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The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, May 27, 2024

Day 57

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 28

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 27, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 2 Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, the Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024.

Founded in 1992 as the Medicine Hat community foundation through an act of the Legislature, the Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta is a nongovernment, nonpolitical, and nonreligious independent organization that operates under the guidance of a diverse, community-minded volunteer board of directors. The organization was founded to truly be community led. In fact, the original idea of the community foundation came from a local area rancher, Mr. John Ignatius, who had supported other community foundations but sought to have a local organization providing similar community benefits.

Although John passed away in January 2000, his legacy lives on through the foundation, which continues to support vibrant, healthy, caring communities across southeast Alberta. The mission of the foundation is to create meaningful connections between donors, local charities, and those in need for the permanent benefit of southeastern Alberta. The foundation responds quickly and creatively to local needs and issues and also embraces diverse perspectives and experiences.

The bill presented to the House today has two parts. The first part, if passed, is to formally include special area 4 in the geographical area that is covered by the community foundation. For years the foundation has been serving special areas 2 and 3, and the special areas themselves all work together and essentially operate as one unit under their own act, so it would be important to have them officially included.

Second, if passed, this bill would revise the membership of the nominating committee, that appoints the foundation's volunteer board of directors. In the current act one of the required positions no longer exists, and the list is very prescriptive, with too much emphasis on membership from the city of Medicine Hat itself. The foundation would like to ensure that the rural areas that they serve have an increased representation on the nominating committee, which they anticipate will help increase rural participation on their board of directors. This is why also over the past few years the foundation has set up rural advisory committees to ensure that they are growing in these areas. The amendments contained in this bill would only help further this critical goal.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, if passed, will benefit Albertans in the southeastern part of our province. It would allow the foundation to formally serve more Albertans through the inclusion of special area 4 and will also provide more representation within the foundation for rural communities. I would like to urge all members of the Assembly to support Bill Pr. 2, the Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has moved second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate should he wish to do so. The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: No. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 3 Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, as you mentioned, on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford I rise to move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024.

The petitioner was originally incorporated back in 1961, and this particular piece of legislation is very straightforward. It simply covers a name change, where the Providence Renewal Centre will be continued as a corporation under the name Providence Centre/Providence Renewal Centre Corporation. This is going to allow a nonprofit to expand some of the work they do, moving some of their operations in a way that was discussed at length through the Private Bills Committee. Thank you to those who presented to the Private Bills Committee and to all the members of that committee.

I on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford am very pleased to move this at second reading, and I look forward to seeing the House support this Bill Pr. 3 shortly. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has moved second reading of Bill Pr. 3, Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024. This is a debatable motion. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. member to close debate. The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Waived.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 4 Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill Pr. 4, Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024.

Rosebud School of the Arts is a nonprofit charitable educational institute recognized by the Alberta Legislature through the passage of the Rosebud School of the Arts Act in 1988 as an institution of higher learning in both the theoretical and practical fields of fine arts. The school works alongside Rosebud Theatre, a professional theatre company that welcomes over 40,000 patrons a year. Rosebud Theatre shows are performed and produced by a resident company of artists who also provide apprenticeship opportunities for students from the Rosebud School of the Arts.

The school is situated in the hamlet of Rosebud, about an hour east of Calgary. The serene rural setting allows students to focus on developing their own unique, passionate voice, that will ultimately contribute in a meaningful way to theatres across Alberta and Canada. The school's goal is to produce storytellers willing and able to explore material covering the variety of mandates expressed by the wide spectrum of theatres within our province and beyond. In 1986 Rosebud School of the Arts established a fine arts guild; that is, a group of artists whose main objective is to offer apprenticeship-style instruction using the theatre as a practical training centre.

Mr. Speaker, the bill before us today seeks to make a number of amendments to the Rosebud School of the Arts Act. The main focus of the amendments contained in the bill is to modernize some of the language and to bring the act in line with the current day realities of the organization while also laying the groundwork for a bright and exciting future in the decades to come. If passed, the amended bill would incorporate modern language that accurately covers what the organization does and strives to do and would allow Rosebud to continue to grow according to their strategic planning.

At the core of the organization's mission is a desire to enrich the lives of Albertans. Rosebud strives to do that by offering grace and understanding through the art of storytelling, the practice of mentorship, and the gift of hospitality. Central to the school and the organization are the values of community and diversity.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments proposed through Bill Pr. 4 would make important changes to modernizing the language used in the RSA Act and would reflect the work done today by the organizations. These changes would allow the school to continue their great work, enriching the lives of Albertans.

I urge all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of Bill Pr. 4, the Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024. Thank you.

7:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has moved second reading of Bill Pr. 4, Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024. This is a debatable motion. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate this evening?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the member to close debate. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has waived.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 21 Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

[Adjourned debate May 21: Mr. Williams]

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader has 14 minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the call.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise at second reading stage of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, and at this time I would like to move a reasoned amendment.

The Speaker: If the hon. member would like to do me a favour, just go ahead and grab the amendment. That will be fine. Pass those through to the pages. As soon as I, the table, and the Deputy Government House Leader have such amendment, I will ask you to proceed.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment RA1. I neglected to highlight, upon calling on the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, that pursuant to Government Motion 39, agreed to on May 23, 2024, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, in second reading. The time for that one hour will expire at 8:41.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West on amendment RA1, please.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suppose I shall speak in a manner that's even faster than I usually do. Maybe I'll try to give the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud a run for her money so that I can get as many words in as possible. RIP, *Hansard*. I am sorry, with apologies to them. However, we are moving this reasoned amendment "because the Assembly is of the view that more consultation is required with municipalities and municipal firefighters on the potential adverse impacts of [this bill]."

There is no question that this bill comes at a time of the unholy trinity of antidemocratic legislation before this House, that is moving with lightning pace through this House, with a pace that does not uphold the tradition of parliamentary democracies that requires deliberation of one's views, even if they come from the Executive Council that holds a majority, for views to come into contact with the opponents such that they come out the other side in better form than when they went in. That is the essence of democratic debate and democratic deliberation. It's part of what makes us all proud to live in this country, in this province, and in this community.

On that, this bill has been described by Rural Municipalities of Alberta's president, Paul McLauchlin, someone you have to be working pretty darn hard to really rile up in the way that he has been. He describes it as

the latest attempt to reduce the authority of municipal leaders . . .

Our provincial government seems intent on overreaching their powers while accusing the federal government of doing the same . . . This pattern of centralization and big government flies in the face of conservative principles. Since the content of bills 18, 20, and 21 were not included in the platform material from the provincial election just last year, it leaves us wondering who is controlling the policy direction of this government.

Now, if one were to approach the matter at hand in this bill, the handling of emergencies, one might even be able to approach this bill with a certain amount of equanimity. There is no question that lines of authority and understanding who holds the pen on what during an emergency of the scale like we saw in the Fort McMurray fire or, in my personal experience, the Waterton fire or in the experiences of the 2013 flood, the 2011 Slave Lake fire, the fires last year – I am sure, given Alberta's vulnerability to climate risk and the more frequent and severe weather events happening here in Alberta, there is no question that we probably have to modernize some of this legislation.

However, nothing in this legislation has been properly consulted. The lines of who pays for what are not clear. Of course, those are some of the most important decisions to make when local authorities are responding to an emergency: will I be left holding the bag with my tax base of, you know, maybe in some cases, in these large MDs where few people live, not a whole lot of ratepayers? For example, I'm thinking here of the MD of Ranchland, which I think has something in the neighbourhood of 46 tax-paying souls, and they were right on the edge of the Waterton fire back in 2017. There is no question that they need to know who is going to be backstopping those expenditures should something catastrophic happen.

Historically municipalities have always been able to rely on the province, but that is no more with this legislation, and that is one of the reasons why we've seen such spirited critique from the Rural Municipalities of Alberta and others. That is why this bill should not be read a second time. There may be areas where this legislation could be redeemed; not in its current form. That is not us talking; that is, of course, the Rural Municipalities of Alberta talking, and one ought to heed what they are saying.

It does leave one wondering who's controlling the policy direction of this government, as Paul McLaughlin said, but also it is not consistent with conservative principles. You know, many will be shocked to learn that I, too, quite like some conservative principles; for example, individual responsibility, the rule of law – super big fan – and making sure that we are not overburdening any one level of government with expenditures, that is to say in this case property owners and property tax payers, and this bill might do that. It is not at all clear that it doesn't.

Also, too, protection of the environment is, in fact, a conservative principle. You don't need to listen to me; you can listen to people like Preston Manning go on and on about this. Conservation and ensuring that we are leaving something to future generations is also or should be a responsible conservative position. That's not the type of knife-and-fork conservatism we see across the way, of course. What we see is this just absolutely, like, valueless, rudderless sort of drift towards illiberalism, if you will, Mr. Speaker. I'll stop short of authoritarianism and say that we are drifting towards illiberalism, that is to say a fundamental disrespect for the institutions that govern us and the principles of liberal democracy that keep us all safe.

In that, we see here an element that has had less attention but requires more, which is why we need this reasoned amendment: this business of allowing for emergency interbasin water transfers. This is an ecological disaster waiting to happen; it is a municipal governance disaster waiting to happen; it's a water licence disaster waiting to happen, and there is no clear way that I can see through that one would be able to effectuate this on a temporary basis. The damage one would do to the environment would be permanent. This is why people need to come before the Legislature to deliberate upon these changes to the Water Act that allow for interbasin transfers.

In my memory, there was only one when we were in government. I think there was another one during the Conservative era that was quite controversial. Ours was to make it in a non water-stressed area – I believe it was the Battle River watershed; I could stand to be corrected on that – to ensure that we could bring fresh water and potable water up to reserve's edge. That was a matter that was well consulted over a period of months if not years. It was something that had full support of the municipalities involved, the rurals, as well as the watershed council, who are, of course, a multistakeholder group who provide input into water management in this province. They are established by the Water Act, and we are thankful that they are; it was a good thing the PCs did.

7:50

But the point here is that now we have allowed for interbasin transfers on a whim. You can just imagine the make-work project for lawyers that this is going to be with different claims on Water Act licences. And this is a recipe for environmental destruction. That, too, is a reason why this is extremely ill-considered legislation. It should be consigned not necessarily to the dustbin of history; as I said, there might be some things in this bill regarding the streamline of emergency management that are worthy of consultation with rural municipalities and others and that can come out the other side of a fulsome consultation process and actually

become legislation. However, this legislation should be consigned to the dustbin of consultation at least.

