



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 28, 2024

Day 58

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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Deputy Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

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Cyr
Dach
Gray
Johnson
Stephan
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my great pleasure to provide a small amount of Speaker liberty to the hon. Premier to introduce a special guest in the Speaker's gallery.

Ms Smith: I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you one of the Edmonton Oilers' star players, Evander Kane, or Kaner, as some fans call him. [applause] Wow. What I and, I can see, all of us like best is that he isn't afraid to drop the gloves. Notably, in game 3 against the LA Kings he earned himself a Gordie Howe hat trick. It was a goal, an assist, and a fight. In doing so, Kane became the first Oilers player to record a Gordie Howe hat trick in the playoffs since Craig MacTavish in 1986. Please keep it up. Let's go, Oilers. Please give Mr. Kane the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: I'm sure his conduct in the Speaker's gallery will be nothing but parliamentary.

Hon. members, I also have the pleasure of introducing a very dear friend of mine and his wife today joining us in the Speaker's gallery. Jatinder Singh Dhillon and Poonam Dhillon are visiting today from Drumheller. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has a school group.

Mr. Dach: M. le Président, je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour souhaiter le bienvenu à vous et, par votre intermédiaire, à tous les députés une classe d'élèves de la sixième année, anglophones et francophones, ainsi que leurs enseignants et parents accompagnateurs de l'école Our Lady of the Prairies dans ma circonscription d'Edmonton-McClung. Je leur demande de bien vouloir se lever pour recevoir l'accueil chaleureux et traditionnel de l'Assemblée.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to welcome to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three classes of grade 6 students, anglophone and francophone, along with their teachers and parent chaperones from Our Lady of the Prairies school in my riding of Edmonton-McClung. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a school group.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an incredible group from St. John Paul II school in my constituency. While they're not here in the Chamber at the moment, I ask the

Assembly to join me and put their hands together in support of a motion that this grade 9 group will not have any homework related to this visit.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce guests from Calgary, a friend of mine, constituent Abid Khan. He's joined by his daughters and family. He's a community advocate and influencer, runs a Facebook group with over 13,000 people, and helps people connect with jobs and needed resources. I ask Abid Khan and family to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of people from the Edmonton, Calgary, and Alberta construction associations. The following people have joined us today: Edmonton Construction chair, Jennifer Hancock; vice-chair, Ben Wagemakers; director of corporate development, Matt Schellenberger; the Alberta Construction Association executive director, Warren Singh; and from Loylton Strategies, Brookes Merritt. I ask you all to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my friend here from Calgary-Falconridge I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Devesh Oberoi, a public health scientist, educator, and community organizer. He's the founder and president of the Indian Society of Calgary, which through social, cultural, and economic support programs has impacted 32,000 South Asian Albertans since 2017. Dr. Devesh was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II platinum jubilee medal in 2022. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so happy to have a good friend of mine here today. I'd like to introduce him to you and to the Assembly through you: Kenton Cardinal. Kenton is Stew Steinhauer's chief of sales for the amazing granite carvings that you see around the city, one of which we have in our Legislature, our reconciliation garden down there. Please rise, Kenton, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the executive members of the Alberta Azerbaijan Cultural Society, including Irada Shamilova, Fatima Akhundova, Fidan Sagiyeva. The Azerbaijani community brings to Alberta the rich Azerbaijani culture, their amazing cuisine, many oil and gas professionals, and they help newcomers. Today they are also celebrating the 106th Independence Day of Azerbaijan. May I ask them to please rise and be recognized.

The Speaker: Are there others? Surprisingly, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: It's tough but fair.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today – thank you very much – to introduce to you and through you a hero of mine, and believe it or not, with all respects to Mr. Kane, who's not here right now, it's my little buddy Dane Lukan from Slave Lake. He and his dad, Ronnie, are friends of mine. I first met Dane because he was born at the Stollery hospital at the same time as my daughter Sloane. He's always been a little underdog, and every single time he exceeds expectations. He's also an amazing silver medalist in provincials at hockey this year. Please rise and accept the warm welcome.

Members' Statements

ASIRT Report on Police Surveillance of the Member for Lethbridge-West

Ms Phillips: The Alberta Serious Incident Response Team has recommended criminal charges against Lethbridge police officers who targeted me when I was a minister. I am grateful that ASIRT undertook a fulsome investigation and found what I've known for years, that my records were accessed in 2018 for no lawful purpose other than political intimidation.

The years that led up to ASIRT's findings have been a bit rough on me. I know people think I'm strong. I've been the face of some tough files in Alberta and nationally, and that is true. I have a reserve of all the strength in the world for building a better world with my NDP colleagues, but I was not prepared for how hard the years-long grind of trying to get a bit of police accountability has been on me, my family, and my love of political life. The LPS did incredible harm to my career and my reputation. They've never shown accountability or responsibility.

It also has a profound and important effect on democracy. In particular, these findings of criminal behaviour by sworn officers send a message to progressive people who might want to participate in politics: in Lethbridge you might be a police target for your views. The threat that law enforcement may violate a citizen's right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure if they don't like that citizen's politics is intolerable in a free and democratic society. The lesson for the community and for Albertans is that we have still not seen accountability for the LPS, and at some point we have to send the message that police intimidating elected officials or anyone else is intolerable.

At this point none of it's over, but I do want to issue some words of thanks to Lisa Lambert, my assistant, who has endured all of this with me in my constituency office; to Geoff Braun, my partner – it hasn't been easy on him either – to my kids and my mom, who helped me with the legal bills; and to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for all of her support and friendship.

The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice. It only bends that way if we are the ones who do the work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has a statement to make.

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Unit

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Feeling safe in your community is important to all Albertans as it allows us to live comfortably and freely, knowing our well-being and security are protected. A sense of safety fosters a sense of belonging. It enables individuals to pursue their passions and interests without fear. The safer communities and neighbourhoods, or SCAN, unit of the Alberta sheriffs continues to support police services throughout the province and help law enforcement better protect Albertans, and it's been making headlines. One way SCAN provides protection is by seeking legal sanctions and court orders to hold homeowners

accountable for illegal activities happening on their properties, as recently seen in Medicine Hat.

1:40

The unit is comprised of experienced investigators who work together to gather intelligence, conduct surveillance, disrupt and dismantle criminal organizations that pose a significant threat to public safety. Mr. Speaker, drug dealers and their activities pose significant threat to public safety and often engage in illegal and violent behaviours to maintain their illegal empires. Their actions can lead to increased crime rates, gang violence, or spread of deadly drugs like fentanyl.

Since SCAN's inception in 2008 the unit has investigated over 9,000 problem properties and has been granted 119 community safety orders. This includes using all means at our disposal to fight crime, which is why SCAN is such a valuable asset and why Alberta's government recently created six positions for a SCAN unit based in Lethbridge. In the past months we've seen drug houses closed in Medicine Hat and Calgary and more to come. SCAN's recent success sends a message to Albertans that drug houses and problem properties are not welcome in our province. I look forward to reading future headlines of its continued success.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has a statement to make.

Government Priorities

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past few months I've had the honour and the privilege of listening to thousands of Albertans as I travel across our beautiful province from Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Morley, Red Deer, Vegreville, Athabasca, Peace River. The list goes on and on. Repeatedly I hear Albertans say that they want better schools. They want to know that their children will not be forced to learn in an overcrowded classroom and that there are enough teachers and support staff. They want better health care, to be able to access a family doctor, and to know that they won't have to resort to motel medicine. They are worried about the environment. They are worried about the air and the water, right from farmers, ranchers, businesses to communities. Albertans want to know that the beautiful landscapes of Alberta will be there for future generations, not torn apart by coal mining. Families want to know that they'll be able to pay their bills, keep a roof over their head, and put food on their tables.

Albertans want an honest government that looks out for them and puts their needs and priorities first. Sadly, rather than listening to these concerns, the worries that come from Albertans – small towns, midtowns, big cities, little villages – the government is set on setting their own agenda.

My message to this UCP government is to start listening to Albertans. Albertans do not want a government that endangers academic freedoms in our world-class universities. They do not want a government that focuses on demolishing local democracy or tearing down our public health care. It is not too late for the UCP to change course and start listening to Albertans, but if you don't, let me assure you that I will be here along with my team to listen to the views of Albertans and make the change that they want to see.

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

Cold Lake Air Show

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Cold Lake Air Show is an annual celebration that brings people together from all over to my

constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul to showcase their pride in Canada's tremendous air force at one of the largest military shows in the country. This year's event is on July 20 and 21 and is especially significant with April 1, 2024, marking the 100th year of service for the Royal Canadian Air Force as a distinct military element.

Skilled pilots from around the world will be sure to amaze guests with their aerial aerobatics and planes both new and old. With over 27,000 people expected to attend this year, events planned for families of all ages, guests will be delighted to see a demonstration of the highly anticipated F-35A Lightning II taking to Alberta skies with an engine that produces 43,000 pounds of thrust and a top speed of Mach 1.6, or 1,200 miles per hour. This display will most certainly not disappoint. This is especially significant for Cold Lake, being one of the two main fighter jet bases in Canada, going through a multibillion-dollar upgrade to accommodate this amazing jet. This is most certainly anticipated by all of us. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure and honour to announce that the Premier of Alberta will be joining us for this spectacular show as well. Thank you, Madam Premier.

I can't wait for this amazing event this summer, Mr. Speaker, that showcases not just my beautiful constituency but our world-renowned air force, that continues to ensure the safety of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I look forward to seeing everyone there. Through Adversity to the Stars.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

School Construction in Calgary

Ms Chapman: People are flocking to Alberta, but this government doesn't seem to understand that when they arrive, they're going to want homes to live in and schools to send their children to, public schools. Over 90 per cent of Albertans choose public schools for their children, yet we have spent months now hearing the minister try to spin underfunded and overcrowded public schools as the Alberta advantage.

In my riding of Calgary-Beddington students who live in the catchment area for the newly constructed North Trail high school can expect two hours of daily commuting come September to get to one of the only public high schools left in Calgary that still has space available. That's because North Trail is already full. In fact, it was full the day it opened. Nine thousand additional students are projected to enrol with CBE next year. A new high school takes three to five years to get up and running, yet the board received design funding for only a single high school.

Well, we can see what the results of this government's choices will be. Five years down the road that new school will open, fill up on the first day, and we will still be running to catch up. Like a prairie storm rolling across the plains, we have watched for a long time, for five years now, as the disruptions in education have ominously stacked up. The storm is now on our doorstep, and we are facing the consequences of this government's choices. Rather than make the hard choices needed to properly fund education, they have chosen to hide, hoping the storm will just pass on by.

A single new school build funded for the largest urban board, a board that will be completely full by next year, overcrowded classrooms, underfunded complexity across the province, lack of access to specialized supports in rural schools: Albertans know the storm is here. They know the damage it will do, and even this minister can't twist things around hard enough to sell this storm as any kind of an advantage.

Collection of Race-based Data

Mr. Shepherd: In March 2022 I introduced a bill, the Anti-Racism Act, a first step to establish a framework and standards to collect data on how provincial policies, programs, and services impact and serve BIPOC Albertans, a thoughtful plan to follow in the footsteps of provinces like Ontario and B.C., who have already begun that important work. Sadly, UCP MLAs and ministers didn't even allow it to reach debate, declaring that a bill on systemic discrimination was trying to do too much too fast, creating bureaucracy and burden for the public service. They said they had a better plan, one that was already under way and needed time for consultation.

Well, contrast two years later. The UCP have introduced Bill 18, a bill the Premier says is needed as part of her personal plan for affirmative action for conservative academics, journalists, and research. The bill appeared out of nowhere one year after an election where it was never mentioned. It would create multiple layers of new bureaucracy and red tape in the public service and for postsecondaries. A bill for BIPOC Albertans: too much too fast. But the Premier's pet political project? Well, full steam ahead. Indeed, two years after the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism promised an expert report on a framework and data standards for the creation, collection, and use of race-based data, he can't even answer a simple question about it.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's concerns about her conservative friends are based on a handful of questionable anecdotes, but concerns about the needs of racialized Albertans are based on facts. The data we have shows that 71 per cent struggle to pay costs like rent, utilities, insurance that the UCP let soar. They're one and a half to two times more likely to be unemployed. They face greater barriers accessing housing and health services. But when it comes to addressing real, systemic discrimination faced by hundreds of thousands of everyday Albertans versus the claims of a few conservative influencers three provinces over, well, this government and this Premier are more interested in their elite friends. Politics over promises.

Racialized Albertans – hey, all Albertans – don't need more performative action from the government. They need a government that actually cares enough to do the work to truly understand what they need. An Alberta NDP government will.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 214, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Time Limits on Bill Debate

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, there was a time when both the Premier and I shook our heads at Tory land entitlement. But now that she's Premier, she's flip-flopped, embraced it all, and even kicked it up several notches. She's ramming through multiple pieces of legislation with little or no consultation and moving to arbitrarily quash debate after allowing barely half as much as we would have seen under other governments, including the former UCP government. What happened to everything this Premier claimed to Albertans that she believed in?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was a time when the member opposite would put Alberta first instead of parroting the talking points of her federal NDP leader. I would say that we have been very generous in reaching out to the members of the opposition to talk about how we might be able to increase time for them to have constructive input into the debate, and unfortunately they have refused. Last night we asked them if they wanted to have one-minute bells so that we could compress the amount of time that we were waiting between the readings, and they refused. It's actually added four hours of sitting around. If they wanted to debate, they should have agreed to that.

Ms Notley: Completely irrelevant assertions, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier has shut down debate from the opposition and all Albertans at least 10 times in the last four days. Our government used closure only four times in all four years of our term, and when we did it, it was after 10 times the amount of debate that this government has allowed on devastating laws that Albertans do not want. To the Premier. She has just one seat in this House. The voices of all Albertans matter. Why is she so afraid of hearing them?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have zero interest in working with us to make the laws better. They have zero interest in putting forward any constructive debate, zero interest in putting forward constructive amendments. We've offered more debate time; they've refused. We have created night sittings to give more debate time. I would encourage the members opposite to be constructive in the debate, and we'll be able to make sure that the bills get their input.

Ms Notley: It is ridiculous. Fourteen minutes is not offering more debate time, for heaven's sake.

You know, it is ironic that this Premier is subverting democracy in this House in order to subvert democracy in other houses all across Alberta. Meanwhile her own caucus is telling reporters that they don't understand her focus on these draconian laws that no one asked for, a very good question they have. To the Premier: is the real reason she's ramming this stuff through because she's going to lose the support of her own caucus members hearing from their own constituents that they don't like this?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus is unified. In fact, in the extra time that the members take between votes there was actually a push-up contest last night, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw ended up winning it with 54 push-ups. We would be more than happy to be here for some constructive debate, and we would ask the members opposite to work with us on making sure that all of the issues get put on the table.

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

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are quite familiar with the government laughing and dancing in fountains while their democratic rights are trampled. When members across the aisle were elected one year ago tomorrow, they ran on a platform of promises they've spent all session breaking. Alberta families are learning that under this Premier the Alberta advantage has disappeared. The cost-of-living crisis is made even more difficult, Albertans' wages, which used to lead the country, are not increasing with high inflation, Alberta's minimum wage is one of the lowest,

and families are struggling with the high cost of insurance. Does the Premier plan to do anything – anything at all – to actually help Albertans struggling with affordability?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the destination in Canada for affordability. That's why 200,000 people have chosen to move to Alberta from other areas of Canada, because we have the best combination of job opportunities, high wages, low taxes, and, in my opinion, the best place to live, work, and raise a family. This was not the case from 2015 to 2019 under the NDP, when we had 39 months of more people leaving Alberta than coming to it under the failed policies of the members of the opposition.

