and what this government is doing is getting those jobs to the table to be able to get that energy out of the ground. Madam Speaker, these things are important, and we need to continue to address the reduction of red tape, getting people the jobs, high-paying, skilled jobs, right here in Alberta.

By imposing other restrictive measures on who can participate in the skilled workforce, this bill, if passed, would exclude qualified individuals, and it could extend the labour shortages in key sectors. I don't know about you, but on this side of the House we want to get people to work faster, participating in the Alberta advantage. This is about getting people to participate. Our side of the House is about getting people to the skills and to be able to execute on those skills in the jobs that they want and desire, that are high-paying jobs. Madam Speaker, this is what this side of the House is about, and this piece of legislation has no part of that.

As I said, we recently passed my Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, and this does demonstrate that our side of the House is removing barriers for skilled workers and for newcomers. The last thing we should be doing is adding in more requirements, more difficulty for newcomers right after promising them the very opposite. We want to help newcomers. We want to be able to get people here to Alberta. We want to welcome them with open arms to Alberta so that they can walk into a great job. This is what the Alberta advantage is about: getting the right job, taking care of your family, and being able to participate in a great culture here.

Now, as the MLA for Grande Prairie I do believe that I use my voice to say on behalf of my constituents that Bill 207 would hinder our . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. The time for the consideration of this matter of business has been concluded.

## 5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

### Requirement for Canadian Credentials

511. Mr. Haji to propose the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a bill that, if enacted, would prohibit, subject to any applicable exemption based on a demonstrated public health and safety risk, a professional regulatory body from including Canadian work experience or experiential training as a requirement to obtain the necessary credentials to work in that profession in Alberta.

**Mr. Haji:** Madam Speaker, it's a great honour for me to rise and bring forward Motion 511.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As I rise to present my inaugural motion in this esteemed Assembly, I am profoundly honoured. Immigration and settlement is an exciting and challenging journey with unnecessary hurdles.

Motion 511 attempts to remove some of these barriers faced by Alberta's skilled workers.

Last year Canada experienced record-high immigration. Alberta has the fourth-highest international migration of all provinces and the highest level of interprovincial migration in the country. By 2030 the number of anticipated job openings in Alberta is expected to exceed the number of new job seekers by 45,000.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's new immigrants encounter formidable barriers that won't allow them to fully leverage the professions that they were trained in. One of the many obstacles is the foreign credential recognition process. The Conference Board of Canada has estimated national earning losses at a staggering \$13 billion to \$17 billion due to unrecognized foreign credentials.

The unemployment rate among new immigrants in the province is on the rise, coupled with a decline in labour participation. The proportion of new immigrants in shelters is on the rise both in Edmonton and Calgary. While we see high international and interprovincial migration according to Stats Canada, let's not forget that Alberta has the lowest retention rate of skilled workers and skilled trades amongst British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and most parts of the Atlantic provinces.

There are many reasons why Alberta is lagging in the retention of skilled workers compared to other provinces. According to Stats Canada Alberta's overqualification rate for immigrants has been steadily increasing and ranking among the highest in the country. On average the latest available data shows that 24 per cent of Canadian immigrants aged 25 to 59 are overqualified compared to just 11 per cent of nonimmigrant skilled workers. In Alberta the figure is 40 per cent, nearly quadruple that of nonimmigrant Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, as members of this Assembly we have the obligation to address policies that impact the economy while disproportionately affecting Alberta's new immigrants. Motion 511 aims to dismantle such barriers, improving Alberta's ability not only to attract but retain skilled immigrants while facilitating their seamless integration into the province's workforce strategies.

Mr. Speaker, disturbingly, 30 per cent of immigrants to Canada with degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or optometry are employed in completely unrelated fields compared to a mere 4 per cent of similarly educated nonimmigrants. The same disparity extends across other sectors and intensifies with a higher level of educational attainment. Essentially, what this means is that the more academically accomplished immigrants are, the less likely they are to secure jobs commensurate with their education. This significant underutilization of skilled immigrants is particularly acute among those trained for industries currently grappling with labour shortages such as our health care system. We cannot allow this phenomenon to undermine the province's workforce, the province's economic strategy, and the province's ability to retain skilled workers. That's why I am asking the government to take tangible actions to address this acute problem.

