



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 29, 2025

Day 103

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)  
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)  
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)  
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
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Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),  
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)  
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(UC)  
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)  
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Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)  
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Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)  
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC),  
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Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)  
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)  
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),  
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)  
Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie  
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

## Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Mickey Amery	Minister of Justice
Devin Dreeshen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Nate Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Brian Jean	Minister of Energy and Minerals
Matt Jones	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Health
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry and Parks
Martin Long	Minister of Infrastructure
Ric McIver	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Advanced Education
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Andrew Boitchenko	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Nolan Dyck	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous and Rural Policing
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Ron Wiebe	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North)
Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### **Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Yao

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Boitchenko  
Brar  
Kasawski  
Kayande  
Stephan  
Wiebe  
Wright, J.

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Vacant

Boparai  
Cyr  
de Jonge  
Elmeligi  
Hoyle  
Stephan  
van Dijken  
Wright, J.

### **Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee**

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Long

Arcand-Paul  
Ellingson  
Hunter  
Ip  
Lovely  
Rowswell  
Sabir  
Wright, J.

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Lovely

Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Batten  
Haji  
Johnson  
Lunty  
McDougall  
Petrovic  
Singh  
Tejada

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Chapman  
Cyr  
Dyck  
Eremenko  
Lovely  
Miyashiro  
Petrovic  
Shepherd

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper

Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

Eggen  
Gray  
Hunter  
Metz  
Petrovic  
Sabir  
Singh  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills**

Chair: Ms Pitt

Deputy Chair: Mr. Cyr

Bouchard  
Ceci  
Deol  
Dyck  
Hayter  
Johnson  
Sigurdson, L.  
Wright, J.

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

Deputy Chair: Mr. Wiebe

Arcand-Paul  
Bouchard  
Ceci  
Cyr  
Dach  
Gray  
Sinclair  
Stephan

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Mr. Sabir

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
de Jonge  
Ellingson  
Johnson  
Lunty  
McDougall  
Renaud  
Schmidt

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

Al-Guneid  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Boitchenko  
Calahoo Stonehouse  
Dyck  
Eggen  
Hunter  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Speaker's Tricorne

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it is a very auspicious day here in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, where a new tradition has begun. I'm excited to announce that over the last number of months I have been working very closely with a wonderful Alberta company that many of you will be familiar with, Smithbilt Hats. As you can see, on my head today is a new Alberta tradition that brings together all of the important parts of the traditional tricorne as part of the Speaker's attire but given a slight western flair. I'm pleased to introduce this uniquely Alberta tricorne that blends the traditions of the hat as a symbol of the Speaker's authority with our western roots, intertwining the history of ranching, farming, and the influence of rodeo cultures.

Now, all members will know the importance of the tricorne hat to each individual Speaker. That is, in the late 1800s the tricorne hat was popularized by being the most common of all hats. Today it is a reminder every day of the Speaker's important role to that of the elected representatives and by extension the people of Alberta; the people's hat, you might say. It's my pleasure to introduce a distinctly unique Alberta tradition to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. May God bless you, and may God bless Alberta.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** This morning I had the absolute privilege of meeting with a very special guest who's joining us today and is now in the Legislative Assembly Speaker's gallery. Please welcome Cathy Geagan, the consul general of Ireland in Vancouver. She's joined by Colm O'Carroll, the honorary consul of Ireland in Edmonton, and Kaiya Sutherland, the executive assistant to the consul general in Vancouver. Thank you so much for joining us here today. There are so many important relationships that continue to be built and need to be built with the good people of Ireland and the EU. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, we have a familiar face seated in my gallery today, and I don't mean my father, but I mean the former member, Michaela Frey. Michaela served the electoral district of Brooks-Medicine Hat from April 16, 2019, to October 7, 2022, and proudly served that constituency with diligence and high levels of effort. She was the 918th member ever sworn into the Assembly. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the last introduction from me today is a very important person in my life. She basically runs my entire

life. I very fondly and kindly refer to her as office mom. She makes sure that I make it to Edmonton safely, calls me when it's been storming to make sure I've been there and arrived safely. She's a very dear friend of mine and also my office manager. We've been working for over 13 years together now. I invite Brenda Berreth to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you Rideau Park elementary school. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you 35 students from Soraya Hafez school, accompanied by their teacher Breana Melloy. If you could all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the individuals from the Water Movement. This organization empowers Indigenous water operators with resources and support to ensure safe and clean water in their communities. Bitu Malekian, Aditya Chaudhuri, Kondwani Asefa, Rod Badger, Mia Cook, and Blair Campbell: I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Ip:** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Corporal Ryan Mann, a constituent and a 14-year reservist with the Canadian Armed Forces. Corporal Mann served deployments to Iraq, Jordan, and the 2017 B.C. wildfires. I want to recognize and thank Corporal Mann for his outstanding service to Canadians. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to all members of the Assembly a number of Buddhist monks and nuns from Plum Village in France and Deer Park monastery in California. The monastics are students of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, and they're accompanied by members of the Caretaking Council for Going as a River Sangha here in Edmonton. The monastics are in Alberta for the next couple of weeks leading retreats in Westlock, Canmore, and Lethbridge. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and reintroduce a good friend of mine and actually the first person I met with after winning my nomination to run prior to the 2023 election, Michaela Frey. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Member Eremenko:** It is my true honour, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you two incredible constituents of Calgary-Currie. Keith Purdy and his partner, Rick Kennedy, are generous volunteers and passionate advocates. Keith is a member of my EDA and is also alternate co-chair of the Alberta Federation of Labour's pride and solidarity caucus. I'm also lucky to have them as friends. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Stacy Petriuk, KC, president of the Law Society of Alberta, and Elizabeth Osler, CEO and executive director of the Law Society of Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

## Members' Statements

### Premier's Leadership

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Mr. Speaker, it's the day after the federal election, and I think it's time we offer congratulations to the Premier. After all, she's done more than anyone else to ensure last night's Liberal victory. Instead of working to fix health care or do anything to help ease the pain of the affordability crisis, this Premier spent hundreds of thousands of Alberta taxpayers' dollars parading around the U.S., sipping cocktails at Mar-a-Lago, and going into the American news day after day to talk about how Pierre should win. Meanwhile behind the scenes she was inviting administration officials to interfere in our election on behalf of the Conservative leader. What did the Premier have to show for the efforts of this Conservative cause? She certainly was not invited to Poilievre's rally in Edmonton. In fact, she was told to stay away, and in the final days she was benched entirely, sent to the other side of the world to be kept out of trouble, considered by Conservatives to be a liability during the campaign.

1:40

What can we expect from this Premier going forward? Yes, the same old refrain. She'll use the election results to stir up western grievances and the foolish Alberta sovereignty sentiments to score some cynical political points. You heard it here first, Mr. Speaker, but Albertans don't want divisiveness. Albertans don't want to separate. They want a government that can work with all of its neighbours, federal, provincial, for the betterment of all Canadians. When the time comes, Alberta New Democrats will be ready to make that offer to the people of this province.

In the meantime we're just wondering, Mr. Speaker: will the Premier have to declare all her time and energy spent in this campaign as an in-kind donation to the new Prime Minister? We'll look forward to finding out.

### 2025 Federal Election

**Ms de Jonge:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today following the results of last night's federal election, when Canadians re-elected Prime Minister Mark Carney and a Liberal minority government. I want to extend my sincere thank you to Pierre Poilievre for his principled leadership and tireless advocacy against the last decade, punitive taxation, and antiresource policies that have made our country weaker, more divided, and overly dependent on the United States.

For years Mr. Poilievre has driven the national conversation toward affordability, unity, and economic opportunity. He has stood firmly against the harmful NDP-Liberal federal policies that targeted Alberta's industries, jobs, and values. In doing so, he demonstrated a deep and unwavering respect for this province, our people, and our potential. While the Liberal and NDP parties have too often used Alberta as a political punching bag, Mr. Poilievre championed our energy sector and made it clear that Alberta matters. He remains a true friend to this province.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are frustrated. The re-election of a federal government that for the past decade has worked to land-lock our

resources, stall major projects, and weaken our economic standing has left many wondering about the future. What we do know is that we will not allow the status quo to continue. That is why our government is calling for an immediate reset in our relationship with Ottawa. We expect action, not words, real collaboration, not political posturing, and in the weeks ahead our province will begin a critical conversation about our future. Our government is committed to listening to Albertans, standing up for constitutional rights, and ensuring that our industries are empowered, not obstructed.

This Friday our caucus will meet to discuss the next steps. Albertans can be assured that we will always defend their interests and work tirelessly to secure a prosperous future for our province within a united Canada that treats us as a valued and respected partner within Confederation.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

### Government Health Policies

**Member Boparai:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to condemn the government's ongoing failure in health care, a failure that can only be described as cuts, chaos, corruption, and cruelty. These are not just words but a harsh reality that Albertans are living with every single day.

