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The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 28, 2024

Day 58

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Irwin
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Wright, P.

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Chair: Ms Lovely
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Petrovic
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Chapman
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Shepherd
Sinclair

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Bouchard
Ceci
Deol
Dyck
Hayter
Petrovic
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Wright, J.

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Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

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.

Hon. members, before we resume this evening, please be aware that in accordance with Standing Order 32(3) the first division called in Committee of the Whole this evening shall have a 15-minute interval between division bells. After the first division the interval between division bells on all subsequent divisions during this meeting of the Committee of Whole shall be reduced to one minute.

Bill 21 Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: There are seven minutes remaining, and we are on amendment A3. Are there any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Going back to the amendment that was presented to the House before we left for dinner, it's interesting that through this bill there were so many different pieces of legislation that were brought into one piece under the guise of emergency preparedness response. An election is not part of that.

Now, what I find very interesting is that if the government was being genuine and really believed that this needed to change because of the fact that we are having wildfires during election periods in May, then I don't think there would be a dispute about that issue. But the reason that it doesn't make any sense is that what this government is actually doing is using their entitlement as the government to extend their mandate an additional six more months just because they've decided that that makes sense. Now, if the government was genuine and wanted to actually adjust the election date so that we could have an election outside of those events, then the government would do the right thing, which is move the election date back to October 2026, not give an additional six more months in their mandate.

That's what this amendment does. It asks the government to be honest. It asks the government to not try to take advantage of the fact that they have the ability to change legislation, to respect the voters of this province, and maybe do something that makes sense but makes sense in the sense of not allowing them to have a longer period of time to continue to introduce bills, as we have repeatedly heard throughout this Chamber day after day after day since we've been sitting, that Albertans don't want.

If the government really believed in being honest with Albertans, they would admit that this has absolutely nothing to do with wildfire, it has absolutely nothing to do with emergency response, and it was just slid into this bill as a way to distract from the other pieces of legislation that this government has put into this omnibus bill, which is basically taking over all of the emergency response, taking over the staffing of municipalities, including their wildland firefighters but also additional staff, and removing any of their responsibility when it comes to financial compensation. That's the big part of this. There's also the piece about the water transfer and looking at this government just arbitrarily deciding when they

should start intervening and using those tools. They hoped that Albertans would be like: "Oh, no, no. The rest of this is fine. Let's just focus on the fact that they're going to try to change the election by six months."

If that was true and if that was the genuine intent of the government, then they would just accept this amendment and they would be willing to say: "Okay. We'll accept the amendment. We'll make the election in 2026. We'll do the right thing. We won't extend our mandate, and we'll also acknowledge that this bill is nothing but a power grab to just take over resources because the government didn't hire up enough people."

We heard from the member, actually, just before we took the dinner break talking about his experience in Parkland county during the wildfire season last year. I believe that that member has genuine concerns, and I believe that he had some really traumatic experiences last year. I don't think we should minimize some of the words that he was saying in this House, but what I did hear the member that represents that area say is that there weren't enough resources, that there wasn't enough equipment, that his municipalities were coming to him to ask him to advocate to this government, that they were asking him to ask the Premier for help, and during that period of time he had silence. That's a big problem.

But the reality is that this bill doesn't actually address any of the concerns that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland brought up. It was about resourcing, and it was about availability of staff, and it was about availability of equipment. This bill isn't going to make any of those things magically appear because the issue is that the government has to hire enough people to be able to respond, they have to have enough equipment to be able to respond, and they have to be able to do that any time that municipalities ask for that help. So the concerns that the member brought up during his piece of the debate were extremely valid.

There have been issues that the opposition has been bringing up throughout the last six months saying that this government wasn't ready and didn't have the resources, so he's right in those pieces, but what the issue is here is that we don't see any of that being corrected within this legislation. We see a government who feels entitled to change the election date to give them six more months of a mandate. We see this government who feels entitled to be able to take resources from municipalities without having to deem that there's an emergency. We see from this government and this piece of legislation the government saying: if we use those resources, we're not going to compensate municipalities for those expenses. That's what this legislation does.

It doesn't address any of the concerns that the member opposite brought up, and that is part of the fundamental problem. If the government was sincere about ensuring that we had appropriate emergency response, then they would be addressing those issues. It wouldn't be by borrowing staff from municipalities. It would be ensuring that we're using WUI to cross-train and hire people. We would be funding appropriately the fireguard program and FireSmart. It would be about ensuring that we're hiring wildland firefighters so that they're available when they need to be available, because we know that joint command works. We've seen it.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 43, agreed to on May 27, 2024, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must now be decided to conclude debate on Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, I must now put the following questions.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:38 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Boparai	Ip	Notley
Chapman	Kasawski	Pancholi
Dach	Loyola	Shepherd
Eggen	Metz	Sweet
Elmeligi		

Against the motion:

Amery	Jean	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Sawhney
Boitchenko	Jones	Schow
Bouchard	LaGrange	Schulz
Cyr	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
de Jonge	Long	Sinclair
Dreeshen	Lovely	Singh
Dyck	Lunty	Stephan
Ellis	McDougall	Turton
Fir	McIver	van Dijken
Getson	Nally	Wiebe
Glubish	Neudorf	Williams
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Wilson
Horner	Nixon	Wright, J.
Hunter	Petrovic	Yao
Totals:	For – 13	Against – 45

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

[The remaining clauses of Bill 21 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 22

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: I seek speakers to the bill in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to speak to Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. The truth is that there's so much more that could be done by this government, but as I've already expressed in debate, this is the government that's too little too late. Too little too late. They take so long to make decisions. They've been in power for over six years, this government, and it's unfathomable that even in question period they consistently get up and they continue to blame the previous government of 2015 to 2019 for all the bad things that are happening right now in Alberta when they've had six years. Too little too late. Of course, they just ride out actually having to do things, productive things, that will actually help Albertans.

Now, we all know that there's an incredible shortage of doctors across Alberta. My colleagues on this side of the House have repeatedly brought up the issue, have given extensive evidence to the case that there is a shortage of so many doctors in, especially, rural communities, Madam Chair, the rural communities that this

government pretends to stand up for. They're like, "We're the party of rural Alberta," but there are so many decisions that this government has made inside of this Chamber that have actually been to the detriment of those same rural communities. The fact that there are so many Albertans that are waiting for doctors is something that you'd think this government would address immediately.

Now, instead of actually focusing on what Albertans need, this government continues to implement its ideological focus. You know, the majority of the members on that side of the House: I mean, they treat Milton Friedman like he's a god, the man who gave us trickle-down theory, the guy who supposedly introduced this whole concept of the free market and that if all these individuals would just serve their own best interest, somehow we would have this invisible hand that would then make things better so that we would have this utopian right-wing capitalist society where everybody is going to get what they need.

But the truth is, Madam Chair, that what these members on the other side of the House fail to recognize is that there are so many people who are priced out of the market. So while they use their ideological bent and apply it to so many different aspects of providing services to Albertans that are supposed to be provided by their government, this here party actually implements their ideological stance and tries to implement it on every service possible.

Madam Chair, that is what we see here with the introduction of Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act. This UCP government, which is too little too late and, of course, always focused on ideology and on their god, Milton Friedman, is trying to attempt to apply these changes to the health care system, which is supposed to be universal.

8:00

We fought long and hard in this country, Madam Chair, so that we could have universal health care here in this country, and I'm proud to be part of the party that actually introduced it by way of putting pressure on a Liberal government to do so. We're going to keep fighting. We're going to keep fighting especially this government, which is so ideologically focused, trying to now take Alberta Health Services, through this bill, and break it into four different silos. We could ask ourselves: why in heaven's name, when they should be focused on making sure that every Albertan has a doctor so that they don't have to flood the emergency rooms across this province, they're going to separate Alberta Health Services into four different silos. From what we can see, what they're obviously focused on is breaking it up into four different silos so that they can then introduce more private operators into the system.

According to them, they believe that this is the way that they're going to be able to run things more effectively, but what they fail to realize, as I've already stated, Madam Chair, is that this government, by doing those exact changes, is going to cripple the health care system, the public health care system. They're going to divide it into two different tiers, where some will have to go through the system as it currently exists and then others are going to be able to pay for better quality health care service if they have the money to do so. But what about the people who are going to be priced out of that system? What about them? What about all the racialized workers in our system that give day in and day out to the health care system? Then what's going to happen to those people? They're going to be kicked out of Alberta Health Services. They're going to be put into private entities. They're going to be working for private entities, contractors instead. They're going to be reduced pay. And

those people won't be able to afford the same services that more wealthy people in this system will be able to afford.

With that, Madam Chair, I'll now take my seat.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate, Bill 22? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am, not at all, I'm sure, to anyone's surprise, a little disappointed to be rising in Committee of the Whole after a mere one hour and 50 minutes of debate on Bill 22 and to be able to take part of what now remains as one hour of debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 22. In my time in the Legislature I've never seen a government shut down debate on such an expansive and important piece of public policy, that has implications for the quality of life and the life of all Albertans, the way this government has done. This is an abhorrent demonstration of governance.

I say this because when it comes to public health care, which is actually health care in Alberta still, although God knows these folks are doing everything they can to change that particular description as fast as they can, that is the singularly most important thing that a government and a Premier can focus their attention on, the absolutely most important thing that we do. When we come together as citizens and we put in our tax dollars and we ask experts to come together and create a service that all of us need and rely on – our parents, our children, our grandparents, our neighbours: we all need this – and we all come together and become greater than the sum of our parts, because this is what we do in the public service and that's what health care is, it's the best example of us coming together.

Over the last few years public health care all across Canada has faced many, many challenges, and people have been less and less able to rely on getting the kind of quality health care that will keep them and their loved ones not only alive but healthy as they go through their lives, so the work of the provincial government on this matter could not be more important. Albertans over the last many years have said that either the first or the second most important issue on their minds is: how does their provincial government manage public health care?

We have a bill before us today, Madam Chair, a bill that utterly blows up and creates nothing but chaos in our public health care system, and this government thinks all we need is roughly three and a half hours to discuss it. Absolutely and utterly shameful. Every single elected member over there should be ashamed of this. I can't wait to see you meet with your constituents and explain why it is you thought you knew enough about our public health care system to blow it up and then provide the constituents, the voters, the citizens of this province roughly four hours to talk about it. Just shocking.

So here's the thing: health care in this province is a mess. I said it's a mess all across the country, but it's actually quite a bit worse in Alberta on many, many fronts. In fact, it is getting worse on many, many fronts. That is happening as a result of the very clear decisions being made by this UCP government currently. The current Minister of Health, who, quite honestly – she claims the record of having been probably the singularly most damaging minister to our public education that we have seen in this province in four decades, and now she has been given the responsibility to blow up and ruin our public health care system.

We are in a situation where our health care is in great, great distress. Now, leading up to the last election, we talked to Albertans about the fact that the current Premier regularly talked about her desire to see more and more opportunities for out-of-pocket privatized payment for health care services by citizens. Then at a

certain point, when she realized that this was not really a very popular thing, she did the thing that UCP politicians and Conservatives all across the province ultimately do: she got herself a cardboard cut-out, and she signed a guarantee for public health care.

But, you know, there are different ways that one can go about privatizing our health care. To be clear, the leaked documents upon which this bill is based do suggest that there is a clear intention to enhance and move forward with some forms of privatization. Notwithstanding that, even if you don't do it on purpose, the other way you do it is that you basically create a fire of incompetence, and then once that's happened, people, as they desperately search for the care that their loved ones need or they need, rush off and they actually start paying for health care out of pocket because the government has done an intentionally bad job at providing public health care to the citizens of the province. That's what we are looking at today with Bill 22.

Before I get into a description of why Bill 22 is so bad, let me just review for a moment the state of health care in our province. We have a thing called hallway health care now. We brought into this Legislature the story of a retired Albertan, a long-serving public servant, who was otherwise relatively healthy, but he ended up in the hospital, and ultimately he was cared for in a hallway for I believe it was 18 days. It was only when he fell out of his stretcher and they were concerned that he might have broken a bone that he ultimately got himself a proper hospital bed. That's the state of things under this government.

8:10

That happened, and that is happening, of course, because here in Alberta we have a profound shortage of acute health care beds. As a per capita number of acute health care hospital beds in this province, we are well below the national average, and we, of course, are going to continue to do that because as our province grows, we are not growing our health care capacity. The last major hospital to be built in this province is the one that our government was proud to build, which was the cancer centre in Calgary. That was done after the Conservative government spent 10 years dithering and ducking and diving and not actually building the cancer centre that they repeatedly promised they would build year after year after year. And it wasn't until a New Democrat government got elected and we said, "Hey, we think that this cancer centre should be built, so we're going to promise that in the election." Here's a nifty thing: because we promised it in the election, we thought we would keep our promise and get it built, and we did. So that's great.

Now, there was another hospital that was the subject of discussion in not one election but two elections now. We talked about building and committed to building a new hospital in south Edmonton, and I believe we first rolled out the announcement of that in late 2017. We put aside the money to start doing the work on that hospital, and indeed even with the quiet desire of the former UCP government to not move ahead with that hospital, if I recall correctly, there was about \$100 million or so invested in getting the area ready for – the MLAs for that area back there are nodding that that's roughly correct – construction.

In the 2019 election the then Premier Jason Kenney promised – oh, no, he was running to be Premier – you betcha, Edmonton; I'll build you that hospital. And then in 2023 the current Premier ran and she said: you betcha, Edmonton; I'll build you that hospital. Then after the dust settled and the ballots were counted, she said: "Oh, I didn't mean build that hospital. No, no, no. You misunderstood me. That's your fault. I said the words 'build the hospital,' but I didn't mean the words 'build the hospital,' so I'm not going to build the hospital." Instead, it's all going to be fine

because 10 or 15 years down the road there may or may not be some more beds at the Stollery. Based on this government's record of keeping promises in terms of building things, all the Stollery announcement does is take the planning back four years so they can dither and rag the puck on this particular project for another four or five years before Albertans start to realize that that's a promise no one intends to keep either.

While all of this gamesmanship is going on, do you know what's happening? We don't have enough hospital beds, and we have a growing population, and then people end up in a hallway for 18 days until they fall out of a stretcher and potentially break a limb in the hospital. That's the kind of health care that this government is bringing into place. Let me be very clear. None of that story will be fixed by creating four more ministers who can rag the puck and pass it back and forth between each other, like every other buck they pass between each other, without taking responsibility and without being accountable, and that fundamentally is what this bill is about doing. So we have a problem there with people having access to hospital beds in this province.

We have a problem with oncologists. We don't have enough oncologists. People now are waiting up to 18 weeks to see a medical oncologist in this province. Now, the members opposite and the Health minister in particular, you know: they love to throw out numbers, but they're never quite directly connected to the actual facts on the ground.

What we know is that in B.C. there has been a range of initiatives taken by the NDP government to recruit and retain oncologists. As a result of that, they have successfully recruited and retained – again, I don't remember the exact number, but it was over 50, and that is good.

But here in Alberta since 2019 we have recruited only 17, and let me be perfectly clear: that's not 17 new oncologists. More than half of those oncologists are replacing oncologists who have left, and the latest count I've seen is that since 2019 we have seen a net increase of six oncologists in Alberta whereas in B.C. it's over 50.

What that says to me is that in one province there is a government that says to their voters and their citizens: "We care about your health. We know it's our job, and we are going to do everything we can to give you the health care you need regardless of how much money you have in your pocket and whether or not you can afford to get on a plane and fly to the States and stay with your friends at the golf course in Palm Springs and buy health care. That doesn't matter. You can get the health care you need right here in your country, in your province because that's our job." That's what an NDP government looks like. That's what's happening in B.C., and in Alberta we have six net new oncologists and people waiting 18 weeks to get care.

This bill creating four new UCP ministers to pass the buck and not co-ordinate and learn nothing about health care because they're scared of science: that's the solution? Madam Chair, that's not the solution. That is an intentional design to undermine our system of health care. It is an intentional plan to create a market for health care paid for by Albertans south of the border who are very rich. That's what that is, that and nothing more.

Family doctors. We are at roughly 800,000 Albertans who cannot find a family doctor, and most recently we heard about a seniors' continuing care centre filled with seniors who just lost their family doctor. Why? Because this UCP government rewrote their contract and took away the money they got for visiting those seniors in their residence. So now those seniors don't have a family doctor. Well, that's just great. But, yeah, you bet; this UCP government is really focused on making health care in Alberta better. Let me just be very clear. That is a very sarcastic statement, for those in *Hansard*, who won't be able to pick up my tone. It truly – truly – is rather a record

of a government that's very, very focused on undermining people's access to health care.

Let's talk about emergency rooms. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about the ambivalence that the UCP has to the services that are available for rural Albertans across this province. Thanks to the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I just checked online and saw the most recent list of operating rooms and obstetric care that are closed in Alberta right now. I didn't have a chance to write down all the communities. I'll just list the ones that I had time to write down in the last eight minutes before I got up to speak: Stettler, Barrhead, Westlock, St. Paul, Rocky Mountain House, Lac La Biche, High Level, Whitecourt, Sundre, Rimbey. That's all I was able to write down before it was time for me to get up and speak.

All those places have no operating rooms right now, no obstetric services. If someone goes into those hospitals, they will be told to go anywhere from 100 to 200 kilometres in search of emergency care. You know, it's not just the people who happen to be living in Edmonton and Calgary who are happy to live in cities that have access to health care. It's actually the constituents of all those happy little UCP members on the backbench, who I know feel very listened to these days, whose constituents are seeing their health care fall apart. Fall apart. They have no access to health care in their communities. So when you ask why it is that people are leaving communities, it's because they can't access health care because this UCP government, through ambivalence, through ignoring the problems, is intentionally moving to close down hospitals all over this province.

8:20

Continuing care: well, we know what a disaster that is. Motel medicine, Madam Chair: a horrendous example of forcing people out of acute care into a roadside motel, into rooms where they had no access to a bathroom because they couldn't get their wheelchair in there and weren't even provided with proper nutritional food. They couldn't get around because, again, they were in their wheelchairs. Sometimes they couldn't get out of their beds. And this UCP government thought that that was totally appropriate.

