



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 20, 2024

Day 70

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
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Deputy Premier
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP),
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Lethbridge-West

Party standings:

United Conservative: 49

New Democrat: 37

Vacant: 1

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Rowswell
Sabir
Wright, J.

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir

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de Jonge
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Renaud
Schmidt

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
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Eggen
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 20, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my great pleasure and honour to introduce two of the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas' favourite people on the face of the entire planet. We are joined by the minister's children, William and Lauren Schulz. Lauren is six years old, loves gymnastics, figure skating, and hanging out with her mom. William is nine, plays soccer – scored eight goals in his last game – and hockey. He is also following in his mom's footsteps where he recently was crowned the grade 4 push-up champion in gym class. They are in Edmonton this week visiting the Legislature, learning about democracy and government, but their main interest is finding out who they need to talk to in the government that can give them the right to choose their own bedtime. William and Lauren, I believe that this responsibility falls under the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas. I hope that you'll have a good time negotiating with her. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, it's also my pleasure to introduce to members of the Assembly a special guest visiting in the Speaker's gallery today, the hon. Ken Hughes, the 798th member elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, who represented the constituency of Calgary-West from 2012 to 2014. During his term of service he served as the minister of energy 2012-2013, Municipal Affairs 2013-2014, and prior to his election to the Assembly Mr. Hughes served as a Member of Parliament for Macleod from 1988 to 1993. Ken is joined in the gallery today by Aidan Kehoe, the chair of Beacon Data Centres. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I also have an introduction for former member Deron Bilous, 829th member elected to the Assembly. He was the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and I believe he's joined in the gallery today by Zach Steele, the chairman of Cariboo Clean Fuels, CEO Bob Blattler, and the adviser Jeff Crone, who are meeting with the Premier and several cabinet ministers to discuss ensuring how Alberta remains a world leader in hydrogen solutions. If they've joined us, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have one last introduction to make today. In the galleries we have a group of new employees of the Legislative Assembly Office staff who are participating in their orientation program to learn about this entirely reasonable place to work that they have chosen to call home. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has a school group to introduce.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this House three amazing groups of students from Baturyn elementary school. If you could all please rise along with your chaperones and your teachers and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you I'd like to introduce Meagan and Dominic and Zoe Wight, Christa and Jordan Gagnon, Rachel and Maverick Vanderzwaag, parents, children, and Stollery families who have gone through some very challenging health times but have experienced the wonderful health care that we have here in Alberta, and we can't wait to see that stand-alone Stollery up and running, hopefully, in the near future.

The Speaker: Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to introduce Gerry and Bernice Cassady, who are celebrating their 70th wedding anniversary. They're joined by their son, Kim, and daughter Colleen, and they are just some of the kindest people I've had the opportunity to get to know in Edmonton-Glenora. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and welcome two very special women, Tarra Shipman and Brooke Pickering, to the Assembly. Tarra Shipman is a fierce advocate for disability rights, and Brooke Pickering is a social work student in her second year at Grant MacEwan college who is doing a practicum in my office and is a strong advocate for transgender rights.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has an introduction.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you four guests from the University of Calgary Students' Union: President Ermia Rezaei-Afsah, Vice-president external Mateusz Salmassi as well as Nathan Ross and Caragh Clifford. They're in Edmonton this week to speak with members of the Legislature about issues deeply affecting postsecondary students.

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

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sherri Shergill, executive director of PCHS, Punjabi Community Health Services, a nonprofit offering free mental health and addiction services in Calgary's south Asian community for 12 years. Under her leadership PCHS emphasizes first-language, culturally-sensitive care, bridging gaps in mainstream counselling for an underserved community. I ask you to please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce Ren Lavergne again. They just love coming here so much, possibly as much as we all do. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's also an honour to rise to introduce to you and through you William and Lauren Schulz, two of the most special people in my life. It's an honour to see them here in this Legislature. It's a reminder of why I decided to run in the first place, but it's because of their patient support and sometimes sacrifice that I'm able to represent the great people of Calgary-Shaw. William, Lauren, please rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce two valued and talented members of the Alberta NDP caucus staff: Brenndan Quinn-Feehan and Ashley DesBrisay. I'd ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. I rise to introduce some incredible humans who are in the gallery from Trans Rights YEG and Public Interest Alberta: Rowan Morris, Brad Lafortune, Rain Bossert, Liv Wood, Ren Pilkington, and Vienna Dowell. Please rise and join me in welcoming them to this Chamber.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you some friends from the Latino community: Carolina Jasso Ramirez and Carlos Lara. Ms Ramirez is establishing a chamber of commerce for Latino enterprises in Calgary. I met them the other night, and – no surprise here – we talked about economic corridors. If you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce members of the central Alberta Sikh community. On Christmas day my wife and I joined them at their new gurdwara in Red Deer. We loved it. It was a highlight of my service. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Hayter: I rise to introduce to you and through you the student union. I look forward to meeting with you in the coming days. If you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Alert Ready Emergency Alert System Test

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to member statements, I would like to make a statement of my own. Today at 1:55 the alert ready emergency alert system is scheduled to be tested in Alberta and across Canada. You may be familiar with alert ready, which has been developed through partnership with federal, provincial, and territorial emergency agencies and is designed to deliver alerts through radio, television, and wireless devices such as a cell phone to notify individuals of emergencies and how they manage them.

1:40

Since the test is scheduled to take place shortly after Oral Question Period begins, I ask that all members turn off their

electronic devices. Please note the alert test overrides your phone's silent and do-not-disturb functions, and the only way to ensure that you do not earn the judgment of your colleagues and become a donor to a charity of my choosing is that you all turn your cell phones off. Please consider yourself fairly warned.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a statement to make.

Alberta 4-H Programs

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every November 4-H members, leaders, alumni, and supporters alike wear their 4-H green and come together and spread awareness of 4-H and the positive impacts it has in Alberta, in Canada, and abroad. 4-H Alberta has been around for more than 100 years, a truly proud history. Many of you may have been involved in the organization in one way or another. Over the last century it has evolved into the dynamic program it is today, offering our youth programming in active living, art, science, technology, cooking, agriculture, and so much more.

Together 4-H makes a difference in Canadian communities by inspiring youth to do by doing, giving them the hands-on skills they need to be successful. Mr. Speaker, today's 4-H helps our youth to become self-confident individuals who value teamwork and have excellent leadership and interpersonal skills. These core fundamentals support them to be strong and resilient as they chart the path in life. Alberta's government is proud to provide funding that helps reach even more 4-H. In 2020 our province committed to an annual operating grant for 4-H Alberta of \$1 million per year over 10 years. Recently through the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership additional funding of over \$730,000 was committed over five years for three programs at 4-H Alberta. Programs include the intro to 4-H program, the agriculture safety and mental health workshops, and the spring Senior Symposium.

Mr. Speaker, hands-on, experience-based learning is the best way for youth to understand the work that goes on in agriculture. The scope of all 4-H programs provides meaningful experiences every child deserves as they grow and develop into leaders of tomorrow. We are extremely proud to support and celebrate this long-standing pillar of our Alberta communities, so please join me in celebrating the great work 4-H does not only during colours week but all year-round.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Transgender Day of Remembrance

Member Irwin: Today, November 20, we mark the Transgender Day of Remembrance. We remember the many trans, two-spirit, and gender-diverse people who have lost their lives due to transphobia and violence. We honour their memories and their stories. We gather as community, we mourn, and we fight for the living. Every year it is such an emotional day for me and for so many in our community, and this year it feels heavier than ever. It feels heavier than ever because at a time when we should be advancing trans rights, we're faced with a UCP government that is seeking to restrict them.

It's heartbreaking to know that a day like today will continue to be needed in Alberta because of the intentional acts of this government, because of three pieces of harmful legislation that deliberately target our transgender neighbours. I don't want to see another hypocritical statement from this minister like the one she shared this morning. I don't want to witness her raising the trans flag only to take it down moments later.

I want to see true allyship. I want to see action. I want to see everyone in this House committing to fight for all human rights so that not one more trans person loses a life because of who they are. I want to see us all not just talking about but showing the respect and care deserved by all Albertans. I want this government to ensure access to the fundamental essentials that many of us take for granted: health care, which this government is hell bent on taking away from the transgender community, and housing, something we know trans folks face barriers in accessing.

We need to commit to doing even more, to being better, to doing better. On the Trans Day of Remembrance I'll take the time to mourn those we've lost, but every day in this Chamber me and the rest of us will fight like hell for the living because on this side of the House we know that trans rights are human rights and trans lives matter today and every day.

Stollery Children's Hospital

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, today is Stollery day, and I couldn't be happier and prouder to speak on something that matters so much and is a real reminder of what's actually important in this world. Earlier I had the chance to only spend a couple of minutes with the Stollery kids who did visit us today, who are gracing us with their presence here in the gallery, but I'm very proud to give them a special hero's shout-out. Jordan, Dominic, and Maverick: thank you for coming to see us today. Jordan told me how much fun she had recently on a Disney cruise. I told her that I'm not sure if I should try it since I can't swim, but if I could, I would definitely wear a Mickey Mouse jean jacket in here if they'd let me.

Mr. Speaker, the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation has a vision to transform children's health so that every child, no matter where they live, can get the best possible care. The foundation invests in mental health, Indigenous health, transitional health, and virtual health in an effort to expand the Stollery's growing network of care. Last year my colleagues and I visited the Stollery, and I learned that roughly 40 per cent, or 120,000 patients, were from northern Alberta. This is why our United Conservative government announced \$20 million in funding over three years to advance plans for a stand-alone Stollery children's hospital in Edmonton earlier this year through Budget 2024.

A new facility will provide more beds, larger clinical spaces, and more rooms and dedicated areas for children and their families, which, to me, is the most important part. The Stollery is a place that's more than just medicine, surgeries, or health. It's a magical place that no parent ever wants to visit but are so grateful that it's there when you need it. My daughter was a Stollery patient, Mr. Speaker, and there's really no way to comprehend the experience we had there, the amazing surgeries performed by Dr. Carlos Solarte, giving my daughter back the gift of sight, but, most importantly, the overall environment.

Thank you so much for visiting us today. We appreciate you. Thank you very much; you kids are so brave.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a statement to make.

Lethbridge-West By-election

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The constituents of Lethbridge-West have been without an MLA for over four months. They are eager to show their opposition to this Premier and her government by electing the next NDP MLA for Lethbridge-West, Rob Miyashiro.

We've been on the doors for months, Mr. Speaker, talking to thousands of residents, and the response is clear: this Premier is making things worse. After five and a half years of a UCP government the people of Lethbridge are struggling now more than ever to find a family doctor or receive life-saving care in their community. They are frustrated with this government's failure to manage an affordability crisis fuelled by the highest inflation rate in Canada, and they are struggling to find a decent and affordable place to live. They are paying some of the highest insurance premiums and energy prices across the province, and they feel it every month when the withdrawals get higher and higher or they are forced to take on more debt to make ends meet.

Lastly, the Premier wants to gamble with Albertans' pensions, making their futures less secure, despite the lack of public support. She is risking the retirement savings of Alberta workers while hitting taxpayers with ever more costs. We have heard that voters from Lethbridge-West want retirement security by staying in the Canada pension plan. Our candidate Rob Miyashiro, a lifelong southern Albertan, has spent 40 years serving the community as a city councillor and as a community advocate, fighting for better health care, protecting people's pensions, keeping our community safe, and demanding better from the provincial government. The Alberta New Democrats and Rob Miyashiro will win the upcoming by-election because Lethbridge-West residents know that better is possible.

Federal Climate Policies

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change has decided to impose more restrictions on industry in Alberta, and just like C-69 the hope is that the emissions reduction act will be deemed invalid. Oh, Steven, you've gotten away from your activist roots as your laws are proven not only to be unconstitutional but impotent, like your Liberal caucus.

Here's a fun fact for you, Mr. Speaker. Over 30,000 workers fly to the oil sands at an average of 90 kilograms of carbon per passenger for every hour of flight, with dozens of flights happening weekly. That's a whole lot of pollution. Steven, start by sending your activist zealots to airports, from YVR and Pearson to Halifax and Fredericton. There's nothing more disruptive than preventing workers from reaching Alberta. And, Steven, imagine the joy of not only preventing these workers from working in the oil sands but also helping these provinces wean themselves off the so-called dirty money. Did you know that a third of these workers fly in from provinces other than Alberta? And that lowball figure of \$100,000 annual salary per worker: that's a billion dollars of income being claimed elsewhere.

1:50

Let's start with Newfoundland. Surely, they do not need that \$130 million in carbon-soaked income from Alberta's oil sands, right? P.E.I.? I didn't even know they could spare 800 workers. They have *Anne of Green Gables*. They don't need \$80 million in salaries being claimed there. And then B.C. Ah, yes, B.C., the purveyors of safe supply who fought the Trans Mountain pipeline tooth and nail. Almost half of the workers hail from B.C. B.C. has definitely expressed their desire to wean off oil, so help them get over that half a billion dollars in these so-called unethical salaries being claimed there. After all, B.C. is just fine being North America's largest exporter of coal. Mr. Speaker, no doubt these provinces will personally thank Guilbeault for helping them wean off this addiction of petrodollars.

But all sarcasm aside, Alberta is a place where opportunity thrives. We have the lowest corporate taxes, lowest personal taxes, no PST, and a quality of life that's second to none. And for workers

across this great country looking for a better future, Alberta is where they'll find it.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Sexual Health Education in Schools

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it's Transgender Day of Remembrance, an important day for family, friends, and all of us to remember those we've lost. This government has introduced three antitrans bills that attack human rights and the dignity of our trans neighbours. Experts, doctors, medical and psychological associations, teachers, parents have all warned of the dire consequences, and the government knows from peer-reviewed studies that this type of legislation leads to increased suicide risk, up to 72 per cent. Why has the government prioritized legislation that we know will lead to more suicide attempts and death?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our minister of arts and culture earlier today lifted the flag of remembrance for Transgender Day of Remembrance, which is a day to memorialize those who have been murdered because of transphobia and bring attention to the ongoing violence that has been directed against the transgender community. Also, since 2021 Alberta's government has recognized March 31 as Transgender Day of Visibility, and since 2018 government has recognized May 17 as an International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. We want to make sure that every person in Alberta is supported, regardless of the choices that they make.

Ms Gray: Is this government comfortable that next year we will be memorializing more? Contained in the Premier's legislation are further attacks on the knowledge students learn about in school: sexuality and health. This government is forcing parents to opt their kids in every single time human sexual health is taught in schools. Comprehensive sex ed is known to reduce teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, delay first sexual experience, but under their plan more students won't learn about sexual health. Why does this government want to increase teen pregnancies, STIs, have sex earlier, and not learn about consent?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Bill of Rights acknowledges that parents have the right to determine the education for their children. The school act also says that parents have the right to determine the education for their children, particularly on some of these issues like sexual orientation. We are adding gender identity as well as human sexuality. We believe it's important for parents to be able to have constructive conversations with their kids, to know what's going on in the classroom, to be confident that the materials that are being presented are age appropriate, and, when those days occur, to be able to talk to them when the kids get home at night.

Ms Gray: We all know parents have that right today. Parents have that choice today. The Alberta School Boards Association supports the existing opt-out sex ed system, not the more burdensome opt-in system the Premier is proposing. Their motion passed this week; rejected this government's plans. The president, Marilyn Dennis, said that trustees do not want students to miss out on health

curriculum, including learning about consent. Parents can opt out their child. School boards, parents, teachers, and students don't want this opt-in plan. Will the Premier listen?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, if it is the case that the members opposite agree that parents already have the ability to make this choice, then it doesn't make any difference whether it's opt-in or opt-out unless you don't actually believe that parents should have the choice. Parents need to know every time that these controversial topics are being discussed in a classroom. They need to be able to have the choice so that when their child comes home at the end of the day, they're able to have a conversation with them about it, or if they feel that their child is not age appropriate and ready for that material, they can make the decision to introduce it to them later.

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

Automobile Insurance

Ms Gray: Statistics Canada has reported that Alberta's inflation is 50 per cent higher than the national average last month. That means that everything is rising in price here more than every other province. So what does this Premier have cooked up? An auto insurance scheme that media reports show is going to cost drivers 7.5 per cent more next year. Instead of exploring a public auto option and reducing rates, why is the Premier introducing the worst possible scenario, one that will make drivers pay even more right now and get less from their auto insurance?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still don't understand why the members opposite aren't standing with us in fighting against the federal carbon tax. The reason why we have additional burden on everything we pay for is because the lion's share of our electricity is fuelled by natural gas. The lion's share, almost 100 per cent, of our home heating is natural gas. The vast bulk of the fuels that we use to get around and also to transport goods to grocery stores is fuelled by, yes, gasoline and diesel. This unfair tax falls disproportionately on Albertans. I wish they'd stand with us against it.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of clues – and that answer was one of them – that this Premier has not read her own report on auto insurance. Her own study says that the public system would have costs of \$100 million to \$500 million range plus a capital injection of \$2.3 billion to pay initial claims, which would get returned to taxpayers, but more importantly the report said that a public system like Saskatchewan's, Manitoba's, and B.C.'s would save the average driver \$765 a year and create 5,000 new jobs. Why would the Premier not choose the public option, that would save Albertans so much money every year?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think the answer to that was in the question of the Official Opposition Leader. It would cost about \$3 billion to establish it, to be able to capitalize it right from the beginning. We also know it would cost 4,500 jobs in the private sector. We want to take an approach that is going to put care first, is going to give better care at lower price, and you'll have more to see on it when we reveal the full plan tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: What their plan puts first is higher rates for Albertans right now. We have the highest inflation in the country. The Premier is now letting private insurance companies raise auto insurance

premiums by twice what current inflation is. The Premier herself admitted at her party convention that something is really broken in Alberta's auto insurance and even observed how much cheaper things are in Saskatchewan. So why doesn't our Premier call up Saskatchewan's Premier, ask him a few questions, and deliver a public option for Alberta drivers that would drastically reduce Alberta rates and make auto insurance more affordable now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where the member opposite has been for the last 18 months as we've identified that this has been a problem, as we began the consultation, as we commissioned the reports, as we ended up with a consultation, and we are now on the cusp of delivering a new option for how we're going to approach auto insurance. We recognize that we have to address issues of affordability, and quite frankly it is the case that in Alberta we have had a very high number of natural disasters. That's one factor. We have a very high number of auto injuries. That's another factor. We're going to make sure that we take care of patients first.

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

Minimum Wage Rate

Ms Gray: With the highest inflation in the country everything costs more in Alberta. In Lethbridge families deal with costs like insuring their truck, skyrocketing utility bills under this UCP's watch. Alberta's central chief economist says that costs of gas and housing and food are putting pressure on folks who are just trying to get by. Even though we produce the gas here, prices are up 4.5 per cent here, and they're down 4 per cent everywhere else. Why under this UCP government is everything so unaffordable for Albertans?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, 35 cents a litre: that is the compounding cost of all of the federal taxes that are on gasoline and diesel because of their fuel tax, their carbon tax, and then the GST on top of all of that tax. Our home heating bills: four times the cost of the actual base price of gas because of the federal carbon tax, which the members opposite continue to support through their leader Jagmeet Singh. They would be able to stand with us in challenging the carbon tax. You would think that they would have some influence on their federal leader in pulling the plug on the federal government or at least pulling the plug on the carbon tax. That would help.