In Alberta regulated professions and occupations are self-governing bodies through provincial legislation. These regulatory entities are entrusted with establishing practical competencies, standards, ethical codes, and relevant bylaws to govern their members. It is the core architectural framework that protects the public interest and ensures public safety. We have over 70 regulatory bodies overseeing more than 170 professions, spanning sectors like insurance, health care, law, architecture, and real estate. Upon registration and licensure under these bodies skilled professionals are required to demonstrate adherence to the required standards of practice and competencies.

Imposing an additional requirement for Canadian experience constitutes redundancy, epitomizes bureaucratic red tape, and to

some extent it is a systemic barrier that disproportionately affects new Canadians in the province. The trend in other similar provinces over the past two years demonstrates the realization and the awakening that requiring Canadian experience only undermines the ability to attract and retain skilled professionals in their respective provinces.

Some examples. In November 2021 the Ontario Legislature passed the Working for Workers Act, 2021, which introduced improvements related to foreign credentials recognition. The bill explicitly prohibits regulated professions from mandating Canadian work experience as a registration requirement except in cases deemed necessary for public health and public safety. Ontario has recently extended this ban to job postings and application forms, further levelling the playing field for internationally trained professions.

British Columbia enacted in fall 2023 the International Credentials Recognition Act. This bill includes the same prohibition on requiring Canadian work experience that Ontario first implemented. Presently the bill covers 18 regulatory authorities in British Columbia across professions.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House our track record underscores our commitment to addressing the issue of foreign credentials recognition barriers. We truly believe in addressing the issue from both equity and economic standpoints. We supported the Fair Registration Practices Act in 2019, we supported and asked for improvements on the fairness for newcomers office to collaborate with regulatory bodies, and we supported the recently passed Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act. These efforts demonstrate our unwavering commitment to fairness and meaningful change for skilled immigrants.

Mr. Speaker, for those who are concerned about potential repercussions on regulatory bodies, Motion 511 proposes ministerial exemptions for health and safety considerations like the approach adopted in other provinces. Therefore, I have brought forth Motion 511 to dismantle barriers hindering the recognition of talent, skills, and contributions that skilled immigrants offer to our economy.

I appeal to all members of this Assembly to support Motion 511. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

**The Speaker:** I might just ask for some further clarification, and perhaps it is the splitting of hairs. I appreciate the fact that you've brought forward this motion. I wondered if you might move Motion 511.

**Mr. Haji:** Yeah. I move Motion 511, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad for the opportunity to rise and speak on this motion today. This discussion is an important one, and I'm grateful for the thoughts that my colleague has already shared today regarding Motion 511. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Decore for using his motion to bring awareness to this important issue.

I also want to highlight that our government values the talents and skills of all Albertans, whether they've been here for five months or five generations. As a government it is our responsibility to ensure that our workforce remains competitive and that job opportunities are accessible to all Albertans, including new Albertans, which we have already been doing.

That brings me to the motion before us today. Motion 511 seeks to remove Canadian work experience requirements for internationally



trained professionals seeking licensure in regulated occupations within Alberta by urging the government to introduce legislation. However, while the intent of Motion 511 is commendable, passing legislation to achieve this common goal is not necessary. Mr. Speaker, that is why I wish to move the following amendment to Motion 511.

**The Speaker:** Excellent. Go ahead, pages, if you want to grab the amendment. It's going to require all the copies. If you can get that to me, we'll get it to the table, we'll get it to the mover, and I'll take a copy, and as soon as we have all those, I'll ask you to continue.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, we're going to get you a copy in just one brief moment, but I have two quick questions.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 41(5.2)(a) and (b) there are requirements when amending a motion other than a government motion. The first is that Parliamentary Counsel approve the amendment no later than the Thursday prior, which, as you'll note when you receive your copy, has taken place. The other is that the hon. member received notice of the amendment by 11 o'clock on the day of which it is moved. I'd just like to confirm that that did in fact take place. This amendment is in order. It will be referred to as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, please continue.

**Mr. Lundy:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Motion Other than Government Motion 511 be amended by striking out "introduce a bill that, if enacted, would," and substituting, "continue to proactively take the steps necessary to."

Now, Mr. Speaker, foreign credential recognition is an important priority for newcomers to Alberta, and this is an important issue for our government. We are dedicated to open discussions and finding the best ways forward. This commitment was just shown recently in this House when Bill 203, the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee Act, was passed. I'm grateful to the Member for Grande Prairie for bringing forward this timely and important legislation and for his advocacy for foreign credential recognition.