Ms Gray: Slowest wage growth in the country; lowest minimum wage in the country.

That UCP campaign platform was supposed to feature an income tax cut, but as we've come to expect from the UCP government, Albertans are now facing higher taxes and fees. This broken affordability promise comes at the same time that the UCP found plenty of tax dollars to reward their friends and insiders with no-bid contracts, higher and higher pay, more expensive gifts for MLAs and government staff. Can the Premier help clear this up? On what page of the platform does it say, "more UCP entitlements and leaving Albertans to struggle"?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has among the highest wages in the country, but it also has the lowest taxes, which means that Albertans have the highest after-tax income in the country. We don't have a sales tax here. We don't have health premiums.

The member opposite also talked about taxes. These are the things that the NDP increased, chasing out tens of billions of dollars of investment, tens of thousands of jobs. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta is not very affordable when you no longer have a job. But, fortunately, the NDP did offer a program for those Albertans out of jobs. They told them to move to B.C. to work. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the UCP's record one year after the election is higher costs, higher taxes, more entitlement combined with falling wages. Let's remember that on day one of their campaign the Premier promised she'd be bringing in a tax cut, and she promised it'd be in place five months ago. Instead, all the UCP have delivered on this session is \$400 million more taxes with the Premier's gas tax increase. Will the Premier admit that she has utterly failed to deliver on the key economic promises she made during the campaign and apologize to Albertans for promising things at election time and failing?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, our record is the fastest growing economy in Canada. Our record is the largest investment in the last 15 years with the Dow Path2Zero project. Our record is the fact that our economy is projected to lead Canada in economic growth. We are coming forward with affordability supports for Albertans, including on electricity, housing, and we're also coming forward with tax reductions, something that the NDP has never been able to do.

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

Colonel Belcher Continuing Care Facility

Ms Sigurdson: Yesterday I stood with advocates for residents of the Colonel Belcher continuing care facility. They're upset with the

UCP for the gross neglect of patient safety caused by commingling residents with complex mental health patients. What was meant to be a temporary measure during COVID has become a three-year nightmare for all involved. Seniors and complex mental health patients deserve high-quality, appropriate care at the Colonel Belcher. Residents are not getting the services they deserve. The government has been aware of this problem for years, so when are they going to fix it?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for bringing this question forward. This is a very disturbing situation, and it highlights why we do need to refocus the health care system. We really need to make sure that those who are complex and have requirements for continuing care but also have mental health issues – that we do have places for them to go to. I've asked for an investigation into this particular situation, but more needs to be done to make sure we have capacity within the overall system to deal with these complex patients.

Ms Sigurdson: In the last 12 months police were called to the facility 56 times. Residents and staff have experienced violence and are often asked to shelter in their rooms due to volatile situations. These seniors are veterans. Many have PTSD. Imagine what this is like for them and for their families, who are not only worried about their health but now fear for their safety. A constant fear of chaos should not be the norm in any continuing care facility. Will the minister apologize to the family, staff, and residents of the Colonel Belcher and immediately begin a public review and risk assessment?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to reiterate that I've already asked my department to do an in-depth investigation into this situation and continue to work with Alberta Health Services to find appropriate placements for these individuals. Alberta Health Services is the current service provider for this particular facility. Again, the reason why we need to refocus is because Alberta Health Services needs to go back to its roots of actually looking after acute care and making sure that continuing care and complex patients are looked after in the most . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.
2:00

Ms Sigurdson: I've listened to the concerns of all involved, and none of them want to vilify the patients who have ended up there. It is simple. Continuing care is not an appropriate place for mental health patients. The Colonel Belcher is a devastating example of how rash policy-making can lead to tragic results. The board chair, a distinguished veteran, no longer recommends families send their seniors there. Residents of the Colonel Belcher, staff, and families deserve answers, so to the minister: how did this happen? Who is responsible? And why, after continued requests to address the problems, has the issue continued for years?

Member LaGrange: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to reiterate that I've asked the department to do an investigation into this particular situation, and we will make sure that the results are shared with everyone so that we can move the system forward, because it is a terrible situation when we have residents and clients that are put into situations that they feel unsafe. This is a very complex individual who needs both mental health but also continuing care, and we lack facilities. We need to address this situation. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Access to Care for Patients with Complex Needs

Member Eremenko: Well, on that same theme, Mr. Speaker, for at least three years complex mental health patients have been co-located with seniors at Calgary's Carewest Colonel Belcher. This arrangement has made for unsafe living conditions for both patient groups, and it's evident that this was never meant to be a long-term solution. My colleague for Edmonton-Riverview has been advocating for the veterans living at Colonel Belcher for over a year. Today, I give voice to the 58 patients living there with a mental illness who are not receiving the care they deserve. Will the dissolution of AHS and the creation of four public health agencies solve this problem? Which of the sectoral ministers will be responsible for making this right?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that the refocus of the health care system is going to allow us to spend more energy, more time, and more resources when it comes to mental health and addiction. Happily, we continue to expand our in-patient psychiatric capacity across the province so that those, no matter where they are in a health care system across the entire continuum of care, can get the appropriate levels of care that they deserve, being Albertan in our system.

Member Eremenko: Alberta has 13 acute-care psychiatric beds per 100,000 people while the national average – coincidentally the same as the recommended minimum – is 30 beds per 100,000. The norm in Alberta's health system is to discharge patients with complex mental health concerns either back to their families or into shelters, ostensibly homelessness, Mr. Speaker. I have heard stories of patients staying in psychiatric acute-care units for two years or more. Hospitals are not homes. Where is the plan to increase permanent housing supports for people with mental health challenges, and where are these forthcoming psychiatric beds that the minister alludes to?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to inform members opposite that we have approximately 35, not 15, beds per 100,000 in Alberta, when you look at stand-alone psychiatric beds and psych beds in acute care. We're very happy to report that, between those numbers, there are over 1,600 beds in the province. This is our system. We understand there is a need to continue growing to match population growth and, obviously, increasing mental health crises in our families and communities. This is something we're committed to with the creation of recovery Alberta as a priority for this government to get Albertans the care they deserve.

Member Eremenko: According to CAMH, in any given year 1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental illness. This government couldn't even provide an estimate of how many long-term care centres have been tasked with housing complex mental health patients. A study out of the U of C just last month found that 66 to 75 per cent of people who are experiencing homelessness in Alberta have an underlying mental health condition. Why is the government so nonplussed to leave patients with complex mental health issues to wallow in a hospital unit or risk the well-being of seniors, staff, and themselves in underresourced long-term care facilities?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the side opposite might not recognize, but these are incredibly complex needs for Albertans in a grave, vulnerable situation that we have a moral obligation to care for, and

we will continue to create that capacity in the province, whether it be a continuing care space, a mental health or an addiction space to make sure that those individuals, no matter where they need care, no matter who they are, anywhere in a continuum, we can get them the appropriate level of care where they need it, which is why we're creating recovery Alberta to focus on mental health and addiction crises and to be able to respond with the capacity we need to.

Bill 18

Member Hoyle: When she was running for the UCP leadership, the Minister of Advanced Education described the Premier's agenda as "an unconstitutional delusion that would lead the United Conservative Party and Alberta down a dangerous path." She was right. But now the same minister is cheering on the UCP's gatekeeping Bill 18, which trashes academic freedom and jeopardizes our world-class universities. When will the minister realize that Bill 18 poses a risk to our institutions and remember what she stood for and vote against this awful piece of legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I had mentioned yesterday, we had a very constructive meeting with postsecondary presidents and board chairs last Friday, with the Premier actually, and we talked about the tremendous opportunities that Bill 18 will bring forward. We talked about, again, as I've mentioned so many times in this House, potential exemptions. We have a pathway forward. The engagement is beginning. We were just with the University of Alberta today, again, talking about the opportunities and research.

Member Hoyle: Given that the Minister of Advanced Education demanded an election so that Albertans could vote before the Premier implemented her extremist agenda and given that now the minister supports ramming through Bill 18, letting the Premier run roughshod over this Legislature rather than listening to Albertans who do not want this bill, and given that if the UCP is afraid to debate their bills, their bills aren't worth passing, why should Albertans trust this minister when she speaks of Bill 18, when the UCP won't let Albertans even have a debate on it?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we have spoken to Albertans. I just mentioned that we spoke to the presidents and the board chairs. I've spoken to faculty. I'm pretty sure the NDP did no such consultation or asked any of them for their feedback on Bill 18 because if they had they would have realized that there is a path forward. We are building in exemptions, and we have support for fighting for more federal dollars. What is the problem with that? Why is the NDP not on board with fighting for more federal dollars?

Member Hoyle: Given that we're speaking to the same stakeholders and not one supports Bill 18 and that we've heard about the risks of Bill 18 and what it poses to postsecondary institutions, to academic freedom, to investment, to Alberta as a whole, but given that it's not too late, the minister could agree today to stop this bill and listen to the concerns that Albertans have from every corner of this province and have expressed so, and given that she could reject the UCP's agenda of shutting down debate they don't agree with and commit to a real discussion about the impacts of this bill, my question to the Minister of Advanced Education is: will she listen and put this bill down?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I along with my caucus wholeheartedly support Bill 18. We are going to use this act to collect data.

Ms Pancholi: That sound is your soul leaving your body.

Mrs. Sawhney: We are going to make sure that it aligns with provincial priorities, and we are going to make sure that we get more federal dollars through this process. We do have support from postsecondaries. We have had these conversations with many people and faculty. I'm not sure who they're speaking to, but try talking to the postsecondary presidents and get their perspective.

Ms Pancholi: Sellout.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

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

NAIT Advanced Skills Centre

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every Albertan should take pride in our rapidly growing population and economy, especially the members across the way. Every day job creators and ambitious newcomers choose to invest and start a new chapter of their lives here in this great province that we call Alberta. With that growth, though, come new challenges. We need to build housing, expand infrastructure, and fill gaps in our workforce. Alberta needs more skilled workers. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how is Alberta's government supporting opportunities in the skilled trades?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, today I was proud to announce that Alberta's government is investing \$43 million to plan the advanced skills centre at NAIT. The advanced skills centre will deliver comprehensive apprenticeship and technology-based education and will meet the needs of industry by targeting four key sectors: construction, transportation, manufacturing, and energy. Once completed, the new training centre will increase NAIT's apprenticeship training capacity by more than 4,200 more apprentices annually.

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

2:10

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. minister for that great answer. It's fantastic to see that we're investing in NAIT. It's a valued institution that I also attended.

That said, meeting our economic potential requires more skilled workers, and job creators are increasingly seeking applicants with an education in the trades. Given the importance that industry and postsecondary institutions do play in our economy, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what feedback have you received from industry and NAIT on this \$43 million investment?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, NAIT president and CEO, Laura Jo Gunter, told us: this is an investment in our vision, setting the stage for Alberta's future. Jason Idler, COO at PCL Construction, endorsed our investment, stating: with so many projects on the horizon, the province's future has never looked brighter. From Brendan Curley, VP at Inter Pipeline, we heard: NAIT's new advanced skills centre will directly support Alberta's economic future, and I'm proud to share that many students, including Mary Beazer and Chloe Sperling, were also in attendance today at the announcement.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that fantastic answer. These are tremendous endorsements for this very important project.

Given that investing in the advanced skills centre is an investment in Alberta's future, this investment is projected to support the training of more than 4,200 apprentices annually right here in Edmonton. The resounding support Alberta's investment is receiving from students, industry, and postsecondary leaders is absolutely phenomenal. Can the Minister of Advanced Education tell us more about how the advanced skills centre at NAIT will benefit Alberta students?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the advanced skills centre will create 640,000 square feet of new state-of-the-art learning space. It will also accommodate the evolution of programming over time, allowing NAIT to meet emerging needs to support Alberta's diverse and competitive industries, and it will support the needs of workers to upskill and reskill as labour market demands change with a growing economy. With government and industry support, this project will be the largest investment made into skilled trades and technology-based infrastructure in over a decade.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order was noted at 2:09 by the Government House Leader.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Bill 21

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been speaking out loudly and clearly about Bill 21. Paul McLauchlin, the president of Rural Municipalities, stated that this bill 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 responses moving forward." But more than ignoring Albertans' voices, the UCP is also attempting to shut down debate in this Legislature on Bill 21. Does the minister agree that Albertans deserve to have their voices heard in this Chamber? And if so, will he vote against shutting down debate on Bill 21?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, what the member is saying: I can tell you that nothing can be further from the truth. We have the support, I can tell you, of Albertans. We have consulted with Albertans. In fact, I and other ministers spoke to the fire chiefs of Alberta only a couple of days ago, and not one time did they bring up Bill 21 as a concern for them. In fact, they appreciated the work and working relationship that we have with them and we're going to continue to have with them.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Paul McLauchlin stated that Bill 21 is not what municipalities were asking for and given that he also stated that Bill 21 is not helpful for rural municipalities, who are looking for collaboration and not control, and given that the minister who represents Calgary-West likes to make the ridiculous accusation that this side of the House has urban privilege, can the minister explain why he is insistent on imposing the UCP's top-down, cabinet-knows-best legislation on rural municipalities who don't support it and don't want it?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, it's a reporting process. Maybe I'll speak slower so the member opposite can understand.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Ellis: It's a reporting process. There are no additional powers. All it is is a stage process from 1 to 4. That is it. There's nothing magical about this. We're onside with Albertans, and we're onside with municipalities in Alberta.

Ms Sweet: Classy, Mr. Speaker.

Given that Albertans expected their elected officials to have thorough and thoughtful debate in the Chamber on the legislation that will impact their lives and given that our job is to raise the concerns of Albertans and those of rural municipalities who wonder where this bill came from since it didn't appear anywhere in the UCP's platform and given that this bill allows the forestry minister to take over municipal firefighters and staffing without declaring an emergency, can the minister explain why he is trying to push through Bill 21 when, clearly, the bill is not being transparent with Albertans about emergency response? Why is the government hiding the fact that they can use this bill without declaring an emergency?

Mr. Ellis: So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to start by apologizing and withdrawing the previous comment. I have no intention to insult the members opposite.

I'm trying to provide clarification. All this is is a reporting process. There's clarity and transparency. In fact, the information that we got from Fort McMurray just only a few days ago, quite frankly, is that a unified command is how you save communities. That's what we're trying to do, Mr. Speaker. We're trying to save communities. All it is is a reporting process. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

AISH Administration

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, disabled Albertans are speaking up, and they're saying that AISH benefits are insufficient to meet their basic needs. The UCP government's response is to use regulations that claw back money from AISH recipients. Here's one example: one partner goes on a leave covered by employment insurance, which results in the AISH recipient having benefits cut because EI income is clawed back. Will the minister please explain how deepening the poverty of disabled Albertans via AISH regulation makes life any better for them?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be in a government and in a province that has the highest benefits for people on AISH, hundreds and hundreds of dollars a month more than the closest province. I'm proud to be part of a government that has made sure that we index those rates to help people be able to make sure that they can meet their bills because of NDP-Liberal inflation that is impacting our province, and I'm also proud to be part of a government that is putting forward record investments in AISH, \$1.6 billion this year. We won't be lectured by the NDP, who really messed this file up.