They said afterwards, "Oh, no, no; we didn't know that was happening," but of course that was only after – I don't know – several days of keep-away being played by two of the ministers, where they did a fabulous job of showing us exactly why UCP ministers cannot be counted on to head up the various silos in terms of health care. They passed it back and forth to each other, and they did that, actually, right here in the Legislature. We sat back here and watched them blaming each other about how this thing happened. Then, ultimately, freedom of information documents came to our offices that showed that, in fact, they'd been warned about this horrendous state of care, and they'd been warned about it in January. They played keep-away between each other or hot potato. "Oh, it's not my problem. It's your problem." "Oh, no, no. It's not my problem. It's your problem." That brilliant display of public governance went on for weeks while people were being sent to deeply unsafe places as a form of continuing care. And we want to create more opportunities for more UCP ministers to play hot potato with each other? I think not, Madam Chair.

Finally, we have the example that we've seen most recently – oh, yes. Right. The other one: the answer to why we have to take continuing care away from Alberta Health Services. Let's be clear. I've been in this Legislature since 2008, and the day that I came in here, the conversation was: "Oh, my goodness, there aren't enough hospital beds. Oh, my goodness, the wait times in ER are too long." Then everyone would say: "Oh, the problem with that is that our regular beds are too full of people who need continuing care. What we need to do is get more people into high levels of continuing care

so that we can get them into the right place at the right time.” That was a conversation that was happening in 2008, folks, okay? I just hate to break it to you. It’s a little bit of *Groundhog Day* going on here. That was in 2008. That was one of the reasons, when we ran for office in 2015, we committed to building 2,000 publicly funded, high-quality continuing care extra spaces, and that’s another thing that we did.

Nonetheless, the current Premier thinks a good way to fix this problem is to put people in motels. Let’s be clear. The whole motel medicine debacle ...

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate?

Mr. Schow: That is a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: I’m going to rise on a point of order. At the end of that speech, suggesting the Premier’s solution is to put people in hotels – I’m not quite sure why the Leader of the Opposition is still standing ...

The Chair: Maybe to clear up some confusion, in Committee of the Whole every member has 20 minutes regardless of leader status.

Sorry. What’s the point of order?

Mr. Schow: Yeah. I did rise on a point of order. Imputing false motives against the hon. Premier would be unparliamentary in this Chamber. The Leader of the Opposition knows that. I ask her to apologize and withdraw under 23(h), (i), and (j). Suggesting that the Premier wants to put people in hotels for medical care is ridiculous.

The Chair: The hon. opposition leader.

Ms Notley: Madam Chair, I do agree with the member opposite that it is ridiculous. However, we do have video evidence of the Premier talking about how she believes that in some cases motels would be an appropriate location for people who are otherwise seeking continuing care. I agree that it’s problematic, but given that she said it, I think it’s completely appropriate for us to be able to rise in the House and speak to it on a bill that relates to the provision of continuing care. So I would argue it is an appropriate matter for debate.

The Chair: I agree that it’s probably a matter of debate. We are in a limited amount of time with that, so perhaps we could proceed with our next speaker in this Assembly, for which I am seeking the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of several initiatives outlined in the government’s Bill 22, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. This is far from the first attempt to reform our health system. If history teaches us anything, it won’t be the last. For decades Albertans have expressed increasing concerns about the state of our health care system, and for decades, whether it was under PC or NDP or, most recently, UCP administrations, the government of Alberta has pursued a two-pronged approach to addressing these concerns.

First, the government has thrown more money at the system, with funding increases that far outstripped both inflation and rising

population. In 1997 total health care spending stood at about \$4 billion. Today it’s \$26 billion, with increases to \$27.5 billion coming in the next two years. Among Canadian provinces Alberta is the second-highest spender per person for health services, and this is after centralizing our system in order to achieve a more streamlined and efficient delivery of services, with wait times increasing from 18.8 weeks in 2008 to a staggering 33.5 weeks today or back in 2023.

Secondly, the government has sought to centralize more and more control over the system while putting ever more decision-making power in the hands of unelected bureaucrats who are unaccountable to the communities they serve. It started with the creation of 17 regional authorities in 1994, and that was reduced to nine in 2003. In 2009 the Stelmach government centralized our system into what we now know as AHS. Stelmach did this, centralizing our system, in an attempt to solve the same problem we face today: delivering cost-effective, equitable care to all Albertans in a timely manner.

Continued attempts to centralize our ambulance services and then, eventually, ambulance dispatch have continued in the years since despite strongly expressed opposition from municipal providers. Every step of the way Albertans were told centralization would streamline costs and result in a better, more responsive system. The fact is that it didn’t work, not even close.

All the new spending and centralization has not reversed the trend of longer wait times in the emergency rooms, longer delays for surgeries, and extended ambulance response times. It has not prevented the temporary closures of many rural and northern emergency rooms. It certainly has not expanded the options available to Albertans who increasingly seek medical procedures in neighbouring provinces, the United States, Mexico, and even around the world, like Germany, where my friend and constituent Trish just came back from for back surgery. In reality, centralization over the medical system has only isolated decision-makers from the communities they serve while giving politicians plausible deniability with regard to unpopular decisions.

I can also tell you as a former registered nurse that centralization has come with ever-tightening control over workers in the system, who are increasingly unwilling to speak out about the chronic problems of mismanagement and waste within the system. Any calcified system unwilling and incapable of listening to honest concerns cannot grow or adapt. If we’re honest with ourselves, it’s clear that this progressively deteriorating state of affairs cannot work in the long term.

All of the failures I’ve spoken of – out-of-control expenses, unresponsive administration, rising wait times, unacceptable rural ambulance response times – all of these symptoms have the same disease: failed central planning. That is the number one problem facing our health care system, and that is the number one problem Bill 22 will address. As currently designed, Bill 22 does not bring back the regional health authorities of the past. Rather, it seeks to break up the management monopoly into sector-specific areas, including primary care, acute care, continuing care, and mental health and addiction.

8:30

I certainly support this idea. The health system in our province is massive. It is taxpayers’ number one expense. It is one of Alberta’s major employers, and in many communities, it owns and operates the largest facilities in town. Past governments have allowed the system to become too big to be responsive, and that clearly needs to change.

More importantly, Bill 22 strengthens political oversight of the system. These changes in particular are why I support Bill 22.

However, it is important to note this bill alone won't solve all the problems our health care system faces. It won't directly fix the rural-urban divide that was exacerbated through 30 years of centralization. It won't open the door to greater choice in our health system, but Bill 22 is a step in the right direction. It seeks to bring back innovation through the regionalization of our system again. It should help undo wait time issues and streamline communication between the provincial health associations, mitigating communication errors that exist today.

There is an old saying: the bigger the government, the smaller the citizen. Madam Chair, the same could be said of our health care system: the bigger the bureaucracy, the smaller the patient. Bill 22 seeks to break up this management monopoly, and that is a good thing.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. I'm challenged by this bill because it's focusing on what I think is the most important issue that Albertans are facing, which is the health of our health care system, and it doesn't do anything to address their concerns. That's why I'm challenged by this bill.

In preparing my bill notes today, I went back through my e-mails to remind myself again what I am hearing specifically from my constituents about health care. I hear time and time again about a doctor shortage throughout Banff-Kananaskis. People can't find family doctors. I hear from doctors that there is disparity in rates of pay for doctors on call. If they're obstetricians, they're not paid when they're on call, but if they're family doctors, they are paid when they're on call. You know, living in some of the most expensive communities in Alberta, that's kind of a big deal for obstetricians.

I hear from constituents that we don't have mobile mammogram clinics anymore in rural constituencies, and that's a big concern because not everybody wants to drive to Calgary to get their health care, and we know that mammograms detect breast cancer early and save lives.

I hear about the staffing crisis, that the recent hiring freeze on critical front-line health care professionals is a problem for the Canmore hospital and the Banff hospital. I hear about the need to retain existing staff and hire more and that our staff are feeling burned out and they cannot wait for the one to two years that this reorganization will take in order to actually restaff and have appropriate staffing levels in our medical facilities.

I hear about climate change and health care, concerns about how all the wildfire smoke every summer is increasing the risk and the frequency of respiratory health issues. I hear about water pollution and air pollution. I hear about overcapacity issues and long wait times in the health care system.

I especially hear from my Indigenous constituents about the challenge of even accessing the health care system, that the systemic issues of how Indigenous people are judged when they show up to a health care facility are reflected in how they're treated and how they're processed and admitted to health care facilities.

I hear about the need to effectively consult with front-line workers, that the front-line workers in Banff-Kananaskis don't feel like they were effectively consulted on this piece of legislation and this move to separate health care into four different silos. I personally attended the consultation that was held in the town of Banff on the separation of the health care system into these four groups, and what I heard from front-line workers that were there was that this consultation was not giving them an opportunity to

even suggest that it wasn't what they wanted. The consultation was, "How should we do this?" not "Do you want to do this?" That was a big gap for the health care professionals in Banff-Kananaskis that day.

I believe in an evidence-based approach to pretty much everything that we debate in this House, and one of the big questions I have is: where is the data that supports this bill and the move to separate out AHS like this?

Health care professionals have e-mailed me saying that they don't like this, that consultation should happen before the direction is decided on, that consultation should happen before the bill is introduced in the House, and that's not really what we have here. This reorganization will do nothing to address the issues like the staffing shortages and the staffing burnouts, and it will add another layer of bureaucracy and more cracks for patients to fall through.

One of the repeated comments that I heard from my constituents, that was the most disappointing, was that this bill is not about patient outcomes. It's not defining patient outcomes to serve Albertans better. It is dismantling a health care system. It's not going to fix the health care system; just add more confusion and disarray and, of course, more blue tape. This government, that likes to reduce bureaucracy, loves to also add layers and layers and layers of bureaucracy with every single bill they bring to the House. So we'll reduce red tape over here, and we're going to increase blue tape over here. That's fine.

Bill 22 will not address what is important to Albertans. You would think that the government would be focused on repairing the relationships with front-line workers that were so poorly damaged by this government's decision-making in the last four years. You would think that repairing those relationships, bringing people together, increasing staffing, addressing burnout would be the priority, not separating the health care system into four pods, which increases uncertainty and makes it harder to recruit professionals because of the uncertainty. Nobody wants to move somewhere where everything is so uncertain.

This bill establishes the Minister of Health, which we already have, and four new ministers. So an already humongously bloated government is going to have four more ministers. Give it a couple more years; I'm pretty sure everybody on the other side of the aisle will be a minister. I'm sure we can think of more ministerial titles for all of you to have one.

Member Irwin: We believe in you.

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. We believe in small government, but everybody should be a minister. We don't want anybody to feel left out here.

Each one of those ministers will have a staff and a public service bureaucracy to support their work. More government, more staff, more blue tape. And where do patient outcomes fit into that? Well, they don't, really, but, hey, at least we'll have more ministers.

This bill says that people will be transferred to jobs that are substantially the same as the current job, but what if their current job overlaps a couple of different areas? Rural doctors do a lot of work for acute care, continuing care, mental health care. Are they going to be answering to three ministers now? We don't really know. Those kinds of questions aren't answered. They're not important. What is important is that more ministers will be putting their little fingers in health care. You know what the real problem with health care is? There are not enough politicians involved in making decisions in health care. That's where the health care system is failing. So let's create a bill that puts more politicians inside health care to pass the buck around, as my hon. leader just mentioned.

This bill also proposes at least 13 additional agencies, boards, and committees, including a supervisory integration council, chaired by – you guessed it – the minister, a more direct role for politicians in health care. It is shameful to me that after everything we've heard from Albertans about the problems with health care, none of them told me: I wish there were more politicians who had a voice in the health care system and could kind of interject their political expertise into what kind of care I'm going to receive to treat my illness.

The biggest question about this bill is what I brought up at the very beginning: why? Why are we doing this? How is this serving Albertans? How is this making the health care system better and stronger?

We can debate the effectiveness of restructuring, we can debate if this will address Albertans' concerns, but I haven't seen any data to suggest that it will. Creating four new silos and more bureaucracy just creates more ministers and more blue tape. It doesn't bring more doctors to rural Alberta, it doesn't address staff burnout, it doesn't provide support for doctors in private practice, it doesn't increase access to health care, and it doesn't increase clarity in the health care provision.

8:40

So is restructuring the solution? No. This is like asking my daughter to clean her room, and all she does is move things around differently. Is the room clean? No. Did she do some work? Oh, yeah. Does the action match what is needed for change? No.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. A pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 22, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, which is a massive piece of legislation, which many people in the health care profession would argue should never have been introduced in the first place and is certainly not the answer to what ails us in Alberta with respect to the operation of our health care system.

It's amazing to me, Madam Chair, and most Albertans who are political watchers, who look at what this government is doing with the Health Statutes Amendment Act as it touches upon 42 different pieces of legislation. What an incredible political gamble this government chooses to take by introducing such a piece of legislation. Now, history will chronicle whether or not this gamble was something that should have been undertaken by the government or not, but indeed on every major front that the public really cares about, whether it's our democracy, whether it's health care, whether it's education, the government seems to be challenging the public, saying: just trust us; we're going to take you in a different direction, and it's not something you've been asking for. That's true under Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, because this legislation is designed to fix the health care system according to the government, yet what it does is create a situation in the system where people feel totally uncomfortable with what's going on.

Now, the answers are before us, Madam Chair, as far as fixing a health care system that is in crisis. The first step that one would normally take would be to talk to the people who are actually involved in the system right now, and that would be your health care professionals – medical doctors and specialists and LPNs and administrators – to actually figure out from those who are working on the front lines right now where the problems are, rather than creating a situation of total distrust, because it's a mark of distrust to do what this government has done. They are telling the

individuals who are currently working in our health care system, who are now involved in providing care, that they are not trusted to provide answers.

The government is making up its own mind pre-emptively to say: look, we're going to split up the health care system into these four different silos. This has been done in very, very quick order and has left behind health care professionals, who are shaking their heads and wondering why the government is acting with this type of speed and, in fact, leaving people without the consultation that one would have expected when you're doing such a massive change.

And not to get into the details of every little bit of the health care information act, Bill 22 – it's deep; it's intense; it's very, very complex – but the public, Madam Chair, and my constituents look at it and they say: "Well, is that indeed what we were asking for? We simply want to be able to get a doctor. We want to be able to make an appointment for my ailing grandmother and get her to see a geriatrician. I want to be able to make sure my child is properly looked after when they get a cold. I want to make sure that a person who gets a broken leg gets properly treated." But this method of approaching the failings of the health care system is not what the public was anticipating.

What Canadians point to as a crowning achievement of our Canadian democracy is our public health care system, a single-payer, publicly provided, publicly delivered health care that people can rely upon, and that is quickly being eroded. People are losing their confidence in it, and this bill is going to contribute to that lack of confidence, Madam Chair.

Now, of course, the father of our health care system, public health care in Canada, Tommy Douglas, in 2004 was voted our greatest Canadian, and any government, any provincial government which threatens to undermine public health care in Canada plays with fire. This gamble that the current government is undertaking is something that I don't think they're going to win. I think the Canadian public are looking at Alberta and saying: goodness gracious.

They're a government supposedly involved in paring things down and doing things efficiently, but this is the most massive ball of red tape that we've seen in decades in this province, and it's being generated by a Conservative government. They've got a minister of red tape reduction, yet this bill will create a deficit in that red tape reduction effort that they've been steadfastly trying to work towards. It's going to create a great big, sticky ball of red tape, Madam Chair. Maybe I could go further. It's going to create a landslide of red tape that this government is so objectionable about. Nay, dare I say that it will be a tsunami of red tape, a virtual tsunami of red tape coming down upon us with the four silos, four waves of red tape, all at once, everything all at once with this government. So watch for it.

Madam Chair, the general public is definitely not going to be favourable towards this massive gamble when they realize that it's not solving any of the problems that we face in our health care system, whether it be access to a doctor, whether it be clinics that are closing, whether it be doctors unable to afford to keep their practices open, whether it's retiring doctors not being replaced and new ones not wanting to practise family medicine, whether it's open positions at universities, open seats of study for family practice not being undertaken, not being entered into by candidates in university because they find family practice so unappealing. That's a product of what this government has done. This bill will not help at all. It's going to be a way to chase people away from family medicine in particular. To listen to public health care professionals talking about what the government's proposal is in Bill 22: they are not happy about it and confused as to why indeed the government is approaching it this way.

It once again seems to be an effort on their part to garner control unto themselves and centralize the decision-making process, and the risk of that is, of course, that not only will the decisions potentially be catastrophic and wrong because they're centralized within a political control basis; the risk of that also, Madam Chair, is a warning to the government that their gamble that they're taking – the risk is that they will be definitely punished at the polls for not getting this right, and right out of the gate they don't seem to be getting it right. I know there are lots of other folks who wish to comment on this piece of legislation, so I won't belabour the point, but this gamble is something that will probably cost the UCP definitely an election loss.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's truly an honour to rise in this Chamber. You know, I actually spoke to this bill prior last week, and I'm reflecting again on the fact that with so many of these substantial, significant bills our time has been limited. I just want to make sure I get that on the record tonight, that this is a UCP government that's very much attacking democracy. Some folks in this Chamber might say that it's not really a big deal, that people aren't paying much attention.

8:50

Well, you know, I heard about time allocation being implemented. It was the top story on CBC Radio earlier today. I posted about it and had a lot of people very upset about the fact that this government is doing that. It just makes me question: is it because you don't stand behind your bills, because you don't want the opposition to be able to ask the questions that Albertans are asking? Because with all of the bills that the UCP are ramming through, there's been a whole heck of a lot of opposition.

I rise to Bill 22 to share all that, but I also want to just speak, as I did last week on this bill, to the fact that, you know, at a time when we should be really reflecting on the contributions of health care workers – I mean, I talked about the fact that these were our health care heroes throughout the pandemic. This UCP government could be doing something transformational to really support health care workers. Bill 22 is not going to do that, and it's also not going to strengthen patient care.

You know, I think to the example our fabulous leader just shared. She was talking about the father of one of my constituents. He is an 81-year-old man who dedicated his life to public service only to be spending nearly three weeks in the hallway of a hospital. What an opportunity this government had to really think about constituents like that one, to think about the patients who've been left behind by our health care system. They're not. Instead, they're blowing up AHS; they're not responding to the concerns and criticisms from both the opposition and from health care workers.

