



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 21, 2024

Day 54

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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Party standings:

United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Michael Peters. I encourage 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.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

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 Guests

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce some very important folks from my constituency of West Yellowhead. Today I'd like to welcome the students, teachers, and volunteers from l'école St. Mary school in Whitecourt who are visiting. It was a pleasure a few months ago to meet them at their school and an extreme pleasure to meet them today at the Legislature. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members 58 grade 6 students from Blessed John Paul I Edmonton Catholic elementary school here visiting us from the Edmonton-Mill Woods constituency. These 58 students are joined by teachers and parent guests learning about the Legislature. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. I'd love to introduce Nicolas Nguyen. Nicolas is a grade 8 student who is super interested in politics. I've had the pleasure of seeing him at so many rallies for workers, queer and trans rights, for Palestine, and much more. He's spending his day off school today at the Legislature. Please rise, Nicolas, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you my two cousins, Jackson Anderson and Damon Kapatch. They were both like brothers to me growing up, and I'm honoured to have them here today. Playing hockey '95 on Sega Genesis together, what we called the Kokum Cup, in my grandmother's basement is one of the best core memories I have. I'm grateful. I love you, guys. Please stand and accept this warm welcome.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Omar Abubakar. He's a good friend of mine, an engaged citizen, and a mental health advocate within the Black communities. I ask Omar to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Jordan Costley from Federation Engineering, Gregorio Oberti from Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, and Cliff Monar. They're here to discuss energy storage within Alberta. If they could please stand and get the normal warm welcome.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, today is a great day to introduce executive members of the Hindu Cultural Society of Central Alberta. The society is growing and constructing a central Alberta cultural centre in Red Deer. It's very exciting. Please rise and receive our warm welcome.

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

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members Erika Pichette, who recently graduated from the bachelor of health sciences at U of C. She works at the constituency office of Calgary-North East to serve residents from different cultures, ethnicities, and skill sets which are yet to be recognized. I ask Erika to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Bill 21

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, Bill 21 needs to be shredded because it was drafted without consultation. It is disrespectful to our emergency front-line professionals, including our wildland firefighters, to municipal leaders, and to all Albertans. This bill removes the authority of local municipalities to respond to local emergencies and threatens to take control of their local staffing resources without any consultation. It proposes to allow the government to take over municipal affairs if they don't like what's been decided, with no discussion and no warning.

Mr. Speaker, firefighters don't need to be asked to do the right thing. They will simply step up and do it when they need to keep their citizens and communities safe. Firefighters don't need to be conscripted by the province to help with grass fires or forest fires that threaten their communities or their neighbourhood homes. They'll do the work. Why does the government feel they need to make changes to the emergency preparedness act to conscript firefighters and other municipal staff?

Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, this government isn't ready for the wildfire season. In spite of early warnings, they refuse to hire up to the levels needed to protect rural communities. They refuse the calls of RMA and the Fire Chiefs to create a joint task force to work on strengthening the work of joint command operations. They refuse to expand the Hinton Training Centre to allow municipal firefighters to train alongside wildland firefighters.

It is yet another tool for them to take advantage of municipal resources. It ensures the costs of infrastructure damages and staffing salaries are downloaded to the municipalities and removes any financial accountability from the province. It is a bill that does nothing but remove the local municipal experts from the conversation, another bill that creates adversarial relationships with local representatives. Mr. Speaker, we can see this bill for all its flaws. It is another government failure to the people of Alberta, a failure to protect local rural communities. At this rate, the UCP needs to hire more staff simply to staff the shredding machine with all the failed bills they've introduced this session. They could have done better spending last winter planning for the riskiest wildfire season ever rather than writing ill-conceived, self-serving legislation that helps absolutely no one.

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

Funding for Joey's Home

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and share some exciting news about increased housing options for Albertans. Many in our community will remember Joey Moss, who, sadly, passed away in 2020 at the age of 57. Joey was a symbol of dedication, enthusiasm, and a proud Edmontonian. One of my favourite parts of watching Edmonton Oilers broadcasts is when they play an image of Joey singing the Canadian national anthem on the big screen. We all share Joey's passion for the Oilers and Edmonton sports in general, and I can't help but smile thinking of how Joey would react to this year's exciting playoff run.

But Joey was more than just a sports figure. He was a champion for people with disabilities and a beloved member of the Edmonton community. He used his platform to raise awareness for individuals with disabilities, break down barriers, and foster acceptance and understanding of people from all backgrounds.

1:40

Today I was proud to see the government of Alberta, in partnership with the Winnifred Stewart association, announce an investment to build on Joey's legacy. Through the affordable housing partnership program Alberta's government is investing \$340,000 to the Winnifred Stewart association, of which Joey was a long-time resident, to build permanent supportive housing in Edmonton. This investment will create five new units at Joey's Home, Mindful Hearts Memory Care Centre, which has provided essential care and services to Albertans with diverse abilities since 2007. This funding will also support necessary renovations to make more units available. In total, Joey's Home will provide 17 specialized housing units for aging adults with intellectual disabilities.

By investing in projects like Joey's Home, we are ensuring that Albertans with diverse abilities have access to a safe and affordable place to call home. Joey Moss was not only an Edmonton legend but also a beacon of resilience and compassion, and through this investment our government is proud to celebrate his legacy and continue his mission. As Joey would be the first to say: let's go, Oilers!

Government Policies

Member Kayande: With 20 minutes remaining, up 3-nothing on the scoreboard, can the team hold a lead? We know the answer; last night the lead held. The Oilers will move on to the next round of the playoffs, and I congratulate them, but real life doesn't have a closing buzzer. There's no end to the competitive threats that we face as a province, and we are a province with a government that's not holding our lead.

The single most important determiner of quality of life is whether wages are beating inflation. In plain English: are Albertans better off than they were five years ago, when the UCP was first elected? And the answer, borne out by both our feelings and in the hard data, is resoundingly, unambiguously no. Albertans' hourly wages are no longer the highest in the country, and inflation is higher than average wage growth for all Albertans, both hourly and salaried, since 2019. And Alberta has the highest unemployment in Canada.

We're not holding our lead. This is the direct fault of the UCP government. It's the first government in Alberta history to ban energy investment. It's a government that's defunding universities, defunding municipalities, a government taking away our CPP, a government who stood by and did nothing as rent, insurance premiums, utility bills, tuition, and fees skyrocketed. The government's response: blame Albertans; it's the federal government's fault; claim that everything is fine; cherry-pick statistics; demand that Albertans ignore the difficulties they are experiencing, the score on the scoreboard, as a result of the UCP.

It's not disloyal or anti-Albertan to tell this government that their policies aren't working and are making Albertans poorer, but it is a failure of leadership to simply watch this happen while doing nothing to make matters better. What will it take, Mr. Speaker, for this government to finally focus on scoring some goals and making Albertans' lives better rather than continue to watch Alberta's lead slowly slip away?

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

Government and Opposition Policies

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is disappointing to see that the Alberta NDP is so open to forming an unholy alliance with the Trudeau Liberals, spreading misinformation and using their influence to do his bidding in Alberta. It is disappointing to see that the NDP is set on whispering sweet promises of change while sowing seeds of chaos and division. It is disappointing to see the NDP cloak their agenda in the guise of progress, championing policies that promote equality but deliver only discord. Ultimately, their actions lead to disruption, leaving chaos in their wake. I see this every time a member of the NDP comes to my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, this is why it is up to us on this side of the aisle to stand up for Albertans and against the NDP-Liberal coalition. We can reclaim the promise of a brighter tomorrow. While the NDP seek to undermine actual progress, I remain steadfast in my commitment to my community and my neighbours. Instead of engaging in backroom attacks, I choose to focus on constructive

solutions and work tirelessly to address the challenges left by the NDP. As the proud MLA for Livingstone-Macleod I am honoured to serve my constituents and uphold the values that define our community. Livingstone-Macleod is filled with hard-working individuals who deserve strong and principled leadership.

Mr. Speaker, our government has made significant strides in improving the lives of my constituents. We are committed to strengthening health care and education, building safe and supportive communities, managing the province's resources wisely, and promoting job creation to enhance Livingstone-Macleod's competitive advantage. We are ensuring high-quality, reliable health services across the region with upgrades at many of my hospitals. We're also building better education systems with new schools such as in Nanton. Additionally, we're investing millions in capital funding over the next three years to expand water supply and storage infrastructures.

In my constituency we believe that by leading with civility, compassion, and grassroots engagement, we can overcome any challenge created by the leftists and create a brighter future for the residents of Livingstone-Macleod and all Albertans.

Vesak

Mr. Schmidt: This week millions of Buddhists around the world, including many in Alberta, will be marking Vesak. Vesak commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. Born to a royal family more than 2,500 years ago in Nepal, Prince Siddhartha Gautama, known today as the Buddha, was sheltered from the suffering of the world and provided with every comfort imaginable in the early years of his life. Upon leaving his palace one day, Gautama was shocked to see people suffering from sickness, old age, and death. This drove him to renounce his royal life and embark on a spiritual path to understand and end suffering.

After many years of wandering and living as an ascetic, Gautama vowed to sit under the Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya until he achieved enlightenment. He achieved enlightenment, realizing the Four Noble Truths: that life is suffering, that suffering has a cause, that suffering can be ended, and that the end of suffering can be achieved by following the noble Eightfold Path. The noble Eightfold Path consists of right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

For nearly 50 years after achieving enlightenment, Gautama travelled around northern India and established the religious practice that we now call Buddhism. After dying at age 80 in Kushinagar, India, his followers spread Buddhism around the world, establishing it as a major religion in Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, and most of Southeast Asia. Buddhism is quickly growing in Alberta, having seven times as many practitioners today as there were 40 years ago.

To Buddhists celebrating Vesak this week: I wish you a blessed holiday, and I hope that the Buddha, his teachings, and his community continue to be sources of happiness and compassion for you and the whole world.

Thank you.

Arts and Culture Funding

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Alberta produces some of the greatest artists in Canada and across the world. From musicians to painters, sculptors, filmmakers, Alberta punches well above its weight when it comes to the arts. We know that investing in the arts and artists always provides a huge return and a huge boost to the Alberta economy. Alberta's world-class museums, heritage sites, and every

creative venue are always a significant draw for tourists and Albertans alike, and I encourage everyone this summer to take the time to visit them. The creative sector employs over tens of thousands of Albertans and contributes billions to Alberta's GDP.

On this side of the House we value artists and their contributions. Last week the minister of arts and culture suggested that I read the budget to see the impressive budget for arts that has occurred under the UCP. Well, of course I read the budget when it was originally released, and, well, I read it once again last week, Mr. Speaker, and there's no comparison between the record of when we wrote budgets for the arts on this side of the House and the members opposite. Over our four years in office we increased the total budget for AFA by \$3 million over what the Progressive Conservatives were spending in their last year of office. But since forming government in 2019, the UCP has cut the budget for AFA four times, totalling over \$5 million. Additionally, the UCP's supposed support of Alberta artists and the creative economy includes attacking the very idea of including artists on the Economic Advisory Council, deep cuts to postsecondary institutions, putting arts programs at risk, and so much more.

The record is clear. The Alberta NDP supports artists not just in what we say but also in our actions, and I urge the UCP to listen to what artists are saying about the impacts of their years of cuts, see the creative opportunities imperiled by their actions, and reverse them. They can start by bringing the funding for AFA back to where it was the last time I delivered a budget. I hope they take the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide oral notice of Motion 37, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Oncologist Recruitment

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, following a diagnosis of cancer the target for an Albertan to see an oncologist is less than four weeks, but under that minister, to whom this Premier wants to give even more power, it can take double that to be seen by a medical oncologist and three times the goal to see a crucially important radiation oncologist. To the Premier: why is she only focused on adding ministers and bureaucrats to a system that desperately needs more oncologists and other important front-line health care workers?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite misunderstand what it is that we are doing. When we are focusing Alberta Health Services, we're doing that so that they can focus on the emergency care and the surgical care, including cancer care, that's needed. In addition, according to the College of Physicians & Surgeons the number of oncologists in Alberta grew from 107 on March 31, 2015, to 142 on March 31, 2024. That's an increase of

33 per cent to date. Seventeen full-time equivalent cancer care Alberta physicians have been recruited with various start dates in '24 and '25.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, that doesn't keep up with the rate of inflation.

Now, we're proud that the cancer centre that our government got rolling in Calgary will open soon – it never would have happened under this failing minister – but our nation-leading cancer centre won't help anyone if the government can't recruit and retain the oncologists we need. So to the Premier: how can she justify only recruiting 17 full-time equivalent cancer care physicians in the same year that B.C. recruited 350, including 60 oncologists?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we are going to see 17 full-time equivalents, an increase which is 9.5, as replacement positions and seven as new positions. There are currently five vacancies that CC are actively recruiting for. There are three oncologists that have already started or will start by June 1, 2024, followed by an additional five with start dates in July of '24; another four in August of 2024; three in September of 2024; one in October of 2024; one in January '25; and two others currently waiting licensure before a start date can be determined.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a fraction of what we are seeing in other provinces.

Now, while Ontario and B.C. are paying more and aggressively recruiting, this government has spent months refusing to come to an agreement with the oncologists who are here. You don't think the country is watching? The AMA says, quote, we need the minister and the Premier and the whole government to say, yes, this is a priority. We have to invest in it now. Absolutely need to invest in it now. End quote. To the Premier. Albertans seeking cancer care are desperate. Why is it taking so long? Why is her government ignoring them?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No one is ignoring anything. In fact, the 350 positions that the member opposite referenced include support positions. We have to recruit not only doctors but also nurses and all of the support staff, and that's what we're doing with our refocusing of our health care system. We have already seen a massive increase in the number of nurses who have been accredited to work here, who will be able to provide that important support. And I also mentioned that we've already seen an increase of 33 per cent in the number of cancer docs. We are going to see an increase of additional numbers over the course of the next year.

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

Hospital Discharge Policies

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this Premier is good at pretending there's nothing to see here, but remember motel medicine? Twenty-seven Albertans removed from hospital care to a roadside motel without proper care or even accessible washrooms. So to the Premier: now that we've uncovered documents showing that both her Health minister and her minister of community and social services had been passing the buck for at least two months before this problem came to a public head, will she admit that it's her failure in leadership that caused this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No one was passing the buck. Contentment Social Services is not a registered licensed provider through Seniors, Community and Social Services. It's an independent contract, and members on AISH have signed up with this entity. For some reason they moved people out of apartment complexes into hotels, at which point the person in question was discharged to a facility that was not able to support his needs. We stepped in as soon as we realized the problem. We identified and made sure that everyone had an appropriate place to stay. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the documents show that her ministers were notified of the problem two months before any of this became public. It shows that the ministers were passing the buck back and forth for months before they started doing it in front of the public here in the Legislature. The minister of community and social services said that he was supporting the Ministry of Health. She said that her ministry wasn't responsible for the motel medicine scheme. To the Premier: nothing about this situation screams "give these ministers more opportunities to dodge responsibilities," so why is she bringing in legislation that will achieve just that outcome?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, these allegations just show what we have said all along. We are dealing with a particular entity that appears to be a bad actor. It's part of the reason why we have four investigations going into it, one looking at whether or not they are misappropriating income support through Seniors, Community and Social Services. The public guardian is also doing an investigation to make sure that vulnerable people were not treated poorly. Service Alberta is also conducting a consumer protection review, and we're also, through Alberta Health Services, working in conjunction with Seniors, Community and Social Services, developing a new approach to discharge patients.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there should be an investigation into why her ministers ignored the problem for at least two months.