It is for that reason that I move this reasoned amendment, and I encourage the entire House to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has moved RA1. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South has risen.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wholeheartedly support this amendment brought forth by my colleague, as I rise here to speak to Bill 21, the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. Unfortunately, this bill is part of an alarming trend from this UCP government to centralize control and reduce municipal authority. This is the third piece of legislation undermining local decision-making, and at this point I don't think this government is showing any signs of putting the brakes on its agenda. More and more we see paternalistic policies coming from this UCP government.

There's no doubt that emergency preparedness and response is going to be a critical issue in the years to come. This UCP government absolutely needs to step up to ensure Albertans will be kept safe, especially as we see increasingly extended and violent wildfire seasons, but the expanded powers of Bill 21 would erode the local authority of municipal decision-makers and complicate emergency response efforts.

This bill shows that the UCP doesn't trust experts and will not listen to experts. They don't seem to trust municipalities or first responders, who keep Albertans safe during a crisis. That's because the key component of this bill is to extend the minister's power to direct firefighters and any other persons and equipment under the municipality's control, to take any action the minister sees as necessary to fight a fire.

While the government claims this would only be done in rare circumstances, Bill 21 provides no clarity on what those scenarios are. This will increase stress for municipalities handling emergencies as they'll be, you know, uncertain if the province will intervene without warning and when and how and what next steps need to be taken. It will also lead to greater confusion among residents about who's in control during local crises.

I'd like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that there's also nothing currently stopping this UCP government from doing more to ensure that our communities are safe during an emergency. Our communities need help and our first responders need help, and there's no debating that, but we need to take Bill 21 for what it really is, another baseless attempt to grab power and keep it under the thumb of the Premier and her cabinet.

It's really unfortunate to see this government continue its disturbing behaviour of not consulting or collaborating, whether that's with other levels of government or industry experts, especially prior to a bill being brought forward, because we do need this government to do more, especially given the impacts of last year's tragic wildfire season and this year's in Fort McMurray. Last year 1,088 fires burned; 26,000 square kilometres of forest, farmland, and property were destroyed; 38,000 people evacuated from 48 different communities; and, sadly, eight wildland firefighters died across Canada. In fact, Alberta Wildfire is still fighting close to 50 fires, two of which are labelled as out of control and now resulting in evacuation of residents from Fort McMurray.

To effectively fight fires on the scale that we saw last year, you need a seasoned team, including front-line firefighters, dispatchers, watchers in outlook towers, schedulers, warehouse workers, logistic workers, foresters, and more. Alberta is failing to retain and recruit the workers it desperately needs, including wildland firefighters. When asked about how recruitment was going, the

Forestry and Parks minister said, quote: it's going really good; in fact, it's one of the best years for recruiting that we've had. But that's not the reality. More than 50 per cent of seasonal workers aren't returning, many leaving to do the same work for other agencies, including Parks Canada and the B.C. government.

My constituent Amy recently wrote to me saying: when the roar of flames is heading your way, you want the best people, the most experienced team fighting to save your community, your home, and your life. The Alberta government is forcing too many experienced workers to leave for work in other jurisdictions and is struggling to hire new workers. I support our wildland firefighters and workers in the Department of Natural Resources. I'm asking you to urge the Minister of Forestry and Parks to act now. Failure to fix this will result in Alberta not being ready when the fires are raging through forests, threatening our communities, homes, and lives. End quote.

This isn't just about Albertans today, Mr. Speaker; it's about future generations as well. We need to make sure we accept the fact that because of this government's inaction in addressing climate change, devastating wildfire seasons and skies filled with smoke aren't going anywhere any time soon. The UCP is failing Albertans by not taking this threat seriously and putting a long-term plan in place. Wildland firefighters with only one or two years' experience are now being appointed to be leads on firefighting crews; they're being asked to lead crews who have even less experience. Without ample preparation for following years or addressing the root causes of what's causing extreme wildfire seasons, we run the risk of even more devastating impacts.

That is where this government should be leading, having an aggressive recruitment and retention strategy across the province and providing necessary resources for firefighters to do their job safely. Several major stakeholders have asked for a long-term strategy for managing wildfire outside forest protection areas, including the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and the Rural Municipalities of Alberta. The Alberta Fire Chiefs Association asked the government for additional resources, increased capacity of training, and equipment to assist in developing a dedicated provincial strategy to better manage and mitigate the risks associated with wildfire seasons. And what did the UCP do? What have they chosen to do? Not engage them.

Currently municipalities have the operational and financial responsibility of managing wildfires outside of forest protected areas in Alberta. So does the UCP plan to pick up more of the cost of managing disasters since they're so keen on having more control? If the UCP insists on intervening in fires outside of the FPA without municipal request, they should take on all the financial responsibility of fighting these fires instead of downloading them to municipalities that are already drowning under years of UCP cuts to their budgets. But as Bill 21 currently stands, local authorities will remain responsible for compensation for any property that was acquired, damaged, or destroyed during a local emergency.

So more power, less responsibility for this UCP government: is that right? Instead of actually having a solid plan in place, this government's best idea is to move election dates.

Albertans deserve to know that this government doesn't learn from its mistakes. It's not focused on protecting Albertans. The UCP is overriding its own fixed election law and unilaterally extending its mandate an additional six months without seeking it first from Albertans. Giving them an extra six months in power seems very self-serving, opportunistic from a government that has a strong record of saying one thing and doing another. The members opposite could have brought forward the next election date, perhaps October 2026, as a show of good faith. I guess this government isn't able to see the writing on the wall that Albertans deserve better.

8:00

If province-wide emergencies and the subpar planning of future wildfire seasons from this UCP government become a ballot question during an election, then so be it. Let Albertans vote on what is most impacting them. It's baffling that this government is using emergencies to garner more control over municipalities. The UCP has demonstrated that it's a power grab, an authoritarian agenda since being elected. With every bill and motion introduced by the members opposite, my colleagues and I hear from stakeholders, experts, and everyday Albertans who reach out to us in droves to express their frustrations at not being consulted prior to decision-making.

Tyler Gandam, the Alberta Municipalities president, said: "This again comes back to another bill that's introduced without consulting Alberta's municipalities or stakeholders. And who is it going to affect the most? If we had the opportunity to talk to them before they tabled the legislation or before the amendments were made, it makes life a whole lot easier and we're able to have that dialogue back and forth." The moves made by the Premier and her cabinet to consolidate power within the provincial government shows this government's desire to impose a set of values on various institutions in Alberta. It's incredibly hypocritical that this government takes pride in people staying in their lane, but they're continuing to use an authoritarian approach to regulating local governments.

We're not suggesting that the government shouldn't step up and take a more proactive role in emergencies, especially when they affect large areas of this province. But instead of trying to seize control, why is the UCP not working with municipalities to better respond to emergencies? Why are they not providing the resources necessary to empower local governments and to act accordingly? Maybe it's because the UCP's priority isn't to collaborate, to work with any individual institutional order of government that has valid criticisms of what they're doing, and it comes at a disservice to Albertans and our democratic processes.

This government has an incredibly exaggerated sense of its own value and its own power. The Premier said during the election that Albertans were her bosses, but it's clear now that she intends to be the boss of everyone.

I am vehemently opposed to Bill 21 – I support this amendment – another sorry attempt by this government to undermine the authority of duly elected officials across this province. The members opposite talk a lot about sticking up for Albertans, about putting our province's interests first and Alberta first and not allowing us to be sidelined, to the point where it actually undermines the foundational principles of our democracy. I think members opposite could use a refresher on these core principles, one of which directly relates to the distribution of power. As Dr. Jared Wesley, a professor of political science and associate dean at the U of A, explains:

our leaders should respect the importance of pluralism, a system where power is dispersed amongst multiple groups or institutions, ensuring no single entity holds too much control. This includes:

- respecting the autonomy of local governments and officials;
- protecting the independence of arms-length agencies, boards, and commissions . . .
- upholding the principle of academic freedom, whereby academics can pursue lines of inquiry without fear of censorship or persecution.

It is absolutely shocking that this government is so consumed by maintaining its control over our province that it would introduce even more backward policies through Bill 21. It is clear that this

government wants control over everything everywhere all at once, and it's utterly shameful that the UCP continues to act against the best interests of Albertans.

The members opposite need to scrap Bill 21 along with every other piece of legislation that undermines the authority of our municipalities and public institutions. I sincerely hope they support this amendment, as I will. We absolutely need more consultation on this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others on RA1 as moved by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-North West? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has the call now.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was shocked by the amount of what I just heard that was obviously inaccurate. I hope not on purpose, but it was so inaccurate, I just had to say something. Just yesterday I attended the annual meeting of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association along with my colleagues the chief government whip, the Deputy Premier, the Finance minister. I've got to tell you I've never been thanked so many times by the fire chiefs in the whole time I've been elected. They were thankful for the co-operation with our government, with the collaboration with our government, with the way we work together on a day-to-day basis and especially during major events, several of which we've had lately.

Mr. Speaker, they appreciate that one of the assistant deputy ministers in the Deputy Premier's office is a former firefighter. They appreciate in my ministry adding the assistant deputy fire commissioner, a former firefighter that's been out bringing the message of the firefighters back to government, because we sent somebody out there that speaks their language, who's a trusted friend and colleague. In fact, as a token of esteem they awarded the Deputy Premier a white fire hat helmet in gratitude for this wonderful relationship that we have. Yesterday – not the last year, not last month; 24 hours ago – this happened.

That is a stark contrast to what we just heard. What we just heard was untrue. The only thing I'm not sure of is whether it was intentionally untrue or accidentally, but it was definitely not true. For anybody watching, all 12 of you – hi, Mom – what we just heard was a bunch of hooley.

The Speaker: On amendment RA1 are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has risen.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of the reasoned amendment proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-West on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-North West. Again, what we're seeing here is an ongoing trend, unsurprising though disappointing, with this government's move to control everything, to concentrate that control, without any accountability, consultation, and possibly leaving municipalities footing the bill, you know, with an added dash of undermining democracy, as we've seen also from the last suite of bills, bills 18 and 20.

We're seeing that this government is showing not only a deep level of distrust in municipal leaders, in emergency responders, and in front-line heroes to keep Albertans safe during a crisis; we're also seeing disrespect for those same stakeholders. Again, this is par for the course with this UCP government. What I'm hearing more and more from Albertans is that they are tired of the overreach. They're tired of the lack of respect for local decision-making, and it's clear that with this legislation what we've seen is that it's increasingly

more an interest in concentrating power and an exaggerated sense of this government's own value and its power.

8:10

Again, in reference to the disrespect for democracy we're seeing that the UCP is overriding its own fixed election law and unilaterally extending their mandate an additional six months – convenient – without first seeking any consultation from Albertans. What I ask myself is: imagine if this was done at any other level of government, which they are very, very quick to interfere with, to criticize, and now basically legislating their ability to interfere and to just make it easier to have that overreach.