I also know that this is an issue of great importance for the Minister of Advanced Education, and I've heard her speak numerous times on the importance of this issue, including highlighting the many consultations that she undertakes to ensure that this will be a big part of ensuring Alberta's workforce for the future.

Our government believes in the importance of hard work and individual responsibility. I also recognize the importance of a strong and competitive labour market that rewards merit and innovation, driving economic growth and prosperity for all Albertans. Our United Conservative government has been cultivating this culture of innovation, and we see it paying off. Today Alberta is the best place in the country to work, live, and start a business. Foreign credential recognition undoubtedly plays a role in shaping Alberta's thriving economy. Skilled workers bring diverse experiences and expertise to our province, and we want to approach this in the best way possible for our economy and society. As Albertans we take pride in our province's reputation as a land of opportunity, where hard work and talent are rewarded regardless of one's background. We recognize the immense value that skilled immigrants bring to our communities, enriching our workforce with diverse perspectives, expertise, skills, and experiences.

Foreign credential recognition is a vital aspect in the integration of skilled immigrants into our labour market. Our government understands the aspirations of newcomers who come to Alberta seeking to contribute their skills and expertise to our economy, yet we also recognize the challenges they face in having their credentials recognized, which can often hinder their ability to fully participate in

our workforce. Our government continues to address these challenges and is working to ensure that Alberta remains a place where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. By recognizing foreign credentials, we cannot only harness the talents of skilled newcomers but also foster a more dynamic and competitive labour market, driving economic growth and prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, a strong economy is essential for sustaining our way of life and supporting our communities. As I've said before and as I know many of my colleagues have said, business is booming in Alberta, and we should be proud of all the progress we are making and the strides we are taking in innovation. This provides the resources and prosperity needed to invest in essential services such as health care, education, and infrastructure and creates opportunities for individuals and families to thrive. By embracing skilled newcomers and recognizing their contributions, our government is strengthening the foundation of our economy and ensuring its resilience in an ever-changing world. By welcoming skilled immigrants and recognizing their credentials, we are demonstrating our commitment to building a stronger, more inclusive province for generations to come.

Alberta has taken significant strides in ensuring fair registration practices through the enactment of the Fair Registration Practices Act in 2020. This legislation reflects our commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment for all professionals regardless of their country of origin.

Moreover, our dedication to attracting and retaining skilled workers is further exemplified by the establishment of the foreign credential advisory committee. As I mentioned earlier, this committee is comprised of up to 13 members, is tasked with streamlining and enhancing foreign credential recognition and assessment processes and facilitating the integration of internationally trained professionals in our workforce.

Therefore, I urge all members to support this amendment to Motion 511, which aligns with our values of fairness, equity, and economic growth, our commitment to keep working towards this goal as well as work that our government has already undertaken on this issue. By doing so, we can ensure that Alberta remains a welcoming destination for skilled professionals from around the world, driving opportunities, innovation, and prosperity for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, we know how important this issue is. A couple of my colleagues were talking about big projects in Alberta that will need skilled workers, including the recognition of foreign workers and their credentials. It's just going to help Alberta continue to grow. I know that the Minister of Advanced Education will continue her efforts to work closely with all stakeholders to ensure that we are moving towards this and that we can move towards an Alberta that is prosperous for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on amendment A1 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

**Mr. Haji:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for engaging on the motion on this very important topic, one that impacts individuals and families, one that has sensible implications on our economy. For those who immigrated to Canada, navigated through the processes, those who share the lived experience, this is an extremely important issue.

5:20

I would appreciate any member of the government caucus explaining to members of this Assembly and all Albertans a few

things considering this proposed amendment. If the actions to prohibit the requirement for Canadian experience without an exemption will not be undertaken through legislation, how does the government caucus expect this prohibition will be enacted? Under the UCP government there have been very limited meaningful improvements in this area despite other comparable jurisdictions like British Columbia and Ontario happily providing these assurances to foreign-trained immigrants. Why the hesitation?

This amendment implies that the government continues to proactively take the steps necessary to

prohibit, subject to any applicable exemption based on a demonstrated public health and safety risk, a professional regulatory body from including Canadian work experience or experiential training as a requirement to obtain the necessary credentials to work in that profession in Alberta.