Now, the Premier claimed to agree with me back in March, saying that fewer silos would put patient health first, but Bill 22 creates more silos and invites the minister, who couldn't deny responsibility fast enough, to do that even more. So to the Premier: why won't she come clean with Albertans, admit that for months her ministers were focused only on passing the buck, and get rid of the legislation that is destined to do nothing but increase that level of dysfunction at the expense of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no silos being created. What is happening is that we are making sure that the entity that is best able to provide the service is going to be providing the service. Right now we have an Alberta Health Services Board that is comprised of the deputy ministers from Health and Mental Health and Addiction and Seniors, Community and Social Services. It's integrated. We also have a biweekly meeting of our health policy cabinet committee, where every time we find issues that need to be resolved through those different ministries, we bring them forward, resolve them together, and then we move them forward to cabinet. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that we've ever seen this level of collaboration between the ministries, and we're quite proud of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: You aren't heroes for fixing a problem you created: that was the title of an e-mail received by the Health minister and the minister of community and social services in the wake of the UCP's motel medicine crisis that saw a stroke patient left at the Leduc Travelodge without proper medical care instead of a care home that he was promised. The Minister of Health and the minister of social services both knew of complaints that Contentment Social Services was not meeting the basic or medical needs two months before the scandal broke in the media, so why did the minister – why did both ministers – ignore these warnings both in writing and in the public?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the hotel that those individuals were in was not even there for two months, so the hon. member is mistaken. Again, as has been said inside this Legislature many times, these individuals had been discharged medically. They had gone out. They were receiving assured income for the severely handicapped. They were inside their own apartments. A bad operator took those individuals, moved them to two different motels. This government found them, took action, and I'm happy to report that each and every one of those individuals is safe. We took that action in under 48 hours to get them all back in their own apartments. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Renaud: A bad actor that this government vetted and paid. In March the Minister of Health declared that proper procedure had been followed. She declared that she had no prior knowledge of Contentment Social Services and had no idea how this group had gotten on to the approved vendor list, but the freedom of information shows that her office knew about this company in January, so how can the Health minister now ask Albertans to trust her with dismantling and redesigning an entire health care system when her own office ignored warnings?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this was not a continuing care provider or a provider that in any way was associated under the Health Act and/or Continuing Care Act. This was an individual organization, and there's a regulatory hole, which we have recognized, which is why my department will be coming forward shortly with regulations around providers who are not providing health care, to make sure this doesn't take place again in the future. Now, with that said, there's no point also in listening to the NDP continue to fearmonger on this issue. I want Albertans to know that everybody involved is safe. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

2:00

Ms Renaud: In January ministers of Health and community and social services were alerted to a complaint that Contentment Social Services was not meeting basic needs. The offices were informed that this bad actor, approved vendor bad actor, had an AHS connection, but instead of taking action on the complaint, they told the complainant that their hands were tied, that they should call 211. Mr. Speaker, this government abandoned 27 people in motel rooms in March, two months after both ministers received a dire warning. What are the ministers going to do to make sure this never happens again? They were on your approved list.

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The complaint that came in in January was actually dealt with in January by the department. The individual was contacted because they had medical health care being provided, and we wanted to make sure that they

were in fact getting the medical health care. It was confirmed to us that they were getting medical health care that they needed. There are four investigations, as the Premier indicated earlier, right now into the bad actor, Contentment, and those are ongoing. As soon as we have responses for the members opposite, we will make sure to make that information public.

Bill 20

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, more municipalities are speaking out against the UCP's authoritarian Bill 20. The mayor of Okotoks stated this week: I really can't stress enough how Bill 20 is eroding democracy. The Okotoks council voted to send the minister a letter asking for changes but then decided to send an amended letter with the mayor stating: I really do think we need to be asking for the rescinding of this bill and highlight that rushing in flawed legislation is irresponsible. Rather than continuing to repeat the UCP key messages, will the minister listen to what municipalities are saying and pull the bill?

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mayor of Okotoks belongs to the mid-city mayors of Alberta. In fact, I met with the mid-city mayors of Alberta today, and they didn't ask me to rescind the bill. They asked about the amendments that are upcoming. The members opposite seem to want to find the worst thing they can find and ramp it up like that's what everybody thinks. The more I talk to municipalities, the more they understand it, the more support there is. We've got some work to do, but I believe that this is a good piece of legislation. I believe we are on the right track. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, the council of Barrhead spoke out against this bill and its sham consultation, with one councillor saying about the Premier: she's been made aware of municipalities' opposition to the bill numerous times. At the AB Munis spring leaders' conference multiple people said: we don't want this. But she brushed it off. She's not listening. Another councillor expressed concern that the UCP is already ignoring voices of municipalities. How does the minister expect any municipality to trust this government when they are ignoring their concerns about this authoritarian, antidemocratic bill?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the NDP read some of the local rural newspapers, but not everything that was said in that council meeting was accurate. I've traded calls with the mayor this morning to correct the misinformation that was said in that council meeting because there were several things reported in the media that are not true about the legislation. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: The folks on the other side say in one breath: why aren't you talking to people? When I indicate that I am talking to people, then they yell. They're not going to be happy no matter what. They don't want the right thing to be done. They're called the NDP.

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, despite the minister's claims, Alberta Municipalities has called for Bill 20 to be cancelled. The government's response is to attack the integrity of the president of Alberta Municipalities, suggesting that someone got to him. Okotoks, Barrhead, Strathcona county, Edmonton, Calgary, Banff,

Blackfalds, Peace River, Olds all oppose Bill 20, with the number of communities growing daily. How many municipal leaders speaking out against the UCP's undemocratic, authoritarian bill will it take before the Premier or cabinet listens and withdraws this flawed, disastrous bill?

Mr. McIver: Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that pointing out the facts is not an attack on character. The fact is that I had a couple of conversations with the president of Alberta Municipalities. We talked about the amendments, that when the amendments come forward, he will see some of his ideas in those things. Then he had a meeting with some other municipal leaders, and he changed his mind. I think that is pretty much the definition of somebody got to him. It's not an attack on character. The president of Alberta Municipalities changed his mind after to a large degree agreeing on what the amendments should be to the legislation. Despite that, he's going to see those amendments very soon.

Wage Growth and Cost of Living

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, a new damning report from the Alberta Federation of Labour shows how Albertans' standard of living is collapsing. Since the UCP took office, Albertans' incomes, purchasing power, and standard of living have plummeted to lows never before seen in our province. The minister is trying to avoid drawing attention to his government's role in this, hopelessly insisting that we're only looking at half the picture, but here's the big picture. Alberta was once the envy of Canada, and we are falling behind on this government's watch. When is the minister going to admit this growing crisis needs decisive action, or is he determined to further erode what used to be the Alberta advantage?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta advantage is alive and well. I could point to 35,000 jobs created in the last four months or maybe 105,000 created over the last 12 months or maybe the fact that Alberta represented 90 per cent of private-sector job creation in Canada over a six-month period. The members opposite are only looking at half the picture because they don't want to look at the other half, which is that we have the lowest taxes in the province, meaning that Albertans keep more of what they earn. They don't have a sales tax. They have the highest basic amounts and world-class public services. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Ip: Given that Alberta has also had dramatically lower economic growth, productivity growth, and business investment growth than the Canadian average and given that Alberta's real hourly wages are down more than anywhere else in Canada, with the weakest wage growth of any province, and given that some may have moved here because this government told them that they'll enjoy a better life only to find out they've been duped, what does the minister have to say to Albertans who answered his call but found that they're earning less and paying more? Does it alarm him to realize that even – and I hate to say it – Toronto is more affordable than Calgary or Edmonton?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is forecast to have the highest economic growth in the country. Alberta boasts the highest productivity, the youngest and most productive workforce in the country. That's why everybody is coming here. The jobs are here, among the highest wages in Canada are here, the lowest taxes are here, and it's the best place to live, work, and raise a family. The

members opposite continue to have nothing positive to say about Alberta. Perhaps they'll tell people to move to Ontario. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Ip: Given that Alberta used to be viewed as a bastion of affordability but since the UCP took over five years ago, the cost of shelter and food both rose 26 per cent and food bank demand skyrocketed 73 per cent and given that Edmonton and Calgary are leading the country in rent spikes, resulting in the second-highest level of inflation in the country, and given that this government is more focused on picking fights with anyone who disagrees with them rather than buckling down and getting to work, I have to wonder: who is the minister actually working to make life better for, the Albertans who rely on us or agitators and instigators . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I have to remind the members opposite that we're in Edmonton, one of the most affordable major cities in Canada. One of the reasons people are moving from places like Toronto and Vancouver is to experience this cost of living versus what they were experiencing in Vancouver and Toronto. We should also think back to what Alberta was like under the NDP, from 2015 to 2019. It was pretty unaffordable when 183,000 people lost their jobs. It was pretty unaffordable when tens of billions of capital were sent to competing jurisdictions. The members opposite were quite pleased. Remember that they were embarrassed, and they wanted us to get jobs in B.C. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Industrial Heartland Water Infrastructure

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the minister of environment was joined by a number of MLAs and dignitaries in Sturgeon county to announce more than \$50 million from Budget 2024 to grow Alberta's Industrial Heartland to create good-paying jobs. I've been a big, strong advocate of this Industrial Heartland for years. As we all know, when opportunities in the Industrial Heartland grow, unmatched potential grows for the rest of the region and for the province. To the minister of environment: can you please inform the great people of Alberta and this House of the significance of the funding for jobs and this opportunity?

2:10

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The designated industrial zone has been a bold new way to support sustainable infrastructure and growth in Alberta's Industrial Heartland. Streamlined logistics, clear environmental expectations, and shared access to infrastructure and resources are helping to attract transformational projects like Dow's \$9 billion Path2zero facility. These facilities need infrastructure to support them. That's why we're investing this \$50 million over five years to help expand water infrastructure in the area and ensure safe and successful operations can continue.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the answer. Given that in order to attract more capital investment, we need to build new water intakes and none have been developed in

the area for more than a decade and further given that with this funding we can attract major projects and streamline regulatory approvals, all the while continuing to protect the environment, can the same minister tell us how the designated industrial zone projects reduce red tape while upholding our high environmental standards?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are absolutely upholding the highest environmental standards while creating a regulatory framework that provides certainty by streamlining approvals and cutting out duplicative processes while also ensuring every facility commits to zone-specific environmental assessments as well as mandatory air, water, and topsoil requirements and guidelines. I think there are ways to improve on this model, but overall it does provide the certainty that industry needs to confidently invest here, and we welcome those new investments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that industry needs water for safe, successful, reliable operations, whether that be for the cooling process or otherwise, and given that the responsible industries and companies note the critical importance of managing freshwater usage and further given that Alberta's government has already made massive investments to ensure water remains accessible for all users, can the same minister tell us how the DIZ and these new water intakes will help Alberta grow our industry as the populations grow?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. This new funding will help municipalities in the heartland construct up to three new water intake facilities and related infrastructure that are both cost-effective and provide fair water access to all districts within the zone. The designated industrial zone is a made-in-Alberta success story, and it would not be possible as well without the advocacy of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I am grateful she was there at the announcement, grateful for her hard work and dedication in helping create a more prosperous province today and, of course, for future generations.

COVID Vaccination Information

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this Premier excels at catering to her far-right supporters. On Saturday she announced her support for an antivaccine town hall being hosted by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. It's filled with discredited speakers making ludicrous claims against the safety and proven effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine for children. In the words of Dr. Lorian Hardcastle, these aren't Canada's leading experts on this topic; these are people who have adopted a particular ideological view and are going to tell the audience what they want to hear. How can the Premier continue to support a town hall that misrepresents facts and risks the safety of Albertans by spreading antivaccine rhetoric?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the COVID vaccine has been available for children since August of 2022. Nothing has changed. It is not mandatory, and parents do have the choice to decide what is right for their family. This event is

happening. It's a constituency association event, and the government is not part of this event.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the Premier expressed her support for the event and in response Dr. Blake Murdoch of the Health Law Institute stated that there is nothing wrong with contrarianism per se, but we live in a world where facts exist and he stated that there is also a huge amount of science that shows that these vaccines save lives and are overwhelmingly safe and that claiming otherwise is a statement of misinformation and given that Dr. Lynora Saxinger stated that there is no benefit and clear risk to platforming disinformation and given that this is not about a mere difference of opinion – there's vast scientific evidence proving vaccines save lives – why does the Premier continue to support an event purposefully misleading Albertans?

The Speaker: I just might remind the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre that it's important that he frames his questions with respect to an issue of government policy, not an event that may or may not be happening.

The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarity. Again, I want to reiterate that we are not as a government part of this conversation. That being said, we do work with public health experts to review the most current data that comes forward on an ongoing basis. Again, the COVID vaccine has been available for children across this province since August of 2022, and it continues to be made available. Parents really do have that right to make that choice for their children. We'll continue to support that right, Mr. Speaker, because that's what we believe on this side of the House.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that antivaccine rhetoric creates more pressures on our health care system and challenges for the people working in it and given that organizers have made ludicrous, inflammatory, unverified claims like that child deaths have increased by 350 per cent since the pandemic and given that many panelists booked for this event, sanctioned by the UCP, have had their medical licences revoked or suspended and given that it includes speakers who've traumatized families by making false claims about their loved ones' deaths yet given that it seems this government would rather support conspiracy theories than our health care system, will the Premier encourage her colleague to cancel this event rather than platforming these outlandish misrepresentations and misinformed . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. We take our evidence from health experts. We will continue to work with health experts here in Alberta. Parents do have the right to choose what they want in terms of vaccines for their children. Of course, they need to make informed decisions. We continue to provide that information. This year alone we actually spent double what we typically spend on vaccine information to parents and to the general public. That will continue. On this side of the House we believe parents do have the right to choose for their families.

Alberta Advantage Immigration Program

Mr. Sabir: Despite Alberta's urgent need for skilled workers, the UCP has failed to secure an increase in the province's immigration quota. On top of this, the government also paused Alberta's immigration program since February, with no update or progress for

the applicants, even as people wait up to seven months to hear about their application. These delays mean that postgraduation work permits for international students are expiring, leaving them with limited options. What does the minister have to say about it?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, there is a great demand for people who want to come to Alberta. We are limited by the number of allocations that we have from the federal government. We are working our way through all the streams to make sure that we remain within the allocation. At the same time, we are processing the applications that have already been received.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the pressing backlog of nearly 7,700 nomination applications coupled with the abrupt suspension of new applications to the opportunity stream since February places the blame squarely on the UCP and given that this government action has meant immigration delays, leaving skilled workers with uncertainty, and a complete disregard for the livelihood and aspirations of countless individuals seeking opportunities in Alberta, what steps does the minister intend to take to resolve each of these backlog applications, and what is the time frame for that?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working very hard with the federal government to ensure that our nomination allocations are increased, and at the same time we are ensuring that all the streams except for the opportunity stream are being processed. The reason for the opportunity stream is that we'll continue to work with IRCC on that to ensure that we have the right number of allocations.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this Premier's administration paused Alberta's immigration program instead of addressing the delays facing these applicants and given that provinces like Ontario and Manitoba have taken proactive steps to negotiate with the federal government and extend work permits for international students and given that while immigrants strive to contribute to Alberta's economy, the UCP's actions limit their ability to do so, can the minister outline what specific steps he will take to help those waiting for their application to be processed and give us some time frame?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would strongly suggest to the member opposite to work with their federal partners, the Liberal Party and the government, to ensure that – this province is facing extreme labour shortages, and we are doing our best to make sure that we have our numbers increased. In that regard I've had a number of discussions with the federal minister. I will continue to work and make sure that we have our numbers in this province that we need to ensure that everybody is welcomed here.