2:00

Ms Gray: Yesterday the minister said, "We are not considering a living wage." He doesn't believe that a family that works hard to put a full day of work deserves to be able to put food on the table and pay for the power. Albertans under the UCP are stuck with the lowest minimum wage and the highest inflation rate in the country. With Albertans struggling to get by, it's no wonder food bank usage has doubled under their watch. Why is the Premier doing nothing to address the cost-of-living crisis? She could start by raising the minimum wage.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of October 1, 2024, the average minimum wage across all of the provinces is \$15.83. What we looked at when we've been examining the minimum wage is: how many people are receiving the minimum wage? I can tell you that in 2018 it was 270,200, and in 2023 there were 126,000 employees. What happens is that there's an entry-level wage that

individuals get paid, and then very quickly they're able to rise up, with additional job skills, to higher positions and higher pay. We need to make sure that we have an entry-level wage that doesn't interfere, especially with young people being able to get that first job.

Ms Gray: Everyone working a full-time job should be able to support themselves. It's ridiculous to do anything else. The Premier herself tweeted: "It's clear that rising costs are affecting Albertans across the province." In Calgary inflation has reached 3.3 per cent, highest in the country. But let's review the facts. Car insurance is up now and going up even higher under this Premier; utilities are up; home insurance is up; food bank usage is up; rent and mortgages, up and up; inflation is up, up, up; and the minimum wage is frozen. Will the Premier take action?

Ms Smith: Well, I would invite the member opposite to call her leader in Ottawa and pull the plug on the federal government so we can get to an election, so we can solve some of these issues. One of the things that we need to solve is getting rid of the carbon tax, which has increased the cost of everything, in particular and disproportionately in Alberta. The inflation crisis is caused by the federal government and their out-of-control spending policies. We need to be able to address that. We're beginning to see rates come down, and we're glad to see that. We have an auto insurance policy that we'll be introducing tomorrow, and we've been making dramatic reductions in electricity. Mr. Speaker, we're moving in the right direction.

Support for Transgender Albertans

Member Tejada: Today is the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Around the world communities will gather to remember precious loved ones who've lost their lives due to violence against trans folks. We know that hate crimes against 2SLGBTQIA people are on the rise, and Statistics Canada reports that trans people are four times more likely to experience violent victimization compared to cisgender people. Will the Premier or any of her MLAs attend the ceremonies of remembrance held in community, and if not, why not?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Transgender Day of Remembrance we honour the memory of all transgender people whose lives were lost in acts of antitransgender violence. Today and every day we mourn these losses and are reminded of our collective responsibility to continue the fight for acceptance and understanding. I in this role have and will continue to meet with members of the community, as I've done from the beginning, to hear their views and perspectives and hear their stories.

Member Tejada: So no.

Given that that's a no, and while remembrance is important, we also need to address the increasing incidence of hate targeting this community, and given that the 2SLGBTQIA-serving organizations across the province have cited personal safety as a major concern, including rural ones, and given that this government's slate of bills is now systemically discriminating against two-spirit, nonbinary, and trans folks, what measures will the Premier take to prevent rising hate crimes against these communities?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As has been said time and again in this House, the legislation that we're looking to bring forward, if passed, is about preserving youth and young people's ability and rights to make adult decisions when they are adults, especially as it relates to some decisions that may be irreversible or affect their fertility. Again, the importance of preserving youth's ability to make adult decisions when they're adults is paramount.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that my office, many offices, including the UCP's, have received thousands of e-mails begging the Premier to stop the rollout of these antitrans bills and given that Albertans are demanding that government focus on the real issues Albertans are facing, like overcrowded classrooms, the crushing cost of living, and not having access to a family doctor, will the Premier on behalf of a province whose real-life issues are being ignored please scrap her slate of discriminatory bills and focus on building an accepting Alberta where everyone's human rights are protected?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government will continue to support this community. I encourage members and individuals who haven't read about it yet: our new 2SLGBTQIA-plus resource hub includes information on health care supports; guidance on how Albertans can amend the sex marker on their birth record, identification card, or driver's licence. It also includes links to relevant grants and education supports. Since 2021 our government has invested over \$26 million into direct supports for 2SLGBTQIA-plus Albertans. Additionally, since 2021 our government has provided over \$1.5 million to these organizations for . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View is next.

Automobile Insurance (continued)

Ms Ganley: The year was 2019, and the UCP removed the cap on insurance rates, and they went up, way up. Since the UCP took office, rates have gone up by 38 per cent in Alberta, more than twice the national average. While Albertans struggle with rising costs under this UCP, what do they do? Basically nothing. Then they had a sudden change of heart right before the election and brought in a cap. I guess their heart changed back because, despite the highest rates in the country, here we are after the election and the UCP have removed the cap to allow rates to skyrocket again. How does the minister justify this?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'd give a little advice to the opposition. They may actually want to see what we roll out tomorrow when it comes to auto insurance reform, both short term and long. I'd start with this: caps don't work. Yours didn't work; ours didn't either. It's a short-term initiative to slow the bleeding, provide an affordability measure while we seek longer term reform. All it does is defer it into the future. The problem is that the system doesn't reflect the actual costs that are being incurred. There currently is about 17 per cent rate pressure in the system. We're going to have the courage on this side of the House to actually bring the long-term reforms forward.

Ms Ganley: Given that caps work fine to protect consumers – that's just not what the UCP care about – and given that no-fault insurance can drive down costs but only when paired with public auto

insurance and there is no indication that the UCP scheme will do the same and given that the UCP are moving to the worst of both worlds, where injured drivers are deprived of compensation while rates continue to increase, to the minister: if the government really thinks this scheme will bring down costs, why pair it with an ability to rise unchecked? Isn't that a pretty clear signal?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, there's so much wrong with that statement, but I would start at their assumption that if we chose to have a public provider of insurance, we could immediately provide relief. The problem is that not only does that system cost \$3 billion, the report showed that it would take 18 to 24 months to set up. My team tells me that that is highly unlikely, even if we could fill the roles needed by hiring the appropriate people to bring in a monopoly system all at once, not to mention the other private-sector jobs that would be lost. It would be impossible.

Ms Ganley: Given the only thing that answer makes clear is that the UCP only cares about rising insurance costs in an election year and given that the new plan will not drive down costs, which the minister well knows – otherwise, why would he be removing the cap? – how can the minister with a straight face tell this House he thinks that his plan will reduce costs while simultaneously changing the law to allow them to rise unchecked? Is it that the minister doesn't understand that Albertans are struggling, or that he doesn't care?

2:10

Mr. Horner: There's one of us that doesn't understand the situation, and it isn't me, Mr. Speaker.

I would just say: wait till tomorrow, when we can more clearly lay out our plan. Cap is one thing, and it doesn't reflect the actual cost that industry is seeing. Currently our data shows us there's one profitable insurance company left in the province. The average rate pressure is 17 to 18 per cent. Many large companies that are maybe your insurers, through you to them, Mr. Speaker, are double that, so what part of this plan will be is to stem the bleeding to ensure we can get to the long-term reforms.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Career Education Programming in Alberta

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy is booming. There are jobs ready to be filled in growing and emerging industries like skilled trades, aviation, engineering, and so much more. Our government is committed to giving Albertans every opportunity to thrive in our growing economy, and that means students, too. My question is for the Minister of Education. How is our government setting students up for success after they graduate and transition into the workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that our students are set up for success after they graduate is a top priority of this government, and we recognize that an important part of that is transitioning into the workforce. That's why we are undertaking a number of initiatives. Specifically, we are working to expand dual credit programming and offering it in our K to 12 schools. We have announced \$4.9 million to support 55 new programs and enhance 22 existing programs. I'm happy to report that we are bringing more collegiate schools online as well. There are currently 12 collegiate schools operating across the province to give these students these opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that our government is enhancing career education opportunities for students across the province and given that investments we are making are setting our students up to discover, explore, and pursue their career interests and given that our government is providing students and families with an amazing pathway to pursue their career interests through collegiate schools, can the same minister please tell this House the impact collegiate schools have on our students?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, collegiate schools have an incredible role to play in our education system. First and foremost, they help to strengthen and enhance a system full of choices. I know it's something that the NDP doesn't like, but on this side of the House we want there to be a diversity of programming when it comes to our education system. Of course, the real way that collegiate schools help to support our students is by giving them an opportunity to pursue their passions, to pursue areas of interest all the while earning postsecondary credits. These are successful options that we will continue to enhance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that there are 12 collegiate schools across the province offering captivating hands-on and experiential programming for students in in-demand fields and given that these collegiate schools are connecting students to endless amazing career pathways and further given that these schools give students a head start on their lives after graduating from high school, can the Minister of Education please share with this House what our government is doing to ensure that more students and more families can be a part of this amazing collegiate school model?

Mr. Nicolaides: Absolutely. Mr. Speaker, we want more students and families to undertake successful opportunities with collegiate schools. That's why in Budget '24 we invested \$64 million over the next three years to help expand these opportunities. Furthermore, I also had the privilege today of announcing that we are officially opening grant applications for approximately \$21 million to school divisions to be able to apply to build collegiate programming in their communities. I would encourage all of our school divisions to take advantage of the applications that are open to expand these programs.

Health Care Accessibility

Ms Hoffman: "Our government is firmly committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act and the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act." You might think that's a quote from an NDP Health minister, but I was pleased and surprised to hear the current minister say those words in this Chamber yesterday. This is a departure from UCP policy to, quote, give Albertans a choice of privately funded, privately delivered health services. What other specific UCP health policies does the government disagree with their party on?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, there's so much wrong in that statement, but I am going to just start with saying that we are absolutely committed to the Canada Health Act and the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. We have publicly funded health care in the province; that's not going to change. In fact, today I announced with the nurse practitioners that we now have nurse practitioners that can practise autonomously. We have 33 practising in the province with another 23 to start soon. That means an additional 50,000 Albertans will have primary care in this province.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the UCP has advocated for American-style, two-tiered health care and given that yesterday the minister said that she supports the Canada Health Act principles, to the minister: what are the five principles in the Canada Health Act, and why does she support each of them?

The Speaker: I'm not entirely sure how the Canada Health Act and its impact – perhaps its impact on government policy may be a question. It's not the question that you asked, so I encourage you to ask a question about government policy.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've already committed to the Canada Health Act and its principles. I want to say that because of the work that we're doing, we're expanding primary care and having access to primary care right across this province. I just want to say that with the nurse practitioners we have rural locations – Beaverlodge, Coaldale, Cold Lake, Consort, Morley, Picture Butte, Three Hills, Two Hills, Vegreville, and Vermilion – that now have nurse practitioners, with many more to come. We're working to address the needs in our rural communities, something the members opposite never did.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the principles of the Canada Health Act are accessible, comprehensive, portable, universal, and publicly administered and given that the government is failing accessibility when nearly 1 million Albertans don't have a family doctor, it's not comprehensive when cancer patients can't even see an oncologist before they die, and it's not universal when the UCP closed emergency departments in Fairview, Hinton, and Lac La Biche this week alone, is it that the minister isn't committed to the Canada Health Act, or does she want to have an opportunity to chat with me about the principles and how she can uphold them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to go back to the member opposite's health record, where I can say that everything went up in terms of wait times. When you look at their surgery wait times, you look at cataract surgeries, hips, knees: everything went up under the former minister, the member when she was Minister of Health. I'm not going to take any lessons from them. We are in fact making sure that the 600,000 to 700,000 people in Alberta who don't have a primary care provider will have one and very soon.

AIMCo Governance

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government appointed the AIMCo board and added pension plans into AIMCo against the wishes of those who rely on it for their retirement. The biggest cheerleader of the AIMCo operation was the Minister of Finance, who raved about its performance this spring. He said, "They're accountable to us in this Chamber. They're accountable to me. We strive to be better. They're doing a good job." If AIMCo was accountable to this minister and he thinks they should lose their jobs, why does this minister think that he should keep his?

Mr. Horner: AIMCo is an important institution, Mr. Speaker, and in my role I will always defend them until a change has to be made, and that's what we did. It says right in their mandate and rules document: this is about great risk-adjusted returns, this is about being a low-cost provider for our pension plans, and this is about having a great relationship with those plans. AIMCo is a great institution. I'm excited about the reset we're undertaking

and very excited that we have the right Hon. Stephen Harper joining as board chair.

Mr. Sabir: Given that it's clear that this move was designed to push the Premier's ideology and given the minister today reappointed several of the members of the board he'd just fired but also politicized the board by appointing his own Deputy Minister of Finance to AIMCo and given that hundreds of thousands of Albertans' retirement investments are at stake, will the minister tell this House why he thinks political interference in Albertans' retirements is acceptable?

Mr. Horner: Political interference at AIMCo isn't acceptable by any means. It never has been, and it never will be. It's too bad to hear him call into question, you know, the morals of a public servant that's going to join the board in that role. Initially, when AIMCo came out of Treasury Board and Finance, the Deputy Minister of Finance sat on the board. We're returning to that practice. We think it's a great piece of oversight that's been missing. I've had the conversation with the board chair; he agrees.

2:20

Mr. Sabir: Given that the UCP remain fixated on taking control of Albertans' pensions and given that they still want to gamble with Albertans' CPP benefits for their political gains and given that it's clear that today's appointments to AIMCo are just another bad turn in the UCP's attack on Albertans' pensions, will the minister end the games and commit that the UCP will keep their hands off the CPP?

Mr. Horner: The only one playing games here is that member trying to strike fear into Albertans about the security of their pensions.

What we initiated last year was a conversation about: would this be a good idea? If the number was this and the benefits and the contribution rate could be this, would this make sense to Alberta? We're still waiting to hear back from the OCA on their opinion on the legislation. No decision has been made. As we passed in the bill last fall, we made it clear that those parameters would have to be met and a referendum, asking implicitly: should we do this to Albertans?

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:21.
The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Skilled Trades Training for Veterans

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supporting our veterans is a duty we must uphold every day, not just on Remembrance Day. These brave men and women who have selflessly served our country deserve our unwavering support as they transition to civilian life. That's why yesterday's announcement by the Minister of Advanced Education is so significant. It paves the way for veterans to access meaningful career opportunities after their service. Could the minister share details of this announcement and how it impacts veterans across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education has the call.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. Yesterday I was proud to announce that our government is investing \$300,000 towards Helmets to Hardhats, an organization that helps Alberta's veterans transition to careers in the skilled trades. This one-time grant will support the Helmets to Hardhats skilled pathway program, which is designed for service

members who wish to pursue apprenticeship education and a career in one of Alberta's designated trades. Alberta's veterans have always had our backs, and we're making sure that we have theirs.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that my role is military liaison, I speak with veterans and service members regularly and given that I consistently hear about the needs for more postservice career options and job supports for veterans, service members, and reservists, can the minister share how this investment will help provide career opportunities for Canadian Armed Forces members ready to transition to civilian life?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This funding to the skilled pathway program will support safety certification, personal safety equipment, supervisory training, and employment referrals for service members who do not have existing backgrounds in the trades. The 18-month program will enable 50 participants to enter into construction safety certification and supervisory training for job-site readiness. Forty of those participants will enter apprenticeship programs. This program will reduce barriers for Alberta's veterans and help them find rewarding career options in the skilled trades.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta's economy is continuing to grow and diversify under our UCP government, resulting in increased demand for more skilled trade workers, and further given that there is nearly unlimited potential and incredible opportunities for skilled trade workers in Alberta, can the same minister share how this investment is not only supporting Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans but is also addressing Alberta's rising demand for skilled trade labour?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. With the rising demand there are incredible opportunities for skilled tradespeople in Alberta. That is why we recently launched a campaign to promote skilled trades and apprenticeship opportunities. We are also working with a range of partners – including postsecondaries, industry, unions, and workers – to address the demand for skilled labour. This investment into Helmets to Hardhats will allow veterans to answer Alberta's demand for skilled labour, and I'm confident that their hard work and dedication will translate seamlessly to careers in the trades.

Funding for Private Schools

Ms Chapman: The UCP government has an abysmal record when it comes to managing growth in our province. When it comes to schools, they ignored rising enrolment for years and are now rushing to catch up. In her televised address the Premier announced \$8.6 billion for constructing public, charter, and private schools. The next day the Education minister announced that all those dollars would stay in the public system. Does the right hand know what the left is doing? How much money is this government planning to divert from public education to build private schools?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has no idea about managing growth. When they were in office they jacked up taxes on businesses, they told Albertans to leave the province and find jobs elsewhere, they created investor uncertainty, and they reigned over a period of population decline as people fled looking for opportunities elsewhere. We have reversed that trend, and as a part of that, yes, we are experiencing unparalleled growth in our schools. Our historic

investment in school infrastructure will make sure that Albertans have the schools that they need in their communities.

Ms Chapman: Given that Albertans have never before been asked to pay to construct private schools available to only those who can meet eligibility requirements and given that provinces like Ontario have private education options without needing any government subsidies and given that public education in Alberta offers an incredible range of choice in programming, will the minister admit that choice in education should be supported for all students, not just those who can afford to pay for it?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I will absolutely and happily stand and support the principle of choice in education, and more so I will ensure that it is defended in this province, unlike the members opposite who, many of them, during their leadership run campaigned on the idea of dismantling choice in education, on dismantling separate schools, unfolding charter schools into public schools, on dismantling that whole system. We believe that parents know best what their children need, and having choices will ensure that those students receive the education that's best suited for them.

Ms Chapman: Well, given that the majority of families choose public education and given that public schools are obliged to accept every single child who walks through their door regardless of their needs or abilities and given that while Alberta has the lowest per-student funding in the country for those in public school – the UCP provides the highest per-student funding in the country for those in private school – why is the minister okay with underfunding public schools in favour of private ones?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we are investing at historic levels to our education system. Our funding is over \$9 billion currently. In addition to operating funding, we've also announced what the leader of the NDP called a generational investment to school infrastructure. We will make sure that we provide the necessary investments for our education system to remain world class. We will not take lessons from the NDP when it comes to supporting school choice or on how to manage growth; we will take lessons from them if we want to learn how to demise Alberta, which we're not interested in.