Ms Renaud: Given that AISH is a legislated income replacement for people with severe disabilities who have demonstrated through an extensive medical assessment their permanent inability to support themselves financially and given that we now know that some successful AISH applicants are being informed that they will be required to repeat the medical assessment in two years, to the minister: why has the UCP government changed AISH eligibility by undermining the permanence of medical diagnosis and subjecting applicants to more expensive and dehumanizing processes?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's important that we make sure that the AISH program can remain sustainable long term and that it is

available for the people that need it. When we make a decision to put somebody on AISH, it is a permanent decision. It'll cost the taxpayer about a million dollars or million and a half dollars going forward. We have rules in place to be able to make sure the right people go on AISH, and we are not going to stop those rules from taking place. It's not done by the government. It's done independently. Then individuals go into the best program in the country, the highest benefits. In fact, even the federal government the other day pointed out that Alberta continues to have the most generous AISH benefits of any province.

Ms Renaud: Given that this minister needs to learn his file because there are regulations that are making life very difficult for disabled Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for St. Albert will know that the use of a preamble after question 4 is out of order. The hon. member has 15 seconds remaining.

Ms Renaud: Current AISH regulations do little more than deepen the poverty of AISH recipients and put them in dangerous financial positions. To the minister: how does creating more financial barriers and layers of bureaucracy that increase the risk of abuse for disabled Albertans make life better?

Mr. Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, the system that is used to be able to determine who should be on AISH is the same system that hon. member's government did when she was in power on this side of the House. I know she didn't do anything at that time, so it must not have been that big of an issue to her at that moment. Again, we continue to invest the most money in history, the highest rates in the country, and we will continue to make sure that the right people get on AISH. That's what you do with a \$1.6 billion taxpayer program. We have to protect against fraud to make sure that program will be available for the people that need it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has a question.

Supports for Veterans

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since I was appointed to the role of military liaison, I've spent my time meeting with Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, and their families, veterans like Brad Russell, a successful entrepreneur, or better known around Medicine Hat as the Donut Commander. Transitioning back into civilian life is not easy, and not all veterans have the same success story. Veterans need access to mental health supports and resources when they need them. We recently held our first veterans' mental health summit to bring stakeholders together to address this issue. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what is our government doing to ensure veterans have access to the mental health supports they need?

2:20

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, thank you, through you, to the member for the question. I was very glad to have attended that very first inaugural and hopefully annual mental health summit for veterans. Of course, we support heroes in mind, and through the CMHA we provide support for families of veterans as well as the Wayfinders Wellness Society. I've also directed my staff in policy to work directly with the minister and those stakeholders you brought together to see where we can improve. Of course, through family members, friends, and your local legion you have the support and connection after serving in support of your country.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are challenges that come from adjusting back into civilian life and given that some veterans are faced with homelessness due to a multitude of reasons, including dealing with mental health issues like PTSD or substance-related issues, and further given that many veterans are hesitant to use the resources available to civilians, can the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services please share what supports are available for homeless veterans and how many veteran-specific resources we have and how they will bring veterans off the street and onto the path of healing?

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, just recently we invested \$3.4 million in veterans' housing in Canada to provide 40 veterans' units right here in Edmonton, \$1.1 million for Homes for Heroes for the veterans' village right here in Edmonton, opened up 18 new units for veterans with Alpha House in Calgary, just a couple of examples of the multimillion-dollar investment we continue to make to support our veterans who are facing homelessness, which is all part of hundreds of millions of dollars that we're investing in the overall homeless file. I'm also happy to report that we've worked with the hon. member to make sure intake processes at shelters identify veterans to be able to make sure that they can access the full supports that they're entitled to for protecting our country and our freedom.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Canadian Armed Forces members do so much to protect and honour our country and province and do so out of a sense of duty and further given that we should celebrate and honour our Canadian Armed Forces members and their families throughout the year, can the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women please share how Canadian Armed Forces Day on June 2 will celebrate active duty members and veterans and where our service members can celebrate this and in perpetuity going forward?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to 1 in 10 serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces, from full-time regular force members to part-time reservists, soldiers, aviators, and, yes, sailors, too. Military service is ingrained in Alberta's DNA. That's why I will be declaring the first Sunday in June as Canadian Armed Forces Day in Alberta in perpetuity. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and I will be hosting the inaugural Alberta Salutes garden party for military members and their families at Government House here in Edmonton on Sunday, June 2.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

(continued)

Member Loyola: I remember a time not too long ago when I stood in this House and asked the UCP to take action to support my constituents who were dealing with skyrocketing utility bills. The answer that I got from the minister of red tape was that the UCP plan was to, quote, do nothing. My constituents are being hammered with unaffordable rents, utilities, and other costs. Will this government take action today to ensure that Albertans are protected during the UCP affordability crisis, or should I tell my constituents that once again the UCP plan is to do nothing to support Albertans?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. We are taking action on utility prices. That is why we moved Bill 19, to make sure that we reduce the rate of local access fees in Calgary and address the default rate across all of Alberta, particularly here in Edmonton. Not only that; we continue to work to restructure our electricity market to fix the structural issues left behind by the NDP when they destroyed our system. We are doing the work that they failed to do. Prices are coming down with more coming. I look forward to tabling further legislation this fall or early next year to make sure that we continue to serve Albertans.

Member Loyola: Given that after the former UCP campaign manager lobbied this government, they lifted the cap on insurance rates and sat back and did nothing as rates skyrocketed, in some cases over 30 per cent, and given that once again the UCP is meeting with insurance lobbyists and insurance companies trying to fix the mess that they made and given that as a result of this UCP disaster my constituents are paying more but the government won't meet with Albertans paying high prices, will the minister admit that the UCP's decisions cost Albertans and apologize for the struggles UCP entitlement has caused?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, of course, we've talked to Albertans. That's why the Premier has put this in my mandate, to revisit this item and look for long-term reforms. We did bring in the good-driver rate cap; that was meant to be a short-term policy move to provide some relief. We know there's a lot of pent-up inflation pressure on the side of fixing vehicles. We've seen what a vehicle costs nowadays, we've seen the changes with technology and bumpers and fenders and mirrors, we've seen what the supply chain challenges have brought to us, but we're looking at everything. That's why we've commissioned two reports, and everything's on the table.

Member Loyola: Given that the only action the UCP has taken to address inflation was to ensure that the Premier could get even more expensive tickets and gifts and given that my constituents can't cover their rents or pay their utility bills with UCP entitlement and given that this government is more focused on grabbing power for the Premier's office than doing anything to end the affordability crisis and given that we know that the UCP is entitled to their entitlements, will the minister commit that until this affordability crisis is over for Alberta families, he won't accept any of the expensive gifts and tickets, like box seats at hockey games, that the UCP has made their top priority?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One other item I wanted to make sure that everybody in this House and everybody in Alberta knows is that we took action on economic withholding within the province of Alberta. Those measures alone are forecasted to save Albertans over \$1 billion in the next three years, this on top of the fact that we are not costing Albertans \$2 billion like the NDP did when they exited off coal. We are doing the work that they failed to do. We are driving real change that will really affect Albertans so they can pay for their utilities and their rent and the food that they need and the fuel to get to the jobs that they can have only here in Alberta as everybody in Canada is moving here. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question to ask.

Calgary Metropolitan Region Board

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Metropolitan Region Board is a not-for-profit government corporation made up of elected officials from Calgary's metropolitan region member municipalities. Decisions made by the CMRB require support from at least two-thirds of representatives, who collectively represent at least two-thirds of the population, which has given the city of Calgary and its neighbours a veto over the more rural communities like High River. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how does this voting structure impact the decision-making process for development in the region, specifically in terms of balancing urban and rural interests?

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The voting model within the CMRB was created initially by the NDP during their time in government. I'm not even going to suggest there was any ill intent, but the fact is that it sometimes did seem to give the biggest city a – not a veto, but that's the word that was used. We have changed the appeal process so that appeals now can go to the LPRT, which none of the municipalities have any influence on. We're working to try to improve that situation, and our work continues because we think . . .

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the significant increase in development costs for developers and municipalities has led to higher home prices for consumers and given that according to the reeve of Foothills county thousands of housing starts have been lost since the CMRB has come into effect and further given that Alberta is facing a housing gap of around 130,000 units according to the CMHC's September 2023 projection for 2030, to the same minister: why are we continuing down this path, potentially exacerbating the housing deficit and its economic impacts?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that those numbers are entirely accurate. I've heard reports from some builders and developers using some of these numbers. [interjections] In fact, many of the applications – well, I'm sorry; Team Angry is yelling at me here, but I'll just carry on – talked about have not been put in yet. I hope that they will come around, and I hope that whatever sorting out on water and waste water that needs to be done will be, but in the meantime I'll continue to work with the CMRB, the municipalities and make sure that we get as many houses built as we can because nothing is more important right now.

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we all understand that the quicker the regulatory process, the more cost-effective it becomes and further given that the CMRB's approach adds time, red tape, and uncertainty to the process in rural Alberta because of their stringent rules and regulations around development, to the same minister: how does this affect the region's investment viability, especially when the metropolitan areas exert their influence into rural areas, potentially hindering growth and development?

Mr. McIver: Well, like I said, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have done is change the appeal process so that, I think, builders, developers, and the smaller municipalities get more of a fair shot.

But the other thing, too, in Bill 20 is that we have limitations on added process that can be used to artificially hold up construction of homes and other important developments for Alberta, and if Bill 20 passes, we think that will also help to speed up and streamline the development of housing, which I know all municipalities want. Everybody that I know except for the folks across seems to be in favour.

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

2:30

Wetland Restoration

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Intact headwaters and wetlands serve Albertans. Every day these ecosystems protect our communities from floods and drought. Reclaiming old roads, introducing beavers, and restoring the headwaters of the eastern slopes will increase natural water storage, but the UCP is more focused on draining wetlands to build a race track, ripping up headwaters to mine coal, and permitting the destruction of the largest boreal wetland fen in northern Alberta. Why is the minister more focused on destroying wetlands and headwaters than protecting water sources for Albertans?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely not true at all. We understand on this side of the House that wetlands absolutely do play an important role in protecting our province from both floods and drought, which we are prepared for this year. That's also why we invest in natural protections like constructing and restoring new wetlands, watersheds while also leading riparian restoration. In this year's budget, unfortunately a budget that the members opposite didn't support, we invested more than \$12 million into wetland and watershed restoration programs because we know it has an impact and helps us address these concerns not only today but into the future.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that those investments to restore wetlands are a paltry sum in comparison to what we invest in other things in the budget, given that implementing natural solutions for drought and flood is five to seven times cheaper than infrastructure solutions like dams and reservoirs, given that the UCP continually boast about their economic strategies but also continue to fund the most expensive options for flood and drought mitigation, and given that a billion dollars spent to build a reservoir isn't going to help any Albertan when there's no water to fill it, how can the minister justify spending so little on nature-based solutions and spending so much on cement and rebar?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, you know, all we hear from the members opposite is fear and smear and either/or. Our approach is all the above. That is why we invest into wetland and watershed restoration programs: again, \$12 million in this year's budget. Under our programs we've invested over \$14 million to restore 440 hectares of lost wetlands since 2020, and we are investing in drought and flood protection programs, \$125 million over five years, to help meet community needs when it comes to flood and drought mitigation. We can do both, and we are.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that those investments are not comparable, given that the minister keeps hiding behind broken processes leading to poor decision-making and acts as though increased monitoring is the solution, given that the UCP is monitoring the draining of wetlands, oil sands tailings pollution, species' populations declining, critical habitat disappearing, and community opposition to their bad decisions and given that monitoring is simply data collection meant to inform management

action and given that monitoring a sinking ship will not save the ship from sinking, will the minister commit to actually doing something to protect our environment, or is she looking to become the minister of monitoring?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, again, monitoring does help give us the data that we need to make good decisions so that we can prepare not only for today but also for future generations. Again, we're going to stay committed to protecting wetlands and making those important investments in natural protections that help support drought and flood mitigation as well as looking at infrastructure across the province to help us manage climate adaptation, which we know is a focus right across our country. We'll continue to partner with communities across the province on this important work.

Government Priorities

Member Batten: This last weekend I spoke at one of the many Enough is Enough rallies that grassroots Albertans hosted across the province in protest to this UCP government and their entitled, egocentric, and ideologically driven bills. Albertans asked this weekend: what will it take to get the UCP government to start listening? They want to know how many e-mails, phone calls are required so that they can stop forcing through their incredibly destructive legislation. When will the UCP realize they're failing Albertans?

Mr. McIver: Well, on the contrary, Mr. Speaker, we're actually serving Albertans. Bill 18 is designed to get more of a fair deal out of Canada. Bill 20 is designed to bring transparency and accountability to municipal elections and to help build more homes and municipalities through the community revitalization levies and property tax exemptions. Bill 21 is to provide better co-ordination during emergencies between municipalities and provincial emergency services. We're getting it done for Albertans, and we will continue to do that and communicate the reasons why.

Member Batten: Given that thousands of Albertans are loudly crying foul and that they're actually referring to the bills by number and given that this government continues to break promise after promise to Albertans and given that rather than tackling the affordability crisis they created, the health care crisis they created, or the overcrowded classrooms they are ignoring, they are focusing on imposing UCP ideology on postsecondary institutions, dismantling local democracy, and causing much more damage, when will this UCP government stop stomping their feet, throwing tantrums, and start paying attention to what Albertans are actually telling them?

Mr. McIver: Kind of fun to hear the word "tantrums" from Team Angry, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that we continue to work with Albertans. As the minister of public safety said, we had a wonderful meeting with the fire chiefs a couple of days ago: very much in favour of many of the things, actually showed a great deal of appreciation for co-ordinating our efforts during recent floods and fires. We're committed to working with municipalities on the regulations around Bill 21. Again, Bill 18: we're trying to get a billion and a half dollars more for municipalities. I don't know why they don't want that on the other side.

Member Batten: Given that Bill 18, Bill 20, and Bill 21 are all about power and control for this government and not for Albertans and given that under the UCP Alberta has the slowest wage growth, the highest inflation and given that Alberta is seeing the steepest rent increases in the country, making it harder and harder for

families to keep a roof over their heads, and given that Alberta has seen the highest utility prices in the country in addition to skyrocketing insurance, tuition, and so much more and given that Albertans need support now, what, when, and how will this UCP government . . .