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

2:20 Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Alberta and all of Canada face a crisis. The addiction crisis has caused significant pain

and suffering to nearly every individual, community, and family. We know that addiction will only get worse if something is not done to intervene and bring people out of addiction onto a compassionate path of recovery. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: given the scale of this public health crisis, what is our government doing to support people in their pursuit of recovery?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that every life lost from addiction is a tragedy, which is why we absolutely must do all we can to build recovery as an opportunity within our system, which is why this government is putting money towards 11 recovery communities, two of which are already open, and we have cautious optimism that we're seeing some progress. February of this year saw its lowest numbers in nearly four years, down 33 per cent year over year from the previous year. We continue to work forward on legislation, including policy on compassion intervention, because there's nothing compassionate about leaving those most vulnerable, those who have the worst tragedy around addiction and mental health issues to die in our streets. We want to be there for them as a government and intervene to help them.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that in Calgary many of my constituents have expressed serious concerns regarding the addiction crisis and further given that this government has taken real action to support Albertans suffering from the deadly disease of addiction, to the same minister: what programs and services exist to help those struggling with the effects of addiction, and how will a greater focus on mental health and addiction services assist these Albertans and their families in the pursuit of recovery?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The truth is that we are committed to an evidence-based, data-driven policy approach, which is why we have continued down the path of a recovery-oriented system of care, and we know we have not chosen policies like we've seen in other jurisdictions like safe supply that members opposite seem to advocate for when they talk about moving more down that path. Instead of safe supply, instead of facilitating more addiction, we're building opportunities and pathways of hope towards recovery, which is why we broke out recovery Alberta and established a new organization dedicated to mental health and addiction care.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that our government has taken a strong stance against the illegal activities of drug dealers and given that we should establish ourselves as strong partners with law enforcement to crack down on drug trafficking, including the illegal diversion of the federal government's so-called safe supply, to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services: what action is the government of Alberta taking to stop the distribution of illegal drugs that lead people into a lifelong path of addiction?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and the minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we're going to take a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to illegal drugs and open-air drug use. As the Premier stated, we're going to do whatever it takes to keep Albertans safe, quite frankly, on this side of the House. That's why we've invested \$4 million to ALERT. We've actually had results as a result of the investment. In fact, there has been \$90,000 worth of methamphetamine and cocaine that was taken off the streets of Medicine Hat. That's what we're doing on this side of the House. The soft-on-crime policies of the Liberal-NDP are not going to be tolerated in Alberta anymore.

Support for LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans

Member Tejada: Alberta pride organizations encourage 2SLGBTQIA-plus people to be their authentic selves and provide crucial support for young people, but a group representing 14 pride societies banned this Premier from any of their events because of her "stated intention to infringe on the rights, freedoms, and healthcare of the transgender community in Alberta." They also write: "You may not join our celebrations in June [if] you plan to attack us in September." Does the Premier understand the harm that she's caused and why these groups are banning the UCP yet again from pride festivities this year?

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we were certainly disappointed to receive that news that government MLAs are being banned from participating in these events. These events are meant to be inclusive and bring people together, so to be excluded is certainly disappointing. [interjection]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Fir: Our government remains committed to building a province that welcomes everyone, no matter how they identify and who they love. We'll continue to support members of the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community through community grants that are offered through my ministry and to make sure everyone feels safe and welcome in our province.

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

Member Tejada: Given that this government has created a dangerous environment for 2SLGBTQIA-plus young people and leaves people in crisis and given that this government wants to restrict trans folks from sport, one of the best ways to bolster mental health and build a sense of community, just like far-right politicians in the U.S., does this government not realize that their blatantly antitrans and anti-queer policies are hurting young people at a time when they should be stepping up to help?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, our government continues to support and advocate for the community through many – I'll give you some examples of community grant funding through my ministry. We've proudly supported Calgary Pride in the past. In 2023 our government with our planning committee provided them \$50,000 to help cover hosting costs for the 2023 Calgary Pride festival. In addition to that, we've invested over \$290,000 to support other initiatives in just the last two years: Calgary Outlink, the Dinner Optimist Club, the Grande Prairie Pride Society, the Canadian gay rodeo association, and many more.

Member Tejada: Given that grants and awards don't unring the bell of harm and that 2SLGBTQIA organizations are scrambling to

give support more than ever to marginalized youth and given that these groups have gracefully offered the Premier the chance to redeem herself, saying, quote, just as they backtracked on so many other policies they didn't think out correctly, they can do that with this one, too, end quote, will the UCP government drop their attack on trans and queer youth and return Alberta to being a place where we celebrate 2SLGBTQIA people instead of going after the rights of the most vulnerable?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we, too, celebrate outstanding 2SLGBTQIA-plus individuals. For example, the Stars of Alberta award, which is a program under my ministry, a few years ago introduced the breaking barriers category, which recognizes outstanding volunteers who do incredible work in the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community to foster diversity and inclusion. We continue to look forward to outstanding nominations we'll get this year for incredible, hard-working Albertans.

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

Wildfire Season Preparation

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within the last couple of weeks some residents in my riding of Grande Prairie-Wapiti were affected by two major forest fires. Firefighters seem to have had these fires under control in a few days, and my constituency and I are wondering what contributed to these fires being under control compared to the fire season last year. Can the Minister of Forestry and Parks please share what improvements our government has made in staffing and technology that will help us reduce wildfires and total acres burned?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The hard work and preparedness of Alberta Wildfire and municipal firefighters allowed us to take advantage of the recent rains. As of today Alberta Wildfire has extinguished 382 wildfires. I want to thank all of the firefighters and support staff for all their hard work. Improvements we have made this year are making a huge difference. We started the wildfire season early, and we hired and trained our firefighters sooner. Budget 2024 gave a \$55 million increase, allowing us to bring on two more night-vision helicopters plus 140 additional firefighters plus more support personnel and full-time wildfire staff. We also extended firetack contracts. All these changes are to help protect Albertans and their communities.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that wildfires can cause stress, turmoil, and displacement for Albertans and that during these times individuals need communication and to know where to turn for these resources and help and further given that I've seen more open communication this year compared to last, can the same minister please share what learnings in communication and how they have improved between the affected residents, municipalities, and the ministry compared to last fire season?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Prior to fire season starting, our wildfire personnel began consulting with municipalities. As fires break out within or near a municipality, we stay in constant communication with fire

chiefs, mayors, and reeves. This way we can get the most up-to-date information out to Albertans in their communities as quickly as possible. Bill 21 will help clarify and streamline this communication process going forward.

I look forward to passing Bill 21, with 100 per cent support from both sides of the House, so we can continue doing the good work for Albertans.

2:30

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

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our government has met our hiring targets for firefighters and other related staff and further given that we're in a better situation now to deal with wildfires than we were at this point last year and further given that our government is committed to supporting Albertans through the wildfire season, can the same minister please share how these new advancements in night-vision helicopters and other tools and resources are equipping us to effectively deal with wildfire situations across the province?

Mr. Loewen: Thank you again to the member for the question. Alberta's ability to fight wildfires during the night is unique. We have three night-vision helicopters fighting alongside our great men and women on the front lines. We also have unit crews and bulldozer crews that work tirelessly 24 hours a day, rotating in and out, to build fireguards like the ones built to protect the town of Fort McMurray. With drones and thermal imaging we are able to see fire activity at night. This helps identify hotspots that need to be extinguished. Once again, Alberta is leading the way in technology and innovation. This is something the people of Alberta should be very proud of.

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

(continued)

Member Eremenko: Well, many of us have seen them, the billboards on the QE II assuring Albertans that recovery is possible. I so desperately want that to be the case, Mr. Speaker, but wanting it and making it so are not the same things. Sadly, recovery is not possible for the 1,867 Albertans who we now know died as a result of opioid use last year. That's 629 in Calgary, 673 in Edmonton, 119 in Lethbridge: three times the provincial per capita rate. It didn't have to be this way. These people didn't have to die. What reason can the government provide to grieving families facing the fact that recovery will never be possible for their loved one?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, it is a tragedy every time a life is lost in Alberta or anywhere when it comes to those suffering from that deadly disease of addiction. It's a stark reminder that addiction is one of two paths; it's either death, tragically, or recovery. That's why we're investing in recovery at record rates, and we're seeing some possibility of cautious improvement, which is why we've seen that February numbers have decreased 33 per cent year over year from the previous year. We've seen a decreased trend since April last year. We hope to continue on this trend, because recovery is so essential for the lives of all those who are suffering.

Member Eremenko: Given that it's the government's responsibility to ensure recovery is, in fact, possible and given that they have committed to 11 recovery communities but have built just two during their five years in government, with barely one cohort having graduated since, and given that for this government recovery is seemingly synonymous with in-patient residential programming that lasts multiple months or even a year, what is the government

doing to ensure recovery community residents aren't discharged into homelessness, chronic poverty, and the scarcity of supports that likely contributed to their drug use in the first place?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could say that we had more built, but the NDP in their term built zero recovery communities, invested zero in recovery. We have built two, have funded 11, are continuing to move down this path, which is why we know recovery works. It is a tragedy to see members opposite throwing stones when we have the only path out of this crisis, as recovery is our priority, and they refuse to get on. I implore them all – I invite members opposite to join the rest of Alberta, to join the world, which is saying: recovery is the path to the solution, not more drug facilitation. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Eremenko: Given that Alberta doesn't publish opioid use disorder figures and given that we have no sense of the scale of the problem except through proxy measures like the number of opioid-related EMS responses, emergency visits, and hospitalizations and given that Alberta's per capita death rate is twice the national rate, will the minister exercise that new influence he holds over the centre of recovery excellence and commit to publishing why Alberta's opioid death rate is so much higher than the national average and just how many Albertans are struggling with opioid abuse? We cannot solve a problem we don't understand.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, it was so sad to see the members opposite vote against Bill 17, the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence Act, which allows us to get that information. And whilst we're comparing numbers, let's compare what it would be if we had, say, an NDP government like those in B.C., where we see numbers continue to increase. They have even more opioid overdoses and deaths. Compared to British Columbia, our February is 26 per cent lower in 2024 than British Columbia. We saw 14 per cent overall lower numbers in Alberta than B.C. We are cautiously optimistic that we are seeing a trend. Lord knows, we are so grateful not to have the NDP in power during this crisis, where we'd see high numbers in Alberta as well. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

School Construction in Calgary

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, over two years have passed since the provincial government announced full funding for the Evanston middle school, yet not a single shovel has touched the ground. Meanwhile Calgary's public schools are bursting at the seams, with unprecedented enrolment growth. This new development could create spaces for 900 more students, but this government hasn't even started construction. How does this minister justify this failure to deliver on promised infrastructure, leaving hundreds of students without the classrooms they desperately need?

Mr. Nicolaidis: There's no question that our students need spaces, Mr. Speaker, because Alberta is the fastest growing province in the entire country, thanks in part to our economic success after the collapse that the NDP led us through. Of course, our children need to learn in the best possible learning environments. That's why we are allocating \$2.1 billion over the next three years to build and modernize 35,000 spaces across the entire province, the majority of those being in Calgary and Edmonton, where we're seeing the greatest need and demand.

Mr. Deol: Given that only three public school projects are under way in a system that has seen historic growth, given that two of them have not yet received full funding or even an estimated completion date and given that even with this knowledge the UCP have only funded one school in Calgary this year, why is this minister neglecting the urgent needs of Calgary students and parents? Does he not realize that students cannot attend the imaginary schools his government keeps promising?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, that's not true. In Budget '23 two projects were awarded full construction funding in Calgary, and in the current budget cycle 18 projects for the Calgary metropolitan region have received approval to move forward. That includes 16,000 spaces; that includes construction funding for a new K to 4 school in Evanston. It also includes construction funding for a new high school in Rangeview. Additionally, the Budget '24 capital plan provides design funding for a number of new schools in every corner of the city.

Mr. Deol: Given that the Calgary board of education is grappling with an explosive enrolment surge, with projections indicating an additional 14,800 students over the next two years, and given that this bureaucratic red tape is only making the overcrowding crisis in our schools worse by the day, will the minister commit to finally addressing this incompetence that is harming our children's education? Will he stop tallying up excuses and start building the schools that Alberta students need?

Mr. Nicolaides: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we are moving forward to build schools and spaces in our fastest growing communities. I mentioned the two in Calgary that have received construction funding, but I also mentioned a number of other projects that have received design funding. That includes a new high school in Cornerstone, two new elementary schools in Redstone, a high school in Aspen, an elementary school in north Calgary. Additional projects have also received planning funding. But, of course, additional enrolment pressures are being faced by surrounding communities, and projects have received funding there as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a question to ask.

Federal Policies

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After years of unconstitutional behaviour from the federal government we saw some promising progress when the Supreme Court ruled the no-more-pipelines act unconstitutional. But Trudeau and his green cronies are back at it again and have proposed new amendments to Bill C-69. And guess what? The changes are still unconstitutional. Can the Minister of Justice please share what these recent changes are and why they still do not comply with the Constitution?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely right. The Supreme Court clearly decided that C-69 was unconstitutional, but of course the federal government refused to listen both to the court and to Canadians. We've completed our review of the tabled amendments, and guess what? The amendments are still unconstitutional. This situation could have been avoided if the government of Canada had sat down with the provinces and engaged in meaningful consultation. Of course,

that hasn't happened; radio silence, once again, from our members in the opposition. We will fight this.

2:40

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

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that the changes to C-69 as they stand could put in situ oil sand development, major highways, and power plants at risk of federal interference and further given that the Alberta government was not consulted on these amendments and that there was no meaningful engagement or collaboration, to the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: how will Alberta's economy and industries be impacted by the amended version of Bill C-69?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that, and thank you to the member once again for that question. Albertans have suffered tens of billions in losses as a result of the Liberal-NDP coalition, both in Ottawa and the members opposite here in Alberta. We're standing up against federal interference wherever and whenever it arises. Alberta Justice lawyers are working diligently to challenge every single unconstitutional move that the federal government makes. The ridiculous Emergencies Act measures: we blocked it. Radical antipipeline legislation: we blocked it. We're going to block it till the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that Justin Trudeau and his NDP alliance have taken an antagonistic approach to interacting with the provinces unless it is for political gain, like with his carbon tax exemption on heating oil, and further given that the federal government has been actively working to undermine Alberta's growth, once again to the Minister of Justice: what is our government doing to protect provincial jurisdiction and keep the federal government in their own lane?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again thank you to that member for that excellent question. Once again, we've suffered tens of billions of dollars in losses in this province, largely because of the Liberal-NDP alliance in Ottawa and the members opposite here in Alberta. We will continue to block each and every unconstitutional move that the federal government makes. The absurd rules, once again, designating plastics as toxic: we blocked it. Radical legislation all over the place: we blocked it. We will not back down from any fight that the feds bring this way.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the minister of red tape reduction.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from Professor David Kahane, who's written a letter to the members of the Presidential Review Committee urging them to not reappoint Bill Flanagan, and it's got a lot of information about what happened at the encampments. I urge everybody to read this letter.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to table two articles. The first is from the *Red Deer Advocate* titled Red Deer's Entertainment District an Example of UCP's Red Tape Reduction Efforts.