I shared the fact that, you know, we should be very much listening to what some of the health care workers and their representatives are saying. For example, the vice-president of AUPE, Sandra Azocar, talks about the fact that, hey, front-line workers: they are adaptable, they are nimble, but when you're already short-staffed, you're overworked, you're burned out, and then you're being thrown into a massive systemic overhaul, what do you expect is going to happen? Unbelievable.

You know, I worry as well – and this is something that she points out – that this is a distraction. She notes that this legislation is a thinly veiled attempt to distract frustrated Albertans from unreasonable wait times for surgery, emergency

services, lack of family doctors, and extensive travel to larger centres to access health care, problems the government [could solve and] should solve through adequately staffing and funding the system.

Instead: distract, deflect.

As our leader said earlier, I mean, I think back, you know, to the time when I was the status of women critic and we talked to folks all over this province who didn't have access to basic health services, obstetrical services. I don't have the list in front of me, but I know our leader shared a number of them. I think about Barrhead, Sundre, Rocky Mountain House, Westlock, a whole bunch of rural communities where Albertans already don't have access to services in those communities. I very much worry what's going to happen with a whole bunch more UCP ministers trying to manage this system.

Sandra Azocar goes on to say that all of these things, all of these distractions that she mentioned – the lack of family doctors, having to travel for services, the lack of adequate staffing – are unacceptable, but the solution is not to implode Alberta Health Services. This is a government that should be listening to those folks who are on the front lines, but they're not.

Friends of Medicare, another organization that's dedicated to protecting health care: they're not happy either. The list of stakeholders that aren't happy is growing and growing and growing. Friends of Medicare director Chris Gallaway says that "what we are seeing . . . is a destructive restructuring plan which will only wreak more chaos in our public health care system while providing cover for further privatization." Part of the Conservative playbook, right? Blow it up, distract, deflect, further privatize.

Canadians, we know – we've talked about this.

An Hon. Member: Shock doctrine.

Member Irwin: Exactly.

We've talked about this, the fact that, you know, Canadians broadly, Albertans broadly very much believe in the fundamental importance of a strong publicly funded health care system. But we've seen time and time again from this UCP government a willingness to privatize. "Starve the system, blow it up and sell pieces off, that's been the UCP's strategy for our health care, and they look to be continuing [it] with this new legislation," says Chris Gallaway from Friends of Medicare.

You'd think this government would have learned their lesson after their disastrous decision to split our lab system into two and their subsequent failed privatization of our community labs to DynaLife, but here we go again. This is a government that doesn't seem to be willing to learn, doesn't seem to be willing to listen . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 44, agreed to on May 27, 2024, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, I must now put the following question.

[The clauses of Bill 22 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.

**Private Bills
Committee of the Whole**

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

The Chair: Are there speakers to Bill Pr. 2? I see that the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has risen to speak.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have an amendment for Bill Pr. 2.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.
Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Wright: Madam Chair, I move that Bill Pr. 2, Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024, be amended in section 2 in the proposed section 1(b.1) by adding “Cypress County” immediately after “the County of Newell.”

The Chair: Would you like to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Wright: Yes. There was a clerical error that missed putting in Cypress county, and it was caught, and that’s why this amendment is very needed, as it’s one of the key areas that this foundation does cover.

The Chair: Are there any members that wish to join the debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Any members wishing to join the debate on Bill Pr. 2 as amended in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to move third reading of Bill Pr. 2.

The Chair: Nope. Nope.

Mr. Wright: No.

The Chair: Are there any other members that wish to join debate on Bill Pr. 2? The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: I support this Bill Pr. 2. I think that we ought to continue in the debate.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill Pr. 2, the Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024.

[The remaining clauses of Bill Pr. 2 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.

9:00

**Bill Pr. 3
Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024**

The Chair: Are there any members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe – oh, wait. I just did what he just did. I’ll have to wait till third reading. I’ll just, you know, get on it.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 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 Pr. 4
Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024**

The Chair: Are there any members that wish to join the debate? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 4 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.

Mr. Williams: Madam Chair, I move that we rise and report on bills Pr. 2, Pr. 3, Pr. 4, Bill 21, Bill 22.

The Chair: Can I just clarify: Bill 20?

Mr. Williams: And Bill 20 as well.

The Chair: Hon. members, the motion is to rise and report on bills 20, 21, 22, Pr. 2, Pr. 3, and Pr. 4.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Lundy: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 21, Bill 22, Bill Pr. 3, Bill Pr. 4. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 20, Bill Pr. 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 18 Provincial Priorities Act

[Adjourned debate: Ms Smith]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act.

An Hon. Member: Evening.

Ms Sweet: Evening. Oh, dear. I've been here for a long time.

I think we've heard from many of the members throughout this Chamber and in the opposition about the concerns that we have in regard to the serious impact that this is going to have for postsecondaries and, really, for anybody that has a partnership with the federal government that receives federal funding.

The government will say that this is about their provincial priorities, and I think we heard from the Premier this afternoon talking about the fact that she didn't believe that the federal government should be influencing and having a say in provincial matters and provincial jurisdiction. The irony of that is that we are currently debating pieces of legislation in this House that do the exact thing that the Premier is concerned about to municipalities. Clearly, there is a double standard here when it comes to respecting people's lanes, when respecting the fact that there are different levels of jurisdiction. The fact that we would see Bill 18 come in doing provincial priorities when not giving that same respect to municipalities I think creates a lot of cognitive dissonance for the government.

In saying that, we have heard from many stakeholders that are concerned about what the future of their projects will look like, what research will look like, what the opportunities will be for those that have those partnerships with the federal government, those who are going to be renegotiating those partnerships in the next six to eight months. What does that mean in regard to dollar amounts, and are they even going to be able to reapply for projects that they may be working on in partnership with the federal government?

Because of that, I have an amendment that I would like to bring forward to the House. I have the requisite copies, and I will just wait until they make it to you, Madam Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment RA1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me to speak to the amendment. I will read the amendment into the record. The Member for Edmonton-Manning to move that the motion for third reading of Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 18, Provincial Priorities Act, be not now read a third time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not adequately consulted with municipalities, postsecondary institutions, and Indigenous communities with respect to the legislative amendments proposed by the bill.

Now, to clarify again, Mr. Speaker, I haven't had much opportunity to be able to speak to this bill because it has been time allocated time after time after time, which has really restricted the

ability of the opposition to bring forward the concerns of the community members in relation to some of the amendments that the opposition would have liked to have presented on Bill 18. Because of that, we believe that this bill should not be read a third time and, in fact, should go back to the chopping block to be re-evaluated so that the government will actually listen and do proper consultation with Albertans as we have heard they would like that to happen.

With that, I will cede my time, recognizing that there are other members that would like to speak given time allocation. I hope that the government considers the amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 42, agreed to earlier today, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration. That time was 9:04 p.m. At 10:04 p.m. debate will conclude should nothing else happen.

I saw the hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition rising. She has the call.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, this is a deeply, deeply troubling piece of legislation, and it is a deeply troubling piece of legislation that warrants considerable attention and a much broader frame of debate than is being allowed as a result of this closure motion. I'm not going to talk about every element of it. I'm going to try to give other colleagues the opportunity to talk about the many challenges this bill imposes upon organizations all across our province because of petty, petty political fighting with the current federal government.

What I want to talk about, though, is the impact of this bill on our postsecondary institutions. In my mind, this is, again, an unprecedented attack on one of the most fundamental tenets of our democracy, of our constitutional democracy, of our freedoms, and, in particular, of our freedom of speech.

9:10

In this bill what we see happening is that the government has decided that they are going to step into the decision-making process of academic funding for research that the federal government contributes to. Now, time and time again we have raised with the UCP government that the federal funding agreements are governed by independent councils or panels of academic experts who operate on the basis of peer review.

Now, peer review is a tenet of academia and academic independence that ensures that research is done in a way that aligns with the preponderance of evidence and considered thought by those who are equipped and qualified to consider whether certain matters warrant attention and research. That is how we as humans grow our knowledge. That's how we, for instance, don't end up funding projects where we relitigate whether the Earth is flat, Mr. Speaker. We don't do that because there are peer review groups that sit on these councils to which the federal government partially contributes, and they make decisions to ensure that we don't run off and spend money researching the matter of whether the Earth is flat, as just an example.

The other thing they do is that they make sure that we do not have politically motivated decisions driving the research that our independent academic institutions are engaging on. As a result, we don't have people who, for instance, don't support the rights of women generally. We don't have those people saying that social scientists cannot do research on the ways in which women, for instance, are systemically discriminated against within certain industries in our society and even in our province, here in Alberta. We don't do that. We don't let people who have a political agenda to oppress the rights of women have a say on how this kind of research is administered. Those are two examples.

There are examples around – you know, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre yesterday and then again today talked about the work that needs to be done to bring about true equity and equality amongst racialized Albertans and the need to have evidence around how those racialized Albertans are being impacted by a whole range of decisions taken within our community. He talked about that. Once again the UCP refuses to join many other provinces as a matter of course in learning about the impact of their decisions on racialized Albertans.

But that's the kind of information where one of the social agencies that are funded through these independent, peer-reviewed councils to which the federal government contributes would potentially do work. They would do that because they know that these are matters in academia and of people who do research in the social sciences, where the information, where the intellectual knowledge is coming from and growing from in these areas. But this government wants to step in, and now they want to edit, they want to veto, they want to gatekeep, and they want to impose their political view on these academic processes.

This goes to the very heart of freedom of speech in our province. It goes to the very heart of academic independence in our province. Even if folks over there don't care about the concept of academic independence or freedom of speech, even if those are not things that matter to them in their world because they don't like people who disagree with them to have voices, as we are learning through this process of having our voices shuttered in an outrageous and premature way, even if they don't like that, the reality is that there are benefits to this.

It is, first of all, foundational to our democratic society. Secondly – and here's a good one – it also helps create jobs. Societies that don't move forward with knowledge as it develops, who don't share knowledge between peers, between the experts, between those who have done all the research: those societies fall behind.

That is why it is a good thing to have universities in our province. It is a good thing to attract world-leading researchers from places all over the globe to our province. It is a good thing to attract diverse and robust debate in our institutions in our province. Peter Lougheed: that was one of the things that he was so proud of, to build a postsecondary regime across our province that attracted the best and the brightest, not only across Canada but from North America and all around the world. Those people are now, with Bill 18, being stopped at the border, and they are being told that they are not welcome here. Unless they agree with the opinions of this UCP government, they will not get the research funding that they would get in every other province where the government seems to still retain an understanding of the concept of freedom of speech and academic integrity.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, maybe this is a good thing. Maybe we should have the UCP interfere with academic independence and freedom of speech because they do know a lot of things. I mean, ivermectin: sure, someone out there may have been treated effectively by it, not anyone that any scientists know, but they might have. Vaccines work, save millions and millions of lives. But, hey, it's possible that maybe that was wrong and science was wrong. So by all means those ideas that some in the UCP like to promote: maybe we should make sure that we're not able to have people research ways in which we can save another million lives. You know, frankly, if the UCP were in charge at the time, we probably wouldn't have made quite as much progress on diabetes as we have. But maybe that's a good thing in the long term.

You know, this is a group of folks who think they know better. I don't know. I can't remember if there is a physician or a medically trained member of the UCP caucus at this point. There may be. I literally cannot recall. But they seem to think collectively that the

Premier has a better understanding of the medical care needs of vulnerable teenagers than that teenager's doctor has. So, of course, it makes sense that they should replace the opinion of independent expert academics with their own opinion.

This is a group of folks, many of whom I've seen question the science of climate change. By all means let's make sure that experts from around the world who have done research on climate change stay as far away from Alberta as possible. Here's the thing, as I said at the outset, Mr. Speaker: we will fall desperately behind the rest of Canada and the rest of the continent if we undercut the integrity and the reputation of our postsecondary institutions in the way that this bill clearly sets out to do. We will undercut the future of our kids. Those kids, those children of ours who want to get a good education, an internationally recognized and respected education, will have to go to other provinces because Alberta's postsecondary institutions will be seen as being under the intellectual thumb of this Premier; very, very scary idea.

Academic independence is a critical part of democracy. Freedom of speech that attaches to that academic independence is a critical part of democracy. This bill rejects those ideas. This bill undercuts those critical parts of our democracy. This is a bill that centralizes control in the Premier's office with someone who does not have a semblance of the expertise to make the kinds of decisions she's insisting she has the right to make, and she will do so at the expense of jobs, of investment, of our reputation, of our academic and intellectual future, and of the future of our children.

9:20

We tried to get them to acknowledge that there is no one in our postsecondary sector who believed that this was a good choice, but their response to that, as with this bill, is to shut down debate and ensure that those voices are not heard. Mr. Speaker, as with so many of these bills, this was certainly not anything that the Premier ran on. She didn't tell academics that their independence and their freedom of speech would be put in jeopardy.

Nonetheless, having made the decision to do that, she is now ramming this bill forward with a minimal amount of debate. I worry a great deal for the future of all those institutions, which I care about very, very deeply; unfortunately, our current Premier and government do not, so I would urge members opposite to vote against this bill.

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is called.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Williams: The incredibly seasoned member of the opposite aisle and Leader of the Opposition knows that making personal accusations against the Premier, saying that she personally does not care, would be unparliamentary. Of course, if we refer to pages 618 to 620 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* in the second edition, it's clear that offensive, provocative language is inappropriate, and also in our own Standing Order 23(i) imputing false or unavowed motives to another member would be inappropriate. The Premier does care deeply, and accusing her personally of not would be inappropriate. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I think it's apparent that this is a point of debate, right? We're talking about issues that are before us

here in the Legislature and how the government is choosing to deal with them, so I would certainly suggest that this is a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I will just provide a caution and remind members that if we stay on the broad strokes of both the legislation or even the amendment that is before the Assembly and focus on the policy of those things, decorum, generally speaking, improves as a result, and otherwise the same is not true. This isn't a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate on amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak against Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act. I should also note that I'm disappointed that members opposite are using points of order to intimidate and stifle debate. I think it's shameful, frankly.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Williams: I rise, obviously, stating that it's inappropriate under Standing Order 23(i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. Implying that we're threatening or intimidating when we are not is going to cause disorder. Points of order are part of the procedural practice of this House. It was raised in good faith. The Speaker ruled on it; it's considered closed. I believe it's going to cause disorder to the House if members opposite somehow imply that we're threatening by using the procedures of this House, and I ask him to withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, in fact, this is a matter of debate again, perhaps within some of the context that you were talking about before, but still, of course, a point of order was called, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West was expressing his view on it, which is an opinion that he's entitled to express.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I'm prepared to rule. In this case I think it's difficult to find a path where that isn't an accusation that one member of the Assembly was trying to intimidate another member of the Assembly through the use of what is a normal practice in the Assembly. I think this is a point of order. The hon. member should apologize and withdraw. If he does so, he can continue with his remarks. I'll consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw.

Debate Continued

Mr. Ip: Back to Bill 18. I'm certainly very concerned about this bill. It's an affront to academic freedom and expression, which is, frankly, one of the basic foundations of freedom, the freedom of thought. So the question to this government, which I find truly

ironic, is: isn't the UCP the party of freedom? To see this bill come forward, where it attacks academic freedom, freedom of expression in many ways, freedom to practise and exercise debate through research, which is central to democracy, is ironic, to say the least. Academic freedom has been for millennia central to human flourishing. It is central to thriving as a society and civilization.

Frankly, I think we're talking about much larger issues here that, in fact, transcend Bill 18. We're talking about something, in my view, that is unprecedented. The idea that any political leader would try to stifle academic expression and thought is an affront to Alberta and all Canadians.

But I'm going to focus on some of the economic impacts and the specifics of this bill. What we have heard very, very clearly is that economic development corporations such as Edmonton Unlimited and others have expressed concern. I'll give you an example. Edmonton Unlimited, for example, is a federally incorporated not-for-profit corporation, and the sole shareholder is the city of Edmonton. I wonder how an organization such as this will be treated under this bill and whether it's going to impede the great work that they're doing in economic development and innovation. The agency's mandate is to help innovators and entrepreneurs, and it has helped spur millions of dollars of economic growth for Alberta, and I should also add, it receives federal funding. In terms of Bill 18's definitions it's not clear whether corporations such as the one I've mentioned, even – you know, how it's going to be impacted under the bill.

There are so many elements of this bill that I think are problematic and will create uncertainty for investors, for those who are frankly trying to make our province a better place for investment and for business. We know that for innovators and entrepreneurs time is money and any delay can impact investment. What I believe is the right thing to do is for this government to take some time for sober second thought, withdraw this bill, do the appropriate consultation that is needed, and provide that clarity on Bill 18. Frankly, I don't even think they should reintroduce it, but if they are going to reintroduce it, let's find out how it's going to impact our economic innovators and entrepreneurs.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I also would be remiss if I didn't talk about its impact on research. Bill 18, frankly, is nothing short of an attack on Alberta's universities and colleges. It will lead to heavy political interference by the UCP, and it will give the government the ability to block research grants that challenge their ideology. Plain and simple. This is what it's about. This government wants to exercise the ability to pick and choose based on their political agenda when it comes to research projects.

You know, as the Leader of the Official Opposition has said, the fact that it's going to be based on the sum of understanding of the Premier is quite scary. I can only imagine folks who are doing research in esoteric fields, such as many folks in the field of mathematics – in fact, it's the folks in the field of mathematics and their decades of research that have led to advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning. I wonder: is the Premier and her cabinet going to interfere with projects such as that, or do they only have a very sort of narrowly focused political agenda? I can't imagine in any instance that interfering with the independent process of peer-reviewed research is going to be good for society.

9:30

But let me just focus on what this means for postsecondary institutions. First of all – I think it's been noted, and I'll mention it again – it threatens to deprive universities of hundreds of millions of dollars, which in turn will absolutely deprive Alberta of jobs,

obliterate talent attraction, and stop groundbreaking research. Bill 18 will enable the government to require approval for federal tricouncil research funding, for example, so our experts who are currently receiving funding under the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, among others, will now have to go through the province, have to go through more red tape in order to access funding, and that will threaten \$533 million in transfers to Alberta researchers which is expected in this fiscal year alone. Mr. Speaker, this is dangerous and potentially fatal to the province's research ecosystem.