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

Arthur J.E. Child Comprehensive Cancer Centre

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government remains dedicated to providing Albertans with world-class health care, which includes access to cancer care research, screening, prevention, and patient-centred treatment. The recent opening of the \$1.4 billion Arthur J.E. Child comprehensive cancer centre, the largest of its kind in Canada and the second-largest in North America, offers leading-edge cancer treatment and research, solidifying Alberta's role as a leader in health care and innovation. Can the Minister of Health provide the House with an overview of the services and impact that Albertans can expect from this remarkable facility?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct. The Arthur J.E. Child comprehensive cancer centre will provide leading care and treatment to patients while driving innovation. The centre will engage patients and enable access to comprehensive cancer care services in a world-class facility. It includes both in-patient and outpatient services and more than 9,200 square

meters of dedicated research space. Services are based on clinical priorities such as hosting more than 100 patient exam rooms, 160 in-patient beds, over 90 chemotherapy chairs, and 12 radiation vaults with three more shelled in for the future growth.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Arthur J.E. Child cancer centre stands as one of the world's most advanced cancer treatment facilities and given that this facility was built to meet today's needs while preparing for the future and further given that with the opening of this facility Albertans can be assured to receive the highest level of care in cancer treatment, can the minister please elaborate on how the centre's design not only enhances patient-centred care but also supports cancer prevention and early detection efforts, creating a healthier Alberta?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Research at the facility will focus on prevention, early detection, patient-centred treatment, supportive care, a positive patient experience, and outcomes. Our government is committed to improving treatments and results for cancer patients and supporting screening and prevention initiatives to prevent future cases. So this centre will increase cancer care capacity by consolidating and expanding services to support integrated comprehensive care. As a cancer survivor myself I know how important this is to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given the estimated 2 out of every 5 Albertans that will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime and given the critical role that early diagnosis and comprehensive treatment play in giving cancer patients their best possible chance of recovery, can the minister explain how the integration of research labs, clinical trials, and extensive cancer care facilities within this centre will improve both treatment outcomes and Alberta's overall health care capacity, ensuring a sustainable and innovative approach to fighting cancer?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The building was designed and is designed to provide a collaborative and innovative environment that will bring state-of-the-art care and research together. Integrated research across the spectrum will further optimize care for patients, and some key features include research labs that integrate cancer research across multiple disciplines with an emphasis on clinically impactful patient-based research. As well, they will support data collection, analytics, surveillance, and reporting activities specific to the cancer population. Additionally, there are auditoriums and libraries that all cancer patients and their families can use.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has a question to ask.

Health Services for Transgender Youth

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that nearly 1 in 5 Albertans do not have a family doctor and in Alberta nobody under the age of 18 receives bottom surgery for gender-affirming care anyway, Albertans deserve an answer from the minister why the top health priority of this government is to ban bottom surgery rather

than to act to retain doctors. Can the minister tell Albertans why picking on vulnerable children who are just trying to live their lives is more important than retaining physicians and why she hasn't implemented the new family physician . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that young people have the ability to make adult decisions when they become adults is key for us. We want to ensure that they have the ability to retain their fertility and make those decisions at a time that is important for them. We are making great strides in recruiting family physicians, and we're also making great strides on the primary care compensation model. I've mentioned many times in this House that that work is ongoing and we're working very closely with the Alberta Medical Association.

Dr. Metz: Given that the messaging from this minister about hormone blockers could not be farther from the truth and given that hormone blockers allow parents, physicians, and the child to decide on a pause on puberty and do not change a child's gender or risk their fertility and given that they cause no permanent changes but to be effective must be started before puberty begins and given that pediatricians who are experts on the medical science have argued against the proposed ban, why is this minister telling parents she is legislating away their right to support their children?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I would say that, once again, we are going to preserve the rights of children to be able to make adult decisions when they become adults. When we look at all of the various legislation and research that has been done in other countries that were further along the continuum than we were and in particular we look at the Cass report that was done in the U.K., we see that they are going away from puberty blockers as well as surgery. We have evidence-based decision-making.

Dr. Metz: Given that transgender people are at very high risk of harm, including suicide, and given the attack on the ability to live safely in Alberta with the same rights for medical care that other Albertans have and that this has already contributed to the suicide of at least one individual, will the minister tell Alberta parents how this government will support the mental health of transgender children while she reduces the chance of even having a family doctor? Will she explain to all Albertans why this cruel bill is more important than rapid implementation of the . . .

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start by saying that suicide in Alberta, for any reason, is a tragedy. We want to do what we can as a government to prevent that in every circumstance, which is why we partner with Counselling Alberta. We're doubling the budget from \$4 million to \$8 million to provide same-day access to important services like therapy and counselling from industry professionals and best practices to always care for those no matter where they are in the province, no matter what they're struggling with. That includes those who have questions around gender, and that's going to continue with this government going forward into the future.

Automobile Insurance (continued)

Mr. Dach: Whether talking to constituents, speaking with Alberta school board trustees or the Alberta Motor Transport Association,

the high cost of insurance is an issue that is uppermost in their minds. Thanks to this UCP government Alberta has the most expensive auto insurance in the country, with rates climbing up to 30 per cent on their watch. While door-knocking recently I met a retired gentleman who worried that the high cost of insurance might force him to give up his car. The UCP are announcing a plan that they know will increase rates again, meaning that Albertans like this individual will pay more. Why is the minister choosing to put the profits of insurance companies over Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think the member made a great argument for reform. The costs have increased greatly, second-highest rates in the country behind only Ontario, and that is with caps in place that aren't showing the true cost of the system. It seems pretty obvious that we need to change the system and take a big part of the costs out of the system, and that's what we're going to announce tomorrow. We'll walk everyone through what will put Albertans first. We'll make sure they get the care they need, and we'll bring costs down.

Mr. Dach: Given that the only thing that's obvious is that Albertans have no faith whatsoever that this minister will do the right thing, keep insurance rates low, given that the UCP knew that the rates would skyrocket the last time they eliminated the rate cap – and, boy, did they ever – and given that the UCP saddled Albertans with rate hikes and the highest costs in Canada and now they're planning to do the exact same thing, given that I've spoken with members of the Alberta Motor Transport Association who have told me that many smaller trucking companies are struggling right now and that now would be the worst time to hike their costs, will the minister heed these concerns, see the pain his government is about to inflict, and reverse this plan?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that couldn't be further from the truth. This entire initiative was brought to us. The Premier put it in my mandate letter to pursue affordable insurance for Albertans, so we're trying to do that in the most balanced way possible. There's a lot of competing interests across the landscape. We're trying to balance potential job losses, economic impact, timelines of major changes, actuarial analysis about the appropriate systems that could lead to the greatest benefit for Albertans. We're trying to weigh all of those things. I can't wait till tomorrow when I can explain it to the members further.

Mr. Dach: Albertans will be watching closely tomorrow as well, Mr. Speaker.

Now, given that many trustees with the Alberta School Boards Association are worried about how they will be able to afford to keep their school buses on the road due to high insurance costs and given that the UCP plan is to make those high insurance costs even higher, can the minister explain why it's more important for the UCP to give profitable insurance companies a break rather than help children get to school safely?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have a thing called profit provisions at the rate board that we can control and monitor potential profits of the insurance companies. We actually lowered that last term from 7 to 6. So there are tools in place to ensure that doesn't happen. Once again, I would notify the House that there's currently one profitable insurance company left in Alberta. Two have left already. Many more are considering it. Any changes that we make in the short term will be to help us get to the long-term reforms. This isn't magic. This is claims versus premiums paid.

2:40 Electric Power System

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, from one side of the country to the other Canadians are struggling to make ends meet. Albertans are facing the same struggles. The two items that have created the largest impact on affordability for Albertans, the carbon tax and high power prices, are directly attributed to the NDP and their disastrous policies. These policies were so terrible that Prime Minister Trudeau couldn't help but adopt them himself. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: what is our government doing to ensure Albertans facing affordability challenges don't have to pay so much to keep their lights and heat on this winter?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that great question. Our UCP government is doing the work that the NDP failed to do. We are working tirelessly to modernize Alberta's electricity system to ensure it is reliable, affordable, and dependable for generations to come. We've tackled the issue of excessive local access fees, and our interim measures to prevent power price spikes are already working. According to the latest Stats Canada data this week, electricity prices this year are down 36 per cent from their peak last year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Alberta's need for more electricity infrastructure grew more in the years since the NDP government blew up the most reliable and affordable electricity grid in North America than it ever grew before and given that the NDP's changes threatened the reliability of Alberta's grid and caused prices to skyrocket and given that Albertans are now on the hook to pay for all the infrastructure required to allow market access to intermittent energy sources, can the same minister tell this Assembly how our government is bringing reliability back to our electricity market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of affordability.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely correct. The NDP made Alberta's power grid as volatile as the weather. While the NDP's bosses in Ottawa are trying to ban reliable natural gas power with their dangerous clean electricity regulations, our government is proud that Alberta is building more reliable baseload generators with thousands of megawatts coming online this year. Also, our new power market reforms will strengthen the grid by moving to a day-ahead market. Not only will this make our grid more reliable, but it will help take the pressure off of Alberta's utility bills.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our economy is attracting billions of dollars of electricity projects with the significant changes being undertaken and given that the higher the number of consumers on the grid, the lower the cost burden for transmission infrastructure per consumer and given the extreme discrepancy between power bills for rural Albertans in comparison to those in major urban centres, who have municipal government backed utilities, can the minister tell the Assembly how our government will bring relief for rural Albertans, who are paying so much for electricity transmission and distribution costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we understand the issues that rural Albertans face. When the NDP were in government, they irresponsibly threw open the gates to the Wild West for renewables. The NDP's poor planning meant ratepayers were burdened with paying for massive amounts of new infrastructure needed to accommodate all the renewable generation. This drastically increased transmission fees, and we are still paying for that infrastructure today, and we'll continue to do so for years to come. Our government is going to work and doing the work that they failed to do and taking action to address transmission and distribution fees with more news on this in the days to come.

Speaker's Ruling Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. Prior to what I know is a busy schedule for many of you heading to other meetings and important business that members attend to on occasion, on Monday I provided an opportunity for members to review the Speaker's memo and quoted at length from such memo. Perhaps the memo was unclear because I see many, many members still today not respecting the requests of that. For clarity's sake, the use of a laptop during the daily Routine is prohibited.

I mentioned on Monday that I would be reluctant to identify members, but if they chose to persist – the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge, Edmonton-Glenora, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, Edmonton-South West, Edmonton-Mill Woods, Calgary-Mountain View, Edmonton-City Centre, Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, Calgary-Fish Creek, Camrose, and Calgary-Klein failed to heed the advice of the Speaker. I'm certain that by tomorrow they will be able to do just that.

In 30 seconds or less, we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia has a statement to make.

National Child Day

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today, the national day of the child, to once again remind us of our duty and moral responsibility to protect and enhance the rights of children. A year ago I stood in the same Assembly and I shared that I truly hoped that that year we would rise above ideologies and partisan concerns to come up with viable solutions for Albertan children. Well, unfortunately, that is not what happened. In fact, we continue to see bills from this government that do not address the needs of children but instead shuffle responsibility between ministries.

Now, I honestly believe in providing people the resources they need to succeed. We are not doing that for our children and youth. This government claims to be reinserting safety into our child care centres, but they are not increasing awareness or training for caregivers so they might prevent the spread of pathogens, nor are they adapting communications so that they are easier to understand and follow. Nope; not this government. Instead, they have created a bill that clarifies where blame should lay when concerns arise. Spoiler alert: they're the first to say "not it". A serious government would take responsibility and accountability. Last year I spoke to the lack of housing, access to necessary health care, poor air

quality, the mental health crisis, food insecurity crisis, all of which continue today.

This past October I was honoured to be present and bear witness to the assembly of national chiefs on long-term reform on child welfare. The desperation, fear, and anger and, eventually, hope felt in that space were almost overwhelming. Chiefs from across Canada are working hard to ensure the best future for their children, yet in Alberta we continue to see overwhelming numbers of Indigenous children receiving services from Children and Family Services. It is 2024, and we continue to see the same mistakes. I sincerely hope on this day that these are not intentional decisions by this government to harm children.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to provide oral notice of Government Motion 51, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows.

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) and for the duration of the 2024 fall sitting of the First Session of the 31st Legislature the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for the consideration of government business unless the Government House Leader notifies the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Bill 36

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It is my favourite time of year, the time that we introduce the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, and I rise to introduce that bill being Bill 36.

This bill will make minor amendments to 19 acts. These amendments would be housekeeping in nature, providing increasing clarity and consistency across all those 19 acts.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 36, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Did you have a tabling?

Mr. Haji: Yep. Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a statement from Edmonton 2 Spirit Society, the statement concerning the current direction that the UCP has taken with regard to the following bills: Bill 26, Bill 27, and Bill 29.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the five copies of a federal parliamentary standing committee submission on Bill C-71 as the red herring, property-grabbing motion that it is.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:50

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from Brandi Gruninger, director and registered psychologist of Evolution Psychology Ltd. in St. Albert, explaining why she is opposed to the antitrans legislation.

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

Ms Hayter: I rise to table five requisite copies of a letter to the Premier as well as other MLAs in the room from a constituent saying that the act is a dangerous stunt and the reasons as to why she would like us to have a diverse, strong, and successful province.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the five requisite copies of an article produced in the *Calgary Herald* today, which is entitled Province Plans to Combine Health Card, Driver's Licence, which will potentially identify if one is a citizen or not wherever and to whomever one needs to present their licence, which is causing grave concern amongst many communities.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia, followed by the Official Opposition Leader.

Member Batten: I have here to table the five requisite copies of Early Childhood Education Is Not a Profession. It's the article I mentioned yesterday in my debate. It speaks to the importance of investment in these vital systems.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table three e-mails with five requisite copies of each on behalf of constituents, Theresa Lister, Carmen Mejia, and Rhys Bearchell, all expressing that banning gender-affirming care will threaten the lives and well-being of youth and families across the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:21 a point of order was raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23(h) "makes allegations against another Member," and (i) "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." At that moment the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall was asking about the actions of the minister against AIMCo and talking about the challenges introduced and specifically the very real fear that Albertans feel regarding potential political interference. The Minister of Finance in his response said – without the benefit of the Blues my rough quote is: that member is trying to strike fear into the hearts of Albertans. This is a clear allegation and impugning of false motives against another member. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is representing all Albertans who share the concern and asking legitimate questions. To accuse that member of trying to cause fear, I believe is unparliamentary and inappropriate for this House, and I hope he might apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is certainly not a point of order. I believe that this is a matter of debate. The hon. Minister of Finance was answering a question and the opposition member, the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, at the time actually even had the audacity of calling into question the integrity of a member

of the public service, the Deputy Minister of Finance, who I believe is a person of the highest character, and this is something that is not without precedence, having that member on the board. But if we're going to talk about imputing false motives, earlier the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall said in his question, unofficially, of course, but also politicizing the board, "Will the minister tell this House why he thinks political interference in Albertans' retirements system is acceptable?"

Mr. Speaker, I'm not suggesting that two wrongs make a right, but if the member opposite is going to call a point of order on this, they should mind their own Ps and Qs.

The Speaker: Are there others who wish to join in the point of order debate?

Seeing none, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. At the earlier mentioned time of 2:21 the hon. Minister of Finance was speaking, when he said, "The only one playing games here is that member trying to strike fear into Albertans about the security of their pensions." He continued on and made other statements.

Well, the Minister of Finance certainly did identify a member about what their intention may or may not be. I don't particularly find this particular statement all too egregious, certainly raising to the level of a point of order. Of course, herein lies the challenge when the Speaker makes any sort of ruling as such. Tomorrow a member might show up to the Assembly and say, "That member is trying to strike fear," or make similar accusations because of a ruling that the Speaker makes on any given day. Of course, the context of each of these rulings is important, and I might just provide some caution to the Minister of Finance that should he have been directing his comments through the chair, it may have been less likely to raise a point of order today and is always good practice in the Assembly. For today's sake I don't consider this a point of order, and I do consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 24

Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: We have before us the amendment A3 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Is there anyone wishing to join the debate on amendment A3? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 24 in support of this amendment, put forward by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, protecting rights to access reproductive health care services, access gender-affirming health care, install and operate solar energy systems on one's own property, and refuse involuntary substance use treatment. I think there's no denying that every single member in this Chamber believes that the rights and freedoms of all Albertans must be protected.

That's why the impacts of having a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that safeguards every Canadian's individual rights is so crucial. There's no arguing with the fact that this is an important

feature of any democracy, but what I take particular issue with is that we clearly have a Premier and UCP government that is more focused on appeasing their base than tackling the issues facing everyday Albertans. That's why the introduction of this amendment is so important. If we're going to speak on protecting freedoms, we should make sure that those freedoms include those that impact all Albertans and not just those that are part of the Premier's base of support.

A few weeks ago the Premier announced her intention to amend the Bill of Rights with major changes related to vaccines, medical decisions, property, and firearms, all of which are currently enshrined in our Charter. One of the biggest concerns that my constituents in Edmonton-South have brought up to me when hearing this announcement is that they don't understand why this UCP government is focused on Bill 24 when there are bigger issues at hand that need to be addressed for all Albertans.

Folks in Edmonton-South don't understand why this UCP government won't address affordability in a meaningful way: constituents like Margery, who e-mailed me recently saying that she believes this government is severely missing the mark on serving Albertans and that the UCP should be intensely focused on making life more affordable. Instead, Margery and so many others in Edmonton-South have seen their utility bills quadruple and car insurance rates more than double that of our neighbouring provinces. The UCP has left Alberta stuck with the lowest minimum wage in the country.

As I review Bill 24 as it stands, it's clear that the UCP's lack of planning – they just aren't interested in listening to what Albertans really need. If they were, they would see that this bill as it stands just isn't a priority for folks trying to do their best to take care of themselves and their families. Each part of the proposed amendments protects rights currently under threat or facing barriers and highlights issues that matter to Alberta families, because that's what we need, a government that is laser focused on what matters to all Albertans.

3:00

I'm reminded of another constituent, Jeff, who came up to me and said, quote: Ask this government why they are focusing on these silly, virtue signalling topics that the majority of Albertans don't see as the top 10 most important issues. End quote. He's right to be concerned over this government's misguided priorities. Why isn't this Premier and this government focused on the rising cost of housing, whether it's getting your first home or renting one, a direct result of a government that fails to plan for the booming population growth that they themselves encouraged with their Alberta Is Calling campaign?

Why are they not focused on getting our health care system back on track? My constituents tell me time and time again that they don't understand why the south Edmonton hospital has been removed from the budget when there is a desperate need for access and hospital care and to get that hospital built. They don't understand why they can't get a family doctor and, specifically, why the government continues to be so combative with front-line health care workers while trying to undermine public health care.

These folks in Edmonton-South don't understand why they have to be worried about their pensions – I hear this from seniors all the time – and why their pensions are at risk of being squandered in what seniors tell me all the time is a plot that has little planning or evidence behind it. I'd love for the members opposite to share with the House: what does this Bill of Rights really solve for all Albertans, and who asked for this? I genuinely don't believe this UCP government would be able to answer this. What consultations were done broadly

that led the government to believe that Bill 24, of all things, is a priority for Albertans?

To be honest, this government really seems to be out of touch with the most important needs of Albertans, and this is why we're putting forward this amendment. We have actually taken the time to sit down, to listen, to engage with what folks are telling us they care about most. I have spoken, my colleagues have spoken with thousands of Albertans, and nothing in Bill 24 has come up at the doors of town halls, at events. This amendment addresses what they've actually raised as concerns over and over again.

Like this UCP government's attempt to denigrate gender-diverse youth, the Premier's constant playing to her base isn't just irritating; it has real consequences. We need protections for the right to gender-affirming care. According to Egale Canada gender-affirming treatments can reduce the risk of suicidal ideation by nearly 50 per cent among those who access them, emphasizing their critical role in supporting mental health. Youth with access to timely care reported lower rates of anxiety, self-harm, and depression compared to those facing long delays. A Trans Youth Can study showed that 16.8 per cent of youth had attempted suicide when facing long wait times for care, underlining the urgent need for accessible services. Restricting access to care not only undermines patient autonomy but also damages the trust necessary for effective health care, leading to avoidance of even routine care by trans individuals.