First, cuts: emergency rooms are overwhelmed, wait times are skyrocketing, yet this government continues to slash funding to public health care. Instead of investing in care, they are cutting their resources for the benefit of themselves and their friends.

Chaos: the government's decision to transfer health care properties on April 1 to a ministry with the power to sell them off is deeply concerning. Back in 2021 the Premier talked about selling Peter Lougheed hospital, a critical facility in one of the fastest growing and most underserved areas of the province, and that is northeast Calgary.

Corruption: DynaLife is a perfect example of this government's utter incompetence. After handing critical lab services to a private company, it collapsed in under 90 days. This is part of a larger pattern where public services are handed off to friends in the private sector, with no accountability. They won't even call a public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal because they know what the results will be.

Cruelty: they attempted to steal Popsicles from kids with cancer, a decision only halted by public pressure. Now we learn that this government is not even collecting data on deaths related to wait times. People are literally dying because they cannot access timely health care and this government refuses to even acknowledge it.

Mr. Speaker, this government's record is clear: cuts, chaos, corruption, and cruelty. Albertans deserve better than this. Enough is enough.

Thank you.

### National Volunteer Week

**Mr. van Dijken:** Mr. Speaker, this week we celebrate National Volunteer Week, a time to recognize and honour the incredible contributions of volunteers across Alberta and Canada. Volunteering is the heart of strong, compassionate communities. Its impact is felt in every corner of our province.

Throughout history volunteers have played a vital role in supporting vulnerable populations, responding to emergencies, and enriching the cultural and social fabric of our province. Their selfless service continues to shape Alberta for the better. From food

banks and community cleanups to youth mentorship and senior support, Albertans dedicate countless hours each year to lift their neighbours up. Across our province community associations, ag societies, sports teams, and religious groups embody the spirit of service that makes Alberta stronger and more connected and more compassionate.

Mr. Speaker, we saw the true power of volunteerism during last year's Jasper wildfire, where hundreds of volunteers stepped forward to assist first responders, support evacuees, and help rebuild hope in a time of crisis. That same spirit shines through in events like the annual highway cleanup, where volunteers of all ages roll up their sleeves to help keep Alberta clean, safe, and welcoming.

Volunteering does more than fill an immediate need. It builds stronger, healthier communities, reduces social isolation, and helps individuals develop leadership and life skills. Beyond their immeasurable social contributions, volunteers also make a substantial economic impact. Volunteering generates approximately \$5.6 billion annually in Alberta's GDP.

Yesterday nominations opened for the Stars of Alberta volunteer awards, and I encourage all Albertans to take part in recognizing those who go above and beyond in service to others. As we celebrate National Volunteer Week, let's take a moment to honour the incredible impact volunteers have in every corner of our province.

Thank you.

### National Volunteer Week

**Member Miyashiro:** Mr. Speaker, I too will speak about Volunteer Week because it's Volunteer Week in Canada running right now from April 27 to May 3. This year's theme is Volunteers Make Waves. Volunteer Canada explains this theme as "it highlights the power, impact, and importance of individual and collective volunteer efforts across Canada. Like a wave, volunteering is movement building." National Volunteer Week is our chance to celebrate the value of volunteering and to highlight their impact in our community.

In most cases we use the term "volunteer sector" as an equivalent to the not-for-profit and charitable sectors. There are 27,000 nonprofits in Alberta and they do much of the crucial work of providing services in communities all across our province. They're also an employer with almost 84,000 employees, many of whom are poorly paid and lack benefits.

Volunteers make a huge difference in every one of our communities. Recent data from CanadaHelps shows that 1 in 5 Canadians rely on charitable organizations for their basic needs, and those that are delivered many times are by volunteers. Our communities depend on the work of volunteers.

In celebrating Volunteer Week, Volunteer Canada even put together a Spotify playlist to inspire people to get more involved in their communities. I encourage people to take a listen and spread the volunteer waves.

Mr. Speaker, as with many people in this Assembly, I have spent many hours volunteering in my community since I was a teenager. From coaching and organizing to providing direct services and more, volunteering has been a big part of my life as well as for that of my family. I continue to put in two shifts per week walking and biking dogs at the humane society in Lethbridge.

I ask that anyone watching this find something you enjoy and volunteer to do it to help your community. Volunteers are not just the lifeblood of our not-for-profit sector; they are the soul of our community.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying thank you to all the federal candidates and volunteers from all parties who've been working their hearts out. Elections are good and democracy is really important.

### Federal-provincial Relations

**Ms Gray:** Now, Albertans have rejected the notion that we should become the 51st state, and now that the federal election is over, it's crucial we pull together to build a stronger Canada for all. So why did the Premier use her message this morning to sow seeds of division? Why not commit to getting deals to build up Alberta's economic and social future as a vital part of this country?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I congratulated the new Prime Minister Mark Carney, and I reiterated the nine things that Alberta needs to see to reset the relationship. We know that if we want to get more investment attracted to Alberta and we want to build more pipelines, we have to have a few things. We have to end the ban on pipelines that essentially was created with Bill C-69; end the tanker ban; stop the emissions cap; end net-zero power regs; end net-zero cars; end net-zero buildings; end the ban on companies being able to promote and talk about their emissions records. As soon as we can see some movement on that, I know we will reset the relationship.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, I and I think many Albertans thought that threatening a national unity crisis might have just been playing politics in the moment, weighing in on the federal election, but now we hear that this is the Premier's agenda, to breed uncertainty through separatism. There is an Alberta-first agenda that fights for a better Canada. That's not the parade this Premier is leading. We need a Premier who will stand up for good jobs, advance Alberta's economy, and not call U.S. tariffs, quote: a big win. We need a Premier who will fight to bring prices down. Why won't this Premier commit to getting good deals for Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are well on our way with the NDP having only received 6.4 per cent of the vote yesterday. That's a complete repudiation of all of the extreme policies that have been advanced by the Liberal-NDP coalition, and I think it opens the door for us to have a constructive relationship about a more moderate approach so that we can develop pipelines, we can develop rights of way, we can end some of these destructive policies, and we can move forward on addressing issues of energy security, affordability, and a reasonable plan to reduce emissions over a time frame that I believe our businesses will be able to meet.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to have been part of an NDP government that built the only pipeline to tidewater.

The Premier is happy to complain about everyone else. We see it constantly. But she is the one running up a massive deficit, cutting health care, making life less affordable for our citizens, all the while playing politics in welcoming separatist rhetoric. The country is worth fighting for. We need a Premier fighting to advance Alberta's economy, not one sowing discord for political benefit. When will the Premier finally start getting good deals for all?

**Ms Smith:** Well, I remember that as a condition for trying to get this pipeline built by the federal government, which, incidentally, cost six times as much as the private sector would have done it, they sold out Albertans. They sold out Albertans, Mr. Speaker. They brought in a carbon tax, which was so hated the new Prime Minister had to end it as soon as he came in. They brought in an emissions cap, which the federal government is using as a bludgeon to try to take over federally. And they did an early phase-out of coal, which has cost Alberta ratepayers billions of dollars. I can tell you that our approach is going to be a little bit different. We're going to work with our federal government and, hopefully, not have to sacrifice Albertans in the process.

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

### Chartered Surgical Facility Contracts

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, private surgical providers like the Alberta Surgical Group got bloated contracts from this government, possibly with political interference involved. These contracts are at the heart of the corrupt care scandal. On February 19 the Minister of Health said, with the Premier looking on, quote: everything got paused because of the investigations, and rightly so. The Premier nodded along at that press conference. We understand ASG contracts are up for renewal on April 30. That's tomorrow. Did the government keep their commitment, or have they renewed the bloated contract with ASG?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. ASG has been providing surgeries on a temporary basis while we are waiting for the Enoch facility to be completed. Because of the investigation we are going to still have a delay in the completion of the Enoch surgical centre, so Acute Care Alberta has made the decision to extend the contract for ASG until the report is completed so that we can get the Enoch procedure up and running. The Red Deer and Lethbridge chartered surgical centres are on hold. We're not going to cancel thousands of surgeries for knee and hip replacements. We're just not going to do that.

**Ms Gray:** Not only did the Health minister and the Premier tell the public that we were going to pause, AHS actually told the media in February that the agreements were paused while the Auditor General's review is under way. News flash: still under way now. Why didn't the government take two months and make sure that we had more hospitals doing these surgeries? Why not support public health care during this scandal? Why would the government renew these supposedly paused contracts while the Auditor General's review under the corrupt care allegations is still under way?

