



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 15, 2025

Day 99

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 1

Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a number of guests who are seated in my gallery this afternoon who joined us for the Vaisakhi rotunda ceremony earlier today. Happy Vaisakhi to everyone. I invite you to rise as I call your name: Dr. Amit Kumar, Lipika Choudhury, Puneet Manchanda, Ilona Maitra, Rajeev Mittal, Delwar Jahid, Harjeet Singh. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly an amazing school from my constituency, Broxton Park school. This is a very special school to me as both my boys attended that school, and my young friend Nico in the audience beats me regularly at video games. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you the wonderful, beautiful, talented students from Duggan elementary school. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure for the first time in my career as an MLA to introduce my first class from my constituency of Calgary-Fish Creek. Please give a warm welcome to the junior high class from Wilma Hansen school.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you on the occasion of Vaisakhi members of the Sarb Akal society of Calgary, a community organization committed to cultural celebration and service. Leading the group is Mr. Harjeet Singh, joined by his fellow members. I now ask Mr. Singh and the group to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group here from the Gurukul Dance Studio of Calgary. This wonderful group led us in the singing of the anthem at today's Vaisakhi event in the rotunda. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, on this very good Vaisakhi day I introduce nine members of the YYC society, including their executive member Gaurav Srivastiva. Please rise and receive a super-duper warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you 75 of my guests who have come today, all individuals who are either in recovery or supporting loved ones in recovery. I ask that they all stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has an introduction.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd love to introduce to you the newest member of our team in Lethbridge-West, Anastasia Sereda, who is a consummate community person, has been the executive director of the ethnic association as well as the head coach of the Troyanda Ukrainian dancers. Anastasia, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to the Assembly Chestermere Councillor Kiran Randhawa; her husband, Amon; and their beautiful daughter, Biback; as well as Amandeep Sidhu and her mother-in-law, Harjinder, visiting from Chestermere for the Vaisakhi ceremony today. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Ministerial Statements

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

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Moments ago 75 Albertans rose above us. They rose to stand for recovery. Raised high above the floor of our debating Chamber, like the standards of our country and our provinces on full display, they remind us. Like our flags, their faces are full of meaning, and in place of heraldry their faces are marked with hardship on their brows. What crosses each face bears, most of us will never know. Weathered and wind stripped, they face against the public nature of addiction and the public policy that flies in the face of their personal recovery story.

Day after day, Mr. Speaker, they rise again and again, not in the grandeur of this place with our Corinthian columns and our standing orders, but instead they stand in order to maintain a life of recovery. Amongst the standards of recovery today, there are also standard bearers. These are our families, unwavering in the desire to lift up their children and their parents on the pathway they hope and believe to recovery, the front-line workers bearing so much of the recovery continuum on the streets and in our shelters, recovery coaches, sponsors, doctors, paramedics, nurses, police, our firefighters, volunteers, and of course, the friends of those in recovery.

Across our nation families and communities have suffered from an addiction crisis that has brought so much pain and destruction for too many years. What is clear to everyone in this gallery, to every Albertan in recovery, to every parent of a beloved child who suffers with addiction, it's this: it cannot go on. No more, Mr. Speaker. No more abandoning our children to the streets, to a life of crime and pain of sexual and physical violence. No more

despairing public policy that assumes some Albertans are too sick to be healed.

Many governments thought that they could find an easier and a softer way, but they could not. Instead, this government, Mr. Speaker, is choosing recovery. His Majesty's government has invested in recovery because we know that recovery is not only possible, but it's probable when we build the capacity and the care pathways to deliver those from addiction into the hopeful embrace of recovery. The virtually opioid dependency program, the world's first of its kind: immediate, same-day access, province-wide to evidence-based medication to deal with those suffering from addiction. Eleven recovery communities, five of them in true partnership with our Indigenous partners across this province. Therapeutic living units: Canada's most innovative program for in-prison addiction treatment centres. This is but a few of the programs, not to mention the northern Alberta youth addiction centre with 105 new beds recently announced, two compassionate intervention addiction centres, and so much more. We've added 10,000 spaces to addiction treatment within the Alberta recovery model since we took office.

Before our government's investment, sadly, those in recovery were in the wilderness, subject to a public policy setting under the Alberta NDP and the federal Liberals that chose despair over hope and addiction over recovery. We must reject this culture of destruction, Mr. Speaker, that has been planted around addiction and choose instead a culture of life. We must be a society that chooses the path of hope, the path of recovery, and the path to care for those who suffer. Our health care must heal those and not harm those who suffer from addiction.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans, unfortunately, have been lied to, lied to by an activist class who have told us that we must choose between compassionate intervention and having safe communities. When we have the choice between the reality, the choice is this: it is between recovery and indefinite addiction in our communities, in our families. There is nothing caring and nothing compassionate, there's nothing Canadian about leaving our loved ones to be stripped of their dignity and, given enough time, stripped of their life to this deadly disease of addiction.

We cannot sit back and let this continue. There's too much at stake for our families, our communities, our province. Mr. Speaker, we must intervene, and a compassionate intervention is one that removes the loved ones from the grips of addiction and brings them into healing, into health. This is not a criminal justice response; it is a health care response to a health care crisis, a public addiction crisis. If someone is in danger, whether it be themselves or endangering the community as a result of their addiction, we must compassionately intervene to care for them.

1:40

One individual, one Albertan overdosed 186 times last year, and for that woman every overdose was one breath away from death. One shelter operator told me last month that a man overdosed under her care 30 out of 31 days in the month of December. I shudder to think of the 187th overdose that leads that dear woman to her death or the 31st day that may be that man's last. I have only to shudder, but for those in our gallery today their hearts have only to sink because they know and experience the terror of living under the threat of addiction and death, that many of us do not know. An overdose does not simply traumatize that one individual; it can traumatize an entire family, an entire community. Mr. Speaker, that is one overdose.

We must choose. We must choose, just as the faces above us in the gallery have today, whether we support recovery and, in doing so, whether we support the lives of those who are most dramatically

affected by this deadly disease of addiction. Recovery is not only possible; it is probable. Recovery saves lives. I know this government believes in recovery. I know that those who have come before us in the gallery, who have lived this crisis before we decided to take part as a government, believe in recovery, Mr. Speaker.

I believe every Albertan knows in their heart that recovery is the path forward for those who suffer from addiction. I implore every member of this Legislature to support us in the Alberta recovery model, in compassion intervention so that we can build a culture of hope and a possibility of a new life for Albertans to be brothers and mothers and community members again, and I pray that the members opposite will join us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie will respond on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Member Eremenko: Mr. Speaker, across our province Albertans suffering from addiction are desperate for help. Today I speak to those families and the loved ones and the people living with addiction and living in recovery, who deserve dignity and hope and real solutions to what is truly an intractable and wicked, wicked challenge. Alberta is not unique in that we are in the next chapter of what has been a devastating crisis that has taken thousands of lives, and they continue to pass away every single day. Every life is a loss to a community, to a family.

I on this side and, I know, members across the way and everybody in this gallery want to see an end. Let us be very clear as members of this Official Opposition. Recovery is possible, but it is a process. We support long-term recovery. It's an essential tool – an essential tool – for people on the journey toward a better life.

First, we have to call some things out, Mr. Speaker. The government has not done enough to stop Albertans from beginning to use drugs in the first place. We just have to look at Budget 2025 for a \$20 million cut to programs for prevention and early intervention. I see the young people – welcome to the Chambers today – who I hope get the information and the fact-based learnings that they need to make better choices in the future; \$20 million cuts to prevention and early intervention do not make that path an easier one.

Next, in Alberta there are hundreds of people who are asking right now for voluntary treatment. People choose voluntary treatment every day, but they are faced with a closed door, and that is not acceptable. Mr. Speaker, people choose it, and involuntary treatment is not the answer that families so desperately want it to be. The failure of this government's approach to the addiction crisis is visible on our streets. Every Albertan sees it. In large and small centres, in Indigenous communities, and in remote towns and villages the outcome is that people are not safe, and this lack of safety is rooted in problems this government would rather neglect. Without housing, without wraparound supports, and without options for those who are seeking treatment today, a forced intervention model is simply not the path forward, and the evidence bears that out.

The UCP is failing Albertans who want to recover. They've committed to 11 recovery communities; the doors are open on three. I look forward to a wholesome debate on the forced treatment legislation to come.

Members' Statements

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, the call is coming from inside the House. Yesterday the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane spoke out

about the gag order imposed by his own team regarding the corrupt care scandal. He took the unorthodox route of communicating through a speech accompanying his tabling of documents. All this after he resigned from cabinet over the corrupt procurement issues. It is worth asking how else the hon. member might be heard in this House given the fact that he has been silenced for 49 days and counting by his own caucus leadership, and all this because he has the audacity to question this government's shady business dealings and corrupt procurement practices.

A gag order to silence concerns coming from this government? Sounds familiar, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it reminds me of that other gag order we've been hearing a lot about, the one involving a leaked memo that shows how this government is silencing employees with gatekeeping lawyers and interfering in the Auditor General's ongoing investigation. I quote: this is not a standard practice our office typically encounters in the course of its work – end of quote – said a spokesman of the AG's office.

We hear again and again from the UCP that they want to get to the bottom of this scandal, but these words ring hollow. In the face of evidence that clearly shows this government is muzzling employees, all we hear from the UCP is that this is standard operating procedure. The Auditor General does not think so, and neither do some members of the UCP caucus. A few of them have now demonstrated real courage by speaking out.

It's time the UCP started listening to people like the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. As we've been saying all along, it's time to bring the corrupt care scandal to an end. The Premier must call an independent public inquiry immediately.

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

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to share a message of hope, a tribute to the families affected by addiction, the parents enduring sleepless nights, the people in recovery, and, of course, to those who have lost their lives to this tragic disease. Despite what critics and activists say, addiction is not a lifestyle choice, and I am sure there are many in this Chamber who would agree. Addiction is a disease that entraps people, often resulting in the loss of livelihood through broken relationships, through loss of employment, and financial destruction. If left untreated, it only gets worse. We know all too well the stories of people in and out of emergency rooms, overdosing day after day, each time on the brink of death. In the most severe cases there are people overdosing weekly. The worst known case is 186 overdoses in one year. This is not a lifestyle choice. For parents watching their child struggle with addiction, they feel powerless, often left with the most difficult decisions of their life on how to help their son or their daughter.

Mr. Speaker, this shouldn't be the case. People suffering from addiction should not be simply told this is their life now, which is the message told by the NDP through their drug facilitation policies like unsafe supply. On this side of the House our message is different. Our message is that you can recover and you can rebuild your life. We refuse to condemn people to a perpetual state of addiction when it's clear how much potential every human being has to become something so much bigger.

My invitation to this House is to stand up for recovery, start offering hope to every person in need, and let them know our government stands behind them every step of the way. We are building the treatment centres, we are removing the barriers, and we're making sure every person suffering from the deadly disease

of addiction has an opportunity to pursue a better life through recovery.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Measles Outbreak in Alberta

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, since this Premier appointed Alberta's latest chief medical officer of health, he's issued only three press statements: one in 2022, one in 2023, and one this year. Meanwhile Alberta has a massive outbreak right now. Government promotion of the vaccine has disappeared, and conspiracy theories have been left to fill the void where strong public health messaging used to exist. Why aren't the Premier, the Minister of Health, and their chief medical officer of health all doing more to increase public awareness of the various serious health risks of measles and encouraging people to get vaccinated?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we are. We have had 77 measles cases, of which there are now 69 that are noncontagious, so there are eight current active cases. In those communities we have made sure that everyone knows how they can get their measles vaccine. You can call 811. There is lots of opportunity for people to get their shot, and most people have taken the government up on that. Over 89 per cent of the children up to the age of 13 have their measles vaccine, which I think is part of the reason why we haven't seen a much greater spread in the community.

Ms Gray: We're now hearing that Alberta does not have a chief medical officer of health. During this urgent measles outbreak the province is without key leadership on the public health file. This government's consistent interference and gag orders have been restricting the CMOH office from doing their important work. Does the Premier understand that by keeping the chief medical officer of health silent, she's chosen to prioritize conspiracy theories over the health and well-being of Alberta's children? What is the Premier doing to end the measles public health outbreak?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, there are currently eight active cases. There have been eight individuals who have been hospitalized. We are doing a public campaign for ads. The minister is looking at expanding that to radio ads in the communities that are still impacted. What we have seen is that many of the cases are related to travel. Some of the numbers that we're seeing are also related to particular communities, so taking a targeted approach to ensure that people know what the risks are so that they can make sure that if they are contagious, they stay away and that they have an option to be able to get vaccinated.

Ms Gray: Again, we are hearing there is no chief medical officer of health right now, and under this Premier public health information has been muzzled. Albertans need consistent, clear, and frequent messages from their chief medical officer of health to counter the misinformation that has led to the current measles outbreak. Parents and caregivers need to be equipped with the best possible information to keep kids healthy. Politicizing important public health information has led to sick children, some at risk of serious illness. Will the Premier apologize and guarantee that our next CMOH will not have political interference?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, when we do have these localized outbreaks, it's the local medical officer of health who ends up taking the lead on that. As I mentioned, we have had a number of cases that have come in from out of province. Some have been on the John D'or reserve; others have been in communities in northern Alberta. The local medical officer of health is the one who is taking the lead on making sure that there is information available, that kids know and parents know where they can get vaccinated, and we're pleased to see that we have 89.6 per cent coverage.

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

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, the former Infrastructure minister, voted with our caucus yesterday to call for a full public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal. So did the independent Member for Lesser Slave Lake. This is unprecedented. The Premier's government is using external lawyers to add an intimidation layer for public servants who want to speak to the Auditor General and even falsely claimed that it was standard practice. It is not. A real public inquiry into this matter is long overdue. Why won't the Premier call for a full public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we announced that we had a shared file so that the Auditor General as well as Judge Wyant could receive information at that time, we indicated that the acting counsel at Alberta Health Services was the one who was co-ordinating the access to the information, the transfer of documents. It was not controversial at that time at all. The ADM of Health has been charged with also co-ordinating with the documents transfer as well as organizing the access to interviews, and she's making the choices about how to do that.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane told this Assembly that he's been put on gag order and "I am now at day 48 of my so-called 30-day suspension, impeding my democratic right to fully represent the people." So public servants and this member are both under gag orders. They may only speak to the Auditor General in certain circumstances about alleged corruption. They only can go into a room with their boss and their boss's lawyer sitting with them. It's ridiculous. Why is the Premier restricting the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane and public servants from doing their jobs and speaking freely?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is a process question, so let me tell the members opposite the process. The Auditor General by law can interview anyone he chooses who has been a current public servant or a former public servant. There are documents that have to be shared so that the Auditor General has them, so that Judge Wyant has them. There is a point person in Alberta Health who is dealing with that. She made the decision to ask for the assistance of a lawyer. There's a point person in Alberta Health Services who happens to be a lawyer, and the AG will get whatever information it is that he desires.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this is a democracy question, a corruption question, an accountability question. The Member for Airdrie-Cochrane called this approach, quote, obstructionist. He said, quote: I would like to see people feel free to be able to share their thoughts with the Auditor General without feeling that there may be retribution for them. End quote. Albertans agree. Why is the

Premier so opposed to letting Albertans learn the truth behind the corrupt care scandal? What is her government hiding?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirteen thousand records have been produced for the Auditor General and for Judge Wyant, and probably several thousand more will be produced. The Auditor General by law has the ability to interview whoever it is he wants. We have left the co-ordination of the documents and the interviews to an ADM who is a member of the independent civil service. She is making a decision about who she would like to assist her. If there are any issues, I've asked my Justice minister to ensure that the Auditor General has everything that he needs, and I look forward to hearing the results of that.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition for question 3.

Ms Gray: This is not a process question. Public servants have been told that they're not allowed to talk to the AG unless their boss and their boss's lawyer are in the room with them. It is absolutely ridiculous.

Now, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane repeated yesterday in this Chamber that the procurement scandal is fast morphing into one of the most epic legal battles Alberta has ever seen. The member said, "This highlights some of the very reasons I resigned from cabinet and why I called for a judicial review, co-operation with the RCMP, and our government's full support of the investigation of the Auditor General." The Premier's own caucus believes she's failing to deliver the accountability Albertans deserve. Call a public inquiry.

Ms Smith: I know the member opposite can count. If she remembers, yesterday there were 45 people on this side who said that they wanted to wait for the results of the Auditor General's report as well as wait for the results of Judge Wyant's report. That's what the actual results were yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

I would also just say that my Justice minister is working with the Auditor General to ensure that he has access to everything he needs. The legislation is quite clear, Mr. Speaker, and we want to make sure that the Auditor General has the documents that he needs as well as having access to the individuals he needs to interview. We are facilitating access, and we'll continue to do so.

Ms Gray: The Premier is trying to bluster the way through this. It is time to stop the excuses. Stop hiring and firing CEOs and CIOs and boards and board members and anyone else who might happen to know the truth of what's going on in corrupt care. It's time to stop lawyering up and intimidating staff who only want to do what's right. It's time for the Premier to do what's right and what's required and call a real public inquiry. As the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane put it, "The only way to achieve full transparency is through a judicial public inquiry." Will the Premier call a full public inquiry with the right to subpoena witnesses, with the right to have testimony? Will she do it?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are going to await the results of Judge Wyant's report. He is receiving the exact same information that the Auditor General is. The timing of that report is an interim report in May, final report in June. It will be released publicly. We will identify – there are a multitude of different stories on the table. None of it has been tested or proven in court. That's why we asked a judge to see what he thinks is the most credible

testimony and to give us some direction on whether there was any wrongdoing, and we'll make an assessment at that time.