This amendment also hits at the fears of many women who have brought it up to me given the UCP's recent trend of actually taking rights away. I've had dozens of women ask me: "Do I need to be afraid of access to abortion? Is that the next target for this government?" It's sad that I can't answer that definitively, that the right to reproductive care will be guaranteed. While reproductive care includes more than just abortion, we can't deny that it's a large part of it, and this amendment assures that right. Abortion is one of the most commonly performed medical procedures in this country. Roughly 1 in 3 women in Canada will have an abortion in their lifetime, and choosing to proceed with an abortion is an incredibly difficult and personal choice. We need this amendment to ensure that Bill 24 would acknowledge that.

These concerns are incredibly valid because in September the Minister of Health announced that the operations of some hospitals would be transferred to Covenant Health, and although she stated that there would be no anticipated change to access to women's reproductive health, the Catholic health authority does not provide things like in vitro fertilization and abortion. We can't deny that changes like this affect reproductive care. We're seeing this government take disturbing steps towards undermining medical autonomy.

If the members opposite really care about protecting medical freedoms, they should fully support this amendment to Bill 24 to protect the rights of gender-affirming and reproductive care. Reproductive rights are human rights, including the right to access abortion. This government has the obligation to provide women, girls, and other pregnant people with access to safe and legal abortion as part of their core human rights responsibility.

The sad reality is that the Premier seems more focused on people who refuse to get a vaccine. She's not focused on parents who want the best care for their kids, on those struggling with mental health and addiction, who continue to lack access to critical services, or women who need access to timely reproductive care. What I know for sure is those of us on this side of the House listen to Albertans, the data, and evidence.

Madam Chair, without this amendment, Bill 24 is another example of this government kowtowing to a small ideological, radical minority, because for as much as the members opposite would suggest that Bill 24 as it stands is about protecting individual

freedoms, it seems that not all freedoms are equal in their eyes. If protecting medical freedoms is so critical to the point that we need to stipulate the right to not be forced to get vaccines, then members opposite should have no problem supporting this amendment. Investing in comprehensive health care, including gender-affirming treatments, promotes better health outcomes and minimizes the need for costly emergency care.

Many of the bills introduced by this government were not part of the UCP's platform or they were introduced after the Premier explicitly said that they wouldn't be, and more and more we're seeing the Premier legitimizing conspiracy theories and undermining our democracy. Let's be clear here. Healthy disagreement is important for the democratic process, and in Alberta we pride ourselves on making smart, pragmatic decisions even if we don't agree on how to get there because Albertans know that we can disagree and still do what's best for all of us. That's what this amendment for Bill 24 is about, doing what's best for all Albertans. I'm not sure when the Premier and her government forgot that it's their responsibility to do what's best for the entire province and not just the loudest, most vocal fringe minority, and it's the fringe minority that has the Premier's ear.

I bring this up, Madam Chair, because I want us to discuss Bill 24 without this amendment for what it really is, an affront to democracy. Dr. Jared Wesley said of this bill:

It represents a broader transformation toward a brand of right-wing populism that undermines liberal democratic norms by reducing local autonomy, curtailing academic freedom, and concentrating authority in the political executive.

We need this amendment to ensure that this isn't a top-down move to control medical autonomy. The members opposite will have Albertans believe that this bill is about protecting freedoms, but so much of what the UCP is focused on revolves around taking freedoms away, which is why we've put forward this amendment to make clear that medical decisions include gender-affirming care, reproductive care, and the choice to proceed with substance-use treatment.

The Premier and her government continue to state their opposition to mandatory vaccines, seemingly forgetting that there is no history of mandatory vaccinations for all Albertans. It's true that many private and public employers implemented vaccination policies for their employees during the pandemic. This included Alberta Health Services, Edmonton public schools, Edmonton Catholic schools, the city of Edmonton, and Alberta courts. These sectors – health care, education, public service – are areas with high in-person contact, and it is in the best interests of our most vulnerable – seniors, young children, immune-compromised individuals – for all of us to do our part, to get vaccinated against viruses and diseases that are preventable and can have long-term, dangerous impacts on our health, especially as nearly 7,000 Albertans have died as a result of COVID-19 since 2020, with over 38,000 hospitalizations province-wide.

3:10

For the UCP to continue to spread dangerous misinformation about COVID immunizations is shameful and puts thousands more Albertans at risk. Without this amendment, Bill 24 could build on that misinformation. When you and your family get immunized with a vaccine, you're protecting yourself, helping to build your community's defence against diseases, and we know that Alberta and Albertans have been built upon taking care of each other, on building community, making sure our neighbours are well cared for. The more people in a community who are immunized, the less a disease can spread.

I want to be clear, Madam Chair. Vaccines save lives. Vaccines are safe, and Albertans have always had the right to choose whether

or not to get a vaccine, but to go further, gender-affirming care saves lives, reproductive care saves lives, and we cannot let these crucial aspects of health care be ignored without this amendment.

It is this government's responsibility to ensure that Albertans are well cared for, and by playing to this harmful rhetoric that somewhere along the way Albertans could be forced to take a vaccine is atrocious. I'm not mincing words when I say that it is the Premier and her government who are feeding into this misinformation. Let's not forget, Madam Chair, that it was just at an event this past summer, put together by a UCP constituency association in Calgary, that claimed that mRNA vaccines like COVID shots pose risks to children. Six of the members opposite attended this event, including the government whip, where speakers claimed excessive deaths in children increased by 3,380 per cent during the pandemic and blamed the vaccine, and they went much further, making inflammatory accusations against public health officials.

Did the Premier correct this misinformation? Did she deny that these were values that she and her government held? Of course not. She simply chalked it up to giving a platform to, quote, contrarian voices, end quote, and suggested that she would be happy to continue platforming those voices. Now we see this government spreading misinformation about gender-affirming care. Will reproductive care be next?

The members opposite may think we're raising unnecessary alarm bells with this amendment, but we must take into account that this government is quick to say one thing and then do the opposite. We must take into account this government's disturbing lack of collaboration and their unwillingness to listen to the overwhelming majority of medical experts telling them that this is misinformation.

What we're talking about just isn't a difference of opinions. We're talking about medical facts and evidence backed up by rigorous, scientific evidence, and this amendment is backed up by research done by leading medical professionals and organizations across Canada. It seems that the Premier is content to undermine our public institutions however she can if it means that she'll maintain support within her party.

There is no doubt that Bill 24 as it stands is just another political tool that the UCP is using to sow mistrust, division, and consolidate power. The amendment would address these gaps. What's worse is that this particular tool is focused on creating even more division in Alberta as this government continues their never-ending fight with Ottawa. For a Premier that so desperately wants the federal government to stay in its lane and only get involved with matters that fall directly under its jurisdiction, she and this government seem to have a real challenge staying in their lane and governing on what really matters to all Albertans. It appears to me that the UCP wants to tighten their grip on power so much that they can't see the contradiction when it's staring directly at them.

Without this amendment, Bill 24 is just another political tool that the Premier and this government is using to placate their base. I encourage all members in this House to seriously consider what freedom means and vote in favour of this amendment so that we can make sure that all medical freedoms are protected through this bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members that wish to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this amendment. I think before we talk about the amendment, it's worth backing up and talking about what the bill does because most Albertans couldn't tell you what the Alberta Bill of Rights is because it doesn't impact most of our daily lives. We have the Charter. The courts are the guardian of the Charter, that is

negotiated as between the provinces and the federal government or was a long time ago – attempts to amend it have been largely in vain – but that has a section of rights in it, and those are enforceable against governments. So it's legislation that binds government actors.

We have in each jurisdiction, whether federal or provincial, human rights acts, and human rights acts bind private actors. Those are government legislation that tell private actors, whether they're employers or people who are, you know, renting houses or various other sorts of folks, that they are not permitted to discriminate on certain grounds.

The Alberta Bill of Rights is in an interesting position comparatively because it's legislation passed by the Alberta government, which means, unlike the Constitution, unlike the Charter of Rights, it can be amended by the Alberta Legislature because that's what it is: it's Alberta. So, arguably, it binds other government actions, but practically if the government wants to take the action, they can just change the Alberta Bill of Rights. So in some ways it could be useful. In other ways, one might argue that it's kind of more of a signal of what governments think are important, and that's what I actually think the problem with this legislation which is presently before the House is, what this government actually thinks is important.

To set the context, because this will live forever in *Hansard*, we are standing in a moment where the health care system is crumbling around us. A record number of Albertans don't have access to a family doctor. Arguably, access to primary care is worse than it ever has been since public medical was brought in in this province. So that's pretty bad. It's pretty bad. There are people in this province currently who are dying of cancer before they get to see an oncologist. That's pretty bad in a place where we pride ourselves, in a country and a province where we pride ourselves on our public medical system. We are standing in a moment where people are literally dying from lack of care.

Health care is a provincial responsibility. One might think that the government of Alberta, having primary responsibility for that, would be laser focused on that problem, on their constituents who are literally dying for lack of their intervention, but they aren't. Instead, they're focused on this, and I really think that says most of what you need to say about this government, that while their constituents die from lack of medical care, they do nothing to help the medical system.

Instead, they are laser focused on pandering to a minority of Albertans who have basically decided that being asked to live in a society with other people and comport themselves in accordance with living in a society with other people, like, for instance, not driving them over with their cars or driving on the correct side of the road or getting a vaccine to protect those around you – those people just don't think that they should be required to do that. They feel that it's an infringement on their rights. I mean, I think this is a really apt analogy, right? We have rules about all sorts of things. Like, okay; arguably, you could say your – and I don't think "right" is the right word for this. Well, we use words differently in society, but I think that the word "right" should be reserved for instances in which whatever your right is imposes an obligation on other people. That's what they teach you generally in law school, right?

3:20

Arguably, your shall we call it a freedom to drive down the opposite side of the road is infringed, arguably, by the traffic safety laws that we have in place, but that infringement upon your freedom is well justified in a society where we all have to protect each other and we all have to be in a position where we're not doing things that are dangerous that impact other people. This is probably the category into which I think this bill falls, right? It's protecting the freedoms, which are being said to be rights but which aren't rights,

of people to harm others. You don't have a right to harm others. You shouldn't have a right to harm others. There are lots of reasons not to have that.

But this is what this government is focused on while Albertans die of cancer for lack of treatment because this government will do nothing to fix the medical system. Instead, they are laser focused on protecting those who think that there is a, quote, unquote, right to harm those around them in society. That is extremely problematic.

We also stand in a moment where people are struggling more than they ever have. Income inequality is skyrocketing, so the gap between what's made by the richest and what's made by everyone else is skyrocketing, and it is higher in Alberta. This is according to Statistics Canada. It's not my opinion; it's cold, hard facts on the table. It's higher in Alberta than it is anywhere else, which has not been the case historically. This is a direct result of UCP government policies. Costs are going up more in Alberta: auto insurance, for example; rent, for example. The government is doing nothing to intervene on that.

Income inequality is higher in Alberta. The government is not only not intervening on that, but they are contributing to the problem. We have a situation where most Albertans' primary concern is whether they can pay their mortgage this month, whether they can buy their groceries, whether they can feed their kids. That's their concern. Most people, yeah, have that concern, or, you know, if they have the misfortune of having a sick family member, then they have concern about whether their family member will survive under what the UCP has done to our health care system. So those are the concerns of Albertans; the concerns of a fringe minority that supports this Premier are about their right to harm other individuals in society.

Mr. Getson: Which minority with unacceptable beliefs?

Ms Ganley: Did you have something to say there, government whip?

The Chair: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but I think now would be a really great time to refocus back on the amendment A3, which is before us.

Hon. member, please direct your comments through the chair and proceed.

Ms Ganley: Yes, Madam Chair. I think the amendment is to the bill, is it not? Does the amendment not amend the bill?

The Chair: Sorry. Are you speaking to the amendment?

Ms Ganley: Yes. I was speaking to the amendment before I was so rudely interrupted by the government whip.

The Chair: Hon. member, we are on amendment A3. If you would like a copy of that amendment sent to you so you could speak to it, I will surely have one sent over to you.

Ms Ganley: I have a copy of the amendment before me. Does the amendment not amend the bill?

The Chair: I look forward to you speaking to the amendment which is before this House.

Ms Ganley: I am speaking to the amendment. May I continue, or would the government whip like to interrupt me again?

The Chair: Hon. member, perhaps it's time we move on to another speaker if we're going to have this back-and-forth conversation. I've asked you to speak to the amendment, and I . . .

Ms Ganley: I have agreed to speak to the amendment.

The Chair: Hon. member, we are on amendment A3, as I've said multiple times before. If you are having a hard time speaking to that amendment, we will move on.

Ms Ganley: I'm perfectly happy to speak to the amendment, Madam Chair. May I continue?

The Chair: That is all I ask, and that's the rule of the House. Please proceed, hon. member.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will proceed.

Before I was so rudely interrupted by the government whip, I was speaking to the bill, which is amended by the current amendment on the floor, the amendment which, I might add, brings in changes to ensure that gender-affirming care is in this bill. Again, the bill to which we are speaking is Bill 24. It is a bill that amends the Human Rights Act. That bill, as I have said – and it's important what the bill impacts, that it only binds government actors. It doesn't bind those in the private sector. That bill is being amended right now to bring in a series of rights. The amendment before us . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I will interrupt you. You know you are not speaking to the amendment. If you want to speak to the bill, we can dispose of the amendment and go back to the bill. If that's what you'd like, I suggest you take your seat and see if there are any other members that would like to join the debate on the amendment, and we can go back to the bill. Is that what you would like to do, or would you like to proceed with the amendment? This is your final chance.

Ms Ganley: I am proceeding with the amendment. The amendment which is before us: that was the sentence I was literally saying. The amendment which is before us adds additional rights to the list of rights that the government is inserting into the Human Rights Act. The act exists. This bill amends the act, and the amendment that is presently before the House amends the amending act. Yes. It's fun being a lawyer. The amendment that is before us adds a right to the bill. Currently this government is . . . [interjection] I'm sorry. Are you challenging that, Mr. House Leader?

The Chair: Hon. member, please direct your comments through the chair.

Ms Ganley: Perhaps the members would like to direct their comments through the chair.

The Chair: Hon. member, you have the floor. It is yours.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Decorum

Mr. Sabir: I rise pursuant to section 13(4), which says, "When a Member is speaking, no person shall . . . (b) interrupt that Member, except to raise a point of order." On two separate occasions first the government chief whip and now the Government House Leader, without raising a point of order, have tried to communicate with and disturb the member directly. That has caused, I guess, disorder. I would suggest that if a member wants to raise a point of order, they should do so through the chair, and if not, they should not interfere

with the member's right to speak freely without any interference or without any interruption from any member of this House.

Mr. Schow: I can't believe what I'm hearing. I am actually stunned that the member opposite, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, is standing up in this Chamber and suggesting that me confirming that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is, in fact, a lawyer is, one, disruptive, but, two, that apparently heckling is no longer allowed in this Chamber. Did the members opposite have some great epiphany that all of a sudden being quiet is parliamentary? I've got to tell you that for the last five years of my time in this Chamber the members opposite have had a really difficult time, Madam Chair, maintaining some semblance of decorum. I have to say that this is very rich coming from that member, who has had multiple outbursts in this Chamber that he's been called to order on and who is now saying that apparently there's some convention that members on this side can't speak amongst ourselves or confirm something, especially in Committee of the Whole, where a broad amount of latitude has been provided to members in this committee.

Madam Chair, you have admonished the Member for Calgary-Mountain View multiple times on relevance. That's a point of order. We sat here quietly. Now, I said something out loud that was heard because it was quite quiet in this Chamber, and the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has a problem with that, with heckling. Very rich. I'll conclude my remarks. Not a point of order. Absolutely ridiculous.

The Chair: Hon. members, first of all, the chair has the authority in this Chamber to uphold decorum. Secondly, comments in this Chamber are to be directed through the chair.

Hon. member, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View was speaking not through the chair but to other members directly in this House, which is certainly not appropriate, in the midst of the chair finding it really difficult in terms of the relevancy of her comments in which she's been interrupted on a few different occasions and provided assistance to matters of such.

3:30

I am finding it very difficult to allow rules of this House to be followed, rules in this committee which you all agree on. You all make these rules up, not the Chair, so we're going to try one more time.

On amendment A3 on Bill 24, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, with the comments and directions in which I have just given.

If the hon. Member for St. Albert has something to say, when it is your turn, you may say your piece.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, you have the floor.

Ms Ganley: Sorry, Madam Chair, I hesitate to interrupt. It's just that I believe the hon. Member from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall had raised a point of order.

The Chair: There's no point of order.

Ms Ganley: Thank you. I just wanted a ruling on that.

Debate Continued

Ms Ganley: Okay. The amendment to the bill which is intended to protect the rights to gender-affirming care: why is this important? It's important because we are standing in a moment where those rights are under direct threat. We have three other bills before this House that are a direct threat to that, that are currently before this House. My point is that the difference between this amendment,

which is designed to defend actual rights, rights which are in the Human Rights Act – I know because I amended it for them to be there – rights which are protected by the Constitution, actual rights, those are pretty important.

The difference between what we're trying to amend here: it's to protect a right, a right which is enforced in society, a right which philosophically is defensible, a right which is an inherent characteristic of an individual, which is a right properly so-called, as my ethics professor would have called it. Meanwhile, the attempts in this bill are to protect a right which already exists and another right which isn't a right at all but which is essentially people asking for the freedom to sort of drive their car on the wrong side of the road.

The bill is problematic from the outset, and the point, I think, of my comments is that despite the bill being problematic from the outset, if we're going to open the Human Rights Act, let's actually do something productive, right? Let's do something productive. Instead of doing this song and dance and this big parade to, like, try and pander to a very vocal minority that are trying to harm the rest of society, let's do something useful, and this is useful. This amendment that we have on the floor: this is useful.

If we're going to open the Alberta Bill of Rights up, which I would argue was not necessary in the first place because Albertans have bigger concerns, there are things that are a much bigger deal, then let's at least do something useful and protect a group that actually is being targeted, protect a group that actually is having their rights violated, protect a group that is in fact under attack right now in this province. If we must engage in this exercise of sort of doing a weird song and dance, which Bill 24 is, this government bill is, and pretending to be doing something useful, then let's actually do something useful.

You know, this is a government that is focused entirely on the wrong priorities. While the health care system crumbles around them, while people are unable to pay their bills, while income inequality skyrockets, while our jobless rate is amongst the highest in the country, the government is focused on protecting rights that aren't even rights, on proposing legislation that really does nothing of substance. So if we're going to do that, if we're going to waste the House's time doing this, then let's at least do something useful. Let's at least protect rights that are actually under threat. Let's recognize that the point of rights, the point of a bill of rights is to protect individuals from a tyranny of the majority, and let's do that with this bill.

I guess, Madam Chair, what my argument here is is that we're trying to give the government an opportunity. We're trying to give the government an opportunity to actually do something useful, to actually make a difference. I mean, there are lots of things the government could be doing to do that; they choose not to, which I guess is their choice. If we're going to bring forward this piece of legislation that does nothing of use, that doesn't speak to the concerns of Albertans, then maybe let's do something useful while we're at it. That is the point of the amendment.