Let's also talk about the different types of federally funded research projects that are at stake. I'll give you some examples. What we have seen in 2023: \$2.5 million was granted to SAIT to establish the alternative construction technologies centre; \$296,000 for the University of Alberta research for palliative and end-of-life care, home and community care, mental health care; \$776,000 for Athabasca University to address systemic racism and discrimination in Canada's health systems; all very important work in our communities across Alberta. The province wants to get in the middle of that. They want to then adjudicate what's appropriate and what isn't appropriate, and frankly neither the Premier or anybody in her cabinet is qualified to do that.

Not only is Bill 18 a threat to academic freedom and to the research industry; it will be devastating to Alberta's students. We've already seen that the UCP has created unprecedented barriers for funding for postsecondary institutions. This comes after they've in fact underfunded or defunded postsecondary institutions by about \$80 million this year, so I can only imagine that the potential loss of funding through research dollars will inevitably lead to unintended consequences, potentially a rise in tuition fees, further burdening students during a time when affordability is at its lowest.

Many researchers and professors in universities and postsecondary institutions rely on research grants to be able to employ postdoctorates as well as student researchers. This will impact them. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of federal research usually goes to students. An example: Dr. Dan O'Donnell from the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations received more than a million dollars in research grants over 30 years to do really important work. Most of this, 90 per cent of it, in fact, has gone to support the wages of students who gain valuable, valuable experience and become innovators and academics of their own over time. This will have a chilling effect. This bill will have unintended consequences. We're not simply talking about more red tape; we're talking about changing the way that we nurture new researchers and new academics, new innovators in our province.

You know, I guess the laundry list doesn't stop there. What we're also seeing is that Bill 18 is going to have a threat to affordable housing. What we're seeing is that, as we all know, Alberta's housing crisis is worsening. Municipalities and the people who need homes will take the help wherever they can get it, but what Bill 18 could do and will do is block badly needed federal funding for housing. That's what will happen. Not only is it going to block any sort of federal funds that will support research but potentially housing as well. What we have seen, Mr. Speaker, is that time and again this government does not have the best interests of Albertans at heart. They would rather play with their futures to make a political point, to stick it to the feds, than do the sensible thing and work with our federal partners and federal government to make Albertans' lives better. You know, in a time of crisis, when it takes years to build housing, affordable housing, missing out on money for construction can have generational impacts.

The federal government's move away from housing policy in the 1980s and pushing it onto provinces is part of what got us into this housing crisis. Frankly, we need the federal government to step up, and the federal government is stepping back up in many ways. We need to work together to address the housing crisis across this country and particularly in Alberta. Let me give you an example of what is at stake. From 2023 alone the federal government has provided about \$6.9 million to bolster the work to end Indigenous homelessness in Edmonton, \$1.3 million to Medicine Hat Community Housing Society, \$175 million to fast-track 5,200 housing units in Edmonton under the housing accelerator fund, another \$228 million for 6,800 housing units in Calgary under the housing accelerator fund. All of this, if you just look at 2023 alone, will be in jeopardy.

At the end of the day, what's the point of Bill 18? Why do we have this? What are we trying to fix? It's so blatantly clear, Mr. Speaker, that the only reason – the only reason – Bill 18 exists is to exert more control, more political control, and that, frankly, is shameful.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Calgary-Beddington has risen to speak to RA1.

Ms Chapman: Great. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to get to speak again on Bill 18, on this amendment. "Be not now read a third time" is a great idea because this is not a very great bill. This is the piece of legislation that we have heard is going to result in Alberta getting its fair share from the federal government. Now, we haven't actually been provided with any kind of rationale for how this fair share will come to us. We haven't been given any information on how this bill will actually have any kind of teeth when it comes to getting that fair share of funding, and the reason for that is because there is no reason to think that passing this bill will have any impact on federal funding that Alberta may receive.

One thing I noticed in the presentation of this bill was that the primary example that was given for Alberta's unfair funding treatment was the federal fund, the housing accelerator grant fund. The example provided was completely misinformed. I am glad that we're talking about housing, though, and let's start with the obvious here. Housing is an issue that transcends this order of government. We all know what the situation is in Alberta right now. We all know the kind of need there is to build housing. This is something that we should be working on with every order of government, and we should be working co-operatively and collaboratively together on this.

In the presentation of this bill the bill sponsor had said that in August 2023 Alberta received 2.5 per cent of that housing accelerator grant fund despite having 12 per cent of the population. You know, I suspect the bill sponsor knows that not too many people would go and do the digging around that was required to find the actual numbers, but it turns out that you really only needed to do a very tiny bit of digging to find out that the housing fund is a three-year fund, and over those three years Alberta is set to receive \$450 million, and that's a 12 per cent per capita share. So that 2.5 per cent that is provided as the rationale for this bill is bad information. It's wrong information. I'm happy we have the opportunity to set the record straight.

9:40

The problem with bad information like that when it's used as the example to prop up this type of legislation: how can you trust it? How can you trust anything that the bill sponsor says, you know,

when they're so capable of providing that kind of misinformation with total clarity as if that was a correct piece of information, which it was not? And this wasn't just the sponsor speaking in the House; this was in the publicly communicated materials. These are statements made to the press about this. We know now that is wrong information, so we have got decisions that are being informed by bad information.

Then again we have a government that is not approaching the crisis that we see in housing through the lens of co-operative federalism. When I spoke on this bill in committee or second or whatever it was, I spoke about the courts and the decision-making that's happened around the concept of co-operative federalism, and I'll say the same thing here, which is: I don't see this government bringing anything serious to the table to negotiate in good faith with the federal government. Why? Well, it seems like maybe that pesky ideology is getting in the way again, because we don't want to build climate-resilient homes even though we know that climate-resilient homes actually save homeowners money in the long run.

But this government doesn't believe that we can achieve net zero before 2050, and, by golly, they sure aren't going to lift a finger to change that belief. If you go back and look at the bill sponsor's introduction of Bill 18, you'll find a lengthy diatribe on how we can't achieve net zero because the theoretical technology to do so doesn't exist yet. I mean, can someone please get Sweden or Norway or Denmark or Switzerland, Finland, the U.K., New Zealand, France – can we get them on the phone? We have got to let them know that what they have already achieved is actually impossible.

Mr. Eggen: I'm calling.

Ms Chapman: Someone is making a call right now.

Norway, I'll note, which is another oil-producing nation, is on target to cut their emissions in half by 2030, okay? So it's possible.

There's a whole bunch more that I wanted to say about this, because I didn't even get into the stuff on postsecondaries and what's happening there, but I know that I have colleagues who will love to speak to that section as well, so I will take my seat.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen to speak.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand and get a chance to speak to Bill 18. The Provincial Priorities Act is actually a bill that I have not yet had the opportunity to speak to, which, of course, is, I think, probably intentional by this government, by limiting debate to such an extent.

But I want to actually begin by talking about what I love about Alberta. What I love about Alberta is that it is fundamentally a place of hope and optimism and opportunity. We see that not only in the people who come to this province, but we see it in the achievements that we have made over and over in sometimes doing the things that were unthinkable or seem to be too big to achieve. But we did them. When you think about our oil sands and what we've done there, I mean, that's a remarkable achievement, and it comes with remarkable responsibilities as well.

We're also a place of incredible innovation, and one of the things that drives so many people to come here is that opportunity to innovate. So when I think about this bill and how one of the key priorities of the intent – and we've heard the Premier and the Minister of Advanced Education make it very clear that this is really about controlling that innovation. It's about actually limiting that innovation and saying that the person in the Premier's office, the person who's going to be administering the red tape on agreements

when it comes to academic research funding: they know better than everybody else as to what will be the source of innovation in Alberta going forward.

They want to control who is doing what kind of research, what will be taught, what they are going to support. They want to decide that. That is the opposite not only of academic freedom, but it's the opposite of freedom fundamentally. But that's what the goal – and it's not even us trying to imply what the intention is. The Premier has made it clear that her goal is to create more Conservative research; that's what she wants to do.

I want to give a bit of a shout-out to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for quite accurately characterizing that as really an affirmative action program for Conservatives in postsecondary institutions across this province. They need a little extra help from the Premier, apparently, to get their research done. But that is counter to what I think is one of Alberta's greatest strengths, which is that we are innovative and we are driven by opportunity. I think about some of the incredible research that has been done at the university that I attended, Mr. Speaker, which was the University of Alberta. That's the place where we came up with the development of quantum canola, which really, really transformed the canola industry.

The first oil sands separation process happened at the University of Alberta; that research started there. The world's first antiviral treatment for hepatitis B: those are things that happened not because some politician decided that that's what we were going to fund, but it's because that's where the innovation, that's where the desire, that's where the researchers were going to go. So not only are we going to stifle that innovation, which is core to who we are as Albertans, but we're going to drive people away from thinking of us as a place where innovation happens.

The second thing that I really love about Alberta and I love about Albertans is that we've always thought of ourselves as having a very big story about who we are. It goes back to that hope and opportunity and innovation. We think big. We welcome people from around the world. We send the people who grow up here – they go out, and they study. They do research, and they innovate wherever they go across the world. It's a very big story, but it runs counter, again, to the story that we're hearing the UCP tell over and over and over again about who we are as a province.

In fact, the UCP seems to be driven by telling a very small story about Albertans. It wants to tell the story that we are about fighting with people. We fight, in this case in Bill 18, with the federal government. Under numerous other bills introduced by this government this session, we're fighting with municipal leaders. We fight with parents and trans kids. We fight with health care workers and professionals. We fight with teachers. We fight with everybody. That is the narrative that the UCP is telling about Alberta, and it is a very small story indeed, Mr. Speaker, when really we are big thinkers. That's the second thing that I love so much about Alberta. It's that the true story of Alberta is actually very big.

Now, the third thing that I love about Alberta – and I think of my parents, who immigrated to this country back in the late '60s from Tanzania and from India – is that Albertans are proud Canadians. We've always been incredibly proud of our contributions not only to other provinces and to our federation, but also we are proud of what it means to be Canadian, and we want to see things done to support our neighbours and to support each other. We are compassionate and kind people. It's part of being Canadian.

This idea that we hear from the Premier when she talked about and introduced and at second reading spoke about Bill 18: she spoke about a very, very limited concept of what the Constitution even means. I actually smiled a little bit because – first of all, I want to

give credit to my colleague the Member for Calgary-Beddington, who did, I think, just an excellent job in bill debate talking about co-operative federalism. I love it when, you know, a nonlawyer goes into a deep dive into the interpretation of the Constitution.

What I don't like, Mr. Speaker, is that we hear a lot of rhetoric from the Premier indicating that she has not done, actually, that deep dive into what and how the Constitution is applied and interpreted. If you listen to the Premier, she'll talk about it only in the sense of exclusive jurisdiction, right? These are the enumerated heads of responsibility that the province has and that the federal government has and never the two shall meet, when actually – and I want to quote somebody who I respect a lot, Shaun Fluker, who is a law professor at the University of Calgary.

He wrote – and I'll table this, Mr. Speaker, but I think somebody else might have already – in a blog about Bill 18:

First year law students learn that one should resist the urge to read constitutional enactments (or legislation for that matter) and take meaning solely on a literal basis from the words themselves, particularly an enactment made over 150 years ago as the Constitution Act, 1867 was. Most of the written text in both Constitution Acts (1867 and 1982) requires a reading that also considers judicial interpretation, constitutional conventions, unwritten constitutional principles, and various other contexts, in order to get a full understanding of meaning and how the provision is actually applied.

In reality, you can read the text of the Constitution and think you understand it, but that shows a very anemic and, frankly, uneducated interpretation of the Constitution.

9:50

In reality, the Constitution has been and will be for many years ahead a living tree – it grows – and our concepts of federalism and co-operative federalism have grown as well. It's not that there are strict areas of jurisdiction that the province and the federal government have. It's that there are opportunities for co-operation. We see that. Our world is a complex and ever-changing world, where things don't fall into those enumerated categories the way the Premier would like it to happen. And I have to point out that we already know that this government recognizes that there is a lot of movement between those areas of jurisdiction.

I'll give an example, Mr. Speaker, something we haven't heard about much from this government in this last session, which is that, you know, an area of provincial responsibility that this government has had no problem with federal interference into is child care. For example, child care is a provincial responsibility – it falls under education – yet at this point in time the federal government funds it almost at 80 per cent of the funding that goes into child care in this province. We recognize that there is a role for both levels of government, but fundamentally it's about the fact that Albertans don't care about that. Albertans want the things that will make their lives better. They want housing. They want child care. They want action on climate change. They want to see all those things. They are all the same taxpayer, whether it's paying municipal taxes, federal taxes, provincial taxes. So while this government is focused on the fight, they're not focused on the outcomes, which are what Albertans hold them to account for.

That's what I love about Alberta. They see through the shenanigans, frankly, and the rhetoric and the posturing that this government is doing when it comes to Bill 18 and so many other pieces of legislation. What they want to see is results for their families, for their communities, for their neighbours. That's what they want to see, and that is a vision of Alberta that we all share at the Alberta NDP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few words to say about Bill 18, really building on what my colleague just spoke about, and that is that one of the great things about Alberta is that we are innovative, and that innovative spirit has really been one of the things that has catapulted our universities into being amongst the best research universities in the country and, in many areas, the best anywhere in the world.

What is going to happen if we create uncertainty in academic institutions is very similar to what we'll see with businesses when there is uncertainty to recruit the best people or to bring in the funding from business, which often comes to our universities as well, and it's that they're not going to come here. We're not going to be able to recruit the best investigators to our universities because they're not sure they're going to be able to create in that environment that offers them that free creativity and where there are extra layers of red tape, disguised as less, in our institutions.

We're also not going to see graduate students coming here. Graduate students need to be in that creative environment. Their grant funding: in many cases the best and the brightest are funded by grants that are awarded by the government of Canada. If that's what's going to get limited, they're going to get those awards and take them elsewhere, where they don't need to have that approval process, whatever it might be, or they don't want to be at risk of that.

Now, we need those graduate students to support our bright minds and professors because they'll have ideas that will be taken to another level by the graduate students. We know that that brings in more private dollars. Many of them develop companies that stay in our province. This is just another thing that this interference in our universities is absolutely going to bring. We're not going to see it over the first few months; it's going to be something that grows. It's a problem because it isn't just a short-term thing. Once you lose the respect of the community, the academic community, it's going to be very difficult to build it back, and the people that are here are not going to be recruiting people with enthusiasm when, really, they're kind of feeling that they want to go elsewhere.

I urge this government to please not interfere and to have a second thought about Bill 18, to not pass this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to reasoned amendment RA1? The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has risen.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm standing to support Bill 18 and to respond to a commentary made by the second-last speaker, who went on to talk about the Constitution and cited some law professor as being somebody who, you know, is a top authority on that. I want to debate a little bit about: what is the nature of the Constitution, and what is the nature of sections 91, 92 of our Constitution? Yes, it was originally formulated in 1867 but reiterated in 1982.

You know, as I mentioned at an earlier time when I stood up, I actually had the benefit of having a course in Canadian federalism by a guy who was at the table negotiating the Constitution agreement, a guy named Peter Lougheed. I can tell you right now that there's no darn way that Peter Lougheed or his minister of intergovernmental affairs, that was also at the table with him, who I worked with for four years, would ever have agreed to the kind of comments that you just made about: what is the nature of Canadian federalism and the rights of the Constitution? [interjection] What?

Mr. Getson: You've got to go through the Speaker.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, through you, of course, I would say these things.

If you want to, you know, revise history and the reality of what was actually discussed by the people at the table, I would remind you of the other person who was at the table when the Constitution was being negotiated and agreed to by all provinces and the federal government, the late Brian Peckford, who was Premier of Newfoundland at the time. He was very clear that Bill C-69, for example, was totally contrary to the understanding of the foundation of our country and what all the people around the table had agreed to was the nature of Canadian federalism. So you want to come up with and invent what you think the Constitution was supposed to say. Well, you can do that, but the reality is that the people who were at the table had a very different vision of that.

If you want to forget about the history of Alberta and how the central government has abused and sucked the resources and wealth and prosperity out of Alberta over the last 60 years, and longer when you talk about other policies like tariffs on trains and things like that, a long history of the federal government setting up policies that favoured central Canada – and I say this as a person who grew up in central Canada. I had no idea that this was going on until you come and you start learning about the Constitution and the history of this country. Why we have Canadian federalism is because when the population is based in central Canada, it can have a tyranny of the majority, and the provinces and the regions must have a mechanism to defend their interests and those issues that are important to their local regions.

[The Speaker in the chair]

So what is Bill 18? Bill 18 is a mechanism to counteract the abuse of the federal government's use of its taxation and spending powers, which it is – it's abuse – to intersect themselves into areas of provincial jurisdiction. That's what Bill 18 is trying to address. So if you wish to defend . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I might just remind the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to speak through the chair. Generally speaking, that helps with decorum around here.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my apologies for not doing so.

I just would like to reiterate, you know, that Alberta has a long history of being abused and misrepresented by the federal government. As I mentioned before, fewer than 6 per cent of the federal Members of Parliament in this province are Liberal. Fewer than 10 per cent of the federal Liberal parties in the prairie provinces are Liberal. Who's representing the interests of Alberta and the prairie provinces, for example?

It's not the federal government. So in those areas of jurisdiction, yes, there are shared areas of jurisdictions and we should be co-operating, but what do you do when a federal government decides that it is not going to co-operate, it is not going to listen to the province, it's not even going to advise them that they're coming to the province to hand out money in contradiction to the public policy of the government of Alberta? That is not conducive to negotiation discussion.

10:00

Ms Notley: This is about press releases? Oh, my God.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, you know, I get some chirping from the Leader of the Opposition over there, who ran a government that acquiesced and folded to the federal government as they abused and came out and blocked a number of pipelines. She wants to talk about – you know, we know people of Alberta remember what you did. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I'm sure there will be opportunity for other members to speak. Currently the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills has the call.