Can the government please tell members of this Assembly what they have been doing on this subject and how they are measuring the success on this? According to the department's annual reports credentialing timelines are not getting better yet. As a province we are leading the country on immigrants who are in a job where they feel overqualified. As a province we have the lowest skilled worker retention rate compared to the other comparable jurisdictions. My question is: without taking tangible action through legislation, what does success look like?

We truly believe in addressing this issue, as I said before, from an equity and an economic standpoint. We are committed to moving forward and working with members of the Assembly. I would have loved for members of the Assembly to support Motion 511 to move forward on bringing Alberta in line with other comparable jurisdictions in the country through legislation. However, I support the amendment, and I will encourage all members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on amendment A1, is there anyone else wishing to speak? Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

**The Speaker:** I recognize the hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 511 as amended. We all recognize that internationally trained applicants are essential to Alberta's growing economy and workforce needs, and we all know that there are barriers for newcomers to entering the career that they were trained in back home. I know this too well. I've often shared the story many times in this House that my own father, when he immigrated to Canada, really struggled to get into the teaching profession. That was a job that he loved back home in India. Ultimately, due to the barriers and sheer difficulties in trying to get credentialed while providing for his family, he decided to pursue a different path. He's a very successful man, my father. We're very proud of him. We love him dearly. It's not often you get to tell your parents in the House that you love them, so I will take that opportunity today.

But these kinds of experiences that he had: they have a detrimental impact on individuals and families, as one struggles to understand if they have met their full potential. The what-ifs, the whys, and what could have been: these questions continue for a lifetime. I know that my story of my father is a story of many people on this side of the aisle and on the other side of the House. I know this through the thousands of doors that I've knocked on, the many, many conversations that I've had before entering politics and as a

minister and MLA with people in similar situations. These stories are not unique, and they are painful. This is why, when we were elected in 2019, tackling this issue was a key priority for government.

In 2020 through the passing of the Fair Registration Practices Act, Alberta has made significant strides in ensuring fair registration practices are indeed enacted. This act was put in place to speed up and improve fairness for all applicants seeking a licence to practise in regulated occupations. The focus was on ensuring that internationally trained first-time applicants seeking to become registered with Alberta's regulatory bodies have a streamlined pathway. Advanced Education administers the act and monitors regulator compliance through a variety of activities. We want to ensure that Alberta has efficient and effective registration pathways. We also want to ensure that regulators apply registration practices that are transparent, that are objective, impartial, and of course procedurally fair.

My ministry works collaboratively with Alberta's approximately 70 regulatory bodies. These bodies govern approximately 190 regulated occupations and designated trades to ensure compliance with this act. They also work to influence registration processes that will improve the experiences for internationally trained applicants. We collect data annually from Alberta's regulatory bodies regarding their registration practices, and we use this data to monitor compliance and to support regulators in improving their registration practices. In 2021 approximately 26 per cent of Alberta's regulators reported that they require Canadian or equivalent to Canadian work experience when assessing application requirements. We want to bring these numbers down where appropriate. That's obvious. We all want the same thing.

Additionally, Advanced Education conducts compliance reviews to assess the registration practices of regulatory bodies. As a result of these reviews, we provide recommendations to the regulators in improving the registration practices. The regulators in turn develop action plans reflecting how these recommendations will be implemented.

We have also hosted several round-tables this year to address expediting registration, discussing third-party assessment practices, and sharing approaches to enhancing public-facing information. This fall Advanced Education will again host an annual in-person event, bringing together Alberta regulators who share promising registration practices and innovative strategies. Together we will continue to develop and enhance a community of practice in Alberta. And, Mr. Speaker, I plan to be very personally involved in this effort.

Furthermore, Alberta's government is establishing the foreign credential advisory committee to address labour shortages and promote our province as a top destination for skilled workers. This 13-member committee aims to streamline and enhance foreign credential recognition and assessment. They will then provide recommendations to the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism within one year.

The work of this committee is integral to attracting skilled workers to Alberta and building the workforce Alberta will need today and in the years to come. Alberta's government has a clear goal to ensure the timely registration of internationally trained applicants. We recognize that this is a crossministerial effort and will require close engagement with our stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, the motivation levels are really high to move the needle on this file. Our economy demands it, and it's an issue frequently addressed by the Premier and my colleagues. The legislation and initiatives we have in place today will expedite the registration of internationally trained professionals. They will

support Alberta's labour force and contribute to growing our economy. However, we need to do more, and we will do more.