Ms Gray: So the government is going to control the information, and we're all going to like the outcome. I do not believe it and neither do Albertans.

We need a real public inquiry because the government has tried every trick in the book to cover up the corrupt care mess. That's why they're intimidating public servants from speaking to the Auditor General. Albertans want to know: has this government been improperly manipulating procurement processes? Spoiler alert: yeah, it looks like it. The signs point to it happening across multiple ministries. If that's not the case, then the Premier and her cabinet have nothing to hide. They should call a full public inquiry under the Public Inquiries Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What was identified, and we agree it to be a problem, is that there were different prices paid for the same surgery at different facilities. We have six different charter surgical providers, two different public service providers through Covenant Health as well as through Alberta Health Services, and no one knows what anything costs. That's why we announced activity-based funding. We are going to have a set price for every single procedure. It is going to be larger for those who have more complex surgeries. Everybody is going to be able to get paid based on the patients that they deliver service to.

Ms Ganley: This UCP government claimed they were co-operating with the Auditor General's investigation into the corrupt care scandal. Then we find out that public servants have been directed not to speak to the investigators unless their boss's lawyer is in the room. The Health minister claimed this was normal – it isn't – and that the Auditor General approved. He doesn't. Yesterday the Premier tried to spin a yarn about needing a single point of access. Does this government want to limit the investigation to a single point of access because it's easier to block?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, that is a ridiculous assertion. We've said from the very beginning, and I want to be absolutely clear, that we take the allegations seriously, and we're treating them as such. The reality is that an investigation of this scope is going to require an organized approach. It's going to require a single point of entry. There are 13,000 documents that have already been submitted, likely thousands more that will be coming, many witnesses. Unlike the wild, wild west across the aisle here, we prefer organization. That's what we're going to stick to.

Ms Ganley: The public deserves answers. Millions wasted on useless PPE and bloated contracts. First, the UCP denied a public inquiry and set up an investigation where they pick the questions and choose the evidence. Then they claim they will co-operate with the Auditor General's investigation; instead, we get a gag order and some weird attempt to pass it off as facilitation. It seems like up is down over there in UCP land. Does anyone over there even know the difference between an investigation and a cover-up?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, let me be abundantly clear for the member. This is not a gag order. Nobody has been subject to a gag order. The civil service retained an agency to help assist with the co-ordination of interviews and the production of records. You've heard it time and time again. There are thousands of documents that are being transferred over to the Auditor General. There are many witnesses that the Auditor General might want to interview.

Creating this process allows for streamlining it, allows for organization, and that's exactly what we're going to stick to.

Ms Ganley: Co-ordination, facilitation, single point of access: it seems like this government has a whole word salad to cover up their cover-up. Here's a dose of reality. What's normal is the Auditor General getting to talk to witnesses without having to go through their boss's lawyer. What's normal is for the investigator to decide what's relevant, not the cabinet being investigated. What is normal in a scandal like this is a public inquiry. When will this government grow up and call one?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That former member was the Justice minister not that long ago. That former member has no idea how this process works. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. While I appreciate the enthusiasm, it certainly makes it difficult for the Speaker to hear the question, which he is entitled to.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, that former member has no idea about how the process works.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the process is that we are going to work very closely with the Auditor General's office. We have created a single point of entry. We are facilitating the production of records. This is the obvious way to do things, and we are going to continue to do it in exactly . . .

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

Member Irwin: You know, sometimes we have to give a little credit when it's due. I admit I was impressed to see the courage from the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane as he stood up yesterday in this Chamber to vote with us in support of our call for a full public inquiry into the explosive corrupt care scandal. I'd like to think, and Albertans would too, that other UCP members will show the same integrity. Let's start with the Minister of Health. She would say that she knows right from wrong. So will she support a public inquiry? If there's nothing to hide, then it should be an automatic yes.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, this government supports the independent offices conducting independent investigations with the full co-operation of this government. A number of independent offices are completing those investigations. They are receiving the documents they are requesting. That's not to forget about the judicially led investigation being led by Justice Wyant. He's conducting a full and thorough investigation about this as well. The Auditor General is doing his work, and the RCMP is as well.

Member Irwin: Given that she's lawyered up and didn't answer and given that the new Infrastructure minister, the MLA for West Yellowhead, is the newest addition to this chaotic Conservative cabinet and given that he's perhaps got many years of politics ahead of him – perhaps – does he really want his record tarnished as a politician who was unable and unwilling to stand up and do the right thing by Albertans? Will he support a public inquiry, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sorry to disappoint the members on the other side of the aisle, but they do need to take yes for an answer eventually. A number of independent investigations are taking place. Those investigations are going to find answers that will be made available not only to members of this Assembly but to Albertans. They are doing exactly what those offices were created to do, and that is to perform investigations without interference from the government or the NDP.

Member Irwin: Third time's the charm. Let's ask one of the most seasoned politicians on that side of the House. Given that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has proudly talked about ethics and accountability in politics, noting not that long ago that regarding ethics MLAs need to be held to a high standard and given that he surely should understand the explosive nature of the corrupt care scandal and just how ugly this all is, will he support a full public inquiry, or will he too show nothing but cowardice today? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood will know that the use of a preamble after question 4 is inappropriate, as I mentioned yesterday. If members on the opposition side continue to do so, we will take corrective actions.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will repeat for the third time now for that hon. member that we are working towards supporting the independent investigations being conducted by the independent legislative office of the Auditor General and the judicially led investigation by Justice Wyant. We know that they are going to have everything they need to get to the bottom of those investigations and provide us with the information we need to take action if necessary. I think that is a thorough and complete approach.

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

2:10 Wildfire Prevention and Control

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta recently saw two of the most intense wildfire seasons on record in '23 and '24, taking our forests, some of our towns, and part of our properties. Early detection and response is crucial for controlling wildfires before they can grow and spread. Improved monitoring is especially important during the spring thaw, when melting snow can lead to drier conditions and increased wildfire risk. To the Minister of Forestry and Parks: can you please provide an update on the steps taken by the government to improve early wildfire detection and response in the province?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. Wildfires have always been a part of life in Alberta, but in recent years the scale, intensity, and unpredictability of these fires have shown us just how important it is to be prepared. Just last week I was proud to announce that our government is investing \$1.9 million over three years to upgrade and expand our fire weather network, key to monitoring changing conditions and detecting risks early. We're also investing \$15 million in the community fireguard program and \$10.8 million in FireSmart initiatives, which are integral ways to mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfires. These investments are important to help protect Albertans and their communities.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the response. Given that Alberta has experienced one of the most challenging wildfire seasons in recent memory in 2023, with unprecedented damages in the forests, homes, infrastructure and given that human-caused fires have overwhelmingly made up the majority of the vast wildfires seen in the province and in my own constituency itself, can the minister outline the measures the government is taking to raise awareness and tackle these preventable wildfires?

Mr. Loewen: Thank you again for the question. The key part of prevention efforts is stopping wildfires before they start. Every Albertan shares a responsibility for wildfire prevention, and every action counts when it comes to protecting our communities and natural resources. Last year we saw 282 wildfires caused by residential and recreational burns, a significant decrease from the nearly 400 we saw in 2022. It is more important than ever to continue building on that progress to further reduce the risk of future wildfires, which is why our government is renewing its commitment to public awareness and education campaigns on safe practices while also enforcing fire bans when necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that our government has long called on the federal government to take a more hands-on approach in responsible forest management and wildfire mitigation and given that the preventable tragedy in Jasper highlighted the need for decisive action to protect our national parks and surrounding areas, could the minister elaborate on what steps Alberta's government is taking to bring the federal government to the table and make sure that Alberta has the tools in place to fight and prevent wildfires in Parks Canada lands and, more importantly, to protect Albertans that live within them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. The recent wildfire seasons and the devastation we saw in Jasper underscore the urgent need for responsible forest management on Parks Canada land. Alberta has long called on the federal government to step up, and it's great to see that we're finally seeing some action with tree clearing under way near Banff and other high-risk areas. We need to ensure that this work is done quickly and efficiently enough to make a real difference for the vulnerable communities nearby. We are and will continue pushing Ottawa hard to make sure they are acting with urgency, and we remain ready to assist in mitigating risks and responding to fires on Parks Canada lands.

Thank you.

Children and Youth in Care

Member Batten: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government needs to learn from their own mistakes. In 2020 they repealed accreditation from child care centres, calling it redundant. They removed quality standards based on current research and that focused on outcomes, outcomes like – oh, I don't know – food poisoning. Fast forward to 2023, when almost 500 Albertans are poisoned from a preventable E coli outbreak, the second largest ever seen in Canada. With young Albertans being put at risk once again with Bill 38, will the minister of child and family services recognize the risk and do something about it?

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Within Children and Family Services we will continue to ensure that vulnerable children and families that require supports by the government of Alberta receive the help that they need. That's why we will continue to invest in services and programs within child intervention as well as early preventative services such as family resource networks. We know by investing in children and families at earlier ages that this will lead to healthy and resilient lives as they grow into adulthood.

Member Batten: Given that it is now 2025 and the government is writing their own future by erasing the lives they once were guardians of and given this government is doing little to address the ongoing recommendations from the Child and Youth Advocate while watching these recommendations get closed due to lack of progress and given that Bill 38 will artificially inflate outcomes of children and youth in care while the government tries to face the consequences of their bad decisions, can the minister explain how the ministry will track the outcomes of youth in care? Or are they scrapping tracking altogether?

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Our government of Alberta relishes and appreciates the recommendations put forth by the OCYA. That's why I'm very pleased to say that since 2013 the OCYA has issued over 115 recommendations for Children and Family Services, and CFS has actually implemented 105 of those recommendations. We know that this is making a tangible difference in the lives of children and vulnerable families here in this province. That's why we take these recommendations extremely seriously, and I appreciate the outstanding work that the OCYA does to provide these recommendations.

Member Batten: Given that the minister claims Bill 38 focuses the advocate on those under 18 and given that the advocate's answer was, "Uh-uh, already doing that" and given that if a government was serious about prevention, they would be heavily investing in it and given the government cut so-called redundant red tape from child care, and kids got sick and given Bill 38 is trying to do the same, this time forgoing youth in care once they turn 18, and given that youth in care are not redundant, can the minister please explain why he's not connecting the dots and doing something?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Our ministry continues to focus on children under the age of 18 by putting forth preventative services at earlier ages because we know that's going to make a huge difference when these children transition into adulthood. We have a wide variety of programs and supports for young adults over the age of 18. We know this is making a huge difference in the lives of these vulnerable young adults, but our focus at the Ministry of Children and Family Services will always be to focus on those most vulnerable and complex children under the age of 18.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement (continued)

Mr. Deol: The former Minister of Infrastructure resigned his cabinet role because he felt, quote: we should have core values, and being against corruption should be one of those. End quote. Corrupt

care was too much for the former minister to bear. He could see it just as Albertans can, and he was as disgusted as Albertans are. The UCP has silenced the former minister in this Chamber ever since. Does the new Minister of Infrastructure share those core values, and is being against corruption one of those?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. We've maintained since the very beginning that we take these allegations seriously. We're working with the independent legislative offices to help facilitate all the materials that they need to conduct their investigation. It's why the Auditor General's the office was created. We respect that process. We're going to continue to work with them to make sure that they have everything. As the Premier mentioned earlier, I've directed a number of my Justice officials to reach out to the Auditor General and make sure that the materials that are being requested are being facilitated and provided.

Mr. Deol: Given that we learned that AHS employees were instructed to refer the Auditor General to outside counsel, a move the UCP's own former Minister of Infrastructure described as obstructionist, given that the UCP's former minister agreed with Alberta's New Democrats that a public inquiry is the only mechanism that will find the truth behind the corruption in Alberta's health care, will the new minister follow the path of his predecessor and call for a public inquiry into corrupt care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. As we've discussed earlier in this Chamber, the civil service retained an outside agency to help with the facilitation of documents and to also provide for the facilitation of interviews. You've heard this before, but I'll say it again; 13,000 records have been furnished to the Auditor General at this time. There will be a number of interviews, presumably, that need to take place. This outside agency is working with the Auditor General's office to help facilitate that, help the civil service receive the advice that they may need, and make sure that the interviews take place.

Mr. Deol: Given that when the former minister was asked about a public inquiry into corrupt care, he stated, quote, that we have nothing to hide; we should take that path, end quote, and given that the UCP has done its best to silence the former minister since the moment he resigned from cabinet, another clear example of UCP obstructionism, the previous minister understands that a public inquiry is the only correct path forward. Why doesn't the new minister understand it?

2:20

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, regardless of who sits in that chair, we've been absolutely clear. We expect full co-operation from every single government minister and every single department with the Auditor General's investigation, with the investigation led by former Chief Justice Wyant, and with any other legislative or other bodies that are conducting those investigations. The reality is that an investigation of this scope requires organization and it requires order, and that's exactly why the civil service retained Rose LLP to help facilitate that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a question.

Addiction Treatment Services in Calgary

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like many cities across North America, families in Calgary have been affected by addiction and the challenges it brings. I hear often of the need for more services that support recovery, restore public safety, and give people an opportunity to build their lives. Thankfully, we know the Alberta recovery model is putting in place more services that will do just that. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what investments has this government made to support addiction recovery in Calgary?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, Calgary is an essential part of the Alberta recovery model and the continuum of care. Recently we've invested in 35 new detox and pretreatment beds at the Calgary drop-in, dynamic overdose response teams within the East Village, mental health and addiction supports within the Calgary police APUs, establishment of therapeutic living communities at Calgary Correctional Centre. We have three recovery communities in the Calgary area, one in Calgary, two in the surrounding area with First Nations. But the biggest thing we've done is that we've created hope and a possibility for Calgarians to know, whether they suffer from addiction or not, that there is a path forward other than simply facilitating addiction indefinitely.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's government has a long list of investments into Calgary to make recovery possible for people in need and given that this has positively led to a 55 per cent drop in the number of lives lost in Calgary to opioid addiction and given that there are some Canadian cities who have gone a different path and instead put dollars towards drug facilitation, to the same minister: how does the work done in Calgary compare to the harm-production cities like Vancouver?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, we have more work to do when it comes to building the Alberta recovery model. We know that. But we'll be honest. We have not gone down the model that we see in British Columbia. When we look at what they've done, they have decriminalization, they have unsafe supply, which is government-funded heroin, and they have more drug-consumption sites than any subnational jurisdiction in the world. By contrast, Alberta has said that recovery is possible. We're building therapeutic recovery communities within our correctional centres. We have a virtual opioid dependency program for same-day access to life-saving opioid agonist medicine. That is evidence based. The list goes on because we believe in recovery.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the NDP's record on the addiction policy is to facilitate, proliferate, and perpetuate the harms with unsafe supply and plans to build drug consumption sites on every street corner and given that the NDP critic, the MLA for Calgary-Currie, shamelessly spent her evenings handing out crack pipes in downtown Calgary . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. McDougall: . . . instead of standing up for recovery, again to the minister: why is the NDP so out of touch with Albertans and unwilling to put their support behind recovery?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:23.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad members opposite support recovery in principle. But they do not, just as the media doesn't, just as the academics don't, close the door on policies like unsafe supply. I want to see members opposite forcefully, full of voice, tell us that unsafe supply should always be dead and illegal in this province, but they will not do it. I'm glad that they support recovery, but that is antithetical to the culture of harm production like unsafe supply and drug-consumption sites on every street corner. I implore members opposite to join us, truly, not just in name but in true, true commitment to recovery within the province of Alberta.

Education Funding

Ms Chapman: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government gives with one hand and takes with the other. They say that they're lowering taxes on one hand, and then with the other they jack up your property tax; 38 other taxes and fees. Our education system is stretched to its limits after years of chronic underfunding by this government. They promised that a new funding formula would fix what ails our classrooms. To the Minister of Education: isn't it true that the Education budget just gives with one hand and takes with the other?

Mr. Nicolaides: No, that's not true at all, Mr. Speaker. In fact, government is making a significant investment into our education system. We are investing over \$1 billion in additional funding to support our fast-growing school divisions, unlike the NDP. They never had to contend with an issue of significant growth. When they were in charge, they were driving people out of the province. They were telling people to move to B.C., to find work elsewhere. However, since our government has been elected, we've reversed that trend, and now we're having to contend with issues and challenges of enrolment growth, and we're happy to invest more into our education system to address it.

Ms Chapman: Well, given that the funding formula gives more funding for some grants but takes away all funding for grants like the supplemental enrolment growth grant, given that the change means the new funding for Edmonton public is just a .1 per cent difference from the old formula, still leaving 1,000 students unfunded, given that classroom complexity is at an all-time high and boards are scrambling to provide supports for kids who need them, how does the Minister of Education justify this ridiculous give and take?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy and proud to justify \$1.6 billion of an investment into children with specialized learning needs to support students who need additional support. I'm proud to stand and support an investment of \$1.1 billion over the next three years in new funding so that our school boards can hire over 4,000 more teachers and other educational support staff. As well, I'm proud to support a 25 per cent increase to the classroom complexity grant to support our kids.

Ms Chapman: Given that metro boards disproportionately bear the burden of growing enrolment in classroom complexity, given that a CBE superintendent recently reported that last year the complexity grant funding had to be supplemented by the division to the tune of \$40 million to actually cover the complexity needs in their schools and given that the increase to the complexity grant this year results in a whopping \$1.6 million increase for the CBE, does the minister really think this drop in the bucket will address the needs of complex kids?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I think that \$1.6 billion invested into supporting students with specialized learning needs is a sufficient step to ensuring that we are working to address the needs of students as best as we can. That is in addition to additional funding that we're providing in other areas to support literacy and numeracy, reading and writing, and other areas that are essential. Again, we do have some challenges that we are working through because Alberta is the place to be once again. We have been flooded with individuals looking to get ahead, a problem, I know, that the NDP never had to contend with.