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

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, I just want all Albertans to know that we are listening. We know that affordability is their top issue, which is why we are addressing the electricity system. Why? Because we've been hearing for years the NDP saying: "Build more renewables. They come in at zero. You'll get the lowest prices." We've done that. Last year we built 75 per cent of all the renewables in Canada. And what do we have? The highest prices ever. So is the NDP just totally misinformed and wrong, or are they actually misleading Albertans on what the truth is? We're here to do the work, to make sure life is more affordable for Albertans. That's what Albertans want. That's what we're delivering. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Family and Sexual Violence Supports

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely critical that our United Conservative government protect families within all our communities, and women's shelters are an essential part of that. It is important that Albertans fleeing domestic violence have a safe place to go when they need help. Will the Minister of Children and Family Services please share with this Chamber the details of the recent funding announcement that the Alberta government has made to strengthen women's shelters across the province, including the Interval Home in Lloydminster?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to that member for just being such a tremendous advocate for vulnerable women within his riding. You know, I'm so proud to be delivering on our campaign promise to provide \$10 million to women's shelters to ensure women fleeing family violence can receive the help that they need when they need it. Our government is providing the Lloydminster Interval Home Society with just over \$2 million in operational funding this year. This includes nearly \$600,000 to fund 13 previously unfunded women's shelter beds to increase their capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for the answer. Given that sexual assault centres are also an essential part of this government's efforts to support survivors, provide a safe place to turn to when seeking crisis intervention supports and counselling, will the same minister also share with this House the supports that have been provided to sexual assault centres in my constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright in recent years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct that sexual assault centres are a key partner in helping us ensure that survivors have access to the help and support

that they need to heal. On top of annual operational funding, we've provided Lloydminster Sexual Assault Services with nearly \$220,000 to address wait-lists for counselling services. Later this week I'll be meeting with sexual assault centre partners right across the entire province to get their input on how best to allocate the additional \$10 million that we announced last month. These are making tangible differences in the lives and families of Albertans. Again, just thank you to the hon. member for his fantastic work advocating for vulnerable women.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that family resource networks are a vital resource to ensure children, youth, and their caregivers can access supports when they need it, further given that these services are highly utilized, serving more than 48,000 children and youth as well as nearly 32,000 caregivers in '22-23, can the same minister please share with this House the details of the increases in funding to family resource networks in Budget 2024 within my constituency and the province?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the member for that great question. Budget 2024 increases the funding for family resource networks by \$6.6 million in early intervention supports, and this will improve outcomes and help keep families together. We're providing a 3 per cent increase for agencies operating and providing services through both the Lloydminster FRN and Wainwright FRN, and this includes Midwest Family Connections, Wainwright and District FCSS, and the Camrose Association for Community Living. Again, I just want to commend the hon. member for his fantastic work advocating for families in his area.

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

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 212

Organ and Tissue Donor Information Agreement Act

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 212, the Organ and Tissue Donor Information Agreement Act.

If passed, this bill would require an agreement between Alberta and the Canada Revenue Agency to give Albertans the opportunity to consent through their tax return for their contact information to be shared with appropriate organizations such as the Alberta organ and tissue registry. Opted-in Albertans would then receive information about the tissue and organ donation process and potentially sign up to be a donor to support the hundreds of Albertans waiting for a transplant. Bill 212 would fulfill the intent of Alberta Conservative MP Len Webber, whose private member's bill allowing for such agreements was unanimously passed by all federal parties, and it will expand on the 2022 bill from the Member for Highwood.

I hope all members of the Assembly will support it and allow for full debate in the House as a priority for all Albertans.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a *Calgary Herald* article from yesterday called It's Depressing Being a 40-year-old Stuck at Home: Why the Dream of Homeownership is Fading for Many Calgaryans. I alluded to this yesterday in my questions to the minister, and I hope the minister will read the article.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of an article from St. Albert *Gazette* on behalf of the Member for St. Albert. The article, in response to Bill 20: Reasons for Voter ID Changes Unclear, Fuel Distrust in Elections, Say Alberta Municipal Leaders.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite copies of an article from the *Edmonton Journal* today by Elizabeth Smythe, a professor at Concordia University in political science. It says that the bills of the UCP are An Example of 'Democratic Backsliding.'

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the May 2024 S&P global insights that highlights the Economic Impact Assessment of Canadian Conventional Oil and Gas. That excludes oil sands. The projection with the federal government imposition of 40 per cent in CO₂ emissions by 2030 results in a loss of 20.5 per cent, or \$247 billion, in cumulative GDP and a loss of 51,000 jobs between 2024 and 2035.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Member Eremenko: I submit the requisite copies of an e-mail from a constituent who writes:

I don't want a separate pension plan, or a provincial police service. I want trans youth to be supported and feel welcome and safe here . . . I want affordable housing. I want renewable and sustainable energy. I want to know that something is being done about climate change.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from Kristin from Calgary. She suffers from severe disabling hyperacusis, which is a severe painful sensitivity to all sounds. She wants to make us all aware of how our health care system fails to accommodate the needs of so many people with communication problems, and she offers suggestions to resolve this.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the requisite copies of an article from today's *Edmonton Journal* titled Indigenous Ontario Legislator to Make History, where it chronicles that Ontario NDP MPP Sol Mamakwa will rise in the legislative Chamber at the Queen's Park on Tuesday and ask a question in Anishiniimowin, known as the language of Ojji-Cree.

For the first time in Ontario Legislature they will allow, interpret, and transcribe a language other than English and French.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there are others? Seeing none.

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:09 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did rise on a point of order at that time. The time noted: the hon. Minister of Advanced Education was answering a question from the members opposite, and in doing so, it could be heard from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud something to the effect of: that's what you hear when your soul leaves your body. And then later throughout the questions it was also audible that the member said, "Sellout." I suspect those comments are directed at the Minister of Advanced Education. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). I don't believe this language is parliamentary; I believe it does create disorder, but I'll leave it in your capable hands.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw for referring to the Minister of Advanced Education as a sellout.

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

At 2:14 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order, which was not noted. As a result, the hon. the Deputy Premier in the subsequent answer did apologize and withdraw for those comments. I consider that matter dealt with and concluded.

Statement by the Speaker

Retirement of Table Officer Janet Schwegel

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to calling Orders of the Day today, I'd like to make just a couple of brief remarks regarding one of our table officers, who is here on her last shift in the Chamber prior to embarking on her retirement. Janet Schwegel has been with the Legislative Assembly Office for over 20 years. She started her career with the LAO as an input editor and quickly progressed in various roles within *Hansard* before moving into the role of managing editor and, ultimately, to her current role as director of parliamentary programs in 2019. Over the years Janet has led *Hansard*, visitor services, venue services teams through some incredibly challenging times, including the pandemic, record-breaking sittings, and, of course, election transitions. In all that she has shown resiliency, hard work, dedication, and is an absolute pleasure and joy to have on your team. On behalf of your colleagues at the Legislative Assembly Office, my office, and all members of the Assembly, Janet, thank you so much for your exceptional years of service. You will be deeply missed by all members of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, that brings us to Ordres du jour.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 18

Provincial Priorities Act

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act, legislation that defends Alberta against federal intrusion and defends our constitutional jurisdiction.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the robust debate on this bill from both sides of the Chamber. As we've come to expect, the members opposite still side with their boss in Ottawa rather than standing up for Albertans, but Albertans are seeing right through them. You see, on this side we believe that Alberta is worth fighting for and we believe that Alberta jurisdiction is worth fighting for. We believe the Constitution of our country is worth fighting for and that the drafters were pretty smart. They knew when they were giving the division of powers why they were doing it, to give to the provinces those areas of jurisdiction where we should take the lead, ought to take the lead, and have the expertise to take the lead.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

We are a province of innovators and entrepreneurs and problem solvers. We have the right solutions, and that's why we should take the lead. Mr. Speaker, I'll just give you a couple of examples for that. When you look at the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, this was a major policy innovation where we identified a problem that in order to have true reconciliation, we needed to have economic reconciliation. To have economic reconciliation, we needed to underwrite the purchase into large projects of an equity stake, which we have done. In fact, this program has been so popular that it started at a \$1 billion loan guarantee. We've had to increase it to \$3 billion, and I suspect we'll have to increase more it by the time we're done.

But look at what happened with this policy innovation in British Columbia. They also announced in their most recent budget that they were going to be setting up a B.C. Indigenous opportunities corporation, and lo and behold the federal government did the same thing with a \$5 billion Indigenous opportunities corporation. I suspect that we will see that also increase. That would not have happened without Alberta taking the lead.

It's the reason why we need to have the provinces be the innovators, whether it's school lunch programs – we've got one; 58,000 kids being fed every year on the school lunch program – whether it's dentistry. We actually have been pioneers in offering dentistry to those who are over age 65. And our pharmacare – it needs to be said – not only do we provide comprehensive coverage for those who are on our various disabilities programs, but also for those over age sixty-five 5,000 different pharmaceutical drugs are covered, and it should be a model for the rest of the country.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Those are a few examples. Let me mention a couple more. Albertan Karl Clark was responsible for developing the first successful means of separating and refining heavy oil from the oil sands. This innovation led to incredible wealth, opportunity, and benefits for Alberta, Canada, and the world, not to mention tax dollars for our federal counterparts. In fact, we could do so much more if the federal government would partner with us and give us our equal per capita share of research dollars, particularly when it comes to net-zero innovations. I'll have more to say about that in just a minute, Madam Speaker.

When it comes to entrepreneurship, Madam Speaker, we know that our province's job creators are unmatched anywhere else in the country. You may have seen a report from the Business Council of Alberta which cited that our province has been responsible for 90 per cent of the private-sector job creation in the country over the past six months. We are one of the very few provinces to have

positive business growth in the country. According to Statistics Canada business incorporations in Alberta increased 5.2 per cent whereas the combined national average saw a decrease of 2.3 per cent.

We are doing many things right here, Madam Speaker. In fact, as I'd mentioned, the federal government is the principal beneficiary of that. You may have seen that there is a recent report of finances of the nation looking at results from '21-2022. This, again, was before we had our full recovery; I suspect it's going to be much higher in subsequent years. What we have seen is that the federal government takes two-thirds of all of the tax revenue generated through personal and corporate income taxes. Let me give you those numbers: \$206 billion in that year went to the federal government; only \$128 billion in personal and corporate tax revenues went to the provincial government. Same thing on corporate taxes: \$80 billion going to the federal government, \$51.5 billion going to the provincial government.

What implication does this mean? It means we at the provincial level send \$77 billion more in personal, \$29 billion more in corporate tax: \$106 billion more to the federal government. So what do they do with the difference? They come up with programs in our areas of jurisdiction and trickle a tiny little bit of money back to us, which is never enough to cover the full cost of those programs. We've seen it on daycare, we see it when we do our analysis on the pharmacare program, we've seen it on our analysis of the dental care program, and it will most certainly be the case on the school lunchroom program.

What they need to do is just stop taking so much from us so that we can cover our own areas of jurisdiction, continue the great policy innovation that we're doing so that other provinces can learn and follow our lead. When it comes to problem solving, I would point to our progress and leadership as well on carbon capture, utilization, and storage as well as the incredible reductions that we have made in emissions of all types. This represents just a small part of what is worth fighting for, and on this side of the Chamber we are fighting for Alberta every day. Unfortunately, the federal government has been bringing in policies that put that all at risk, and many of those policies also showcase their willingness, even eagerness, to overstep their constitutional jurisdiction.

You know, Madam Speaker, when I moved second reading of this bill, I spent a lot of time talking about our Constitution, something that I am always happy to speak about, but the members opposite have neglected to even consider that an overreaching federal government has so many negative impacts on Alberta. But this legislation will put an end to their overreaching practices.

Let's recall why it is we brought through this bill in the first place. Number one, at a Council of the Federation meeting in Halifax in November 2023 the Premiers were united in the belief that Ottawa should work with the provinces, not bypass them. Premiers said they were willing to look at adopting legislation similar to Quebec's. We put that right in the communiqué. In fact, we got it printed off on-site to make sure that we had it in our care package when we left, a copy of the bill, so that we could look at how we might be able to adopt it here. I just want to give my thanks to the officials in Quebec for assisting us as we went through the drafting of this legislation. In Alberta this is no longer just talk; we are taking action to protect our constitutional jurisdiction.

Let's go back again to why it is this was necessary. We watched that the very first province in the country to get a deal with the federal government on housing accelerator funds was none other than Quebec in November, \$900 million through a joint matching program, and they are then proceeding in making sure that they identify the municipalities that are most in need of those housing accelerator funds.

Contrast that with what happened in Alberta. The Prime Minister flew in, did a press conference without contacting us, without contacting our ministers, and announced 230-some million dollars for the city of Calgary. They then also announced a similar amount for Edmonton. They did another announcement including six municipalities of various sizes. We have 350 municipalities in this province, Madam Speaker, so they left the vast majority of municipalities out in the cold.

This is not appropriate, especially now that you look at the story today that Rick Bell has written in the *Calgary Herald* quoting several council members wondering whether or not there truly were strings attached. Did they have to do blanket rezoning and risk getting unelected in the next election because their constituents are so angry at them just because they feared that if they didn't do the will of the federal housing minister or Justin Trudeau that they were not going to get that money? They're doing an investigation on that right now. No municipality should be put in that position, where in order to get a handful of dollars from the federal government, they end up completely upending their area of jurisdiction, which is to make the decisions on zoning in their own municipality.

We want to make sure that doesn't happen to any other municipality, and we want to make sure that we get our fair share of those dollars. I think we're short about a billion dollars based on what we've seen other deals be, because British Columbia also was able to negotiate another province-wide agreement and then work with their municipalities in order to ensure that those dollars are delivered fairly. We are going to continue working with the federal housing minister to do very much the same thing, because that is our objective.

Let's make sure we get, at a minimum, our equal per capita share, and let's make sure that we use our expertise and our relationship with the municipalities to identify those who need that additional help. Let's make sure that we're distributing it fairly. Here we have actually seen that in August of 2023 Alberta received a fraction of what we're entitled to, 2.5 per cent of \$1.5 billion, despite having 12 per cent of the population. They are not funding housing in rural communities or Indigenous communities. The federal government is only signing deals with select communities, which means that many communities are left out regardless of their housing needs.

3:00

Our government has demonstrated we are already on the right track. We're leading the country by having the fewest regulations and the fastest permit approval times to enable housing construction and increase the supply of homes, one more way in which we are demonstrating leadership in the country. Other jurisdictions are seeing a decrease in their housing starts. We've seen an increase. We've had more than 14,000 housing starts year to date in 2024, which is an increase of one-third over last year, and we haven't even reached the peak construction season yet. Together with our partners we're also working to provide 25,000 families with affordable housing by 2031. That's a \$9 billion investment. If we were to have a true partner in the federal government, we would not only be able to accelerate that proposal, but we would also be able to increase the amount of housing we're able to provide.

That's why these strings attached to funding are so problematic. We're already hearing about it, because we know that one of the moves that the federal government wants to make is to have stricter and stricter green building codes, that will increase the cost of housing for everyone. We are talking about an affordable and attainable housing crisis, and to have the federal government come into our jurisdiction, clearly demonstrating they do not understand where we get our energy from and trying to overlay restrictive building codes, is going to add tens of thousands of dollars to

additional home construction. That's why we do not want them putting these strings on individual municipalities in return for being able to receive federal money. Blanket zoning changes remove personal choice from Albertans as to the type of community that they want to live in, and that's what they're experiencing in Calgary now. Alberta has had successful housing programs, and the federal government should partner with us to expand and enhance them. They should not be duplicating programs.

I can tell you that they do know how to do this work because they did it with us once before. Ottawa worked with all the provinces individually. They did not work with separate health authorities. They did not go down and try to work with separate hospitals. They worked through the provinces so that they could create a fair program for delivering on their obligation under the Canada Health Act to help in providing funding for health care. We do not have a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach, which enables provinces to make decisions based on their specific needs and priorities. Instead, they worked with us on bilateral agreements so we could identify the areas of joint concern.

In fact, the Minister of Health signed off on a continuing care agreement just last week. All provinces signed on. B.C. was the first on October 10, 2023. Quebec signed on last, March 27, 2024. Reporting criteria were included in the deal for accountability and transparency, and we all agreed that if any one province was able to negotiate a sweeter deal than anyone else, then we all had clauses to make sure we got the same and the federal government treated us fairly.

Now, I know that the members opposite would like to argue that somehow this approach that we are taking is going to strain our relationship with the federal government, that it's going to result in less money for Alberta. Well, Madam Speaker, I don't know how we could get less money for Alberta than what we currently already have. They take more tax revenues from us than any other jurisdiction, about \$5,000 per person, and then in every single program they end up giving us back less than we're entitled to not only on a per capita basis but also on the basis of the growth that we're experiencing.