The second is Rice Howard Way Becomes Edmonton's New Entertainment District, published in the *Edmonton Journal*. These articles demonstrate how reducing regulation leads to positive outcomes for Albertans.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite five copies of an op-ed from this morning's *Edmonton Journal* written by Keith Gerein entitled City Hall Has Seen Big Changes and Even More Likely on Way, wherein Mr. Gerein cites that municipalities will be saddled with exponentially huge costs to accommodate Bill 20 and that the much-maligned bill should be pulled.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Minister LaGrange, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Paramedics 2022-23 annual report, the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta 2022-23 annual report, the Alberta College of Social Workers 2023 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:25 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to withdraw that point of order.

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

I might just provide caution that if hon. members are making unparliamentary comments off the record that perhaps could have been caught on the record, I would advise extreme caution against such language.

The matter is dealt with and concluded.

Statement by the Speaker

Democracy Discovery Centre Display

The Speaker: Prior to moving to Orders of the Day, I would like to highlight, now that it is summer – I assume third or fourth or fifth winter will still be upon us, but now that we are approaching summer, the Alberta Legislature Visitor Centre is open extra hours for the summer season. I'd like to briefly mention a new display in the Democracy Discovery Centre recently opened called *You Have a Voice*. This is a hands-on exhibit that encourages visitors to write their Members of the Legislative Assembly. Visitors look at a riding map of the electoral districts to find their MLA, select vintage postcards, and prepare a note for their members.

Normally these postcards will be delivered through the interdepartmental mail to your legislative office, but a few of them have already come in, which we will have the pages distribute. These postcards are at least 25 years old and have been found in the archives of the Legislative Assembly. We know that because you'll note that the number is 403 for the Legislature here in Edmonton, which, of course, changed over 25 years ago.

Hon. members, I hope that you will receive many more notes of encouragement over the coming months.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 18

33. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a motion for time allocation, which allows up to five minutes for a member of the opposition to respond to such a motion.

It would appear that the Deputy Official Opposition House Leader has risen to provide a response.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate rising and being able to speak to Government Motion 33. I would like to say that this is the first time that I would be rising to such a motion; however, I believe it's 45 times now. Actually, no. We did this last week, so I believe we're now at 46 times that the government has introduced a time allocation motion since they have formed government.

You know, I think that it speaks to what the Speaker was just referring to about the importance of the democracy. I appreciate that the Government House Leader feels that there's been enough time on the record in regard to time allocation, and that's why these motions continuously keep being introduced in the House, but I strongly disagree.

You know, we've heard a lot over the last few months, weeks, years about democracy and the importance of democracy within the province, the relationship between the municipalities, the province, and the federal government. The government will speak to the fact that, of course, they have the majority in the House, so they're able to do what they so choose to do. There's no disputing the fact that that is true, but with majorities comes great power and great respect and responsibility and respect to every single Albertan no matter who they voted for.

2:50

Now, it's not about the government taking responsibility of what they believe to be true. It's not the be-all and end-all of agendas and pushing through with no regard for the situations that are happening in the province, no regard for the citizens that they represent, no regard for the stakeholders that are speaking out against the concerns of Bill 18. It speaks to the fact that this government has a responsibility to the people that got them into this place. When time allocation is put in this House, it limits those conversations. It completely disregards the responsibility that the government has to ensure that they do good governance, that they listen to their stakeholders, and that they ensure the legislation that they're introducing actually meets the needs.

Now, Bill 18 impacts almost every Albertan. In fact, I would say that it does impact every Albertan. It impacts an Albertan that wants to look at advanced education. It impacts Albertans that are looking

at K to 12 education. It impacts health, anybody that has to deal with housing, jobs, the economy, mental health, addictions, anybody that happens to be connected to municipal affairs, like our local councillors. Technology, innovation, transportation, agriculture are significantly impacted by Bill 18, and unfortunately I haven't had time to speak to that yet. Culture, status of women, seniors, energy, public safety: this bill impacts every single jurisdiction across the province.

It impacts them when this government chooses to do time allocation because they just want to continue their fight with the federal government. This is what this bill is about. This bill is not about this government trying to do things better or trying to listen to the people of Alberta and actually do a democratic process. This bill is about another fight with the federal government, not allowing the federal government to be involved and to try to support any processes or any type of ability to do good work in this province. It is a sovereignty bill, and Albertans don't believe in that. The government sure does, and we know that. We've heard that a lot. They don't actually believe in democracy, because if they did, they wouldn't have put time allocation in place on this bill.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we are here for now the 46th time in this House with this government doing time allocation, only allowing the opposition, the very people that are here to stand up and speak on behalf of Albertans – they are limiting those voices; therefore, they are limiting Albertans' voices. The government should be ashamed and remove this motion and go back to debating the bills the way that our democracy is intended to work.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 33 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:53 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

3:10

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Sigurdson, L.
Arcand-Paul	Haji	Sweet
Batten	Hayter	Tejada
Brar	Hoyle	Wright, P.
Ellingson	Kayande	
Totals:	For – 46	Against – 14

[Government Motion 33 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 18

Provincial Priorities Act

Mr. Sabir moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 7: Mr. Williams]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is amendment REF1. The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction has 14 minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate? On the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand in support of the amendment for Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, Madam Speaker, I'm a bit of a nerd when it comes to municipal government. I think municipalities have an incredibly rich opportunity to make community for economic development, for housing, for initiatives, for sustainability, for resilience, for climate action, for social justice, for good work, for living wages, for cost of living. I think municipalities are a completely kind of underutilized order of government when it comes to local policy-making and local place-making. So it's with great disappointment that the province feels the need to exercise the kind of paternalism that is on display with Bill 18. I believe in the potential of cities.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt; however – and it's entirely my error – the hon. the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall moved REF1, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, who spoke to the motion, and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie also spoke to amendment REF1, in which case she is ineligible to speak again.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has risen.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak in favour of the referral on Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I am in full agreement with my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall in his assertion that this bill needs to be halted now and sent to committee before it causes some very real damage. What I will say right from the start is that the name of the bill is a misnomer. It's talking about Albertan priorities, and what I am seeing as a repeated pattern in this government is that they are not advocating on behalf of Albertans and what their priorities are. They are, however, busily poking holes in our democratic process and seem committed to getting in the way instead of actually helping and serving Albertans, as we've all committed to do. One constant reminder I have of this, and I've mentioned it before, is the prayer that we all do every day in the House, where we “seek to improve the condition of all.” That is definitely not anything I'm seeing in the course of bills that are coming out of this government.

This bill really just flies in the face of what I'm hearing from people in terms of what's on the list of Albertan priorities. They need affordable housing. They struggle with the rising price of utilities, of insurance rates, of overcrowded classrooms, some of which I'm hearing in my very riding just today via e-mail from constituents. They have struggled to find a doctor or see a specialist in any sort of a timely manner. We're still seeing just terrible wait times in terms of emergency at hospitals. Then in terms of our respected and hard-working public institutions, they need support, they need funding. In an affordability crisis their own support services are now being pushed to their very limits.

What this proposed bill does instead of helping, instead of doing any sort of meaningful stakeholder work or consultation, which should be done prior to legislation not afterwards in regulations, as this government is wont to do, is that it causes stress on the institutions, on the organizations that rely on relationships and funding with the federal government as part of the mix of their operations.

For a government that's seemingly obsessed with this manufactured fight with the feds and perceived overreach – the whole bill should be used as a cautionary tale. Like, I'm looking forward to a time when we don't have a UCP government and this bill will be used as an example and a cautionary tale in social studies classes as an example of government overreach and interference.

While this government continues to drone on about supporting the local work that's being done, and I see that in terms of just even, you know, some of what I heard today about the 2SLGBTQIA community and the supposed support and allyship for those groups, what I'm seeing in terms of just everything that this government is putting through and proposing as policy is really just dismantling that work and interfering with and threatening that it might not even get done at all. What it does is that it also amounts to delaying, disrupting, and taking money off the table for work that the government refuses to do in terms of housing affordability, newcomer settlement, and many more areas that touch Albertans' lives every day.

What I see is an obsession with a fight with Ottawa, and it will just result in losses, in just a time suck for these organizations. They already have to jump through so many hoops to apply at any level of government for funding. You know, usually I'm seeing that these are people that are already at their max. They're trying to serve vulnerable populations, and now they have more hoops to jump through and the added threat of perhaps falling on the bad side of this government and their proclaimed war against wokeness. Basically, if this doesn't fit in with the government agenda, they're going to attack it. They're going to get in the way.

The UCP's fight with Ottawa will result in losses to the organizations and, by extension, our communities, our cities, and Albertans as a whole, and we're already seeing the impacts of this fight. Their refusal to accept federal funding for diabetes medication and contraception is a failure to address the needs of so many that I've spoken to who are already trying to economize. We're in an affordability crisis, and having access to medications, having access to diabetes treatment, to things like contraception care, already would take a huge bite out of those budgets, and it removes agency from vulnerable folks. You know, this is a government that's constantly talking about choice and freedom while they're actively removing it from people in our communities. This is incompetent legislation, and, as I said earlier, passing a bill before consultation is irresponsible. You can't just whiteout your mistakes later.

One of the other things that I'm really concerned about with Bill 18, as my colleague had mentioned, just this paternalistic bent, is also the undue influence that we're seeing from extremist factions

that are within the UCP and outside of it, the undue influence that they have over legislation and the harmful impacts that has now and into the future.

One thing that I have noticed as a trend as well is that their conventions are the way that they tell on themselves. I remember back in 2018, when the now minister of municipalities was begging his supporters to not pass resolutions that would out queer kids. I'd like to think that this was out of concern for the community, but he knew then and most certainly knows now that these would be harmful, but again their own words come back to haunt them. One of the quotes was that: this will severely hurt our chances at winning; don't do that to yourself.

3:20

So back then they were accusing us of using fear and smear, and we knew that their convention resolutions were really just the canary in the coal mine. On this side of the House we clearly hear those dog whistles, and we clearly see the creep of authoritarianism and the impending implementation of a TBA agenda. So what did they do? Well, they did exactly what we told people that they would do, and they allowed parental notifications of GSAs.

Do we need more examples? How about their convention in November. One of my constituents, the mother of a nonbinary child, copied me on correspondence with the Minister of Education. She was assured that these decisions would be made by school divisions, and we know very well now that what's on the agenda in the fall is a full flip-flop from this government and a commitment to follow through with harmful policies against the advice of experts.

So given the trends, given the pattern of behaviour from this government, this is just very concerning to me around a whole host of organizations that I've spoken to as critic. Anything that has to do with diversity, anything that has to do with inclusion in our communities, anything that has to do with housing, because, you know, of course, we couldn't go ahead and actually make an effort in our housing, if we are building affordable housing, which they keep promising – I've yet to see those results – that would also be sustainable housing that could actually give constituents some relief on their energy bills by having greener construction in housing. Anything that goes against this agenda, this what I would say is largely an extremist-influenced agenda, is now on the chopping block.

I know that in the discussions with my stakeholders, federal funding can be a key component of their operations, and I'm extremely concerned that this government will happily pose in photo ops, they'll talk about recognitions – which I might add are, you know, recognitions in spite of the policies this government is willing to put forward. Great; you survived. You survived this government. You survived their attacks on your community, and here's some recognition for that.

Their battle against perceived wokeness and inclusion will create casualties, and I think that Bill 18 is one of the vehicles in which they will try to do this. This could have an effect on so many of the funding initiatives that people are asking for. You know, I think one of the biggest things I would say in terms of Bill 18 and in supporting this referral to this UCP government is: if you're not going to help, get out of the way.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on REF1.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm grateful to have the chance to rise and speak in support of the amendment to refer this

bill, Bill 18, to committee, because, in my view, there are a number of things that need to be looked at and need to be done, and we need to have the opportunity for a fulsome discussion to, in my view, make this bill even somewhat palatable because this is a bill that shows the lengths that this UCP government will go to make sure control of everything rests with a very small group of people. It's a bill which demonstrates the UCP way: little or no consultation in advance of the bill, and with a promise of consultation as regulations are being drafted. It's a bill which, when viewed together with so much of the legislation that's come before us over the past number of months, displays, I believe, a pattern of disdain.

So much of what's been tabled here is not what's expected, what they've advocated for, nor is it what they need, and, Madam Speaker, that list is long. We've had surprise announcements, misses, and legislation like this one that suddenly this UCP government would be pursuing an Alberta pension plan, put in place a new provincial police service or agency, the dismantling of health care in this province, the lack of requirements for hours of care for seniors in our province's continuing care system. This is a bill that again is another fight with the federal government. This is a government that's already made sure that Albertans won't have access to diabetes medication and contraception as pharmacare begins its rollout, all because of their unwillingness to even entertain a program that comes to us from the federal government.

In addition, though, with this bill they've put access to critical research dollars for scientists and academics at risk. In many ways with this legislation in addition to other bills, including Bill 20, this UCP government to me seems to be in some sort of contest to become the world's worst sort of helicopter parent. It's not even an implication. It's entirely clear. This government believes itself to be the only group, the only organization, the only entity capable of acting in the best interests of those who live here, except, of course, with one particular problem: that it doesn't actually want to hear and reflect upon what all of those folks are saying and what they are grappling with daily. It's an incredibly paternalistic and authoritarian response to the very real issues that exist today.

There are a number of organizations and people who, as my colleagues have mentioned, will likely be harmed by what is and is not in this bill. It's a short-sighted act, Madam Speaker. Municipalities are impacted; postsecondary institutions are impacted; anything that's considered to be a current entity of the provincial government and anything the government decides later will be an entity. As a result, I have a number of concerns. If we talk about that issue of provincial government entities for just a moment and who might be involved in the process of deciding what gets declared an entity and under what circumstances, I understand that the bill allows for a minister or someone else who might be assigned or some other entity, in fact, to be given the right to exempt another provincial entity from the requirement to get prior approval to enter into, extend, or renew an intergovernmental agreement. Now, I'm going to say that that level of "who knows really what's going to happen?" is quite something.

In that case, then, it's not only the minister who will have this power and authority but it could be someone else altogether. It could be a group of people. It could be an organization, then, who will be able to exempt provincial entities from the requirements of this bill. And that does indeed beg another question for me. Knowing the predilection for this government to provide for its friends and neighbours with all manner of jobs and positions, what exactly will be the circumstances that will lead to an exemption, and who will be that one or group who will be in charge of determining the requirements that need to be met for such an exemption? Perhaps it will be like Bill 13 where it will be upon the recommendation of someone in the department to recommend

something to the minister, or perhaps it will be a group of someones from a myriad of departments who review, investigate, assess, or recommend, or perhaps, Madam Speaker, there will be some new border agency that will be created in the end for just this purpose, to oversee all of this review, and if that's the case, it ends up being like a red tape express.

It's absolutely frustrating that there aren't additional details in terms of what that particular governance structure might be, but again, that's just par for the course. It isn't really about clarity or transparency. It's about being casually and deliberately obtuse all in order to own the feds and to impose control. That is likely why there's such a strong public response against this bill and others. That's why there's a call to scrap it. But like all other entreaties from Albertans, from the people that we've all been elected to serve, this government has chosen to ignore them. We're in a housing crisis, a health care crisis, an affordability crisis, an infrastructure crisis, an education crisis, and that is where our combined focus should be. Our focus shouldn't be on arguing, fights, and schoolyard spats, or attempting to show someone – in this case, other levels of government – that you are the boss. That doesn't end a crisis; it simply prolongs them and erodes trust.