An Hon. Member: Fish Creek.

The Speaker: Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Anyways, the people of Alberta let that government know what happens when you betray your own province, and we found that out in 2019, didn't we? Albertans will remember who's defending the interests of Alberta and who's representing the interests of a federal government that wants to abuse the rights and responsibilities and jurisdiction and the prosperity of this province.

With that, I would just say that I would like to support Bill 18. Thank you very much. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

On the amendment RA1. The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge looks like he's rising. He has approximately two minutes remaining.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 18 and against this bill. As we know, the UCP: they're always picking a fight with Ottawa and wasting Albertans' money on that. As we have seen in the past, like, they already have taken access to diabetes medication, contraception, and now they are taking away access to research and affordable education. As we have seen, the Premier seems to have forgotten that Albertans democratically elected their local leadership to run their municipalities. Why is this government so power hungry that they want to poke their nose everywhere? They may be creatures of the province, but they still represent the priorities of their constituents. This government is the gatekeeper-in-chief, and this is the bill that is called Going to Make It Harder to Get Federal Dollars, Taxes Albertans Pay, Back to Alberta.

As we know, we are going through a housing crisis, and people who need a home will take help wherever they can get it, but with this bill they won't be able to. This bill is destabilizing a lot of Albertans and their needs. This government has created unprecedented barriers to funding for postsecondary institutions, and this comes after they defund postsecondary institutions by \$80 million each year. Mr. Speaker, our local Albertan students have to go away, out of Alberta, which costs another thousands of dollars . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 42, agreed to earlier today, all questions must be put to the Assembly.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:04 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Boparai	Ip	Notley
Chapman	Irwin	Pancholi
Dach	Kasawski	Shepherd
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet
Elmeligi	Metz	

10:20

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

Totals: For – 14 Against – 47

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 42 I must put all the necessary questions to dispose of Bill 18, the Provincial Priorities Act, at third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:22 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	Lundy	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fir	Nally	Wiebe
Getson	Neudorf	Williams
Glubish	Nicolaides	Wilson
Guthrie	Nixon	Wright, J.
Horner	Petrovic	Yao
Hunter	Pitt	Yaseen
Jean	Rowswell	

Against the motion:

Boparai	Ip	Notley
Chapman	Irwin	Pancholi
Dach	Kasawski	Shepherd
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet
Elmeligi	Metz	

Totals: For – 47 Against – 14

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

10:40

Bill 20

Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand and move third reading of Bill 20.

Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of debate about this, and let me say that some of it's even been accurate. I'll take a couple of minutes and describe the other parts because there seems to be – no matter how much people know what the facts are, they seem to say otherwise, beginning with the fact that the folks across the aisle and some members of the media continue to say that there's been no consultation. Well, everybody in this room knows that I tabled two reports that we did with consultation last year, one on the Local Authorities Election Act and one on the Municipal Government Act changes. Many of the things that are in the bill have been talked about at least, besides that, in passing ways to the Alberta Municipalities conventions and the Rural Municipalities association conventions. This is a good piece of legislation.

Now, the things that people want to fight the most on – again, talking about what has been misrepresented. The most comical, I suppose, description of the bill by some of the media is using the phrase – and I love this – “sweeping new powers.” Well, Mr. Speaker, there are no new powers. Everything here that is in Bill 20 that we're able to do, we've always been able to do. The things that the media and some folks across the aisle want to talk about – “new powers” – include the authority to dismiss councillors. Well, we've always had the authority to dismiss councillors. I offer as evidence the fact that about six months ago we dismissed a bunch of councillors in Chestermere. For those that actually want to know some facts about that, one should go to the website alberta.ca/chestermere. There's a ton of information there. But the most important fact is that it's not new power.

The other thing that people seem to want to call new power is the ability to overturn municipal bylaws. Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we've always had that authority. Every government has, including the NDP government when they were in government. They had that authority, too. And I would say that as further proof that we've always had that authority, we've actually done it a couple of times in the last couple of years, including this session of the Legislature, where the affordability minister put in a piece of legislation to overturn the city of Calgary's ridiculously high taxes on electricity. Now, the minister responsibly asked the city of Calgary to lower their ridiculously high taxes, and they said they would. You certainly can't say they were dishonest about the answer, because they did change them, except they changed them effective 2027, which, for those keeping track, isn't for a little while. So the minister responsibly made the change for them effective at the end of 2024 because they needed the help.

Outside of that, the other example that I would offer you is that near the end of the COVID restrictions when the government of Alberta removed masking mandates, the city of Edmonton decided that they would be the provincial Health ministry and they would add masking mandates. Again, it was a ridiculous thing to do, so this government responsibly put a piece of legislation in the House to overturn the city of Edmonton's ability to be the provincial Health ministry, which is completely out of their lane.

Mr. Speaker, here's the problem. The reason we have to make these changes is because: what if somebody like Edmonton did that,

say, in the middle of the summer, put a ridiculous bylaw in place that Albertans would have had to live with for several months before the House sat again? All this really does is make sure that there's a mechanism to deal with that if necessary.

Interestingly enough, the other thing that the bill doesn't deal with but people seem to conflate with it is the ability to overturn land-use bylaws. Well, there's actually nothing in Bill 20 that really affects that, but here are the facts. Since 1995 every government in Alberta has had full authority, without delay, to overturn a municipal land-use bylaw. In fairness, that's been used zero times. It was used zero times by the PC government, it was used zero times by the NDP government, and it's been used zero times by the UCP government. So there's no change there.

Mr. Speaker, some of the other things that I'll touch briefly on that people don't want to talk about because they're such good news is the fact that we're going to make it easier and more affordable for municipalities to provide affordable housing.

There are elements in the bill that exempt affordable housing companies or organizations from property tax, both provincial and municipal, through the CRL. It will include more forms of housing, again, because that's one of the biggest things that we need in Alberta, and our government, as you know, is working very hard to do that. So it will make it so that more forms of housing can be used in the CRL, community revitalization levies.

We are making it more transparent for when big cities have what are effectively already in place, parties, the party system. Of course, I'll remind everybody that in the last election, using Calgary as the most outstanding example at \$1.6 million from the unions to support nine members who ran for Calgary city council, and, in fact, the business group had third-party advertisers that committed at least \$400,000 to a mayoral candidate. Mr. Speaker, if it walks like a duck and acts like a duck – well, this certainly walks like a party and acts like a party, so we need some more accountability and transparency. That's what the bill does.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will move third reading of Bill 20, and at this point, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 21

Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 21, the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

Alberta's government is laser focused on making sure that we are well prepared for emergencies and that we have the necessary tools in place to keep Albertans and their communities safe for disasters. One of those tools are the proposed amendments in Bill 21. This legislation is about protecting the safety of Albertans. With disasters becoming more severe and complex, it's certainly crucial for the government to be able to respond decisively to protect the lives of Albertans and the communities where they live.

With Bill 21, if it is passed, our government seeks to bolster our emergency response capabilities to better protect the lives and livelihoods of all Albertans. A crucial piece of legislation is not just about new areas. Despite what the NDP would have you believe, it's certainly about safeguarding all Albertans.

By amending the Emergency Management Act, the Forest and Prairie Protection Act, the Water Act, the Election Act, the bill, if passed, would provide clarity to effectively manage emergencies as we would work with municipalities.

Our government was elected on a platform of putting Albertans first, building a stronger, more resilient province, and by introducing Bill 21 we're following through on our commitment to prioritize safety and ensure that Alberta is prepared to face any challenges that come our way and, of course, the lessons learned from the last disaster season.

Mr. Speaker, during an emergency Alberta's government has the ability to effectively respond and become, in these very increasingly critical circumstances, with adequate preparation, co-ordination, resources, essential to mitigate the impact of disaster to ensure the safety and well-being of all Albertans. It's, of course, imperative that the government prioritize disaster response and invest in resilience measures and changes to legislation to effectively manage these changes in the future. That's exactly what we're doing with this bill. Bill 21 will ensure that Alberta remains resilient in the face of any challenge that we might face.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell you a little story about those who have been, of course, impacted by Bill 21. Over this past weekend I was able to attend, along with a few colleagues, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association Conference and Trade Show. We engaged with the group of well over 200 members. These were fire chiefs as well as firefighters that were in attendance. Again, I attended with various colleagues, and of course we had many discussions, but what we didn't talk about, because it was never brought up, was Bill 21. That tells me that there's an understanding and a respect that we have with our firefighters in our communities and especially those chiefs. I was certainly honoured on that particular day when they gifted me a first responder helmet, which is a token of their support and appreciation for not just myself but for the government, which I am extremely humbled and grateful to receive. I was certainly honoured that we have also received support from municipalities.

10:50

Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Grande Prairie supports Bill 21. Mayor Jackie Clayton said that, and I quote, Bill 21 brings clarity and consistency for our municipalities by clearly defining the roles of provincial and municipal governments in a crisis, unquote. She goes further on to support Bill 21 by saying that, quote, it streamlines the powers used during an emergency, providing greater assistance that enables municipal leaders to focus more on their residents and daily operations. Mayor Clayton also said that, quote, the bill allows the province to offer crucial services and support on a larger scale, ensuring our local authorities can confidently manage emergency planning and response within their jurisdiction, unquote.

Mr. Speaker, as I've stated: clarity, consistency, confidence to manage an emergency; that is our goal. Full stop. The legislation, despite what the members opposite say, is about focusing on that transparency and clarity and consistency because that's what we've heard from municipalities and incident commanders from the last fire season.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I do move third reading of Bill 21, the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, and I also would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

For too long, Albertans have faced a health care system that is overburdened, hard to navigate, and slow to address their needs. This inefficient and unreliable system has led to long wait times for emergency care and surgeries, a shortage of family doctors, and overwhelmed emergency rooms.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the debate from the NDP over the course of this evening, and I have to say that there was a lot of misinformation, a lot of smear and fear because, apparently, the opposition doesn't want to fix the health care system. They would rather see it stay as it is. We do not accept that. Once again, I believe the NDP are on the wrong side of history. While the challenges that are being faced are widespread across Canada, Alberta is poised to lead the way in fixing them. It begins with the Health Statutes Amendment Act, Bill 22.

In November of 2023 I announced our government's plan to refocus Alberta's health care system. This refocusing is designed to create a system that meets the needs of Albertans today and for generations to come. The Health Statutes Amendment Act lays the foundation for the transformative journey toward a health care system that truly serves Albertans. It represents a fundamental shift in our approach to health care, to create a more efficient, accessible, and patient-centred system. The act enables the establishment of four new provincial health agencies focused on primary care, acute care, continuing care, and mental health and addiction. These agencies will be responsible for overseeing and delivering integrated health services, and ensuring that all Albertans receive timely access to care regardless of where they live.

Mr. Speaker, by clearly defining roles and responsibilities we will streamline operations, enhance accountability, and improve transparency within our health care system. This new structure will keep the best parts of a large single provider and will ensure a seamless patient journey. There will be dedicated leadership for each sector, and this leadership will be held accountable and tasked with achieving priority goals to improve patient outcomes in each area. The governance structure will ensure that there is co-ordination and communication across all sectors. Patient care will be at the forefront of this new structure, with front-line workers empowered to provide the best of care to their patients.

Listening to the health care workers has been central to our refocusing: not what I heard from the other side, but in fact we have been listening, Mr. Speaker. We know health care workers on the ground and regional partners have a direct line of sight on what needs to change to improve quality of care in their community. Over the past few months we conducted one of the largest public engagements ever by the government of Alberta, with 65 in-person sessions across the province; 3,000 people attended, most of whom were health care workers. We gathered online survey feedback from more than 18,000 Albertans – and, again, most of them were health care workers – and 10,000 telephone town hall attendees. These included health care workers, patients, families, and caregivers, which will be crucial in shaping the way forward.

As I have said on many occasions, the vast majority of these individuals agreed that the current system is not working. We have to do something different. The Health Statutes Amendment Act includes updates to the Regional Health Authorities Act and the Health Information Act, parts of which have not been revised since the 1990s. The amendments ensure clarity in the roles and responsibilities of provincial health agencies and health care providers, facilitating a transition to a more agile and responsive system.

Under the new legislation provincial health agencies will oversee operational planning and clinical service delivery across the province, allowing them to prioritize health care based on the unique needs of Albertans. It's what we have heard through this extensive engagement, first, the extensive engagement that we did on the Continuing Care Act and, secondly, on the MAPS, or modernizing Alberta's primary care system, as well as the Indigenous MAPS as well as the targeted additional engagement on the refocusing. Every time we heard that we needed targeted leadership to oversee these different agencies and sectors.

Enhanced oversight by the Minister of Health and other relevant ministers will make sure the strategic direction of the health system is aligned with the evolving needs of Albertans, creating a responsive, efficient, and patient-centred system. In short, we are creating a health care system that works for all Albertans.

We also need stability, Mr. Speaker, and stability during this transition is a top priority. There will be no job losses for staff who are moved to the new organizations. We are committed to avoiding any interruptions to employment or patient care. Any unionized employees within Alberta Health Services who transition to new teams will retain their collective agreements and bargaining processes under their new employers. In fact, these collective agreements and collective bargaining processes are being confirmed through legislation to continue to apply in the same way for employees under their new employer as they do under AHS. We are dedicated to supporting health care workers through this transition and leveraging their expertise to build a system that better supports them, their patients, and the communities they support.

Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, supports a hopeful vision for the future of health care, a future that would see every Albertan having access to a primary care provider, swift and efficient emergency care, equitable continuing care options, and integrated mental health and addiction services. We can keep doing what we've always done and hope for better outcomes, or we can refocus how the system is structured, amend our legislation accordingly, and create a path forward that will get us to the outcomes Albertans want and deserve. These legislative changes will move us toward a modern and more responsive and effective health care model that better reflects Albertans' needs and priorities.

I now ask for your support to put Albertans first, to put patients first, and to support Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act. This act will lay the foundation of a refocused health care system that will meet the needs of Albertans now and for generations to come.

I now adjourn debate.

11:00

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health might like to ask to move to adjourn debate.

Member LaGrange: I move third reading, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to request unanimous consent to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

Time Allocation on Bill 20

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a time allocation motion, which allots up to five minutes for a member of the Official Opposition to respond to the motion. Is there anyone wishing to do so? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been down this road quite a few times already on time allocation, and obviously, specifically with Bill 20, we learned very quickly this afternoon that there is some work that needs to be done. We heard from the constituents up in Fort Chip around the fact that they had some amendments that they had proposed to the government that they had requested be brought into this piece of legislation, that have not been done. So I would encourage that the government reconsider their stance on time allocation, reconsider the bill, and look at the fact that there is a group of Albertans that have asked to be consulted with, and are looking to be consulted with, and have an actual amendment to provide to the government to change this bill. So I will speak to that.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 46 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:03 p.m.]

[One minute 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	Lunty	Singh
Dreesen	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
Jean		

Against the motion:

Boparai	Ip	Metz
Chapman	Irwin	Pancholi
Dach	Kasawski	Shepherd
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet
Elmeligi		

Totals: For – 46 Against – 13

[Government Motion 46 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 21

47. Mr. Schow moved:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, 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: Hon. members, the hon. the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 47. This is a time allocation motion that allows for up to five minutes for a member of the Official Opposition to respond. It appears the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is going to do so.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's not the first time I've risen to speak out against time allocation, and it's quite actually, I want to say, alarming to see just how almost gleefully the Government House Leader is introducing time allocation and how gleefully the members opposite are voting in support.

You know, we are hearing from countless Albertans who are paying attention. Might not fully be paying attention to all the intricacies around time allocation, but they're certainly paying attention to these bills: Bill 21, Bill 22, this enormous piece of legislation that's had just mere minutes of debate in the last reading and, not to presuppose, but I'm certain in the next reading as well. At a time when we should be really trying to uplift and strengthen democracy, we're seeing the complete opposite from members opposite. These are on bills that will have significant and far-reaching impacts on the day-to-day lives of Albertans. I think Albertans deserve fulsome debate from the members of this Chamber. I've said it before, I mean, I really urge all of us in this House to reflect on the absolute honour that we have to do this job.

11:10

I tell elementary students, grade 6 students, when I'm visiting that, like, there are 87 of us; 87 people do this job in the whole province of Alberta. Why wouldn't you do everything you could in your power to do the job well? And that means being here for debate. That means not stifling debate as you continue to do on every significant piece of legislation. [interjections] The members opposite are laughing at that. We know that on Bill 18, Bill 20, Bill 21 they are hearing from their constituents. Rural municipalities, rural communities across the province are up in arms. For the members opposite to laugh and to joke about cutting off debate: shameful.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've made my opinion clear on this. I'm going to urge these members as they head back to their constituencies for the summer break to really reflect on why they're here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 47.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 47 carried]

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

[One minute 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	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
Jean		

Against the motion:

Boparai	Ip	Metz
Chapman	Irwin	Pancholi
Dach	Kasawski	Shepherd
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet
Elmeligi		

Totals: For – 46 Against – 13

[Government Motion 47 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 22

48. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 22, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 48. This is a time allocation motion that allows for up to five minutes for a member of the Official Opposition to speak to the motion. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't say that it's a pleasure, but I will rise and speak to this motion. I will say that getting an opportunity to speak to this motion on Bill 22 is actually the first time I'm going to get a chance to speak to Bill 22, because it's actually had the least amount of debate in this Legislature before this government brought in closure.

I want to point out something. I appreciate the work done by Dr. Jared Wesley, who just earlier today posted a little bit of statistics that I think are really relevant for this discussion on time allocation. Since 1971, going back that far, Alberta governments have only invoked closure, time allocation, on 60 bills in total – since 1971; that's older than I am, Mr. Speaker – and 25 of those 60 times that it's been imposed on a bill have been done under the UCP in the last five years.

Under Premier Lougheed: done zero times. Under Premier Getty: five times. Under Premier Klein: 16 times. Under Premier Stelmach: seven times. Under Premier Redford: five times. Under Premier Prentice: once. Under the Leader of the Official Opposition: once. Under former Premier Kenney: 17 times. Under this Premier: eight times in only one year it has been brought forward on bills.