What would be nice to see, if they're truly concerned about the dates and about avoiding that time where we're going to be facing more wildfires, is to move the next election date to October 2026 as a show of good faith. Do I have any hopes that this would actually happen? No.

I want to respond a little bit to what I'm seeing as the response. We're seeing responses from constituents, and I'm sure that they've received these e-mails within their own offices. They can likely look them up, I would say, especially the Premier's office. I just want to share some of an e-mail that I received in my office from a Calgary constituent, and it reads as follows:

Bill 21

I oppose the intent and design of this bill for the following reasons: The bill takes power and authority from local responders for the provincial government without taking any of the responsibility. When a natural disaster goes wrong, and it will, it is clear [that this government] intends to bumble its way through the emergency, with no additional resources, personnel or specific expertise and then blame the local responders for the inevitable communication issues that will arise. Nothing in this bill ensures that the provincial cabinet has any of the expertise in... (emergency operations command) needed to fulfil the function of emergency oversight. It is irresponsible to introduce a bill introducing structural changes to vitally important, life supporting, functions such as responses to natural emergencies on the hope that it will be better. What evidence do you have from any other jurisdiction that your plan has any merit? Transferring water between boundaries is a disaster waiting to happen. You don't seem to have considered the issues of "Robbing Peter to Pay Paul" and the mathematical game theory problems this creates. I reference the UCP's failure in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, where it was clear that petty political agendas were seen as more important than the health of [its] citizens. The cabinet making the political decisions did not have the expertise, nor the interest in gaining that expertise, nor the interest in listening to that expertise, and thousands of Albertans died. The UCP have not taken responsibility for their actions. Nothing in this bill addresses this critical flaw.

That's the end of the e-mail.

Aside from constituent response, we also know that the RMA has given us their own response. One of the quotes that I have here from the RMA, from the president, Paul McLauchlin, is:

"In recent weeks, we've seen an alarming trend from this government when it comes to how they view municipalities," said 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. Our provincial government seems intent on overreaching their powers while accusing the federal government of doing the same to them. This pattern of centralization and big government flies in the face of conservative principles. Since the content of bills 18, 20, and 21 were not included in the platform material from the provincial election just last year, it leaves us wondering who is controlling the policy direction of this government."

I am left with many of the same questions. What I would say is that from the party of smaller government, I get how it becomes smaller when it is this finely concentrated and the decisions are concentrated within a small group within cabinet.

I look back to several of the emergencies that I have lived through as an Albertan and how much I valued the local decision-making, how much more it was respected. I'm thinking back to the floods of 2013. I lived in Bowness. I lived in one of the communities that was flooded. The water came to within a block of my house. We were evacuated. It was an extremely traumatic experience, and I was heartened by the local response that I saw from not only emergency responders but from our municipal government at the time and the good decisions that were made at that level.

I shudder to think of some of the larger emergencies that we have looming. We know that we are in – you know, we hit our wildfire season much earlier than expected. We know that we will see these emergencies on the horizon, and like all municipalities – and I would trust, especially as I've seen some of the plans from the city of Calgary, I would imagine all other municipalities would follow suit. There are plans in place to address these emergencies, and we need to respect those local plans. We need to respect local knowledge around those plans and respond to what they are asking us for.

Unfortunately, what I'm seeing from this government in its overreach is ignoring the local knowledge of municipalities, ignoring the expertise of people on the ground in order to concentrate control, and I'm very concerned about the impacts that that will have on response. So, again, I would just say that in terms of the reasoned amendment from my colleagues here, I very much support those reasoned amendments. I would like to see this government go back to the drawing table and start to make responsible decisions that take into account the local knowledge of municipalities and of their emergency responders. For that reason, I support the reasoned amendment.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1 are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-North East has the call.

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the House to support this amendment and share some thoughts on this bill as well as on this amendment. We have a government in Alberta that wants to control everything. This is now clear more than ever. This is a government that doesn't trust the other levels of government.

I understand that the federal government is of a different party than theirs, and I understand that they leave no opportunity to score political points against them and bring in those bills, like Bill 18 and other bills, to score political points against the federal party, but I don't understand what their problem is with the municipal level of governance. I don't understand what their problem is with the local authorities. Why do they want to take away all control from all of the levels of government? This is the government that talks about less government and is now introducing their third piece of legislation to grab more power.

How shameful is that, that they don't care to address the actual issues of Albertans? They don't care to talk about inflation. They don't care to talk about health care, Mr. Speaker, or the affordability crisis in Alberta. According to the latest report inflation in Calgary is the highest in the country. Alberta has the lowest wage growth in the entire country. The rents have gone up, groceries have gone up, utility bills have gone up, and this government is focused on more power every single day. They talk about free-market economy or trickle-down economics. They talk about open-market system, but what we are seeing from this government is the interference in the

same market. They have clearly interfered in the renewable energy sector, and that has impacted billions of dollars of investment and thousands of jobs in Alberta just to satisfy their ideological ego.

8:20

This is another level of hypocrisy that Albertans are seeing under this UCP government. Did they run on grabbing more power from municipalities? No, Mr. Speaker. Did they run on tearing apart our health care system? No. Did they run on bringing an Alberta pension plan? No. Did they run on establishing an Alberta police force? No. But did they run on giving a billion-dollar tax break to Albertans in 2024? Yes. But that promise has already evaporated, and Albertans feel deceived and betrayed by this government.

This Bill 21 is another power grab, not only from municipalities but also from Albertans. They elected all members, including myself, until May of 2027. That is a four-year term, but this government wants more power for more time. Thank God, we are living in Canada; otherwise, who knows how long they would have extended their term? We all know they have a very dear friend named Tucker Carlson. We also know that he has very close ties with Putin. The source of inspiration of this government is very dangerous, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is another example of a tawdry tale of political skulduggery. This bill amends the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, but many UCPers have a very sketchy, very sneaky, and flawed track record with finance disclosure. Not only that; another dear friend, David Parker, openly flouted the Elections Alberta rules. How can Albertans trust this government about the changes they make to financial disclosures?

This bill also amends the Forest and Prairie Protection Act. This is the same government that does not add any funding to support the wildfire combatting efforts in Budget 2024, and this is the same government that thinks that local governments and authorities just cannot do their job properly. After their haphazard presentation of the budget this government wants another power grab to manage forest protection areas. A government that cannot manage children's Tylenol now wants to manage the forest fires and that, too, without adding any funding to firefighting efforts.

Albertans would not have thought of this day, Mr. Speaker. This is the government that does not believe in climate change. They don't believe in science. They don't believe in facts. In fact, they don't even listen to experts who know more than them. One of the reasons they need to grab more power is because those experts give scientific opinions, and these folks just don't like to listen to those. Instead of accepting their shortcomings, they just want to govern with an iron fist.

Climate change is impacting our agriculture sector, it is impacting our economy, and it is making life more unaffordable for Albertans. Last year Alberta saw the strongest tornadoes in Alberta's history. Extreme weather conditions cost Albertans \$3 billion in losses in 2023. In 2023 Alberta burned 10 times more area than the five-year average. Alberta saw 2.2 million hectares burned in 2023. The five-year average is 226,000 hectares burned. I know the members on the other side will say that 67 per cent of the fires are human caused, but let me also share that the human-caused fires account for just 20 per cent of the hectares burned whereas the natural lightning caused 80 per cent of the damage, which is 1.75 million hectares.

Albertans will face serious impacts of these damages. The Insurance Bureau of Canada estimates that \$2 billion to \$3 billion of payouts will be made, and this will seriously impact the insurance premiums that Albertans pay. Thanks to the UCP government, because they have removed the insurance cap, that has already

increased the insurance rates in Alberta, which is the highest median insurance in the country.

This sentiment is echoed by the Canadian Climate Institute's Dave Sawyer. He suggests that a government can help by climate-proofing housing and working with homeowners to install the equipment to help reduce the climate damages, exactly what the NDP promised to do in the 2023 election, because experts think this is the right thing to do, and on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we do listen to experts.

This also reminds me of the hailstorm of 2020 in Calgary-North East. Mr. Speaker, that was the fourth-costliest natural disaster in Canada's history. The UCP even delayed to declare that as a natural disaster. My own car, my own house were damaged, and I had to wait for hours to talk to insurance companies. Insurance companies declined the claims of so many people in Calgary-North East. They felt abandoned both by insurance companies and the UCP government.

I am also reminded of the Calgary floods in 2013. Back then I was a student and working as a security guard, and I've seen first-hand people being evacuated, local authorities on the ground making important decisions to save the lives of the people in Calgary. Now this government doesn't believe that those local authorities can do their job properly and wants to take away their power from them, their authority to do the right things. Mr. Speaker, Albertans cannot be fooled by this UCP government anymore. They have described the real intentions of this UCP government.

Let me also share some insights that stakeholders asked from this government to fight the fires. Several major stakeholders have asked for a long-term strategy for managing wildfires outside forest protection areas, including the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and the RMA, which the provincial government has not been engaging. They have not consulted with these important stakeholders, and they want to take power away from them. The Alberta Fire Chiefs Association has further asked the government for additional resources, which they have not given – increased training capacity, equipment, aeriels – and requested the establishment of the provincial fire services advisory committee to assist in developing a dedicated provincial strategy to better manage and mitigate the risks associated with wildfire seasons.

Municipalities have been vocal that they need more financial support fighting the fires. Parkland county mayor Allan Gamble said in 2023, and I quote, that as wildfire seasons across Alberta grow in length and intensity, these disasters are placing a substantial strain on rural municipalities' resources and budgets. Unquote. And this is the government that pretends to care very much about the rural community, about the rural people, yet they do not give them funding, yet they continue to ignore the calls from rural municipalities, yet they continue to take away the power from local authorities in rural municipalities to handle the situation that might arise in their communities. This is not the government that Albertans voted for. This is not the government that rural communities voted for. Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with a government whose policies are not germane with stakeholders. Come 2027, Albertans are ready and have already made up their minds to elect the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, I request all members to vote against this power bill of the UCP, and I request all the members in the Assembly to vote in favour of the amendment. This amendment is very important, that can help the rural municipalities, that can help the local authorities, that can also give some sort of advice to the people on the other side who, instead of listening to the opposition, are laughing at this very important bill. They can go back. They still have the option to go back and listen to those important

stakeholders, listen to those local authorities, and go back and listen to the constituents who they represent.