I do believe that Motion 511 as amended seeks to eliminate some barriers faced by internationally trained applicants in getting their credentials in Alberta, and that is why I feel it's important to welcome these amendments, which we have, that recognize and reflect the ongoing work already under way to support skilled workers seeking opportunities in a regulated profession in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Member Tejada:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to rise and speak in favour of the motion as amended, Motion 511, from my hon. colleague in Edmonton-Decore. I'm very thankful for the work he's done in community and honest consultation with stakeholders on this issue. I truly believe that this motion is about realizing our potential as a province, fortifying our workforce, and bolstering our economy. This isn't just a priority for newcomers, as mentioned previously by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont. It is a priority for all of us here in Alberta.

As critic for antiracism and diversity I've already heard from many stakeholders in the antiracism and diversity spaces that removing barriers to credentialing is essential to building a strong foundation and charting a successful path here in Alberta. In general I'll always advocate for stronger supports and legislation to ensure that when we court folks to be part of the Alberta fabric, they arrive with confidence that they can find work that aligns with their knowledge and expertise. This motion as amended rightly addresses what we've been hearing on the ground.

5:30

On a personal note, I've known something, as a second-generation Canadian, for as long as I can remember. Much like many members have already stated here, I'm a second-generation Canadian. My mother came here in the '70s with work experience that she didn't get to use in Canada. We know that all work is valuable work, and I'll echo the minister in saying that I'm thankful for my parent's example as well in the work ethic she modelled for my sister and I. She spent many decades and took pride in the work she eventually did with little ones at Calgary Catholic Immigration. While it wasn't related to her previous experience as an accountant, she brought real joy and heart to that job.

But I do feel that there is a significant untapped potential when it comes to folks who come here with skills, drive, and resilience if they're limited by regulations that don't recognize our realities in terms of labour shortages and don't take into account their expertise. I know of cases recently where folks were respiratory specialists, before COVID, looking to build a life here. One was a respiratory specialist and decided that the obstacles to working here were just too numerous, and that was, frankly, a big loss for us.

Taking this step would boost our economy through better wages and benefits for these workers. The Conference Board of Canada has reported in the neighbourhood of \$13.4 billion to \$17 billion nationally in lost wages because of this barrier that people face when their credentials aren't recognized. Some of this is due to work not matching the skill set but also due to the fact that unemployment among new immigrants is actually on the rise. So the requirement for Canadian experience vastly increases the proportion of newcomers who are underemployed.

Over the years I've heard multiple versions of the phrase "diversity is our strength," and ultimately it is within our reach in this House to honour the spirit of that phrase by enacting meaningful legislation to ensure that newcomers aren't stuck in the

endless cycle of not being able to get Canadian credentials due to lack of Canadian work experience. I really do believe that the UCP must do better at recruiting skilled immigrants and supporting them in their employment and making sure that it matches previous experience. Let's not wait for a foreign credential advisory committee to be established; let's see some immediate action. Show us how you would like to reduce red tape in regulated professions.

I would be remiss if I didn't clearly state that we also need to not make it more expensive for newcomers to come to Alberta, and I'm referring to the increased fees that include their qualification assessment. Removing the Canadian work experience requirement will make a real difference in improving the lives of these new Canadians. I truly hope that given the nature of this amendment, the amendment to the motion that we're talking about here, the UCP is able to report back their progress on this and give us some meaningful data on how they're successfully removing barriers for newcomers.

Now, I do know they like to borrow from other jurisdictions when it comes to legislating, so maybe they could refer to provinces like B.C. and Ontario, where work like this has already been done. I kind of think they secretly like our ideas, as evidenced by following our lead on Bill 207, so they should note that we've asked for this since last spring leading up to the election.

In summary, I will be voting in favour of this motion as amended and urge all members to do the same. I look forward to seeing meaningful action on this and to removing barriers to credentialing newcomers and ensuring their success and recognizing as well that newcomer success is actually part of our success here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, followed by Calgary-North East.

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in this Assembly and speak to Motion 511. Before I go further, I'd like to note that I'm not opposed to the sentiment expressed by this motion. I'd be happy to support this motion if it included the amendment moved by my colleague the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Motion 511, when amended, would read as follows.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue to proactively take steps necessary to prohibit, subject to any applicable exemption based on a demonstrated public health and safety risk, a professional regulatory body from including Canadian work experience or experiential training as a requirement to obtain the necessary credentials to work in that profession in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, broadly speaking, Motion 511 seeks to remove Canadian work experience requirements for internationally trained professionals seeking licensure in regulated occupations within Alberta, and we want to have more opportunities for doctors, for nurses, for electricians, and various other regulated professionals, even such as the one that I worked in prior to serving Albertans in this role.