Every time the minister of transportation, or whatever his role is, thumps about that, he needs to think about the fact that if the tables were turned and this was an NDP government that was invoking closure as many times without even a modicum of debate on these bills, they would be outraged.

That's the test, Mr. Speaker, of democratic function, to say that it's not just about giving ourselves power, but it's about saying: what would we want to happen in a functioning democracy if a different party, a party we oppose even, had that authority and had that power? That's how we should be conducting ourselves. That's how we should be implementing our democratic rules and principles. We should not be thinking about controlling it all for ourselves but thinking about how we would want it to function for the millions of people in this province that we represent.

Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. We currently have 38 MLAs representing far more constituents than ever before in the Official Opposition, yet we've seen debate limited more times than has ever been done in history in just the last year by this government. I have to ask the question: what is this government so afraid of when it comes to debate? I think they are simply afraid to have to answer to their constituents on the record for their views on these bills.

I have not been around as long as the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I've not been around as long as the Member for Edmonton-North West, so I haven't seen these things happen for as long as they have, but in the five years that I've been a member in this House, I have seen what happens and why the government gets pretty antsy and itchy to get out of the House. They do it because they know that when they're here, they're starting to get asked questions by their constituents, and they're being asked to answer for the bills they're bringing forward. So they want to scatter. But I've also seen this story play out once before, at least, when they get out to their constituency and they have to face the music with their constituents.

That's what's going to happen. Then I'm certain that when we come back in the fall, there will be more fractures, more division, especially as we know that the Premier is heading into a leadership review in the fall. All the rumblings that have already started to happen: it's like a replay of last session, Mr. Speaker, last term. I've seen this happen before, and it's happening already. If there's one thing we can count on in Alberta politics, it is that the Alberta Conservatives will eat themselves alive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

11:20

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 48.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 48 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:20 p.m.]

[One minute 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	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
Jean		
Against the motion:		
Boparai	Elmeligi	Pancholi
Chapman	Ip	Shepherd
Dach	Irwin	Sweet
Eggen	Kasawski	
Totals:	For – 46	Against – 11

[Government Motion 48 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 21

Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 21 at third reading. The hon. the Deputy Premier has 16 minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Pursuant to Government Motion 47, agreed to earlier this evening, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. Is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide notice of an amendment to Bill 21. May I do that?

The Speaker: Yeah.

Dr. Elmeligi: Sorry. Am I doing that the wrong way?

The Speaker: No; it's okay. What I'll need you to do is that I'll need you to move it, not provide notice.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. I would like to move an amendment.

The Speaker: Perfect. If you can pass these to the pages, I'll get a copy, we'll get a copy to the table, and as soon as we have those, I'll provide you the opportunity to continue.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment RA1.

The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Manning I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, be not now read a third time because the Assembly is of the view that it is contrary to the values of Albertans for the minister to acquire or utilize an individual's personal or real property and have no obligation to pay compensation in respect of that property if it is damaged or destroyed as a result of the minister's actions.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

This amendment speaks quite a bit to a lot of what my colleague from Edmonton-Manning brought up this afternoon, when we were in bill debate on Bill 21, and this is really around the amendments to the Forest and Prairie Protection Act. Where the province has a bit more discretion to conduct and direct emergency wildfire responses, Bill 21 really broadens the minister's powers to require municipalities to take action, and it also requires or allows for the minister to go onto property in response to emergencies, which, of course, sounds fine.

The part that gives the government the ability to enter private property for the purposes of managing a water emergency or a wildfire: the part that is really problematic for us is that the government may be able to go onto private land or real property to enact responses to emergencies. However, there is not guaranteed compensation for property owners or municipalities that are required to act in certain ways to respond to emergencies. The act really leaves it open. The act broadens the minister's powers to require municipalities to take action, but it leaves it open whether those municipalities will be compensated for taking that required action.

This is particularly problematic because when you say the word "require," that means that has to happen, but then if you say the words "maybe there will be compensation," obviously that implies that maybe there might not be compensation. Then the cost of that emergency response could fall to the property owners, the real property owners, or the municipality. I am concerned that the changes to the Forest and Prairie Protection Act and the Water Act may actually download further costs to municipalities for emergency response if that compensation is not there. It doesn't seem very fair that the government would require action and then not be willing to fund that action, necessarily.

Part of the issue with Bill 21 in general is that, again, it is another bill that is putting a lot of power into the hands of the government, really centralizing power and taking it away from local decision-making authorities. That, to me, is particularly problematic.

11:30

Another part of this bill that is really problematic, whether we're talking about the Forest and Prairie Protection Act or the Water Act or just the bill in general, is that there is little to no definition of what qualifies as an emergency. What are the criteria and thresholds that define an emergency or define the situation where the province would be expected to take control of emergency response? I understand that it's difficult to define "emergency" when you're not in one, but I think we have to try because one of the criticisms – oh, my gosh. It's, like, 11:30. One of the criticisms of this bill that we've heard from municipalities is that it doesn't provide them the certainty of when the province would need to step in or what that would look like. But really defining "emergency," defining the criteria and thresholds around "emergency" is a really critical part of that.

I think that becomes also particularly important when this bill contains things like the potential for interbasin water transfers under the Water Act, which is a very controversial topic we have talked about in this House a few times. I don't need to get into necessarily what the impacts are with the interbasin water transfers or why people are a little bit nervous about them, but I am concerned when we create a piece of legislation that opens the door to an idea that is controversial, not necessarily scientifically supported, and the decision rests entirely in the minister's office. That just is uneasy for me.

You know, I do recognize that there could be extreme situations where an interbasin water transfer might actually save lives of

Albertans. I can appreciate that. However, an interbasin water transfer usually also requires quite a bit of infrastructure to move water from one place to another, like a pipeline or something, for example. Those aren't typically things that can happen very quickly, as you need to respond quickly in the state of emergency. So I'm pretty uneasy about this part of the amendment to the Water Act that allows for interbasin water transfers in times of emergency when we haven't really defined what an emergency is, we haven't defined the criteria and thresholds of that emergency, and also we're proposing something that requires infrastructure to be built, which typically takes longer than an emergency lasts. So I'm not super comfortable with that part of the act either.

The other part of this, I think, that is challenging for folks is that this act gives the province the option to take over local emergencies outside of a provincial emergency if the local authorities request it or the local authority council or staff may no longer be able to adequately respond, although, again, "adequately respond" is not defined, or events that affect several jurisdictions. While that sounds like it's going along in a positive direction, without defining "emergency," without defining "adequately respond," it does start to weaken the decision-making power of municipalities.

I question how some of these things can happen already. The province already supports municipalities in emergency response, so I'm not quite sure why we need to have a new piece of legislation that would guide or allow the province to have more power in that dynamic. As the RMA president Paul McLauchlin says:

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 . . . This pattern of centralization and big government flies in the face of conservative principles. Since the content of bills 18, 20, and 21 were not included in the platform material from the provincial election just last year, it leaves us wondering who is controlling the policy direction of this government.

For me, in this concern raised by the RMA president, the one thing that really stands out to me is that this bill could confuse and complicate emergency response moving forward. That, to me, is really, really important.

We want to make sure that our municipalities, who know the landscape the best, who know the communities the best, who understand the local topography and the local space are best able to respond to an emergency to support their residents and the people that they serve. So any bill that offers confusion or complication to an emergency response I think is quite risky. These are situations where lives and homes and livestock are literally at stake, so we want to make sure that anything that the province is doing is helping the situation, not making it more complicated or more confusing for folks.

One of the things that I really struggle with in this act and Bill 18 and Bill 20 is that there's a certain essence of entitlement here that the provincial government knows best, and when it comes to local decision-making, I beg to differ. I actually think that our municipal governments have a pretty strong grasp of the landscape and their constituents. They really understand their local area. That's what they're elected to do. So when we create laws that interfere with their decision-making or confuse that decision-making, we're actually creating a space that isn't serving Albertans but is potentially making their lives a little bit harder. I thought we were here to make lives easier for Albertans, but maybe that's just me.

But, you know, coming back to our amendment, I also find it very interesting if there's no obligation to pay personal or real property owners compensation for going onto their property to control or take action against emergencies. The damage that could be caused to property from emergency action could be tree removal. It could

be building berms for flooding. It could be digging trenches for wildfire breaks. The damages that could happen to real property and personal property could be significant, and to not require compensation for that would just further add trauma to the trauma of dealing with an emergency literally happening in your backyard. It feels a little insensitive to say that you're going to require action but not actually back that up with support and compensation.

With that, I move this amendment, take my seat, and defer to my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are referring to the amendment as RA1.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment RA1? The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For me, it's absolutely essential that we support this amendment. I think that many of my colleagues have appropriately engaged on this particular bill, but, you know, I'm willing to take it just a little step further. To me, I like to call a spade a spade; it is what it is. For me, this bill reeks of Take Back Alberta not wanting to put on a mask. I mean, we've heard it right from the minister's lips that this is what it's really about. When the local authorities at the municipal level were encouraging people to take safety precautions and to wear a mask, some of the members on the other side of the House, well, just couldn't take that. They just couldn't take it. Of course, their friends in Take Back Alberta were up in arms about it, literally. Literally, up in arms about it.

11:40

When their friends from Take Back Alberta decided that they were going to run roughshod all over the party, the UCP, they made their demands, and this was one of their demands, to make sure that if local authorities, whether it's putting on masks or being able to use plastic straws – well, it was just not going to be enough for Take Back Alberta, and they were going to demand that their party, the good old UCP, is going to make sure that this will never be allowed to happen in the province again.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Loyola: "Hear, hear," says the member on the other side of the House, because, of course, he agrees with it. He agrees with everything I'm saying.

But here's what he won't agree with, Mr. Speaker. He won't agree with local authorities, municipalities, who are there to represent their constituents and are taking safety precautions for their constituents, many of the constituents asking for these things. You've got to remember that on both sides of a political issue there are people. There are actual people who are asking the local authority to actually implement a bylaw. It's not as if there are no people who are asking for it.

The government has to come to terms with the fact that there are constituents that disagree with them. They just disagree with your point of view, you know, and we've got to come to an end of this demonizing the other side because they don't agree with you. That's the problem that we're facing here as a province, Mr. Speaker, that politics has become about demonizing the other side rather than focusing on the real issues and constituents that have issues and want certain bylaws implemented.

Their local municipalities are doing what they ask, but that's not good enough for this government. They want to be able to say: well, no, if we disagree with you, then we want to be able to override the decision that you've made at a local level because we

don't think it fits with our ideology. That's what it is. Let's call a spade a spade.

Mr. McDougall: And you would never do that.

Member Loyola: We would always, always respect a decision of another order of government. Would we disagree with them if the issue was there? Of course, we would, and we would put it on the record, but we would never, Mr. Speaker – never – create a law to override the decision-making authority of another order of government.

You know, it's so crazy, Mr. Speaker – I'll call it that – because the members on the other side of the House continually blame Ottawa and the Prime Minister for all these other laws that are being implemented at a federal level and are fighting against Ottawa. They pick fights with Ottawa on a whole number of issues, and now they want to turn around and basically tell local authorities what to do instead. Well, where I come from, you know what that's called? It's called authoritarian, and it is a characteristic of dictatorships. That's exactly what it is, and that's why I'm calling a spade a spade right here today on the record. It is authoritarian. And when you're centralizing so much power and decision-making into one person's position, being the Premier in this case, that's also authoritarian.

It just puzzles me to no end, Mr. Speaker, how we can have a government that sits on that side of the House and claims to be the defenders of freedom yet acts in such an authoritarian way with the implementation of these bills, presenting these bills inside of this Assembly and then wanting us to vote alongside with them when we know, clearly, that these are characteristics of authoritarian governments. We can agree to disagree. We can disagree with another order of government. But you know what? At the end of the day, we have to work together. We co-operate, we negotiate, but what we don't do: we don't present a bill in an Assembly that overrides local authority decision-making powers. That is authoritarian.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Minister of Forestry and Parks has risen.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak against this amendment here quickly. There's nothing changing in this bill on our liability and responsibility of liability to municipalities or property owners. This is actually – I guess it speaks to something that doesn't even exist in the bill.

Just listening to the commentary on this amendment, the last two speakers spent very little time actually talking about this amendment, so obviously they don't feel that this amendment is that important either. I hear them talking about criteria for emergencies, talking about water transfers, talking about Bill 18 and Bill 20, talking about shovels or spades or something. I'm not even sure what that commentary was about.

I would suggest that we vote this amendment down because, again, there's not any change happening when it comes to responsibility of liability. A lot of the discussion here today has just been repetitive, and there's really nothing new. I guess that they have to debate, so I would suggest that we vote this amendment down and carry on with our evening.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak?

Member Irwin: I mean, I hesitate to even bother speaking now because I've been convinced by that minister that there's no point, really. We're just reiterating our points. No, we are. I look at the camera because I know there are people watching, actually, right

now, and they heard that. I know that because they're telling me they're watching. Believe it or not, there are a lot of people watching because they care about our democracy. They absolutely do.

Ms Chapman: Not just my mom.

Member Irwin: Yeah, not just your mom. Not just the Member for Calgary-Beddington's mom is watching.

I know, actually, a number – I won't name anybody because I don't have their consent. But I know that there are city councillors watching currently, and I know there are folks in Red Deer watching currently and many others as well. I will see if I can get their permission to name them all the next time I stand to debate.

You know, I want to support my colleague's amendment to not have Bill 21 read a third time. I mean, I've had the opportunity to go through this bill as well as the other bills that we've been debating, the bills, of course, that we've just seen this government pass time allocation on, shamefully, so we're not going to be able to debate them in the fulsome manner that we should.

You know, thinking back, what the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was just saying was quite interesting to me. It was bringing me back to teaching social studies 30 in Bawlf, Alberta, and how we would dig into what it meant to be an authoritarian state. We'd obviously unpack the political spectrum, and we'd look at historical and current examples of authoritarianism. I mean, while I am, as I noted earlier, incredibly honoured to have this job and do the job that I'm doing right now, I certainly do sometimes miss being in the classroom because this UCP government gives so many relevant examples in the teaching of political systems in social studies 30.

11:50

You know, I'm also reflecting on the fact that, again, it's not just in Bill 21 where we're seeing the undermining of local decision-making – of course, I'm going to speak to Bill 21 primarily right now – but we see that as well with Bill 20 and, in fact, even with Bill 22, with the unknown future for health care in this province. I mean, this is a pattern, with all these pieces of legislation, of the UCP wanting to control everything everywhere.

Mr. Eggen: All the time.

Member Irwin: All at once. That's right.

I think one of the alarming things particularly in Bill 21 is, you know, just the deep level of distrust that it shows in municipalities and in emergency responders and, in fact, in those folks on the front lines, the front-line heroes that we rely on to keep Albertans safe.

As my colleague just talked about, this continued blaming of the federal government and this continued, you know, emphasis on, any time they can, trying to sow division with other orders of government instead of wanting to work with them – and I was thinking, like: oh, gosh, why am I so thirsty tonight? Well, I've had a tendency to take a drink every time the UCP mentions Justin Trudeau, and let me tell you it is a lot. But it's been primarily us speaking tonight, so I better, right now actually, just take a sip. That's right.

Mr. Eggen: It's good for your kidneys.

Member Irwin: It is good for the kidneys. Thank you. The Member for Edmonton-North West is correct on that one. He, too, was a teacher.

You probably also remember teaching social studies and thinking about the many relevant examples that this government is providing right now.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Member Irwin: Yes. But I'll go back to speaking through the Speaker.

You know, again, my point there being that we have a lot of complex challenges in our province, and we should really be looking to our provincial government as someone who's willing to work with other orders of government instead of working against them. We see again the undermining of local authorities with Bill 21.

Earlier today I heard – was it earlier today? Was it earlier this evening? I'm not sure. [A cellphone rang] Oh, I hear a phone ringing. I'll just wait for that to be over.

Earlier today I heard the minister responsible for Municipal Affairs talking about – what did he say? Maybe it was even just earlier tonight. I don't know. It's all a blur, but he said something along the lines of: you know, the opposition is saying that these pieces of legislation are going to give sweeping powers. That was earlier tonight, right?

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. Sure.

Member Irwin: I'm looking at the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. She's got a far better memory than me even though she's far older than me.

Anyway, the minister pointed out: oh, the opposition is, you know, fear and smear and saying that these bills are going to give sweeping powers, sweeping authorities. Actually, Minister, it wasn't just us saying that. Who is saying that? Well, it's the Rural Municipalities of Alberta. The president, Paul McLauchlin, raised concerns over this. McLauchlin, yes? Thank you. I said it correctly, right?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Member Irwin: Thank you. Had me worried there for a minute. I had a guitar teacher once with the last name McLauchlin as well. Anyways, I'm not very focused here tonight, but I'm going to get back on track.

In Bill 21 the RMA president, Paul McLauchlin, talked about how this bill will give sweeping authority to the province over local emergency situations. He said that recently, over the last few weeks, we've seen an alarming trend from this government when it comes to how they view municipalities, just as I noted here.

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.

Again, another clear example of overreach and another clear example of doing exactly what they blame, what they accuse the federal government of doing.

I'll end with one more quote from him. He goes on to say that, you know – and, again, the minister talked about this – the province claims this would only be [used] in rare circumstances.

He notes that the legislation does not actually provide clarity on what those circumstances would be. Final point:

This is not legislation municipalities asked for and is not helpful to our members. Municipalities appreciate support and partnership from the province during emergencies, but the best path [forward] . . .

And I love this quote.

. . . towards a positive outcome is collaboration, not control.

Collaboration, not control.

This UCP government would be so wise to listen to the RMA on this, to listen to the countless municipalities they've heard from, not just on Bill 21 but on Bill 18, on Bill 20, on Bill 22. Again, they're refusing to. Incredibly alarming.

I just want to end my remarks by pointing out, of course, the moving of the election date. Again, we all know that the UCP has mapped out a number of reasons why they think this is necessary, but to me, if the NDP had done this when they were in power, it would have been absolute outrage. I know it. It would have been absolute outrage from that party. So the fact that the UCP is overriding its own fixed election law and unilaterally extending their mandate an additional six months without actually getting permission from Albertans is another example of an incredibly alarming power grab from this UCP government.