I would urge all members to look deep in your hearts and, whether you think I'm entitled to my degrees or not, consider the substance of this amendment and vote in favour of it. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I call the question on amendment A3 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Now, back on Bill 24. Looking for speakers. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much. This is on the bill as a whole. I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate on the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024. Having reviewed the bill, I am wondering: how come we are debating it in this House? Certainly, it is legislation put forward by the UCP, but we already have a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that supersedes this legislation and is really protecting the rights of all Canadians, including Albertans. So it makes little sense that we are spending the time – as my learned colleague said earlier: how come we're focusing on this?

We know there's no need for Bill 24. Human rights are already protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. You know, legal experts in Alberta are saying things: that really this is providing nothing of substance; this bill is merely symbolic. We all know that recently the Premier had her leadership review by members of the UCP, and in order to appeal to them she's ignoring the real issues of Albertans. This bill is not the concerns of Albertans. Albertans know that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms already protects their rights in our province, as they do across all provinces in Alberta, and that the real issues that Albertans are facing are issues of affordability.

We know that utilities, groceries, insurance, rent: it's all skyrocketing in our province, and families are really struggling. That's what this government should be focusing on. We know that we don't have enough affordable housing in our province and that this is causing much hardship. We're having more and more people on the street and, of course, the temperatures are decreasing, and people are in, you know, dire situations. This is the focus that the UCP should have, making sure that Albertans can live in dignity, that they're supported.

We know that almost a million Albertans don't have a family doctor, and that means that they're not getting the health care they deserve. Oftentimes they're using emergencies, very expensive aspects of the health system, which hurts all of us. It's not good for individuals. It's much better if they have their own family doctor. Of course, then, it can be more preventative, and issues don't become so much worse, and it's not emergency care, which we know is very expensive.

It's confusing to me and I know to many of my constituents why the UCP has brought forward this legislation because it is not even in the top, you know, 10 of what Albertans are concerned about.

3:40

We know this is just another aspect of the health system that really needs focus by this UCP government. The persons in care act: the most recent report identifies that the complaints have tripled since the previous year because of issues within the continuing care system. People not receiving the care they need, people being neglected, people being abused: I mean, this is the work of government. This is what the UCP should be focusing on, making sure seniors are living in dignity and have the supports they need. Sadly, this UCP government is not seeming to care about that.

They've brought forward this Bill 24, and one of the rights they're wanting to put into this is the right to make your own medical decisions. Well, that already occurs. We know that people do make their own medical decisions along with their doc and, you know, if they're a youth or child under 18, with the support of their parents or guardians. So it's very confusing why this needs to be put in here. Again, legislation that's not needed, that is focused not on the priorities of Albertans: it's kind of a bit of a waste of time.

A second aspect of sort of this right to make your own medical decisions is that the individual has the right not to receive a vaccine. That is a real – I don't know – very specific area of health care that the UCP for some reason want to elevate. Again, I would say that this has a lot to do with the leadership of the current Premier. This

was a promise she made to the party members, that she would put in legislation so that people could have the right not to receive a vaccine. I mean, that already exists, too. There is no history of mandatory vaccines in Alberta. Certainly, some larger organizations, both private and public, sometimes for the best interests of the whole community, will make those kinds of directives as a policy. But, you know, people do have the right to make that decision.

What's happening now, because of the UCP's sort of hyper-focus on not science, not evidence but, rather, sort of conspiracy theories and things like that, is that vaccines are becoming less and less available to people who actually, indeed, want them. This legislation will only create more chaos like that.

I'll just tell you a personal story. My mother recently was hospitalized for several weeks. You know, she's 87 years old. She's an elderly woman. Certainly, I classify her as frail. She was offered right away the flu vaccine while she was in hospital because it's in the fall, and that's usually when the flu vaccine comes out. We know, especially for vulnerable populations like my mom, like seniors, that the flu will make a big difference. A lot of times people will die from the flu when they're vulnerable and elderly, and so they offer that to them. I thought: that's great; I'm glad she's getting it. Mom gets it regularly, as I do, each year. I'm a cancer survivor. That was something that I learned – my oncologist said to me: make sure you always get the flu vaccine because you're vulnerable. So, of course, I always do; my mother always does. So we got the flu vaccine. Of course, the COVID vaccine, you know, we know was also available, and so I asked the nurse, because they had just only arranged the flu vaccine. This is a major hospital in the Edmonton area, and so I asked the nurse, "When's the COVID vaccine coming?" And she said: "Oh, I don't know. We haven't heard anything about the COVID vaccine." Here, in a major hospital where very vulnerable people are, only the flu vaccine was offered. No COVID vaccine was offered.

Of course, again, the science, the evidence shows us that that's very important, especially for vulnerable seniors, to have that vaccine, but a major hospital in Edmonton is no longer offering that. They're not forcing anybody to have it. They're just not even offering it. This kind of, you know, lack of understanding of science and evidence that's demonstrated by the UCP is actually – now major hospitals are not even offering some very important vaccines, the COVID vaccine to people in a major hospital in Edmonton.

It kind of shocks me a bit that there's such a disregard for the science in this area. Certainly, we know that, you know, from the World Health Organization, a widely respected, international body, that vaccines have saved more human lives than any other medical intervention in history. In history. Vaccines are very important for public health. Going back to the 1500s even, there were medical people who were working on vaccines to make sure that people were okay.

There's a very long history of the evidence of the science of vaccines, and it's really very tragic that the UCP is saying that this should somehow not be available to people or that we're forcing people to have it, because that's not, indeed, the case. This legislation is really not doing what it needs to do, and it sort of missed the point altogether.

We know, too, the other focus of it is about the right to one's property, just compensation and due process, and also the firearms, which are federal jurisdiction. Again, what are we doing with this legislation? It's really a waste of the House's time, and I'm very disappointed.

With that, I will take my seat.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to Bill 24? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move an amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A4. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. I'd like to amend Bill 24, Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024, by moving the following, that Bill 24, Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024, be amended in section 4(b)(ii) by adding the following after the proposed clause (a.2):

- (a.3) the right of the individual to barrier-free access to full participation in society, including equal access to public spaces, services and opportunities.

Madam Chair, the reason why I am moving this amendment should be fairly clear. I think the people that have chatted about this bill or talked about why we need to amend the Alberta Bill of Rights have been fairly clear about, you know, some people's rights are getting trampled on. Well, I would suggest that there is a very large group here in Alberta. We're home to almost 5 million people; 1.3 million of those people are living with a disability right now, and because of the state of Alberta we don't have any one piece of legislation that aligns all of the work around accessibility for people with disabilities. Because we don't have that, we have ministers of the Crown standing up in this place and saying things like: take yes for an answer when I talk about building codes. Well, I'm not talking about building codes. Building codes have been around for a long time. They get amended all the time; that's regular practice.

3:50

Then we'll have them talking about, "Well, we love disabled people; we want them to have access to all areas of life," yet we don't see the work to change that. We don't see the work to actually progress towards those goals, which is why I have continued to ask this government questions. When will we see accessibility legislation that really truly is a game changer for people with disabilities? In a brief, brief statement about what this is – very clearly, what this is: it's like a framework, Madam Chair. What it does is that it looks at all ministries, all areas of life here in Alberta, and it says: what can we do to identify, prevent, and remove barriers for people with disabilities so they can interact in all areas of life?

Now, some provinces in Canada have had this legislation for years. I think some of them go back probably, like, 20 years. I think maybe Quebec was one of the first places to introduce this legislation. But what we saw after 2019, after the federal government actually passed federal legislation – it's called Accessible Canada Act. We saw most of the other provinces that still did not have accessibility legislation start to craft their own. I think the last province to fall in line was British Columbia, and they introduced the Accessible British Columbia Act. Well, not a lot of uniqueness in the titles, but they are actually all the same pieces of legislation; different jurisdictions. What we saw after 2019, after we saw a federal framework of legislation: we saw other provinces follow suit.

Now, the only province after Prince Edward Island that doesn't have accessibility legislation is Alberta, and why that's important, Madam Chair, is because we cannot measure any progress that we're making for people with disabilities. Now, that's not to say we're not actually making investments, because we are. Every day we're making investments to create more accessible spaces for people with disabilities, but we aren't measuring it. We don't know exactly what the point of it, we don't know what the outcomes we hope to gain, and we are unable to measure progress. As a result, we see every day where the holes are.

Let me give you a couple of examples because I think examples are important. Now, when a lot of people got elected in 2019 – probably

some people in this Chamber will remember being elected for the first time. Big flurry to set up your office, you know, figuring out. You've got to hire staff. You've got to get equipment. Where are you going to rent? Yada, yada. But there were no rules around accessibility, so there was nothing that said: you need to be sure that your constituents can actually get in to see you. It's not okay just to say: "Well, yeah. I'll meet you in a coffee shop down the road." That's not accessibility. That's just one example, and that's a super easy thing to fix, but we don't have a framework to be able to fix these things.

I'll give you a couple more examples. Again, like I'm saying, I'm not saying that we're not making these investments. We just don't talk about it, measure it, and then see: what else do we need to do? One of the committees that I'm on is Public Accounts, and as you know, every Tuesday morning when we're sitting, we're able to review an annual report with the Auditor General. Often some of the questions that I'll ask are around accessibility. Let's say that we're talking about apprentice seats that the government is creating. Let's say that they're going to create 10,000 new spots over the next – I don't know – three or four years. Great. That's awesome. That's good news. So my question would be something. "Well, how many of those 10,000 spots will be accessible to people with disabilities?" "Yeah. Well, we don't measure that. We can't really answer that question." Now, I have no doubt that many of those spots are indeed accessible. We just don't have a framework to measure it.

In the examples we see examples of it every day, and accessibility legislation looks at lots of different things. I think we can all understand what accessibility in the built environment means. We see it every day. These are ramps. This is making sure you have a lift. This is making sure your website is easily accessible to someone who is blind, for example. We all know what the built environment – oh, technology was not the example I meant to use. Built environment, easy to understand; the other areas, not so much. One of the really important areas that we fail as a province here in Alberta ... [interjections] If y'all are done chatting; I don't know.

Here in Alberta one of the things – sorry. Lost my track here. Some of the other areas. One of the areas that we really need to work on is the development and delivery of programming. That actually goes through all ministries, all areas. We need to make sure that everything, every program, every grant that we design, every new helmet program, hard hat program that we design, every program we design – maybe we design another page program. Whatever it is that we are designing, we have to design it with people with disability in mind. Very often accommodation or accessibility requires very little work, sometimes we're almost there, we're 98 per cent there. All it takes is a little bit more effort. So the design and delivery of programming is one. Built environment is the other.

Communication. I can't tell you how many times my friend who is blind – he's actually a practising lawyer – will contact me and say: "You know the government of Alberta's site. I went to fill out this form. I could not because my screen reader wasn't working on that page." It wasn't working on that page, Madam Chair, because not every page meets the criteria. We don't have a law that says that when you design something – a new web page, for example, or a new program or a new form – it must be accessible to all Albertans, all of them. But we don't do that. We don't have legislation.

The other areas are obviously procurement, our education, our employment. One of the most important areas, one of the most important investments we can make is around employment. I'm sure you've heard me say, again and again, that people with disabilities – and again, I want to talk about people. There are 1.3 million Albertans living with a disability. That's not just an intellectual disability. [interjections] I'm sorry. It's a little distracting with all the conversations, Madam Chair.

I'm not just talking about a developmental disability. I'm talking about physical disabilities. Many are invisible. People are on the spectrum. People have genetic disorders. Certainly, people are mentally ill. All kinds of disabilities, many you can't even identify just by looking at somebody.

People with disabilities, no matter whether they're visible disabilities or not, are twice as likely to be unemployed, and when they are unemployed, they start that descent into poverty, and once they've used up all the assets that they have, they're very often forced to go on to social safety nets like we have here in Alberta, one of which is AISH; the other one is income support. Nobody wants to grow up and live on AISH, Madam Chair. It's poverty level. It's under \$2,000 a month. It's not manageable, and I'll tell you that income support is even worse because it's about half that.

But we know – I've quoted this study before; I have tabled it before – that there was a study done in 2022, and it's called the Development and Implementation of a Framework for Estimating the Economic Benefits of an Accessible and Inclusive Society, funded by the centre for research on inclusivity. The economic benefits to Canada would be \$337.7 billion in one calendar year – and that's equal to about 17.6 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product – if as a country, all across the country, we were successful in removing barriers. And it sounds a little bit simple to identify, remove, and prevent barriers. It's a fair amount of work.

I think we could all probably agree that up until today in November 2024 we've tried saying: "Do your best. We'd like you to consider people with disabilities as you develop your programs or your budget or your future business plans." But people aren't doing that. Sometimes it happens. It happens off the corner of the desk sometimes. Sometimes it happens with a really progressive person who maybe has someone with a disability in their lives, so they're thinking about them. But it doesn't happen as a natural practice, as a normal practice, and that needs to change, which is why, Madam Chair, I think this amendment would actually make a really kind of – I don't want to say: useless bill that nobody really asked for. This is really a performative exercise.

This amendment would actually say that we understand that there is a huge group of Albertans whose rights really are not respected, very clearly not respected. They don't have access to all of the things that we can normally expect, you know: meet someone, get married, go to school, get a job, have a career, have kids. A lot of people can't because they can't even get in the door. They can't literally physically get in the door. Do you know that hospitals are one of the most inaccessible places we have? They're not accessible to people with physical disabilities. This happens all over the place and not just in physical locations. It happens in programming. It happens in budgeting. It happens all over the place.

Madam Chair, I would urge all of my colleagues, if they truly, truly want to protect the rights of Albertans and truly open up this province to all of us, all Albertans, all almost 5 million of them, that they consider supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

4:00

The Chair: Are there are others that wish to join the debate on amendment A4?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A4 as moved by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Back on 24. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 28

Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 28, Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that we are in Committee of the Whole on Bill 28. I think that all members of the House have come to an agreement that it makes sense. We might as well just get the work done and move on.

I had asked the minister a couple of questions that I was hoping at some point he would be able to respond to. Maybe he'll be able to get back to me in third reading if we get there today.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I do just want to put on the record again that although I appreciate the intention of the bill and I do encourage all members of the House to vote in favour of it, I would have liked to have seen a little bit more of an alignment across the prairie provinces about how these fines were being implemented. Again, we see in other prairie provinces where there is more of a scale based on offences, first-time offender, second-time offender, and that there's also in other jurisdictions some potential for some jail time that's attached to some of this when it becomes something where it's identified that these continue to be repeat offenders.

We do know that this has significant impact on our food security, on the wellness of Albertans and ensuring that we are able to keep our food chain clean and healthy and that people are not infected with disease from contaminated meat. It also does support and keep our reputation intact. I think honestly that when we look at meat inspection, we look at the fact that we are such a large export market when it comes to our meat production, it is very important that we don't have contaminated meat entering into our food supply and potentially damaging the reputation of the good Alberta products that are produced in this province.

Again, you know, Mr. Chair, I do support the bill. I do think that all members in the House should support the bill. Again, I would have liked to have seen an alignment across the provinces when it came to maximum fines and also maybe a little bit more of an explanation as to why we're now taking up to two years for these investigations to occur and whether or not that has to do with staffing capacity. Maybe hiring more people into the ministry to do the work would be appropriate.

In closing, that's all I will say at this time. I encourage all members of the House to support the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 28, the Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2024. I'm proud to talk about an issue that's important to many Albertans: the safety, quality, and trustworthiness of the meat we put on our tables. Alberta's livestock industry is world class, and our government is looking to strengthen public confidence in this industry with these proposed amendments. After all, our livestock industry doesn't just feed our own families but represents the best of what we have to offer to markets near and far.

This industry is built on the values that define us: hard work, responsibility, and respect for the land and animals that make this livelihood possible. Our government understands that keeping this reputation isn't a given. That's why protecting the quality of

Alberta's meat products is a top priority. When Albertans put food on their tables, they deserve to know that it's not only of high quality but trustworthy.

The Meat Inspection Act outlines the standards for licensing, inspection, and compliance in the slaughtering, processing, and sale of meat. It's a robust set of rules that ensure the highest quality from start to finish. It isn't just a checklist. It's a guarantee to every Albertan that what they're buying is safe. Our inspectors and peace officers have the authority to enforce these standards strictly, and the act and the regulations spell out under what conditions meat can be sold and how inspectors conduct their work. These guidelines reflect the trust Albertans place in a regulated food supply.

Mr. Chair, the amendments proposed in this bill represent a real commitment to maintaining and strengthening that trust. I want to be clear. The sale of uninspected meat is illegal in Alberta. The amendments in Bill 28 propose to increase the penalties for illegal slaughter and sale of uninspected meat. Right now the maximum fine for these offences is \$10,000 per violation. Bill 28 proposes raising this limit to \$100,000 per offence, sending a clear message that if you put Albertans' health at risk, there will be consequences.

If Albertans can trust the food they're buying, they'll choose Alberta meat producers over others, which is essential to support our local economy and rural communities. We want Alberta families to feel confident in every cut of meat they buy, knowing it's been responsibly handled and inspected by professionals in the field.

The amendments proposed in Bill 28 would continue to strengthen the Meat Inspection Act by extending the time inspectors have to investigate and lay charges from six months to two years, giving more flexibility to conduct thorough investigations. In complex cases where evidence can be difficult to gather, this extended time frame is essential.

Our government recognizes, Mr. Chair, that enforcing the law isn't just about handing down punishment. It's about promoting a culture of compliance and responsibility. That's why our government is committed to a balanced approach that emphasizes education, to guide those who may not be fully aware of the standards, encouraging them to comply with the law before it reaches the point of legal action. Increasing fines and investigative timelines is about aligning our standards with those in other jurisdictions, ensuring Albertans have the same level of safety as consumers anywhere else. Alberta has 121 licensed abattoirs and 65 inspectors and program specialists working to make sure our meat meets the highest standards.

Mr. Chair, my constituency is home to many local companies across various branches of this industry, from meat packers to butchers to processors and suppliers. One success story that I want to highlight is that of the Mueller family, especially the late Armin Mueller. Armin was an immigrant from Ligschwil, Switzerland, who grew up dairy farming. He moved to Canada at the age of 21, bringing with him a deep understanding of hard work and dedication to quality.

After some time out east he settled in Bentley, Alberta, starting with a modest herd of 45 dairy cows. Over the next two decades he grew that herd to 200, all while raising a family with his loving and beautiful wife, Rita. Together they embody the values of entrepreneurial spirit, grit, and perseverance that define Alberta. Eventually, Armin and his family decided to leave dairy farming to pursue a new path, raising bison.

Today the Mueller family operates Rangeland Bison, one of the most respected bison meat companies in Canada. This isn't just a business; it's a legacy rooted in building something meaningful and in representing Alberta's best values. Armin Mueller's story is a testament to what we can achieve with good policies, firm and fair

regulations, and strong values. People like the Muellers make Alberta proud, and they and others like them deserve our support.