If they can't do that, they can at least check their inboxes, because their constituents are already reaching out to them on so many other things. We have seen this past weekend that there was a rally held across Alberta telling this government to do the right thing, to do the things that they were elected to do, to do the things that matter to people instead of grabbing power from Albertans, instead of grabbing power from local authorities, instead of grabbing power from local municipalities and the rural communities that they pretend to care about.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me an opportunity, and I request all members to please vote in favour of this amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1. The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills caught my eye.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I rise to speak to the amendment RA1, which is suggesting that we not read Bill 21 a second time.

8:30

I think that we've heard from some of my colleagues that there are several reasons why we should not be reading for a second time Bill 21. As we've heard from several people, not just here in the NDP caucus but constituents from across Alberta municipalities, leaders in municipalities, Bill 21 is part of a trilogy that is designed to take authority and control from municipalities and place it into the hands of cabinet and the Premier's office. We have heard time and time again from people across this province, again, municipal leaders across this province that this is not actually what they're looking for. They're not asking the government to take control of those decisions. They're asking for collaborative, participatory working arrangements with the provincial government.

You know, I think I'll refer back to some comments that we heard previously on Bill 21 from the other side of the House, in fact, saying that at this moment in time there is a great working relationship between the government and municipalities on a number of fronts, including emergency response. I think we have to ask the question: if there's already a really good collaborative working relationship between the government and municipalities for emergency response, why do we need Bill 21?

I think that we have also heard from municipalities that there are concerns about the government taking control of municipal resources without having the provisions to make sure that municipalities are compensated for any costs that are related to taking control of those municipal resources, and we did not see any amendments come forward to say that the province would be willing to do that. I think that, again, if we don't have municipalities asking the government to be taking control and we have the government already saying that there's a great collaborative relationship with municipalities for emergency response, I would have to ask: why do we need Bill 21?

Again, I think if we're going to question, you know, why we would need Bill 21, why we would read Bill 21 a second time, when we know that there are already measures in place where the provincial government has the ability to have greater authority in emergency responses – we saw that, in fact, under a previous government during the wildfires in Fort McMurray the provincial government at the time declared a state of provincial emergency, and in doing so, it activated all of the powers and abilities that the government is suggesting that they need in Bill 21. Again, if we already have legislation in place that allows the provincial government to do what they intend to do with Bill 21, why do we

need Bill 21? What is the need or the drive that we would have to do this without following what was in place previously in order to take control during a state of emergency?

I think we also need to question with Bill 21 the concerns around water. I think we all know that water is a precious resource that many people think about and give a great deal of thought to, whether it be in a potential flood situation, whether or not it be in a drought situation, whether or not we are looking to access water to deal with wildfires.

Again, I'll reflect back on the fact that the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas was talking about the great relationship with the licence holders for the water basins in southern Alberta, that there was a great deal of collaboration in these licence holders coming together in signing agreements in how they would collaboratively work together to allocate water in the matter of a drought. I would wonder why we would want to use Bill 21 to set all of that work aside when all of those licence holders have already come together in a collaborative manner with the minister to be talking about allocations of water. Why would we want to set all of that really great work aside with Bill 21, where the government would simply step in and say, "That's fine; thank you for all of your work; we're here to save the day," when those licence holders have already done the work on how they feel they would be best served to allocate that water?

Certainly, there's greater concern when we talk about that Bill 21 would allow not just to be stepping in on the water allocations, but when we talk about transferring water from one basin to another, there is potentially great potential for unintended consequences when we start moving water from one basin to another. Again, there are many questions about the validity of Bill 21, about the inherent dangers that could be found in enacting Bill 21.

This may be another situation where, again, the government is simply going to say: we only will be using this, of course, in times of extreme emergency, and don't expect us to ever, you know, enact Bill 21. We've heard this, again, with many of the pieces of legislation that have been brought forward by the government, to say: "You know what? Just trust us. This is a just-in-case piece of legislation." But I think there are far too many questions now with the number of pieces of legislation that have come forward with that intent of: "You know what? Just trust us. We won't actually ever use this legislation." With more and more bills under that banner I think it causes people to really question whether or not that is actually the intent and whether or not it's a "just trust us" or whether or not there is, you know, maybe something else, like a deeper intent, behind these bills, including Bill 21.

And then, of course, as I think I said the last time I stood up to debate on Bill 21, the movement of the election date: again, I think that we can all appreciate the fact that we should be considering moving the election date, that we can appreciate that in May it is a time of year where there are likely emergencies taking place in Alberta, where I think all of us agree, especially looking to last year, that there were emergencies taking place that really didn't make it possible for candidates to be appropriately going out and preparing for an election, when that was, quite frankly, not what was on their constituents' minds. Their constituents were thinking a lot more about their safety and security and what might be happening to their homes and their land. So I think we all agree that maybe we do need to move it from May.

But, again, as members on this side of the House have asked, why the unilateral decision by the government to just give themselves six more months of mandate and move it out to the following October? Why not dial it back and take six months less to your mandate? Why not choose another month? As I know some people

have said, you know, January is maybe not the most pleasant time to be out door-knocking 10 hours a day to be preparing for an election, but that doesn't mean we take January off the table.

Yeah. I think we have many questions about Bill 21. I think we have many questions about Bill 21 that have not been answered in debate. It is unfortunate that we won't have more time to be debating Bill 21, where there could be more time to ask these questions and hear the responses to those questions, but here we are. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to say that I'm going to ask members of this House to vote in support of amendment RA1.

Thank you for the time.

8:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has approximately 45 seconds remaining.

Ms Wright: Excellent. All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I rise in support of this reasoned amendment, RA1, for a number of reasons. That's because when taken in concert with bills 18, 20, and even Bill 5, Bill 13, Bill 17, what this bill is really talking about, kind of a behind-the-scenes look: it's about an entitled government that is determined to collect power within a small group of people, sometimes, in fact, to just an individual person, an individual minister. This is a government, clearly, that has issues with consultation and engagement.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member; however, pursuant to Government Motion 39, agreed to on May 23, 2024, not more than one hour shall be allotted for the further consideration of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:41 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Kayande
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Brar	Hayter	Tejada
Ellingson	Hoyle	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 12 Against – 46

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 39 I am required to put all questions to the Assembly for the dispatchment of second reading of Bill 21, the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:59 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Kayande
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Brar	Hayter	Tejada
Ellingson	Hoyle	Wright, P.
Totals:	For – 47	Against – 12

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

Government Motions

Time Allocation on Bill 22

41. Mr. Schow moved:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 22, Health 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.

[Debate adjourned May 23: Member Irwin speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has four minutes remaining. Government Motion 41 allows one member of the Official Opposition to respond to the motion. The hon. member chooses not to use the four minutes that's remaining.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 41 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:17 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Kayande
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Brar	Hayter	Tejada
Ellingson	Hoyle	Wright, P.
Totals:	For – 47	Against – 12

[Government Motion 41 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 22

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

Member Irwin moved on behalf of Mr. Eggen that the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 22, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the reorganization in the health care system resulting from the legislative amendments proposed by this bill, if enacted, will destabilize and create inefficiencies regarding effective patient care in the health care system, resulting in negative impacts for patients and health care workers.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 23: Member Irwin speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has a number of minutes remaining; however, she chooses not to use those.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you for this opportunity to rise and to speak in support of the amendment to Bill 22, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. As this Bill 22 is all about health care, let me share some of my stories working inside the system to illustrate how this proposed bill is simply . . .

The Speaker: Apologies to the hon. member. I just might note that pursuant to Government Motion 41, agreed to earlier, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, in second reading. We are on the amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia may continue.

I ask members to keep their comments quiet as they may or may not be leaving the Chamber.

The hon. member.

Member Batten: Thank you. As this Bill 22 is all about health care, let me share some of the stories of my time working inside the system to illustrate how this proposed bill is simply insufficient and will cause confusion in health care and harm to Albertans. About a year into my practice in the NICU we shifted from paper charting to electronic charting. Now, this was pretty stressful. We were accustomed to having 24-hour paper packets in our hands of our patients' lives. We needed to be able to flip quickly to the vitals page to confirm levels and then back to medications to make sure that we could administer them. We thought we were super efficient because that's how we'd always done it and it always worked.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The transition was rough. The unit had never had a shift like this before. You might have heard this before, but NICU nurses can be a little bit rigid at times. So there were one or two opportunities identified for future transitions: things that we should do again, things we should never do again, and all those things that make sense in hindsight that we didn't think about before. One of the latter was that of moral distress of the staff. Intensive care is serious business, and the health care staff are highly trained, mentally engaged, and provide specialized care to high-risk patients. One big problem that was identified was that the staff were distracted and their mental capacities were stretched due to the transition itself. The staff were distressed that they were not going to be able to provide the same level of care while also completing this huge change.

A handful of years later the unit transitioned once again, this time from one electronic system to another, to connect care, this time connecting professionals across the province, not just inside the unit. Fun fact: did you know that this beast of connect care that connects providers and patients across the province, with great potential to radically change the way health care is communicated here in Alberta, was brought in by the 2015-2019 Alberta NDP government? Thank you very much.

Here we are in 2024, years later, watching the tail end of this transformation. This is what proactive planning looks like. This is what a government with the best interests of Alberta in front of mind acts like. Compare that to what we're now seeing with Bill 22, possibly one of the biggest bills to have crossed my desk thus far. This bill provides solutions where there are no problems and more ministers, red tape, government administration where there are problems.

A huge claim by this UCP government is that Alberta Health Services, AHS, is top heavy, so their solution is: let's multiply it by four, put in new, multilevel management for each. Yeah. Okay. First things first, in 2018 AHS was identified as one of the top five highest rated integrated health systems in the world. Now, I don't have the exact numbers in front of me, but taking one multilevel management, pointing at them with blame without any actual research, and then breaking them into four times as many seems like a terrible solution for a problem that does not exist.

Now, back to the NICU. The second transition, the one from electronic charting to another: although the system was more complex, the scope was much larger in terms of practice and personnel, it went much smoother than the first. The disruption to capacity on the unit was still affected, but the transition was met with greater acceptance and preparation. The unit provided more coverage to alleviate staff stress and provide reinforcements for providing care. These additions were a direct result of a postmortem

having been completed on the first transition from paper to electronic charting.

I want to emphasize that the second transition from an electronic system to another required far more funding, and as we know, health care funding has been quite anemic these past years, especially when considered in light of high inflation and population growth. For the NICU it meant that we had to be proactive, plan, and maybe request specific funding and budget to take these steps to prepare personnel for the massive change that was coming and the massive change that was happening in addition to the 24/7 care provided in the NICU. So where in the budget can I find the allotted funds for Bill 22 and these anticipated types of necessary transitional aids if we're going to quarter AHS? This was an example of one unit – granted, a large, busy, intense unit, but one unit – with unique needs out of hundreds if not thousands of unique units across the province.