Given my rambling speech there and the points that I've made, I would again urge all members of the Chamber to support this amendment to not have this bill read a third time. Go back to the drawing board, go back to the municipalities, go back to your stakeholders, and actually listen to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to speak.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this small opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 21. I want to begin by thanking my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood even though she took a jab at my age. I want to point out that there was a time when she was much better at debate late in the evenings, had a better flexing of the muscle. Her memory was a little bit better. So, you know, some of us may age faster in years; others may age faster in effects. We'll see. I just have to return that.

I want to take this opportunity because it's, again, a very brief opportunity to actually speak to Bill 21. You know, I think it's really important that when we stand in this House and we talk about the very legitimate concerns that are being raised by Albertans, by organizations such as the Rural Municipalities association, by Alberta Municipalities as an organization on all of these bills, what we hear from ministers on the other side and from members on the other side is that they stand up and they say: the Alberta NDP think this, and they're not being truthful. But we're actually just reflecting, as is our responsibility as elected officials but also as the opposition, what we are hearing and what we know the government is hearing on these matters.

Now, when it comes to Bill 21, I'm actually reminded, as I'm about to enter debate at, you know, midnight – and maybe I'm getting a little rusty, too – of a conversation that I had last night with my kids. It's amazing how many times that while I'm parenting, I realize a lot of the lessons that I'm trying to impart on them are lessons that the government would do well to abide by as well. Last night my daughter and my son got into a big argument, a big battle. It turned out my daughter had asked for my son to give her these pocketed sheets that you put in these binders where you could put, like, trading cards and things in. She wanted a few of those extra blank pocket pages, and she asked him for them, and he said no. It was quite unreasonable because he had a stack of about 100 of them, so to not share a few with his sister seemed very, very unreasonable.

So I went in to mitigate it, and she said it was completely off. I turned to him, and I said, "Well, why are you taking such an unreasonable position?" And he said, "Well, yesterday I went into her room and I asked for something, and she was spiteful and sort of said, 'No, I won't let you have that' for no good reason."

So he was actually just reacting not specifically to the ask on the table, but he was remembering the interaction they'd had the day before, and of course that was influencing how he was interacting with her now.

12:00

The reason I bring this up is because Bill 21 in and of itself – perhaps had the government done some consultation, had they had the conversations. You can hear from the responses and the concerns raised by the Rural Municipalities association that a lot of it is that they simply don't understand what the problem is that's being attempted to be fixed by this bill, and they don't understand the circumstances in which it's going to be used. So they're coming at their concerns around Bill 21 not in isolation; they're coming at it from, first of all: we don't have the answers to the questions that we have about this bill and how it's going to be used.

But, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, because you've heard the quotes already from Paul McLaughlin with the Rural Municipalities association, they're saying that it's coming as the third in a series of bills that seem deliberately intended for the province to seize control over municipalities and the decision-making authority of locally elected leaders. So you cannot view Bill 21 in isolation, on its own. We've heard the government members stand up and the minister say that nothing's changing; we just had the minister of forestry stand up and say that nothing's changing.

Well, if that's the case – we know that cannot be the case because they're introducing a bill. We know that the bill does have effects. It allows for the province to take over responsibility when a local municipality declares a state of emergency; they can take that over without consulting and working with that local municipality. There is a change there. But, again, it's coming on the heels of bills 18 and 20, which, again, were nowhere in the UCP platform. They were nowhere mentioned by the ministers, by the Premier.

I've mentioned before that I sat in several meetings where I heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs speak with municipalities, both mid-size, rural as well as the large cities. I've sat in those rooms where he's been a speaker and he's talked about what's coming up, and this all happened before session began; there was no mention of a lot of this. Huge swaths of Bill 20 and Bill 21 and Bill 18: no mention of these provisions. So people are coming in with their trust already broken. Municipalities are saying: you, government, seem to be intent on seizing control over what is within our responsibility; we don't know why you didn't talk to us about it before; you certainly didn't campaign on it, so therefore we're seeing it in context.

The government would like us to view Bill 21 as just a small piece that's going to change a couple of things, but in reality it is, again, part of a larger government action. I know, Mr. Speaker, that many of the members are hearing this from locally elected municipal councillors and reeves and town councillors, who are actually Conservatives. They are UCP supporters likely, but they're saying: "What are you doing? Why are you doing this? We don't understand what the goal is." It runs counter to the very principles that this government claims when it comes to protecting their own jurisdiction with regard to the federal government.

It's a bizarre turn of events, Mr. Speaker, for this government to take this strong and decisive of an action, allowing very little time – actually, almost no time – for debate on amendments, no time for engagement. We heard just today there were amendments coming forward from First Nations on various bills, but there's no time anymore to actually debate those amendments, consider those amendments, bring them forward, and certainly no consultation was done beforehand. That's what we're hearing.

I just want to mention briefly on Bill 21 as well that, you know, it is shocking to me that the only time that we have actually heard any recognition from this government about the effects of climate change, which are profound, which are real, which are growing every year on Alberta, certainly on Canada but certainly on Alberta – we've all experienced it over the last few years. The only time we've ever seen any recognition of the real effects that climate change is having is when it serves this government's purpose to give themselves an unearned extra six months as government.

It's remarkable how many times we've talked about wildfires, we've talked about droughts, we've talked about concerns about water going forward. We've actually heard the minister of environment – and I do feel like there need to be sarcastic air quotes around that – actually blaming El Niño. I've literally never heard a government talk more about El Niño in the face of climate change. Like, they're so dead set on refusing to acknowledge that climate change exists except for, Mr. Speaker, this one chance when it actually gives them an extra six months in power. Then all of a sudden – they still won't say the words. No, no, but they will acknowledge the effects. But that's the only circumstance in which they do.

So, fine, Mr. Speaker. I agree that last year's provincial election during the wildfires was awful. We obviously know that people were evacuated and it affected their ability to be engaged, and we know that several candidates were not able to get out and talk about their platforms and their views although if the UCP was talking about their platform, it turned out to be a sham anyways.

We know that there were real effects as a result of climate change on our province during the last election, but if the commitment was truly there around making sure that Albertans have better access and are better able to engage in the electoral process, there's a simple fix which this government could have taken, which is to actually move the election forward six months. But they didn't choose that because climate change is only real when it gets you another six months of authoritarian power.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll leave my comments at that and give my colleagues an opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Beddington to amendment RA1.

Ms Chapman: Okay. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and speak to amendment RA1, that "Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, be not now read a third time because the Assembly is of the view that it is contrary to the values of Albertans," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

My colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud just made some really excellent commentary about climate change, so when I saw the title of this bill, climate change was the first thing that I thought about, right? I was out, you know, trying to knock on doors in the last election, not having much luck for that week where we were under that thick haze of smoke, so the idea that we were going to be bringing a bill in that we were talking about that was going to do something, anything, to address climate change was exciting.

You know, according to the Insurance Bureau of Canada Alberta is actually one of the two riskiest places in Canada to live when it comes to natural disasters. I don't know if you're like me; I find that I go to the IPCC site on the semiregular to do a check back in on climate change. Where are we at with climate change? Now, 1.5 degrees Celsius: that's a number that I think that we have all heard. That's what we're trying to avoid in terms of climate change, going above that 1.5 degrees Celsius. Now, unfortunately, you know, human-induced warming did reach one degree Celsius already in

2017. That was a number of years ago. So we know that we're not on the right track when it comes to climate change.

Seeing this bill come in, the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, knowing it was related to fire management, to water management – and, of course, those are the biggest climate risks that we have here in Alberta, that risk of drought and the risk of wildfire, which is an extension of the drought, right? We know that those dry conditions are what allows those wildfires to really take off. I was excited to see this thing that was going to come in on climate change because we know that we're not in a good place.

There's a really great website, actually. It's called albertaclimaterecords.com. It has actually the historical records from 1951 until now of a whole bunch of different measures, right? This has got, like, mean annual temperatures but also tracks things like warmest days, hottest days, coldest days. It's data from hundreds of weather stations across Alberta. It has those historical records, that I mentioned.

It also has future projections going out till 2070 under three categories, you know, an averaging, and then what it could look like if it was hotter and drier. What could it look like if it ended up being cooler and wetter? What kind of weather and, like, severe weather outcomes might we be looking at based on those changes in our climate?

One of the things that it shows is that the mean annual temperature over the last 70 years here in Alberta – we've already gone past that 1.5 degree temperature that we look at as that risk when it comes to climate change. Depending on where you're looking in Alberta, it's actually a one to three degree Celsius increase that we have already seen here. We know that the result of those temperature increases are things like more extreme weather events.

12:10

NASA has a really good site that really walks you through a lot of the things that happen when you hit 1.5 degrees but then also when we get to two degrees, which is the path that we're on now. At 1.5 degrees Celsius around 14 per cent of the Earth's population will be exposed to severe heat waves at least once every five years. At two degrees Celsius it's 37 per cent of the population. We know the results of those heat waves. We saw that just last year, I think, actually, in Europe and Asia and in parts of the United States, what happens when these heat domes occur. There's no running from it, right? We know that they're more likely to happen in urban environments. That's just the result of our built environment and the way that asphalt holds and reflects heat. It's very different from the way a natural environment is capable of absorbing that sunlight. Oh, right. India and Pakistan: 2015 was the last major heat wave there. At two degrees warming that could occur annually, so that could be something that we see happening every year.

Permafrost. You don't spend a lot of time thinking about permafrost sort of in the day-to-day of things. But permafrost is actually a really important carbon sink, so it's a really important mechanism, a natural mechanism, to store carbon. Once we get up to two degrees Celsius, which is that warming that we're right on track for, it's an additional 1.5 to 2.5 million square kilometres of permafrost that essentially thaws out and releases all of its carbon into the atmosphere.

This isn't an issue for Alberta, but I thought it was interesting, which is why I noted it down. At two degrees warming more than 70 per cent of Earth's coastline will see sea levels rise by .2 metres. When you think about .2 metres – I still think in feet. Huh. What is that, like, two-thirds of a foot?

Member Irwin: Dude, you're asking the wrong guy. Ask the doctor.

Ms Chapman: You were the teacher, though.

Okay. Anyways, it seems like a small number, but in terms of the impact it can have on coastal flooding, beach erosion, and salinization of the water supply – and that's one of the big risks.

Did you secretly do the math there and then just not tell me?

Member Irwin: You're right. You're right.

Ms Chapman: Yeah. Okay. Good.

Ice sheets are something I think a lot about because I'm Canadian and it's very north up here. We know the work that the ice sheets do, a ton of heavy lifting in terms of reflecting sunlight back – right? – and also, like, you know, locking up all that water and ice. At two degrees instabilities in the Antarctic ice sheet and the Greenland ice sheet are potentially an irreversible loss, okay? So that's what we're on the path for, an irreversible loss of our ice sheets. That is a multimetre sea level rise. That doesn't happen right away, right? That's something that happens over hundreds of years. That doesn't mean it's something that we shouldn't be paying attention to now.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford does such an excellent job of bringing her Indigenous teachings into the House, and one thing I've heard her speak about many times is the seven generations, right? That's about thinking past the current election cycle, you know, whether that cycle is four years or we give ourselves an extra six months because we just want to have an extra six months. Even if you think about that, that's a very short-term way of thinking. I'm so grateful to have the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford in the House to bring in that perspective of thinking ahead, thinking to: what is the next generation, the next generation? Those are the generations that are going to have to deal with the fact that at two degrees warming, coral reefs cease to exist.

Not me – I don't like feeling trapped, so I don't scuba dive – but I'm sure that some of us in here have gone scuba diving, and we have had the opportunity to see coral reefs. That is something that within our lifetime, certainly within my children's lifetime could no longer be a possibility because that is the kind of damage that climate change is going to wreak on our habitat.

Food security is a huge one. Why are we talking about this? Why aren't we passing more legislation that takes meaningful action on climate change? Because at two degrees warming, food security for cereal crops especially starts to reduce, right? That's your maize, your rice, your wheat. We eat those things every day, right? I am an Albertan. I like beef, and I like bread. I eat vegetables because it would be weird if I didn't, and I've set a good example for my kids. You know, we eat the salads, but we . . .

An Hon. Member: Pulses.

Ms Chapman: Yeah, pulses are great for us. But I eat the salads so that I can eat the beef and the bread. Those are the good things, so I don't want to hear that climate change is putting my bread at risk. I'm being a little bit flip about it, but it is actually a serious thing: the kind of food insecurity that could be a result.

My final fun fact – I don't know if *Hansard* can put in that I air quoted fun because it's not fun, but it is a fact – is that at two degrees warming 7 to 10 per cent of rangeland livestock will be lost. That's my beef that we're going to lose there.

We have this very pressing concern. Climate change is a very pressing concern. We have the opportunity to pass legislation in here, and instead of doing something about this, you know, we've got another one of these bills. Who's asking for this? Nobody. Who voted for this? Nobody. We didn't talk about this during the election. This wasn't part of any kind of a platform of this government. Then it turns out when they – and it's just like this whole set of bills we're talking about where: you know, let's just

go ahead and write this legislation, pass this legislation; we'll consult after; we'll figure it out after, right? I can't wrap my head around how that works at all.

You consult before. You go to your stakeholders in advance, and you talk to them. What happens if you don't? Well, what happens is that your stakeholders aren't happy about it, and we know that RMA isn't happy about it. Sweeping authority, right? You know right off the bat that when someone's talking about sweeping authority, the things they say after that are not going to be complimentary.

Bill 21 undermines Alberta's current partnership-based approach to emergency response and centralizes control with the provincial government, even when emergencies are declared locally. Along with bills 18 and 20, this is the third piece of legislation introduced this session that erodes the responsibility and local decision-making authority of municipalities.

The other thing I have been having a very hard time wrapping my head around is: when do we know when we want a whole bunch of decision-makers? I have certainly heard the Premier talk in health care about this need for swaths of decision-makers and that way more decision-makers are going to result in better outcomes, yet when it comes to municipalities and how we deal with municipalities, all of a sudden: no, we don't want any; we want fewer decision-makers; we want to centralize that power, and we want to take local decision-makers out of the process.

I honestly don't know how to square that circle. Circle that square? Square that circle.

Mr. Getson: It's square the circle.

Ms Chapman: Yeah. Good. It's a little bit past my bedtime. Yeah. Square that circle.

No clear explanation for – yeah. That was a good quote from this RMA thing, too. “No clear explanation as to how this will do anything other than confuse and complicate emergency response moving forward.” Certainly, I have spoken to that on some of the other bills that we've been speaking about tonight, about the complete lack of rationale that is being provided for these bills, these bills that aren't being consulted on, that certainly were not campaigned on, and now we're not even being provided with any kind of explanation for them.

12:20

Member Loyola: Dictators don't have to explain anything.

Ms Chapman: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is spicy tonight.

Bill 21 also proposes change to the Forest and Prairie Protection Act. I don't know how long I've been talking for. I'm going to keep going until someone gives me the – five minutes? Oh, five minutes left. That's your hand coming down? Oh, I should have planned a much tidier summary for that. That went a bit longer than I was expecting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen. There are approximately four minutes left.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I plan to use them effectively this evening to actually speak about the amendment to the legislation we're speaking about, the amendment to Bill 21, moved by the Member for Edmonton-Manning, that the motion for third reading of Bill 21 not be read a third time because, of course, it's contrary to the values of Albertans and – I'm paraphrasing here – it

allows the government of Alberta to rip off rural municipalities in new and creative ways. I say that because it allows further downloading of costs onto municipalities.

On top of everything else that it accomplishes, it adds insult to injury or injury to insult. It works both ways. What it does allow is the minister – in addition, even if a minister orders local authorities to take specific actions, the local authorities will remain responsible for compensation for any property that was acquired, damaged, or destroyed during a local emergency. So the municipalities are on the hook simply because of this legislation, that gives the government of Alberta the power to force them to foot the bill even though it was the implementation of the emergency measures that caused the cost in the first place and that implementation was at the hands of the government of Alberta. Once again, the downloading continues.

Rural Alberta certainly has no friend in the UCP when it comes to legislation like this. Once again, as we all know, across the aisle, Mr. Speaker, there are plenty of people who count support from rural Alberta, but also on this side of the House 30 per cent of the people in rural Alberta support our efforts in the opposition. It's commonly known by all those who know something about rural Alberta that if you keep kicking your dog, that dog eventually looks for another home. This bill is looking to kick the dog once again, and that rural Alberta dog is going to be looking for another home because the downloading continues.

The downloading of costs onto rural municipalities is nonstop, whether it's traffic fine percentages that the government of Alberta now claws back from municipalities, whether it's abandoned wells' reclamation costs that are being hammered onto the municipal budgets, the municipal property taxes that are owed by the government of Alberta to municipalities right across the province, 60 million bucks owed to the city of Edmonton alone, that the government of Alberta is off-loading onto municipalities.

This legislation is just another big, strong example of the UCP kicking the rural dog once again and off-loading costs onto municipalities that don't deserve it, and they're loudly exclaiming their opposition to it, Mr. Speaker. The opposition is nonstop. Whether it's from RMA or Alberta Municipalities, they're vociferous in their attack of this piece of legislation, and they are not holding back. They're very, very much making claims that this is the most draconian they've ever seen a government act towards municipalities in the province. That dog is going to bite back. That dog doesn't like being kicked. It's going to be looking for another home, and that will happen very soon.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 47, agreed to earlier this evening, one hour of debate has now been completed, and I am required to put to the Assembly all necessary questions to dispose of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, at third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:25 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Boparai	Ip	Metz
Chapman	Irwin	Pancholi
Dach	Kasawski	Shepherd
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet
Elmeligi		

Against the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz
Bouchard	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	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
Jean		

Totals: For – 13 Against – 46

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 47, agreed to earlier today, I am required to put to the Assembly all of the necessary questions to dispose of third reading of Bill 21, Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:30 a.m.]