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

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2019 Alberta's government has been a leader in supporting those suffering from addictions with the opportunity to pursue recovery. Sadly, the addiction crisis has continued to get worse across the nation, causing more pain for individuals, families, and entire communities due to failed Liberal-NDP policies, as seen in British Columbia. But here in Alberta we progress as we build what we called the Alberta recovery model. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, can you tell this House why this government has chosen to focus on recovery?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the question of why we choose recovery might as well be reframed as: why do we choose hope; hope for those suffering from addiction, hope for communities that feel burdened by public addiction? The truth is that recovery run its course has one of two ends. It either ends in pain and misery and, tragically, given enough time, in death, or it ends in recovery, a new lease on life, and the ability to rejoin community as a family member, a mother, and a brother again. We will continue to choose recovery, because if you do not build pathways within government out of addiction, you can only expect it to increase.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the minister. Given that Alberta is on track to build 11 recovery communities across the province, thus opening more than 700 new addiction treatment beds capable of supporting more than 2,000 people every year and given that addiction is not isolated to urban downtowns but has become a challenge across the whole province, to the same minister: what impact will the \$350 million commitment of 11 recovery communities make in rural Alberta?

2:30

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see bipartisan support in building more recovery capacity throughout our province. Unfortunately, before we were in government, there was no capacity, so we have some making up to do. We are well on our way with the numbers mentioned. We've added more than 10,000 spaces up to now. We continue for long-term meaningful recovery through examples like the Métis Nation, Siksika, Tsuut'ina, Blood Tribe, Enoch, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and Gunn. These are just our recovery communities, not to mention all of the millions of dollars of grants that we have that go to local nonprofits that work doing recovery. Long before the government had it as its mantra, these individuals were working on recovery for a long time.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that when the NDP were in government, they did not add a single addiction treatment

space and instead put Alberta tax dollars toward services facilitating addiction and death instead of encouraging recovery and given that this left Albertans needing treatment with no supports from their provincial government and given that if the NDP was still in power, they'd be pushing ahead with their radical ideology into every corner of the province, to the same minister: what is the response you're getting from rural municipalities when they hear about the Alberta recovery model and what that can mean for their communities?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta, just like urban Alberta, is begging for more recovery capacity and recovery capital in their communities. You look at Red Deer, you look at Grande Prairie, and you look at all the communities in the surrounding area that support it. The truth is that the common-sense approach to the addiction crisis is not to facilitate more addiction. It's been tried and it's failed. We've seen this movie before, and it ends in a Greek tragedy. Look at East Hastings and other parts of British Columbia. Instead, rural Alberta is going to return, where we have recovery capacity again for those suffering from addiction and safe, clean, beautiful streets.

Jordan's Principle Funding

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, Jordan's principle exists to end the jurisdictional spat between the federal and provincial governments so that Indigenous children do not suffer. Right now the federal government has a backlog of 140,000 requests. The full and unequivocal support of Jordan's principle would require this province to step up when the federal government fails, which is now. Does the Minister of Indigenous Relations understand that to fully implement Jordan's principle, the province should actually be doing something to support Indigenous children in this province?

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Our priority is to ensure that some of the most vulnerable and complex children here in this province are looked after and are supported. That includes a large number of Indigenous children that are within the care of Children and Family Services. That's why our government continues to work on strengthening cultural connections, because we know that this makes a huge difference when it comes to the lives of these incredible young adults. Part of the way that we do that is by ensuring that a cultural plan is developed, because we know that cultural connections are integral to making sure that these incredible youth are supported, as well as recruiting, training, and supporting kinship caregivers throughout the entire province.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul issued his concerns about education assistants losing their jobs because of the Jordan's principle backlog while claiming that this isn't about education cuts and given that education assistants should be funded by the province, not a federal program meant to support the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of Indigenous children, and given the minister said moments ago that 4,300 workers would be hired under this budget, will the Minister of Education support the education assistants in Lakeland Catholic, Wild Rose, or Northern Lights school divisions, to name a few, or are we going to continue hearing the blame game for when this government fails Albertans?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, as part of Budget '25 we've also made increases to a number of very particular and specialized grants. One of those grants includes the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit grant, which is funding that we provide directly to our school divisions to help support objectives related to enhancing and strengthening support for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. We have increased funding to that area so that our school divisions are in the best possible position to support students. Of course, the federal government, though, needs to fulfill all of their obligations and provide the funding that they've committed to.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that the province does have a responsibility to ensure equity of access to services for Indigenous children in Alberta, both under an MOU and under Jordan's principle itself, which many politicians at all levels seem to forget, and further given that Indigenous peoples are, sadly, too familiar with this passing of the buck between the federal and provincial governments, will the minister – any of them; I'll take anyone – do the right thing, fix the problems left by the federal government for all Jordan's principle requests moving forward, or is this all just a ruse to own the Libs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have much voice today, but I'll do my best.

We take Jordan's principle very seriously in the province, Mr. Speaker. It's actually part of my mandate to make sure that we do follow Jordan's principle. We actually go over the line to make sure that Indigenous children and Indigenous people are looked after, especially when it comes to – you saw what happened around all the fire season last year. We worked really hard there. I ended up going to Ottawa with a bill for all the work that we had done there, and they actually came through and belied up for the money that they owed us, so it does happen, and we work hard at it.

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

Investigation of Health Services Procurement (continued)

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Attorney General told media that he's forcing public servants to talk to an external lawyer. He calls that, I quote, a single point of entry. End quote. That would be a gag order. The leaked e-mail shows that the ADM requires staff to copy her on all e-mails to the Auditor General. If your boss is sitting at the table with you, you know your job is on the line. To the minister. Not allowing public servants to speak freely with the Auditor General when he's investigating the corrupt care scandal: can he explain to me why that is?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again the NDP is creating controversy when there really is none to create. The Premier has been very clear. The instructions to the civil service and to the government members in this Assembly are that there will be one hundred per cent co-operation. A single point of entry to help facilitate and organize documents, 13,000 of which have already been sent to the Auditor General, many more to come; potential witnesses in the dozens or maybe even more need a form

of organization. That's exactly why the civil service retained this outside agency.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Auditor General didn't know about this process, didn't approve it, and doesn't know why the Minister of Health would have claimed otherwise and given that he's been dragged away from doing his job just to correct the record and given that observers know what's going on, with Professor Lori Williams saying, and I quote, it looks like they're trying to control the information that's being provided. It doesn't look open, it doesn't look transparent, and it definitely doesn't look honest. Why is this government so unwilling to do the honest, open, and transparent thing and just call a public inquiry?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, that is simply not true. We've been working, again, closely with the Auditor General's office to provide all the information requested. All the government ministries have been directed to comply with all of the investigative requests of the Auditor General. There is a judicially led investigation happening, as I mentioned before. That is an inquiry being led by Justice Wyant, the former Chief Justice of the provincial court of Manitoba. We are working with Justice officials who have already reached out to the Auditor General to make sure that all of the material is being collaborated.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Attorney General says things have been corrected but given that public servants haven't received any new instructions; instead, they've only been told that when the Auditor General comes a-knocking, they should let their boss know, call in the lawyer, and say nothing and given that's not open, that's not transparent or ethical, will this government release all public servants from their gag order, issue a new e-mail with a correction saying so, stop trying to hide from the corrupt care scandal of their own making, and will you guarantee whistle-blower protection for all staff who are interviewed?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again nothing could be further from the truth. The NDP have never let facts get in the way of a good fake news story, and this is no exception to that.

The civil service are free to meet with the Auditor General. In fact, it is the law if they are requested to meet. Both current and former employees are required to meet with the Auditor General if they are so requested, Mr. Speaker. What the civil service did, once again for the clarity of all members of this House, was retain an agency to help facilitate document production and interviews. That's what they're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has a question to ask.

Addiction Treatment and Recovery (continued)

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been 10 years of the federal government pushing their radical agenda onto Canadians. When it comes to addiction, you will find no country with more drug facilitation and nowhere more friendly to criminals and drug dealers. Addiction is a disease that if left untreated will only end in pain and possibly even death. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what is Alberta's government doing to stand up to the policies that facilitate addiction across our nation?

2:40

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this province has made unsafe supply illegal where we are. More importantly than that, what we prohibited – we've encouraged, we've grown a culture of recovery. We're building 11 recovery communities with hundreds of spaces across this province. We're funding all sorts of recovery not-for-profits in your communities, and we're building hope again for those who suffer from addiction to know that there is a pathway, there's an alternative other than indefinite facilitation of addiction, and tragically that often ends in death. There is hope. There is recovery. We will stand up for Albertans because we believe that there is a better path possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that over the past decade of Liberals being propped up by the NDP, they have brought forward disastrous policies like decriminalization and unsafe supply and given that the NDP solution to the addiction crisis is more drugs, more crack pipes, and fewer consequences and given that they twist these policies with euphemistic language, misleading the public to believe they are reducing harm, to the same minister: how is he standing up to this radical agenda and putting recovery first?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that when these policies came out initially around needle exchange and needle cleanup, the idea of harm reduction was a good one and one that we support, and this province funds millions upon millions of dollars of that work. But when you take it to its logical conclusion, when you look at the way that the federal Liberals and the NDP have articulated this in cities like Vancouver, the logical end is government-funded heroin in unsafe supply and more drug consumption sites in British Columbia than any other jurisdiction in the world. Where is the off-ramp out of addiction? Where is the caring health care, where health care should heal and not harm those? It's become harm production.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that on this side of the House we don't believe in flooding the streets with opiates and crack pipes, like the members opposite do; instead, we are giving people their lives back, investing in treatment and recovery to give people hope and an opportunity to heal and given that Alberta is an international leader in standing up for recovery, to the minister: what is your message to families whose children are suffering with the disease of addiction?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I say to families: thank you. Thank you for what you have done, caring for your loved ones to bring them out of addiction. Though many of us in this Chamber will never know the tragic reality of the threat living over you, that your son or daughter may not make it through the night, thank you for your perseverance and for your hope. You need to hear the minister of the Crown say this in support of the work you're doing. I say to you as well that recovery is possible. Every single Albertan needs to know this. We should never be despairing and have a policy that says it's better to be despairing in the ditch than it is to get recovery and return to the family. I pray that everyone hears that message today.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Child Care Affordability

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, quality, affordable child care is not a luxury. It is an important social infrastructure. It gives children the strong start they deserve. It gives parents, especially mothers, the ability to work, study, and provide for their families. It is one of the most powerful tools for working families, a key instrument to support our low-income families, improve our workforce participation, and grow our economy. The March monthly consumer price index, released this morning, shows Alberta continues to have the second-highest inflation rate in Canada. Food prices alone have gone up twice compared to last month.

With such worsening affordability challenges, this government has made child care even more expensive for the very family who can least afford it. By eliminating child care subsidies, this government has pushed hundreds of dollars in new costs on to low- and middle-income Alberta parents. Families who once paid less than \$173 a month for child care are now being charged \$326. That's nearly double. Parents now have to pay additional new charges for meals, field trips, and transportation. This means some families are paying up to \$500 per month per child.

Albertans are already stretched thin, facing the second-highest inflation in the country, stagnant wages, and the highest utility bills in Canada. For many this increase is the breaking point. They are being forced to reduce their work hours, turn down opportunities, or consider leaving the workforce altogether.

While the government claims that the change is about simplicity, what families are experiencing is anything but simple. This is a cut that hurts kids, sidelines parents, and deepens inequality. Mr. Speaker, we need solutions that lift families up.

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

Vaisakhi

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Vaisakhi, also known as the celebration of a successful harvest and the beginning of a new year, is a major tradition celebrated in India and now across the world, resonating with communities world-wide. It is celebrated in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Fiji Islands, and by millions of individuals across the world.

Vaisakhi commemorates the founding of Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1699, an event that forever shaped Sikh identity and principles of equality, courage, and service to humanity. Traditionally, Vaisakhi is celebrated with parades, community meals, and visits to gurdwaras offering prayers and distribution of donation. Sweets and gifts are exchanged to share the blessing in our lives and for the opportunity to unite with others. Various traditional dances like bhangra, singing of folk songs, and the sound of dhol drums are performed as a reminder of enduring values of faith, celebration, and community togetherness, and devotional hymns and chanting create an atmosphere symbolizing the collective spirit of celebration.

I feel honoured to celebrate Vaisakhi alongside my fellow constituents and Albertans. Festivals like this play a crucial role in fostering a deeper understanding of our shared culture, history, and

heritage. On this special occasion I want to extend my warmest Vaisakhi greetings to all those celebrating. May this Vaisakhi bring peace, prosperity, and happiness to you and your family.

Happy Vaisakhi. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Surgery Postponements

Dr. Metz: Albertans deserve a government that will invest in public health care. This government's self-serving agenda isn't working. Their actions are making cancellations of outpatient surgery within hours of someone's appointment common.

One preventable cause is lack of anaesthesiologists due to preferential supply to private surgical clinics. Stubborn ideology to privatize and incompetent government leadership are responsible. Cuts, chaos, and alleged corruption drive preventable cancelled surgeries. Patients and families are harmed. They suffer stress, anxiety, and ongoing symptoms. They continue drugs that have side effects and risks and treatment costs. Some conditions become less curable.

Delayed cancer surgery decreases survival. Chemotherapy may be unavoidable. Cancer surgery also means additional cost to patients. Perhaps grandparents have already travelled to babysit and now will be asked to return later. Transportation needs to be reorganized. Accommodations need to be rescheduled. These are all expensive. And some people are being asked to do this four times.

2:50

Cancelled surgery means some patients continue to lose income. Others need to reorganize their time off. It also delays return to participation in family events and recreation. Cancelled surgery also impacts the health care system. Surgeons may learn that their surgery the next day is cancelled too late to do anything else. Hospitals have staffed their ORs. Anaesthesiologists have been moved to private centres. We have to absorb this cost in the public system.

Government Accountability

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, yesterday this government failed to act with courage and accountability to vote for a public inquiry. Truth and honesty are two of our seven sacred teachings. Tapwewin in the nehiyaw fundamental legal concept means truth. We are taught in our ways that truth spoken freely is the only tone of justice. In your ways you may have heard it or been taught it as, quote, come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free. End quote. Those of us who voted in favour of an independent public inquiry understand that the full truth is a prerequisite for justice, never mind accountability. In the instance of rampant corruption demonstrated by this government in procurement and in the service of chartered surgical facilities, the public deserves both truth and accountability, something only available in a full public, independent inquiry. Even the members opposite who voted with us truth seekers know the value of honesty and transparency.

Truth be told, Mr. Speaker, I'm just as concerned with uncovering what this government did to strong-arm its public servants and bloated contracts as I am with the accusations the former Infrastructure minister made, that this is reckless behaviour that crosses all departments across the provincial ministries. What if they have strong-armed members of the nonprofit sector when they cut funding to the Sexual Assault Centre? What if they diverted money deliberately from disability advocacy groups when they clawed back AISH? What if they systemically propped up First

Nation band administrations for AIOC money and left others passing the hat?

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government, in the face of an endemic problem, may think that some vaccinations won't work, but the only inoculation for corruption and dishonesty is truth. [Remarks in Cree]

Presenting Petitions

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition urging the government to introduce legislation to terminate the Grassy Mountain coal project because of the risk the project poses to southern Alberta's environment, water, and agrifood economy. This petition has over 6,000 signatures from concerned Albertans not just in my own constituency but from across the province.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 53

Compassionate Intervention Act

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise and request leave today to introduce Bill 53, the Compassionate Intervention Act.

For several years families across our country have been pleading for a program like compassionate intervention to help us and families who are suffering. If passed, the act will create pathways for parents, health professionals, peace officers, and others to petition for care for those suffering from addiction.

[Motion carried; Bill 53 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. First, the appropriate copies of an article titled Passover Begins Soon: For many Jews, the Celebrations will Occur Amid Anxieties and Divisions.

Second, the working definition of anti-Semitism, which was adopted by this House in 2022.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table five copies of the article titled [my last name] Disavows Claims of Support by the Alberta Republican Party.

Mr. Speaker, I had passed Motion 517 in this House, that clearly stated that I wanted to prevent foreign interference and safeguard Canada's sovereignty. The opposition voted along with me on that. You know, when it comes down to it, I would hope that they would stop these allegations.

The Speaker: I would encourage the member, if you'd like to make a member's statement, to get himself one or on the list for one.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings, and I rise to table five of the articles. The first is an article showcasing ongoing interference from foreign governments of Iran, China, Russia, titled AI-driven Election Interference from China,

Russia, and Iran Expected, Canadian [Election] Security Officials Warn.

The second is an article showcasing a CSIS intelligence report from 2021. The article is titled CSIS Warned Beijing Would Brand Conservatives as Trumpian: Now Carney's Campaign is Doing it.

Third is moving from foreign interference to domestic interference with our federal election. An article calls out Carney and his clown show for fake Trumpian buttons stating: Liberal staffers reassigned.

Fourth is a *Niagara Independent* article calling out Canada's Sleeper Election Issue: the Loss of Charitable Status for Religious Organizations, also calling out the House of Commons committee on finance report '21, recommendations 429 and 430.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, is a charitable law group article titled Why Removing Charitable Status from Churches, [Temples,] and Mosques is a Bad Idea, highlighting the negative social services impact that stripping these organizations would have.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of a letter from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul which highlights the concerns about Jordan's principle, which I spoke about today, and some Facebook posts with a little bit of misinformation in them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 18 tablings. I don't know how much licence that gives me, but I'll just tell you that I'm proud of the members of the Sherwood Park United Church, who are an affirming congregation, a Christian congregation that welcomes and affirms members of all identities. These are letters to the Premier asking the government to rescind bills 26, 27, and 29.