9:40

Bill 22 is ambitious, asking for sweeping changes with little stakeholder engagement – and, yes, the health care workers are stakeholders – taking one system and breaking it into four after more than a decade and a half in the current system. You'd think there'd be more communication, more engagement, more debate time, but that's not what we're hearing. It's not what I'm hearing from health care workers, and that's not what we're seeing here in this House from this government.

Transitions are complex, and health care is literally people's lives. These sweeping changes put everyone's lives at risk. Now, I'm not saying that our public health care system is not in need of support because it absolutely is. I'm just not seeing how this Bill 22 is a smart move for Alberta. Given this UCP government's track record of overstepping into public health decisions with their ideology instead of following science, I have no faith that this government has done their due diligence, and I'm worried.

I'm worried about the workforce, public servants who are continuously told to do more with less and to follow the UCP's slippery slope of core requirements for practices and care. Did you know that right now registered nurses leave their practice on average by year 2? It wasn't that long ago that it was five years, before that seven, and we were worried then. Now two years? The training is longer than two years.

The current workforce is made up of professionals who have come through the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, maybe as brand new grads, graduates who were fast-tracked through their education because we needed them on the front lines, or maybe they're seasoned staff who were needing support long before March 2020. Either way, our health care workers have been on a roller coaster of the consequences of misinformation from this government, the war against best practices. This UCP government has been keeping our health care workers and our patients at risk.

Now toss in a complete overhaul of a world-renowned Alberta Health Services; I think it's perfectly fair that health care workers are worried. Anticipatory stress, Madam Speaker: health care workers can see the train on the track coming right for their patients, and they are not just worried about themselves; they are worried about, well, their patients. Bill 22, by putting up literal buildings between primary, acute, and continuing care and removing mental health and addictions from all three, is highly concerning.

Anyone who has navigated a health concern knows how complicated and confusing this can be. Between the fear of whatever is going on healthwise, this system that is health care is complicated, and it should be. Human beings are complicated, and we do not fall into clear categories like those that have been suggested.

Something as benign as a broken leg could cross all four boxes and at different times need the continuity of care across them all. With AHS, a single entity, with the addition of connect care, massive steps were being taken to ensure exactly this so that patients receive the necessary care when needed without unnecessary delay.

Health care workers work best as a team. I know that our health care workers will continue to provide the best care that they are able, but why is this UCP government making it more difficult?

Jumping back briefly to connect care, with a price tag in the billions, somewhere near \$1.4 billion, actually, what is the UCP government planning to do with this massive software? Will it continue to expand across Alberta, or is this UCP government going to toss it out with the AHS bathwater? Then will taxpayers have to spend millions if not billions for new training, new confusion, new chaos as our health care workers stumble through yet another major change? Where will these funds come from? Our social programs are all tapped out, so there's no more cutting there.

Madam Speaker, something else that has me quite bothered is that I'm worried about the patients here in Alberta. Has this government started to facilitate the connections between these silos they're creating? What about case management, transition services? The UCP is moving forward with these new silos but without any apparent proactive solutions. Patients are somehow supposed to navigate these new systems without any support.

I only wish this Bill 22 had something I could share positively with my constituents. Alberta's health care needs support – there is no question – after years of the UCP record funding that doesn't account for inflation or population increase, which actually means that they have cut health care post the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic that affected health care world-wide.

What about the children and youth, Madam Speaker? This UCP government committed a sneeze of \$20 million to build a stand-alone Stollery hospital and seems to think that that's enough. Well, now, I don't quite have a quote for a stand-alone hospital, but given that the cost of a single 24-hour stay in our level 3 NICU is \$20,000, \$20 million is hardly a drop in the bucket.

Bill 22 is not only ridiculously bloated with amendments across 44 different statutes; it is a half-baked solution to a very real, acute situation, that is our provincial health care system. Albertans deserve a robust health care system, the one that they've known way before this UCP government, and they deserve so much better.

I encourage all members to vote for the amendment and against Bill 22. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in the House and add a few words on the amendment for Bill 22. I want to start by saying we know all about massive things: the Oilers' current playoff run – well, not anymore – the Glenmore reservoir, the preserved remains of T. Rex found at the Royal Tyrrell Museum, the dome of Alberta's Legislature, Mount Columbia, and many other Albertan treasures. One year after the provincial election I have one thing to add to my previous list, and it is the Alberta government. Absolutely massive. Yes, massive government, and with Bill 22 one can rest assured that the Premier and her Executive Council will do all they can to further centralize and expand their powers and control everything everywhere all at once.

Four bureaucracies, Madam Speaker. Four. Our entire health care system has been divided into four additional layers of costly bureaucracies. And, yes, the 250,000 hard-working health care

professionals will be impacted by Bill 22. Public health care professionals are feeling once again blindsided by such a decision. Where do physicians fit into this model? How will this model help focus on primary health care and attract more family doctors? How can this model help physicians thrive and make them want to stay in our province? Between Bill 22 and the ill-advised Bill 18, which puts programs such as neuroscience, brain health and exercise, patient- and family-centred cancer survivorship – Alberta is at risk of losing funding in critical programs in areas of health care research. And Alberta is at risk of wasting taxpayer money, an additional \$85 million spent in reorganizing Alberta's health care system. How does this government plan to retain workers and research in this sector?

Madam Speaker, in the heart of Calgary-Glenmore is one of Calgary's most utilized hospitals, the Rockyview general hospital. I had my two children at the Rockyview hospital, and I have many connections to it. In my time as the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore I have spoken with numerous health care professionals who dedicate their services to this hospital and other health care providers within Calgary. Many of the health care professionals that I have had the privilege to speak with have openly voiced frustration with this government's policies in the world of health care. Many have shared with me that they consider leaving our great province because of this government's policies. Those who wish to stay remain under unimaginable stress. I cannot imagine the stress that our dedicated health care workers have been under.

Madam Speaker, how can the Minister of Health be trusted to oversee these four bureaucracies in Alberta when vulnerable Albertans were subjected to motel medicine, highway health, and hallway medicine under her very watch? This is a chaotic plan that will only create greater challenges for health care providers across the province. Patients who have very specific needs have the potential to be passed around several different government agencies just to hopefully receive the care they need. It is unclear how these four groupings, or bureaucracies, provide better care.

9:50

A number of new bodies will also be created, including a supervising integration council, which will be chaired by the Health minister, resulting in a more direct role for political leaders in health care. Why is this happening? How does it improve health care in our province? Thirteen groups intended to facilitate regional and Indigenous input will be established as well as a procurement secretariat and mechanisms to facilitate communication and coordination between these various entities. How will this leviathan of a structure achieve the Premier's goals of, supposedly, reducing bureaucracy and management?

Rather than searching for pragmatic solutions, this Premier and her government have doubled down and are proceeding with a plan that will put Albertans at risk and rip apart Alberta's health care system. It is nothing more than a plan to centralize more control in the Premier's office and in the minister's office.

Madam Speaker, we must look towards ways that Albertans can receive care effectively and efficiently without having to suffer from long wait times. Enlarging our health care system in such a way reduces individuals' needs into silos and neglects the needs of a wide variety of diverse Albertans. Albertans in both rural and urban areas are struggling with the reality that health care in this province is not what it was. Around Alberta this government has sparked a massive sense of confusion in the way our health care system will be run in the near future.

Madam Speaker, whether it's Bill 22 or 21 or 20 or 18, I see no evidence in any of this that the UCP is in search of excellence in providing government services, whether it is providing services for

Albertans, managing interprovincial affairs, voting, emergency co-ordination, and now health care in Bill 22. All I see are changes for the sake of power. It is the UCP government amateur hour at its best. At what point will this government realize the levity of their actions? At what point will this government recognize that health care professionals are actively leaving Alberta? At what point will this government realize that in order to make decisions in health care, they must actively seek out the perspectives of those actually working in health care?

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, Alberta can do so much more. More specifically, this government can do so much more for Alberta. We are facing unprecedented challenges, all while our population is booming. Centralizing our systems in such a way not only gives more power to the Premier, but it makes our systems less efficient and more bureaucratic. I support the amendment. I oppose Bill 22. I oppose this waste of government resources. This bill does not solve our health care challenges.

Thank you.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to stand today and speak to this amendment to Bill 22. I am certainly disappointed that more of my colleagues won't have an opportunity to speak to this amendment, of course, because of the time allocation. It is just stunning to me that we are talking about the largest line item in this government, \$25 billion in the '24-25 budget, and we have a total of 60 minutes to talk about an incredibly important amendment that will facilitate some invaluable discussion from folks like my colleague here from Calgary-Acadia, who has direct and lived experience in this particular field. But you know what? We all do, whether it be as patients, whether it be as family members, whether it be as professionals working in that space.

To limit debate on such a crucial issue that touches every single Albertan, with a line item of \$25 billion, to limit the debate on an issue of such great gravity and importance feels like an incredible loss to Albertans and to the capacity that we have within these four walls to work together and identify ways that we can in fact make the very best legislation possible for the people that we represent. It's challenging when we're given a time allocation of just 60 minutes to address this particular amendment to just trust government, which is really what they have been asking in this entire endeavour of reorganizing and, in fact, dissolving Alberta Health Services as we know it: just trust us.

Well, you know what? If we were given a little bit more than an hour to debate this absolutely critical shift in the way that we deliver health care in our province, maybe we could establish a bit of trust on both sides of this Chamber, but that is, unfortunately, not something that has been provided for tonight.

Just to remind folks here, the amendment that we're talking about is asking that

Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, [is] not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the reorganization in the health care system . . . will destabilize and create inefficiencies regarding effective patient care in the health care system, resulting in negative impacts for patients and health care workers.

I will certainly speak in support of this amendment because what is currently happening in Alberta is absolutely antithetical to what is happening in major health systems in the developed world across the globe, which is identifying opportunities to consolidate, to merge service to create albeit potentially large and somewhat burdensome health systems but where there is a facilitation of

greater collaboration and greater working together of the different silos. Unfortunately, Alberta is going in entirely the different direction.

I think that it is very much a concern when this government is not following best practice when it comes to the actual co-ordination of a very big, absolutely critical system to the well-being of every single one of our citizens and every single one of our residents. So, you know, I think that the members opposite might understand why trust on this particular file is a challenging one.

I want to raise two instances just in the last 24 hours that I think indicate where this dissolution of our health system as we currently know it has been embodied and where that risk is actually held. One of them is in a recent press release from the government of Alberta, just this morning, that included a kind of quick-facts list for the reader, and in it they talk about Mental Health and Addiction investing an unprecedented \$1.55 billion.