[One minute 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	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
Jean		

Against the motion:

Boparai	Ip	Metz
Chapman	Irwin	Pancholi
Dach	Kasawski	Shepherd
Eggen	Loyola	Sweet
Elmeligi		

Totals: For – 46 Against – 13

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

Private Bills

Third Reading

Bill Pr. 2

Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta Amendment Act, 2024

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

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

This is going to allow the foundation to better serve the southeast region of our province, and it will be for the betterment of all Albertans in that region.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has moved third reading of Bill Pr. 2. Is there anyone else wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or ask the hon. member to close debate.

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

Bill Pr. 3

Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and move third reading of Bill Pr. 3, Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024, on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Speaker, this is just a name change in relation to the bill, so I would just ask all members to support the amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has moved third reading of Bill Pr. 3, Providence Renewal Centre Amendment Act, 2024. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate?

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

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

Bill Pr. 4

Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024

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

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

I've already given my five cents about this, but essentially it is to update the wording amongst the amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod has moved third reading of Bill Pr. 4, Rosebud School of the Arts Amendment Act, 2024. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate?

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

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

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 20

Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has 13 minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Mr. McIver: I think I want to hear from the opposition.

The Speaker: Seeing that is not the case.

Pursuant to Government Motion 46, agreed to earlier this evening, not more than one hour shall be allotted to further consideration of Bill 20, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak to Bill 20. This has been an interesting time to think about this bill. I've heard a lot from the minister and the government talking about having the power: we have already the power to remove councillors; we already have the power to overturn bylaws. But there's a difference between power and authority. We've asked: why are you passing this legislation if you already have the power? It's because they want the authority. How do you get political licence to change our province? How do you get the power? How do you get the political authority?

12:40

Well, it turns out that for political authority the first place they're going to look is to change the legislation so that the provincial government has the authority then to take these drastic measures that change our municipal democracy. There's no mandate, no political licence, no consultation for the suite of bills around Bill 18, Bill 20, and Bill 21. RMA, Alberta Municipalities, mid-sized cities' mayors, big-city mayors: none of them were consulted ahead of the introduction of this legislation. It is when that legislation came in that we have had the fierce feedback and the vocal opposition that has led to people saying that this is leading towards a more authoritarian province, a less democratic province.

What are municipalities concerned about, Mr. Speaker? When I've talked to them, they are just concerned about downloading of provincial responsibilities and the associated costs for municipalities of taking care of things like health care, which are not in their jurisdiction. Calgary, Hinton, Canmore, Edmonton have given me examples of the health care costs that they are covering. The total cost for the Calgary fire department to respond to medical calls in 2023 was 13 and a half million dollars. AHS turned around and reimbursed them for \$311,000. It's a massive discrepancy. Thirteen million dollars that Calgary has to pick up as a municipality to cover health care costs.

City of Edmonton health care costs. They've incurred in 2023 \$9.1 million in direct costs associated with addressing addiction and mental health needs of Edmontonians. These are provincial jurisdictions. They have been saying from a municipal side: please step up, government. But what we're getting is that stepping in with these bills that are taking this route of authority.

In Hinton the municipality is looking at funding the facility so that people can have their primary health care, to have doctors' visits. They're looking for a way that they can have proper health

care in the community. The province isn't stepping up, so the municipality is finding a way to fund health care costs.

We have the municipalities saying, "We wish the government would step up," for their jurisdiction and their responsibilities like health care, but what they are finding is that that's not what's happening. They're dealt this Bill 20.

What they've also told me is that the overall climate for elected municipal officials is discouraging in this province. For the families of municipal leaders there is way more heat than you would expect for somebody who's trying to serve their community. Going to the grocery store in your local small towns is becoming a risky business for families of locally elected officials. It's discouraging.

Then Bill 20 is more discouraging. The feeling from the municipalities: they've quipped that this bill is just going to be, "Why don't we, from the Municipal Affairs side, just create a 1.800 I Hate My Local Councillor phone line so that you can call in right to cabinet? Reach them when you have an issue that you aren't happy with." Maybe there's a fence that is six feet too long on the property. You have researched the bylaws. You have talked to your local councillor, and they are not taking care of business. Take that straight to cabinet. That is an opportunity, then, for them to come and either change the bylaws – and call that 1.800 I Hate My Local Councillor. Very discouraging from a municipal governance perspective.

When municipal organizations like the RMA and the Alberta Municipalities and mid-sized city mayors had a chance to look at Bill 20 – again, no consultation prior. It arrived, and then they finally read it. When they saw it, they were seeing things that were challenging for them, and they wanted to bring those to the attention of the government.

For cabinet's ability to remove councillors and cabinet changing bylaws, again, government has always had this power. This Bill 20 is going to give them that authority and create that authority in our province, which is why when the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was talking about this being authoritarian legislation in this suite of bills – Bill 18, Bill 20, Bill 21 – it is right on. The government is creating authority for them to act in what they say is an efficient manner, but it is a manner that is behind closed cabinet doors.

You know, the RMA and the Alberta Municipalities have made it clear from the start and even after the amendments that they are not comfortable with the authority the government is trying to take over their local jurisdiction. It seems that the only people that want this seem to be the UCP.

When it comes to municipal political parties, which have not been amended out of this legislation – and it has been put forward as a pilot project to be run in the big cities, but the mid-sized city mayors have no interest in this. The counties have no interest in this. No one is asking for political parties and more partisanship in a council decision-making system. The majority of Albertans are opposed to this. When they hear about this bill, they hear about the political parties. The only reason that the UCP are proposing this is that they want every level of government to be UCP and to make it easier for them so that they have no opposition and no public debate from other levels of government. We think what they want is the farm teams of the UCP to be at municipal council, and that's not what council should be. Council should be making local decisions for their constituents.

There are those stranger parts of this bill, which comes back to that thing we were trying to address earlier today with the death of truth in society. We can take a look at our global context and understand that Alberta is a part of the world, and in this world we know that there is a changing happening in our media. People are hearing things or are worried about things that aren't things that

they need to be worried about. That's led to the prohibiting of electronic tabulators.

I had great stories. I've talked to Cold Lake, where during COVID they were able to create drive-through voting, which was a safe way for people not to get out of cars, come up to an electronic voting booth and vote, because they had electronic voting tabulators. It was a better way to vote. There's a cost that's going to be incurred by municipalities with the removal of electronic voting.

This is another instance where it would sure have been great to have consultation ahead of time. There was nothing coming from Albertans saying: hey, we need to get rid of electronic voting. If it was, it was a very small minority, because after the last municipal election we did not have any scandals to report of the elections, and there was no question of the integrity of the election. It seems that it is conspiracy theorists that are driving this, and the provincial government is catering to them.

Lastly, and probably one that is worthy of more debate than we have time for: big money in municipal government. Bill 20 adds the ability for unions and corporations to make donations to candidates. The UCP wants to bring dark money back into politics and limit grassroots candidates. The proposal will allow business owners to run, to charge expenses to their businesses, and make that as a donation. Individuals will be disadvantaged. I think that it's different from our provincial donation rules, which is an interesting kind of separation. We should just have that the voters are the only ones that can contribute financially. Now we're going to invite corporations and unions in to fund campaigns, which up to now have been, especially outside of the big cities, largely self-funded. Albertans are against this involvement and encouragement of campaign financing.

With tabulators, there is no evidence that tabulators are less accurate than hand counts. With these donations: it is not allowed provincially. Albertans have been clear that they do not want to see big money in politics; \$5,000 is far greater than the average Albertan can afford to donate, especially in the middle of an affordability crisis in this province. A reduction in contribution limits would have been a nice thing to have seen brought into Bill 20.

12:50

In terms of vouching, we had a good discussion about this today, and we hope that we will see some progress made in regard to the participation of Indigenous members of Alberta in municipal elections. Alberta Municipalities has recommended that the ability to vouch for another elector be maintained in the legislation as it is now. Additionally, they have pointed out that it should be consistent with how it is provincially and for federal elections.

The biggest thing that people are going to notice come next election is local election parties because of Bill 20. While political parties are important to this Legislature and are part of our parliamentary system at the provincial and federal levels, they are not a good fit with local government legislation. They don't match with the way councils should run and make decisions, and they don't match with the size of communities, and it doesn't change whether it's big cities or counties. Caucus meetings are whipped, and that is not how we need to have our council meetings.

Putting provincial parties on the ballot would require a fundamental rethink of how municipalities are governed. It's going to change the way administration presents information to council, and it's going to change the way council decisions are made. It's unclear from this legislation how this pilot is going to be evaluated and then move forward to see how it will be applied to the rest of the province or removed.

Removing councils and councillors, the ability for cabinet to decide behind closed doors to remove a councillor and trigger a referendum without an independent publicly reported inspection being conducted first is extremely troubling, especially in the absence of any sort of criteria as to what constitutes the requirement for this in public interest.

The bylaws: this is the role of elected municipal leaders. The ability for cabinet to change bylaws undermines the role of the democratically elected municipalities, and enabling cabinet to repeal bylaws behind closed doors in the absence of any process that prevents public scrutiny and judicial review is troubling. Municipal leaders have said, in addition to the 1.800 I Hate My Councillor line: you can just come pick up the keys and run the municipality if that's what you want.

RMA does not support political parties at the municipal level or the related amendments to Bill 20. There has been a call from Jared Wesley to his Conservative friends to say that it's okay to speak out against the UCP government, that many of them have supported all their lives, because of this legislation. It excluded stakeholders and public servants, and it's ignoring the Constitution and the rule of law.

Lastly, it's been brought up before by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, but Keith Gerein really put it best: "Ultimately, the true test of a government giving itself new authority comes down to the question of whether that government would still be in favour if the powers were in the hands of a rival party." Can the UCP confidently answer yes for Bill 20?

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn . . . [A cellphone rang]

The Speaker: Right after he pays a fine for a phone violation.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health has 14 minutes remaining should she choose to use it?

Seeing not, pursuant to Government Motion 48 agreed to earlier this evening not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 22, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. Is there anyone wishing to join debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak at third reading of Bill 22, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. The Minister of Health moved third reading, and in her remarks she talked about how the system is not working. She said that the health care system is inefficient and unreliable, talked about long wait times for surgeries, shortage of family doctors, overwhelmed emergency rooms. This is a rare occasion when I will agree with the Minister of Health. Indeed, the health care system is not working. All the problems she identified are in fact the ones that exist.

Where we profoundly disagree, Mr. Speaker, is on how we got here and the reason for this dire state of the health care system. Under the UCP government's watch over the past five years we have seen an unprecedented degradation of our health care system. Under a UCP government every one of those areas that the minister mentioned has gotten worse.

Surgical wait times. Mr. Speaker, we are still below where we were on things like hip surgeries, on knee surgeries from where we were when this government took office in 2019. We have poor results in each of those areas.

Shortage of family doctors. Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke as if this is something that's been going on for decades. The fact is that it was not that long ago before this government took power that we had an abundance of family doctors in Alberta. We did not have hundreds of thousands of Albertans who could not access primary care. That has taken place under this government as part of their unprecedented multiyear war on doctors. Their decisions, their policy. They created this mess.

Overwhelmed emergency rooms. Again, Mr. Speaker, we have seen unprecedented wait times under this government. We see unprecedented levels of ER closures across this province due to a shortage of ER nurses and doctors. The fact is that that is not the fault of the system; that is not the fault of Alberta Health Services; that is the fault of this government.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the UCP are the bad boss that keeps adding work, that won't give you the resources you need to do it. They micromanage you at every single step, and then they blame you for the inevitable result: failure. It is this government's continuous, constant political meddling and interference which has undermined health care workers and our health care system and led us to the position we are in today.

Now, the minister suggested that we on this side of the House, the Official Opposition, don't want to fix the health care system. To quote the minister, Mr. Speaker: "Nothing could be further from the truth." The fact is that we have been working tirelessly over the last five years, listening to front-line health care workers, bringing their concerns forward, holding this government to account. We would like nothing better than Albertans to get back even to the levels of access they had in the health care system simply before this government took office for the first time in 2019. We just don't think that creating more silos, more bureaucracy, more chaos in the system is going to get us there.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? Front-line health care workers agree. Dr. Tony Gomes, surgeon, past president of the Alberta Association of General Surgeons. His thoughts on what this government is looking to accomplish through Bill 22. He says, and I quote, that the plan was clearly drawn up by the Premier and the Health minister on the back of a napkin then handed to administrators saying: we think this is the best way to restructure health care, and we want you to do it with \$65 million in the next two years.

1:00

This is not a plan that health care workers are welcoming, despite what the minister claims. Heather Smith, president of the United Nurses of Alberta, says, "The short answer is, we don't know what's going to happen. But rather than calling it a 'restructuring,' it would be better to call it an evisceration." Indeed, Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing from health care workers, what we're hearing from the folks on the front lines, the folks who know this system inside out, the folks who have been enduring the last five years of meddling and interference from a government that has been undermining their work and the system at every turn, is that this government is simply creating more chaos, more uncertainty at a time when things are literally being held together by duct tape.

Dr. Paul Parks: the Premier brags about having his number on her cellphone, how in touch they are with him, how much they are listening to him. Here's what he has to say: AHS can't really function right now because no one knows what the landscape is going to look like; nobody feels comfortable making decisions; the system is kind of in disarray to a degree already; the access block is massive. And what does he say about how prepared this government is to move forward with Bill 22 and this back-of-a-napkin plan to restructure the entirety of the system? Here's what

he has to say: when we push at high levels and ask the government what their plan is, it's very clear that there aren't a lot of specific thought-out details over how it's going to look and interact. Not a lot of specific thought-out details over how it's going to look and interact.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a system which people are literally depending on for their lives. Our health care leaders, the folks who are working on the front lines of this system, who are in touch with and represent front-line workers across this province, say that they don't know what this government is actually doing because it seems this government doesn't know what they are doing.

So for all the minister's bravado in standing up in this House and claiming that they are the heroes riding to the rescue, we know, in fact, Mr. Speaker, they are the ones who have created this mess, and they clearly do not have an actual plan for how to fix it.

Dr. Gomes notes his concern with the continued uncertainty that is being created while this government dithers, drags its feet, hides behind closed doors. He says: the biggest problem over the next couple of years is the complete uncertainty over how this is going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, the minister stood and talked about all the deep consultation they are doing, how much support they're hearing from health care workers. Here's what Dr. Gomes has to say about their consultation: the biggest thing that's been bothersome is that the Alberta Association of General Surgeons, the Alberta Medical Association just haven't been consulted at all about how this should be structured. He goes on to say: you'd like to help them to at least continue to provide the services that people need, but there has been no engagement; no one from the government has asked the people who actually work in the system.

Now, we've seen, Mr. Speaker, the kinds of consultations this government likes to do. Yes, they will get everyone in a room, they will sit down with moderators, but they don't actually ask people what they should do. They say: this is what we're going to do. They bring people in to sit and be told. The thing is that when you participate in a consultation with this government, then they will turn around and use the fact that you showed up to that meeting to claim you support everything that they're going to do.

This is not a government, Mr. Speaker, that consults in good faith, as we have heard on Bill 20, as we've heard on Bill 18, as we have heard on Bill 21, and the same is true on Bill 22. This government is not actually asking health care workers how to make the system better. They're going to health care workers and saying: this is what we're going to do. And what we are hearing from those front-line health care workers is that they have no faith in a government that has steadily undermined them, in a government that has brought us to the state of the health care system we are in now, where a senior citizen spends 17 days on a bed in a hallway, has to nearly break his hip to get access to a bed. That is not the fault of Alberta Health Services. That is not the fault of the front-line health care workers, who are doing everything they can to hold this system together even as this government's interference, as the lack of resources, as this government's meddling drive more and more folks out of our system.

Now, of course, the minister will stand and she will brag about numbers of registrations. She will brag about numbers of new oncologists coming into the province, but she won't tell you that those aren't actually net gains; those are backfilling folks that have left the province. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that in so many respects we are not getting further ahead. But in the midst of this, while Albertans are waiting up to 16 weeks simply to get access to cancer care, when Dr. Parks is on social media talking about the fact that they have individuals who have undergone surgery to remove a

cancer and they have to wait so long to get treatment for that cancer that by the time they get the treatment, the cancer that's been removed has started to grow back – that is the state of our health care system under this government.

Is the priority of this government, then, Mr. Speaker, to stabilize the system? Is it to bring in the health care workers that we need? No. It's to create even more chaos. As I've said previously, Bill 22 isn't about improving quality of care. It's about increasing government control, because that is what is really happening with this restructuring that we see taking place here. This is about creating more political control over the health care system, disempowering health care workers and folks with the expertise and the knowledge to make the right decisions on health care.

The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka stood and spoke in support of the bill. She had a quote. She said: the bigger the bureaucracy, the smaller the patient. Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is creating even more bureaucracy in the health care system. They are not reducing it by one iota. They're simply moving where it is. They're creating that bureaucracy within the minister's office. Indeed, they're creating multiple new ministers' offices to oversee the health care system, multiple new boards, and more oversight and more deputy ministers, more bureaucracy to the point where, frankly, patients are going to become microscopic.

We don't know what's going to happen over the next two years. We have already seen as this government has rushed to carve off pieces of the health care system, to contract more pieces out, which is another part of this, and we are seeing where that leads us as well, as we see these contracts or these people that have been sent off to things like staying in Travelodge motels when they're dismissed from hospital.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we need real investment in our health care system to provide the services that people need. We need investment in the infrastructure, the beds, the rooms, a south

Edmonton hospital, that capacity that we need here in the city. We don't need four new silos, with more bureaucracy, more ministers, more administrators. We need more folks on the front lines. Bill 22 does nothing to get us there. Indeed, the very fact that this minister and the Premier continue to stand and put forward a false narrative, saying that Alberta Health Services was never intended to actually cover the whole of the health care system, the fact that they can't simply stick to the facts: it betrays that this is not about what they say it is.

1:10

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we absolutely want to fix this health care system. I can tell you that when we have the opportunity to take government in 2027 again, we will. Whatever mess this government makes of it, we will be there to ensure Albertans are able to access the care they need when and where they need it, that health care workers are supported in their work, empowered in their work, paid a fair wage for that crucially important work. This will be a jurisdiction again where we attract doctors, health care workers, when we build our system up instead of tearing it down. Albertans deserve nothing less.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank all members of the Chamber for their co-operation and diligent work this evening. At this time I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 29, 2024.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:11 a.m. on Wednesday]

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