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we've given \$3.5 billion more to AHS and they're doing fewer surgeries today than they were six years ago. That's the reason why we're using charter surgical centres because when you pay a facility on the basis of the surgeries they perform, they find a way to do it more efficiently. A surgical block of time in hospitals: you're lucky if you can get four surgeries completed. A surgical block of time in a charter surgical centre: eight to 10. That's the reason why we've been able to reduce the backlog, increase the number of surgeries, and we're going to keep doing it.

**Ms Gray:** This government tied the public health care system's hands behind their back and then told them to try and do more.

There's no reason for the government to award renewed contracts while mired in the middle of a scandal. Albertans need these vital surgeries. Invest in public hospitals. Hospitals have been deprived of the basics like anaesthesiologists to do surgeries, and this government said that while they were paused on awarding further contracts, they would do that for a review. Why would the government renew potentially bloated contracts to ASG or any other private surgical provider under this scandal? Wait for the investigation.

**The Speaker:** The leader of the government.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we can do both. We can continue contracting with charter surgical centres, as we have done, as the members opposite did. The members opposite also had 40,000 surgeries that were done under charter surgical centres. We've managed to see an increase of 25 per cent in charter surgical centre treatments, but at the same time, we have our Alberta surgical initiative. We're spending \$331 million to expand the number of surgeries that are being done in public hospitals. We can do both. We've got a lot of people who we need to reduce the backlog for, and we're going to do it.

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

### Measles Outbreak in Alberta

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta is facing a measles outbreak like we haven't seen in a generation. As of yesterday: 159 cases. More infections are spreading for this preventable disease. The Premier has spoken of active case counts, but those past the communicable phase of this disease are still at a personal health risk. So the total counts do matter a lot. We need clinics, translated public health information, and outreach to all kinds of communities. Why is this government not doing more to communicate the risks of measles to the Alberta public?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly hope the member opposite was able to google "Alberta measles" so that she could find all the information that's available online. We have been keeping track of all of the cases by zone, the number of cases that are passed the communicable stage. We now have six active cases. We're glad to see that young people who have been infected with measles are on the mend, but we're also encouraged to see that we've seen a 66 per cent year-over-year increase in the vaccination rate. That is happening because of the outreach we're doing. It's happening because of the campaign that we're doing. It's happened because of the targeted information that we're giving out.

**Ms Gray:** Mocking people about a public health outbreak is not a good look.

There have been serious concerns that the chief medical officer of health, who is no longer in the role that he was in, has not been able to publicly advocate for the things he was recommending to government. Albertans know what that is. That's a gag order. With the measles outbreak hurting young children, this is no time for political intervention into the public health system. Why isn't the government doing more to alert Albertans to the risks of measles, to promote vaccination, to put this information on the government home page, like I asked yesterday?



**Ms Smith:** It is very easy to find the information. Alberta measles: look it up on Google. It will very likely be the very first entry. In addition to that, all of the information is in one place and there is a link to the AHS website that shows the latest exposures by communities. Anybody can go on and have a look and make sure that if they have symptoms, that they can cross-reference that with places where there may have been exposure. Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to do the outreach. We are continuing to give the information. We're continuing to see an increase in vaccination, and I'm very hopeful that we'll be able to get over this outbreak very soon.

2:00

**Ms Gray:** This government is failing the test of keeping the public safe from this highly preventable disease. Put the information on the home page instead of your failed budget.

Meanwhile, Alberta children are getting infected, and along with the infection comes risks of serious complications. This is what Albertans get from an antiscience, antihealth, antivaccine government. Measles has been successfully managed for over 50 years, but now things are going backwards. When will this Premier intervene, correct course, make sure her Health minister doesn't make another mess of this and good public information gets out freely?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a near 90 per cent vaccination rate when kids are up to the age of 13. We have also changed the schedule, in line with the fact that we now have more kids who are in care with child care, so that you can get your second dose by the time you're 18 months of age. That's part of the reason why we've seen a massive uptick in the number of vaccinations this year. It's gone up 66 per cent because people are getting their kids vaccinated at a younger age. There is a lot of information out there in the public, there's information on our website, and we're going to continue to make sure that everyone has the information they need so that they can keep their families safe.

### Federal-provincial Relations (continued)

**Ms Pancholi:** The UCP's political strategy for the last six years has been pretty obvious: blame everything on the federal government, pick endless fights, and distract from their own failure to deliver on a resilient economy and strong public health care and education. It's obvious, but it's also produced nothing for Albertans. Albertans have said over and over what their top priority is, and it's affordability. Grocery bills, electricity costs, car insurance keep going up, but the UCP doesn't even pretend to care about it. Instead of provoking a national unity crisis or stoking the fires of separatism, will the Premier commit to focusing for once on the needs of everyday Albertans?

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to be part of a government that takes a full ministerial approach to affordability for Albertans. We're putting Albertans first in every single ministry, making sure that we meet their needs, plan for a better future, work through all the challenges, and face the things that we need to face by fixing the system and many of the messes that the NDP left behind. That's why we're working on utilities. That's why we're working on insurance. That's why we're working on health care, affordable housing, and a ream of other things,

serving Albertans who elected us to be here. I'm very proud to be part of that.

**Ms Pancholi:** Six years and no results.

Look, I get it. When you make hating the feds your whole identity, it's hard to give it up. That's probably why the Premier was so busy campaigning for Carney. I mean, every time the Premier reminded Canadians that she and Poilievre were on Team Trump, the Liberals got more votes. That must be hard for the UCP to swallow today. But Alberta needs to get stuff done. We need national consensus to build new energy projects, and the only party that's built pipelines to tidewater is the Alberta NDP. Will the Premier admit it's time to give up bad habits and focus on getting deals to support Alberta's economic future as part of a strong and united Canada?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I applaud the work that the Premier has done since she was elected as Premier. She has led this province forward in very difficult times. I also want to congratulate the new Prime Minister Mark Carney with his minority government. We look forward to working with him. Certainly, we were hoping to see the Conservatives win. It's no party on this side of the House. Speaking of not being a party, I'd like to draw to the attention of the members opposite how they were decimated last night. I mean, their overlords in Ottawa: what are they going to do next?

**Ms Pancholi:** Let's take a look at how some other Conservative Premiers, grown-up governments responded to the federal election on behalf of provinces. Doug Ford said that his government "stands ready to work with the federal government to unleash [their] economy" and "to tear down . . . trade barriers." Tim Houston said that he looks "forward to working together to get things done for Nova Scotia." But this Premier? She didn't even mention internal trade barriers or jobs or investment, just separatism. Why can't the Premier set aside her partisanship, reset the relationship she's worked so hard to destroy, and make Alberta and Canada a united economic powerhouse?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't really hear much of a question about government business from the member opposite, but I am happy to stand here today in the Chamber and say that defending Alberta is not a destination; it's an ongoing struggle, one that the Premier has continued to engage in from the time that she became our Premier, making sure that Albertans know, the United States knows, and the government of Canada knows that we are here to be meaningful partners and part of Team Canada, but we are asking Team Canada to be part of Team Alberta as well.

### Influenza Immunization

**Ms Sigurdson:** One hundred and ninety-three Albertans have died from the flu this season, which is the highest number in at least 16 years. While 140 of those were over 60, doctors are also reporting younger adults dying from preventable infections. Only 21 per cent of Albertans received a flu shot this year, the lowest rate of vaccination since 2009. This drop is directly related to misinformation around vaccines. How many more Albertans will get seriously ill or die before this government stops politicizing public health and launches a robust province-wide flu vaccination campaign?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, any death related to flu or any reason is unacceptable, and our hearts go out to those families first and foremost. But there are many factors that influence why there is a higher flu season this particular year. The fact is that we have two strains of influenza. We have influenza A and influenza B. The second strain is H3N2. It's a particularly virulent strain that is causing more severe illness in individuals, adults particularly who are of age 65 and older, so that's why we have . . .

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

**Ms Sigurdson:** Given that Alberta has now recorded record-high flu deaths three years in a row, rising from just 16 deaths in 2009 to 193 this year, and given that public health messaging on vaccines has been lacking while hospitalization and ICU admissions increase dramatically, will the minister finally admit that this government's refusal to lead on flu vaccination has put additional strain on our hospitals and take responsibility for allowing preventable deaths to become Alberta's new normal?