The Speaker: I think you've highlighted the challenge that we face with tablings more broadly.

Ms Hayter: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five copies of the recent Alberta Council of Women's Shelters Report on Domestic Violence Shelter Impact in Alberta. Apparently, I misspoke last week when I said that thousands of Albertans were turned away. In fact, it was 31,248 people that shelter could not be provided for, an increase of 12 per cent from last year. I encourage all members and Albertans to read through the report and learn more about the struggles, including 88 per cent domestic violence shelters who had to cut funding due to . . .

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table an e-mail from Vicki. She lives in Taber. She is a lifelong Albertan, raised in the Cayley and High River area. She's written a very impressive letter to the Premier and to a number of MLAs urging the UCP to stop coal mining on the eastern slopes and stop hanging out with MAGA types.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta's 2024 Giving Together report that outlines local stories and vital grant contributions provided by this

organization to support and strengthen charities of all industry sectors to bolster communities in southern Alberta.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:05 the Leader of the Official Opposition rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At that point the Leader of the Official Opposition rose pursuant to 23(h), (i), and (j), in particular (j), which says, "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." At that point the Minister of Justice was answering a question, and after identifying the Member for Calgary-Mountain View specifically as the former Minister of Justice, he went on to say: that member has no idea how the process works. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but that's my recollection. I think that's the kind of language that's quite insulting.

3:00

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has been a former Justice minister and an hon. member of this Chamber, was never involved in calling a police chief over traffic tickets, was never involved in yelling at people's driveways, was never involved in conflict of interest situations or sending people threatening e-mails. She served this province for four years, the longest serving Justice minister in my memory, and is an honourable person, and I think just identifying her as a Justice minister and then saying that she has no idea, that she has no clue is quite insulting language, and the minister should refrain from using that language, which likely will cause disorder in this House.

Mr. Schow: Well, that was entertaining, Mr. Speaker. At no point was the hon. Minister of Justice suggesting that the former Minister of Justice was not a person of integrity. That at no point came into play. I'm also not sure what previous Justice ministers on this side of the House have to do with the member's argument besides to try to draw attention to their actions. We're talking about the current Minister of Justice and his comments, which, with my unofficial records . . . [interjections] I'm not sure what the members opposite have to say. I suspect when I sit down, if they have something they want to add to this, they're more than welcome to stand up. It is well within their privilege. But at the moment I have the floor to speak, and I'd love the opportunity to make my argument. I didn't say anything while the member there was speaking. I was just laughing.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, my unofficial records would confirm what the Deputy Opposition House Leader said, something to the effect of: that former member has no idea how the process works. At the time we were talking about a judicial inquiry which we have engaged. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View suggested that's not sufficient. The Minister of Justice said that the member then, obviously – I shouldn't say "obviously" – has no idea how the process works. That is the definition of a matter of debate or a difference of opinion. I do not believe that this is a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to add to the point of order debate?

Seeing none, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. Hon. members, on occasion, including yesterday, when the Leader of the Official Opposition used some provocative language to describe the Premier, it was suggested that that also was a point

of order, and yesterday it was ruled a matter of debate. While identifying individual members and making comment on their capacity, whether they know something or don't know something, is unhelpful and often leads to a point of order or a deterioration in the debate, I'm not of the opinion that this particular statement, where the hon. Minister of Justice said the following, "That former member has no idea how this process works" – there was actually an interjection separate to that as well. Then he continued, following the call of the point of order, "Mr. Speaker, the process is that we are going to work very closely with the Auditor General's office," and he proceeded.

While certainly the language is provocative, perhaps unhelpful, I'm not convinced that on this occasion it rises to the level of a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:23 the Deputy Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the said time I rose pursuant to 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was asking a question, and he referred to the Member for Calgary-Currie and made allegations that she was handing out pipes. There are a lot of problems with this kind of allegation, the language the member used. I think it's ridiculous to think that a member of this House would do such a thing.

I will quote from the minister's debate in estimates as well. The second thing is that I find these comments very ill informed and, quite frankly, unintelligent. I think the minister has said during the estimates, page FC-292, March 10, 2025, that he has "no problem with much of what people call harm reduction services. We fund millions upon millions of dollars of it, and I do it happily: Naloxone, needle exchange, the DORS app." The Member for Calgary-Currie is the shadow minister for Mental Health and Addiction. She has advocated for harm reduction policies, but at no point – at no point – has she asked or advocated for distributing drugs or pipes or anything of such a nature. Just like that, we may differ with the minister's position and policy view agreement, but we will never translate his willingness to distribute Naloxone or needle exchange as distributing drugs. So I guess the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek took it too far.

I also want to draw your attention to paragraph 494 of *Beauchesne's*, that was quoted in your ruling of March 15, 2023, *Hansard*, page 602, which says that "statements by Members respecting themselves . . . must be accepted." The Member for Calgary-Currie has denounced such allegations that she has advocated any such thing, the distributing of pipes or drugs. When the member has made that statement, they need to be accepted. Paragraph 494 also goes on to say that on occasion the Assembly will be required to "accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident."

One more thing I would draw your attention to is *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 13, page 619: "Remarks which question a Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order." The allegations the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek made clearly attack the integrity and character of an hon. member of this House, and this should be ruled out of order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is going to be a bit awkward for the member opposite because you have already ruled

on this specific point of order not long ago, and I'm happy to go through if it pleases you. If it doesn't, I'll leave it on – I'm sure you have your own records. But what is really important to note is that if the Member for Calgary-Currie doesn't like members of the government pointing out that member's activities, including handing out clean drug pipes, then the member shouldn't have done it in the first place and shouldn't have celebrated it.

The Opposition Deputy House Leader said that at no point – these are his words – has the member ever advocated for this or done this. Now, Mr. Speaker, either that member has chosen to disregard facts that have been disseminated in this House or the member is deliberately misleading the House. There is a social media post that was tabled in this very Chamber. I know that every time a document is tabled in this Chamber, all members of the Assembly read everything, so there is no excuse for the member not to know this. This post from the Member for Calgary-Currie said:

Last week, I joined [the Street Cats] on a patrol in downtown Calgary, [meeting] people who were preparing to spend the night on the street. In a five-block loop along [seventh] and Stephen Ave, we encountered dozens of people who [asked for] . . . clothes, hygiene [products], warm food, [drinks], and . . . clean drug [pipes].

A subsequent comment on the same thread said:

And we gave it to them, no questions asked.

There it is right there, Mr. Speaker.

Despite whatever they've gone through and whatever is happening in their lives at that moment, they deserve care and they deserve to be treated with dignity.

I would agree with the following line. We all deserve to be treated with dignity, though I don't think that giving people clean drug pipes and clean drugs is treating them with dignity. It's keeping them stuck in the cycle of addiction, something we are now dealing with with the new bill on compassionate intervention.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, you have ruled that this is not a point of order. If the members opposite have a problem with the government pointing out things that they have done in very recent memory, I might add, maybe they shouldn't do silly things like hand out clean drug pipes and then post it on social media and celebrate it. Not a point of order; a matter of debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has something substantive to add.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In response to the Government House Leader I just wanted to clarify one point. He read from the social media post in which they use the word "we" and then a list of items. And then later: when people asked for things, they were given. Nowhere in that post does it say that the Member for Calgary-Currie personally handed any individual specifically a crack pipe. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Shepherd: In fact, that member has stated she did not do that specific action. What the government is alleging is that she did in fact commit that specific action. And as my colleague and fellow deputy House leader noted, the practice of the Assembly is that members are taken at their word about their actions. Now, I understand that the government may want to cover for their own behaviour by trying to drive a salacious rumour, but the fact is that what they are alleging is not specifically stated in that post. The member has denied it, and practice shows the member should be taken at her word.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to . . . [interjection] Order. Order. Order.

Members, let me highlight that in the course of the last eight minutes or whatever it's been of productive use of the Assembly's time while we go around and around on an issue we've once discussed, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall implied that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was unintelligent in the use of his defence of a point of order. Entirely unhelpful. The Government House Leader implied that the Opposition House Leader intentionally misrepresented or misled the House. Also unhelpful. While I appreciate the desire to win some sort of political point inside the Assembly through the use of a point of order, I think it's important even in our discussions of points of order that we do so in a manner that is not likely to create disorder. Referring to another member or at least the words they used as unintelligent is counterproductive at least; a point of order perhaps; disappointing at best, I suppose.

We're here about the people's business, and we've spent an extended period of time discussing the nuances between: did someone do something, or did they not? What does a social media post mean, or what does it not?

Certainly, the Speaker has no desire to be the arbitrator of things that are posted on the Internet, but I will highlight for members of the opposition that over a long period of time members of the opposition accused the Member for Taber-Warner of doing certain conduct that they believed was unbecoming of the member, and day in and day out they came and directly accused that member of doing something that they had concerns about.

When we directly choose to single out, identify, or exclude a member of the Assembly, inevitably, decorum decreases and often a point of order is raised, and here we are. If the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek hadn't made an accusation that some members on that side of the Assembly like to do this type of activity, it's unlikely that we would have spent this period of time focusing on a point of order. As a result, I would encourage members, in the future if they would like to go down this line of debate, that they make it much more broad, and as a result we will be much less likely to have points of order needlessly where, as we saw with the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, debate is continued.

What I'll say is that both of you, the Official Opposition House Leader and the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, are correct with respect to *Beauchesne's* chapter 494 and needing to accept the statements of a member, but I also am sympathetic to the arguments that have been made by the Government House Leader with respect to what did or didn't happen. Now, of course, the Speaker nor the majority of members of the Assembly were present on such a date in which the accusation took place. I'll encourage members of the government to accept the statement that the member made and that if they'd like to continue down this pattern of debate, they do so in a much less personal manner, and also encourage members of the opposition to highlight to them what happens when they also use provocative language when describing members of the government.

I think what we've seen here is a very robust caution to both sides of the Assembly, and in light of such a caution I'm not going to require an apology or consider this to be a point of order on this occasion, but I hope that members will govern themselves accordingly. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 44

Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting, advocating, and growing the agricultural industry in Alberta, and that's why we are proposing changes to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act while also helping the emerging biogas industry.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In fact, if the proposed changes to this act pass, our province's agricultural industry can grow even more to meet opportunities presented by local and global markets in an environmentally sustainable manner. We heard from the agricultural industry and biogas industries that the act needed more clarity about managing organic waste to provide regulatory certainty not only for farmers and ranchers and agricultural processors but also for the biogas industry, which can use this organic waste to generate heat, electricity, and renewable natural gas. Madam Speaker, we listened, and with these proposed changes we have a wonderful opportunity to grow and diversify our agricultural industry and fuel an emerging one.

The Agricultural Operation Practices Act, or AOPA, and its associated regulations provide legal authority for oversight of confined feeding facilities and manure storage. We're seeing increased interest from confined feeding operations and other investors to establish anaerobic biodigesters or biogas plants as manure produced by livestock operations can be used as an input source for biodigesters to produce biogas and fertilizer. The biogas can be refined into renewable natural gas to produce heat and electricity, which creates an alternate revenue stream for our producers. The nutrient-rich fertilizer produced, called digestate, can also be used to grow crops and improve soil health, increasing value-added processing and improving waste management on-farm.

3:20

Until now we have used a memorandum of understanding between Agriculture and Irrigation, environment and parks, and the Natural Resources Conservation Board to manage the digestate by-product from the biogas industry. This MOU was developed about a decade ago and was always meant to be a temporary fix to respond to an emerging technology and an emerging industry. However, as the agriprocessing and biogas sectors expand and more anaerobic biodigesters come online, Alberta needs to ensure there is regulatory clarity, flexibility, and opportunity to manage organic waste, including digestate, to provide investor confidence.

The proposed changes formally bring digestate under the legislation and allow producers to store, compost, or directly apply it to land. Changes will provide this emerging industry with the regulatory certainty to do business and create more jobs in rural Alberta, and with access to abundant inputs from livestock operations our province will be an attractive place for investment in the biogas industry.

Farmers, ranchers, and ag processors also produce other organic by-products like crop residues or vegetable waste that cannot be used for things like animal feed. This leads to a lot of organic

material being sent to landfills if they cannot be composted or applied to the land. Now, this is a needless waste and needlessly fills landfills with organic material that can be utilized in another way. We have a huge opportunity to divert these materials to the biogas industry, which is looking for all the feedstock they can get.

Madam Speaker, it's time to bring certainty for our agricultural industry and the biogas industry. If this legislation passes, farmers could store digestate and use it to supplement fertilizer and use it for soil amendment. Moving the existing rules established under the MOU to legislation will provide farmers in the biogas industry with certainty to do business here in Alberta, which I think we can all agree is the best province to do business. Now, changes to the act will help attract investment as well to rural Alberta. This is a win-win scenario for our province and all parties included.

Other changes to the act include administrative amendments that would align AOPA with updates made to the Municipal Government Act to include the recognition of intermunicipal development plans. Proposed changes also clarify that all affected parties have 20 working days to provide comments on an application before approvals and clarify the roles of the NRCB board, approval officer, and inspector. Finally, Bill 44 would extend the regulation's expiry date by five years to 2030.

Madam Speaker, all of the proposed amendments to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act will help grow the agricultural industry. Farmers, ranchers, and agriprocessors have asked the government to create regulatory certainty, and that's exactly what we are doing. Alberta's government has listened, and through the changes proposed in Bill 44 we're responding to build our economy, advance sustainability, and support our producers.

Madam Speaker, for these reasons I move second reading of Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act. Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 44 for the first time. I do want to start off by saying that expanding biodigesters in the province, I think, is important. Alberta is actually quite behind when we look at other jurisdictions. Canada is behind when we look at other jurisdictions, to be honest, when it comes to this technology and being able to build these facilities.

What I do find very interesting, though, is that we do see success where biodigesters have actually been built in Alberta. We have one that's in Lethbridge, for example, that was built in an industrial area of Lethbridge that was able to address the concerns that the constituents of the area had around making sure that there was no contamination, that there were no issues around downstream smells, all of those sorts of things. Because of that, the county decided to build it in an industrial park and not build it anywhere near a residential area. That was done under an MOU. So we have seen through MOUs and through the ministry that there is an ability to do this. So I found it interesting that all of a sudden now we would have a bill being brought to the House that, basically, was supposed to be brought forward, as the minister said, to address some of the regulatory concerns, was supposed to be able to ensure investment certainty, and to do all of those things.

Yet what I don't see in this piece of legislation – and I'm hoping the minister and I can have chats about this. There is a current project, that he is very, very aware of, that is currently being looked at within the province that the minister actually referenced when he was at RMA in relation to the town of High River. That project has been held up not because the community doesn't want to see it happen, not because the community doesn't think that, you know,

the job creation that's going to come out of that is not important, not because of the fact that the community is also in support of the fact that we do need to find a management strategy for the waste in that area but because of the fact that there is a conversation happening around the environmental piece of it.

There's a tailings pond that is attached to this project. There are concerns about the smell of this project, and there are concerns about the proximity to the residents of this project. The minister went to RMA and mentioned that, well, we're doing this because of the project that's in High River, which is interesting because it's also very close to the Premier, I believe, and also to the minister. There's, like, this really close relationship happening in relation to this specific bill in who is being helped, especially when the minister decides to highlight it as why we're doing it.

What I don't understand is that if that's the case, then the concerns that have been holding up this project in High River, which is the environmental piece, you would think they would be being addressed in the bill, yet they're not. So is it about job creation, is it about biodigester, or is it about the fact that with the MOU the government didn't have the ability to just push projects through and to remove some of the accountability pieces that citizens of this province have a right to have access to?

As we know, the project in High River is in front of the Environmental Appeals Board today. We're actually waiting for the report to come back from the Environmental Appeals Board to let us know that the concerns that the community around this biodigester had have been addressed. Yet we see a government not waiting for the process to happen, for the appeal board to come back and say: these are the recommendations; this is how this project can be successful; this will make the community and the members of High River be able to feel confident in this project being built and being activated. No. What we see is the government again putting a piece of legislation into this House and trying to push through changes on appeal, changes on deadlines, and looking at different triggers that should have been respected to allow to happen before we started to debate this bill. It's another upside-down UCP way of the government just ignoring the processes that exist in this province and the appeal process and the evaluations and just saying: well, no; we're going to write this bill.

Then, the issues that are coming forward around the biodigester, concerns around the environment – the minister of environment is not even mentioned in the legislation. For some reason the minister of agriculture is going to be the one that's going to monitor these projects. That's not normal. Usually it's the ministry of environment and the ministry of energy who would be looking at it. Biodigesters are energy creators. There are pieces of where they should be attached. The ministry of environment should be looking at the environmental pieces and monitoring the environmental impacts, a hundred per cent they should, because the primary concerns are the fact that the environmental protections are the ones that are the biggest issue when it comes to these projects, and it is what's holding up the one in High River.

3:30

Now, my hope is that, once the appeal is heard and the recommendations come back, the project can go forward. The citizens of High River want it as long as their concerns are addressed. It's a great job creator. It will help our industry in being able to address those pieces. I want to be very clear, because I know that the minister is going to try to say that I'm anti-this-project and I'm anti-this-legislation, and I'm not. I support it. I support the fact that we need to have biodigesters, and I actually just think that we're behind, but what I don't support is ignoring the voices of constituents who have said, "Please make sure that these

environmental pieces are dealt with,” and then to see the government come forward and, for some reason, not really address them in the bill.