First of all, that is not new money; \$1.1 billion of that \$1.5 billion came over from the Ministry of Health. But now if the Mental Health and Addiction ministry is suggesting to the province that these unprecedented investments are being made in Mental Health and Addiction, I think that is suggesting to Albertans something that is not, in fact, true. What we have got before us is a reallocation of dollars from the health system to Mental Health and Addiction; \$1.1 billion is not any – there's no more money being addressed and funnelled towards addiction and mental health in a way that is desperately needed.

But with this reorganization I think the vast majority of Albertans are going to say: "Oh, that is a really big number. Good for Mental Health and Addiction, good for the UCP government to be investing those kinds of monies." Friends, it is not new money; \$1.1 billion has been hived off the health system and brought into Mental Health and Addiction, but this is where following the money and following the programs and following the accountability is going to become so incredibly challenging both for the civil service but also for Albertans.

10:00

Where is this money coming from? Who's delivering my service? The navigational challenges – I can't even begin to think about how we as elected representatives are going to effectively communicate this to constituents, to our loved ones, to people who may be facing different challenges to navigate this very complex system. I think what is going to happen is that you are going to have to advocate like heck to make sure that you and your loved ones get the care you need because this is not a system that is going to be easy for one to facilitate, to be a part of, to access the care that we all deserve and that we need.

Now, the second example that I wanted to talk about – and I'll talk about it in a little bit more depth – is that just this morning, Madam Speaker, I and my colleague stood in Calgary for a press release in regard to a really troubling practice, that has become normalized since COVID, that co-locates complex mental health patients with seniors in long-term care facilities.

Our press release this morning was on this particular situation that we wanted to highlight and that my colleague the MLA for . . .

An Hon. Member: Edmonton-Riverview.

Member Eremenko: . . . Edmonton-Riverview – thank you – has been working on for quite some time. The Carewest Colonel Belcher facility was specifically built in 2003 for veterans, veterans who proudly served this country, veterans who deserve the utmost respect and dignity in their final years, veterans who, I should add, have some complex mental health issues of their own as a result of

their service, operational injuries that include posttraumatic stress disorder.

Now, what has happened is that as a result of strains on the hospital system from a system that was utterly overwhelmed from a global pandemic, they needed to relieve some pressure in the hospital system, so as a temporary measure they invited complex mental health patients from a number of different service providers – it’s really not clear whether they were in community or whether they were in acute-care spaces – and brought them into Colonel Belcher beginning in January 2021 though I think that there is evidence that that actually happened sooner than that.

One can imagine that, unfortunately, there has been a great deal of tension in Colonel Belcher ever since. What has happened is that with this temporary solution, without the resourcing, without the supports, without the planning, without the intention, without the staff, without the security, it has absolutely hit a bit of a frenetic pace at Colonel Belcher, resulting in neither patient group getting the care that they deserve. As we know, in long-term care staff are chronically undersupported. They are overworked. They are underresourced, and now what we’ve done is that we have brought together two very different patient groups. Psychiatric care is not geriatric care, and vice versa.

This government committed to do a risk assessment, to complete a fulsome review to determine that if this was going to be a path forward, it would be resourced properly, it would have everything it needed to make sure that the patients living in both of those spaces would be appropriately supported. No review has been completed, and we’re over three years from when that practice first took place, and it continues to move forward.

Let’s use that example. Let’s use this particular incident of what happens when we’ve now created four different silos within our health system. We have mental health and addiction, we have acute care, and now we have continuing care, and I’m absolutely positive that primary care is a consideration there; for example, when family doctors or GPs actually come and access the long-term care space to provide care to residents rather than asking them to come out and visit them. In this complete alphabet soup of organizations that is now going to be created with Bill 22, how is this actually going to be navigated by a family? Who is responsible for that review? Is it addiction and mental health? Is it acute care? Perhaps that’s where some of the patients are coming from. Is it continuing care? Who is going to be responsible? Who is going to be accountable?

In five short weeks, Madam Speaker, as of July 1, addiction and mental health services are going to be the first set of programs, and 10,000 staff are going to be hived off Health, and they’re going to be forming their own silo. I don’t think it’s clear to anybody, certainly not in the legislation, who is ultimately going to be accountable for the deliverables that ensure that mental health and addiction patients are in fact getting the care that they require.

Where these silos interface, where they hit up against one another: that is going to be a massive grey zone that absolutely brings a question around which staff are accountable, which ministry is accountable. Bill 22 introduces this oversight minister to kind of keep an eye to the larger system, and then each silo is going to have a sectoral minister. Again, which ministry, which minister is going to be accountable for which parts of the system? This is an incredibly complex set of programs and departments, and it simply doesn’t work that way, just like humans and our care don’t work that way. We can’t divide lines between the kinds of needs that we need to have addressed on an everyday basis.

I think, as I mentioned, that this incident at Carewest Colonel Belcher is a perfect example of where these silos are not speaking to one another. These are folks who have endured a system with

very little support from the minister and who are owed some answers as to why they are not getting the care that they deserve. I don’t even know where to tell them to ask for those answers. Do they go to the oversight minister? Do they go to the sectoral minister? If the sectoral minister, which one? These are fundamental questions that in very short order – by Canada Day, Madam Speaker, they’re going to be owed these answers because those will be fundamentally different people and different departments and different bureaucracies.

As has already been mentioned, Health is a monolithic ministry, as it should be. It’s an awfully complex one. But the minister for red tape reduction, I’m sure, is dismayed that we’ve taken 13 councils and traded them for – you guessed it – a different 13 councils. I want to add that mental health and addiction – I appreciate that this is certainly within my wheelhouse. It’s not lost on me that we’re all about a year into this particular term, and I have certainly done a deep dive on my critic file. I’m very honoured to be the opposition critic for Mental Health and Addiction. Mental health is not one of those pieces that can be parsed out into a nice, tight, and clean department. Mental health pervades our entire lives, and it certainly is a consideration in every single aspect of our health.

Once again, what does that actually look like when the rubber hits the road and it is time to deliver the care that Albertans would expect? Simply renaming regional health authorities to public health agencies, renaming Covenant Care or AHS to a health service delivery organization, replacing “provision” of care with “delivery” of care, as Bill 22 does, does not inherently improve the system. That rearranges the deck chairs on the *Titanic*, and that is not what we need. These are not the kinds of interventions that we need. The interventions we need are family doctors, appropriately staffed hospitals and long-term care facilities, decent wages that don’t force a person to work in three different facilities in a week because that’s the only way that they can piece together a livable wage and a livable income, not changing names on a letterhead, Madam Speaker. That is not the solution that Albertans are looking for.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on the amendment RA1? The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would argue against the amendment for a number of reasons. I’ve been actively listening to the members opposite, and I feel I needed to stand up and correct a lot of the misinformation that I was hearing from the other side.

10:10

Bill 22 is actually an enabling piece of legislation which allows us to do the refocusing that we need to do. The member opposite from Calgary-Currie just referred to the health system as the *Titanic*. We know what happened to the *Titanic*. It was going down, and it went down fast.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that having gone across this province and done 65 in-person engagement sessions with over 3,000 Albertans, most of whom were health care workers, having a survey that was out – we talk about engagement. It was one of the most and is still one of the largest engagements right across this province. We’ve had a survey out that had over 18,000 respondents provide their feedback, and most of those were health care workers as well. We had online town halls: 10,000 people took part in those; over 10,000 people, and those, again, were mostly health care workers. We’ve had 35 Indigenous in-person sessions across this province thus far.

And we're continuing to engage because we are not going to be satisfied with just an initial engagement. We need to continue to engage with the workforce. I can tell you resoundingly – resoundingly – that almost to a person, no one would say that the current health care system is working. In fact, the vast majority were saying: "You know, it's about time we do something differently because we are stuck. No one's listening to us on the front lines. We could do things better. We need to provide better patient care. We need to make sure that we have a seamless flow through the health care system."

We have over 1,300 IT systems that don't talk to each other, Madam Speaker, and that's unacceptable. How do we get to connect care being accessible right across the province, not to just Alberta Health Services? Alberta Health Services: right now we have almost a \$27 billion budget, of which almost \$19 billion goes to Alberta Health Services. While they provide – I'll give you an example. They provide roughly about 28 per cent of continuing care in the province, but they hold the contracts with everyone else, and they fund themselves differently than they fund the others. We have inequities across this province that need to be addressed, and that's what the refocusing is going to look at and going to do.

Madam Speaker, they talk about health care professionals leaving this province. That is not what we're seeing. In fact, we've had more doctors, over 500 more doctors, come to Alberta to practise just in the last year alone, of which 215 are family physicians. We've been able to work collaboratively with the Alberta Medical Association, not only to sign a new agreement just 16 months ago, I believe it is, worth about \$780 million, but we are continuing to work with the Alberta Medical Association, and we've got a new framework for family physicians that has been agreed upon, and now it's gone to rate review. That doesn't sound like fighting with our family physicians, with the AMA. We're in fact working very collaboratively with them.

More nurses, Madam Speaker, over 4,700 more nurses in this year alone, have started working in Alberta. Nurse practitioners: a new funding model for nurse practitioners where they can work autonomously to their full scope. We've seen over 1,000 applications at the U of A for the nurse practitioner program. We've also seen over 70 apply to work autonomously and have their own practice.

Madam Speaker, more EMS workers, more ambulances on the road, more collaboration on integrated fire, EMS, and first responders, more surgeries in this last year alone. This is not a system that is – yes, there are pressures, and, yes, we need to address the issues that I've heard over and over and over again as we've gone across this province. But one thing I can say is that we are addressing them and we are actually taking a real look at making sure that we have tangible solutions, that we provide accountability, that there are actual outcomes that have to be worked towards.

Madam Speaker, I could go on and on, and I'm happy to do that, but it's very frustrating to hear the members opposite continually putting out misinformation on this issue. This legislation will in fact allow us the ability to create those sector-focused agencies, which are the result of extensive engagement, the extensive engagement that happened on the Continuing Care Act, that led to the Continuing Care Act, and the subsequent regulations that came into force here at the beginning of April. That piece of legislation – resoundingly, there as well, throughout that engagement, there was a desire and a cry for targeted leadership.

I also know that while Alberta Health Services, as I said earlier, has right now approximately \$18 billion, almost \$19 billion worth of the funding, a lot of it is focused on acute care. When we look at how much goes into continuing care and into primary care and into

mental health and addictions, we have to make sure that we put our resources into those allocations, into those other sectors as well.