Mr. Chair, we can't let illegal practices undermine the work of Alberta farmers, ranchers, and licensed processors. When bad actors break the law, they threaten not only the safety of Albertans but also the integrity of Alberta's reputation. This bill is about standing up for Albertans and for everyone who works hard in this industry. It's about making sure Alberta is seen as a place of integrity and prosperity, a place where we can continue to trust the food we serve our families. With these amendments we're sending a clear message. Alberta takes food safety seriously, and those who follow the rules will have our support.

We're here to protect Albertans' health and safety, strengthen our economy, and uphold the trust people have in Alberta's meat industry. I'm confident these changes will help keep our province's standards high, ensuring Alberta remains a leader in quality and safety in the food industry.

With that, I encourage all members of this Assembly to support Bill 28, the Meat Inspection Amendment Act. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First and foremost, I want to thank the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for her support and great comments. I think we can all agree that when it comes to food safety and security, it should always be a primary concern of our government every single day and also every government across Canada. With that, I appreciate the comments, too. This is about providing that security for Albertans but also honouring the commitment of so many farmers and ranchers that have created such a legacy behind our livestock industry here in our province.

I'd also like to thank the member opposite from Edmonton-Manning. She did have a couple of questions here in Committee of the Whole. I hope to be able to address some of those questions that she has asked in relation to the structure of the bill, both relating to the fine amount and the limitation period.

I just want to be clear in saying that when we came forward with this, we wanted to have something that was simple, and that's why we went with the \$100,000 fine. We didn't do an escalating fine structure for additional offences. We thought going straight to the \$100,000 or up to the \$100,000 – and I want to be clear: up to \$100,000. For every offence committed, that can be \$100,000. There could be multiple offences that an individual can be charged on. This seemed very clear to us as something that's easier to manage with our investigation team and provides just a clear message on where we're trying to go with the fine period.

Of course, this aligns more with what we're seeing in some of the provinces across Canada. British Columbia would be the one that we found we didn't want to model. They have fines of up to \$25,000 for each day for first offence and \$50,000 for each day on a second offence for personal. Now, it becomes a difficult thing for our investigators to assess how many days they were actually in noncompliance or completing illegal activity, so we didn't think that was in the best interest. It would just provide more burden on our investigation teams.

Saskatchewan, of course, for individuals is a first fine of \$75,000, second fine up to \$100,000. Manitoba is at \$50,000. Ontario was \$25,000. Of course, being a beef-producing province, being a province that has one of the largest bison herds, very strong in poultry and pork production plus others, we thought it was indicative that we match and go in line with Saskatchewan at \$100,000. That's why we provided just a clear signal in our bill that we were going up to that as a maximum fine for each offence.

Of course, on the limitation period: this was incredibly important. The complexity of the cases that are happening in relation to some of the illegal activity – they're very complex. Our investigators came back to us, had expressed to us that the current Alberta limitation period of one year from the time the offence occurred was not enough because sometimes they wouldn't be notified until many months after that offence had occurred. They wanted to make sure that they had the time to do a thorough investigation, which gives a higher likelihood of them being able to convict those offenders.

Just in relation to that, it mirrors pretty much every province across Canada. British Columbia is two years after the facts on which the proceeding is based first come to the knowledge of the minister. That's B.C. We mimicked that. We thought that was important, that when an offence is reported, it allows our investigators two years. That's really what we mirrored. Of course, in Saskatchewan it's two years after a contravention occurred; the same with Manitoba and Ontario. But what we saw in B.C. would apply a little bit more time for our investigators to do thorough investigations, which I think we can all agree is incredibly important. When these issues are brought to our attention, we want to make sure that the investigation is done in a manner that's going to create a high likelihood of a conviction if there are gross offences being committed. Hopefully, that provides a little bit of a few answers to the members opposite on why we went to those two increases in relation to the Meat Inspection Act.

Of course, I want to just take the time to say thank you to all the farmers and ranchers as well our operators, our OFSOs and abattoirs, our licensed processing facilities here in Alberta. They have put us on the world stage as having the highest food quality and safety standards in the world. That combined with the fact that we have the best beef in the world and best livestock producers in the world on bison, pork, and poultry really has made Alberta a beacon for where a lot of countries are coming to feed their global demand. I'm very thankful for the hard work they put in every single day.

Of course, I'd like to just comment to everybody in this House, I hope I get support on this bill. I hope we can pass this quickly. I think it's timely, and we need to get moving forward on this as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to speak?

Are we ready for the question on Bill 28, the Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2024?

[The clauses of Bill 28 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 24 and report Bill 28.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 28. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 24. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the

Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the motion, those who agree with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed? That's carried.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 33 Protection of Privacy Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 33, the Protection of Privacy Act.

Over the last several years I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have heard from folks from all across Alberta that privacy is extremely important to them, and I hope, after our debate on this bill, that Albertans will take comfort in hearing that their privacy is important to the Alberta government, too. In fact, Bill 33 is an important part of our plan to implement the strongest privacy protections in Canada, accompanied by the strictest penalties for privacy violations.

But before I walk through what Bill 33 will do to strengthen privacy protections, I think it's important to take a look at our history on privacy policy. Today, Mr. Speaker, we have three separate pieces of privacy legislation. We have, of course, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, or FOIP, which covers privacy protections related to public bodies. This includes the rules that the government of Alberta must follow regarding the privacy of Albertans when delivering public services. It also impacts municipal governments, all agencies, boards, and commissions as well as postsecondary institutions.

We also have the Health Information Act, which provides privacy protections for all Albertans regarding their medical records.

4:20

Finally, we have the Personal Information Protection Act, or PIPA, which outlines the protections in place governing how private-sector organizations deal with the personal information of their customers. Well, Mr. Speaker, PIPA is currently the subject of a review by the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, and I look forward to hearing their recommendations as we consider options to further strengthen PIPA next year.

Of course, the HIA is one of the pieces of privacy legislation that I'd be more than happy to continue working with the Health minister on to look for opportunities to strengthen this in the future if needed.

But what we are here to talk about today, Mr. Speaker, is Bill 33. This bill is the next iteration of the privacy protection in FOIP. It is important to note that FOIP has not seen meaningful or substantive updates in over 20 years. Let me say this another way. FOIP legislation predates smart phones, social media, and even the Internet, so it is fair to say that our public body privacy legislation is out of date and in need of modernization. It's hard to believe how 20-year-old legislation could possibly anticipate all the nuances of our modern digital landscape, and the pace of technological change is accelerating so we need to keep up with the times. That is why it is so important for us to update our privacy legislation starting with FOIP.

Many other jurisdictions have taken steps to modernize and strengthen their privacy legislation, and today we are here to discuss

Alberta's proposed approach. We may not have been first, Mr. Speaker, but I believe that our approach is the best. Our goal is to implement, as I have said, the strongest protections in Canada. Albertans should have confidence that their privacy is protected.

Before I get into the specifics of what Bill 33 will do, Mr. Speaker, let's talk a little bit about the services that public bodies provide to Albertans every day. Every day Albertans interact with government services; every day Albertans see doctors, nurses, surgeons, and specialists; and every day Albertans visit motor vehicle registries to register a vehicle or renew a driver's licence or book a driver's exam; every day Albertans rely on the land titles registry when they buy or sell a house. Every one of these interactions, Mr. Speaker, results in the creation of a record. Whether it be a paper record or a digital record, a record is kept.

Another word for these records is data, and this data, Mr. Speaker, is essential for the delivery of public services. Without this data your specialist wouldn't know what other medications your family physician had prescribed. Without this data a registry agent wouldn't be able to help you register a car or apply for a driver's licence. Without this data you wouldn't know if that dream home that you were planning to buy had a lien on it until it was too late. The things we take for granted in our daily lives are dependent on these records being kept, and the government of Alberta is the steward of this data on behalf of all Albertans. It is our job to ensure that this data is accurate, collected with proper authorization, protected from unauthorized access and disclosure, and used for legitimate purposes for the benefit of Albertans. That's a big responsibility, and we take it very seriously.

Earlier this year I shared with Albertans my plan to launch a series of initiatives to enhance transparency and to strengthen privacy protections for Albertans, and Bill 33 is this next step towards implementing the strongest privacy protections in Canada. What will Bill 33 do, Mr. Speaker? Let's get into some of the details.

First, it will take the privacy provisions from FOIP and it will create a brand new, stand-alone piece of legislation dedicated solely to privacy. Why is this important? Well, it will allow us to be more nimble in the future, because, as I said already, technology is evolving quickly and we need to be able to keep up with the times. With this change, Mr. Speaker, having stand-alone privacy legislation, we will be able to make faster, more nimble changes and tweaks to ensure that our legislation is up to date and that it reflects the modern technological landscape and continues to offer the strongest protections possible for Albertans.

For those who might be wondering, the access to information component from FOIP will have its own legislation as well. That is the subject of Bill 34 which my colleague, the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, is leading.

Well, second, Mr. Speaker, through you to all Albertans, let me say this: this legislation ensures that the government will never sell your data. No government ever should, and thanks to Bill 33 no government ever will.

We're also adding a mandatory breach notification so that Albertans must be notified in the event of a privacy breach resulting in a risk of significant harm. In today's fast-moving technology landscape, Mr. Speaker, AI is a tool that is boosting productivity and automating processes in every industry, including in government. Well, we believe that if AI is being used to assist in content generation or decision-making or predictions that affect you, then you deserve to know. This legislation will make sure that you're notified.

This legislation also introduces the concept of nonpersonal data so that public bodies can anonymize or deidentify their records for the purpose of research and analysis. This will help to improve

public service delivery while strengthening privacy protections for all Albertans.

These amendments are a vital part of our plan to ensure that Albertans have, as I have said before, the strongest protections in all of Canada. To accompany these protections, this legislation includes the strictest penalties in Canada for those who violate our privacy laws, the strongest protections and the strictest penalties.

This legislation is designed to give Albertans more confidence and trust in how the government manages and uses data. We want to make sure that all Albertans have confidence that their personal information is protected at all times and is secure from unauthorized access.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, we know that Albertans want strong privacy protections. The strongest privacy protections don't just happen by accident. They happen by design, and that is what Bill 33 is all about. I look forward to the debate in this Chamber over the coming weeks as we discuss these important topics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was interesting to listen to the minister's remarks. One thing that minister completely overlooked is that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has commented on the minister's bill, and I found it very disingenuous that government is not even mentioning that there were comments made by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

I do agree that protecting privacy is important. It's important for the respect and dignity of Albertans. It's important to restore and maintain trust and faith in democratic governments, but the bill does nothing. If anyone has read this bill in this House, if anyone in this Chamber has read the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's comment, they would know that this bill is weakening these protections. This bill is eroding the oversight of the office of the Ethics Commissioner, and it's not updating the privacy protection regime in this province.

I will give many examples, mostly what is contained in the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's comments, but I do want to correct the record. The minister claimed that there will be mandatory breach notifications to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth. Section 10 says that "the head of a public body must protect personal information," and 10(2) says:

If an incident occurs involving loss of, unauthorized access to . . . personal information . . . a public body where a reasonable person would consider that there exists a real risk of significant harm to an individual as a result of that loss,

then we'll consider reporting to the individual, to the commissioner, and to the minister. So there is no mandatory reporting in this bill. That's not correct. That's not in this bill.

4:30

The second thing. I think the minister mentioned that our goal is the strongest privacy protections in Canada. Before making any such claims, the minister and the government must have read, should have read the comments made by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Yesterday we heard similar claims about Bill 34 even though we pointed out in this House that that bill was expanding exceptions to access to information. They were creating new definitions, restricting access to government records. They were taking away the oversight function of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Government didn't really listen, but I hope that government has now read the comments about Bill 34 that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner provided.

A number of things that have been discussed in the comments of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner – and I will also talk about those. One is that Bill 33 is missing a paramouncy provision. A paramouncy provision is that anything contained in this piece of legislation is paramount on all other pieces of legislation that this House passes. Why is it important? If this bill is not paramount, it's quite possible for the government to introduce some other bill tomorrow, include some program in that bill, include some provisions for collection and use of public data, and they would not be subject to this piece of legislation. Bill 34 contains that paramouncy provision but not Bill 33, so it's in no way, shape, or manner making these protections stronger. In fact, there are many other pieces of legislation that have already been passed which will include collection and use of information, and this bill will change nothing about those provisions. So government needed a paramouncy provision. If they wanted to take privacy seriously, they should have included that. That's what the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has recommended in their comment that they released today.

A second thing is about common or integrated program or service. I think in a day and age where multidisciplinary approaches are becoming more common practice, programs involving multidisciplinary teams are becoming more common, and more stakeholders and players will be involved. It's common that information needs to be shared. Sometimes it would need to be shared between government bodies. It needs to be shared with other outside stakeholders. For sure, we need some provisions to protect the privacy when we use data for those programs. While this bill makes provision for that common or integrated program data, as the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has mentioned, indicated, there are not enough guardrails to protect that data. What's missing from there is that although this bill says that there will be privacy management programs, those programs won't come into force for another year. What government needed to do is that they need to have those programs in place and then bring these provisions. And that's what is also recommended by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

So I think that while these provisions are good, there is significant risk for Albertans' privacy, and government needs to take these provisions, listen to the advice they are getting from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and fix those provisions.

Similarly, the government is also making some amendments with respect to data matching and using data in various different ways. The concern here is government is claiming that it will not sell public data to anyone. Sure, they won't sell public data – there were clauses – but there are provisions in this legislation on how government can use that data. They can use that for those shared programs, they can use that for generating data without identifying information, and they can use that data for research and analysis. This bill doesn't provide any certainty who will be doing that research, who will be doing that analysis. They are permitting the use of government data for research and analysis, but there is no definition provided for that, there are no guardrails provided for that, there are no criteria provided for that, and there is huge and significant risk that that is potentially a threat to Albertans' privacy. Again, I would say that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has noted and recommended changes to this provision as well.

Then this bill also protects government in a very significant way. Earlier in Bill 34 government expanded the exceptions for access to information. They included everything in cabinet, even factual information, facts. You won't have access to cabinet facts; it's

likely that they are using a separate set of facts. They included any interaction between political staff and cabinet. That would be excluded. They included that prosecutors' records will be excluded. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has raised serious concerns about these exclusions.

Those exclusions are also reflected in Bill 33, that privacy laws don't apply to that information. It's quite possible that government and their political staff, that are yet to be defined in the regulations – at any given time there are usually 150 to 200 political staffers – can create a huge amount of data, collect public information to which privacy laws won't apply, to which FOIP laws won't apply. So there is a huge threat to Albertans' privacy with the exceptions that this government is carving out in those two pieces of legislation.

Government can claim all day long that these are the strongest protections across the country, but the fact is that this is the most secretive government, who was awarded the code of silence award in government secrecy just in 2020 by a national journalist organization. The changes they are making through this will, I guess, qualify them for that award going forward every year.

We do urge the government to look at these exceptions and act in a democratic way. If the minister of Bill 34 wants to take time to read the comments made by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, that would be a good time to do so.

4:40

Then there is another provision that is a huge cause for concern. That's the disclosure in the best interest of a minor. This is a government that thinks that they can decide everything. The reason this is problematic is that a public authority, government, is giving its departments power to disclose a minor's information if they think it's in the best interest of the minor. Best interest is not defined in the legislation, and there are no guardrails, no criteria parameters, anything around that provision.

The concern is that most jurisprudence around best interests of the child, in the context of child welfare laws, is that wherever a minor is able to consent, the court will take their consent into account. If they're able to comment, the court will take their comments into account. Earlier the government was standing up for parents. When they are not able to make a decision or consent, their parent and guardian should be asked about that.

Here government is giving public bodies authority to decide wherever they see fit. Again, that's a huge concern. Government has huge data that relates to minors, who are now completely left out of any protection whatsoever in this legislation, and government should be ashamed of themselves if they are claiming that that's the strongest protection across Canada. I think members who don't like my comments should take time to read the bill.

Then there are other recommendations that are coming from the comments of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner which relate to privacy impact assessments. That's mentioned in the bill. If prescribed by regulation, if government decides that there should be a privacy impact assessment behind closed doors, then a privacy impact assessment will follow. I think government is embarking on new things here about data, about provision of data for cross-sectoral programs. I think it is important that government should involve the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and provide that assessment before sharing the data with stakeholders, before creating those programs, before putting Albertans' privacy and information at risk.

That would be a reasonable thing to do. That is a reasonable recommendation that is made by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and government should take that seriously. If they want to be taken seriously, they should listen to at least the advice they are getting from independent officers of the Legislature.

Similarly, there are provisions with respect to automated decision-making, and those provisions are also new and are there in response to technological developments where you can use data in many different ways, but at the end of the day when you are using Albertans' data for any purpose whatsoever, Albertans should have some trust and confidence that their information is not compromised. Government would think that Albertans will believe them or trust them, but they won't, so the better course of action is that they take that information to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, let them have a look at it, and then decide. Similarly, with the provisions around automated decision-making, the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has said, "I am surprised that [Protection of Privacy Act] does not contain any protections for Albertans for the use of automated decision-making systems." That's a direct quote that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has written in their comments. That's a glaring oversight on the part of this government. They should take responsibility for this oversight and take this bill back to the drawing table and try to rewrite it a bit better.

There are other things as well. As I said, they are watering down the oversight role of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. There are recommendations that what powers should be left with are vested in the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, which include reviews and comments about privacy impact assessments and their ability to review those agreements beforehand, before any information is compromised.

In short, in this form this bill should not be supported. Albertans should be deeply worried about their privacy if this bill was to be implemented. For the government and all members of this House my advice is: please do take time to read your legislation. Please do take time to read the comments made by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner with respect to Bill 33 and also Bill 34. Let's protect Albertans' right to privacy, and let's work together to protect the right to information.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 33, the Protection of Privacy Act, a piece of legislation that should have marked a new chapter for Alberta's privacy protections but instead falls short in addressing the realities of our modern and technologically driven world. Privacy legislation is not just about setting rules; it is about fostering trust between citizens and their government, and it's about creating a framework that can adapt to an ever-evolving digital landscape and, most importantly, ensuring the rights and dignity of Albertans are upheld.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Bill 33 fails to deliver. It creates unnecessary complexity, dilutes oversight, and misses critical opportunities to future-proof Alberta's privacy landscape. It does not adequately address the challenges posed by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, and it disregards the urgent need for robust protections that other jurisdictions such as Europe have already implemented. For Albertans this bill represents not just a missed opportunity but a potential step backward.

Privacy protections are about trust, Mr. Speaker. Privacy is more than just a legal obligation. I guess we should ask ourselves: why should we care? Privacy is the foundation of trust between Albertans and their public institutions and their government. When Albertans share their personal information with public bodies, whether it be for health care or education or something as routine as vehicle registration, they do so with the expectation that their data will be handled responsibly, securely, and transparently. Trust

in privacy protections is what allows citizens to fully participate in public life. Without it, people are hesitant to engage with public services. They might fear that their data could be mishandled, shared without consent, or even breached.

I should note that Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner, an independent officer of this Legislature, put it aptly in her recent letter to the Minister of Technology and Innovation, where she states that ensuring robust privacy protections is fundamental to the relationship between citizens and their government.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, Bill 33 as it stands risks undermining that trust by failing to adequately safeguard the privacy rights of Albertans, and I'll go on to explain why. First of all, there is fragmentation and fragmentation by design. I have to say that that's one of the most concerning elements of Bill 33, the decision to split the existing Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, or FOIP, into two separate pieces of legislation. Bill 33 specifically addresses privacy, and Bill 34 specifically addresses access to information. Now, this government has justified this move by claiming that it will allow for more tailored updates in the future. However, in practice what it does is that it creates unnecessary complexity for public institutions and individuals alike.