Maybe I haven't read it right. Maybe the minister wants to come back and explain to me how he will be in charge of doing those environmental assessments and making sure that, as the minister who will be responsible for the regulatory process of these biodigesters, he will ensure those environmental impacts are being met and that the tailing pond concerns and the smell and all those things are being addressed. I would like to hear that.

I also would like to hear, when we see conflicts between municipalities – because we also see in this piece of legislation how municipalities are referenced, I think, 33 times or 36 times or something like that, in this bill. That's a lot. The word “municipality” is talked about a lot in this bill for a bill that is to deal with biodigesters. The reason for that is because of the fact that, more often than not, you will see an urban municipality that has high citizen concentration, and then you will see a feedlot close by to that area that may be in a county outside of that municipality, and there is conflict, right? Where do you put it? Where do you put the biodigester? How do you manage the concerns of the citizens that live in those areas? That is what is happening right now on this certain project.

What I see happening is that the government is playing around with a little bit of language in the bill, that now means that when these assessments are being done for these project approvals, it may consider the conflict between the municipalities or it may not, and it's up to the discretion of the assessor to determine whether or not it meets the Municipal Government Act and whether or not it aligns with the multi-use interface between the different municipalities and whether it aligns with the intermunicipal development plans, which then will prevail over the municipal development plans, which makes it a little bit more complicated.

This again goes back to who gets to decide, depending on whether it's a county or how close it is to an urban centre, whether or not there will be a conflict or whether or not that conflict even needs to be considered. Then it only gives 20 days. It gives 20 days for affected parties to comment on the application. Municipalities have, like, a month to, basically, get involved in the process and be notified. Right now it's 10 days, so I will say that it's a little bit longer, but, as we know, municipalities even give their citizens longer than that when it comes to, like, looking at bylaw changes and whether or not there are going to be zoning changes. It's less than what municipalities give their own citizens, so I'm not quite sure how we landed on 20.

I guess the question would be: when is the notification provided, and how are we ensuring that those 20 days are being honoured? Also, why hasn't there been anything built into this legislation around zoning of interface and space? Why have we not been looking at the fact that – like, Lethbridge did it well. I think it's a great example of when a community looks at the impacts of what these projects can do to their local communities, that putting it in an industrial park makes sense, and, like, keeping it away from the residences of the area makes sense. Why there wouldn't be a conversation around how close it should be to residential citizens, the residences where they're living, and why that wouldn't have been a consideration within this piece? Maybe it's going to be in regulation. I don't know.

It does raise some questions around why the decisions were made to do this, and the timing is weird. I think the government had opportunities to – there are two projects in the province that we know about. There may be potentially more biodigesters that want to be built. I don't know why it is that under Lethbridge it made sense and it worked, and all of a sudden now we need legislation

for two projects, one in Nanton, one up in the minister's own riding and the Premier's hometown. The timing of it seems odd, and also the fact that we have this appeal process in the works.

It would be like the government – I don't know – coming in and being, like, “Oh, there's a review in front of the AER right now on some energy project” – like, I don't know, coal – and deciding that they're just going to come in and legislate that we should be coal mining and ignore the AER recommendations and everything that has to do with it. Like, when the government does stuff like that, it just seems strange. It just seems really odd that they would just ignore appeal processes and mechanisms that exist within government to ensure that citizens have the voices that they need and the processes that they need to be able to have their voices heard, just ignore those to put the legislation through, and then to really reference it in public, to be, like, “This is why we're doing it, because this project is taking too long to get built, because it's in front of the environmental appeal board right now.” That doesn't seem right. It's a little concerning.

I hope that when we see the report – because it's due this weekish, supposed to be, we should be seeing it sometime – whatever the report brings forward, that those issues are addressed and that it's a good learning opportunity and maybe those learnings are built into regulation for the legislation such that we can ensure that these pieces are being addressed. I also think, though, that it would also be really nice, since we're here and since we're talking about the opportunities for investment in agriculture, that we would see more of these opportunities being brought forward, that we would see other legislative changes through the ministry of agriculture that would support more value-add, that might look at supporting our agriculture industry through horticulture, that might look at whether or not there should be statutory reviews done to help build capital so that those who want to access capital to diversify our agriculture economy can access capital.

I think there are lots of other opportunities. If the minister wants to look at trying to diversify and bring more investment to the province, create more jobs, look at local food, all of those things, there are a variety of other legislative options that could be used to do that as well. This is one piece, but there are a variety of other pieces that I know stakeholders have been asking about when it comes to, as the government likes to term it, red tape reduction that would help drive local investment in other areas outside of biodigesters and would also help to drive our local agricultural communities. I also think it would be great to see some work being done in the north of the province in relation to how we're looking at water management, irrigation components, looking at working out how we're going to get our product to market from the northern routes. There's a lot of opportunity and a lot of work that can be done in those aspects.

This is one opportunity, but I would definitely like to hear and see that there are more of these bills coming forward that help to drive other investment opportunities when it comes to diversification and value-add in the agriculture industry. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to join this debate? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very glad to rise today in the Chamber to speak on Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025. Agriculture is an industry that fortifies the promise of prosperity in Alberta. Long before the discovery of Alberta's vast energy resources, people were drawn to the province, knowing that with hard work and a bit of luck the land would provide for them and their families.

Agriculture is part of our identity. The farmers, I think, we all share a connection to as Albertans. Even those who are not farmers often have a friend or family member who is. For those of us in the cities and the suburbs, for those of us on the farm, taking the kids to the farm of a friend or relative, even, is not just a fun outing but a chance to reconnect with the places our food comes from.

3:40

Driving across Alberta today, you see open fields dotted with remnants of our lengthy farming heritage: leaning wooden barns, empty grain silos, rusty machinery, old houses, and other remnants of the past all remind us of simpler times, when far more people relied on agriculture to make a living; however, on that same road trip you're sure to see just as many signs of how this industry has changed, just like our province has. Modern machinery dwarfs those rusty steam tractors that used to till the fields, and steel-sided barns now stand where the wooden ones have since crumbled.

Madam Speaker, farming has always been and will always be a fixture of the Albertan identity, but we must also recognize that the farms of today are not the farms of our parents and grandparents. The purpose of the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act is to update our province's regulations to reflect the ongoing change in this sector. Earlier I mentioned how the equipment of today dwarfs the equipment of the past, and that isn't without reason. Today's agrifood industry produces and exports more than it ever has in the past, and it creates a lot of waste in the process. Farmers, ranchers, and agriprocessors collectively produce 3.4 million tonnes of organic waste every year. The current legislation provides producers limited options for dealing with that waste, much of it going to waste disposal facilities.

Bill 44, if passed, would define organic material in the legislation, giving agricultural producers and agriproducers more options for managing these organic materials. This would result in less organic waste ending up in waste disposal facilities, reducing the strain on municipal waste systems. The new legislation would enable this off-farm organic material to be stored, composted, or applied on farms. This would create new crop nutrient options for farmers in addition to conventional fertilizers, creating a circular economy. Farmers are always looking for ways to increase sustainability, and this change would give them a new option to do so.

If passed, this legislation would provide greater clarity and legislative backing for our emerging biogas industry. Biogas facilities use biodigesters to convert organics to biogas, which can be used to generate electricity and heat or to be further refined into renewable natural gas. The nutrient-rich solid and liquid remnants of the anaerobic digestion that takes place in these biodigesters are referred to as digestate, as we heard from the minister. Because of the other changes proposed in this act, this digestate would also become an option farmers could use to fertilize their fields and improve soil health.

According to Statistics Canada, Alberta's agriculture sector already leads the country when it comes to total cash farm receipts. By passing Bill 44, this Legislature would further empower our province's farm operators and agriprocessors by giving them additional revenue options. The ability to convert waste organics to renewable natural gas and electricity also presents our province with an opportunity to become a leader in renewable energy. This regulatory shift would encourage investment into the emerging biogas sector, meaning more jobs and more prosperity for Alberta, particularly in rural areas.

Madam Speaker, our government was elected by Albertans, with a mandate to create a stronger and more resilient economy. Through Bill 44 we would not only strengthen our agricultural sector but also

diversify the sector, making our economy even more dynamic. I'd like to thank the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation for his work in helping to craft a bill that I can be excited to tell my constituents about.

It was President Dwight D. Eisenhower who once said, "Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field." I think the minister deserves this Chamber's appreciation for crafting legislation that isn't out of touch but is genuinely grounded in the modern reality of agriculture in Alberta. If passed, Bill 44 will meet the evolving needs of an industry that has long been a cornerstone of our province's identity and prosperity, and that is why I am proud to support it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Glad that you remember the name of the constituency. It does border yours in Airdrie-East.

Yeah. I'm happy to rise and chat about Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025. We have heard from the minister, from a couple of members already talking about the benefits of biodigesters and the benefits of this act, and I will agree. I will also say that I'm happy to see legislation that is providing opportunity for economic growth and prosperity, that is providing opportunity for the agricultural industry, which is one of the most important industries that we have in Alberta.

We've already heard about some of the benefits that we can achieve from biodigesters. We know that biodigesters can help with methane reduction, which we know actually has more intense and profound immediate impacts on climate change than carbon does. We know that biodigesters, through their construction, maintenance, and operation, will have the opportunity to create jobs.

We know that biodigesters are potentially going to impact land use and reduce the need for landfills or reduce the strain on municipal landfills. I think, particularly around urban areas in Alberta, we're quite concerned about the space of landfills, but even, obviously, across rural Alberta municipal landfills, you know, are expensive and sometimes challenging to operate.

We know that biodigesters have the potential to generate power and heat, which can have ancillary uses. And we know that after having gone through a biodigester, we still have materials that can be used for composting, so there's still life beyond the biodigester to continue to support the agricultural industry.

My colleague from Edmonton-Manning I think did an excellent job of pointing out that as we go down this path, we do need to be listening to communities and that we need to address the concerns of local communities any time that we're going through a review process for industrial facilities, including building a new biodigester. We need to listen to the concerns of the community and respect the concerns of the community whenever we're evaluating an industrial project, including a biodigester.

Biodigesters could be potentially an incredibly important component of agriculture in Alberta. Again, agriculture is one of the largest industries in Alberta. This includes primary production, but it also includes a number of value-added activities and adjacent activities and manufacturing. We know that agriculture generates exports for Alberta. We know that agriculture creates jobs. We know that it supports extensive adjacent support industries, including mechanical services, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and logistics. We know that agriculture builds communities in every corner of this province and that a healthy, prosperous agriculture industry in Alberta is critical for the future success of rural communities across Alberta and agriculture. Yeah.

It provides opportunities in every corner of this province, in urban municipalities and rural municipalities.

You know, we can take a moment to note that Alberta is, in fact, home to some of the northernmost productive agricultural areas in the entire world. We have communities like La Crête, in the far northwest corner of this province, that is primarily an agricultural community. La Crête is one of the fastest growing rural communities in Alberta, so we can see how a successful, prosperous agricultural industry can help our communities grow.

3:50

We know that Lethbridge has proven that a community can experience healthy growth and achieve economic stability through agriculture. This is a mid-sized city in this province that – when other larger municipalities in this province have been experiencing some pretty extreme, you know, volatilities from oil and gas, Lethbridge has kind of weathered some of those storms because they're based and built on agriculture.

Madam Speaker, we know that our agricultural producers are facing challenges and incredible uncertainty. While we can stand today specifically talking about Bill 44 and biodigesters, I think we need to address in this House the uncertainty that our agricultural producers are facing, that our agrivalue businesses and manufacturing businesses are facing. The tariff war is now global. Nobody in this House really knows what's going to happen this afternoon, this evening, or tomorrow morning when we wake up. The agricultural industry in Alberta is highly export dependent, and we should be looking to initiatives. This government should be looking to provide certainty to our producers. I think it's important that, in addition to talking about biodigesters, we need to look to all opportunities in agriculture and how we're providing certainty to our producers in this time of incredible uncertainty.

We know that agriculture generates billions in revenue and in exports, that most of those exports, the lion's share, probably half, go to the United States, but China, Japan, and the United Kingdom are also important destinations. There are a number of other emerging potential markets for Alberta's agricultural products, including Indonesia, India, Europe, and Africa.

The role of biodigesters actually have a role to play in food security. We should be talking about food security. It's not that long ago that we experienced a global pandemic, and that put our global food supply chains at risk. It resulted in increased prices and made people worry about where their food comes from. Today we're facing a global trade war that could also be putting those same food supply chains at risk, and we should be thinking about that from the perspective of how it creates opportunities right here in Alberta.

There is a growing trend that could be connected to facilitating biodigesters across Alberta. Vertical farming and greenhouse growing has been expanding in Alberta. It's generating employment, advancing technology, strengthening supply chains, giving us access to locally grown, fresh, healthy food. That's a good thing, Madam Speaker. We should be looking at how all of the pieces in the system are working together to facilitate those opportunities. In fact, these facilities could be located adjacent or near to biodigesters and taking advantage of the, let's say, by-products of a biodigester, including renewable, low-carbon heat and power, which is needed by vertical farms and greenhouses. This could potentially lower costs and reduce the carbon impacts of vertical farming.

We should also take note of vertical farming and greenhouses since we also consistently in this House frequently, maybe almost on a daily basis, talk about surface water and water management. As we're thinking about vegetables and leafy greens, vertical

farming and greenhouses vastly reduce the consumption of water in growing those vegetables and leafy greens.

This bill doesn't support the growth and development of agriculture more broadly. This bill is very helpful for developing and fostering an industry that we should be looking at. Again, my friend from Edmonton-Manning pointed out that Alberta and Canada are kind of behind the rest of the world when it comes to biodigesters. We're also a little bit behind the rest of the world when we think about all of the opportunities that lay before us in agriculture.

Madam Speaker, when I was VP of strategy at Calgary Economic Development and working on developing the economic strategy for Calgary, I had the incredible opportunity to be meeting with agricultural stakeholders and producers, both near and far, from Calgary and across this province. In fact, at CED we had a steering committee providing us advice on the opportunities in agriculture for Calgary and for southern Alberta. Admittedly, that was a while ago. Of course, it's important for us to stay abreast and afresh of what is happening in the industry now.

Just over a month ago I had the opportunity to attend an event hosted by the current strategy team at Calgary Economic Development, and they identified some themes and trends for us to pay attention to, some opportunities here in Alberta that, while we don't see it here in Bill 44, we should be thinking about including in future bills that are supporting the growth of agriculture in Alberta. One of those trends is that agriculture is now happening in unconventional spaces. It's more local. It's happening in underutilized buildings. It's happening in small towns. It's happening in cities. This is resulting in the production of a greater diversity of crops and food for us here in Alberta.

We can also think about kind of, like, those unconventional spaces might put agriculture next to some unconventional activities that we don't normally think of as those two things happening together. Cryptomining is happening in Alberta. Cryptomining is incredibly energy intense, and cryptomining generates heat. You can put small-scale cryptomining in a greenhouse or a vertical farm, generating the heat needed by those facilities to help with the growth of their crops.

Another trend that we're experiencing is autonomous agriculture. There is agriculture – absolutely, everybody needs to be aware of the fact that agriculture is probably one of the most technologically advanced industries in Alberta, and they are adapting to new technologies every day. This has the opportunity to grow adjacent industries right here in Alberta, including robotics, drones, and artificial intelligence. While we're, again, talking about Bill 44 and biodigesters today, we should be and, hopefully, we will see some future bills in this House that are supporting the growth and development of robotics, drones, AI, not A1 but AI, that could be helping to also grow and develop agriculture in this province. Precision agriculture is fast becoming one of the most important aspects of agriculture here in Alberta and around the world.

Genetic engineering is another trend that we should be paying attention to or that has been ongoing for a long time and, in fact, has already got a really strong foothold right here in Alberta. The University of Calgary, without even having a department for agriculture, conducts more ag-related research than any other postsecondary institution in this country, and a lot of that research is associated with crop development, seed development, and genetic engineering. Calgary is also Canada's home to the world's leading research firms when it comes to seed development and bioengineering.

Again, Bill 44 today; I can hope for bills in the future that are going to help us, you know, move towards these other opportunities. There's a biorevolution happening in agriculture that

includes fuel and biofuels and jets fuels but also materials, including in advanced manufacturing and construction, also adjacent and ancillary industries that could grow up right here in Alberta and be attached to ag and in some way be facilitated by those biodigesters that we're talking about today.

You know, I'll circle back and say, yeah, I think the biodigester is a good thing. I'm glad that this bill is coming forward. I'm glad that this is something that Alberta is moving forward on. But we still have a lot of work to do for agriculture in Alberta to achieve its true full potential, growing new trade relationships, looking at ancillary industries, looking at trends in agriculture, striving towards access to capital, facilitating technology. There is so much that we could be doing here in Alberta, Madam Speaker. For that, thanks for Bill 44. I hope to see a lot more in the future.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Bill 44 and support of the proposed amendments to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. I think the amendments that are coming forward are very practical, very common-sense kind of amendments that will help to grow and diversify our already very innovative agricultural industry here in Alberta. I want to thank the minister for bringing forth this bill. It will help to deliver real benefits, I believe, in the rural communities that I represent for the farmers and ranchers and agriprocessors, not only in my constituency but right throughout Alberta.

This bill will also help to continue to promote the industry, help it to evolve and grow and to continue to be very innovative and lead in the agricultural aspects in the years ahead. I believe that Alberta's agricultural industry has been a cornerstone of our economy for many, many years. For as long as Alberta has been a province, agriculture has been a cornerstone. Maybe we could even consider it the backbone of our economy in providing for many of our families and our communities in rural Alberta but also in the agriprocessing providing for many of the families that are in smaller towns, even in the cities with the further processing of agricultural commodities.