3:30

It's unhelpful because there is, as I said earlier, real harm to be done and particularly in terms of my own riding, in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I know that this bill, should it pass this House, will have a direct impact on some local organizations which serve many of my residents, organizations like Civida. How might this bill impact Civida's operations, plans, plans for future projects, which, of course, equate to housing for folks across Edmonton and housing for many folks in my riding? Civida regularly works with all levels of government. It's the largest provider of community and affordable housing in Edmonton. They manage over 5,300 homes and have more than 130 sites across the city, and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is home to the greatest number of those sites.

Civida has a lot of interesting projects on the go, including a terrific project that will involve renovation of some existing buildings to provide all manner of housing along with a new way of serving folks which will allow those folks to stay in their homes for a longer time. Their rent may go up commensurate with whatever it is they happen to be earning at that time, but they won't have to leave their home, which is incredibly important. Folks will have, finally, a place to call home.

To get there, collaboration is a part of Civida's world. They regularly partner with the governments of Canada, Alberta, the city of Edmonton, and indeed other social service and civil society organizations, but because of their relationship to the city and to the province, they will likely fall under the provincial entity category. What, then, would the passage of this bill mean to those current and future projects? How many additional steps would they need to take? How long would they need to wait in order to secure funding for projects like the ones I've just described? Who will they end up having to work with? Would they still be allowed to secure funding, for instance, that originated with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or will the province just say no because it doesn't fall into some sort of a matrix?

The uncertainty this creates for the folks in my riding and for folks all across the city is unconscionable. These are questions that demand a response from this UCP government, and that is, of course, why this should be referred. You know, we see there's no hint of irony in the bill's title, Alberta priorities act. Well, perhaps they could learn from the residents of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Madam Speaker, because here's a list of some of the priorities from the folks who live in my constituency.

They would like smaller classrooms. They would like supports in school for kids who need them. They would like affordable housing that ends up being a place they can call home. They would like a government that works with the federal government and a government that will provide medical care that's needed through programs like pharmacare. They would like this government to put required levels of care back into continuing care. They don't want a new police agency. They don't want an Alberta pension plan. They want, Madam Speaker, a government they can trust. These are the priorities of everyday Albertans, and I think that that's what we should focus on. That's what people expect from this government, and that's what I think a referral to committee of this bill would help us gain.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in the debate on amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak in support of the amendment brought by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall on Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act. In the midst of a wealth of critical issues such as health care, the cost of living, a weakened economy, and a housing crisis this bill clearly shows what this government's priorities are for this province, which is picking fights with the federal government while ignoring the people they were elected to serve.

According to the news today Calgary's inflation rate in April was the highest in the country, at 3.6 per cent, compared to the Canada-wide rate of 2.7 per cent. That's a 0.9 point gap. Trevor Tombe, a Calgary-based economist, estimates that most of this gap is accounted for by faster rent increases in the city. Bill 18 doesn't address any of this. It is far reaching, and it impacts Albertans from a wide variety of institutions across our province.

The far-reaching nature of Bill 18 allows the provincial government to obstruct critical funding pathways from the federal government directed towards postsecondary institutions, municipalities, school boards, and even in the energy space. With the Alberta government's recent moratorium on renewables and their opposition to net-zero goals there are serious concerns about federal grants that could be blocked. There is \$9.74 million in federal money to improve access to hydrogen fuels, including supporting product testing and attracting investment to Alberta's hydrogen industry. There's \$160 million in federal investments for nine Alberta-based solar power projects that will create hundreds of jobs, generate significant clean solar power, and deploy 163 megawatts of new solar generation and 48 megawatts of battery storage capacity.

There is \$175 million in federal investments for 12 Alberta-based clean energy projects that will create thousands of jobs and enable local economic growth while delivering clean, affordable energy to communities. There's \$23.4 million for EDF Renewables Canada to support the Cypress 2 wind project in southern Alberta. Now, I understand that the UCP has launched an ideological attack on the renewables industry and is picking winners and losers in the electricity sector, but Albertans are searching for a government that creates policies that will improve their quality of life.

For municipalities, postsecondary institutions, and school boards, federal funding is essential to ensure the proper delivery of services and programs. Bill 18 blind sided postsecondary institutions. Many students and educators raised their concerns with the bill. The University of Alberta's consolidated budget, for example, shows that the federal government provides funding for approximately 39.4 per cent of the university's research. That's a big budget.

Topics that might be at risk of losing funding due to Bill 18 include neuroscience, brain health and exercise, patient- and family-centred cancer survivorship, community disaster research, microbiome research, thermodynamics, wild microbiome infections, RNA and protein biophysics, critical border studies, politics of citizenship, and human rights. Why does the UCP think they need to review funding for these areas?

Bill Flanagan, the president of the University of Alberta, voiced his frustration, stating:

Bill 18's potential application to public post-secondary institutions is inconsistent with our obligations and commitments relating to freedom of expression and robust research. If passed, the legislation could give the Government . . . the specific power to prevent an institution from accepting any federal research funding if that funding does not align with "provincial priorities."

In a joint letter from the graduate students' associations from both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta student leadership warned that Bill 18 could dispel scholars and talent from our province. It is imperative that we as elected representatives remain committed to upholding Alberta as an international destination for talented academics and researchers. This bill represents an ideologically driven attack that, according to those who have dedicated their professional careers as educators, poses risks to academic freedom itself.

3:40

Madam Speaker, I receive a lot of e-mails about the trifecta of bills we have right now. Specifically for Bill 18, I'd like to read an e-mail from a Calgary-Glenmore constituent, and I quote here.

I'm writing to express my disappointment with the recent announcements that the government of Alberta will introduce legislation intended to prevent direct funding agreements between the government of Canada and Alberta municipalities. Your comments to the media detail that Alberta will act to obstruct municipalities' efforts to rapidly build homes and benefit from unrestricted participation in the federal housing accelerator funding program.

I do not agree with the government of Alberta's decision to rescind the requirements for environmentally sound home construction in Calgary and Edmonton, which I see as irresponsible, and it ignores the climate change emergency. I have strongly opposed the restrictions on renewable energy development in Alberta. Your latest announcement fails to acknowledge that cities and rural communities will benefit from the housing accelerator program and also represents the continuation of a negative trajectory that jeopardizes equitable, sustainable growth in Alberta.

Your statements describing the new funding model as bribery are wholly inappropriate. Preventing the direct funding model between municipalities and the federal government shows an intention to squander valuable time and resources, which are already scarce commodities. The requirement for municipalities to have the province's permission before entering into funding agreements intended to accelerate home building is unnecessary, adds more bureaucracy, and is not in line with the government's red tape reduction policies.

This constituent continues and says:

As a proud Canadian I am impressed by the federal government's dedication, care, and innovative efforts to develop new policies and programs intended to benefit Albertans. It is unacceptable for the Alberta government to obstruct municipalities from participating in funding models meant to enhance infrastructure and housing development. As Canadian taxpayers we have a rightful expectation of support from the federal government. It is truly disheartening that the government of Alberta persists in obstructing future-minded change and is preoccupied with designing policies to prevent Albertan municipalities from

engaging in and benefiting from federal initiatives. Such actions will undoubtedly harm Albertans.

Recent polls also show that I'm not alone. More Albertans are dissatisfied with the performance of the Alberta government. Many strongly oppose the government of Alberta's hostile reluctance to fully support relevant, helpful programs like pharmacare, housing accelerator funding, \$10-a-day child care, and climate strategies, including carbon pricing.

As Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services it is imperative . . .

And I continue to quote this constituent, Madam Speaker.

. . . that you seize these opportunities and work with the government of Canada to implement and/or customize these new, innovative policies, and failing to do so is unprofessional and undemocratic. Most Albertans expect collaboration with the government of Canada to improve our lives. I encourage you to shift the tone and behaviour substantially regarding collaboration with the government of Canada.

After five years Alberta finds itself worse off. We have the highest level of inflation, pollution, and toxic waste liabilities. We now have no requirements for nursing care hours for LTC residents. People are contracting SARS-CoV-2 in hospitals and at school. We underfund family medicine and are witnessing out-of-control overdose deaths. The evidence shows that our public health and education systems are collapsing, which is not true in other provinces. Your actions and words reflect a lack of seriousness related to improve the lives of Albertans. Moreover, the decision your government is making failed to foster a healthy environment, both figuratively and literally.

This Calgary-Glenmore constituent continues to say:

In closing, consider the weight of these concerns and the expectations of Albertans. It is not merely a matter of policy but of integrity and responsibility to the people you serve. We look to you for leadership, a commitment to collaborative governance, and actions that prioritize the well-being of all Albertans. The decisions made today will shape the future of our province for generations to come. Let municipalities work with the government of Canada to build a brighter, more sustainable future. Thank you for your attention to this matter. I eagerly anticipate positive changes that reflect the best interests of all Albertans.

End quote. It's a long e-mail, but it's a beautifully written letter from a wonderful constituent in Calgary-Glenmore. This letter is a testament to how real Albertans feel about this government's decision to enact Bill 18 and other bills similar to it.

In conclusion, I support this amendment. I want to reiterate that Bill 18 poses serious risks to several of Alberta's most coveted institutions and incites fear in Albertans that might not be entitled to the same access for services that they were before. Madam Speaker, Alberta is home to some of the world's brightest minds, and we must work to ensure that we remain a hub for talent and innovation. Bill 18, Bill 20, among others instill a feeling of uncertainty in our province, inevitably leading top talent away from Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of the amendment put forth by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Bill 18 absolutely needs to get sent back to the drawing board for so many reasons but particularly because of the devastation it will cause for postsecondary institutions. Bill 18 requires the provincial government to approve all federal funding to provincial entities, including funding provided to postsecondaries for research. The level of political overreach that this UCP government continues to exhibit knows no

bounds. They seem to forget that the whole point of publicly funded research is to generate knowledge and solutions for the public good. We are facing many significant, complex, and intersecting challenges. These challenges require smart, thoughtful, and humble people who work within the social and natural and health sciences who specialize in inquiry and critical thinking.

Because the UCP didn't properly consult with postsecondary institutions, Bill 18 opens the door to political meddling in academic research and risks driving top academics out of this province. In fact, it already started happening, as several researchers reached out to us saying that they've received offers to conduct research elsewhere and are seriously considering it to work in less hostile environments. I spoke with a prof recently who asked me to join them at a meeting with PhDs in medical research to give them hope to stay in Alberta as the majority of them said that they will not be staying with Bill 18 as it kills research and job opportunities. Who knows how many researchers this bill has already scared off?

As Dan O'Donnell, an English professor at the University of Lethbridge and the president of the council of Alberta faculty associations said, quote: all we're doing is holding Albertans hostage; that money will simply be distributed more to B.C., Saskatchewan, and Ontario as well as all other provinces where they're not going to ideologically vet. End quote. We have two of the largest research powerhouses in the country right here in Alberta, and while postsecondary institutions grappled with drastic budget cuts, their critical lifeline to federal research funding was being threatened. This comes after the UCP government defunded postsecondary institutions by \$80 million this year alone. There's no doubt that postsecondary institutions don't want anything coming between them and their ability to secure even more federal funding.

3:50

The UCP has already made life so much harder for postsecondary institutions and students. Bill 18 is a devastating blow on top of that because postsecondary institutions were utterly blindsided by this legislation. They were given no prior warning or discussions or consultation, and this has been the standard operating procedure of this UCP government.

Allowing Bill 18 to affect federal funding for postsecondary institutions is disastrous because the federal government is actually increasing the amount of research dollars available. The federal government made a major financial commitment to graduate students and scientific infrastructure that postsecondary institution leaders say will help address the brain drain and allow them to retain and attract young research talent. This includes \$825 million over five years to increase the annual value of federal scholarships for graduate programs. Those scholarships will be \$27,000 a year for a master's student, \$40,000 a year for PhD students, and \$70,000 a year for postdoctoral fellows. This addresses the reality that many young researchers are living off federal stipends and many of them fall below the poverty line.

The federal government also is committing an additional \$1.8 billion over five years to the three bodies that fund the lion's share of academic research across this country: the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. How much of this funding will Alberta miss out on because the UCP refused to consult with anyone on Bill 18 and its impacts to postsecondary? Just a couple of weeks ago the Minister of Advanced Education said, quote: I don't believe the intent of this bill is to stop funding; it is to have an understanding and knowledge and information about what's being funded. End quote. What

priorities are those, Madam Speaker? If the UCP government is concerned about Ottawa's overreach into postsecondary institutions and provincial jurisdiction, then why isn't this UCP government funding postsecondary well so that they could rely less on federal funding?

Let me be clear, Madam Speaker. The UCP government is absolutely not interested in supporting postsecondary, students, and our world-class advanced education. This government is more interested in stifling academic freedom and undermining the rigorous peer-reviewed method by which research is conducted all in the name of picking fights with Ottawa, pushing political ideology agendas, and heavy government control.

In 2023 the U of A received \$250 million in federal funding for research in humanities, health sciences, social sciences, and natural applied sciences, a 19 per cent increase over the past five years. University of Calgary received \$190 million in research funding in 2023, or about 35 per cent of its total research revenue, from the federal government. All these research projects are vital to our economy. These make a tangible difference in the lives of Albertans, Canadians, and people around the world, from discovering life-saving medical treatments to a new technology that fuels our future local and global economies.

When trying to justify this bill, the minister suggested that Bill 18 was about providing clarity on what kind of research is being done at our postsecondary institutions, but, Madam Speaker, all of that information is public, and I'd be happy to e-mail the minister with all the links to provide all the breakdowns for where funding is going if she'd like. The truth of the matter is that, like many other bills introduced by this UCP government, Bill 18 is about authoritarianism. Tim Caulfield, a Professor of health, law, and science policy at the University of Alberta pointed out how draconian Bill 18 really is. His quote:

The UCP's Bill 18 is such a blatant and politically motivated assault on academic freedom and free [speech and] inquiry that it doesn't seem real. Does the government . . .

He says,

. . . fear knowledge this much? Do they fear the light that research and free inquiry brings to democracies? We are moving in a terrifying direction.

And I couldn't agree more. This is truly terrifying to witness.

The government likes to cite Quebec's legislation as an example of similar policies, but it's important to note that postsecondary institutions are expressly exempt from Quebec's legislation. This means that Alberta will be the only province to have legislation in place that potentially blocks federal grants for postsecondary research. Our research will be viewed as political propaganda and would be just useless at this rate.

If our institutions can't attract top researchers to Alberta, they lose access to some of the best teachers in the world. That means all of our students in our postsecondaries, not just those assisting with research, will feel the effects of this disastrous legislation. In fact, we may even see a decline of students wanting to come here, including international students. The loss of funding to postsecondary institutions would lead to a rise in tuition fees, further burdening students during a time in an affordability crisis.

This bill is arguably one of the most dangerous pieces of legislation that the UCP has tabled yet and still has serious problems beyond impacts to postsecondary institutions. The red tape Bill 18 will create – what it would do is almost unimaginable, all in a time and all in the name of this government fighting with the federal government and sticking it to Ottawa.

I wholeheartedly support the amendment to refer this bill to committee. We need expert voices in this discussion, not another attempt to move away from the facts. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on the amendment to Bill 18 to refer the bill to committee, REF1. Of course, I stand in support along with my colleagues on this side of the House. Of course, we know that this bill gives the UCP sweeping powers to interfere in many aspects of Albertans' lives and a lot of it not for good. It seems to create some very specific, I think, guardrails on what we explore in Alberta. My colleagues have already talked quite a bit about academic institutions and what this means for them, and I'd like to share my comments also regarding that.