The existing FOIP Act was designed to provide a unified framework that addressed both privacy and access to information. These two areas are deeply interconnected. When public institutions manage personal data, the question of how that data can be accessed is inherently linked to how it is protected. Splitting FOIP into two separate laws risks creating conflicts, inefficiencies, and gaps in the legislative framework.

Imagine an Albertan trying to determine their rights regarding personal information held by a public body. Now, instead of consulting a single piece of legislation, they must navigate two separate acts with potentially overlapping or contradictory provisions. Similarly, public institutions face the challenge of determining which act applies in any given situation, potentially leading to confusion, delays, and possible noncompliance. As Commissioner McLeod noted in her letter, that, I should note, was sent today to the minister, this fragmentation makes Alberta's privacy framework unnecessarily complex and difficult to navigate.

Mr. Speaker, privacy protections are only as strong as the oversight mechanisms that enforce them, so in this regard Bill 33 represents a significant weakening of protections. While the bill includes provisions for privacy management programs and privacy impact assessments, it largely leaves the implementation and enforcement of these measures to the discretion of public bodies, with minimal involvement from the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The commissioner's role was created to ensure accountability and transparency. In fact, that role is critical. Independent oversight provides Albertans with confidence that privacy protections are being upheld and that breaches or failures will be addressed. However, under Bill 33 the commissioner's powers are now limited. The commissioner is not given adequate authority to proactively audit compliance, review privacy management programs, or ensure that public bodies are meeting their obligations. This lack of oversight leaves significant gaps in Alberta's privacy framework.

One particularly concerning aspect of this bill is its approach to breach reporting. Under Bill 33 public bodies are only required to report breaches to the commissioner and affected individuals if "a reasonable person" determines there is "a real risk of significant

harm.” Speaking to my colleague the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, this is a legal phrase that is actually not easy to interpret. It becomes vague. It’s a standard that is potentially subjective and could create dangerous loopholes. One asks: who decides what constitutes a real risk, and what happens when public bodies interpret this standard as too narrowly? As Commissioner McLeod recommended, breach reporting should be automatic. Albertans deserve to know when their personal information is compromised without ambiguity or delay.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most glaring omissions in Bill 33 is its failure to address the role of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, in the use of processing of personal data. AI systems are increasingly being used by all kinds of organizations to make decisions, generate predictions, and analyze data. While these technologies offer significant benefits, they also pose some risks to privacy. In Europe, I should mention, the General Data Protection Regulation sets a global standard for addressing these challenges. The GDPR requires organizations to disclose when automated systems are used to make decisions about individuals, explain how these decisions are made, and provide recourse for affected individuals.

Alberta, by contrast, lags far behind. Bill 33 fails to include any meaningful provisions for transparency, accountability, or oversight regarding AI and automated decision-making, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner raised similar concerns in her letter, highlighting the need for more clear guardrails to protect Albertans from the potential challenges of AI. These include transparency requirements, the ability for individuals to opt out of automated decision-making, and protections against the misuse of data in training AI models. By neglecting to address these issues, Bill 33 leaves Albertans exposed to the risks posed by emerging technologies.

Mr. Speaker, these shortcomings are not abstract. They have real and immediate consequences for Albertans. Weak oversight means more opportunities for data breaches to go unnoticed and unaddressed. Complex and fragmented legislation creates confusion for public institutions and bodies and increases the likelihood of errors, and a failure to address AI and automation leaves Albertans vulnerable to decisions made by opaque systems without accountability or recourse.

Imagine an Albertan discovering that their personal information was used in an automated system to deny them a government service with no explanation or way to challenge the decision, or imagine an Albertan filing a privacy complaint only to find that they must navigate multiple layers of bureaucracy before their concerns are even heard. I should note that these are not hypothetical scenarios. They are, in reality, very much a risk if Bill 33 is passed in its current form.

Mr. Speaker, as I noted previously, just today Alberta’s Information and Privacy Commissioner made clear in her submission to the Technology and Innovation minister that this bill is lacking – lacking – in so many areas. For the record I want to emphasize the importance of the recommendations made by Commissioner McLeod. Her letter outlined several ways to strengthen Bill 33 and address its shortcomings, and given that we are still very much in debate, I really hope that these recommendations will be adopted.

First of all, automatic breach reporting. The commissioner recommended that all data breaches be reported, regardless of subjective thresholds, and that transparency is essential to maintaining public trust. She goes on to say that stronger oversight is also needed, and the commissioner called for expanded powers to proactively audit public bodies, review privacy management programs, and enforce compliance. I mentioned earlier about the importance of AI protections, and the commissioner highlighted the need for guardrails on automated decision-making, including transparency,

accountability, and the ability for individuals to opt out. Finally, clarity and simplicity. The commissioner urged the government to simplify the legislative framework and avoid unnecessary complexity.

These recommendations by an independent officer of the Legislature are not radical. They’re not partisan. They’re not politically driven. Frankly, they’re common sense. They reflect the lessons learned from other jurisdictions, and they also reflect the expertise of someone who has spent years safeguarding Albertans’ privacy rights. Ignoring these recommendations, Mr. Speaker, is a disservice to the people of Alberta.

5:00

Alberta is not the only jurisdiction grappling with the challenges of privacy in a digital age. Countries around the world, including those in the European Union, have implemented robust privacy frameworks that address the realities of emerging technologies. I previously mentioned the GDPR, for example, which has become the benchmark for modern privacy legislation. It not only protects individuals’ data but also fosters innovation by providing clear and predictable rules for organizations.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an opportunity to lead in this area, but Bill 33 squanders that opportunity. Instead of setting a high standard, it leaves Albertans with weak protections, vague standards, and inadequate oversight. We can and must do better.

Mr. Speaker, privacy is not a privilege; it is a right. I mentioned earlier that it’s so fundamental to the foundation of functioning and transparent democracies. In fact, it’s so foundational that it is enshrined and included in the universal declaration of human rights by the United Nations. It is a fundamental aspect of democratic society and a prerequisite for trust in public institutions.

Frankly, Bill 33, as it stands, does not meet the standard Albertans deserve, but I think there is still time through this process to fix its shortcomings. I urge this government to reinstate strong oversight, empower the commissioner to audit compliance, review privacy management programs, and hold public bodies accountable.

I also urge this government to simplify the legislative framework, reconsider the decision to split FOIP into two acts and ensure a unified, coherent approach to privacy and access to information, address emerging technologies, introduce clear rules for AI and automated decision-making, including transparency requirements . . .

The Speaker: Perhaps the member will have an opportunity later to conclude his remarks.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m happy to rise to speak on Bill 33. It does give us an opportunity to talk about privacy, which is of paramount importance to our citizens. Having a good understanding of the importance of privacy and why it needs protection in this province I think is key when we’re going to be discussing new legislation that’s addressing our privacy, that’s intended to protect our privacy.

It’s interesting. I think I’ve got it right, but I don’t believe we included privacy in our Alberta Bill of Rights, and that seems like we missed an opportunity there. Rather than addressing some of the core things that are important to our citizens, now we have legislation in front of us that’s going to be addressing how we handle our information that we are entrusted with as a government.

It seemed interesting to me that the minister’s pretty strong position was that one of the best things about the new legislation is that we’re not going to sell our citizens’ information. I can’t believe we’re patting ourselves on the back for that, but, okay, I guess that’s one thing we can celebrate, that the government is not going to be selling its citizens’ information. We’ll take that little win.

Everyone does have a right to privacy though, you know, from privacy of our family, privacy of our home, correspondence that's unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. Information privacy is crucial to the broader right to privacy. It relates to an individual's ability to determine for themselves when and how and for what purpose personal information is handled by others.

Protecting privacy is key to ensuring human dignity, safety, and self-determination. It allows individuals to freely develop their own personality. The right to privacy is also recognized as an enabling right, as it facilitates the enjoyment of other human rights such as freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of assembly and association; and the right to be free from discrimination. In this way privacy serves as a foundation for our democratic society.

What are some of the impacts of interference with that privacy that we're trying to protect? Interference with an individual's privacy can result in many different types of harm for an individual such as reputational damage, embarrassment or humiliation, emotional distress, identity theft, or fraud; financial loss happens, physical harm can happen, intimidation, disruption of government services, discrimination, the feeling of disempowerment.

But failing to respect their right of privacy can also have wider societal impacts. It can lead to the erosion of public trust and a lack of willingness to engage with government. A large part of this debate has already been brought up from the Member for Edmonton-South West about how important trust is in our government and how protecting that privacy ensures that trust. As such, it's vital that Alberta's public-sector organizations are transparent and appropriately handle citizens' personal information to ensure that they retain the trust of the community.

It seems again that the minister's most important promise of Bill 33 is that the government will not be selling its citizens' information. Maybe to illustrate some of the importance of privacy for the bill discussion, we maybe bring up some examples of when people's personal information is compromised.

Maybe Janet and her children are survivors of family violence and receiving services from a government department. The department accidentally discloses some documents to the perpetrator of the family violence that includes Janet and her children's personal information. In this scenario Janet and her children could face physical harm as well as severe emotional damage. They may be required to relocate from their home and may lose trust with the department and no longer engage with their services.

Or maybe an example of Graham, who's an employee of a university and he makes a complaint to HR about the conduct of some of his colleagues. During the investigation the university discloses information about Graham's complaint throughout the organization and details of his complaint become common knowledge amongst his colleagues and the university management team. In this scenario Graham could be humiliated and may experience distress because of the disclosures.

Or perhaps Zara, who applies for a role at a statutory agency. The application process requires Zara to send the agency a large amount of personal information, including identity documents, and the agency fails to store the application securely and their systems are hacked. Zara's information is obtained by a third party, who uses her identity documents to steal money from her bank account. In this scenario Zara has suffered financial loss as well as emotional distress because of the breach.

That is why, with our 1,200 government bodies, it is so important that we protect people's information. Common types of breaches, you know, include cases where an employee wrongly snoops on the records of someone who they know, or return scans from a computer or equipment without properly deleting the data.

Larger files for breach are symbolic, and penalties levied are rarely close to the maximum amounts, including, you know, what Saskatchewan's first Information and Privacy Commissioner told the CBC News. So I wonder: will the UCP commit to actually enforcing the heavy fines that are listed in Bill 33? We know the enforcement of payment is not the specialty of this government. We've seen that in other scenarios across this province, especially in rural municipalities.

One of the things that I found that was interesting with Bill 33 is that it would not apply to medical records, upon my read. Information that's in the possession of private companies is also excluded, which I think is something we need to be addressing when we're looking at legislation for privacy for our citizens.

The government has not yet specified when they will be enforcing all the details for the enforcement of breaches, and it feels like there's a lot of room in that. I think that when I read a note on it, it was: we're expanding it from three months to almost half a year for policy breaches to be investigated. Frankly, the minister's lack of knowledge is astounding.

5:10

Frankly, just on another side note, another minister's lack of knowledge is astounding because he repeatedly tells us that the government does not pay taxes. He knows and I know that the minister runs a program to pay municipal taxes called GIPOT, grants in place of taxes, so taxes by any other name are vital revenue for Alberta municipalities to serve Albertans. Edmonton's mayor just posted today on social media that he wants the Premier to restore grants in place of taxes. It seems to be another thing the minister doesn't know is the law.

In rich irony to the legislation Bill 33, which we're discussing: we have a minister that's failing to protect the privacy of our citizens and another minister is asking government bodies, municipalities to compromise the privacy of businesses in this province that reside in their jurisdiction, and our government is asking municipalities, rural municipalities in particular, to send letters to reveal the names of specific oil and gas companies that are not paying their property taxes. So on the one hand we're saying that we're going to protect the privacy of citizens and their records, and then on the other hand we have a government that's actually asking municipalities to reveal the privacy of businesses and citizens in their jurisdiction. It's great irony, Mr. Speaker.

We all know in this Assembly that there is a very serious problem with oil and gas businesses that are not paying property taxes to rural municipalities. Municipalities are tremendously frustrated by the lack of support from the UCP to enforce payment of property taxes by bad-acting oil companies, but the solution is not to compromise the privacy of businesses and citizens in Alberta.

As was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, protection of privacy is paramount. The protection of privacy: with that, you protect people's confidence in their government. We seem to have a government that is continually eroding the confidence of Albertans in our government, too many times. We have 1,200 government bodies that we need to know citizens can go to and can entrust their information with, that don't direct resources towards chemtrail investigations. The Finance minister fired the entire board of AIMCO and then appoints former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, someone who's a successful politician but has no experience managing funds, to now manage \$170 billion. Those are ways that you erode confidence in our government agencies.

These moves by this government are dizzying. The number of terrible pieces of legislation they bring in are eroding the confidence in our government, and bringing forward legislation that the office of the privacy commissioner has already pointed out there are many

flaws with is not going to improve people's confidence in our government.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 28

Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise here today to move third reading of Bill 28, the Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2024.

The proposed act will increase penalties as well as extend the limitation period to investigate an offence. If passed, the act will address the illegal slaughter of animals and the sale of uninspected meat. Alberta has seen an increase in the illegal slaughter of animals and the sale of uninspected meat, and these are serious offences, Mr. Speaker.

The proposed two amendments that we are changing aim to deter offenders who are engaging in these illegal activities. Legal meat sales are quite lucrative, in some cases involving large cash transactions. The current penalty of \$10,000 for an offence is not strong enough to deter offenders. We need a much higher penalty. That is why we are proposing the increase to the fine to a maximum of \$100,000 for each offence under the Meat Inspection Act.

The second proposed amendment will address the time to investigate cases. Alberta is seeing a rise in the number, complexity, and organized nature of these cases, with some offenders using a complex network of sellers, suppliers, and rotating slaughter locations across the province. The number of investigations of illegal slaughter and sale of uninspected meat nearly tripled between 2022 and 2023 and are expected to double again by the end of 2024. Mr. Speaker, these numbers are extremely alarming and are unacceptable.

The current period to investigate is one year from the time that an offence occurred. That is not enough time, Mr. Speaker. This level of criminal activity requires more time to investigate and potentially bring charges against offenders. If passed, new legislation will increase the limitation period from one year from the time an offence occurs to two years from the date an offence comes to the attention of an inspector or a peace officer. The limitation period is the time allowed to investigate and lay charges for offences under this act, and if we do nothing, we risk the health of Albertans and we risk harming Alberta's entire livestock and meat processing industry as well.

To be clear, the sale of uninspected meat is illegal in Alberta. Any meat or meat product that is sold or distributed in Alberta must come from an inspected slaughter facility, abattoir, or processing facility. At these Alberta-licensed facilities government inspectors are on-site to conduct inspections before and after every slaughter to ensure the meat is safe to consume and animals are handled and slaughtered humanely. Mr. Speaker, we have a team of experienced and dedicated meat inspectors and food safety specialists who help with licensing, facility inspections, and surveillance.

It's worth noting that Alberta has some of the highest food safety standards in the world, and we're extremely proud of our licensed operators, who uphold these standards and maintain our world-class reputation in food quality and safety. This includes our on-farm slaughter operations that conduct uninspected slaughter and carcass processing activities on their farms or their property. This meat is strictly for the owners of the animal to be consumed by their

household and cannot be sold, gifted, bartered, or otherwise transferred.

The proposed amendments to the Meat Inspection Act are aimed at those who contravene these principles and put the reputation and entire economy of our meat sector at risk. Mr. Speaker, I would like to add that \$100,000 is the maximum fine. Of course, the fine amount is decided and imposed by an Alberta judge upon conviction based on the severity of the offence.

Our inspectors work always through a compliance approach. They begin with education. They progress through several steps aimed to encourage compliance, but we always have to make sure that when that doesn't happen, we have the fines and the ability to be able to move forward with enforcement and potential prosecution to ensure that we are protecting our food safety and quality here in the province.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that Albertans remain confident in our food safety system. It's also important that we continue that confidence on the global stage as we are supplying meat products around the world. Of course, we believe that this government will ensure a strong supply of safe, high-quality meat while helping to protect the reputation of our livestock industry at every chance we can.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members support this bill and help the government move forward with strengthening Alberta's food safety laws. With that, I hereby move third reading of Bill 28, the Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2024.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It sounds a lot like how the Speaker applies fines here for cellphone misuse in the Chamber, with encouragement and then a \$100,000 fine on your third offence.

Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak to Bill 28 on third reading and relate to this House that my great-grandfather Walter Horne was a butcher in Raunds, England, before immigrating to Canada, and he was also, when he came to Canada, a rancher, a farmer, a cattle dealer, a John Deere implement dealer.

5:20

He passed down his meat-cutting tools and equipment to his eldest child, my grandmother Winnifred LaBelle, who was also an excellent meat cutter. I helped cut and wrap farm-raised sides of beef and pork a number of times with her for our family to eat. I have her bone saws and knives at home, and I know how to use them.

Each fall our family of six kids would also work with my parents and cousins on my uncle's farm to kill, pluck, singe, eviscerate, and bag about 125 chickens in one long day to fill our freezer for the winter. We actually cooked three chickens at once, two for supper and one for sandwiches the next day. We knew from a very young age, Mr. Speaker, that the highest standard of cleanliness had to be maintained to prevent meat contamination.

Now, I also worked on the cleanup crew at Canada Packers in my late teens, and in that plant I cleaned the meat inspector's office, actually, each day. I cleaned the nine floors and stairwells of the Canada Packers building, which, unfortunately, no longer exists, as well as the elevator shafts with high-pressure hot water, super concentrated bleach, and heavy-duty soap. You would actually have your uniform eaten right off you if you splashed that bleach on your pants.

Everyone on that shift was responsible for cleaning the plant. Whoever was responsible for cleaning that whole plant was

absolutely dedicated to the strictest cleaning standards. In the lab the workers, the meat inspectors all were very much focused on maintaining those standards, were super proud that the meat products were processed in a clean, safe plant and that they were producing the highest quality food. That was priority number one.

On the beef kill floor as soon as the animal's hide was removed, diseased carcasses were almost always immediately apparent. The deep yellow-coloured fat in the carcass was often a dead giveaway that the animal was diseased. The meat inspectors condemned these carcasses immediately, and they were sent to rendering and removed from any possibility of human consumption.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no excuse for tainted meat ever to be offered or sold for human consumption. Unfortunately, this has happened recently in Alberta, with disastrous consequences. Hundreds of Alberta children and adults got sickened. Many will have long-term health consequences as a result.

But Bill 28 addresses this matter, thankfully. Penalties for offering or selling tainted meat or meat products will rise to \$100,000 from the current \$10,000. This is reasonable given that some recent individual sales of illegal meat have been recorded at half a million dollars each or possibly higher. The fines for each count, charge need to be high enough to be a deterrent to the practice of selling uninspected meat. Investigations are increasing up to two years, and that's a good idea. Hopefully, these fines act as a deterrent to profiteers with no regard to the health of individuals and the consequences of their greed by selling illegal meat. Jail time might have been a consequence that this bill would have anticipated. I would have supported that as well.