As a government we want to maintain and ensure a fair and efficient registration and application process in skilled work and in trades. It's something we take very seriously, and that's why the Fair Registration Practices Act came into effect in 2020. The FRPA governs the registration practices of Alberta's regulatory bodies, and the Ministry of Advanced Education works directly with regulatory bodies to administer that act and monitor compliance. This is an ongoing process, and it involves different components. The ministry conducts targeted compliance reviews to assess the registration practices of regulatory bodies, it facilitates round-tables

to explore opportunities for improvement, and it hosts an annual event to share innovative practices among regulators.

Mr. Speaker, my point is that it is evident that work is being done to continuously evaluate the registration practices of Alberta's regulatory bodies, and that is why I speak in support of the amendment to this motion. Our government is certainly committed to removing barriers for internationally trained workers looking to become licensed here in Alberta, and this is also exemplified by the establishment of the foreign credential advisory committee, a fantastic bill that was brought forward by my colleague who sits near to me in this Chamber.

This committee, consisting of up to 13 members, is tasked with streamlining and enhancing foreign credential recognition and assessment. That includes reviewing legislation and other rules that govern the recognition of foreign credentials in this province. It includes the evaluation of processes in place in other jurisdictions in Canada to advance foreign credential recognition and identifying other areas for success. Mr. Speaker, this is important work, and these are important objectives that our government is working towards.

Now, if we look at this province, our economy is growing. It's growing rapidly. The Alberta advantage is certainly real. This is one of the reasons why our province is often referred to as the economic engine for Canada, and a lot of that is due to our workforce. You know, we have such a young and vibrant and skilled workforce, and the fact is that we need more skilled workers here in Alberta to keep that growth going, and we need to continually work to remove barriers for internationally trained applicants to become licensed here in Alberta. Our government will continue that work to ensure fair registration practices in this province.

I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in support of the amendment to Motion 511. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Member Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise in the House and support this Motion 511. The recognition of foreign credentials is a complex issue – we all understand that – and it does involve all levels of government working together to support all those newcomers who need the recognition of their foreign credentials. There are accredited postsecondary institutions that assess the educational credentials for academic placement, and there are provincially mandated assessment agencies that evaluate educational credentials for the purpose of both academic placement and workforce entry. All newcomers must get their credentials recognized by one of these regulatory bodies. The situation is different in different provinces, but in general the process is considered unjust, expensive, and lengthy.

5:40

I have the honour of representing Calgary-North East, which is home for so many new immigrants. They have big dreams, and they're willing to work hard to achieve those big dreams. They do not want any kind of favours from their elected officials. They just want their skills to be recognized and respected so that they can work in the field in which they are trained.

Let me share some personal stories and examples of my constituents. My father is a foreign-trained pharmacist with more than 25 years of foreign experience, but he is unable to work here in Canada because he is not able to get his credentials recognized. As well, he's not able to gain Canadian experience. My wife has a master's program in human genetics, and her master's program is considered equivalent to two bachelor's degrees somehow in

Canada. She could not find employment because she does not have Canadian work experience.

I've met another constituent who came to Canada with a master's program. In fact, he was a dental surgeon. That dental surgeon could not get into the dental assistant program at SAIT just because he did not have mathematics in grade 12. He was unable to find a job in a dental clinic. He was unable to find any job related to his field of study because he didn't have Canadian experience. At the same time, he couldn't get his credentials recognized. This is the situation that most of the new immigrants are facing. We need to help. They need help, and they expect help from their elected officials.

I hear five main issues when I talk to new immigrants wanting to get a job with their foreign credentials. Canadian work experience requirements are the top one; secondly, language testing and other unique requirements applicable just to foreign-trained professionals. The third thing is timeliness of process to get their credentials recognized. The fourth thing is communication with the regulatory bodies, and the fifth thing is data reporting. I understand that we can't solve all these things altogether, but what we can do is that we can support this motion from my friend and MLA for Edmonton-Decore, who is proposing to make it easier for foreign-trained individuals and professionals to find jobs in the Canadian market.