As our economy continues to evolve, so do our farming practices continue to evolve. The farming practices today are very different from the farming practices of when I was a young man 50 years ago and even today are different than what we saw 10 years ago. We continue to see improvements. We continue to see the ability for the ag industry to provide more value from the basic commodities that we grow and find many different alternative streams of revenue and also efficiencies that we see through amendments like what we're seeing forward here in Bill 44, in the AOPAA, that will provide a reduction to red tape, provide support for environmental stewardship, and create job-creating investments in Alberta. These amendments and the growth that they can trigger in our biogas industry can help reduce waste, provide clarity around organic material management, and allow Alberta producers to use the digestate and other by-products from biogas production to improve their soil, help to grow their crops, provide nutrients for their crops.

But I think one of the things that Bill 44 is trying to ensure is that it provides certainty. The biogas industry is a growing industry, but it needs certainty in order for it to continue to grow and to continue to operate in Alberta. By essentially legislating what had previously been governed by a memorandum of understanding between Agriculture and Irrigation and Environment and Protected Areas and the NRCB, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, we give businesses the confidence to invest and expand. Alberta's livestock-

rich landscape gives us a competitive advantage, and these updates ensure we remain an attractive destination for investment in the biogas infrastructure.

Farmers and ranchers produce over 3 million tonnes of organic waste every year on their operations, mostly from livestock manure but also from food processing. The changes that are being put forward in Bill 44 provide clarity on how producers can now store compost and apply organic waste and digestate to the land as a soil amendment. These materials supplement synthetic fertilizers and have proven to boost crop production and improve soil health.

One thing that I have experienced as a producer of crops over the years is that the evolution of how we manage the soil and manage the inputs continues. Over my lifetime I've seen improvements in our soil health. Less tillage, more focus on efficient ways of production have given us soil benefits that we not necessarily even understood before we started to move in the direction of reduced tillage and the like. Over my lifespan I've seen improvements in soil health, in soil till, and I'm very hopeful that we continue to improve and that we are able to hand down the ability for the next generations to continue to grow food in a very efficient manner and continue to feed families from right across the entire globe.

The organic waste can now be directed to biodigesters, which convert it into biogas for electricity, heat, renewable natural gas, producing other by-products, but the primary by-product, digestate, can be used as a nutrient and soil amendment product. And these biogas facilities not only reduce environmental impact and odour, but they also capture methane and support Alberta's energy independence.

I'm always interested in hearing from industry and their feedback on the proposed amendments within legislation that is introduced. I read a quote from the Alberta Beef Producers vice-chair, Kent Holowath: "Investing in biodigesters is a win-win for both cattle feeders and the environment. These systems allow us to capture methane, reduce our environmental footprint, and turn waste into renewable energy. Biodigesters help us improve efficiency, reduce odour, and contribute to Alberta's energy independence. As cattle feeders we're committed to responsible resource management and see biodigesters as a critical tool for advancing sustainability in our industry." I guess that's the part that gives me great pleasure in bringing forth legislation such as this, when industry can see the benefits of it and come alongside and recognize that in the past there was a certain level of uncertainty and that this legislation can bring more certainty into the decisions around investing in the biogas industry. I think this is a win-win, as the vice-chair of the Beef Producers had said.

That's why these changes matter. Madam Speaker, our producers have told us they need economical and efficient ways to manage organic waste, and this bill is a direct response to that request. It supports innovation, reduces dependence on synthetic fertilizers, and gives our producers greater control over their operations. As the cattle feeders and other stakeholders have said, this is a win-win for agriculture and the environment, and I am proud to support Bill 44 as we move forward. I believe the intent of the bill is very positive in that we can look forward to improvements and growth in the biogas industry as the investors see the certainty that they can recognize in Bill 44 as they move forward.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 44.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:10

Bill 49
Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes
Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate April 10: Mr. Amery]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much. I rise to speak to Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Two issues that I think are really important to speak to are both the idea of the services that will be provided and the costs that will be incurred. The minister has claimed that a provincial police force will offer better service at a lower cost. That is something that the UCP like to claim about a lot of the changes that they're making, yet they fail to deliver.

Let's talk about some examples. What is their record? Why should we believe that it will be different with this bill? There are examples of why we cannot trust that this government can deliver on better services and lower cost. When they offer to build a completely separate private police force, how do we trust that?

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Well, first, in the health care system, where we had similar promises, we have the example of DynaLife. Did Albertans get better service? I think it is unanimously agreed that the answer to that is no. When we think about the services, people had an inability to even get appointments to get the lab work done that they needed. We had people that were arriving hours before labs opened so that they could get in line and found that there's already a lineup forming for the lab work that needed to be done same day or urgently. There was a need for already overburdened physicians to call and make special arrangements for their patients to get urgent lab work because there was no other way they could get done what didn't need to be done for the next many weeks, and we had patients going to our overburdened emergency departments to get lab tests done.

What will this translate into for a police service? Will we have people waiting days, weeks for the services they need? Will there need to be an intermediary that helps them when they need to get the police involved? If we go back to DynaLife, we also had to deal with errors and delays in getting results out. How will this play out in a police force? Throat swabs and other tests for infections that had to be turned around within 24 hours were taking days to report, and then they often went to the wrong physician. How will this show up in a police force? Will people have to wait days for investigators or police to show up, and then maybe they'll go to a neighbour and not to the right place?

We have to think about processes and procedures that develop over time and that have been well evolved with the RCMP. Many of these procedures, processes, rules develop because a problem arises. Does that mean that if Alberta develops an independent police force, we have to start back at the beginning and develop everything and come up against all of these same problems once again and then look into them and say, "Oh, you know, we should have known that before; that was an issue"? Will people have to die to get there?

Now let's talk about this idea of saving money. Did that happen with DynaLife? Not only did this government waste hundreds of millions of dollars for a very shoddy service, but they eventually bought DynaLife for another \$100 million, and it was already bankrupt at the time. There should have been some discount available for that. What will it be for a new police force? I am

hoping that this government can give us some good examples of where we can have confidence that they actually know how to provide a good service and how they're planning to save us money.

We also have the example of the funding of the private surgery clinics. The original argument was that private surgical clinics – yes; publicly paid, so we're spending our tax dollars here – could crank through a higher volume of procedures. We also heard that there was no capacity within our public hospitals. We then heard that one of the goals was that these could be staffed with cheaper non-union staff. Well, there are problems with all of this. Everyone who studies health care systems knows that while you can provide quicker and efficient service when you pull together services that are provided in a high volume, by taking it outside of your regular system, you're not going to be able to integrate it in with everything else that needs to happen. And we knew that these new private surgical clinics will draw health care providers from our public system when one of the biggest problems we face in our public system is a lack of qualified providers.

Of course, the people that were setting up and running these clinics knew that one of the problems was going to be this limited resource, so they built it into their contracts that they would get preferential access to, for example, anaesthesiologists or that there would be a guaranteed number of procedures that had to be paid for anyway. This was being covered off by the people that knew what the problems were going to be.

These private surgical centres have delivered as predicted on pulling staff out of our public hospitals, and we have seen the consequence that we have more surgeries being done on the set things that are done, on the population that have low risk, low complications. But other surgeries are climbing. Nine of 11 other types of surgeries that are followed have increasing wait-lists, and these are often very critical surgeries. We know that even within the problems that are dealt with in their simplest form in these chartered surgical facilities, the wait-lists for those that have more complex needs are growing.

We have certainly seen that the access to anaesthesiologists has been limiting our ability within our public system because they're being sopped up by the private clinics, both by contract and also because they can make a lot more money doing a lot more cases and shorter cases and not needing to do the call and provide the other complex services. So we're seeing problems. How is this going to translate into our police services? Are we going to see a shift in what actually gets looked after and where it gets looked after?

4:20

We have seen our wait-lists grow. In the past the process was that if there weren't enough anaesthesiologists or another resource to provide all the services that were needed, the team would look at what was most critical and do that. But when there's a contract that means that you have to first do the private surgeries, then that's going to get dealt with. How is this going to impact our police services? Those things were all completely predictable.

Anyone who studied health care knew that we were going to have problems with what got delivered, and it was also predicted that costs were going to be going up. It's pretty obvious that when you start a service, you offer it at a lower price, but as you develop a monopoly on that service and the public system can't handle it anymore, prices go up. So how is that going to happen with the policing services?

We now have limited capacity in our hospitals because the capacity has been built out in these private centres. Indeed, we've seen that the costs have risen. More money is needing to go to these centres. Higher price contracts are being signed off by government

than what is even available in our private centres. This is not going the way we need it to.

What is going to happen with regard to our safety and security? Will we be doing bailouts of this police service like we're having to see with some of the private surgical centres? Insanity is really doing the same thing over and over again, and it really appears that we're going in that direction. Do we want to put our safety in the hands of a separate organization where part of the stated goal is to actually save us money? I'm not sure that that is possible the way it's being set up. I don't have confidence in this government that they can really provide better services for less money because that has not been what we're seeing. We're getting worse and worse service, and we're not saving any money.

Let's look at how private corporations might save us some costs. Well, one of the ways is to stop providing services where things cost more. Is that going to happen with regard to policing? This is going to affect rural Alberta much more than any of our municipalities. Do they have high-speed Internet? Well, you know, it costs more there. Do they have good bus service? No. It costs more, so the private sector pulls out. Will the same thing happen as we move to policing in this way? Do rural Albertans trust this government not to cut them out of police services because they cost too much? Rural Albertans deserve genuine solutions to their safety concerns, not bureaucratic, expensive experiments.

This plan is forcing through massive police restructuring that nobody in Alberta asked for or wants. Eighty-six per cent of Albertans want to retain the RCMP, and 84 per cent believe Alberta has far more pressing priorities than creating a new police force.

Rural communities are especially concerned about response times and local knowledge, but this bill fails to address these. This bill could force massive unpredictable financial obligations onto local governments. What is the answer to that? Instead of wasting hundreds of millions of dollars on bureaucratic restructuring, we should invest in critical services like front-line policing resources, crime prevention, mental health supports.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand and speak a little bit about Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. For the most part my remarks, not unlike those of my colleagues, will have to do primarily with the establishment of that new Crown corporation, which, in the minister's words, is intended to enhance the delivery of policing in Alberta through amendments to the Police Act, namely the independent agency police service. Certainly, the minister notes that sheriffs have been asking for better. He says that sheriffs have been asking for more enhanced training, that they require better pay, and given their scope of practice that additional funding is required, and that this bill, Bill 49, provides some clarity on that governance and operational framework, some oversight mechanisms, and that the passage of the bill will allow municipalities who so desire to begin conversations with whoever will end up being the new chief of the independent agency police service, or IAPS. We do love our acronyms.

Of course, it is true and no one here in this House would ever dispute, Mr. Speaker, that every single Albertan deserves to and must feel safe and supported. It does not and should not matter if they live in Edmonton, Calgary, or where some of my relatives live, in central Alberta, in Innisfail, Rimbey, Sylvan Lake. As my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre noted last week, the right to safety, though, is not a partisan issue. All Albertans are indeed entitled to community safety, those support services, and an

effective addressing of crime. There should be not just equality but equity as much as possible built into all of that in the delivery of those services, particularly since we know there exists right now disparity throughout this province.

It is a problem, of course, that is also currently facing our health system, as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity was just noting. One can think very, very quickly of the number of EMS shifts that go unfilled throughout the province, the number of ERs that are closed all the time, which means, of course, that someone is called to that emergency from a location that might be hours away, which also means that there's a bit of a domino effect because someone in their home community is now not going to be served because they are serving someone else in another community. Albertans are now driving hours to receive services when those ERs are closed.

It's a problem that exists for all sectors of our first responders, and it's a problem that absolutely we as legislators should and must grapple with. But the issue is how best to grapple with it, and since all Albertans deserve safety and support and appropriate access to that safety and support, the question would be, then: why does this UCP government continue to push forward a plan that so many communities have already rejected and that so many Albertans have already said no to?

If we look at what Albertans have already said more than once – and this is, of course, contrary to the minister's assertion that Albertans no longer support the RCMP and therefore are demanding this new police force. The Rural Municipalities of Alberta association has reaffirmed their position. Their position in some ways is in opposition to the plan, but mostly it's honestly a cry for more information and a cry for better and more comprehensive consultation. They've asked for that consultation. They asked for it a few months ago, they've asked for it recently, and they asked for it a few years ago in the January '22 APPS transition study, the engagement guide for RMA members. It's astonishing to me that they still have yet to find those answers, that they are still not being listened to, that they are still not being respected considering these are the folks to whom this new agency will presumably be offering service.

4:30

Some of the RMA's top priorities remain exactly the same as they were three years ago; no one will be surprised. They do say that they're supportive of any measures that support enhanced safety in communities but that changes should only be made after careful consideration and engagement with municipalities. They say that enhanced police capacity is, of course, beneficial to rural communities but only if supported by proper governance and local input, and that that municipality should not be required to incur additional costs, which goes to my colleague's comments earlier today. They are concerned that the creation of a provincial police force should not take place unless a detailed feasibility study proves that such an approach will reduce provincial municipal policing costs and enhance service levels across the province. They asked for this three years ago, Mr. Speaker. In late 2021 they note that the government of Alberta released three reports that outlined a potential transition to a provincial police service. They, in fact, themselves, support their members by creating reports that help their members understand those potential impacts.

In 2022 the government released an additional implementation report, yet despite those additional reports it's still unclear how that number was arrived at, which was that each detachment should have a minimum of 10 officers. In other words, Mr. Speaker, they still don't have the information that they have been requesting, not just for a week or a couple of weeks or a couple of months; this is now a years-long process. I know that I've said this before: I don't

understand why consultation is so hard. When you consult, you should be consulting with as many people as you can. We have members across the aisle who say over and over and over that it is in fact a duty to consult, and it's the duty to consult people that you don't always agree with, but that, honestly, doesn't seem to be happening, particularly in this case.

RMA then and now have asked for a detailed cost breakdown. As responsible trustees of the public's money, of course, they did. They'd want to have at the very least a heads-up about how much their bottom line might be changing on behalf of their own communities and their own constituents. It truly does not appear that the minister has done adequate consultation. While I have absolutely no doubt that he has in fact spoken with about 35 communities – that was the number he provided last week – that are interested in having conversations moving forward as to whether or not the new IAPS is appropriate for their community and their municipality, but circling back to that basic point of both individual and community safety, which is the thing that lies at the heart of all this, if a municipality or region is looking for a different approach, of course, it's appropriate to voice and discuss concerns that exist, except decisions made by the UCP government should be and simply must be ones that genuinely serve Albertans, not the whims of members, not political agendas.

The idea is not to create, in fact, Mr. Speaker, additional chaos for those folks who serve their local communities with honour. As well, it is certainly not to create additional chaos for those who serve their local communities as elected officials or staff, and Alberta's municipalities, regions, and all Albertans themselves deserve and should expect both local flexibility and local input, particularly when it's something this important, that will, as other folks have talked about, completely change the way in which policing is delivered in this province. That, of course, is the way in which a responsible government looks to solve problems, particularly when those problems mean that someone needs help right now. We all want that 911 call to be answered. Again, all Albertans deserve to feel safe in their home, but, again, and I know I've said this before, and I'll probably be saying it many more times in this House, it's astonishing to me that the lessons appear not to have been learned from previous experiences.

The RMA said the same thing when Bill 11 was brought before us. The RMA said the same thing years ago with the MacKinnon report. Why must this group, why must Albertans continue to ask for the most basic of things: information, clarity, a depth of discussion. How can this bill be truly reflective of the majority of communities and Albertans if those questions have not been answered? Instead, we hear that community leaders were taken aback; they weren't expecting this bill; they were shocked by the introduction, and I would assume that if consultations were ongoing, there wouldn't be any shock. I think about, you know, whenever the report cards would come along in school, we were always told as teachers: make sure there are no surprises for parents or for kids. The idea was to have those ongoing conversations, those ongoing feedback conversations. Yet this doesn't seem to be what's appearing.

This lack of respect and lack of collaboration rather belies the minister's contention that it's all about providing choice for municipalities. It seems to me that the only choice that matters is the government's choice. It's not choice for municipalities; it's not choice for Albertans. It's just choice for the government.

We know that 86 per cent of Albertans want to retain the RCMP, 84 per cent of Albertans believe that the province and this UCP government should be focused on other things, and certainly that's the case in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. We've got health care issues to deal with. We have a health care crisis. We have a

government that's embroiled in corrupt care, chaos, and the need for a public inquiry. We've got ballooning classrooms in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview as well as around the province. We've got Albertans that are right now worried about their jobs and whether or not their jobs are going to be there in a matter of weeks, much less months. Yet we haven't heard what the plan is to protect those jobs, particularly if what we expect to happen in terms of challenging times actually happens.

Without knowing what the department has come up with in terms of cost, we can look to a report that came out in 2021, but of course we can't really look at that report because in the interim inflation happened. It needs to at least be revised upward by 10, 15 – I don't know – 20 per cent, so those numbers cannot be relied upon to be the actual cost that this government is going to be carrying as we go forward. At that time they estimated the cost for their transition to be somewhere in the region of \$366 million and that that transition would also result in a loss of revenue to the province of about \$1.02 billion over six years. That's a staggering impact to the province's bottom line. Again, that was now four years ago. While that report didn't provide recommendations as to whether or not an APP should actually happen because that wasn't part of their frame of reference, what they also did mention was, of course, that because their terms of reference were so narrow, they didn't consult widely with stakeholders because that wasn't what they were supposed to do. But they also recommended that more engagement happen, engagement that, from what it appears, we have heard has not in fact happened.