**Member LaGrange:** Of course, Mr. Speaker, we do have a robust influenza campaign, and we will continue to have that. I do need to correct the member opposite. Prior to the 2021-22 year influenza deaths in the community were not reportable to Alberta Health, and since '21-22 influenza deaths have been actively investigated in a standardized manner, so it's likely more deaths are being captured compared with historical seasons. What that means is that we believe in being transparent with the public so that they actually know what is going on.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Given that vaccination saves lives and doctors have been clear that we are losing loved ones who could have been protected by simply getting a flu shot and given that health experts are pleading for a stronger campaign next year – one saying, and I quote: it's clear the status quo right now is not having an effect, and that is evidenced now by three record increases in influenza deaths – will the minister commit to leading a robust province-wide flu vaccine campaign, or will she stay silent because of pandering to the antivaccine supporters in her own party?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, that statement was just ridiculous. Of course, we already have a robust campaign. We will continue to have a robust campaign for the rest of this year and into next year because, of course, we have to take influenza very seriously. We continue to provide timely information to Albertans. We continue to be transparent with the numbers. We continue to put things on our website so that people can go there and access timely information. We're going to continue to do that because Albertans deserve it.

### Red Deer Justice Centre

**Mrs. Johnson:** Mr. Speaker, Red Deer received good news last week. The government has delivered for Red Deer and central Alberta once again. The recent opening of the new Red Deer Justice Centre and 12 new courtrooms, with room to expand to 16, will mean that the people of Red Deer and central Alberta can access timely and efficient justice services. Can the Minister of Justice tell this House how this \$191 million investment is improving access to justice for the people of Red Deer and what this means for our community?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The opening of the new Red Deer Justice Centre is truly a good-news story, fantastic news for the good people of Red Deer. Not only is it an absolutely stunning building but it increases our courtroom counts from eight to 12, with the capacity to increase to 16. Look, nobody wants to be in court, but, at the very minimum, if they have to be in court, they may as well be in one that can handle their matters efficiently and effectively. The good people of central Alberta are going to be very well served by this remarkable building, and we're very proud to have opened it.

**2:10**

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

**Mrs. Johnson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister for that answer. Given that this is the first new courthouse for Alberta in decades and includes plenty of new modern technology and given that there are new spaces in the Red Deer Justice Centre for people to use for family and civil mediation, can the minister expand on how these new spaces in the Red Deer Justice Centre will help to make the justice system more accessible, efficient, and help people who utilize our court system?

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, again, to the member for that remarkable question. It was, Mr. Speaker, indeed, as the member mentioned; the Red Deer Justice Centre is the first new courthouse in decades. It was thanks to the leadership of this government that we recently opened that building. Our government knows that the Red Deer Justice Centre is important to the fundamental concept of access to justice, and that's exactly why this new building contains state-of-the-art technology to be able to serve the good people of central Alberta in a quick and efficient way.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for that answer. Given that this new facility is over 300,000 square feet and more than three times the size of the previous courthouse and given that there are justice programs for people taking alternative approaches to the traditional courtroom trial process for Indigenous people and Alberta's long-standing drug treatment program, can the minister speak to how these alternative approaches to justice will support reconciliation and help people who are struggling with addiction?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Apart from the bigger space, more courtrooms, and new technology, the Red Deer Justice Centre has dedicated space for people who are taking alternative approaches to the traditional courtroom trial process. The new Indigenous courtroom is designed to support Indigenous justice practices, with dedicated venting for smudging purposes where all participants can attend in a circle. This new courtroom will also support Alberta's drug treatment court that has had incredible results, where the vast majority of individuals who go through the drug treatment court never reoffend again. We're very proud of these new accomplishments.

### Energy Industry Liability Management

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Mr. Speaker, the polluter-pays principle is simple and clear. If you make a mess, you clean up after yourself. That's what I tell my kids every day. The Premier told us that her mature

asset strategy will uphold the polluter-pays principle. The Premier previously lobbied for R-star. The energy minister's mandate letter refers to incenting reclamation, and the Premier's mature asset strategy report fails to mention the polluter-pays principle even once. Why has this government stopped supporting polluter pays?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Energy and Minerals.

**Mr. Jean:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate it. I'd like to let the member know first-hand, as I have repeated time and time again in this House and outside the House, that Albertans will not be responsible for the pollution of others. We've been clear that we will clean up our mess. We will continue to clean up our mess, just like Albertans cleaned up the mess of the NDP by kicking them out and firing them and hiring us. We're going to make sure that industry pays for the mess they make and that Albertans live in the best place in the world to work, live, and play. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Given that the strategy fails to define what a mature asset is yet it includes Crown corporations, not one but two, HarvestCo and ClosureCo, and given that their plan backs away from the polluter-pays principle and instead backstops the scheme with public dollars and given that I've never seen a government so obsessed with Crown corporations like this one, how much money did the Premier put aside for her two new Crown corporations, HarvestCo and ClosureCo?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, we engaged extensively with landowners, with industry, with environmental groups. We found the right balance. No public money will be used to clean up the mess of others.

I understand why the other side and the members are a little testy today. Yesterday they lost their grand overlord in Ottawa, lost the election, resigned his seat. There is no party in the NDP party nationally. I'm wondering if the rumours are true. Are they actually negotiating for the Alberta Liberal brand today? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Given the Rural Municipalities of Alberta said that the engagement process was, quote, problematic in multiple ways; the flaws in the process directly contribute to the questionable credibility of the final report and given the UCP consultations were conducted behind closed doors with a lack of diverse stakeholders – the RMA said, quote, the environmental sector, gas co-ops, the renewable energy industry, multiple arm's-length government agencies and organizations representing the broader public interest, end quote, were all left out – why should anyone trust that the UCP will not leave this mess for Albertans?

**Mr. Jean:** Probably because they saw the mess the NDP left behind, Mr. Speaker, when they attempted to fix it and did absolutely nothing. They know first-hand that we will do what we promised to do. We've got 21 recommendations. Our Premier is ambitious. We want to double oil production, but we know that we can't do that without taking care of what's happened in the past. The industry will pay for the mistakes they made, and we're going to make sure those mistakes are never made again.

#### Termination of AHS CEO and Board

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier hand-picked the AHS CEO and his board. After hardly a year she fired them all because they

were swallowed by the machine. This was a seven-person board containing three deputy ministers and the Premier's health guru, former Minister Lyle Oberg. Yet this Premier lost their confidence. The board was fired because they resisted putting Andre Tremblay at the helm of AHS. To the Premier: is it not a conflict of interest to have the Minister of Health and her former deputy overseeing an investigation in which both are implicated?

**Mr. Amery:** Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the hon. member for that question. The Minister of Health is not overseeing the investigation; the Auditor General's office is overseeing the investigation. The former Chief Justice from the provincial court of Manitoba is overseeing an investigation. Those investigations are independent, and there's a reason for that: to maintain the independence and integrity of those investigations. Unlike the opposition, who do not want to give these investigations a chance to complete, we're prepared to wait and see what the investigations tell us.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, given the AHS board fully supported their CEO and her probe into potential corruption and given they backed her investigations into both Tylenol and surgical facilities and given this UCP government ordered a directive to halt those inquiries and given the AHS board received advice from four independent lawyers advising them to turn over all documents to the AG and police and given they were terminated immediately after submitting those records, to the Premier: why not come clean as to why you really needed to fire the board?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, the materials that have been furnished to the AG now number 13,000 or more. There has been full co-operation with the Auditor General. We have been working directly with the Auditor General's office to make sure that the interviews are being facilitated, that document production is being facilitated. Everything that we need to be doing to be working with the Auditor General to facilitate the investigation is happening.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, given the hand-picked AHS board and its CEO were performing their fiduciary duty to investigate wrongdoing and given this government refuses to do the same and given the so-called independent investigation by the UCP is meant as a shield for self-preservation and given I warned caucus that supporting a whitewashed report that is later proven false by the Auditor General and the RCMP will make you culpable in a cover-up, to the Premier: are you seriously going to stick to the same story under oath when questioned by the AG or the RCMP?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we would not presuppose the investigation of an independent office that is conducting that investigation. I would direct the hon. member to take a look at the statement of defence, which outlines the government's position very clearly. The Auditor General is conducting an investigation into the process. We're going to let that process unfold. We're going to wait to see what the results of that investigation are, and if necessary we'd be happy to take action.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, on January 27 the AHS board met to discuss concerns of potential corruption and the implementation of Andre Tremblay as CEO. During that meeting three deputy ministers were asked to leave if they could not hold the confidence of the room. The Deputy Minister of Mental Health and Addiction remained. Of those attending board members, one informed the minister of their ongoing discussions. To the Minister of Health: what request did you make of the AHS board upon feeling compelled to call in and interrupt their meeting?

2:20

**Mr. Amery:** Again, Mr. Speaker, we're working with the independent offices that have been tasked and created, in fact, to conduct these investigations, providing them all of the information necessary to be able to review the procurement practices of AHS, to review the allegations made in the statement of claim, and to review the overall processes to see if anything was untoward. Once those investigations take place and the results come forward, which are going to come forward here very soon, this government will be able to take action.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, given it was reported to me that during the AHS board meeting on January 27 members expressed apprehension with Andre Tremblay becoming CEO and given their concern stemmed from evidence provided of potential interference and given four independent lawyers advised board members to submit all materials to the Auditor General and police and given the Minister of Health reportedly called into that meeting demanding that they not heed counsel's advice, to the Minister of Health: please deny again that the AHS CEO and board were not fired to control information.