On the issue of housing they don't even acknowledge the fact that we have been the destination now for more than 20 per cent of newcomers coming to the country, including more than 60,000 Ukrainians, who have found safe harbour as well as opportunity in our province. In fact, we've been asking for them to acknowledge that we need to have our appropriate level of provincial nominees through the provincial nominee program. We have about the same as Manitoba, which is a fraction of our population. Why can't they deliver on giving us 20,000 new provincial nominees, which is what we've been asking for time and time again?

These are the kinds of ways in which we are treated unfairly under our Constitution, and we are going to assert that we have to take the same approach as Quebec. Quebec, incidentally: they choose 55 per cent of the newcomers that come to their province. Why have this difference in the treatment between our two provinces? You know what will happen as well. With the resettlement of newcomers it requires additional dollars to support them. We're not getting the appropriate share of dollars in order to be able to support the newcomers to our province. That's simply not fair. In Quebec's similar restrictions that they have, that we propose in our legislation, is one that they've had in place for over 20 years, and the federal government has respected those guidelines for over 20 years through different types of government. So that should tell you something, Madam Speaker. When we look at how successful Quebec seems to be in being able to get federal compensation even though they opt out of programs and say, "Hey, don't worry; we can deliver them," they have success time and time

and time again, and it's because of legislation like this that has been in place.

It also covers the same entities that are covered by our legislation: municipalities and municipal bodies; public agencies such as postsecondary institutions, school boards, and health agencies; other legal entities that receive more than 50 per cent of their funding from the province. If you're getting more than 50 per cent of your funding from the province, then the province should have some say in how those dollars are spent. Agreements are still made, money still flows, but Quebec's provincial jurisdiction and priorities are respected.

Now, let me just say a word about our postsecondary institutions. Ottawa's priorities are not Alberta's priorities. Alberta has been funding targeted enrolment expansion based on Alberta's labour market in order to ensure industry and job creators have the skilled and professional workers that they need. In fact, the Minister of Advanced Education just announced a major expansion in supporting NAIT that will enable them to train 4,200 more new apprentices. That is the approach that we need to take in Alberta. We have massive new projects that are going to need to be built, not the least of which being a Dow Chemical petrochemical plant, which is going to be 6,000 to 8,000 workers that are needed there, plus all of the new workers that we're going to need to be able to keep up with our housing requirements. This is the priority that we have.

Ottawa provides funding specifically in other areas that are not urgently needed in our workplaces and our economy. Ottawa specifically funds programs, initiatives, and research that furthers their ideology, and that ideology is often contrary to Alberta's interests, like the plastics ban. Ottawa has also bypassed the province on various issues related to international students, despite the province being actively at the table in meetings. I think we were all surprised when we heard that the federal government was coming through with a new approach to cap international students, and lo and behold – guess what? – under that cap, because they were going to deliver them on an equal per capita share finally, we ended up getting a higher entitlement of international students. Maybe we should have passed a piece of legislation like this sooner so we could have gotten fair treatment sooner.

I do want to just mention that when we talk about the kind of funding that the universities, especially our large research universities, want to have, they put forward a proposal with our support: \$50 million in committed funding from Alberta Innovates as well as \$7 million from the provincial government on a net-zero initiative so that we could fund research into building out the hydrogen economy, doing carbon capture, utilization, and storage, finding other ways to capture emissions and reduce them. It was put forward. They went through the process. It seemed like it was all going to be going their way. It's in partnership with the U of A, the U of C, the University of Lethbridge, Athabasca University, in partnership with NAIT and SAIT, because they're going to need to apply this research as well. We have \$100 million on the table, and they were asking for \$100 million from the federal government, and they said no. They have no idea why.

But I can tell you that we have 12 per cent of the population and we only get 9.5 per cent of federal research funding. They do not match the things that we are interested in supporting, and they also neglect the areas where we have demonstrated that we are at the table and asking them to partner with us. This is the reason why we need this type of approach, because we will get more of those dollars to fund the research priorities of our universities that are also in sync with the needs of our economy.

I should also mention, Madam Speaker, as you know, that in other provinces we've seen Ottawa spend hundreds of millions of dollars funding so-called safe supply. Safe supply is illegal in

Alberta, and we will not be pursuing this response to addiction. We do not believe there's any such thing as a safe supply of heroin. There's no safe meth. There's no safe fentanyl. We're seeing growing evidence in other provinces that these pills prescribed by the federal government have become a currency to trade for drugs like fentanyl, and then they are ending up in the hands of younger and younger kids. These programs are putting more highly addictive drugs on the streets, making them more accessible to create new users.

This is the kind of thing we cannot allow the federal government to force through on their own, but I can tell you the kind of innovation that we're doing in our province that I sure would like to see the federal government match us on, maybe even fund us on, and maybe even do the same in their own facilities. I was just at the Red Deer Remand Centre on the weekend spending some time in the therapeutic living unit, which is where about 10 men have been going through intensive therapy through our recovery-oriented system of care. They're starting at 7 o'clock in the morning. They're working on themselves until 8:30 at night. They're connecting with each other. They're connecting and making amends for the debt to society they have to pay, making amends for the hardship they've put their family through. And they are amazed that we're investing in them. They asked me the question: "Why are you doing this? Why are you investing in us this way? No one else ever has." And I said, "It's because every single one of us has a family member or a friend who's gone through this."

3:10

There are two pathways. You either go down the road of continued addiction and death, or you go into recovery and you start a new life. We want to give all of those folks a new lease on life, and it's working. We now, this past week, just unrolled our fourth therapeutic living unit in our corrections facilities. No one else in the country is doing this, but they should. Once again this underscores the reason why you need to leave these decisions to the provincial level of government. We can try some things, and when they work, we can do more of them, and when they try something and it doesn't work, like in British Columbia, where they have tried safe supply and it resulted in chaos on their streets, chaos in their hospitals, they said: "You know what? We're going to try something different this time." In Toronto they wanted to go down the same path of decriminalization. Doug Ford said, "Heck, no," and the federal government, to their great credit, said: we're not going to allow that to happen.

But, again, that is the deference to the provincial governments that needs to be shown. We're the ones who have the gauge on what's happening in our communities. We're the ones who experience it first-hand, we are the ones who are seeing it every single day, and we're the ones who can try the new things that become the innovations that others are going to be able to use. This is why we have to make sure that we assert provincial jurisdiction, why the federal government is best in a role of being a funding partner for us so that we can identify shared jurisdiction and shared outcomes and we can work on those together. They should not be coming in here and working to actively subvert the approach that we want to take. They should not be actively trying to do workarounds on the entities that we create through our legislation or that we fund principally through the decisions that are made in this Chamber.

Madam Speaker, Albertans will know their priorities better than the federal Liberals or the federal Liberal-NDP alliance ever will. That is why we are so focused on working to keep Alberta's priorities front and centre rather than ceding those priorities to the Liberal-NDP alliance, that seems to focus all its time on working

against every single one of Alberta's priorities. It's not unreasonable for us to believe that Alberta should be eligible for our fair share of federal funding for roads, for infrastructure, for housing, for health care, for research, and for other priorities that matter to Albertans. In fact, that should be the expectation. At a bare minimum we should be getting per capita funding. But in areas where we have higher pressure, because we are the place that is creating most of the jobs and we are the place that is attracting so many people from across the country and giving safe harbour to people from around the world – there are some areas where we actually should get more than equal per capita funding, but at the very minimum we should be getting our fair share.

It's good governance to ensure that we are taking responsibility of all of our areas to govern. We can defend our constitutionally mandated jurisdiction and still be a good partner in Confederation. I would argue that we are a very good partner in Confederation. Federalism works when all parties respect the jurisdiction lines drawn up by the Constitution. But right now it's the federal government who refuses to respect those jurisdictional lines. It's the federal government who is not being a good partner in Confederation. Madam Speaker, the Provincial Priorities Act seeks to make these lines clear and keep Ottawa focused on national issues while we will focus on provincial ones.

We want them to build the Ridley Island terminal as a way for us to export more of our products to market. Trade is a federal responsibility. Ports are a federal responsibility. Instead, they say no, but they want to tell us how to run our school lunchroom program. It is completely backwards, Madam Speaker. Ottawa does not and cannot understand what matters to Albertans like our provincial government does.

Our government's primary focus is the well-being of our province, the communities within our borders, and the people who live within them. The legislation that we put forward will enable us to ensure that we are advancing Alberta's priorities, not Ottawa's priorities. We believe that federal and provincial funding should be spent collaboratively on things that Albertans are asking for. This legislation will help ensure that Albertans get their fair share, that it's spent on the projects that will make a real difference in our province. That's why I'm pleased to move third reading of the Provincial Priorities Act, Madam Speaker.

I'll adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

Adjournment of Spring Sitting

45. Mr. Williams moved on behalf of Mr. Schow:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2024 spring sitting of the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

The Deputy Speaker: This is not a debatable motion.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 45 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:16 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	Smith
Dyck	McDougall	Stephan
Ellis	McIver	Turton
Fir	Nally	van Dijken
Getson	Neudorf	Wiebe
Glubish	Nicolaides	Williams
Guthrie	Nixon	Wilson
Horner	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Pitt	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Batten	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Brar	Hoyle	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Eremenko	Kayande	Wright, P.
Gray		

Totals: For – 48 Against – 16

[Government Motion 45 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 18

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

The Speaker: This is a time allocation motion, which permits five minutes for a member of the Official Opposition to respond. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow intends to do so.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here we are again: another time allocation motion. I've been struck, especially given the late night, the one late night that we've had so far, just being here, standing in this House, as a child of immigrants, as somebody whose parents really came from a place where it would be impossible for me to have this role, by what an amazing honour and privilege that it is to have a voice. To literally be paid by the taxpayer to have a voice for the people in my community is so incredibly humbling, especially so much as this is a province where so many are voiceless. You know, it's really more than just being a representative. I get to represent. I am a part of so many various different communities who are here.

I mean, look, Mr. Speaker, debate matters. Clearly, we just saw this when the Premier spent 25 minutes of her time debating this very bill, Bill 18, and the reason she did that was because words matter, and the words that she says in this House matter. What we as an opposition and what the people of Alberta, through us, through their representatives, are asking for is the same opportunity to be heard. Sadly, when debate is cut off in the way that it is, before we have had the opportunity to actually make the arguments in debate that we think our constituents want us to make, then it really does subvert our democracy. It makes it so much more difficult for everyone to bring this province together.

This institution matters. You know, like, sometimes I'm very unclear about exactly how it matters, but it has existed for 800 years, and it exists in the way that it does and it has always existed the way

that it does because this has been the best system that we have figured out yet for how to resolve our disagreements and move forward. By saying, “Look, big parts of how this institution is run are just not all that important anymore,” when only maybe about a dozen members of the opposition get to speak on a bill, it means that we’re not really having the best results, and more importantly we’re clearly not getting a social consensus. I very much fear about the rise of polarization, the rise of conflict that really comes out of the failure to approach our democracy seriously and try and use the tools that we have that have worked for centuries in order to create a democratic consensus.

Mr. Speaker, through you I’d like to urge every single member of the caucus on the other side to, please, very seriously consider. By all means, support your bill, pass it, move your agenda, but give us a chance to speak.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 42 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:39 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Batten	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Brar	Hoyle	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Eremenko	Kayande	Wright, P.
Gray		

Totals: For – 46 Against – 16

[Government Motion 42 carried]

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 20

Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment is on the floor. Actually, I think it improves the bill. It allows the cabinet to remove a councillor by order of vote of the electors that elected the councillor to determine whether the councillor should be removed. It’s not a new power, but indeed it is an expedited path to the authority that’s already been there with the provincial government.

Again, Madam Chair, this is a power that we always hope we don’t have to use. We hope we never will, but history has taught us that it’s possible that that will be required. An example is what we were required to do in Chestermere. The details, for those folks at home and maybe some in the Chamber: if you go to alberta.ca/chestermere, there is a large volume of information on what transpired there, and that process took quite a while.

Again, we never hope to have to go to that extent, but should we need to, this and future governments will need the ability to do so. We’ll always have the ability to do that, but if circumstances require that it be done a little more quickly, then that is now enabled.

The ability in the amendment to overturn a municipal bylaw is not a new ability; it’s something the government has had forever perhaps but definitely for a long, long time. Again, we hope to never have to use this authority, but in the last couple of years it’s had to have been used a couple of times, most recently with a bill that was in the House this session. The affordability minister talked to the city of Calgary about the extremely – extremely – high taxes on electricity, and the city of Calgary promised to correct that situation. They passed an amendment within the city, but they attempted to correct the severely high taxation as of 2027, which seems like not in the spirit of what was requested, so the minister put a responsible piece of legislation before this Assembly to correct that to at the end of this year instead of two years later than that.

4:00

I guess what I’m saying, Madam Chair, is that even though government dislikes doing these things and prefers not to, from time to time a municipality makes decisions that require it. Again, this is not a new authority but indeed a somewhat expedited path to the authority should that authority be needed.

The other example in recent time where a bylaw has had to be overturned is near the end of COVID restrictions. When the government removed mask mandates, the city of Edmonton chose, irresponsibly, in my opinion, to try to become the Health ministry and require a mask mandate within the city of Edmonton. At that time we had to put a piece of legislation before this Assembly in order to not allow that. That was okay, Madam Chair. I suppose it was unfortunate that Edmonton did that, but it was able to be done because the House was sitting.

The reason this amendment is important is: what if something of that nature was done in the middle of June or July and the House isn’t going to sit for several more months? Then a very bad decision by a municipality might be in force and causing problems for several months, or at great expense we might have to try to reassemble this House in the middle of summer, and that would be expensive, unfortunate. While I don’t feel sorry for any of us MLAs if that was to happen, I do definitely feel sorry for the staff, the clerks, the security, the other people that work in this building, if they perhaps had to come back suddenly from perhaps a well-earned vacation, a vacation that for some, you know, they might have had booked for two years with their family. These are reasons why these amendments are required.

The other piece of the amendment is of course to make the bill come into force not upon passing but when it’s proclaimed. The simple reason for that, at least one of the reasons for that, is that currently there are some by-elections going on in Alberta. Of course, in the same way that most people would say that you don’t

change the rules in the middle of a game, whether it's a soccer game or a hockey game or a baseball game, whatever game it is you want to think of—well, an election is quite a bit more serious than a game. It is certainly a competition, and it seems wrong to change the rules in the middle of a game called an election, too. That's the reason for that part of the amendment.

Madam Chair, I hope that the members of this House see the wisdom in passing this amendment, and thereafter I hope they pass this bill. It's a good bill that will be in the best interest of Albertans. We have of course committed to consulting with municipalities and Albertans on the regulations that will underpin the legislation, and we have every intention of keeping that commitment.

With that, I will not take more time right now, and I encourage folks in this House to vote for this important amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the minister for his comments in our time-allocated debate. You know, Bill 20: the government has put forward some amendments, but how did we get here? We got here because prior to bringing a bill into this place, we had no consultation with key stakeholders. The Rural Municipalities association and Alberta Municipalities are both opposed to this bill and the amendments that have been brought forward.

I'm going to propose an amendment to the amendment. The government amendment does not go far enough. The amendment to Bill 20 from the government in relation to the ability to remove a councillor or amend or strike a bylaw is inadequate and still done within nebulous terms such as government interest, and it's done in cabinet . . .