Primary care is the foundation of health care. If we can create a strong primary care system where everyone has access to a family practitioner, where they can get their needs met, where they can do the preventative work, where we can do early intervention, then we keep people out of hospital. How many people go to a hospital? I heard a statistic that it could be as high as 80 per cent of people going into the emergency room don't need to be there if they had a family practitioner or . . . [interjections] I'm sorry, Madam Speaker; they're yelling at me from across the aisle, but I didn't catch what they were saying.

Madam Speaker, I hear the statistic that it could be as high as 80 per cent of people going into emergency rooms could be triaged if they had gone to a family practitioner, so we need to address that. We have alternative level of care patients. Do you know what those are? Those are patients that are languishing in our hospitals right now who have finished their course of treatment, but we don't have facilities for them to go to or we need transition plans, et cetera. That's unacceptable. We need to do better. We can't have people languishing in hospital. There's one case of an individual, a senior, who languished in the hospital after his treatment for 890 days. That's almost three years. That's no longer acute care; that's a living arrangement. We can do better than that and we are going to do better than that by setting up the sectors that are focused on improving health care for Albertans.

When the members opposite say that people do not want the change, that's not what I hear. That's not what I'm hearing from front-line workers. It's not what I'm hearing from doctors. It's not what I'm hearing from nurses. It's not what I'm hearing from health care aides. It's not what I'm hearing from patients. In fact, I hear stories on an ongoing basis from patients who are saying: "You know what? This system has failed me. It could be doing so much better."

Madam Speaker, you know, it's taken a while for us to get where we are, but we need to do something that is different because to do the same things over and over again and expect different results, I believe, is the definition of insanity. We cannot continue along this insane road of expecting the health care to get better yet we don't do anything about it to change it.

I'm very proud of the work that's been done thus far. There's a lot more to do. We're going to continue to engage, particularly with our workforce, particularly with everyday Albertans, and we're going to make sure that we get it right. We also know that, you know, there are going to be some bumps along the way. We're going to have to own that and be able to pivot and be able to be nimble, but, Madam Speaker, we are committed to making sure that we improve the health care of Albertans because people's lives do hang in the balance and they do matter. You know, I am very, very focused on making sure that we are successful with the new health care refocusing that we're doing.

Thank you.

10:20

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise tonight to speak to this amendment that I do support, but I am strongly against Bill 22. My inbox as well is telling me that people in Alberta are against Bill 22. Frankly, this bill will not fix our health care here in Alberta. It's not going to fix our health care system. Bill 22 is only going to cause more confusion. It's going to cause more disarray, and I can't help but reflect on how this is going to impact every one of our constituents.

Based, as I said, on my inbox, the ones that I even got today, I think that we've all received today, people aren't happy, and frankly I and Albertans don't really remember this being proposed on the campaign trail. Where was this piece of legislation hiding during the election campaign? I'm assuming that, you know, it wasn't there. It wasn't transparent, because probably if Albertans knew that this was what was coming down the pipe, they would have voted differently. If they knew that their health care system was about to be dismantled, they probably would have said a strong, hard no to that.

I really believe that only the UCP could believe that separating the health care system into four separate agencies could lead to more integration. I'm wondering how four separate agencies cut down on the red tape. Instead of focusing on our lack of doctors in rural Alberta, the UCP and the Premier are focused on adding four additional layers of bureaucracy and cost. This is red tape, and it's costing the taxpayers, and I would love to know how it's fiscally responsible.

As I've stated, I'm sure many of you have, like myself, received e-mails from Albertans against Bill 22. I really appreciated the e-mail from Mr. Appleyard.

I oppose the intent and design of this bill for the following reasons: This bill is so flawed it's hard to know where to start. You have presented no evidence that health structures like the one proposed will have any of [those] promised results. Indeed splitting AHS undoes more than a decade of work unifying AHS from the regional structure that was there previously. The UCP have not presented any evidence that reversing the previous conservative government's initiative will simply not create the flaws of the regional system, of which there were many. The UCP is running blind and dragging what was once a well functioning system into ruin. The lack of financial resources over the last few decades has been deliberate and has strained the system. The UCP's pathological unwillingness to fund the health care needs of the province has put every Albertan in a risky position. It is clear the UCP wishes to break the Canada Health Act in order to "fix" the system, and I reject the entire campaign the UCP has led to privatize health care.

I see no evidence in [this bill] that the UCP is in search of excellence in providing government services [including] (policing, inter-provincial affairs, voting, emergency coordination, and health care). All I see are changes for the sake of power.

By throwing all these objectionable bills forward at the same time is simply a "snow job." The UCP is pushing as much of this forward as you can to overwhelm Albertans with . . .

Oh, I can't say that word. Sorry. That would be . . .

An Hon. Member: Unparliamentary.

Ms Hayter: It would be very unparliamentary, yes. Sorry.

This is not responsible leadership. The UCP's track record for consulting with anyone who might possibly have a different view is telling of the lack of responsibility you take in governing. I refer to the UCP's overuse of time allocation measures that limit debate. What are you so afraid of?

Well, thank you, Mr. Appleyard. My guess is the fear is that it would give many MLAs the opportunity to share their concerns, share your concerns, share other constituents' concerns with the government on how they do not want Bill 22.

I also received an e-mail from Ms Gramlich today saying that she "strongly object[s] to all the unprecedented authoritarian changes" from the UCP government, that it is "threatening democracy and [the] democratic process," that the changes that are being made to health care are unsupported, they are costly, and they are

not motivated by the health of the health care system or Albertans, but rather by power and the ability to make change through legislative process. You are taking down seasoned leaders with front line and senior leadership experience and replacing them with pawns to do your bidding. You are scary. You don't represent Albertans – rather you represent yourself.

Bill 22 is a blueprint that is going to escalate the chaos in our hospitals and our clinics and will do nothing to improve results for patients and support staff, for our constituents. I cannot support Bill 22, that is only going to end up dismantling our Alberta Health Services and make health care more chaotic for patients and the people in our ridings. Albertans deserve health care that is there for them when they need it and a seamless movement when they need to move from primary to acute to continuing care.

As I stated, it is disappointing. I share the echo of concern of the Member for Calgary-Currie that we are each right now given a short, allotted amount of time to talk about it when we are hearing resoundingly against Bill 22, yet not everybody in this House will have the opportunity to stand here and stand up for democracy, stand up for public health care and for our constituents. So that there's time for others to speak, I do just want to say that I cannot support Bill 22 as I don't want to see the dismantling of Alberta health care services.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I support Bill 22. I have heard the NDP repeatedly go over and over and over again on interference with what's happening with our health care system. The problem the NDP have is that – I actually was present during their four-year term, and I remember specifically that these same allegations were levelled against the NDP themselves.

I would like to reference an article. It is a CBC article, and this is typically not friendly to the UCP or at that time the Wildrose or the PCs. The title of the article is Health Minister Sarah Hoffman Denies Allegations – sorry; I retract that. The former Deputy Premier of Alberta and the former Health Minister . . . Denies Allegations of Political Interference in AHS. I'd like to spend a lot of my time on this because this is exactly what they're saying that we're doing, and this is what the allegations are that, unfortunately, they can't get around themselves.

Now, in this article we had a former executive officer, Vickie Kaminski, say that "she resigned over interference," interference from this NDP government. Now, again, they're playing that they're shocked and they're horrified, and they're mischaracterizing what we're doing here in Alberta, but they did it worse. They literally went in there and they started to actually force what they were doing on AHS. At least we've got the common courtesy to say: "You know what? We're going to restructure it and allow it to be run correctly by ministers."

10:30

Now, moving on, what we've got is that it starts off with "Alberta Health Minister," the former NDP Deputy Premier, "is denying allegations she and her deputy minister politically interfered in the operation of Alberta Health Services." Now, the response from this NDP former minister is something that should shock everyone, but it happened. This was a direct quote from the NDP former minister. "I understand that from the tone of the letter" – and this is the resignation letter from that CEO – "she feels that there was

interference . . . I think it was governing.” Isn’t that interesting? Isn’t that something that we can all say? “You know what? It was just governing.”

This is what we’re saying. Let’s take something so important that we’re going to make sure that we have representation, ministers responsible for making sure it’s got it right. Now, the former NDP minister is calling it just governing, and now today they’re saying that, well, we’re ripping it apart and burning it to the ground. That is clearly not what we’re doing here. We are saying that it’s not working. The NDP, back in their four-year term, was saying it wasn’t working, and today they’re saying it’s working perfectly. That clearly is not the case.

Now, there’s a lot to this article. You know, again, I had lived through this, and they conveniently want to forget because that’s what the NDP do. They point out all of this awful stuff, and they refuse to acknowledge they did exactly the same thing. Now we’ll go into the formal concerns here. All right.

Kaminski, in her letter, told Hughes and Carpenter that she was “apprehensive that (the AHS board) will not be allowed to function as a board should, especially since the regulations were quietly changed to allow government to appoint the clerk of executive council to the authority’s board.

This decision removes any illusions about whether or not the Government of Alberta will continue to overly influence the work of AHS or that there is [a] degree of independence.”

That’s right. This is the CEO warning that there is too much influence coming from the NDP government. And you know what? Today they’re saying, “Hey, you know, we don’t like that anymore” even though they got caught doing exactly – exactly – the same thing. There are no illusions anymore. AHS is no longer manageable.

This board was actually removed by the former PC government in 2013. The NDP brought in their own board of directors in 2015, and then the minister herself decided she wanted to micromanage them. Well, why not do what we were doing? Maybe looking back and redoing exactly the same thing, which is what the NDP are saying – completing and doing the same thing over and over again is insanity. I agree. Why would we do this? Let’s try something different. Let’s try making sure that we get real value. Taxpayer money is being used more efficiently, but that’s not the answer they’re hoping for.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 41, agreed to on May 27, 2024, one hour of debate has now been completed, and I am required to put all the necessary questions to dispose of Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, at second reading.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:34 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Kayande
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Brar	Hayter	Tejada
Ellingson	Hoyle	Wright, P.

10:50

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 12 Against – 47

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 41, agreed to on May 27, 2024, I am required to put all necessary questions to dispose of Bill 22, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:52 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Kayande
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Brar	Hayter	Tejada
Ellingson	Hoyle	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 47 Against – 12

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I rise to request unanimous consent for one-minute bells for the remainder of this evening’s sitting, including the first bill of Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent denied]

**11:10 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 21
Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024**

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to everyone who's here this evening. Certainly, I've had the opportunity to listen to some comments regarding Bill 21. I'm starting to question whether or not the members opposite have read Bill 21.