Mr. Speaker, last week one of my constituents, Sandeep Kaur Sadioura, came to meet me. She has a master's degree and a bachelor's degree in education, experience in teaching, yet she is not able to find a job just because she does not have Canadian experience. She doesn't have Canadian experience because she has foreign credentials which are not recognized. Millions of new immigrants are falling into this never-ending loop.

Passing this motion will help us move towards competency-based assessment as opposed to blanket Canadian work experience requirements where possible. In addition to competency-based assessments, we need to support different pathways for internationally trained professionals to obtain successful recognition of their credentials such as stage-based assessments, microcredentialing, and bridging programs. We need to work with employers to bring awareness and explore opportunities for mentorship programs. We also need to move forward with minimizing requirements for applicants trained in other countries similar to Canada and those with extensive experience, which could be more than five years.

We need to help. We need to come up with these concrete policies and concrete solutions. Unfortunately, what we are seeing from this UCP government is the creation of another committee. We don't know how it will function, we don't know how many resources it will have, and we don't know what kind of people it will have. We will continue to wait for the recommendations and then continue to wait on the actions that this government will be willing to take. It is so unfortunate.

But I'm so proud to support these new immigrants. I'm so proud to speak in favour of this motion, that will help address the labour shortages, will improve the economy, will help foreign-trained professionals to live better lives in their new home. As my colleague and friend from Calgary has already mentioned, the Conference Board of Canada has calculated losses to earnings due to unrecognized foreign credentials at about \$13.4 billion to \$17 billion nationally. I think that is a serious issue that we need to address, and it is my honour and privilege to speak in favour of this motion. I request all the members in this House to support this motion and to support foreign-trained professionals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on Motion Other than Government Motion 511 are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore to close debate. He has up to five minutes to do so.

**Mr. Haji:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout our province the impact of skills shortages is noticeable throughout various sectors, leaving a clear dent in our economic prosperity. This deficiency isn't just about numbers on a spreadsheet; it affects the livelihood of our residents and the vitality of our communities. Addressing this pressing issue requires a bold approach with a crucial focus on removing barriers to credentialing.

In our increasingly interconnected world where talent knows no borders, it's imperative that we harness the potential of individuals trained outside of the country. While our province experiences increases in both international and interprovincial migration, we must take a critical look at how we integrate internationally trained immigrants into our workforce and into our economy. This isn't merely about assessing our performance; it's about setting meaningful benchmarks that guide our actions towards equitable outcomes.

Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, our retention among skilled workers leaves much to be desired, lagging behind comparable jurisdictions. This isn't just a statistic; it is indicative of a systemic issue that demands our immediate attention. We must create an environment where skilled workers feel valued, where they feel supported, and ensure that their contributions are not only recognized but also supported for the long term.

Secondly, the dilemma of internationally trained immigrants within our province is well documented. Many arrive with high hopes and ample qualifications only to find that navigating the system themselves is harder than anticipated. One particularly grating statistic is the disproportionately high percentage of immigrants who find themselves overqualified for their current roles. This mismatch between qualifications and job requirements not only stifles individual potential but also adversely impacts our economic progress. Consider this: in Alberta immigrants are four times more likely to be overqualified for their positions compared

to nonimmigrant populations and twice as likely compared to the national average. This isn't just a matter of individuals being overeducated for their roles; it is a symptom of a larger issue that undermines the efficiency of our workforce and worsens our overall productivity.

Moreover, the insistence of Canadian work experience further exacerbates the situation, creating additional barriers for newcomers striving to establish themselves in their chosen fields. It's time for a paradigm shift. Instead of waiting for bureaucratic processes to run their course, we must take decisive action to dismantle the barriers that impede progress for newcomers. This includes advocating for the removal of work experience, which would open doors for opportunities for many talented individuals eager to contribute to the success of our economy.

**5:50**

Ultimately, this isn't just about securing jobs for newcomers; it's about ensuring that they find meaningful employment that aligns with their skills and aspirations. When we invest in the success of newcomers, we are not just bolstering our workforce; we are enriching the fabric of our society, laying the foundations for a better future.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing a meaningful change that demonstrates a change, a real change. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 511 as amended carried]

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members of this Assembly for their hard work today. Congratulations to the Member for Edmonton-Decore for his motion.

At this point in time I would like to move that we adjourn the Assembly until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:51 p.m.]



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