The Chair: Hon. member—sorry—I hesitate to interrupt. Perhaps I should have a copy of the subamendment before you speak further to it.

Mr. Kasawski: Yeah. It's here.

I'd like to table this amendment, and I have the requisite copies, Madam Chair. I'd love the page's assistance. Thank you so much.

Madam Chair, I kept the original, thinking it was a keepsake. Now I know that's not what it is.

The Chair: This will be known as subamendment SA1.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have a 64-page bill here that changes multiple acts within the municipal affairs statutes, and more time needs to be spent on it, and more consultation needs to be made on it. The proposed amendments we have seen: sections of it should be struck. We have clear indication from RMA and Alberta Municipalities that they want to have us bring this back into the legislative process so that we can work on making this a better bill. The only people who want this seem to be the UCP, who, we have seen, want to control everything all at once, and they want to strip the democratic rights of local residents in municipal elections in Alberta.

The Chair: Any members wishing to join the debate on subamendment SA1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on subamendment SA1 as moved by the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:07 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Batten	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Brar	Hoyle	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Eremenko	Kayande	Wright, P.
Gray		

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 16 Against – 44

[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Chair: We're on the amendment. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I'll try to be brief. In the comments made before the subamendment was attempted, a couple of things that were said were untrue. It was said that there was no consultation. Madam Chair, in recent days, after statements from across the aisle saying the same thing, I actually tabled the Local Authorities Election Act consultation, which is on the government's website, and the Municipal Government Act consultation, which is on the government's website. That's not the only consultation we did. The folks across are well aware that the consultation was done, so when they keep repeating things that they know are not true, I kind of feel the need to stand up and correct the record, so that's what I'm doing.

The Chair: Are there any other members to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We are in Committee of the Whole on Bill 20, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. I'm seeking members to the bill. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. On Bill 20 I'd like to offer another reasoned amendment. I've got the requisite copies here along with the original.

An Hon. Member: A reasoned amendment or a reasonable amendment?

Mr. Nixon: No. It's committee.

Mr. Kasawski: Oh, maybe it's not. It's an amendment.

An Hon. Member: There you go.

Mr. Kasawski: There you go.

I'm offering – I did, but I maybe don't . . .

Mr. Nixon: You can't do a reasoned amendment.

An Hon. Member: A reasonable amendment.

Mr. Kasawski: There we go. It's a reasonable amendment. Let the *Hansard* record show that I have a reasonable amendment. [interjections]

The Chair: Okay. Order. Order. Order.

Wait till I have a copy, hon. member.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

You may proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment strikes the sections that enable political parties. No one has been asking for this. The majority of Albertans are opposed to political parties. We are looking for a less partisan world. They're opposed to political parties in municipal elections. The reason the UCP are proposing this is that they want to have, it seems, every level of government loyal to the UCP or their Conservative counterparts. The UCP want to have zero dissent and freedom amongst Albertans.

We know that there is opposition to making the lives of municipal councillors more difficult by making it more partisan, and we want to maintain our current system of democracy at the municipal level. That is why we have proposed this reasonable amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The hon. opposition member has moved this amendment, and let me say that I don't support it. I think that he did say one thing that I think I agree with, that people want the process in municipal politics to be local. I'm paraphrasing, so I'm sure I'm not getting the words exactly right, but my intention is to not change what the hon. member said.

But let me say that what people do want is accountability and transparency, and these sections are meant to deal with that. The fact is that in the last election there was about \$1.6 million spent in Calgary by the local unions supporting nine candidates. There was at least \$400,000 to support another candidate by the business community. Madam Chair, when the behaviour is very much like a political party, you need to call it what it is, but what's missing is that with political parties, including ours and the ones across the aisle, the rules require there to be accountability and transparency and reporting on the money that comes in and goes out.

This amendment, of course, would continue to allow a lack of transparency and a lack of accountability, which is why our government won't be supporting it, because on this side of the House we are for transparency and we are for accountability. I will be voting no for this amendment and encouraging all colleagues in the House to do the same.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A2.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

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

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Batten	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Brar	Hoyle	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Gray	Kayande	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

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	Rowswell	Yaseen
Jean		

Totals:	For – 15	Against – 43
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back, with no amendments before us in Committee of the Whole, on Bill 20. I see the hon. Member for Sherwood Park rising.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. Happy to rise again to speak on Bill 20, and I have an amendment to propose, with all the requisite copies.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. The integrity of our democracy is being challenged, so we would like to amend Bill 20 to reinstate the ability to vouch for another individual's identity. The change in vouching in Bill 20 is intended, it seems, to disenfranchise Albertans and will limit the ability of anyone not on a permanent list from voting. The UCP might say that the permanent voter list is a good thing, but it does not provide an updating of the list for local elections, so it's not working with our local communities to make sure our local democracy has the best resources and the best list available.

The bill does not provide the ability to be added to the list on election day. So if you've just moved to town and you don't have any address locally, too bad. If you lost your ID the day before the election and you'd like to still vote, exercise your right, too bad. Maybe your driver's licence has expired, like it has for many seniors. Too bad. Maybe you're houseless. You'd like to vote? No. Too bad.

Vouching is an acceptable means of increasing access to democracy, and this change by the UCP is a step in the wrong direction. Alberta Municipalities recommend that the ability to vouch for another elector be maintained in the legislation, and we are concerned that it is being narrowed. Additionally, it is worth noting that it will create confusion for voters since vouching is accepted for provincial and federal elections. It is a system that has a high level of integrity, is not abused, and does give people the opportunity to vote, and for that reason we are presenting an

amendment that will reinstate the ability to vouch, as we do vouch in provincial and federal elections. So that will change Bill 20.

I hope that will be accepted by all members of the Assembly.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs on amendment A3.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the hon. colleague that moved the amendment for his thoughts and efforts there. I'm going to make an assumption, and I realize assumptions aren't guaranteed to be true. The assumption I'm making is that the hon. member, while I won't accuse him of having anything but good intent, perhaps doesn't understand what we're trying to do in the legislation as well as we'd prefer that he did.

The thing is that vouching is rarely used. That's a fact. It has a place. The place that, really, most vouching has been done in the past is still allowed, and that's vouching for addresses. Now, where that's important is if someone recently moves into a municipality and there's somebody near them that could say, "Yes, this woman, this man moved into this municipality; I can vouch for that," and they'd be able to vote. That's a legitimate reason.

The other reason. Currently the most common form of ID that's used at election time is the driver's licence, and many times the driver's licence doesn't actually have the street address. In many rural parts of Alberta it'll say, you know, "Post office box 456789," whatever it happens to be. It's hard to know, for the person with that on their driver's licence, which municipality they actually live in or which city, county, town, village they live in. So vouching will continue to be available for that.

The other thing. I think the hon. member that moved the amendment – and I'm sensitive to this, and I actually appreciate his concern for this. We are making a commitment as a government to those who might be homeless, that might be low income, that might not have a permanent place to live. The minister of seniors and social services: his ministry has actually been the lead on this. When we dealt with the illegal encampments in Edmonton and worked with the Edmonton police to get people out of danger in those encampments – and we have now the centre that they go to. Say the word for me, what the centre . . .

Mr. Nixon: Navigation centre.

Mr. McIver: Navigation centre. Thank you.

That word slipped my mind. I'm sorry, Madam Chair.

We get people ID pretty much, Minister, the same day?

Mr. Nixon: Instantly.

Mr. McIver: Instantly. There you go. Okay.

I appreciate the concern on this, hon. member with the amendment. Our government is making a big commitment to make that ID available, basically instantly or as close as we can. Our commitment is to make sure that everybody who lives in Alberta, is a Canadian citizen, and 18 years old that wants to vote can.

4:40

I actually appreciate the hon. member's concern for this. The hon. member may not be aware – and it would be no fault to the hon. member – how committed our government is to this. We're going to hold ourselves to a high standard to try to get everybody that wants ID to have ID before the next election.

I genuinely appreciate the concern, but our government is making a commitment to make ID much more easily and quickly available than it has been in the past, and in the next, I guess, about a year and a half, between now and the next election, we've got to make

sure that what we can do now in Edmonton we can do in many other places across the province. Again, I won't criticize that concern. I think that's a legitimate concern, but I'm just saying that we are determined.

On top of that, Madam Chair, the other thing that we're doing as government that, while it's not in the amendment, does speak to the hon. member's remarks is the expansion of special ballots. In past municipal elections there were two or three accepted reasons to have a special ballot. When this next municipal election comes, the only reason you need is that you want one. You don't have to prove that you're out of town working. You don't have to prove that you're in the hospital. You don't have to prove it. You could just say, "I want one," and we will provide a form where you can get one. Again, even if you have mobility problems, if you're going to be out of the province working or out of the province on vacation or maybe just don't feel like going outdoors on the day of the election and want to get your vote in ahead of time – it could be because you're helping somebody in this Legislature try to get re-elected – it doesn't matter. The point is that you don't need a reason other than the fact that you want one. People will be able to get a special ballot ahead of time, get it in the mail, and make sure that their vote counts and will be in. We're going to make a bigger effort to do that, too.

For those reasons, I won't be supporting the amendment despite the fact that I think some of the reasoning for it was well intended. I think other things that we have in the legislation deal with those concerns. For that reason, I won't be supporting it, and I suggest that other members of the Legislature also choose not to do so.

Mr. Nixon: I just want to take a moment to rise and build a little bit on what the Minister of Municipal Affairs said, because I think it's important to make sure that members understand the facts of how that voting mechanism would work when it comes to the homeless. As the minister said, it's commendable to see the member ask that question. The reality is that the minister is correct. First of all, with the navigation centre in Edmonton, working with Service Alberta, we could deliver actual full-photograph ID instantaneously right there at the facility. People can leave with the ID. But we also work that way through all of our homeless shelters throughout the province, where we can bring a temporary ID, working with Service Alberta, so anybody could receive their identification immediately going through that process.

The other thing that we do that's really important – the minister may not know this, but I think it would be helpful for him as he's talking about this work for the municipal election – is that we have created the ability to be able to use our shelters, which is where individuals that are homeless often are actually living and it's their home, as an address. They use that not just for voting; it's a way to be able to do mail. You know, one of the challenges in our world is that, of course, you need somewhere to mail something to to fill out almost every form, not just associated with government but associated with almost everything. Being able to provide a place that somebody can be able to get that information to: it certainly addresses it.

I also think it's worth pointing out – I mean, it was interesting to see the amendment, but as the minister just pointed out, all of the issues around vouching still happen. It just is, you know, another indication that the Official Opposition is not actually taking time to read the legislation. They probably should take a little bit of time to make sure that their amendments actually are to change things that would need to be changed, not just for, you know, general purposes.

I mean, they made it clear that they've got a lot of amendments to bring forward, but spending time on amendments that actually are already happening would be counterproductive, from my

perspective. But I do really appreciate the member bringing up that work that's taking place around the navigation centre process.

The other thing that is really important to make sure that we continue to keep at with Bill 20 is the work around affordable housing, which is not getting a lot of debate time in the Legislature. I suspect that's probably because it's one of the best parts of the bill. It's really good news. It continues to see massive red tape reduction that is resulting in some of the largest construction numbers that we've seen take place. It's another reason why we've got to make sure this bill passes, because, as we know, the homeless, which the hon. member just brought up, are very much depending on us continuing to be able to create more infrastructure and to develop that process.

But again, back to the hon. member's amendment, I would strongly encourage us not to vote for this amendment, one, because the things that the hon. member has indicated that he is concerned about are able to still continue and there are already really clear structures in place for how we are able to make sure that the homeless can receive identifications. I think, Madam Chair, that's also a reason why, hopefully in the future, we could see the Official Opposition support some of the measures that we're trying to do to be able to get people into locations like that, because what I can tell you won't happen is that we can't do that process when individuals are in temporary places, right? As the minister said, when you're dealing with dangerous encampments, there clearly is no way that we'd be able to produce ID or give any sort of an address, not only to be able to help somebody to be able to vote but to be able to get them their income support checks, access to things like AISH or other things that they may need just to be able to function or to be able to get a step up when it's going forward.

Lastly, also, I would say, Madam Chair, as a rural Albertan I really think I'm just happy to hear that Municipal Affairs is taking into account that issue about rural addresses. It is by far one of the biggest concerns that you see in places like where we live. I mean, I live at the last road just west of Bergen, nothing between me and Banff national park, and we certainly don't have a postman that comes out there, so we have to use the postbox inside town. You know, lots of organizations: they get very confused when they leave the urban area and you can't give that actual, physical address. If you get to see a physical land description, it would be a lot on your licence, so PO boxes are how we have to communicate and how we are able to get things like letters, and also, obviously, that is what is on our driver's licence. It certainly works for where they're sending a speeding ticket, so I don't see why it would not work for when we would want to, you know, be able to go vote, to recognize where we live.

You know, it's interesting. Even in my hometown there's one postal code. I mean, all of those urban guys would have – I don't know how many postal codes the hon. minister of postsecondary would have in her constituency, but the town of Sundre is just T0M 1X0 for the entire town, so there's not a lot of discrepancy between it.

Then the last thing I would say is that, you know, we also just give out the last four digits of our number, because the first three are all the same, too, so if anybody says it's 7922, it just means it's 638.

Anyhow, I appreciate it, but I don't think we should vote for this amendment at all.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be really brief, although the government likes to take up all of the time. We just received an urgent e-mail from ACFN urging the provincial

government to extend the rights to vote in local elections to Indigenous Albertans. Clearly, the government has not consulted with Indigenous communities.

Most Canadians would be shocked to learn that there are still places in Canada where it's illegal for Indigenous people to vote in their local elections. In Alberta and some of the other provinces Indigenous people who live on-reserve that are connected or surrounded by municipalities or regional governments are ineligible to vote in their local elections. This means that Indigenous Canadians are disenfranchised when it comes to local . . .

Mr. McIver: That's not true at all.

Ms Sweet: It is true.

In British Columbia the issue is resolved by incorporating urban reserves and the boundaries of municipalities and regional district governments while still preserving the rights and titles of band council. With the introduction of Bill 20, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, the Alberta Legislature has a rare opportunity to right this historic wrong. Extending the rights to vote for all Indigenous Albertans would be a giant step forward.

ACFN has proposed a simple amendment to the Alberta Legislature that would allow Indigenous Albertans to vote in local elections. Passing this amendment would end the legislative session on a positive note and send a strong signal to Indigenous Albertans, says Chief Adam. It is ethically and legally the right thing to do.

Mr. Wilson: Well, I don't know that I agree with what I just heard, because I had people from all over the province voting for me just the last election that were Indigenous people, and they could vote at any election booth, same as anyone else. I'm not sure if this is some other province, but I'm pretty sure in Alberta you can vote wherever you want.

Ms Sweet: Call Chief Adam. He just sent me the e-mail.

Mr. Wilson: Well, I'm just saying that I know that people voted for me all over the province, and I know that they could do it. I'm just saying.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate?

Mr. McIver: Listen, I appreciate the hon. member across reading the e-mail, and I appreciate the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations, but let me be sure. I believe Indigenous people can vote across Alberta in municipal elections. If it turns out I'm wrong – and I've been wrong before – if we don't fix it today, we'll fix it before the next municipal election. I don't think it's true, but we'll be happy to fix it if it turns out that it's true. I know we bent over backwards to make sure Indigenous people could vote in the referendums and such in the last municipal election. We'll bend over backwards again to make it possible. If it turns out I'm wrong, I'll fix it. I can't fix it today, but we'll fix it before the next municipal election if indeed that is the case.