I encourage all members to support this piece of legislation. The reputation of Alberta's meat industry must be vigorously protected by encouraging vigorous prosecution of those who will sell meat illegally in Alberta.

Once again I encourage all members to vote in support of Bill 28.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just felt like I would be remiss if I didn't stand up in support of this Bill 28. Several people here know, maybe not everybody, that I spent a little over three years of my life with a knife in my hand cutting meat; a butcher, if you will. I was a little bit younger and skinnier then. In fact, I'm so old that when I did that, that was in the grocery stores. I think I was, like, the last of the ones in retail that used to actually go to the truck behind the store and throw the hind of beef over my shoulder and carry it in and put it on the rail and then strip it off the rail. Yeah. I was a lot stronger then, too, let me tell you.

But here's the thing. I was also fortunate enough, after spending some time with a knife in my hand, to spend another 20-odd years in the meat business on the business end of the meat business. I've got to say that I have an appreciation for it, and I would say that anybody that likes to eat should also have an appreciation for it.

What I think I know is that in Alberta there are two real major meat packers. There are other important meat packers. They're all important. But the fact is that what gets processed in Alberta represents, I think, north of 80 per cent, 85 per cent of what is processed in all of Canada. It's a major industry and one we need to fight for, because we're always at risk. Our neighbours to the south actually take most of the animals grown here in Alberta. Most of them go south of the border either in a box or on hoof. One way or another, most of it goes below south of the border because as Albertans we have what I would call a very good habit. We produce a heck of a lot more of almost everything than we could possibly consume ourselves, and that goes from grain to energy to beef and a whole bunch of other things.

What's important about that is that tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of commerce depend upon the meat and beef industry. Some might say, and in some instances it would be true: well, if you've got some entrepreneur that's found a shortcut to make more money, why wouldn't you let them do it? Well, the reason in this case why we would never contemplate letting them do it is that it puts at risk the multibillion-dollar industry, the tens of thousands of jobs, the family livelihoods, the people, the ranchers, the labourers, the truckers, everybody that depends upon that industry. If we let bad product go into the market, we are actually risking a major, major, major industry.

We've seen it before in the past, where there's been the mad cow situation a few years ago. It was years before we got beef into some countries in Asia and other places, and if we were to be less than vigilant, we would risk a repeat of that. We would risk the industry leaving Alberta forever, and our farmers and ranchers: while they might still be able to grow beef, it would be much less profitable and much less good for them and their families and our economy. So there's no way we can allow this.

I want to thank the minister for bringing this forward. Very important. It seems like a simple bill, and in some ways it is, but it's so important to protect one of Alberta's major industries, one of Alberta's most signature industries. When you think of Alberta, there's a lot of great things, and I won't go into detail, but let me just say beef is one of those great things. The minister was right when they said Alberta beef is recognized as the best in the world. It's an industry that we should all be proud of. It doesn't happen by accident. It happens on purpose.

When you let people process meat without going through the regular process and something goes wrong, you don't know where it came from. Right now, for those listening at home, when you buy a piece of meat at the grocery store, if you ever have doubts about it, in most cases, if you have the label, they can actually trace it back to the animal that was in the field. As hard as that might be to believe, that's just how good our beef industry is. They can probably trace it back to that animal's parents, any kids the animal would have been part of producing and everything else.

That's part of why Alberta has a world-class beef industry. That's why it's so important to protect, why this bill is so important, because after all those years of hard work and science and sweat and labour and the billions of dollars in revenue and the jobs and the family ranches and the people that depend upon this industry, I hope we can all agree it's in all of our best interest to protect this industry.

I appreciate the support for this from the other side of the aisle, too, Mr. Speaker. It's not every day we can agree on something. This looks like it might be one of those things, and from my standpoint, it's so important that I hope we get a unanimous support on this, because a lot of good people's livings depend upon it and our province's reputation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will be short. One, I think we all agree in this House that we should support the bill, and I encourage all members in the Chamber to do that.

5:30

One of the things I just wanted to highlight real quickly as we're talking about our international reputation and the importance of this bill is that when the minister actually introduced the bill, he had a validator, which was the vice-chair of Alberta Beef Producers, who said that we've got teams of people that travel overseas, visit with

countries like Japan where they build international markets, and it's really, really important to understand that the reputation that we both have provincially and locally also extends and gets word across to a lot of our global trading partners, even to the United States, Mexico, and places like that.

I felt it was important to put that on the record, Mr. Speaker, given the statements of the Premier this week around CUSMA and looking at whether or not we should be asking Mexico to pull out of CUSMA and if we should just be having a trading partnership between the United States and Canada and not including Mexico. I would encourage all members in this House and government members to really have a good conversation with their colleagues in relation to: if we all agree that this bill is important and that it's important because it supports the beef industry and our international trade partnerships, that includes Mexico.

Again, validated by the Alberta Beef Producers about the importance of that partnership, I would say that given that if we're going to put some energy behind this bill and we're going to put some energy behind ensuring the reputation of our beef industry, we also ensure that we're working with our trading partners.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 30

Service Alberta Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

[Debate adjourned November 6: Mr. Deol speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has eight minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others? Looks like the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak in support of Bill 30, the Service Alberta Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, as it applies to updates to Alberta's legal framework for condominium properties and construction projects. The amendments to the Condominium Property Act, Prompt Payment and Construction Lien Act, and the Public Works Act will impact many Albertans, including homeowners, tenants, developers, and workers.

The updates to these three acts are important steps to positively impact Albertans and address issues I've long heard from speaking to folks in the community about condominium governance and process but also from contractors and workers in terms of processes to guide their work and how they are compensated. This is critical as we navigate an affordability crisis, a housing shortage with some of the highest rents in the country, with the last item still to be addressed by this government, of course.

In the interest of giving credit where it's due, the government of Alberta is finally aligning itself with other provinces that have already taken action on addressing condominium disputes and ensuring that prompt payments within the construction industry are also addressed. I appreciate the intent of this bill and hope this government can take some further action to improve it.

The first point that I wanted to discuss was the condominium dispute resolution tribunal. Throughout my time in constituency offices and now as an elected member it's always an honour to hear from people about the issues that impact their lives, and what I've

found is that condominium governance dispute resolution and management can loom large, and not always in a positive way. It makes a lot of sense. Condominiums aren't just about a unit in a building or a group of units. Condominiums are homes where people build their lives, raise their families, work remotely, and even build their social networks. There's also quite often a significant personal financial investment, and this can also be viewed as security while folks are aging. When constituents have chatted with me about conflict in their condo around the boards or the recourse that they might have when they're trying to resolve a dispute, it's often a very long conversation that can be very, very emotional as they talk about the conflicts that arise and the possible impacts on their financial investments. Prolonged disputes and nonexistent guidelines have created a lot of stress and have impacted mental health and financial well-being for a lot of these folks.

We know that owners have been asking for this for about a decade, and now that the government is taking this step, I hope that they ensure that the tribunal that's being created is well funded and resourced appropriately so that Albertans are well served. The \$8 million that is already earmarked is a good start, but I hope that the government can commit to monitoring the progress, efficiency, and transparency around the tribunals.

Another topic that comes to mind when we're talking about this legislation and that is dealt with by the amendments is prompt payment legislation. The amendments made to the Prompt Payment and Construction Lien Act deal with payment of contractors, subcontractors, and their subcontractors, so businesses, small businesses, and their workers alike will be impacted. I'll note that it would be nice if we actually had a labour ministry that dedicated itself to matters involving workers, but that, sadly, is a discussion for another day.

I'm surprised by the long gaps. When I was reading up on this bill, I looked at some of the gaps in the requirements for timelines . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. I hesitate to interrupt, but perhaps . . . [interjections] Order. Order. Order. I might just remind members that if they would like to have private conversations, perhaps they can do that in either of the lounges that are available to the members or, at the very least, keep the volume down to a lower level so that I have less challenge hearing the member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Just to repeat, when we're talking about prompt payment, I was actually really surprised to look at what the requirements are in terms of timelines for payment of contractors and subcontractors. Just to give a little context, Crown-to-contract payments are to be paid in full no later than 28 days after receiving notice, contractor-to-subcontractor payments are to be paid in full no later than 35 days after receiving proper notice, subcontractor-to-subcontractor payments are now to be paid in full no later than 42 days after receiving proper notice.

The concern that I have here is that we're looking at several different layers of contractor; the people who are working for any of these businesses and small businesses are just workers, and we happen to be living in an affordability crisis. I know from having spoken to a lot of contractors and having a lot of construction workers that I speak to on a regular basis, that are part of my social circle and my family, that often they have a lot of hustle. So they're doing a lot of contracts concurrently, and the idea that there is such a delay in payment no matter what level of subcontractor they are is very concerning when we know that our rents are higher than ever, people are having trouble paying their

bills. So that's something that I would like to see addressed, actually, those large gaps.

I'll also note that in the amendments of this legislation that P3 projects are exempt, and that I find also concerning because, again, when we're talking about the workers – so when people are doing their work, whatever the nature is of the contract, whether it's private or it's part of a P3, I think that these workers deserve to have the same protections in terms of their compensation and that they can all look forward to timely payment. So I would say that if this government is truly committed to supporting Alberta's construction workers and small businesses, they should ensure that prompt payment protections apply to all government-related projects, including P3s.

5:40

Another item that I see as a possible gap that could end up hurting workers and small businesses is the idea of enforcement. So I'd like to know what processes will be followed in terms of contractors and subcontractors who aren't getting paid on time, and especially if there will be any sort of recourse for them in terms of enforcement.

Some of the other issues that come up within the amendments here are adjudication and legal clarity in the Public Works Act. The amendments to the Public Works Act aim to improve the adjudication process for public works disputes. By allowing adjudication to proceed concurrently with court action and making determinations binding, the government hopes to expedite dispute resolution and reduce the legal backlog. I can see that this aligns with practices in other provinces that seek to simplify and accelerate dispute handling in the public sector.

While this is a step in the right direction, adjudication alone cannot address broader inefficiencies that exist in Alberta public works projects. Alberta also needs to work to address insufficient project oversight, co-ordination issues, and bureaucratic bottlenecks. Adjudication is helpful for specific payment-related disputes, but it doesn't tackle some of those systemic issues which require a much more comprehensive approach, including transparency, clear timelines, and accountability so that we can prevent delays before they occur.

In terms of lessons from other provinces, just looking at how condo tribunals were handled in Ontario and B.C., they actually offer online and accessible systems. I want to just sort of harken back to some of the comments made by the Member for St. Albert about what exists in other provinces, what we should be looking at here in terms of accessibility. I would say that Alberta's tribunals should match or exceed this and be more accessible in terms of technical audits. Ontario's audits are proactive for buyers. Alberta should add strict penalties for noncompliant developers. Prompt payment: I know from what I've read that Ontario kind of sets the standard in this regard, and I think that Alberta should expand coverage to P3 projects and consider faster deadlines.

When we look at how these issues are being approached in other provinces, we can see the strengths of the amendments that we're trying to make here but also where they might fall short. Ontario's tribunal, again, just to repeat, they have added online options. They also give us the ability to do this work without lawyers, and that reduces legal costs, which, of course, we all know we want to avoid and can be very expensive.

Mr. Nally: Do you have questions? I'd be happy to address your questions.

Member Tejada: Sorry?

Mr. Nally: You had questions on P3s. Why don't you do an intervention on P3s?

The Speaker: The member would like to intervene. If you would prefer not to have an intervention, you can just say: I won't be taking interventions.

Member Tejada: I decline the intervention.

The Speaker: Okay. Perfect. No problem.

Member Tejada: I'll just continue with some of the notes that I've got here, but thank you.

British Columbia has implemented a similar system and went even a step further to handle claims under \$5,000. I think that Alberta's tribunal should be designed to meet or exceed those standards, offering a user-friendly, cost-effective platform that Albertans can easily navigate. I think having accessibility front of mind should be one of the goals that, as legislators, we have for everything that touches people's lives.

In terms of technical audits I know that Ontario's technical audits serve as an early warning system for condo buyers. Alberta's adoption of this requirement is essential, but I think to protect condo owners, government should also establish strict penalties for developers who fail to meet standards or ignore defects that are uncovered in these audits. Hopefully, we would be as diligent in protecting homeowners as we are in supporting developers.

We're talking about prompt payment. As mentioned, Ontario's prompt payment standards have become a bit of a benchmark, so Alberta's alignment with these timelines is commendable. Am I running out of time? Okay. Alberta's alignment is commendable, and I would say that, in closing, there's a lot of good being done here. I hope that some of the comments made here are taken in the spirit in which they are delivered, and hopefully we can improve that process.

With that, I will cede my time and support – I wanted to just state again that we support this bill, and I hope that my fellow members will also support it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 30, Service Alberta Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. The bill seeks an amendment on three pieces of legislation, and I would like to speak to the prompt payment legislation amendment. Bill 30 extends prompt payments to Crown contractors, like Ontario's bill in 2019. It requires contractors paid within 28 days and subcontractors within seven days, but it exempts P3 projects, which is a loophole that risks delays for workers on payment. All projects, including P3, should have similar time frames in terms of prompt payment so that there are no delays.

Bill 30's prompt payment provisions are a step forward, Mr. Speaker, particularly for Alberta's construction sector, a sector that is currently struggling and is constrained because of a shortage on labour, skilled workers. Prior to this only private-sector projects were covered under prompt payment legislation, leaving contractors and subcontractors on public projects without similar protections.

The amendments: Alberta's prompt payment requirements will now extend to Crown contractors in alignment with other provinces, like Ontario's Construction Act, an amendment which was made in 2019 that introduced a prompt payment adjudication regime. In Ontario contractors must be paid within 28 days, by project owners within seven days of receiving their payments. Similar provisions exist in other provinces. A good example is Saskatchewan and New Brunswick. Manitoba also has recently enacted similar rules, that are based on the similar models that Ontario had enacted in 2019.

These timelines have effectively become, as it seems, standard across the provinces, but the problems that exist here in the proposed Bill 30 are the loopholes that leave some of the workers outside of within these time frames. Not only at the provincial levels, but the federal government also enacted a Federal Prompt Payment for Construction Work Act, which sets a strong precedent for prompt payment within federal contractors as well.

This act requires payment to contractors within specified timelines with subcontractors and their subcontractors, which here are also receiving payments down the chain within seven days. This is becoming important now more than ever because of the existing inflation which is creating pressures on individuals and families. Mr. Speaker, a one-day delay on payment, if you are a P3 constructor or a contractor within that frame of working, a single delay of payment because of the existing loophole can be a difference between families and the initiation of an eviction note from their landlord if you don't make the payment on time because of the delays that exist within this loophole.

5:50

We all know of the change in the housing affordability crisis over the past few years. In Calgary the average rent for a one-bedroom unit increased by 20 per cent over the past two years. In Stony Plain the average rent for a three-bedroom unit increased by 18 per cent within the last two years. In Medicine Hat it has increased by 10 per cent over the past two years. In times of these increasing cost pressures, for individuals and families that work within areas of P3 initiatives, that are not covered under the proposed Bill 30, it would leave them to be in a situation where they can't make prompt payment because of their not receiving prompt payment, similar to other workers who are working in similar projects but just outside of P3s. Bill 30 notably exempts public-private partnerships from these prompt payment rules, which is a concerning loophole.

What makes closing such a loophole timely and important is, as I mentioned, the existing affordability and the existing shrinking purchasing power that Albertans are facing now, the growing affordability crisis. We have higher utility costs. We have the second-highest auto insurance rates in the country. In fact, we are three times or four times higher than other provinces in some areas. The unemployment rate in our province is quite higher, the second in the country and the highest outside the Maritimes. Of course, the minimum wage, that we have talked about a lot in the House, having the lowest in the country, and yesterday it being reported the highest inflation rate makes it harder for Albertans to be able to meet their payment obligations, and a single delay of any of those payment obligations is another pressure on the families.

We have to keep in mind purchasing power in a time like this, and a delay of payment will just worsen the rising costs that are impacting various aspects of expenses within Alberta's families. A good example is food security, and it's a critical issue for many. As I said, the annual inflation report that was released in October shows

the cities of Calgary and Edmonton having the highest in the country, comparable to other major cities. Actually, Calgary has higher than the province when you look into that, and such inflation rates going higher will make people's capacity of purchasing power quite challenged. Food Banks Canada reported already that Alberta's food insecurity rate is 27 per cent higher than the national average. A single delay of payment, as exists within the loophole of this bill, just makes the situation worse.

We must look at Bill 30 in the context of all these challenges. Imagine if you are a construction worker in a P3 project, where you are falling into the category of Albertans that are not covered under this bill, where your rent has increased by 20 per cent or 30 per cent as before, where your cost of living is quite high. How will you be able to manage to navigate through and make the payment on time?

Another reason why the loophole in Bill 30 needs to be addressed is that as a province that is struggling to attract and retain skilled workers, particularly in the construction sector, we need to address the existing housing affordability crisis by increasing the supply of construction. And where you don't have such a number in the workforce, it delays in terms of dealing with the existing housing affordability issue.

As we know, P3s are increasingly used for major infrastructure projects. That means that quite a number of workers within these projects will be impacted by the existing loophole in this bill. As I was saying, P3s are increasingly used for major infrastructure projects, but contractors and subcontractors that are working on these projects would remain at risk of delayed payment just because they were left out of the proposed amendment that is already catching up with the other provinces.

Prompt payment is important to ensure workers are paid on time. It will help contractors in the construction industry get paid on time so that it addresses the cash flow. It will also protect new workers from being taken advantage of by being told to work more jobs in order to get paid in previous jobs. Beyond workers being paid on time, they also need to be supported. What I will propose is that if this government is truly committed to supporting Alberta's construction workers and small businesses, it should ensure that prompt payment protections apply to all government-related projects, including P3 projects.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

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

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a second time]

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, the clock looks like it's just about that time, so I figure I'll move to adjourn debate until tomorrow at 1:30 pm.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	2039
Introduction of Visitors	2039
Introduction of Guests	2039
Statement by the Speaker	
Alert Ready Emergency Alert System Test	2040
Members' Statements	
Alberta 4-H Programs.....	2040
Transgender Day of Remembrance	2040
Stollery Children's Hospital	2041
Lethbridge-West By-election.....	2041
Federal Climate Policies.....	2041
National Day of the Child.....	2049
Oral Question Period	
Sexual Health Education in Schools.....	2042
Automobile Insurance	2042, 2044, 2048
Minimum Wage Rate	2043
Support for Transgender Albertans.....	2043
Career Education Programming in Alberta.....	2044
Health Care Accessibility	2045
AIMCo Governance	2045
Skilled Trades Training for Veterans.....	2046
Funding for Private Schools	2046
Arthur J.E. Child Comprehensive Cancer Centre	2047
Health Services for Transgender Youth.....	2047
Electric Power System.....	2049
Notices of Motions	2050
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 36 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2024	2050
Tabling Returns and Reports	2050
Orders of the Day	2051
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 33 Protection of Privacy Act	2060
Bill 30 Service Alberta Statutes Amendment Act, 2024	2068
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 24 Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024	2051
Bill 28 Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2024	2058
Third Reading	
Bill 28 Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2024	2066

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