First of all, the legislation does say that this applies to any provincial entity. I have the bill here, and I know we're on the amendment to refer, and we want to refer because the entities are such a broad swath of all the institutions in Alberta. It has a public agency as defined under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, under the Financial Administration Act, the Post-secondary Learning Act, the Education Act, regional health authorities, and then they go on to other health authorities like Covenant Health and any subsidiary of Covenant Health, the municipal authority act and the Municipal Government Act, Alberta Housing Act, or – this is the final one; this is sort of the catch-all phrase that we often find in legislation – “any other entity or class of entity designated as a provincial entity in accordance with the regulations.” So this impacts a significant number of the institutions of Alberta.

What it says about provincial entities: they “may enter into, amend, extend or renew an intergovernmental agreement without obtaining prior approval in accordance with a process established in the regulations.” So they may not do that, because the UCP thinks that they need to be vetting this. You know, it kind of boggles the mind because, of course, the UCP like to say how much they are concerned about red tape, but, oh, my goodness, this is – like, significant red tape is created. That's why it's so important to move this amendment to committee, because I think that they've made a mistake. This doesn't make any sense, that they would want to increase so much red tape, because this process is carried out, appropriately so, without them being involved at all. Now I'm sure you'll have to increase the size of the public service in order to do this.

4:00

Besides that, of course, this bill certainly flies in the face of what are sort of fundamental aspects of academic freedom, freedom of speech. That the UCP would be vetting research undertaken by academics because it does or doesn't fit with the way, you know, the government is thinking: well, please. We live in a free society. People can do things like that. The Supreme Court of Canada has talked about that; they have ruled on that. The government of Alberta, the UCP right now, has no right to interfere in that, and I'm sure there will be court cases that come up if this legislation is indeed passed. The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that academic freedom is necessary “to allow free and fearless search for knowledge and the propagation of ideas” that is “essential to our continuance as a lively democracy.” That's from the Supreme Court of Canada. What the UCP is doing is obviously hindering that.

We have two major research institutions in our province, of course, the University of Alberta here in Edmonton and the University of Calgary in Calgary, and I'm a proud alumni of both of them. Back in '82 I got my BA in political science from the University of Alberta, and in '93 I got a bachelor of social work and a master of social work in '96 from the University of Calgary. I've taught at both institutions. Certainly, you know, from time to time

colleagues that I've worked with in the past, since I'm in this new public position or have been – I guess it's not new anymore; it's been nine years. But they will reach out to me and go: what's going on?

And this is certainly one of the pieces of legislation that my friends that work in academe are reaching out to me regarding. It really is abhorrent, and it's putting Alberta in a very vulnerable position. Certainly, I mean, U of A and U of C are both world-class, you know, research institutions, and certainly in Canada they're both in the top 10. This will definitely hinder our ability to attract – my colleagues have spoken about this – academics. We're always on the hunt for high-class academics that are on the cutting edge of research.

Sadly, I wish this was the only bill that has come before us that has, you know, caused difficulties for academic institutions, but back in 2019, under the Kenney government, there were significant cuts to postsecondary. The U of A actually shouldered 50 per cent of the millions and millions and millions of dollars of cuts in our academic institutions, really challenging many people working there. I know from colleagues, from constituents, because U of A is in my riding, that people looked the other way when they found that Alberta was in this very sort of retrenchment-type climate where such significant cuts – so people weren't interested in coming to our province because there weren't those investments.

That's why I'm beseeching everyone in this Legislature to vote in favour of this amendment to move this to committee for review, because it feels like it's not making any sense for the UCP to be, you know, standing in the way of people having research and being funded by the federal government. The president of the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations, CAFA, said that this bill is only about the UCP's fight with Ottawa. There's a humorous quote that he makes. He goes, "'Back off or I'll shoot myself in the foot' is a strange way to teach Ottawa a lesson."

Guess what? U of A: how much did they get? U of A got \$215 million in federal research funding just last year, in 2023, representing 1,800 separate federal funding agreements. This research funding is a matter of public record, and these research projects are, you know, helping advance the thinking and the understanding, the evidence in particular areas of research. It's a significant thing to think that the UCP is going to have the capacity with the public service as it sits at this moment to actually be able to assess all of these grants. That's a lot of money. Of course, there's the fundamental question of just – they have no business being involved in that.

Unfortunately, the Premier is misinformed. She's been quoted in the media as saying, "Oh, well, Ottawa is using this kind of funding to put forward their agenda," and that's completely false. These are totally arm's-length committees. They're called tripartite committees that actually allocate the funding. It is in no way something that the federal government is deciding on. It's the Canadian Institutes of Health Research; the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, NSERC; and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, which is called SSHRC for short a lot of times. These are completely arm's length from government. Whatever political party is in the government federally, they don't have anything to do with it. That's very sad that the Premier is giving false information about what actually is the methodology for applying for these . . .

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Williams: It's unfortunate to hear the member opposite accusing the Premier of giving false information. This is unparliamentary language and certain to cause a lack of decorum and disruption in the House. We kindly ask the member opposite to withdraw, and we can continue our debate.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't believe that this is a point of order. I believe that it is a matter of debate. Whether the government would like to agree with what our stakeholders are telling us on this side of the House, the reality of it is that what the government is saying is not what our stakeholders understand it to be. It's a matter of debate at this point, and I don't think that it's a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I don't agree this is a point of order. However, I will provide some caution to the members speaking that perhaps we could end up in the territory of unparliamentary language if we continue down this path.

With that caution, I'll ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to finish her remarks.

Debate Continued

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Well, certainly, Janet French, as a journalist with the CBC, has clearly articulated what exactly was said. What's really important to note is that the federal government is not at all involved in this process. It's really inappropriate for the provincial government to be involved in this process, and it flies in the face of the principles of academic freedom, where researchers can pursue their research independently and they don't need to get approval from any level of government.

4:10

However, these committees that I just identified earlier, the tripartite committees that review it, are made up of, you know, international academics that are leaders in their particular fields; they have expertise in those particular areas. They're deciding. These are people with knowledge about how that particular area of study – they have the understanding of that particular area of study, so they're making the most informed decisions. There's absolutely no involvement with the federal government. But, sadly, this legislation will involve the provincial government. As I've already said, the Premier has clearly indicated that she wants things to be . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 33 the question must now be put.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:11 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Sigurdson, L.
Arcand-Paul	Haji	Sweet
Batten	Hayter	Tejada

Brar	Hoyle	Wright, P.
Ellingson	Kayande	
Against the motion:		
Amery	Jones	Sawhney
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schow
Bouchard	Loewen	Schulz
Cyr	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
de Jonge	Lovely	Sinclair
Dreeshen	Lunty	Singh
Dyck	McDougall	Stephan
Ellis	McIver	Turton
Fir	Nally	van Dijken
Getson	Neudorf	Wiebe
Glubish	Nicolaides	Williams
Guthrie	Nixon	Wilson
Horner	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Pitt	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen
Johnson		
Totals:	For – 14	Against – 46

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 33 I am required to put to the Assembly all necessary votes with respect to second reading of Bill 18.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:29 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:		
Amery	Jones	Sawhney
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schow
Bouchard	Loewen	Schulz
Cyr	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
de Jonge	Lovely	Sinclair
Dreeshen	Lunty	Singh
Dyck	McDougall	Stephan
Ellis	McIver	Turton
Fir	Nally	van Dijken
Getson	Neudorf	Wiebe
Glubish	Nicolaides	Williams
Guthrie	Nixon	Wilson
Horner	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Pitt	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen
Johnson		
Against the motion:		
Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Sigurdson, L.
Arcand-Paul	Haji	Sweet
Batten	Hayter	Tejada
Brar	Hoyle	Wright, P.
Ellingson	Kayande	
Totals:	For – 46	Against – 14

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 18 Provincial Priorities Act

Mr. Wilson: Madam Chair, I rise to introduce an amendment for Bill 18 in the House today.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1. Please note that it is two pages.

Hon. minister, you may proceed.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Alberta's government has made a strong commitment to build, maintain, and strengthen relationships with First Nations and Métis communities across this province. This effort is near and dear to me, and I'm honoured to be part of the important work that is making real, meaningful change across the province for Indigenous peoples. This amendment to Bill 18 states that if passed, this bill will not affect Indigenous groups in Alberta. This means that First Nations and Métis settlements will not be affected by this bill. I want to assure Indigenous communities across Alberta that this bill will not affect them or their rights. This is of vital importance as we continue to build new relationships across the province, to strengthen our existing ones.

Indigenous communities play a major role in moving our province and the economy forward, and with programs like the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation and the Aboriginal investment fund this government is proving it is committed to walking the path towards true economic reconciliation. Economic reconciliation is a vital step towards a brighter, more prosperous future for Indigenous people in Alberta, and I am very pleased with the work this government has been doing to advance this. I always say that when Indigenous people succeed, we all succeed.

I acknowledge that Indigenous communities have the ability to negotiate and manage their own long-standing funding relationships with the federal government, and this amendment will ensure that those agreements and relationships are not affected by Bill 18 and instead would only apply to the provincial entities specifically identified in Bill 18.

In this amendment we want to ensure that Indigenous groups aren't captured by the definition of "provincial entity," and they can't be added as a provincial entity in the regulations under the act. The proposed amendment aims to achieve this by defining Indigenous groups and adding a new section that clarifies that "an Indigenous group is not, and [may] not be designated as, a federal . . . or a provincial entity for the purposes of this Act."

With respect to First Nations we know their primary relationship with the Crown is through the federal government, and it's not our intent for this legislation to undermine that. This act does not in any way impact the treaty rights, which we continue to respect. I also want to emphasize that this act and this proposed amendment do not introduce changes to the Metis Settlements Act or the associated regulations and agreements.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

4:50

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak in favour of this amendment for Bill 18. However, before I do so, I must acknowledge what many in the community view as the misguided Provincial Priorities Act, or better known as another instalment of red tape created by the UCP government. Despite its name, it does not actually deal with the priorities of Albertans, like affordability, publicly funded and delivered health care, or schools in all parts of the province.

Bill 18 is yet another avenue for the provincial government to insert itself in the affairs of a myriad of democratically and, might I add, duly elected members of municipal governments or the experts appointed which ensure the effective management of many of our public services like postsecondary institutions, hospitals, or even affordable housing bodies.

A piece of legislation of this magnitude is quite concerning given the numerous priorities that Albertans have asked this government to prioritize, like affordability, health care, housing, climate change. Well, Alberta, you've been duped by the government in draft after draft of legislation that addresses none of that. But I guess it's unfair of me to say, because at least one of them addresses climate change. Oh, wait. No, it doesn't. Not explicitly. It uses emergencies that stem from climate change as an excuse to usurp more power from local authorities.

So what does this piece of legislation do? Well, let's walk through it – why don't we? – a tradition I seem to be taking on while this government implements really far-reaching legislation instead of addressing the real issues that Albertans are asking for them to address. I want to begin by addressing that this amendment is sorely needed, not just for this piece of legislation but for all pieces of legislation by this government. Reconciliation is beyond necessary for many areas that this government is responsible for.

I need only remind you of the commitment that the province made under a caring and strong NDP government with respect to Jordan's principle. Madam Chair, Jordan's principle requires both the federal and provincial government to put the petty jurisdictional squabbles aside to do what is best for Indigenous children who require assistance from their government, be it in health care, education, or social assistance. This government could learn so much from a principle like this. It is one rooted as close as it can be to Indigenous legal principles or looking after one another. In Nêhiyawêwin we call it [remarks in Cree].

Had this amendment not been proposed, I was ready to introduce an amendment of my own sort with respect to this important exemption. Indigenous peoples have always been an afterthought by colonial governments, and this government is no different. While the member who proposed this amendment, the minister, has finally done the right thing, it is a shame that they did not do so before introducing this piece of legislation. This government should have also considered bringing forward an amendment to exclude postsecondary institutions from having to adhere to the provincial government's misguided priorities, but I digress.

I want to focus on the importance of passing this amendment so that more Indigenous leadership is not bound by the misguided priorities of the provincial government. I'd also like to note that this amendment clearly states to Indigenous leadership that its sovereignty cannot and will not be usurped by the provincial government so long as I and my colleagues on this side of the House sit here.

I'd also like to opine on the other deficiencies in this bill and will begin with the definitions which highlight the need for this amendment, in particular intergovernmental agreements, the crux of this bill. Cabinet has had several meltdowns over the past couple

of months while other elected representatives tried to circumvent the UCP's temper tantrums in Ottawa. Municipalities, housing management bodies under the Housing Act, and postsecondary institutions have had a history of securing funding from federal entities, which, read in another way and with a more plain understanding, is the federal government in Ottawa, the very entity that the provincial government has decided it wants to go after because the current government does not align with its harmful and misguided priorities, like a sovereignty that it usurped from First Nations without consultation or this bill, which usurps the ability for provincial entities to get federal dollars for programs that Albertans so desperately need.

While I do not want to go on about the important points that my brilliant colleagues on this side of the House have already raised in this House and to Albertans – namely, on the obvious restriction on postsecondary institutions that this bill affects – we should be abundantly clear that this bill, as bad as it is prior to this amendment, went so far as to have some unfortunate consequences to other entities such as First Nations, Métis settlements, and various other Indigenous organizations that might be classified under either entity that might want to enter into an inter-governmental agreement.

This amendment as drafted is good. It is a start, but I would urge this government to continue doing this type of work to ensure that Indigenous rights and the relationship that was supposed flow under treaty is respected and honoured in a good way. I know that reconciliation is a foremost thought for many of us, especially on this side of the House. I would like to see more of this being proposed in pieces of legislation that seem to overextend itself paternally into areas that it should not. This amendment is a good amendment, and I thank the minister for proposing this. It is so needed.

But prior to this amendment being introduced, this legislation was the exact type of legislation that has unfortunate consequences because it is based on hasty decision-making. In this case it is solely to, quote, own the Libs, end quote, something this government has foamed at the mouth day in and day out over and which this piece of legislation tries to do, to the detriment of Albertans.

This unfortunate consequence of this legislation can be seen in section 1(c)(iv), which, as it presently reads, folds in another order of government that this Chamber has historically – and, thankfully, through this amendment, has not forgotten. This government should have had the forethought to include this amendment before introducing this piece of legislation, and I'll say this till I'm blue in the face. First Nations and Métis folks cannot continue to be an afterthought in this Chamber. But, alas, here we are, and here I am urging this House to pass this amendment for the reasons that I outlined today.

Although all of the fanfare this government hosts with Indigenous peoples for photo shoots or press conferences, they still manage to draft bad legislation that amounts to folding Indigenous peoples in their speaking notes to make their political point but not actually doing anything with respect to the needs and wants of Indigenous peoples in this province. Instead, they are an afterthought, as demonstrated in this amendment. Indigenous peoples should be considered at every step during the legislative process as to how the provincial government's paternalistic overreach might have unfortunate consequences.

Let's face it, Madam Chair. This government and its predecessor, also a UCP government, has to date not acted honourably in its responsibilities to Indigenous peoples. It is easier to take photos and make empty promises without doing the hard work of including their voices before it makes bad decisions that affect their rights. This amendment, although very necessary, was done at the eleventh

hour and only implemented because Indigenous leadership requested it. But had they ignored Indigenous leadership again in this instance, I would have introduced one that would have been much stronger.

Madam Chair, First Nations and Métis settlements have had to develop many creative ways over the years to operate in the legislative frameworks between the federal and provincial governments. One level of government blames the other for its problems while the other blames it right back. The only people that suffer from this jurisdictional hot potato are Indigenous peoples. I just mentioned not too long ago a really helpful representation of how this can be seen through Jordan's principle. Provincial and federal governments ran Indigenous parents and guardians through hoops and created unnecessary red tape just to give Indigenous children the opportunity to access inter alia health care, social, and educational services.