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the reasons for the AHS CEO's termination, that is well outlined in the statement of defence, which is available publicly for all Albertans to see. We have relied on the facts contained in the statement of defence to support our position. We will defend our position vigorously, and we'll see what the court has to say about that.

The Auditor General is conducting its own investigation. We're happy to facilitate and co-operate with all the materials they need, Mr. Speaker. The former Chief Justice of Manitoba is conducting an independent investigation. We're working with that office as well. We're looking forward to seeing the results.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, given that on or about January 29 the AHS board submitted information to the Auditor General and given that board delivered a letter to the Minister of Health on or about January 30 notifying her of two things – one, they submitted documents to the AG and, two, they denied a request to allow Andre Tremblay to take over as CEO – and given that on January 30 an emergency meeting of the Health cabinet committee was convened to fire the AHS board, to the Premier: please tell the House again how that meeting was merely to stand up Acute Care.

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, once again, the reasons for the termination of the former AHS CEO are well articulated in the statement of defence. It is very detailed. It is clear. There are very articulable reasons as to why she was terminated. We'll stand behind those reasons. We will defend the allegations made in court vigorously, and we will allow the court to make that decision in due course. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

### Provincial Police Agency

**Mr. Kasawski:** Sherwood Park and Strathcona county residents want reasonable government provided by reasonable people. We want policy based on merit, on facts and data, not on bombastic political theatre and misinformation. If the Premier has an idea, she should run it by the people of Sherwood Park, but she won't because she knows that 86 per cent of the people of Sherwood Park support keeping the RCMP. Can the Premier explain why she refuses to listen to the people in Sherwood Park and wants to replace the RCMP with an Alberta provincial police force?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, we have told all municipalities within this province that the choice is theirs. We allow those municipalities to have their own choice. If the choice of Sherwood Park is that they wish to continue with their policing jurisdiction, with their contract service provider, they certainly have the choice to do that. On this side of the House we believe in choice. We believe in giving options for people in rural Alberta to decide what is going to meet their needs in their community.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Given that the UCP dumped the notion of an Alberta provincial police force just two years ago because it's a very unpopular idea, given that we were all relieved when the Premier did not put this bad idea in the mandate letters of any ministers and given the Premier said that she would ask Albertans this question by referendum, why is the government legislating an Alberta provincial police force to replace the RCMP?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, we have said time and time again that we are augmenting and supporting police all throughout this province, whether it be the city of Calgary, whether it be the city of Edmonton, whether it be police all throughout the province of Alberta. We have requests regarding our SCAN teams. We have our fugitive apprehension teams. These are officers that are already performing policelike functions. I'm not entirely sure why the members opposite are opposed to fairness in employment for people that are doing the job as police officers so that they can actually be treated as police officers fairly.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Given that bad ideas never go away from the UCP, like their terrible plan to bring coal mining back to the eastern slopes or taking Albertans out of the CPP, given that trading the Mounties for a risky new UCP police force will undermine the safety in our communities and likely result in more bloated contracts to their friends and insiders, how will creating a new police service possibly make Sherwood Park safer when it's not going to add an additional police officer or social worker to our force?

**Mr. Ellis:** See, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I completely reject the premise of that particular question. A First Nations group says that calls for service can have a response time of up to six days. Another First Nations group says to me: the levels of service and response times are absolutely inadequate to protect our members; we actually live with the reality that a call for help just won't be answered. That is the reality of people in rural Alberta. That is the reality our First Nations communities are facing right now. If they're not going to stand up for rural Alberta and they're not going to stand up for First Nations communities, on this side of the House we will.

### Rural Addiction Treatment Services

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Mr. Speaker, rural communities across Alberta are not immune to the problems caused by addiction, poverty, and access to recovery services. While Budget 2025 has made an important investment in mental health and addiction care, people in rural areas still face challenges accessing these services due to the long travel distances and smaller local support. Can the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction please explain what plan the government has that will focus on rural areas to help prevent substance abuse and support long-term recovery in rural Alberta?

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

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that member for the question. The truth is that every single Albertan deserves an

opportunity at recovery if they suffer from addiction, and that includes rural Albertans in my constituency and his. I want to thank the member for his warm welcome when I came to his constituency recently. Coming out of that, we saw the need for more addiction treatment spaces in Drayton Valley, and we included a \$300,000 grant for Opportunity Home within Drayton Valley because of the good work that they're doing there as a grassroots organization.

Of course, we're continuing to invest in the virtual opioid dependency program across this province for same-day access to immediate, evidence-based health care for those suffering from addiction, and also, not least of which, compassionate prevention across this province coming soon.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that recovery from addiction is about both treatment and rebuilding a stable life and given that rural Albertans coming out of recovery programs often face barriers like unemployment and lack of basic supports, to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: what is the government doing to help rural Albertans to move from recovery into steady work, safe housing, and being part of their communities again?

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

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this budget we're spending \$185 million on employment supports to help people get back to work, about \$185 million more than the NDP spent; about \$9 billion with our partners on housing, creating thousands of units of housing, and as I've already said, the NDP basically made none; and we're spending billions of dollars on income supports to be able to make sure people have jobs and to make sure they have support as they transition out of addiction treatment. And, of course, we indexed AISH. We're the only government who did that. Unfortunately, the NDP spent zero dollars on AISH.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is very important that rural Albertans can get services close to home that match the needs of their communities and further given that youth programs, recovery supports, and treatment centres should be planned with rural needs in mind, to the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: how is the government helping to grow recovery centres and local prevention programs in rural Alberta?

2:30

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you again for the question and the advocacy of that member, which is terrific. We need more addiction recovery spaces across the province. We've added 10,000 since this government came into power in 2019. For treatment spaces across the year we're adding 700 new, one-year-long, high-quality treatments across the 11 recovery communities, the vast majority of which are in rural Alberta. I'll add that members opposite in power did not add any seats for addiction or treatment spaces at all, never mind recovery-focused approach. And, of course, we're going to have 50 beds north and 50 beds south across Alberta for compassionate intervention so that every single community has access to life-saving care if somebody is a danger to themselves or others, Mr. Speaker.

## Rural Transportation Services for Persons with Disabilities

**Mr. Dach:** Mr. Speaker, the minister of transportation is willing to intervene in municipal transportation to restrict the travel choices of Albertans, but when it comes to increasing the freedom of some Albertans to travel, he's not interested. For example, the freedom of rural Albertans with disabilities to access public transit. A 2023 Humphrey centre report recommended that the UCP government implement province-wide standards for public transportation to address the needs of people with disabilities. What was the minister's response? Crickets. Why is the government willing to restrict some Albertans' freedom to travel but not willing to enforce mobility rights of people with disabilities?

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

**Mr. Dreesen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite. Last week I was actually in Edmonton talking to Edmontonians about the issues that they were having on bike lanes on 132nd Avenue – I think it's near his riding – where there are four main lanes that are being restricted by the city of Edmonton with \$100 million. There are six schools in that area. The main arteries that we have, our provincial road network, the hundreds of millions of dollars that are going into provincial roads actually add lane capacity to actually reduce traffic congestion in the city of Edmonton. We have to be on the same page with the city of Edmonton, and that's something that we'll continue to work on.

**Mr. Dach:** Let's talk about people with disabilities, Mr. Speaker. Given that transportation options in smaller communities are too often nonprofit organizations which must beg for government grants and given that billions are rightfully being invested in urban public transit projects in Calgary and Edmonton and given that Albertans with disabilities have a right to public mobility just like anybody else in the province, why is the government unwilling to even study the possibility of a provincial bus transportation network that would give rural Albertans in every corner of our province, including those coping with disabilities, access to the same right to public transportation that the minister supports in urban Alberta?

**Mr. Dreesen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as an MLA from rural Alberta I obviously understand the issues that we have. That's why we're investing billions of dollars in rural Alberta to increase our transportation network. Yes, we're putting billions of dollars into LRT projects in Edmonton and Calgary, but we're not forgetting about rural Alberta. We're investing billions, as I mentioned, to make sure that our road network is expanding, that it keeps up with the growth that we have not just with our population but also for the economic opportunities in the industry so that they can do what they do best, which is make sure that they can provide jobs for people in Alberta, we can develop our resources, and we can get it to markets.