They also identified a need for further detailed study across a number of areas to validate the initial stakeholder engagement undertaken, and they also talked about a focus on community policing and the community policing workforce. They talked of collaboration. But, again, this bill doesn't answer those questions either. So even in that five years long ago report there was an understanding that more information was needed, that stakeholder engagement needed to be extended, that community needed to be directly involved every step of the way, and that there needed to be, in fact, a focus on community and on collaboration. They mentioned that a number of times through the report, yet this government has decided to go ahead anyway, no matter what the RMA and its membership say, no matter what Albertans are saying.

Before I go on, I do want to mention something – I'm going to say that it stayed with me in the last week – and it's the issue of unions and the pillorying of unions. In his remarks the other day the minister had a number of things to say about unions, in particular the National Police Federation, which is, in their own words, the certified bargaining agent for over 20,000 regular members and reservists in the RCMP, with approximately 3,500 of those folks serving in Alberta communities. We heard comments from the minister about a week ago, saying things like: "members opposite along with their friends in the union," costs will increase "due to RCMP wage negotiations," "failure of the unions in Ottawa," "the union is going to want you to believe," "it is the fault of the union." I'm here to tell you it's not the fault of the union. The union is doing its job, advocating for its members. That's what unions do.

Unions who represent police service members – and it wasn't so long ago that police service members didn't have unions representing them – like every other union out there, are about making life better for everyone. In fact, history shows us and tells us definitively that when there are strong unions to set a pay standard, non-union employers inevitably will follow. Unions, in fact, provide examples of what a good benefits and leave package can look like. It's unions here in this country, for instance, that pave the way for maternity leave so that women like my mother, who was fired when she was pregnant with me just because she was

pregnant, would no longer be fired. They could simply go on a leave.

4:40

There is inherent value in unions, and I really do wish folks across the aisle would begin to understand that. There is better pay, reduced wage gaps, particularly for women, as I just alluded to, as well as for those folks new to this country. Jobs come with benefits that one can depend upon, so that if you're sick, you don't have to fudge things; so that if you're sick, you can be home and be sick and then get better and then return to work because you don't have to worry about not getting paid.

Union jobs come with pensions. No one should go into retirement worried that they are going to be living in abject poverty. No one should. A "pension" is not a bad word; "pension" is a good word. The advent of unions brought with them the advent of pensions, safer workplaces, the value of collective bargaining. Every year thousands of workers join unions.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in support of Bill 49. It's an important step towards addressing Alberta's evolving public safety needs. The rapid changes within our communities have warranted changes to our systems to help serve Albertans better. This legislation strikes the right balance between boldness and practicality in improving policing across the province and ensuring we keep all Albertans safe while allowing local communities greater discretion to make decisions that work best for their unique needs.

This bill values local control over safety. Although Alberta's RCMP will remain the official provincial police service, this legislation provides an innovative choice for municipalities. Bill 49 will establish a new independent policing agency, providing municipalities throughout the province with more options to select the policing model that best meets their unique needs. This is a key provision of the bill. It gives municipalities greater say over their local policing priorities.

The widely accepted and lauded approach will mean that local authorities will be able to partner with a policing service that is equipped to understand and react to the distinctive obstacles that they encounter, with public safety at the forefront. For those areas where the RCMP may not be the most suitable fit for the particular needs of a community, this new police service model will provide a vital and missing link.

The police service independent agency does not merely build on the RCMP model; it fortifies Alberta's whole policing structure. The bill means that the new agency will not only complement existing police services across the province but will ensure better co-ordination between different kinds of policing bodies. The RCMP, Indigenous police services, municipal police, and now this independent agency will work hand in hand to ensure that our communities are safe. The goal of Bill 49 is to allow law enforcement agencies to function more efficiently and responsively across Alberta through improved co-operation between these agencies.

One of the main ways Bill 49 changes the game is with its provision for local civilian committees that can be established in municipalities. These committees will empower municipalities to establish their own priorities around policing and around public safety so that the specific needs of each community can be heard and addressed. This is a model that is already serving municipalities policed by the RCMP very well, and we will see it expanded under

this bill to municipalities that choose to contract with the new police service. By empowering local citizens to have a say in the decisions that affect their safety, we're building a more responsive, accountable, and transparent policing system.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In addition, by establishing a Crown corporation to run this new police service, Bill 49 guarantees that the agency will be governed by an independent corporate board insulated from political interference. This governance model is essential for preserving the integrity of the service and for guaranteeing its operation in a transparent and effective manner by setting clear lines of authority for the government, civilian oversight bodies, and the police service itself. The service is guaranteed to act with the highest standards of professionalism and independence.

We also need to look at what this new agency will do for our rural and remote communities. Those areas, which law enforcement often leaves underserved and not by choice, are now offered more access to police services and the ability to come up with strategies that meet their needs. They have struggled with delayed response times and limited resources for far too long. This bill fills that void by creating a new agency that will provide these regions with high-quality services.

As we consider this bill, we need to keep in mind how important safety and security are to the lives of all Albertans. Investigating law enforcement is about much more than making arrests; it's about protecting families, providing a feeling of safety so that our communities can flourish. Bill 49 is about ensuring that we have the best possible police services in place to serve Albertans now and in the future.

This new police agency is a valuable addition to Alberta's existing policing framework and provides additional capacity. This is not about replacing what is there but about reinforcing and diversifying our model so that it better serves the needs of Alberta today. We are giving municipalities more flexibility to choose the right style of local policing. This will help communities throughout the province to access what they need to meet public safety challenges of the 21st century so much more easily.

I fully support Bill 49. It's a practical and forward-looking answer to Alberta's changing public safety requirements. It empowers local communities. It improves co-operation among police services and strengthens our overall policing model. This legislation will create safer communities and strengthen the partnership between local governments and police departments. I call on all members of this House to support this bill and to work with me for a safer, stronger Alberta for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to add my voice to the debate on Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. I think the reason that we're here today debating this bill goes back some years, and it goes back to the Fair Deal Panel's report that was commissioned, of course, by the Premier at the time, Premier Kenney, and completed in 2020. You know, that report certainly had many recommendations to the Conservative government that would make Alberta an outlier in Canada, and a lot of them were very bad recommendations. It comes to mind that one of the recommendations was to move out of the Canada pension plan and create an Alberta pension plan, and of course we know that the Canada pension plan is one of the top pension plans in the world. It is a very stable source for pensions for Albertans and all Canadians.

Of course, this is a misguided, I would say, recommendation by this panel, and it kind of falls into line with their misguided recommendation to also get rid of the RCMP, which this bill is supporting, and to create an Alberta provincial police force. Again, it's that same kind of strange recommendation that the UCP government seems to want to follow. I certainly, along with my colleagues on this side of the House, do not support this legislation. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Hon. members, I'd just like to remind you that if you're having private conversations, please feel free to do so in either one of the lounges or the peace lounge.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is the one with the call.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is kind of the origin, I would say, of moving forward with this legislation all these years later. Certainly, in 2023 when the Premier, who continues to be the Premier, did say before the election that her government would not go ahead with the provincial police for Alberta – but that was before the election – perhaps she was looking at some of the polling. We know that Pollara did a poll that 86 per cent of Albertans didn't want to change from the RCMP as the provider of policing through, you know, most of Alberta. Of course, that was before the election, and after the election the Premier is now revisiting this. We saw the precursor to Bill 49 last year in the Public Safety Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, which was the precursor and also advocating for a provincial police force.

4:50

Of course, what this bill does is create a Crown corporation for a provincial police service. We know that they would move sheriffs to this provincial police service. That's something that the minister has said himself. Surprisingly, but perhaps not so surprisingly, the police service did not even hear from the government, hear from the UCP regarding this. There was no consultation with the sheriffs association, which I think is a fundamental aspect of being a good government, that you actually do consult with people impacted by legislation that you bring into place. I think that this is obviously a poor carrying out of creation of legislation, and I think, justifiably, the sheriffs are quite concerned about this transition and feel they should, and rightly so, have been consulted on it.

It's not just the sheriffs who have concern. The National Police Federation also has a concern, and I think that that is incumbent on the government, again, to be consulting with these bodies that do speak for the police across Canada. Brian Sauvé, the president and CEO, presented several concerns about the Alberta government pushing ahead with this provincial police model. He indicated that he says that it's extremely costly. There's no clear financial plan. You know, it's kind of unproven. We don't really know much about it. Again, no consultation, no transparency. These are significant issues, I would say.

The AUPE also, who represents the sheriffs, you know, is asking the government: "How about doing something that's really going to make a difference? How about creating the conditions to recruit and retain sheriffs?" That's the issue. We don't have enough, and we need to make sure that people are supported and want to stay in that position so that they can do the work that's needed. This is very important work. It is the protection of Albertans all across our province, yet it seems like the government doesn't really see these vital voices, these people who are impacted by the legislation, not being included in that consultation.

I just recommend the government to – it's never too late. They should obviously listen to those voices and make sure that they take

into consideration the impact on Albertans and these organizations that do represent sheriffs, for example, as, you know, 600 of them: their jobs will be much, much different. It's out of respect, I think, that a government would absolutely do that.

Of course, the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, RMA: you know, they too are raising some red flags about this legislation. They say there's really nothing in Budget 2025, no info. What's the cost of transition? What are the timelines? How will the new police service work with the existing RCMP? What's going to be the police funding model? How is that going to be impacted? The Provincial Police Advisory Board: how is that going to be impacted? Certainly, the RMA is wise to be concerned about this legislation as it may force massive, unpredictable financial obligations onto local governments.

I mean, it's a significant shift with a lot of things unknown, and passing this legislation could mean a very significant financial burden on municipalities. Where are the feasibility studies? What about all the loss of the federal subsidies? You know, Alberta will be now doing it on their own. How are they going to split the costs between the province and municipal governments? There are so many concerns regarding this legislation that the UCP should for sure be talking to stakeholders, people impacted by this legislation to ensure that Albertans are supported and kept safe.

I just want to say – I mean, some of my colleagues have already said this, but I want to add my voice – that the UCP seems to have a penchant for administrative changes that they think will magically fix situations, but oftentimes, certainly in my 10-year history in this House, a lot of their policy suggestions or legislative changes just don't work. They don't work.

There's some kind of naiveness about the legislation they're putting forward, but I mean a significant example of that is in our health care system. Since the UCP was elected in 2019, it's just been chaos in that sector, you know, firing CEOs, firing whole boards. They have now created these four pillars. Or is it six? That keeps changing. They've moved continuing care and home care, which is my shadow ministry, out of Health altogether into Seniors, Community and Social Services, but nothing has changed. In fact, things are probably worse because nobody knows what's going on. And that's exactly what's happening here. Nobody knows what's going on. The government needs to realize that they need to work with people so that the best outcomes can happen, and that's not happening with this legislation. There are so many unknowns.

I just would recommend to the government that instead of doing all this restructuring and creating chaos, wasting millions of dollars in this process, what about investing in front-line police resources? What about investing in crime prevention programs or mental health support or addictions services or community safety initiatives?

You know, on Friday in my constituency office I had a meeting with Neighbourhood Watch. This is a local organization that supports local communities to support people to be safe in their communities, working a lot with seniors, which, of course, is my shadow ministry. We know that there are huge issues with fraud, and we want to make sure that seniors can age well in our communities. But guess what? Their funding has been cut completely. They had a grant from Seniors, Community and Social Services for many years. It was like a small grant, \$60,000. Well, this year they got nothing. Why isn't the government investing in those kind of preventative programs that really do help Albertans?

Of course, we know that when people are well, when people have the supports they need, affordable housing, mental health supports – we heard earlier today that a new bill was being presented. It's the UCP's new panacea on helping people with mental health and addiction issues. But guess what? People right now, without being

forced into treatment for addiction issues, can't get into treatment even if they want to. It's not about forcing anybody into anything and, you know, taking away their human rights, which is unnecessary unless it's an extreme case of harm to self or others, but actually having enough beds and supports for people so that they can receive treatment, actually, when they want to. Many people would benefit from that greatly, but instead we have this sort of punitive government that has to have this heavy hand and control people, but actually they're failing because they already have so many people wanting services, but they have no services for them. These recovery communities are still in theory, many of them. There are so many things.

Kind of like this. This bill is really about the theory of what the police force will – and they're asking, like, municipal governments to sort of just, you know, work with us; we'll help you along. But it could be a very dangerous bill for them. How much will they know about how much they'll have to pay? We know this government has been downloading a lot of costs onto municipalities. You know, they're already stretched a lot for many, many reasons, that I won't go into at this moment.

5:00

I just want to say, certainly, that Bill 49 is not a bill that I support and my colleagues on this side of the House do not, and I commend all members of this Legislature to also vote against Bill 49.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 41 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned April 9: Mr. Schmidt speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has nine minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a second time]

Bill 47 Automobile Insurance Act

[Debate adjourned April 8: Mr. Sabir speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has three minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has the call.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to add comments to Bill 47, Automobile Insurance Act. I have a lot to say on this. I joined the insurance industry back in 2000; you know, I can speak on this bill at length. The insurance premiums, looking at it as a consumer and being in the office, always have been a problem in this province, ever since I got my first car, as a consumer experience and working as an insurance broker in the office. It was not only high premiums, but it was always higher insurance premiums compared to other provinces in Canada.

I remember I had a client calling me – you know, he was a relatively young gentleman, 18 or 19 years of age – and crying and complaining that he's been working two jobs just to afford a car. He bought it for, like, \$300. He bought it for \$300 for his very first job. He was paying \$8,000 in premiums – \$8,000 – with bare minimum coverage. He had only third-party insurance for \$200,000 amount only. With those kind of complaints, those kind of calls, I

just could not help those clients but share their concerns. “I understand. I'm just a messenger. I share your concern as a consumer. I have the same issues.” But I couldn't do more than that.

It was not long ago. You know, the market was actually very tough in those days. I'm talking about the years 2002, 2003, 2004. The insurance companies had very hard underwritings. They just wanted a clean business. They never wanted to touch anything of the driving experience of six years, seven years, or... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. If the hon. members want to have private conversations, it's now the second reminder that they can do so in the lounge.

Until then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has the call.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your guidance. I always appreciate it.

Insurance companies would want only the best kind of clients that would have 10 years of experience or minimum six years of experience. If the client even had any not-at-fault claim, where that was not in the control of the individual, where somebody else came in and sideswiped or hit or there was a comprehensive claim on the policy, the insurance company would deny the coverage. They wanted to remain all those policies through the facility market that was facilitating the business of so-called high risk. Any new drivers, anyone with less than six years of experience was considered by the monopoly of those private insurers as a high-risk client, and they would go to those facility markets I mentioned, where clients were paying \$8,000 just because of their age, nothing to do with their driving experience, where even the expert drivers of three or four years, of professionals, were paying, I remember, like, a minimum of \$4,000 just for the liability coverage.

I have seen those days, you know, when insurance premiums and auto insurance became the election issue. The Klein government was scared they would lose the election on this issue, and they were the ones who brought the grid premium in in 2004. They called it the all-comers rule, and they legislated the way that no insurance company operating business in Alberta can refuse to take the client. They legislated the maximum premium that an insurance company can charge in given situations to certain driving ratings and not more than that. That was the only way the Klein government could come back, legislating all-comers rules. I've heard in this Chamber from government House members many times that, you know, meddling in private insurance businesses will be costliest and would not work. That was the time the Conservative government in this province stepped into the private insurance industry and legislated the all-comers rule, that was facing the anger of Albertans over the insurance premiums.

That didn't actually last very long, Mr. Speaker. You know, within five, six, seven years of time insurance companies find so many different ways to raise the premium. They upgrade vehicle rating every year. They also increase property rates. I remember the people who used to pay, like, \$250 on their home insurance just about four or five years ago then started paying \$1,500, probably. In these days those average rates are more than \$2,500.

When we're talking about those increases in this time of affordability crisis, you can see Albertans' wages have not been increased by 400 per cent, but the insurance premiums are. This is how it has been impacting.

In 2015 when the Alberta NDP government came in, they capped the insurance premium. I saw that was the time when the insurers in Alberta kind of rallied and came together and started actually spreading all kinds of misinformation and lobbying brokers against

by creating issues with brokers and the consumers, by not offering coverage, by not offering payment plans and not offering property coverage to expensive vehicles like Suburbans and Cadillacs and all those vehicles and spreading information through brokers and the public that it was the NDP government's fault; you should go back.

5:10

They started quoting the campaign, collaborating with UCP staffers. A number of those people who were campaigning for insurance companies were registered insurance lobbyists and at the same time they were UCP staffers working to campaign for the UCP in the elections as well. From those people, they also became the government's very high-profile staffers after that. That was the key reason the UCP government in 2019, ignoring the public outcry, removed the insurance cap, and that led to, like, 35 per cent to 50 per cent of insurance premiums increase.

We understand that the insurance industry has taken a really keen interest and worked very hard for the UCP campaign, to fund the UCP campaign, even to change the narrative in this province. The problem is that the people in our ridings – if it's happening in my riding, I'm not alone. Every single day, if I go to a radio station for a talk show, if I'm at a town hall, if somebody is complaining, they're complaining for their high premiums.

What this UCP government did: they brought another no-fault property damage coverage, that was unique in this province and unique in this country, something that happened to add more money for the consumer to pay, to not be able to claim the same coverage they used to. The DCPD, the no-fault property coverage, they added with an additional premium based on the driving record from \$300 to \$8,000. The consumer will pay, in addition to their insurance premiums they used to pay, to be unable to sue the at-fault third party for the damage they have caused.