For a government so patently intent on reducing red tape, it is quite curious as to why they are creating the most unnecessary red tape for any of these defined agencies, boards, or any of those undefined entities. This amendment clarifies that they are not going to be including Indigenous organizations, and I am glad for that. But, Madam Chair, the legal frameworks within First Nations, Métis settlements, and Indigenous organizations are complex. I would know as I've advised many of them. I've incorporated and have represented Indigenous decision-makers of all types in exercising their sovereignty or expanding their business in this province.

It is also incredibly disingenuous for the sponsor of this act to sit in this Chamber speaking to this bill to highlight the inefficiencies between the feds and First Nations, yet providing zero solutions is, in essence, tokenism at its worst. It is a shame, Madam Chair. What I can tell you is that no matter how you cut the current definitions of the federal entities or provincial entities, which are so gosh darn broad that Indigenous entities would be implied and affected by the paternalistic piece of legislation before this amendment, it was beyond necessary to include these amendments and should have been incorporated prior to this bill being introduced in this Chamber.

The other side does not get a pat on the back for doing the bare minimum. They ought to have known better and acted accordingly. Instead, they were caught without any contemplation of Indigenous peoples and were thereby forced to make this amendment, and I want the record to show that.

5:00

Madam Chair, this is not a government focused on a relationship based on reconciliation in this province. It is one that continuously pushes the boundaries, and when they are caught, they put their tail between their legs and are shamed into doing the right thing when they should have been doing the right thing from the outset.

Madam Chair, this amendment is necessary, and I urge both sides of this House to support it. If we do not, First Nations, Métis settlements, and other Indigenous organizations will likely be affected by the unfortunate consequences of this government's paternalistic overreach for UCP priorities, not Albertan priorities, and let's make that very clear. It is clear that the UCP priorities are nothing more than new ways to reify its never-ending temper tantrum against Ottawa. It is not standing up for Albertans at its core. This bill does the opposite. It sticks it to Albertans because this government has no intention to help Albertans.

Just as I rose the other day in this House to speak about the provincial government's ongoing overreach into areas that it should not interfere, this piece of legislation does this in the most egregious

ways. While this amendment is welcome, the balance of the legislation is bad.

I'd like to wrap up my remarks in favour of this amendment by reminding this government of its responsibility under treaty to be a good relative of Indigenous nations. Treaty, as I was taught, is a relationship. It is not a contractual agreement. It was not a secession of land, and it was not the way that we intended to live together. Our relationship here on these territories is with the Crown, it is with First Nations, and it is with our leaders. They should be included in every step.

This amendment, although good, should have been done ahead of time, and I'm sad to say that this government has failed to do this. This amendment at the eleventh hour, although necessary, should have been incorporated well before a month and a half after it received introduction in this House.

I look forward to introducing a pathway for this government to move forward in a reconciliatory way, as treaty intended, because they clearly need help in doing this work, and stay tuned for what that might be. It is shameful that it took this long, and this government must do better moving forward.

It is for these reasons that I support this amendment but with the strongest caution to the government that they must do better. [Remarks in Cree]

The Chair: Are there others to join in on the amendment?

The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 18.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Cyr: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 21

Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

[Debate adjourned May 16: Member Hoyle speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South has three minutes remaining.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in opposition to Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. This legislation reveals a profound distrust of municipal leaders, emergency responders, and front-line heroes in their ability to safeguard Albertans during a crisis. It represents the third instance of legislation that undermines local decision-making, among other bills – that includes Bill 18; that includes Bill 20 – which aim to

consolidate power within the provincial government, something that seems to be central for every single bill that we have to debate in the House, in fact, the crosscutting theme for all government bills.

Bill 21 reschedules the next provincial election from its previously set date to October 18, 2027. In conjunction with the rescheduling, the bill also updates the Alberta Senate Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act to reflect the new timelines that have been proposed in Bill 21. This adjustment is an extension of time for the current government. I wondered why the government did not do six months earlier instead of taking an additional six months in governing.

One of the significant components of Bill 21 is its amendment to the Emergency Management Act. This change grants the provincial government the authority to assume control over local emergencies even if a provincial emergency has not been declared. With the current existing legislation, the province can intervene if local authorities request help, if local councils or their staff are no longer capable of adequately responding to any crisis, or if an emergency impacts several jurisdictions simultaneously. This provision raises concern about the erosion of local autonomy and the potential for provincial overreach in emergency situations, potentially undermining the trust and the efficiency of local governments.

The *St. Albert Gazette* states that the expanded powers in Alberta's Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, or Bill 21, would further erode the local authority of municipal decision-makers and complicate emergency response efforts, quoting the Rural Municipalities of Alberta. I'm going to table this tomorrow. This bill does not help the local communities to respond to emergencies that are within their capacities.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The bill also introduces new reporting requirements for local authorities concerning local emergencies. These requirements mandate that municipalities provide detailed reports on emergency incidents and their responses, which could increase administrative burden on local governments, Madam Speaker.

Additionally, Bill 21 amends the Forest and Prairie Protection Act, expanding the province's discretionary authority to manage and direct wildfire responses both within and beyond the designated forest protection areas. This amendment again broadens the powers of the minister to compel municipalities to take specific actions during a wildfire, another demonstration of centralization and power consolidation. According to RMA president Paul McLauchlin "Bill 21 is the latest attempt to reduce the authority of municipal leaders, with no clear explanation as to how this will do anything other than confuse and complicate emergency response moving forward."

What makes it worse, Mr. Speaker, is that the bill does not clarify whether municipalities will receive compensation for executing these orders, raising concerns about the financial and operational impacts on local governments. This is another mechanism of cost downloading to municipalities during a crisis. According to the president of RMA

this will add an extra layer of stress for municipalities managing an emergency, wondering if the province will arbitrarily step in, and more confusion for residents related to who is in charge during local emergencies. This is not legislation municipalities asked for and is not helpful to [the] members [of the RMA].

5:10

Let's talk about what we learned from the histories of the struggles of rural municipalities in the province during the 2023 wildfires. The 2023 wildfire season in Alberta has left a significant

impact on the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, revealing critical gaps in support and resources from the provincial government. Thirty-eight out of 69 municipalities highlight the immense financial burden and the insufficient support received through the provincial programs, particularly – a good example – the disaster recovery program, or the DRP. This is where the province needs to step up, rather, and help municipalities during an emergency crisis instead of consolidating power and undermining the municipalities' responses to crises, which are needed when you need nimbleness and agility during those crises.

The RMA underscores the severe financial strain experienced by municipalities due to the wildfire damage and recovery efforts in 2023 collectively. For example, the requests for the DRP support totalled \$60 million. Despite this substantial cost, nearly half of the municipalities that applied for the DRP funding have not received any of the amount requested.

When Bill 21 introduces and provides additional powers to the minister, that will mean that the minister can ask and provide orders for the municipalities to take additional responsibilities during the responses while the municipalities provide an example of where they have not been receiving substantial support when they need it. In fact, overall the DRP funding disbursed to municipalities accounts for only 21 per cent of the total estimated costs that were incurred during the 2023 wildfires. This disparity highlights a significant shortfall in the provincial support, leaving municipalities to bear the brunt of recovery expenses largely on their own. But this government has the plan to continue downloading additional responsibilities and costs on municipalities through Bill 21, when this becomes a law and when the minister has the authority to do so.

In addition to their financial challenges, nearly 50 per cent of the municipalities indicate that they did not have access to adequate provincial wildland firefighter equipment or capacity during the wildfire season in 2023. This lack of resources hinders their ability to effectively combat wildfires and protect their communities during emergencies. We can see that the RMA clearly indicates that the current level of provincial support is insufficient to meet the needs of municipalities grappling with the aftermath based on the 2023 wildfire season experience. The significant gap between the costs incurred and the funding provided by the DRP coupled with delays and lack of communication calls for action from the provincial government to actually decentralize the powers and come up with ways to be nimble in the response during the emergency and the recovery phase, not the other way around.

Let's talk about the Water Act amendment. Further, Bill 21 modifies the Water Act to grant the cabinet and the relevant departments enhanced authority during emergencies. Specifically, the amendment allows the government to suspend any water licence during an emergency and prioritize water use based on emergent needs. This provision disrupts existing water rights and usage plans. Remember the crosscutting theme. What is it? Control and centralization.

The amendments give power to the government to enter private property for the purpose of managing a water emergency. This invasive authority is explained as, quote, to facilitate an effective emergency response but could raise significant privacy and property rights issues down the line. Additionally, the bill enhances enforcement tools, including the ability to measure and monitor water use by different licensees, ensuring compliance and efficient resource management during emergencies.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, Bill 21 encompasses a wide array of changes that centralize authority within the provincial government, significantly altering the dynamics of local governance and emergency management. Instead, this is what this government can

do: ensure that the municipalities receive adequate financial support to cover the full extent of their emergency and recovery costs. This government can do that. The province needs to establish clear timelines and maintain transparent communication with municipalities regarding funding disbursements. The province can provide municipalities with sufficient wildland firefighter equipment and capacity to better manage and mitigate wildfire risks.

By addressing these issues, this government can significantly alleviate the financial and operational burdens on municipalities, enabling them to mitigate, respond, and recover more effectively and prepare for future wildfire seasons. The resilience of Alberta's rural communities depends on the robust and responsive support system from the province, and this depends on the robust and responsive system that the municipalities have. Bill 21 is not offering a solution. Therefore, I ask all members in this House to vote against Bill 21.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time today to speak to Bill 21, the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, or shall I say the Control of Everything Everywhere All at Once Part 9 Act.

I will not be supporting this bill. Bill 21 completes a trilogy – or maybe doesn't complete it; with the nature of these bills, we don't know what is to come next – of bills designed to consolidate control in cabinet. But perhaps this isn't a trilogy after all. Rather, Bill 21 is the most recent book in a long series of seemingly never-ending horror stories, stories written by the Premier and those who control the UCP, fabricated stories where the belief is that the only solution to any perceived problem is to place more authority within cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I hope you'll allow me a few minutes to reflect on the past several months in this House. Don't worry; I will bring this back to speak directly on the contents of Bill 21. I think it is important to take a moment to reflect on the bills put forward in this House to build on the theme that was put forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Decore and see that these sets of bills illustrate the government's intent to consolidate power within the Premier's office and with members of cabinet.

5:20

There are two elements to this. The first is to as much as possible separate Alberta from the federal government and control all aspects of provincial authority, removing all perceived influence that the federal government may have. The second element is to wrest control from municipalities beyond the basics of repairing potholes and snow removal. The second element also goes beyond municipalities, assuming decision-making authority for all consolidated entities.

Asserting provincial jurisdiction over any federal influence began with the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act, providing the government of Alberta the ability to ignore any federal program or legislation that this government feels goes against their interests, not the interests of Alberta but the interests of this government.

This was followed up with the Alberta Pension Protection Act, giving the government the authority to move forward to remove Alberta from the Canada pension plan. Despite the fact the federal government does not make investment decisions for the CPP, this government has messaged exactly that. Make no mistake; this government has clearly used language indicating they feel these

pension funds and investments and the direction of those investments belong to them, not Albertans.

To remove any public perceptions of wrongdoing in the course of their work, we have the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (No. 2), which changed the rules on gifts and prevents the Ethics Commissioner from releasing the results of an investigation during an election period.

Then we have the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, opening the possibility of an Alberta police service with oversight from a new public agency whose members would be appointed and report to the minister and cabinet.

Wresting control from municipalities and consolidated entities was kicked off with the Public Health Amendment Act, 2023, which removes the authority from the chief medical officer of health to make decisions in a public health emergency, placing that power in the hands of – you guessed it – the minister and cabinet and their hand-picked experts.

The government followed this up with the Real Property Governance Act, taking property and buildings from consolidated entities and placing those properties under the direct control of the Minister of Infrastructure to decide what their future use will be.

Then they introduced the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence Act, allowing the government to set their own agenda for recovery, undermining research being done by our academic institutions and Alberta's health agency.

This was followed up quite directly with the egregious and very tellingly titled Provincial Priorities Act although maybe it should have been entitled the UCP Priorities Act, providing the province with ultimate authority over any funding from the federal government to municipalities and consolidated entities, including access to funding for priorities like affordable housing and academic research.

The government of Alberta then stepped in to seize ultimate authority over elections and election results from the citizens with the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, an act which allows the government to override local decisions, remove elected members of council without justification, or nullify or amend any bylaw that they see fit.

We can see there is a very clear theme, as laid out by the Member for Edmonton-Decore, in all of these, and it's not just a trilogy. There are a number of acts that systematically are placing control with cabinet, and with this newly introduced Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, they have now extended their power to control municipal resources during an emergency and given themselves six more months in government without asking any Albertan or consulting anyone, just overriding the rules that are already there and giving themselves another six months. I guess they're planning ahead, knowing that the people of Alberta are likely to reinstall an NDP government after learning what has happened just in the last year of this government's mandate.

Mr. Speaker, in talking about Bill 21, I was in this House the other day listening to the government's debate on the bill. We heard in that debate the challenges faced by municipalities to determine the level of threat and if it warranted declaring a state of emergency, that this caused municipalities a great deal of anxiety, and that perhaps they needed support from the provincial government in making this critical decision in declaring a state of emergency. However, my understanding is that Bill 21 doesn't alleviate that challenge. The municipality is still responsible for declaring a state of emergency. There's no support from the province in deciding on whether or not that local state of emergency should be declared.

The bill does, however, give the province the ability to amend or cancel a local state of emergency that has been declared by the municipality. It doesn't sound like a whole lot of support to me. The

bill also permits the province to take control after a local state of emergency has been declared. Neither of these powers in the bill support the municipality with that original decision to declare a local state of emergency.

I also heard in debate a description of a high level of co-operation between the province and local municipalities that is already being experienced in emergency situations. The government outlined that there is currently a co-ordinated, collaborative, integrated approach between the province and the municipalities in dealing with local emergencies. Mr. Speaker, if that is indeed the case, why is Bill 21 necessary? Why does the province feel the need to take control of municipal resources in the event of an emergency if we already have this collaborative, integrated approach between the province and local municipalities?

If a challenge is faced by a municipality in making a decision to declare a local emergency and in receiving provincial support more quickly when an emergency is declared, does Bill 21 actually solve those challenges? I would argue that it does not, and in fact legislation isn't needed to solve those challenges. What the bill doesn't do is acknowledge the costs incurred by the municipality when the province assumes control and direction over municipal resources, and it also does not require the province to compensate the municipality for any costs incurred. Mr. Speaker, I question why the government isn't moving to support municipalities in their efforts. Why aren't we responding to declared requests for additional training capacity and equipment to respond to emergencies, notably wildfires?

Clearly, municipalities were not asking for this legislation. In a bulletin released by the Rural Municipalities of Alberta dated the 10th of May 2024 the RMA said:

The proposed amendments to the Emergency Management Act would give the province the authority to take control of local emergency management once a municipality has declared a local state of emergency. The province claims this would only be done upon request of the municipality or when the municipality does not have capacity to manage the situation. However, how these decisions will be made is not clearly defined in the proposed legislation. The RMA stands by its members as the local authority on emergency management.

Bill 21 won't provide clarity for additional supports in an emergency situation. In fact, it may actually do the opposite, leaving citizens confused on whether or not the local municipality is leading the emergency response or whether or not the province is leading the emergency response.