**Mr. Dach:** Given that Albertans with disabilities need access to public transportation that actually accommodates their daily needs and given that much of rural Alberta is a public transportation desert since Greyhound left in 2018, given that in 2023 the Humphrey centre recommended government support for intermunicipal and rural transportation for the 1 in 5 Albertans living with disabilities, when will the minister act on this recommendation to provide disabled Albertans a province-wide public transportation system

that satisfies their needs so that they can exercise their right to fully participate in Alberta life? Show me one dollar you've spent for that right.

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, we've just invested, just the other day, another \$3.5 million to help the aging in Alberta and to help people facing disabilities with transportation. We invest millions of dollars in each of our largest cities to help those who need transportation in all of those cities, and we invest millions of dollars in rural communities all across the province to be able to make sure that takes place.

Sadly, the NDP voted against every one of those dollars because they don't care. That's pretty clear, and I think that's because they're struggling right now to figure out which one of them is going to join their leader and be part of the Liberal Party and which one of them is going to stand for their actual social values with the NDP. I'm looking to see it. In fact, I heard they changed some of their colors to purple the other day.

#### Automobile Insurance Reform

**Member Kayande:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has taken the pole position in justifying this government's many scandals, but instead of focusing on Albertans' priorities, like making life more affordable, he's helping make car insurance more expensive by 15 per cent or more. Even worse, the Minister of Justice is also happy to strip away the rights of injured people to fair compensation adjudicated by the courts. More expensive insurance that delivers fewer benefits; why is the Justice minister supporting no-fault car insurance?

**Mr. Horner:** We hear all the time in this House and when we're speaking to all of our constituents about the affordability concerns of Albertans. That's why we're moving forward with a new system of auto insurance. We know that we have the second highest premiums in the country. We know that we need a system that changes. If you look around, you do the crossjurisdictional scan, you can see NDP-led B.C. went to a care-first model like this because they couldn't afford the \$4.1 billion of taxpayer dollars that they had to put in to prop up their system.

**Member Kayande:** Given that it's not just wasting his constituents' tax dollars that should weigh on the Justice minister's conscience and given that eliminating their rights in vehicle accidents where another driver is at fault might also cause him qualms, given the Justice minister has admirably helped injured people get the care they deserve in the past, why won't the Minister of Justice stand up and admit that the courts have an important role in helping injured people get the care they need after an accident?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, that's why we're moving to an Alberta model, a care-first system. It will in some ways be the first of its kind, and it will have tort or court access when you have major traffic safety violations, and it will make sure that we take care of everybody. Under the current system, what happens if you hit a deer or another kind of wild animal that's on the road and you're injured terribly? You don't have an at-fault driver to sue. So not only will this take pressure off of the court system, it will also ensure that everybody gets the care they need and they can get back to their lives.

**Member Kayande:** Given that the residents of Calgary-Cross need such careful stewardship of their tax dollars and given if someone working two jobs, taking care of a family, working with their hands needs care and compensation when they're injured in an accident,

when someone hurts them, will the Justice minister stand up and tell this House what he has to say to the constituents of Calgary-Cross who are being left behind by his choosing to be an instrument of the Premier's agenda instead of the representative that they deserve?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, all Albertans from all constituencies want to see their tax dollars spent wisely. I think that's why we've won the last two elections.

We're moving toward a system that will provide care for everyone with the highest level of compensation in the benefits package. We took the Manitoba model, which was the highest in the land, and we increased the income support to match the higher income levels of Alberta. This is the most generous, highest level of benefits of any care-first model in the country. We're going to make sure everyone gets the care that they need.

#### Federal-provincial Relations

*(continued)*

**Mr. Hunter:** Mr. Speaker, last night the east elected another federal Liberal minority government, this time under Prime Minister Mark Carney. Despite Trudeau's resignation and his junior coalition partner Jagmeet Singh being fired by the good people of Burnaby Central, the Liberal government that spent a decade land-locking resources, threatening energy workers, and driving away investment sadly remains. Albertans are justifiably concerned. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: how is Alberta's government prepared to respond if the Liberals continue on their path of interference in Alberta's energy future? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. the minister of energy.

**Mr. Jean:** Well, the first thing we're doing, Mr. Speaker, is making it clear and obvious that there's a business case for our oil and gas and for pipelines. The NDP under the pro-Liberal leader in Alberta and their defeated pro-Liberal national leader are just simply wrong on energy, and Canadians know that. They won't call for more Alberta natural gas getting to Asia to replace coal, and it is an obvious solution. We believe in the exact opposite; we think that more Alberta energy getting sold to Asia is a good thing for Asia, a good thing for Canada, and a good thing for the world. It's good for the planet and it's good for Albertans, but the Liberal-NDP coalition doesn't want it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that the federal government appears poised to continue pushing harmful initiatives like so-called clean electricity regulations, the emissions cap, and the net-zero vehicle mandate and given the serious economic risks these policies pose to Alberta families and our economy, again to the Minister of Energy and Minerals: what are Alberta's priorities as we prepare to engage with the re-elected Liberal government?

2:40

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, we're working hard to grow our energy industry by doing exactly the opposite of what the NDP and the Liberal coalition have been doing. Our Premier has called for a doubling of oil and gas. It's an ambitious agenda, and we're going to do exactly what she's asked. Albertans want it, Albertans expect it, and it's better for the world. We're talking to all the pipeline companies to improve pipeline efficiency and egress. We're asking

oil and gas producers to increase their capital investments right here in Alberta. We want a growing energy industry that will employ a lot more Albertans. We reject the keep-it-in-the-ground policies of the NDP and the Liberals, and we always will.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has repeatedly challenged federal overreach in the courts, including Bill C-69, the plastics ban, and emissions caps, and given the re-election of a Liberal government – minority government, that is – that continues to threaten our constitutional jurisdiction over natural resources, to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: what legal tools is Alberta prepared to use to uphold our provincial jurisdiction and protect our economy?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has and will continue to defend our province's interests and constitutional jurisdiction against federal overreach every single time. As the hon. member mentioned, we beat them on Bill C-69. We beat them on the plastics ban. We beat them on many things. It's past time for Ottawa to come to the table and negotiate to reset the relationship. Maybe in light of the new Prime Minister we'd be happy to reset that relationship between Ottawa and Alberta with meaningful action rather than hollow rhetoric, but, as the hon. member asked, we will defend Alberta in every which way possible.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this 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)*

### Women's Political Participation

**Ms Hayter:** Today I rise to say something controversial. All women need to have a seat where decisions are made in politics, whether we are progressive women or conservative women. That's how good policy is made. We must support women's voices. When someone asks us a question in the Chamber, we deserve to be able to answer it ourselves. We're not children who should be seen and not heard. We're all elected officials.

As women in politics we stand on the shoulders of those who fought for us to even be here. They didn't just fight for our right to vote or to run for office; they fought for equal pay, for women's health issues, basic dignity. And the work isn't finished, Mr. Speaker. You know, one of my favourite things to do is visit elementary schools in my riding. I love telling kids, "You could sit where I'm sitting someday," and I mean it.

Lately we've been speaking about the UCP government's cuts, chaos, cruelty, and corruption. Well, I'd like to add a fifth C to that list. Don't worry, Mr. Speaker; the C-word is collaboration. Can you imagine this place if we could actually work together across the aisle, collaborating to represent the people of Alberta? I can because I've seen it. It happened when the NDP government was in power until 2019. People who were here even before 2015 have told me stories about how members used to work across party lines.

What changed in 2019? The formation of the UCP brought with it a style of governing where opposition voices are routinely silenced, where members are thrown out of the caucus for voicing their concerns, where collaboration has become a dirty word. Think

about what could be accomplished for Albertans if we all collaborated. But for that to happen, the division has to stop. This dismissiveness has to stop.

We were all sent here by Albertans who expect us to do things to make their lives better. Let's actually do that together. I look forward to having a government in 2027 with 50 per cent women because that's when Alberta will truly hear all our voices.

## Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Justice.

### Bill 54

#### Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move first reading of Bill 54, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

The proposed amendments would deliver on my mandate to review the legislation and recommend changes to strengthen public trust in the integrity of our elections and other democratic processes.

Mr. Speaker, I now move first reading of Bill 54.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a first time]

## Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, and I have provided the requisite copies. First is an article by Chief Kelly LaRocca for the Mississaugas of Scugog Island titled Ontario's iGaming Market Will Hurt First Nations and Others, which talks about a similar situation in Ontario that Alberta is following with Bill 48.

Then the second tabling is a Supreme Court of Canada decision of Pamajewon from 1996, where First Nations were criminalized for gambling on-reserve, highlighting the double standard with First Nations and gambling as historically blocked.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table an article: AISH, Income Support, Seniors Benefits Indexed to Cost of Living under New Bill, dated – let's get this – November 8, 2018. I would like to remind the minister opposite that the UCP was not first.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

**Mr. Guthrie:** Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. The first is from my March 17 Auditor General submission, containing my personal handwritten notes, prepared ahead of the February 11 cabinet meeting, revealing what I shared with colleagues during that meeting.