4:50

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, given what the minister has just said, we do have an opportunity in third reading to do a recommittal to fix this problem. Will the minister commit today to going to a recommittal?

The Chair: Any other members to join debate? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: No. As I said, we will do the research. We'll find out what's true and what isn't. I don't think that a recommittal is the way to do it, but there is a fall session, there's a spring session before the next municipal election. If that is indeed an issue, we will fix it, and I thank the hon. member for twiggging us to it. Like I said, while I think I'm right, I've been wrong before, and we'll double-check.

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

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to simply say: you know, Chief Adam is a great constituent of mine, and he and his friends on the reserves have had plenty of opportunity to meet with the government over the years, and they continue to do so as well as with myself. They have input on virtually everything. Our Minister of Indigenous Relations has also funded our Indigenous communities in the billions of dollars in regard to the AIOC grants. They continue to be partners. We have done some things with our Métis friends, as an example, in regard to settlements that are not widespread across the nation. I would say that we do an exceptional job of ensuring that our Indigenous peoples are consulted with. That's all.

Thank you.

The Chair: Other members to join the debate on amendment A3?
Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:52 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Batten	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Brar	Hoyle	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Eremenko	Kayande	Wright, P.
Gray		

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 16 Against – 44

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: There are about two minutes remaining in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just back to our last discussion about Indigenous members' ability to vote. Maybe, it was suggested, the minister should go back to his meeting on March 26 with the AFCN. In that meeting it was brought up, this issue, so it would be a worthwhile thing just to go back to the meeting minutes from that meeting.

Madam Chair, I have an amendment to offer on Bill 20, and I have the requisite number of copies and the original for the pages to bring forward. This amendment . . .

The Chair: Sorry. Hon. member, just wait until I have a copy of the amendment before you proceed.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A4.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, the death of truth is a statement that we hear about and we are dealing with in the context of our world, and what it leads to is . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt – I really do – but pursuant to Government Motion 40, agreed to on May 23, 2024, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 20, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, I must now put the following questions to conclude debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Batten	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Brar	Hoyle	Sweet
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Eremenko	Kayande	Wright, P.
Gray		

Against the motion:

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
Horner	Nixon	Wright, J.
Hunter	Petrovic	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen
Johnson	Sawhney	

Totals: For – 16 Against – 44

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 20 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:03 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For:

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

Against:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips	
Batten	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.	
Brar	Hoyle	Sweet	
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada	
Eremenko	Kayande	Wright, P.	
Gray			

Totals: For – 43 Against – 16

[The remaining clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 21

Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: I seek members wishing to join the debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise and to speak to the emergency preparedness act given that I haven't had an opportunity to be able to do that and we are now in time allocation.

I do have an amendment that I would like to introduce, and then I will speak to it.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.
Hon. member, you may proceed.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Now, the reason that I've introduced this amendment is that within the changes to the four pieces of legislation that are in this bill – first, the changing of the democratic process with trying to change the election dates, the changing of the Emergency Management Act, changing the forestry act, and then changing the Water Act – in those two pieces of legislation, the emergency act and the forestry act, we clearly see this government starting to play around with municipal staffing, the ability to direct municipal staff, including firefighters and their additional staff, in case of an emergency or if the minister so chooses under the forestry act without having to deem that there is

an emergency. What the government has also done in this piece of legislation is removed the ability or the opportunity to reimburse local authorities if there are any costs that are incurred because of those decisions that are being made.

So what I have done, because we've seen it in three different sections within the legislation – I am moving it on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. I know the government doesn't like to hear this. Really, they get louder and louder when I talk about the facts of the legislation because clearly none of them have read it, but the reality is that there are four pieces within these acts where the government has changed the wording around compensation. In one line it says that they can. Another line says that they don't have to. Another one says that they shall. It really just depends on what piece of legislation you're looking at and then what section you're looking at.

5:10

I am amending the section where it says, "unless the Minister makes an order under [the subsection]." We're striking that out. "The Minister, by order, [may] reimburse the local authority for any compensation caused to be paid by the local authority under subsection (1) due to an action of the Minister." That needs to be put back in the bill. The government can't download provincial responsibility and provincial thought and action onto the municipalities and expect municipalities to foot the bill.

I would encourage the government to just be honest about what they're trying to do. Put this back into the legislation to ensure that municipalities know that if they have a wildfire in their areas, they're actually going to get compensated for it.

The Chair: Any members wishing to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the member opposite putting forward an amendment. The problem with the amendment, of course, is that the bill merely clarifies what already exists. When it comes to dealing with the finances and everything, when it comes to fighting a wildfire or doing any other emergency act, there are already processes in place within the existing legislation that contemplate the fees going back and forth between the municipality and the provincial government. This just clearly identifies that and clarifies what's already existing. There is no change there, so there's no reason to pull these things out.

Again, as has been said multiple times already, this bill is to clarify things, to make things extra clear between the municipality and the provincial government on what happens during an emergency in the province of Alberta. I think we all have to agree that when it comes to an emergency, we want to be able to make sure that things are clear, for starters, but we want to make sure that we have all hands on deck and make sure that we're not creating any kind of a situation where we don't have the ability to make sure that we are able to respond to an emergency both as a municipality and as a provincial government. That's exactly what this bill does.

Again, this amendment is not necessary, so I would suggest that we vote this one down. Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Seventeen million dollars is what Parkland county was owed from last year's wildfire. It took almost 11 months for that county to be reimbursed for those wildland fires because they had to keep going through a review process to see if the province was going to be willing to do anything.

If the government is serious – and I’ve heard this from both the minister of emergency preparedness and the minister of forestry. If this is about clarity for municipalities to understand the reporting process and to be able to ensure that municipalities understand how everything is going to go, then by putting in, “The Minister, by order, must reimburse the local authority for any compensation caused to be paid by the local authority under [the section] due to an action of the Minister,” it’s pretty clear that the province is going to pay it if they direct and decide on behalf of a municipality that money needs to be spent. So for clarity purposes, to the ministers who want to clarify the process, which is what this bill is to do, let’s clarify it: must reimburse local authorities. Easy as that. Accept the amendment, please.

The Chair: The hon. minister of emergency preparedness.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I read this, “due to an action of the Minister,” I certainly appreciate the members opposite thinking that I’m directly in command and making the decisions on the ground in particular incidents, but that’s just simply not the case. Certainly, the government of Alberta and the Minister of Forestry and Parks have incident commanders who work very closely with municipalities. We have, of course, the Alberta Emergency Management team in the government of Alberta. Certainly, as written here, “action of the Minister,” I would say that this is, quite frankly, inaccurate.

I would also argue, as my colleague has stated before, that if there is a decision that has been made by the government, which would include the actions and decisions made by Alberta Emergency Management or that of forestry, then, yes, of course – we have been saying this. We’ve been very public about this. If these are decisions that have resulted in a cost to a community, then the government will be responsible to pay for this.

I certainly encourage everyone to vote this down. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:15 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Schow
Boitchenko	Loewen	Schulz
Bouchard	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Lovely	Sinclair
de Jonge	Lunty	Singh
Dreeshen	McDougall	Stephan
Dyck	McIver	Turton
Ellis	Nally	van Dijken
Fir	Neudorf	Wiebe
Getson	Nicolaides	Williams

Glubish	Nixon	Wilson
Horner	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Rowswell	Yao
Jean	Sawhney	Yaseen
Johnson		
Totals:	For – 15	Against – 43

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 21. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let’s try this again. The government has said that the whole point of this bill is reporting. It’s about transparency. It’s about ensuring municipalities know when things need to happen and to make sure that the reporting structure works and all the things although we haven’t seen an issue yet this year, Fort McMurray being a good example, of how the command works and how communication was working and all of those things.

5:20

What we do see in this new piece of legislation is that the minister of forestry will be able to take over municipal firefighter resources without declaring a state of emergency. So that’s a fun new fact. That’s really open communication. That’s really being transparent and ensuring that Albertans understand what’s going on and really talking about the reporting system.

So let’s fix that. I have an amendment which I’m moving on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, what this amendment does is a couple of different things. The first one is to ensure that the minister, because it is clearly – I mean, as much as the members opposite and the ministers opposite want to say that it’s not actually them doing the direction, the legislation specifically refers to the minister. So when I’m referencing amendments and I say, “The minister,” that is how the legislation is written; therefore, it is the minister who is ultimately responsible, to clarify that point.

It does say under section 4(7) as well in section 5(8) that there is an opportunity for the minister of forestry under the amendments of the forestry act – not the Emergency Management Act; we’re now moving into the second act. We’re amending two acts again in this omnibus bill. I’m talking about the fact that when we look at this, the minister of forestry would be able to take control of municipal firefighting resources without declaring a state of emergency. Not only that; it would require the municipality to be responsible for the loss of damages, which we’ve talked about, which I tried to change. The reality of it is that that needs to change.

The other piece that needs to be changed is that for some reason in this legislation the government decided that they wanted to move to municipal districts or an urban municipality definition and not just municipalities, which is a very interesting legalese way of trying to create distinctions and definitions around supports and who has authority. Let’s change that. We need to move it back to just municipalities. There doesn’t need to be a distinction between rural municipalities, which was one term, municipal districts, or urban municipalities. That starts to become really fancy when you start to take over authorities of staffing in municipalities. We’re going to treat everybody the same in the province. They’re all municipalities. We’re going to work with everybody the same by making this change.

We're also going to ensure that because of the reporting system and the transparency that this government is trying to create, we're going to let Albertans know when this happens by ensuring that the minister has to declare an emergency before using these powers.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any members to join debate on amendment A2? The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Yes. Again, looking at this amendment, it's definitely unnecessary. Again, we talk about this over and over again, about transparency. There seems to be a concern over taking over firefighting. Well, in the province right now level 1 would be normal operations, which would be a municipality fighting the fire on their own. Level 2 would be mutual aid, which is where the provincial government is asked by a municipality to help out with the fire. Level 3 would be unified command, where we have both the municipality's firefighter leads and the provincial government's Alberta Wildfire leads in the same room with unified command. And then level 4 would be Alberta Wildfire taking control over the entire fire. That's the way the process works now.

That's why with this Bill 21 we want to make sure that each one of those levels has some criteria that can be used to identify the step-by-step process. That's why Bill 21 is so important, because everybody will be aware of that process and what the criteria are to go to the next level. When we have Alberta Wildfire controlling a situation currently, then the municipality's firefighters continue to work with Alberta Wildfire. I believe the municipality would want that to happen because they want to have as much opportunity to fight the fire as possible, and having the most people and the most experienced people, which would include the municipality firefighters, on the scene would be the way they would want to have it happen.

Again, these are changes to the Forest and Prairie Protection Act. When it comes to the identification of a municipality, we have to make sure we include Métis settlements, too, in this. We want to make sure we don't leave our Métis people out. Currently, the way the legislation is, the ones that were in the forest protection area were included, and the ones that were in the white area weren't included. We're making sure it's clear that we're there to protect the Métis people, whether they're in a forest protection area or not.

Now, as far as having to declare an emergency, Madam Chair, I think we want to make sure that in an emergency we can act. When it comes to fighting fire, we don't want to wait for processes to happen and things to unfold and go through any kind of process; we want to make sure that we can act effectively, efficiently, and quickly. I think we're in a good position the way the bill is written now. I don't believe that these amendments are helpful. In fact, I think they're somewhat counterproductive to what we're trying to accomplish by making sure that we are able and have the legislation behind us to be able to fight wildfire in this province.

We came through a year, last year, where we had a record-setting year, with 2.2 million hectares burned. We had tens of thousands of people evacuated. We want to make sure – and I think that's what the people of Alberta want. They want to make sure that they feel confident that we're ready and able to do the job. So we wanted to make sure that this legislation came forward this spring, because we want to make sure that we're ready to go and make sure that this clarity is there.

Madam Chair, when I talked to people that were directly affected by the fires this year and had to look them in the eye, people that had lost their homes in these fires, people that had their work, their lives for weeks totally disrupted – when I got to meet with them one on one and we asked them, "What was the biggest issue that you've seen?" that is where Bill 21 came from, from that input from regular

Albertans that were deeply affected by the wildfire and lost their homes, had their lives disrupted. That's why we came up with Bill 21.

This Bill 21 is good the way it is. This amendment is not helpful. In fact, it's hurtful. Thanks.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to the amendment?
Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:28 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Haji	Phillips
Batten	Hayter	Sigurdson, L.
Brar	Hoffman	Sweet
Ellingson	Hoyle	Tejada
Eremenko	Kayande	Wright, P.
Gray		

Against 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
Horner	Nixon	Wright, J.
Hunter	Petrovic	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen

Totals: For – 16 Against – 45

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Seeking speakers to Bill 21 in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Ms Wright: Thanks, Madam Chair. Pleased to stand in this House to speak about Bill 21, the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. We've heard many concerns from many different folks, including, of course, my colleagues, who are concerned with the change in the election date, so on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall I have an amendment to introduce.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Wright: Thanks very much. To begin, what this amendment does is that it repeals section 38.1(2) and instead substitutes:

- (2) Subject to subsection (1),
 - (a) election day for the general election immediately following the coming into force of this subsection is October 19, 2026, and

(b) election day for each subsequent general election is the 3rd Monday of October in the 4th calendar year following the immediately preceding general election.

Madam Chair, this amendment seems to me to be an entirely reasonable way forward. Certainly, given the uniformly almost perplexed response from many Albertans at the time that the bill was introduced, it is, in fact, an amendment that I and my colleague would have hoped might have been introduced by this government itself. The amendment is fairly simple. It simply seeks to establish an alternate date for the next provincial election. Rather than October 18, 2027, it's October 19, 2026.

The idea inherent in Bill 21, this idea of buying extra time, adding six months to the fixed election date as it now stands, one needs to ask: to what end? The government, by doing so, is overriding its own fixed election law and unilaterally deciding to extend its mandate. No consultation with Albertans, no election that Albertans might have expected.

Honestly, it's not lost upon me, the irony of ironies, that we're talking about an extension of this UCP government's time in office, time this government wishes to gift itself during a week when we've seen the opposite, Madam Chair: time allocation after time allocation after time allocation. Time allocations designed to simply limit debate, to limit the voices of the Albertans we all represent.

Madam Chair, Bill 21 clearly sets the conditions for this government to take just a wee bit more power than Albertans bargained for. It changes the process of our elections, that democratic process, and by extending this UCP government's time by that additional six months before the next election would be held, we certainly understand that Albertans didn't ask for this. They didn't ask for the election date to be changed. They didn't expect it coming out of the last election. While one can certainly understand the need for flexibility given the very real experiences and trauma that folks experienced during last year's fires during the time of the election – folks living under evacuation notices, folks having to evacuate, being away from their homes during that election campaign – the suspension of many of the election campaigns, of particular election campaigns was absolutely the right thing to do. It protected Albertans. There's no dispute about that.

The instability, the worry, the fear, the concern that was caused by that emergency was immense for all those Albertans forced to live through those circumstances, so it does make sense that a government would want to look at a potential change of date to account for all sorts of emergencies, some perhaps created by climate change: fire, drought, flood, and, of course, a pandemic. But the question before us is really: why extend six months later? Why the need to hang on to power for that additional length of time? Why not just simply fix the date earlier? Set it for the fall of 2026, as we are proposing to do in this amendment. That, in fact, would seem to me to be the more reasonable, thoroughly democratic option.