5:30

Bill 21 also amends the Water Act, providing the provincial government the power to authorize interbasin water transfers in the event of a water emergency. Those decisions can be made outside of normal authorizations, and water basin agreements would not be subject to appeal. Mr. Speaker, water basin decisions and interbasin transfers are decisions that should not be taken lightly or done in haste. We are talking about a delicate balance of natural systems with a high chance of negative unintended consequences. I'd like to remind the House, too, that in recent weeks we have heard the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas proudly declare the voluntary stakeholder agreements that are now in place for the water basins in southern Alberta in dealing with drought. Bill 21 would allow the province to sidestep those voluntary agreements and make unilateral decisions on water allocation. I wonder why the government, after having worked so hard with those stakeholders for those basin agreements, would want to sidestep and make their own decisions.

I can't leave a discussion on Bill 21 without also talking about the basic affront to democracy, as Bill 21 also conveniently extends

the term of this government without asking for permission or consulting with Albertans. The argument being made is that the likelihood of an emergency situation in May is simply too high and that future elections could be interrupted as last year's elections were interrupted; well, not interrupted, but we know the challenges that were faced during those times. So based on that, Bill 21 moves the fixed election date to October, automatically extending the life of this government by six months. Mr. Speaker, why did we choose October as the ideal time to hold an election? Why not November, February, or March? Why did the government extend their term rather than shorten it? The next election could be October 2026 rather than October 2027. This decision without consulting anyone reinforces this government's commitment to their priority: control. There is no valid argument to extend the term of this government by six months. They are extending the life of their government without justification.

I urge the members of this House to do the right thing. Listen to statements that have been made by rural municipalities across Alberta, listen to citizens' statements on democracy, and vote no to Bill 21.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Calgary-Acadia.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour always to rise in this place and have a word. I don't usually get up to speak; however, sometimes when you hear some of the things that the opposition is talking about, you just need to set the record straight. Really, on this conversation around the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, Bill 21, I realize that I have forgotten more in this world than those guys will ever know collectively on this world.

So let us start off. Mr. Speaker, do you know that 25 years ago was my first encounter with how governments deal with borders? I was flying in the medevac, and we saw a bunch of forest fires that Alberta was managing. I was with the forestry guys. I couldn't help but notice the borders were very close to the Territories and Saskatchewan, and I got to see the winds were blowing these fires in that direction, and I said: "Well, what happens? How are we working with Saskatchewan and the Territories on this fire?" And they said: they don't. It's their problem. Right now the fire is on the Alberta side; we're taking care of it. There have been no interventions in between there, and the federal government didn't step in or anything. To everyone's benefit, though, I mean, these areas were largely boreal forest, not very inhabited, so Saskatchewan or the Territories would have time to address the issues that would arise from that.

That was my first indication way back when that governments, municipalities, whatever, don't necessarily work with each other on certain incidents. In this case what our government is trying to do, I think, is actually to still be respectful of local authorities but to understand that there's a bigger picture there and that some municipalities – and they deciphered this through experience – don't necessarily look at the borders between the different municipalities. They're only focused on their own communities. So I think that's why it is important that the provincial government does have the ability to at least oversee and make sure that any emergencies like forest fires are being managed in a responsible way and that they're looking at all of the jurisdictions in a region when they're addressing that.

We also have to recognize that these municipal governments, these municipal fire departments – and God bless 'em because that is the world I came from – don't necessarily have the resources, the manpower, and other information that a provincial entity has

available to them. I do respect the fact that we do have a provincial emergency operations centre, which has the ability to take a look and provide any guidance and advice to all the municipalities when they're in an emergency like this.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that I do have concerns about what some of the members across the way are saying. They aren't pulling from any fact. They probably haven't spoken to anyone in emergency services. They just read the newspaper articles. It's important that, you know, maybe they start doing a little bit more consultation and research when they're doing their discussions on this.

I mean, it's ironic that we're the ones that are talking about more oversight for municipalities, and they're the ones that are talking about more freedom for the individual municipalities. I mean . . .

An Hon. Member: Yeah, it is, isn't it?

Mr. Yao: It is, isn't it? Actually, you know, they belong to a party whose federal counterparts are trying to impose their will on the provinces for vote-buying.

I mean, when you look at a dental program or a daycare program, those are two prime examples of where the funding actually is inadequate to provide those services, which is why so many daycares and other agencies and now dentists as well are not signing up to these programs because there are costs that aren't considered that they're going to lose out on.

I know a dentist that's leaving this nation because they're so worried about that dental program. [interjections] Wow. There's no respect coming from across the way. They're always heckling me here, Mr. Speaker. I'm very intimidated by this. The privilege from across the way is horrendous.

Again, a provincial authority would do best to work with the municipalities, and I believe that's what we're trying to achieve here, to ensure that municipalities do have that support and are aware of that. I fully support that as someone who does come from that field, entirely.

Even the criticisms around the election date, you know, I would argue that there are some members across the way that felt that the last election could have been theirs if it weren't for some fires going on, which I totally disbelieve. I mean, I guess the point is that we do want to have an election during a time when there's not as likely to be some emergencies out there, and we've noticed that the fires do seem to be happening in the spring quite often here, which they've traditionally always done. You know, we just want to really have that focus on those fires and not on things like elections and stuff like that. We don't need any political grandstanding during that time, and I think everyone can agree with that.

Bill 21, quite honestly, I think is as noble as it comes to good legislation by a government that's being responsible and ensuring that emergencies are managed in a very appropriate way. Secondly, the date and time of those elections that will happen every four years are in a position so that Albertans are not distracted and are focused on the election, so they can truly see what the opposition's bad policies are that they're trying to push and they're going to see the United Conservative government doing a good job of what it's trying to provide.

Yeah. I just needed to clarify some of those comments because, again, I do have concerns that, you know, a lot of it doesn't come from fact. A lot of it comes from opinion, and a very distant opinion that I can't put together. With that, I wanted to just put in those comments there, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you so much for the honour to speak in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia, should she choose to do so.

Member Batten: Well, that was something. Okay.

I rise in opposition to Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, a.k.a. the control everything everywhere all at once and possibly forever.

My colleagues have provided some really great debate thus far, and I hope, of course, to contribute, providing some more very good reasons why this bill is unnecessary and just another power grab by this UCP government.

5:40

Bill 21, among other things, provides the provincial government more control and oversight of municipal leaders and their decisions. Now, the obvious assumption would be that the government of Alberta doesn't currently have that power, right? Because, otherwise, why would we be wasting time, capacity, taxpayer dollars debating a bill that is redundant with the government's current abilities? But here we are debating a bill that's exactly that: a waste of time, capacity, and taxpayer money. I've heard the Premier explain how recent wildfires up north somehow supports this bill. Well, no, Madam Premier, it does not. What it demonstrates is that all levels of government already work together and that there is no need for the province to play a larger role or have more control.

This is such a bizarre set-up for me. Let's just say that I'm a municipality in Alberta. There is a natural disaster: flood, fire, drought, whatever. Assuming that Bill 21 were in place, how does that change my initial actions and interventions to the disaster? Well, it doesn't, and it shouldn't, because this UCP government certainly would not be asking Albertans to put their lives on the line while they waited for a response, right? So as a municipality I would take all the necessary steps to secure lives with boots on the ground, co-ordinate neighbouring areas that might also be affected, and connect with, eventually, a central command where the larger co-ordinated effort would be launched. So Bill 21 is not about making the local response more effective.

So what is it about? Well, the government, certainly, could not possibly be asking for a delay in response to disasters, so what is this UCP government trying to do with this bill? Now, don't get me wrong; I'm all about collaboration. The provincial government certainly plays an important role. Given that disasters don't respect the provincial or international boundaries, co-ordination needs to continue at the provincial level. But why off the hop? Why is this UCP government so needy?

The Premier was interviewed the other day and seemed to imply that the equipment, the air tanks, the night-vision-equipped helicopters, the water bombers, et cetera, would only be available if the government made the call, all the calls. Now, I certainly hope I've misunderstood and that the UCP government would certainly never misappropriate publicly funded resources, lock them down, and use them for their own agenda. That would be, among other things, a complete disrespect and misuse of the office in which they were elected.

As it currently stands, and to the best of my knowledge, local authorities activate the feet on the ground, collaborate across authorities, and, if needed, loop the province in for more resources and support. As this just happened up north with the wildfires, it remains clear that there is no need for the province to have more authority over emergency response. If it's not broken, why are you trying to break it? Why is this UCP government trying to further narrow decision-making authorities to themselves? This is the exact opposite of what the municipalities are asking for.

This Bill 21 claims that the UCP needs the ability to reach into municipal affairs, meddle as they see fit, and that the elected municipal officials just fall in line. Yeah. Okay. The UCP government says: “Trust us. We’ll only do it under exceptional and unprecedented events.” Okay, but given that the effects of climate change will continue bringing exceptional weather – drought, floods, fire – should we trust that this government of Alberta will demonstrate restraint and not use this bill except in the case of actual exceptional and unprecedented events? When does the exceptional become standard and the unprecedented become everyday?

This government has already shown its inability to stay out of local politics. Recall the mask bylaw here in Edmonton, where the UCP government decided that it should be a minister’s decision whether there’s a mask bylaw or not. The minister, not the chief medical officer of health. Nope. The minister.

Another part of this power grab: this bill asks Albertans to trust this UCP government to manage the province’s water, the same government who continues to rally for more coal mining while also complaining of the aesthetics of renewables here in Alberta.

With this recent history of irresponsible decisions this UCP government wants control of Alberta’s water now, one of our most precious natural resources, with impacts reaching far outside Alberta. So what’s the approach now? Who has say over the water in Alberta? Well, taking it directly from the alberta.ca website, on the drought management page it currently shares:

In Alberta, water management response is shared with:

- the province
- water providers
- regional districts
- municipalities [and]
- Indigenous communities.

Although the situation is critical, with proactive water management and working together, we can make the best use of the province’s water supply and increase our chances of being able to meet the needs of all water users.

Well, we know how the municipalities feel about this bill, and I suspect that the others on the list might feel the same. So the province decides there’s an unexpected and unprecedented event occurring in the province. Then what? All bets are off, and then only the government of Alberta controls all the water in the province? Yikes. This government is then asking Albertans to trust that they will respond urgently, respond appropriately, collaborate immediately, and follow best practices to keep Albertans safe. The latter is the most concerning for me.

This UCP government isn’t exactly known for following the science or current research, including that climate change is a real thing. Goodness, the Premier herself wrote a whole article about the positive nature of smoking. So how can Albertans count on this government to act in their best interests when all they’ve been doing this entire session is inflating their worth, lining their pockets, and condensing power and control into their own office, away from other elected officials, emergency response, and front-line heroes?

Mr. Getson: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 5:47.

The hon. the chief government whip.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Getson: Yeah. It falls under imputing motives, 23(i), (j), and (k), causing disorder. The government lining their pockets: the hon.

member should know full well that making allegations of such a thing like this is absolutely unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker. And here I thought we were going to let some things go this afternoon, but I guess we’re going to call points of order.

This is not a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, as the government whip just said, “The government is lining their pockets” does not speak directly to a member in this Chamber. Therefore, it is not a point of order even though it may bother the member opposite.

The Speaker: Are there others? I am prepared to rule should there be no additional remarks.

Here’s what I would say. Without the benefit of the Blues I am unsure of the exact word which the hon. member used prior to making the accusation that members of the government were lining their own pockets, but I am certain that I can find many, many, many references to such language creating disorder and, in fact, being a point of order. I think that for the betterment of the Assembly this afternoon the hon. member should apologize, withdraw, and proceed with her remarks.

Member Batten: I apologize and withdraw.

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

The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Debate Continued

Member Batten: Okay. Per my stakeholders, this government has shown itself to purposely remain ignorant or to simply not care that Albertans expect their safety to be prioritized over industry and over profit. But, alas, here we are.

Bill 21 plays politics with the next election date. This UCP government will claim that they want to move the scheduled election date to the fall so as to avoid trying to have an election during our now yearly unprecedented spring-summer events. Okay. Sounds great to me. Let’s pull the election date back six months and hold it in fall 2026. Yeah. And, no, I’m not the first to suggest this, nor am I the last.

See, when there’s such a concern about these exceptional and unprecedented events that are occurring seemingly every spring, this UCP government is using the safety of Albertans as an excuse to give themselves another five months in office without consent of Albertans. By extending their time in government without consultation of Albertans, what’s to stop them from extending it over and over again? Sure, the federal government has laws dictating that provinces must have elections every five years. Remember, of course, how well this UCP government works with the federal government.

5:50

This UCP government spends so much time and energy drafting bills to elevate themselves above Albertans. Now, imagine if they spent even just a quarter of that time, that energy addressing proactively the wildfires. Acknowledge that you are way out of your expertise, and just stop suggesting solutions such as clear-cutting Bragg Creek, which, of course, goes against what the locals want and also the desires of Albertans, as the only way to prevent wildfires. This is simply not the case. Wildfire management is a science and, as such, is introducing new technologies into the field like the equipment other provinces have purchased to monitor

wildfires, identify, and manage them earlier. You'd think, given that this technology would support all of Alberta and not just the logging companies and ATV users, this would be where we'd see this UCP government investing. Alberta is a natural beauty, and shame on this UCP government for charging Albertans to access their own backyard through the K pass and then destroying the backyard for profit. Shame.

Bill 21 does not serve Albertans. I encourage all members to vote against it.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 21.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

(continued)

Time Allocation on Bill 20

35. Mr. Williams moved on behalf of Mr. Schow:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 20, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a time allocation motion, in which a member of the Official Opposition has up to five minutes to respond to such a motion. I see the Official Opposition deputy House leader has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're at it again. I feel like I just had this debate a few minutes ago on another bill. So now we are counting 47 time allocations for this government. Forty-seven? It was 46 earlier today. We're at 47? Yeah; 47.

Ms Sigurdson: You're right on track.

Ms Sweet: Yeah. Right on track.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the government stands and they say that it's so important that they listen to their constituents, that Bill 20 is so important because municipalities have a whole bunch of concerns,

that the government has met with them now, and they're going to talk about their concerns, and all of these elected officials across the province are overreacting to Bill 20. But don't worry; the minister has it under control. All right. Well, if that was the case, why would we need to time allocate?

I mean, we should be able to have a wholesome debate in this place. The opposition and all the members of the opposition should be able to bring those concerns forward, as we have been doing, by all of the municipalities that continuously keep saying that Bill 20 is not a good bill. [interjections] Again, I'm being heckled by the government right now saying: all? Well, if they have more MLAs and more municipalities that are concerned, they could stand up and they could talk about those things. Of course, now we're only going to have an hour to talk about it.

The government already knows that there are more. There are more municipalities that want to talk about their concerns with Bill 20. We thought that the government was going to come forward with all of these amendments to fix the problems, yet they don't want to talk about those amendments. This bill is such a mess that every single municipality across this province doesn't like it. They've been told to shred the bill. They've been told to get rid of the bill. The minister has repeatedly had to stand in this place and talk about the fact that he keeps having to have meetings with municipal leaders because they don't like the bill, and now there's only an hour to fix the bill.

Once again, this government doesn't believe in the democratic process. This government is choosing to shut down the voices of anybody that may oppose their point of view. It is clearly the theme of this Legislature, for this time that we have been here with bills 20 and 21 and 22 and all of 18 and all of the things, that this government doesn't actually want to hear what Albertans want. It is their way or the highway, and clearly the highway needs to be paved by this government because they just want to run over all the people in Alberta.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 35 carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 on Wednesday, May 22, 2024, the year of our Lord.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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