The second contains a short write-up in my handwritten note which expresses concerns I stated during the January 30 Health cabinet committee meeting.

**The Speaker:** Are there other tablings?

Seeing none; members, that brings us to points of order, of which there were none.

Ordres du jour.

**Orders of the Day**  
**Government Bills and Orders**  
**Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Rowswell in the chair]

**The Acting Chair:** I would like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 48**  
**iGaming Alberta Act**

**The Acting Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Edmonton-West Henday, go ahead.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today in support of Bill 48, the iGaming Alberta Act. While I recognize that many jurisdictions across Canada have made the transition to online gambling, I do have to ask the question, though: has there been any consideration or conversations with the First Nations gaming operators? I know the Premier tasked the minister with this back in 2023, but reading this bill, I don't see any recommendations. I know that regulations are coming, but I do want to stress that there is an important urgency to include First Nations in this conversation.

2:50

As this House is aware, the First Nations development fund offers many opportunities for First Nations to use the revenue that is garnered through in-person gambling on-reserve for economic, social, and community development projects. This includes infrastructure development, cultural initiatives, crime reduction programs, and business ventures. As we know, funding on-reserve is a big sore spot both provincially but also federally, and this jurisdictional back and forth between the province and the federal government creates a system in which First Nations are often deprived. Turning to their money that comes from their on-reserve casinos helps to supplement that, and we see that with many successful First Nations here in Alberta.

One I'm thinking of is not too far from here and one not too far from the great riding of Edmonton-West Henday, the Enoch Cree Nation, the River Cree casino. It provides, really, an opportunity for Enoch to develop infrastructure but also to develop cultural opportunities for their nation and for their members, and we can see that with the business development happening around River Cree. Many of us have either been there, we've accessed the casino, or we've hosted events there. We all see that the business development and the changes that the casino has brought to that nation have been tremendous.

If we go down south to Calgary, we can see the Tsuut'ina Nation, which has also developed many businesses around their casino, Grey Eagle casino. I am a big fan of supporting Indigenous business, and it just so happens that all of these casinos generate new businesses in their community.

I bring this up because, you know, there is no reference in this legislation to ensure that the increased revenues and jobs through this bill and through iGaming are realized by all Albertans. This also, most importantly, must include First Nations and Métis peoples. I do think about those casino operators on-reserve, and I think about them because there will definitely be effects by the shift to online gaming.

During COVID I remember the chief of Enoch working with the UCP government at the time to work on restrictions being lessened so that the casino could continue operating. The impetus behind that was that there were some serious concerns about a loss of revenue

that was negatively affecting the Enoch Cree Nation and certainly those other First Nations that have casinos that rely on their revenue. While you know, Mr. Chair, that many First Nations oftentimes only have these casinos for revenue and there aren't many in the province, but I do take note that the Minister of Indigenous Relations mused himself at estimates last year to continue spending money at these casinos. With this bill and the consultations that had happened in 2023, I do hope that the minister and that this ministry take into account these very serious and credible concerns that are at the table with respect to online gambling.

I bring this up, and I mused briefly about the First Nations development fund. For those in the gallery or those watching, this is a fund that comes solely out of gaming revenues on First Nations and which the province keeps a portion of. We'll have a conversation about that another time because the chiefs have had some concerns about that for some time. But undoubtedly the First Nations development fund will be affected by the shift to online gambling under this bill. So we have some serious matters that we need to discuss about the iGaming Alberta Act. I know that these consultations have been undertaken. I still am waiting for the results from those consultations and the types of arrangements that these consultations were suggesting, because if we're having online gaming based on First Nations, the locus of where that purchase is made needs to be assessed. We need to have agreements in place with First Nations. That way, the revenue can go back to the First Nation and thereby go back to the communities.

Mr. Chair, I am concerned now that these First Nations operators that do have physical bricks-and-mortar casinos will be unduly affected by the potential loss in revenue from this move to iGaming under this act. I do understand that this type of legislation is necessary to regulate this type of gambling, as many other jurisdictions are doing, including Ontario. I still have to worry about the First Nations operators because they do provide multiple opportunities for their nation not only in employment but also in all of those other areas that I enumerated quite a moment ago.

In Ontario – I just tabled an article in this House today – the rollout of iGaming was no different than here. Alberta is moving on this legislation, and I am heartened to hear about the consultation, but we do need to hear about what that consultation created. What did we hear from First Nations? What types of agreements and arrangements is the province going to enter into to ensure that these casinos aren't going to be completely affected and these nations are not going to be affected?

I bring this up because this government talks really big on economic reconciliation but, if I'm going to be quite frank, I don't see any proof of economic reconciliation in the bill as it currently stands. Although I support it, I would like it to be strengthened, particularly when it comes to First Nations gaming on-reserve. Like I mentioned, those gaps that exist by government funding or lack thereof are addressed through the FNDF but also from the revenues garnered by these casinos.

I do recognize that in the article that I put forward by Chief LaRocca from the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation there was mention about a cannibalization or its employment impact on Indigenous communities. I know the members opposite and the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon know that the employment opportunities that come with the casino in Enoch are very important. I was going to use a big word there, but I decided not to.

**Mr. Eggen:** What word? What word?

**Member Arcand-Paul:** You'll have to wait, Member for Edmonton-North West.



I do think that there is some conversation here that needs to be had, and we do need to see the report on what those consultations were and the types of arrangements that will be entered into with First Nations.

My question is: who has the government consulted with on this? I think that that is a really important thing. I do recognize that the minister did point to the Ontario model as an example of the online gaming regime that will be implemented here in Alberta, and I understand the importance of it. We have grey market organizations that are conducting online gaming. We do have to have these conversations because right now we don't get the revenues from this online gaming in this grey market scenario. We do need a regulatory system in place. We do need fulsome discussions with how that revenue is distributed.

Another question I have is: will the general revenue fund be allocating dollars to First Nations from a portion of this iGaming? I do take note in the legislation that the minister has that power to identify what is done with the surplus funds, but I also want to see a little bit more with respect to how the general revenue fund is allocated for First Nations.

Undoubtedly, the number of people – hopefully not; hopefully the casinos do remain still quite viable. I know that many of the casinos across Alberta that are run by First Nations, Mr. Chair, are being expanded. They are seeing big growth, but that is because the draw to these communities is that you can participate in supporting Indigenous economy, which is something that I truly value and appreciate.

I bring all this up, too, because I also tabled earlier today the case of Pamajewon. This is a Supreme Court of Canada decision where high-stakes gambling was unallowed on-reserve. This is a seminal decision from the Supreme Court of Canada, that as first-year law students or law students that are studying Indigenous law it is one that you have to read. What the Supreme Court of Canada did was identify that high-stakes gambling was not a right under self-government for Indigenous nations.

3:00

And while the facts are different to this today and the comments about iGaming here in Alberta, I do want to make mention of something that hits home for me quite specifically. In 2006 and shortly before that Alexander First Nation, my First Nation, had created a data centre with the intentions of allowing and expanding iGaming in this province, and one thing – and quite fortuitously, the former chief at the time dropped by my constituency office today right before coming to the Legislature, and we had a conversation about this. The server farm that was developed on this old arena in the community: I remember running around there as a little one and watching my dad play. Me and my cousins were actually just talking about how we would go run up to the top. I didn't, actually, because I was a good kid, but my cousins would go up to the top, and there was, like, a viewing site where they would watch hockey down below in the old arena.

But as the years went on and lack of investment and support from the governments of the day, the arena fell into disrepair, so the nation at the time had decided to repurpose that old arena to create a state-of-the-art data centre. The data centre was intended to be this server farm for online gambling. At the time, in 2006, the Premier of the day, Ed Stelmach, did have conversations with the chief. There were plans to move this forward, and everything was trying to be done above board. But at the time, in 2006, the Alberta government specifically said that they were not able to enter into an agreement for iGaming. This was years ago, almost 20 years now, that we were having these conversations.

But now we're having them today. I am heartened to hear that we are moving forward with First Nations, but we do need to be explicit in the legislation. We do need to be explicit in the regulations, and this is my comment to the minister. It is a good bill, but we need to do better. In our regulations we should be addressing First Nations, and I thank you for . . .

**Mr. Nally:** I agree.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Yeah. I thank you for having those conversations in 2023 and moving forward.

But let's make sure that the regulations are strong. Let's make sure we are including all of those operators that might lose some dollars through the FNDF, including nations like mine, who were hoping to do this back in 2006. Now we would have that opportunity. There are many nations out there that have these surplus buildings where they could host online gaming.