As I've stated in this House already before, in comments that I've made inside and outside of this House, the bill is actually about transparency. It is about clarity; it is about consistency when it comes to this legislation. There are no new powers in this legislation. I know the members opposite might be unfamiliar with incident command or emergency services or emergency response, but all we're doing here is providing clarity and transparency when it comes to a reporting process. That's it. It's not complicated. It's not rocket science. It's just something that, quite frankly, most people, I believe, who have read the bill would understand.

I know that there have been allegations that municipalities, municipal firefighters, and the potential adverse effects that are going to come out of this bill – I find it interesting, and I appreciate my good friend the Minister of Municipal Affairs who mentioned this earlier. I know that the members opposite: they want to believe that the sky is falling and that the firefighters are going to be, you know, losing their minds and chaos is going to break out in the province if Bill 21 passes. But, Mr. Speaker, I find it completely ironic because I personally was . . .

Mr. Amery: Madam Chair.

Mr. Ellis: Sorry; Madam Chair.

I find it personally ironic that I was invited as a guest speaker to the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association just yesterday along with my friend the Municipal Affairs minister. My friend the chief government whip was invited. The Minister of Finance was invited.

Not only that, Madam Chair, but we were in a reception with all the fire chiefs, and do you know what they didn't talk about? They didn't even mention once as I stood there Bill 21. That was it. That was their opportunity. The minister is there. "Minister, I think I might have questions." They didn't even raise it. They didn't question.

You know what they did, though, Mr. Speaker? Madam Chair. I apologize, Madam Chair. I couldn't believe this because I was stunned by this. They white hatted me. They thanked me for the work that I do with them. They thanked me for having a government that is willing to listen. I was stunned. A police officer: I actually have now a white fire captain's hat from the Fire Chiefs Association with the appreciation for the work that we do with them.

I mean, talk about misrepresentation or an opposition that is completely out of touch. I'm starting to question whether or not what they're doing is – I'm going to just say this, Madam Chair. It's questionable. It's questionable, right? It's not based in reality. I think we have to ask ourselves that. Again, no new powers, clarity, transparency.

And you know what else they thanked me for? What else they thanked me for is that we just recently appointed a new assistant deputy minister for emergency services who is a fire chief, a fire chief from the Edmonton fire service. They thank me for that, because it is about transparency. It is about clarity. It's about making sure that we have a good relationship with our fire chiefs, Madam Chair. I'm a little taken aback by many of the comments that are made by the members opposite, but I'm going to say this: I want to thank our fire chiefs. I want to thank them for the work that they do, their incident command performances. You know, yesterday I spoke to the regional fire chief in charge of Grande Prairie region for the fire. Not only did he not talk about Bill 21 but we did talk about the incident that had taken place there, and he thanked my good friend the minister of forestry for the work that his department has done, the collaboration between the government.

We talked about how we can do things better, and that is part of the relationship that we're doing, Madam Chair, with the fire chiefs, and I think it is something that is going to move us in even more of a positive direction than what we are doing here in Bill 21. I think Bill 21 is a step forward. I think continuing collaboration is another step forward in how we work with our good friends the fire chiefs. I'm going to take this opportunity to also thank not just the fire chiefs but also those firefighters, all the people that helped our good friends in the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo area – that's right – as they, you know, evacuated a few communities.

I want to thank our friends in the RCMP who were able to assist in getting those – you know what? I don't need to listen to the peanut gallery over on the other side. You know what, Madam Chair? I can tell you that I have the utmost respect for constables, and anybody who questions that does not know who I am. Constables, corporals, sergeants are absolutely the backbone of those organizations, whether you're in the RCMP, whether you're in the Medicine Hat Police Service, Calgary Police Service, Edmonton Police Service, or any police service in this province or in this country, and I want to thank them for their service. I want to thank all those people, the volunteers who are able to help those who were evacuated.

You know, in speaking with the chief in the Grande Prairie region, he appreciated not only the work that we had done with them but of course their, we'll call it, smooth evacuation, when we got people out in a safe manner and that so far in that particular area things are under control, I would say. I think that is something that is to be commended for both Alberta Emergency Management, Alberta forestry as well as the municipalities. Really, municipalities are your first responders, and we know that. That's why we provide them the education and the training. That is why they held the conference that they did yesterday in Calgary to make sure that those firefighters have all the necessary equipment and training.

With that, Madam Chair, I'd like to thank you for having the opportunity to speak on Bill 21 in Committee of the Whole, and with that I would like to adjourn debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:18 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz

because the sentiments expressed on that day certainly mirror how I feel here.

The time allocation motion that was just moved and all of the time allocation motions that have been moved over the last several days and that we expect to be moved over the next several days are not how this Assembly is supposed to proceed. It is not normal, it is not good for democracy, and I think that the government has really lost sight of what this Assembly is supposed to be for and how this is supposed to work. Calling time allocation on a bill when only two hours was given prior to time allocation being used at second reading, a total of eight members of the Official Opposition being able to weigh in on a bill, to be clear, Bill 21, where the Rural Municipalities of Alberta strongly denounced this legislation and asked important questions, following that up by immediately time allocating Committee of the Whole and not allowing members to speak is not how the Alberta Legislature is supposed to work.

With eight speakers of the Official Opposition speaking, that's 21 per cent of the Official Opposition caucus. There are 38 members of the Official Opposition that should be able to speak about this.

To quote the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre:

The members on this side of the Assembly have just as much of a right and just as much of a responsibility to their constituents as the government members do to theirs.

I continue the quote:

This is the Assembly where their issues are supposed to be dealt with. This is where democracy is supposed to take place. This is where debate is supposed to happen, and by the government taking this action, they are stifling debate. They're not just stifling the opposition members; they're stifling the people who sent us here to represent them, and I think they should be very much ashamed of their behaviour.

Mr. Speaker and all members, the context here is that under this government, each bill – we've seen an average of three hours of debate. This is not normal. Under the NDP government the average hours of debate were roughly six for each. On bills of significant importance you would see debate go as far as 29 hours, 25 hours, 21 hours, 16 hours, 18 hours. Under the previous UCP government, for those of you who were members, you saw that Bill 8 was debated for 44 hours. An actual opportunity was given to members of the Official Opposition to weigh in, a group of opposition that was at 24. We currently have 38 members of the opposition. A division is being called after 60 minutes. That gives each of my members one and a half minutes to potentially weigh in on something. We all have a responsibility and a right to be able to represent constituents, especially on bills where there is such significant concern as we see on 21.

Now the saying goes: when someone shows you who they are, trust them. Time allocation is a tool that is supposed to be used cautiously and with respect for democracy, and that is not what we are seeing. We're seeing it during a time when you are passing Bill 18, where you're saying: "Trust us. We're not going to interfere with funding to universities, never mind your agricultural producers, never mind municipalities. Trust us. We're giving ourselves all these new powers, but we won't use it too heavily." Bill 20, same thing: "Trust us; we're not going to just take over municipal governance," even though that's exactly what all of your stakeholders are worried about. Bill 21: "Trust us; we're not going to take over your local authorities during emergencies," except that's the power you've given yourselves. You're giving yourselves more powers and saying, "We will use this responsibly."

Here you're taking the power of the Alberta Legislature: you are not using it responsibly; you are using it in a heavy-handed way to

shut down debate on four pieces of legislation that all deserve more time, that all deserve time for consideration of amendments, which we have and likely we will not get to. We've dealt with this before. We'll end up tabling it. But the disservice will be to Albertans and to our constituents. I've been listening to the debate. The idea that there would be filibustering or low-quality entries into the conversation is completely false because my members have been listening to their constituents and bringing those voices here into the Chamber. I have heard some repetitive comments in the past in my nine years. That's not what we've heard here.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 43 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:49 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Kayande
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Brar	Hayter	Tejada
Ellingson	Hoyle	Wright, P.
Totals:	For – 47	Against – 12

[Government Motion 43 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 22

44. Mr. Amery moved on behalf of Mr. Schow:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 22, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, 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.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a time allocation that allows for up to five minutes for one member of the Official Opposition to respond. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow intends to do so.

Member Kayande: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is incredibly disappointing. We have heard a very eloquent response to the previous time allocation motion just 20 minutes ago by the Official Opposition House Leader. It's certainly very difficult for a mere rookie like me to add a huge amount of insight to what she brought forward, but in fact so much of what she said is actually easier for

me to talk about in speaking to time allocation on Bill 22 because everything that she referenced, all the time that we have had, the lack of time that we have had to discuss Bill 21 actually stands even more true for Bill 22, which, if my memory is serving correctly, has had exactly one hour of debate from where members of the Official Opposition were allowed to speak on it. I know that because time allocation was introduced on it before a single opposition word was spoken on this bill.

Let's talk about, like, what a tragedy that is when we talk about a bill that is – really, the purpose of the bill is to draw and quarter the Alberta health care system. Health accounts for 43 per cent of this government's operational spending. To put that into context, Education accounts for 25 per cent as the second-largest operational budget item. The two together make up 68 per cent of Alberta's budget. Health care, being responsible for not just 43 per cent of the spending in this government, is also a system that touches everyone's lives.

While the government can talk about, you know, having done this and that consultation and talked to this and that person, and can certainly go through, like, a list of stuff, let's be clear. This is a system that took many, many years to get to where it is. It deserves debate, and it deserves opposition time, and it deserves time of all members to talk about the right way to fix it, time that this government has not granted, first of all, by imposing time allocation at the first available opportunity and, secondly, by introducing the bill so late in the session that nobody was actually able to get a good look at it and figure out how this massive, multiheaded Hydra was actually supposed to work.

12:10

The health care system touches all of us. It deserves enough time for us to go back into our communities and talk to people, talk to our family members, talk to our family members who are in the system themselves, talk to alternative providers. Like, I just want to give a shout-out to the Alex here for operating, like, one of the best primary care systems in the city of Calgary, integrating addiction and counselling and youth, you know, all of the different pieces that are right now working very disparately.

The government has made outlandish claims that we actually want the system to continue as it is. What we want is that we want the system to be fixed. This is a government that has always, over the last five years, decided to leap before it looked. This is the government of Turkish Tylenol, this is a government that put a billion and a half dollars into a pipeline that did not have its U.S. construction permits and was never going to be completed, and this

is the government that is now drawing and quartering the Alberta health care system and, unfortunately, we believe, going to reduce its effectiveness and actually hurt people. It's awful, Mr. Speaker, and I find it incredibly disappointing.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 44 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:12 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Kayande
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Brar	Hayter	Tejada
Ellingson	Hoyle	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 47 Against – 12

[Government Motion 44 carried]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's 12:30 a.m. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 28, 2024.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:30 a.m. on Tuesday]

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