I met the corporate of a taxi business in Edmonton. They said they have met with, actually, the UCP transport minister. They made so many promises with them. Nothing was delivered. That company ended up paying half a million dollars more in premiums due to DCPD and giving up their right to collect the compensation if somebody else hit their car on the road. They paid half a million dollars in premiums, and they lost coverage. That added another \$2 million cost to their business because they have to cover the cost they used to cover for at-fault claims. Now they have to cover their vehicles during not-at-fault claims as well.

So the businesses are crying; they're on the brink of falling apart, and they have been actually reaching to this UCP government. They're telling me that. The truckers are telling me that. Taxi companies are telling me that. They have approached these ministers, the transportation minister, the previous and current. They promised them that they will look into it but did not because they are backed by the insurance companies. Because the UCP runs campaigns of having money from the insurance companies, they are not willing to listen to it.

I'm always listening to even the Ministry of Finance and many UCP members' arguments that insurance companies are not doing good. I'm not convinced. If there is a – I have a lot to say. I think I will have another opportunity again to add my comments during a different stage of this bill debate. I know the Speaker has given me a hint that I don't have much time to add.

I'm not fully convinced. There are so many other things to investigate into. If the government is convinced insurance companies are not making money off of charging the highest premiums in the country in this province, then they need to look elsewhere. If the companies would have been losing money, they would not be fighting against public insurance. I tell you that.

I have an example of, like, countries of more than 1 billion people, like the country of India, where the insurance industry, public insurance, was a backbone of government services to the people, making their life better and building the country's infrastructure. It was a profitable business, and the private insurance companies are lobbying to get into that. They did it. They did it. If that business was not profitable, they wouldn't have done that. Same here.

With this, I will conclude my remarks on Bill 47. I have a lot more to add. I will add it in a later stage. Definitely, this Bill 47 is going to cause a lot of harm to the insurance industry, to Albertans. Our government actually needs to think about this bill. This bill cannot be supported in this form.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow has the call.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act. This is a complete restructuring of automotive insurance in Alberta, and it's a restructuring in a manner that's entirely unique within Canada. It's fair to say that this is an experiment. This has never been tried before.

First, I'll start with kind of context for why some changes to insurance are necessary. There's no argument that the system is not working for people. I do believe that it is important that insurance companies are profitable, but this is a product that we require people to purchase. Therefore, if we require people to purchase insurance and maintain a level of liability, then it is incumbent on the government to ensure that that coverage is affordable and also covers the things that – you know, the regulation and the policies actually cover people for what we require them to own. As a result of that, there is an auto insurance rate review board that makes sure that insurance companies are not overearning.

Now, there are a number of lags. A claim can happen in 2022. There's an initial claim. Maybe it goes to the legal challenges. You know, it takes a long time to get through, and maybe that claim is finally settled in 2025. It's really hard to know at any point in time whether the rates are fair and reasonable, but what we can watch is what the returns of insurance companies are in the stock market, for example.

It must be especially galling to the people of Alberta that at the same time that their rates are going up by 30, 40 per cent a year, that at the same time that they get good driver discounts as long as you don't change your insurance company – Lord knows good drivers don't change insurance companies either or buy new cars – as long as none of that happens and you're defined by this regulatory description of what a good driver is: I don't even know what the plain language of that is. A driver with fewer than X speeding tickets who doesn't change their car, who doesn't change their insurance company, and who doesn't, you know, go through, like, the entire ladder of things that they can't do. Regardless, such a person will see increases of only – I don't know – 4 per cent or something like that on the highest insurance premiums in Canada.

5:20

At the same time that person, if they had invested their premiums instead of in their insurance policy, if they had invested that in – oh, I don't know – Intact Insurance for example, they would have made double their money in the last five years. Double. I get it. I mean, I look at the investor presentations. I go to Intact's website. I download it. I have a look. They describe it as a hard market. I don't know what that is, so I go and I look, and they say: oh, yeah, hard

markets are when insurance is expensive. Yeah; no kidding. I know insurance is expensive for the people of Alberta, and it is a very hard market, and it does seem as though there is a limited amount of competition that can bring those costs down.

Now we've got a situation where it seems as though the insurance companies have a friendly government, where they can cry poverty and get what they have always wanted, which is to collect premiums and not pay claims. Now, I'm reminded of – I mean, I'm going back into my history here, where I used to love *Seinfeld*. Oh, my God, that was such a great show. I remember the episode where Jerry Seinfeld goes to a rental car counter because, of course, he lives in Manhattan at a time when it was possible for someone to actually live in Manhattan and not be a millionaire. He goes to the rental car counter and the clerk says: oh, yeah; we got your reservation, but we don't have any cars. Of course, Jerry Seinfeld – I don't know. Is this coming to mind to anyone? Boy, this has happened. This seems like a very real thing: "Yeah, we got your reservation, but we don't have any cars. We got your reservation at the restaurant, but we don't have any places for you."

Of course, Seinfeld said one of the, you know, best parts: "Yes. Yes. I understand that you took the reservation, but you didn't hold the reservation. Between the two, taking and holding, the far more important is the holding of the reservation." Between taking the premium and paying the claim, the far more important thing for an insurance company to do is pay the claim.

We now have a regulatory model being proposed here in Bill 47 where paying claim is optional. Paying the claim is optional. Still requiring, you know, that we ask Albertans to pay for insurance, but we don't require that the insurance company pays the claim. They're calling this care first. We call it no fault. That's what Albertans call it. They call it no-fault insurance. Every other jurisdiction in Canada that uses a no-fault insurance model has it publicly delivered, and there's a reason for that. There's a very good and valid economic reason for that, the most important being that there are actually things that government is terrible at doing.

See, a market-based insurance company that is properly regulated has the following pieces of its value that it delivers. Number one, and most important, is it underwrites. The hardest part of writing an insurance policy is underwriting the policy, meaning assessing the risk. Somebody comes in with a brand new truck: what is the risk that this driver will cause us a claim? That's super hard. It depends on extremely proprietary models. It depends on massive amounts of mathematics, information systems, probably artificial intelligence now. It is exceedingly hard to underwrite, and underwriting mistakes blow up insurance companies. They are catastrophic, so insurance companies must underwrite in a private tort insurance model.

The second thing they have to do: they have to process claims. Yeah, processing claims is hard. It's not, like, super hard, like underwriting. Basically, you set up a website. You have claims adjusters. You, you know, work people through. You get them the fixes that they need. If they have minor injuries, then – and I'll talk a bit more about minor injuries – you have access to medical professionals. All that: it's basically the blocking and tackling.

Third thing: managing fraud. Admittedly, when you have a tort-based insurance company, some people could be faking their injuries. This is bad for society. Nobody wants that. It escalates the cause of claims. Therefore, definitely, managing that fraud is exceedingly important for an insurance company although it is not as hard, probably, as underwriting.

Okay. Underwriting, claims, fraud protection: of all of those value propositions, well, in a no-fault system you don't really need to spend all that much time on underwriting because the damages are capped. There is very little risk. The risk of, you know, creating

a risk pool that is bad for the insurance company goes down a lot because what you have done, in the language of finance, is you've cut off the long tail of it. You've cut off the multimillion-dollar big damages where somebody has a life-changing event where somebody did something wrong to them and they need compensation for it.

Let's talk about that a little bit. What we're talking about here is we're talking about people who have been injured and people who have been hurt by someone. The right to go after somebody who has hurt you predates this Assembly. It predates our system of common law. It probably predates every legal system that we have inherited on this land. It is a right that exists for the treaty people. When somebody harms you, they are responsible for making it right.

When we talk about no-fault insurance, that means that that legal tradition is gone. It means that we think about the – and this is what amazes me about a Conservative government bringing this in, because it is anticonservative. It is the absence of conservatism. It is socialized risk. Who I really want to hear from on this bill is not just the Minister of Finance, who we have heard from, but I would also like to hear from the Minister of Justice because this is an issue of fundamental justice. If somebody hurts you, are they responsible for damages? Are they responsible for making it right? Are they responsible for making it so that you've never been hurt before?

I challenge all the members across the aisle to explain to me how socializing risk, how socialized auto insurance actually makes a ton of sense. Now, you can say: "Oh, no, no, no. See, this is privately delivered. It's not socialized." No, no, no. You're socializing the losses, Mr. Speaker. They are socializing the losses and privatizing the gains. It is, like, the worst form. Hence, we have businesses in the insurance industry that are doubling their returns in five years; not a bad gig. And it's wrong.

We got lots of statements from the Minister of Finance about how, you know, injured people won't actually be left out in the cold; it's care first; we really care. Like everyone, I have had experiences with insurance companies. I have had people close to me in my life who have had their, you know, little fender-benders that, of course, now, because of the way – there's no question costs have gone up because of all of the electronics and all of the amazing stuff in cars now. It's definitely become very expensive to fix them. I have, you know, personal experience not just of the vehicular damage but also for which it is no fault. Frankly, if you buy a more expensive vehicle, then the cost of repairing that, replacing it falls upon your own insurance.

5:30

When it comes to, like, minor injuries and – oh, boy – the definition of minor injury, holy crow, you could drive a truck through that. I believe it was in the Ralph Klein days that they attempted to define minor injuries as maybe, you know, your arm got cut off. That's a minor injury because it doesn't affect a limb that's weight bearing. Weight-bearing limbs were major injuries; any other limb was a minor injury. Like, there's definitely some very weird language when we talk about insurance for sure.

But we all have had the experience of: oh, yeah, so you have a neck issue. That's like, you know, somebody gets five physiotherapy visits, and if that person needs more, then you just fill out a form. But you're actually filling out a form and talking to three adjusters and going through the whole "Why are you still sick and getting a doctor's note?" and just getting ground down at every step to get the benefits that people are entitled to. So it's no surprise that maybe somebody who's sitting there six months after a so-called minor fender-bender that crumpled a bit of steel – people aren't made of steel. We're considerably softer and squishier than steel and break easily.

Somebody with soft tissue damage might say: I'm still not okay. That is where this bill leaves people hanging.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak today against Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act. You know, I think this bill goes against the reason why folks purchase insurance. At the end of the day, it's to protect themselves. Insurance providers provide financial protection against unexpected events like accidents, illness, and damage to our property. It also helps reduce financial burdens. But, most importantly, it offers peace of mind by ensuring that costs associated with unforeseen circumstances can be covered. Without insurance individuals would be responsible for paying these expenses out of our pockets, which would be very financially difficult or impossible right now, especially during an affordability crisis here in Alberta.

You know, now the UCP government is asking Albertans to trust the government with their insurance, which is definitely not peace of mind during a corrupt care scandal. Every Albertan deserves to feel protected by their insurance. Our constituents can't trust the UCP government to do this right now.

One of the constituents from my riding of Calgary-Edgemont in Dalhousie wrote me in opposition to Bill 47. I don't know if I'm allowed to say my own name.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Ms Hayter: Okay.

Dear [Member for Calgary-Edgemont] . . .

She doesn't know parliamentary procedure, Mr. Speaker. I will send her an e-mail and let her know.

She goes on to say:

I am a resident of Dalhousie for the past 25 years. I am an occupational therapist, [and] I am gravely concerned about the proposed change to the no-fault insurance system by the Alberta government. I have worked solely in private practice for the past 25 years and my patient population are people that have been injured in MVAs. Many of my patients' injuries have substantially altered their lives including their ability to work and participate in their usual activities of daily living. The treatment they require, often a combination of physical, cognitive, and psychological treatments, can be required for years after sustaining certain injuries. The amount and type of treatment needs to be determined by independent health care professionals and not insurance adjusters. Often the injured person cannot work or are working reduced hours, and they [are struggling] with taking care of themselves, their homes, and their families. I have seen what uneducated insurance adjusters have done over the years in making decisions about an insured treatment need without having any knowledge to make health care decisions. It is very scary to think that the government employees or insurance based employees will be able to do this. It is also very concerning that injured persons will not have the right to sue when their whole life is changed and they are suffering . . . [that they have no resources] to hold the person responsible accountable for the negligence that caused their injuries. The potential savings in insurance premiums does not come close to the loss an individual could experience without having the right to sue in the future.

I thank Gillian for your thoughtful e-mail. You're right. It is very scary. You know, the government wants Albertans to trust them with their insurance. Let's let that question rattle around in our heads for a few minutes: trust the UCP government?

I've got another letter from a constituent.

Dear [Member for Calgary-Edgemont]:

I understand that there is a review going on regarding the prospect of no-fault auto insurance for the province of Alberta. I would urge you to argue against the prospect of a no-fault system.

I have been working as a health care professional in Calgary for 20 years now and have had a number of experiences with my patients who have been injured in automobile accidents in Calgary. While many are well served by their insurance companies, there are many others who share with me frustrating stories of their insurance companies withholding benefits – sometimes for false reasons.

I would like to give you a particular example that illustrates this problem.

One of my patients had a significant back injury from a rear-end collision she sustained in Calgary's northwest, not far from your constituency. This caused significant chronic pain that radiated into her pelvic floor. Her pelvic floor pain made it impossible for her to return to her occupation as a teacher, and even made it difficult for her to carry out basic homemaking chores. She was also concerned about her future ability to bear children (she was a young mother with one toddler and had intention to continue building her family at the time of her accident.) In the course of trying to resolve her chronic pelvic floor pain she sought the care of a number of healthcare professionals including those practising in physiotherapy, chiropractic, ob/gyn, as well as others. Despite the efforts of these professionals, the problem persisted for 18 months and showed no signs of resolution. [Insurance adjusters] (not a qualified health care professional in any sense) made the executive decision (based on a poorly executed analysis by a healthcare professional who had never met the patient nor examined the patient) that her chronic pain had gone past an average amount of time – and used that “logic” as a reason to cut her off from her auto insurance benefits. In other words, the adjuster used this faulty reasoning: Because this patient's injury was atypical, there was reason to doubt the veracity of her claim as chronic pain and, therefore a justification to cut her off of her auto insurance benefits.

The only reason this patient was able to continue seeking care and finally resolve the issue was due to the fact that she had retained a lawyer in Calgary who insisted that she continue to seek the care of specialists until there was one who could finally resolve the matter. The lawyer would vouch for the healthcare costs after the insurance company refused. The lawyer – not the insurance company – guaranteed that the patient's care would be covered until the matter was resolved. This eventually did take place – she found a specialist in pelvic floor pain, and over the course of several months, finally made gains in resolving this pain. [And] I am pleased to say that she was able to give birth to a baby daughter about 11 months after the treatment [was successful.]

This would not have happened without the lawyer's backing.

We cannot rely on a system where only the insurance company has a say in how a patient is provided healthcare. There needs to be a counterbalancing voice to keep the insurance companies honest. I'm sorry to say this, but I have plenty of experience where insurance companies demonstrate that they are only interested in profit – not in caring for their policyholders.

I have witnessed numerous other unfortunate situations like this where the insurance company does not behave ethically [and] there is little a single policy holder can do to change the unethical behaviour. People simply do not have the power to take on a large organization.

I can see that moving to a no-fault government run auto insurance system will save most people in Alberta a small percentage of insurance costs every year. But what we are missing is that there will be some Albertans every year who struggle with hard-to-treat injuries that [would] be too easy for a single-body insurance system to overlook. In other words, without their own legal representation, there will be no voice of justice for the most severely injured Albertans who need the auto insurance benefits the most.

Please urge the UCP government to take this very significant problem into account as they look into this matter. Thank you for your time.

5:40

Well, thank you, Robert, a registered psychiatrist from the riding of Calgary-Edgemont, for sharing your concerns. I share your concerns. My colleagues share your concerns.

Every week something new comes out from the UCP government in their corrupt care scandal showing Albertans that we can't trust the government. Our public health care system is being decimated and broken down at this moment by this government, piece by piece. I believe it's now at five pieces or maybe seven that are being privatized. It's all being privatized, and it's causing more and more chaos. Now the government is going to look at the insurance companies, causing more chaos.

You know, to be in this Chamber yesterday and see, for all of us, two fellow Members of the Legislative Assembly stand up with the NDP to this government and vote in favour of a public inquiry to represent their constituents: that was an honour to witness that part of the session in history. What a wild idea, to get elected and represent the constituents you serve. News flash: we are all here to serve our constituents. We're all here to listen to our constituents.

I've also received a few e-mails from folks who have in the past supported the UCP government, and they don't live in my riding. They're not happy with this bill, and I'd love to share them with you as well. [interjection] I know. It's tiring talking about insurance, but these are the letters from your constituents, and I thought we might want to hear them.

This change would strip Albertans of their right to seek . . . recourse and accountability for reckless driving. This undermines fundamental rights and protections.

I have been a loyal conservative supporter for 28 years. This is an election-defining issue for me. If the vote passes, I will withdraw my support . . . and will not be voting for the party in the next election.

Please reconsider this direction. Protecting Albertans' rights should remain a priority. It's what your party ran the election on.

Another one said that

protecting Albertans' civil-legal rights should be paramount. Clearly a vote for no-fault insurance would be the most un-conservative move ever considered.

I think we just heard that a few seconds ago.

I have voted for your party the past 30 years in every election. Should you change the current tort system to no-fault, the UCP will lose my vote in the next election.

I had a third, but I'm being told that I'm going to be wrapping it up. The folks aren't happy. It's very clear they don't want it.

Were everyday Albertans consulted? Were your constituents consulted and listened to? Ultimately, insurance needs to protect Albertans, especially those who get into accidents, providing the support they need when they need it.

Mr. Speaker, after this riveting debate about auto insurance, I'm hoping that we would all like to adjourn debate today.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for her riveting submissions. As we have come to a conclusion today, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until Wednesday, April 16, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: I might just remind the hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont that these are perfect examples of documents that ought to be tabled. I expect that you'll do that tomorrow.

Ms Hayter: Can I ask – I'll ask a question later.

The Speaker: That sounds like a great idea.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:45 p.m.]

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