We certainly know that, overall, this UCP government has a little bit of difficulty with consulting. We know this change in election date speaks to the continuance of that pattern that we've seen with so much of this recent legislation, because it's about consolidation of power. That's what the additional six months is about. But, again, Madam Chair, Albertans didn't ask for this. They didn't ask for the upending of when our next provincial election was supposed to be. They didn't ask for time allocation either. Albertans do not want six more months of this government, a government that's fixated on legislating things they did not campaign upon.

For all these reasons, then, I urge members, including those opposite, to show good faith and support this amendment.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I know my colleagues, the ministers, are going to have something to say about this.

I've heard lots of conjecture. I've heard lots of people from the opposition. Calgary-North East, the MLA from there: he's talking about my area. The MLA from Edmonton-Manning is talking about my area. Mayor Allan Gamble is from Parkland. He's literally my mayor. Reeve Joe Blakeman: he's my other guy, and Wade Lewis on the other end for Yellowhead. I have the fortune of having five counties under my area that I get to interface with, three of which last year were under fire.

During the campaign when the election kicked off – in all fairness to the member from your constituency, you weren't there either. I was out there in the middle of the night dealing with evacuating people, and you know who else wasn't there? The candidate you were running against me, who was your former ag and forestry minister. He wasn't there either.

So we were out there in the middle of the night helping people move, looking at all the pain and anguish of them, these little old folks getting moved in the middle of the night until 2 in the morning. Anthony Giezen: he was there. He was the local councillor from Yellowhead. The MLA for West Yellowhead was on the way, except he smoked a deer on the way down, coming down from his country to get to Evansburg, Entwistle. We were all there.

When you're talking about what you need to do as an MLA, Madam Chair, to the other members, you need to be there for them. I'll tell you full well that those folks, our people, the ones we represent, want us there in those emergencies. And you weren't there on the phone either at 10 o'clock at night, 11 o'clock at night, dealing with three Reeves when they were trying to decide if they were going to declare an emergency, calling out for us as MLAs to reach out to our Premier to declare an emergency because they were being overrun. Their mutual aid benefits, the resources they had: they were being overrun. They didn't have an option unless they threw the flag up in the play and said: here, come help us out.

You weren't there when there were sorties flying over your house for a month, because all the helicopters were based out in Villeneuve. You weren't there. You weren't there when people were calling to ask you if you could get dozers or if you could drop helicopters in so they didn't burn out by Shining Bank. These are people I grew up with. These are people that work there. These are our grandparents. You were not there. I held three separate town halls.

5:40

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Using language like "you" is particularly not helpful. Please direct your comments through the chair. More like "the members," that sort of thing, would be helpful.

Mr. Getson: Yes, Madam Chair, and thank you. As you can tell, this is very passionate and very near and dear to my heart. These are people from our communities. The members opposite were not there at the three town halls we held. The members opposite didn't hear the anguish in people's voices. The members opposite weren't there for the compensation of when we worked through the details, which takes time when you're reimbursing landowners and going through all the damages that were done when you put in firebreaks and fireguards. They weren't there when we saw the inefficiencies in the system. They weren't there for the lessons learned, that we pulled together to put into Bill 21.

It's not by happenstance that I put Motion 505 forward to talk about the impacts of forest fires and the prairie fire act and how we need to deal with things. What I've heard is lots of rhetoric, jumping

up and down saying that it's the climate crisis. They weren't there to deal with the real problems of the day. They weren't there on Sunday, Madam Chair. They weren't there on Sunday when the chief, the actual president of the Alberta fire association, who is my fire chief in my area – they weren't there when chaplain Chris White asked us to be on stage with them to talk.

You weren't there to hear any of the feedback on Bill 21, and you know what? We didn't hear any negative feedback. What we heard time and time again was: "Thank you for all the work you're doing. Thank you for working with us. Thank you for hearing . . ." And this member opposite is chuckling. I don't recall seeing that member anywhere there either, Madam. Not to point her out, but she's chuckling. Chuckle, chuckle, chuckle.

We took the feedback from the town halls, and our forestry minister and my colleague MLA were out in Wildwood – and I grew up in that country, and they don't tolerate fools very much. They're pretty direct folks, so if you want to see a product of that environment, you're looking at him. They want direct answers; they want things taken care of; they want their voices to be heard. These are the same folks that fired up their tractors. They were out there plowing up the fields. They were there behind the lines, doing all this stuff, Madam Chair. If we stood up in here and listened to all these amendments coming forward and if we stood up in here and delayed this bill any more, we would be going against our consultation and what we did with our folks in our areas.

This isn't something that should be politicized. This is something that should be embraced so all Albertans can benefit from our lessons learned, so we don't repeat mistakes, so we don't have a bunch of smoke piking up in the atmosphere, so we don't have a bunch of problems out there so people are going out of their homes, so we have people working together, a staged gate process to have a check and balance so it isn't based on three people having an emotional conversation in the middle of the night to declare an emergency so we can get the trigger of the next event to get the resources available.

For crying out loud, folks, if there's one thing you want to do and you want to filibuster on something else, go for it, but this isn't one to do it. This is the thing that we need to get through to help people, to make sure we don't repeat mistakes, so I implore you. Members on my side, I know you're listening. Let's get past these amendments, get to the bill, pass this thing so we can actually do some good this year, and we can hang our hats on something, hopefully, that we all did together to actually make a difference to help out grandpa and grandma and those communities so they can be there when we need them most.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. minister of emergency preparedness.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on the amendment to Bill 21. The big UCP government strikes again. With Bill 21 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.

Just one year ago, during the 2023 provincial election, this government spoke an awful lot about the prospective size of their government, with promises of cutting red tape and implementing small government. Bill 21 is the embodiment of big government. Bill 21 is yet another example of this government's stubborn commitment not to consult stakeholders on a critical issue. My question is: what is the problem this government is trying to solve? It is a solution to a nonexistent problem, yet another example of the

Alberta government spending time on a bill that has no real, material impact on the way Albertans live their daily lives.

This legislation shows a deep level of distrust of municipal leaders, emergency responders, and front-line heroes to keep Albertans safe during a crisis. Alberta municipalities have had enough of this government's unwillingness to act in a collaborative manner. Municipal authorities are prepared and trained for special circumstances, including local emergencies, and of course the Alberta government can support once called upon.

As stated by the president of the Rural Municipalities association, 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 . . . last year, it leaves us wondering who is controlling the policy direction of this government.

He continues:

Municipalities manage wildfires outside of the Forest Protection Area. This includes taking the lead in coordinating a response, as well as responsibility for the actual firefighting work . . . If the Government of Alberta insists on intervening in fires outside the FPA without a municipal request, they must take on all the costs of fighting these fires. In 2023, municipalities outside the FPA that responded to wildfires were consistently frustrated by a lack of provincial capacity support when they requested it. It is hard to see how giving themselves more power to intervene will address the fact that they were not prepared to help municipalities outside the FPA last year.

The RMA is opposed to allowing inter-basin water transfers except in the most dire of situations. As written, Bill 21 opens the door to transfers in situations where other solutions may exist . . . Additionally, we are very concerned that decisions made in a water emergency would be exempt from authorizations and not be eligible for appeal. Speed matters in emergencies, but so does making the correct decision, especially given the environmental and public health impacts of controlling water. The RMA wants to be an active partner in managing water emergencies, but Bill 21 allows the province to cut municipalities out of the process.

Madam Chair, President McLauchlin is absolutely right. Community leaders in municipalities across Alberta know their local context, and I actually heard that from the member opposite just a few minutes ago. These folks know their communities and have worked tirelessly for decades to ensure that their teams have the skill sets needed to rise up to the challenge for emergencies. It seems the provincial government right now is the vinegar that calls the lemon juice sour. Why is our government so obsessed with controlling things that aren't theirs to control?

Madam Chair, rather than repeatedly challenging Alberta municipalities, why isn't this government focused on working in a collaborative manner? Alberta is full of immensely talented individuals and is home to some of the world's brightest minds. I hope that the office of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services could consult more with them and talk to them and speak to the RMA and really work in a collaborative manner. I really felt the sincerity of the member opposite just before me on moving things along, but it has to come with consultations and with understanding the local context.

5:50

As elected representatives much of our time is spent in conversations with the constituents we serve. Every day we hear

their feedback. My inbox is actually exploding with e-mails and requests. I'm sure you're all receiving the same e-mails because I'm copied on them, every single e-mail to repeal these bills because of the way they're infringing on our democracy.

Madam Chair, I cannot support this bill. I do support the amendment, and I really call on the members opposite to do the same and scrap this bill and listen to their constituents.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just for the record, for those of you who do not know, an FPA is a forest protection area. I think it's just important to make sure that everybody is aware of that. I know I learned that from the hon. minister of forestry.

I just want to, of course, add and say thank you. I want to thank all of the rural MLAs, especially those who were returning or those who were in the process of trying to be elected. I can tell you how difficult it was. For those of you in the House that do not know this, when the writ is dropped, you cease to become an MLA. You know, these wonderful men and women who were out there advocating for their communities were doing so because they are good people and out of the goodness of their hearts. I can say thank you. Thank you on behalf of the people of Alberta.

Now, I will say this on behalf of my good friend the hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks. We were put in a very difficult situation. Neither one of us had the ability to campaign, but we believed that the greater good was the people of Alberta. Both he and I and the Premier made a choice. The choice was to provide the leadership that was required to steward us through one of the most challenging times in Alberta's history, the first time in Alberta's history that we actually had to declare a provincial state of emergency.

Out of that, we had lessons that were learned. Out of those lessons that were learned, through talking with people that were involved, like my good friend the chief government whip from Parkland county, learning from that, saying, "You know what? We need to push this election date to October of that particular year" – these were the sort of things, the feedback we were getting. We were getting that from Albertans, and we were getting that from municipalities, and we were getting that from the people that we interacted with during the most difficult time in Alberta's history. One of the things that we said – and I know the minister and I have talked about this as well as the Premier – is that we don't want to put anybody through anything like this again. We're coming from an absolutely, I would say, genuine perspective to say: no; we don't want to do this.

I thank you for this amendment. We are not going to accept this amendment. We're going to continue with what is in the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to the amendment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 21 at this committee stage just for the few minutes that we have remaining. Of course, we have not had enough time for this bill, for Bill 18, for Bill 20. In fact, this is a great injury, in my view, to democracy.

Why are we here? Time is what gives the public a window. What we do in this House is opaque. The traditions are, well, some 800 years old. Bills are difficult to read. The fact is that even speaking through the chair is something that is quite foreign to the general public. It also appears to be foreign to a number of the members that are here as well. Even those rules make what we do here somewhat inaccessible to the general public. Bill stages, committee

stages, all of that: what it is designed to do is to give the public time to understand what legislators are doing, to bring our jobs back down to earth, to make sure that the people that we were all elected to represent have time to grapple with the pressing business that we are undertaking as a Legislature.

That is not what is happening in this Legislature at this time. I have never seen in my many, many years in and around this Legislature, not just as a sitting member but also in the years that I spent as a staffer back when we had two and four MLAs, an abuse of democracy such as we have seen in this last session. I have never seen a government so enthusiastic to hand-wave away the legitimate concerns coming from the public, to hand-wave away the legitimate concerns coming from the Rural Municipalities association.

As I have said, there may be some things, especially this Bill 21, to commend it. There may be some lessons learned from emergencies. Folks across the way are not the only ones who have ever had to deal with an emergency. We dealt with the single-largest evacuation due to forest fire in Canadian history, and we did so in a way that supported those folks, that made sure that those debit cards were there, that ensured that we got the federal assistance that we needed. They are not the only ones and they won't be the only ones into the future because these sorts of severe weather events are going to continue to happen, unfortunately, whether it's flood, whether it's drought, and we need to be prepared. There are ways that maybe this legislation does speak to those challenges, but this is not that because the stakeholders have not been fully informed. The public does not understand what the government is trying to do with this legislation.

Committee of the Whole is the time to grapple with some of the amendments in good faith, not in a time-allocated way, to understand what might be happening with the other aspects of this bill, to really grapple with this question of what it would do to the ecosystem to have emergency interbasin transfers for water, what that would actually do to our ecological health across the province, yet we see none of that. We see an unprecedented attack on the institutions of liberal democracy in Alberta. It is a crying shame. No wonder there are folks across the way who are now standing up to go and, you know, run off to talk to Don Braid about how they're worried. This is not the government's agenda. This is not what they ran on. No wonder they've got restive MLAs. No wonder folks are starting to ask grumpy questions from the backbenches, like the Member for Livingstone-Macleod did earlier today.

This all comes in the context of hundreds of thousands of sole-source contracts, of a government that is merrily embracing the concept of paying for access, that has appointed an Ethics Commissioner who was a rank partisan, who was demonstrably unfit for this job. There's nothing wrong with being a partisan. I'm a partisan. I'm proudly a partisan. It's probably why I shouldn't be the Ethics Commissioner, Madam Chair. Yet that's what we have seen in this House, assault after assault on the principles of liberal democracy. The only way that it gets better is if we elect a New Democrat government in 2027.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Williams: I stand only to say that on this side of the House, Madam Chair, regardless of what journalists believe, we stand united and proud behind our Premier as Conservatives, behind Bill 21, and our entire legislative program. We will continue to represent Albertans.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Well, I've got about 60 seconds that I want to just use to read a little bit of the bio for the current chief of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency. I'd like to hear from the members opposite about what is inadequate about this exceptional individual, who is responsible for CEMA in the case of an emergency, that they don't think that in our municipality, the biggest city in the province, Chief Susan Henry is not equipped for the job, why they think that they know better than Chief Susan Henry.

[She] was appointed Chief of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency . . . in 2020 and has been with The City since 2001.

Prior to the role, Susan was the Deputy Chief of CEMA since 2015, where she was second-in-command. She was

responsible for disaster risk reduction, community education and outreach and business continuity. She [provides] leadership to Canada Task Force 2, an all-hazards disaster response team, into one of the leading six heavy urban search and rescue teams in Canada. In addition to creating national and international relationships, Henry was also responsible for the management, training, development and deployment of over 150 highly skilled volunteers.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. The clock strikes 6. The committee is recessed until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	1653
Introduction of Guests	1653
Members' Statements	
ASIRT Report on Police Surveillance of the Member for Lethbridge-West	1654
Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Unit	1654
Government Priorities	1654
Cold Lake Air Show	1654
School Construction in Calgary	1655
Collection of Race-based Data	1655
Notices of Motions	1655
Oral Question Period	
Time Limits on Bill Debate	1655
Government Policies and Cost of Living	1656
Colonel Belcher Continuing Care Facility	1656
Access to Care for Patients with Complex Needs	1657
Bill 18	1658
NAIT Advanced Skills Centre	1658
Bill 21	1659
AISH Administration	1659
Supports for Veterans	1660
Government Policies and Cost of Living	1660
Calgary Metropolitan Region Board	1661
Wetland Restoration	1662
Government Priorities	1662
Family and Sexual Violence Supports	1663
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 212 Organ and Tissue Donor Information Agreement Act	1663
Tabling Returns and Reports	1664
Statement by the Speaker	
Retirement of Table Officer Janet Schwegel	1664
Orders of the Day	1664
Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 18 Provincial Priorities Act	1664
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 20 Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024	1669
Division	1670
Division	1671
Division	1674
Division	1674
Division	1674
Bill 21 Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024	1675
Division	1676
Division	1677
Government Motions	
Adjournment of Spring Sitting	1668
Division	1668
Time Allocation on Bill 18	1668
Division	1669

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