Right now that is an issue for rural communities. Access to broadband Internet, high-speed Internet is still a concern for rural communities. Right now we are acknowledging that these urban centres, small, mid-sized cities, and nations that are nearby them will be the only ones that benefit from this and from high-speed Internet. With this bill we also have to talk about investments to broadband Internet, and I note that this government acknowledged that as well as something that needs to be done for rural Alberta, but we need to see action. I know that many First Nations in Alberta are still struggling with access to Internet, heck, let alone fresh and clean drinking water. But I digress. We still need to have that conversation about the Internet because I know that there are many First Nations, especially in remote communities, that could benefit from this regime. I do hope that we have that conversation about how we can benefit all Albertans, including First Nations in Alberta, because that is a helpful way of ensuring economic reconciliation is done in a good way.

I would also like to just acknowledge that there's still some work that needs to be done with respect to minors accessing gaming. I know that it's been addressed in here quite explicitly, but it's hard on the Internet. I grew up with the Internet. I know exactly, like, how you can get around putting in the age, how you can get around many other things. We need to have that conversation about: what does that regulatory framework look like when it comes to protecting minors? From the data that we have, 65 per cent of Canadians aged 15 and older are doing online gaming. They are accessing it. So when we come to talk about protecting minors, we have to acknowledge that we are potentially creating habits for young people. We do need to have a consideration for how we educate our kids to not rely on gambling in negative ways.

We also recognize that 2 per cent of the people that do access online gambling do form habits that are addictions, so if we want to be quite clear about the role of government with respect to iGaming – I know maybe for Albertans this is not a conversation we're having because they're already accessing them via other platforms. But I am heartened to see that Play Alberta has good revenue. It is being accessed, and there are significant wagers being put on Play Alberta. I would like to see that we do have programs in place to also help parents navigate those conversations with respect to educating them on gambling respectfully.

I'm going to share this little anecdote, too, for the minister. When River Cree was first built, I remember taking my late grandpa Angus Paul to the casino. His favourite thing he'd ever do was to go gambling. He had several strokes in his later years, so he wasn't very mobile. He would have to go in a wheelchair. He couldn't talk. One of the things that he loved doing with – and I hate saying this – his

favourite grandchild – I was always the favourite grandchild of my grandparents.

**Mr. McIver:** Obviously.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Minister.

He loved going to the casino. For him it was one of those things where he got to leave the elders' lodge and go and spend a few bucks and spend it with his grandson. He always happened to win. I don't know. He was just so lucky that he had won. I think Creator had blessed him with the ability to hit all the sevens when he needed to.

I also wanted to just say that for us as Indigenous people there are not many opportunities to access culturally relevant businesses, and casinos are one of those. I do acknowledge that in Alberta we have come a long way from opening casinos and these conversations, particularly around FNDF. I would love to urge this government to have those conversations about what FNDF looks like moving forward.

I'm going to talk really briefly with the time I have left – two minutes; thank you, Mr. Chair – about other communities, including in Edmonton-West Henday. I have a casino, the Pure Yellowhead casino that will certainly see a potential decrease from this. I know the minister has had these conversations with these community groups and operators, but I do have to make mention that that might take away from their revenue as well. I wouldn't want to see a casino operator lose any revenue, especially ones in our communities that are supporting local economies but certainly also through the revenues that we get through the general revenue fund to be able to support community initiatives. While we are having these conversations, we do need to make sure that all of these considerations are made.

Again, I support this bill. I know it sounds weird, but you came out with a good bill, Minister. I just want to make sure that the regulations are updated and ensure that we are including First Nations and including Métis communities because we still need some casinos with Métis communities. That's another conversation to have.

I would really thank this Chamber for listening to me, all these anecdotal pieces. Casinos are a part of my life, and a lot of neechies do access our casinos because sometimes on a Friday night that's all you can do, just go hit up the blackjack table and have a lot of fun.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you for picking me first.

**The Acting Chair:** Are there other speakers? The Member for Calgary-North East. Go ahead.

**Member Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to introduce amendments to this Bill 48.

3:10

**The Acting Chair:** Could you read out the amendment while it's being distributed?

**Member Brar:** Sorry. Just a second. There are three major amendments to this bill: (a) in section 2(2) there are two parts, in clause (d) by striking out "and" and by adding the following after clause (d):

(d.1) to establish and maintain an online program to promote responsible gaming with respect to online lottery schemes based on the principle of harm reduction, and

(b) in section 5(2) the first is in clause (c) by striking out "the corporation, and" and substituting "the corporation," and the second is by adding the following after clause (c):

(c.1) evaluating the effectiveness of the corporation's online program to promote responsible gaming and providing strategic direction to the corporation with respect to the program, and

(c) in section 19(1) the first part is in clause (b) by striking out "during the year, and" and substituting "during the year," and second is by adding the following after clause (b):

(b.1) a summary of the corporation's activities with respect to its online program to promote responsible gaming, and.

Can I continue with my comments, Mr. Chair?

**The Acting Chair:** Proceed. Sorry.

**Member Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me this opportunity to introduce these important amendments. Today I rise to speak in support of critical amendments that I am proud to introduce to Bill 48, the iGaming Alberta Act. At first glance, this bill appears to set up a shiny, new corporation to expand online gaming opportunities in our province, but a deeper look reveals a glaring omission, an omission that risks gambling with the well-being of Albertans. While this government is very keen to profit from online gambling, it has somehow forgotten to build in the most important protections for the people who will be impacted: families, youth, seniors, and vulnerable Albertans who are at risk of gambling harm.

My amendments today seek to correct that dangerous oversight. They introduce three essential pillars. The first one is a dedicated harm reduction based, responsible gaming program, the second is mandatory independent evaluation of the program's effectiveness, and the third is annual public reporting on the corporation's harm-reduction activities.

Mr. Chair, without these amendments, Bill 48 is not a responsible thing, and it is important that all members of this Assembly should have a deeper look at these amendments. I urge everyone to support these amendments to strengthen this bill. Albertans expect better from all of us, and it is our job to make sure that Albertans are protected and well served. Let me share with the House why these amendments are necessary, and let me speak first about why these amendments are so important.

Online gambling is not like traditional gambling. It is not like traditional casinos. Online gambling is faster, more addictive, more accessible, and more anonymous. Studies from across Canada, from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, from the Responsible Gambling Council, from Gambling Research Exchange Ontario, all tell us one same thing: online gambling carries a far higher risk of addiction and harm than in-person gambling. They all tell us that one same important thing. The Responsible Gambling Council found that online gamblers are 4.5 times more likely to experience gambling problems than land-based gamblers. The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction has warned that as online platforms grow, so too does the risk of youth addiction, financial problems, and mental health issues.

Mr. Chair, I got an opportunity to read the 2023 AGLC annual report, and the data shows that problem gambling rates have been rising since 2020, particularly among young adults. This Bill 48 says nothing about protecting Albertans from that rising tide of harm.

We need to strengthen this bill, Mr. Chair, and I would like to go one by one through the amendments. Let me walk the House through exactly what these amendments will do. The first amendment would mandate that iGaming Alberta must establish and maintain an online responsible gambling program based on harm reduction principles. This is not optional. This is not public relations spin. It becomes a core, legally binding responsibility of the corporation to protect the most vulnerable Albertans.

The second one requires that the corporation's board of directors evaluate the effectiveness of that responsible gaming program and provide strategic direction to improve it. Not just once, not just when convenient; it must be ongoing, it must be strategic, and it should be taken seriously.

The third mandates that iGaming Alberta report annually to the public and Legislature summarizing its harm reduction activities.

Mr. Chair, Albertans deserve transparency, and all Albertans have a right to know: are harm reduction programs being implemented, are they working, and are rates of gambling harm going down or going up? It is deeply important that all members of the House should look into these amendments without making these a political, ideological issue. It is about protecting the lives of Albertans, protecting the future of the young adults in Alberta. It's about protecting their financial future as well. It's about protecting their mental health issues as well.

3:20

Being a student of public policy, I believe that the basic idea of any public policy should be to ensure that the policy must serve the people it is designed to serve. The basic process of public policy is to design it, to implement it, and to evaluate it, and if there are gaps, those gaps must be addressed and fixed. That's exactly what these amendments are.

I would like to highlight the importance of harm reduction. It's a proven public health principle. I want to be very clear. This is not about banning gambling. This is not about moralizing. This is about public health. This is about harm reduction, a principle that every major health authority in the world endorses. Harm reduction is not a radical idea. It is a basic idea. If you can't eliminate a risky behaviour, you mitigate the risks to protect people's lives, health, and dignity.

We use harm reduction in alcohol regulation. That's why we have minimum drinking ages and responsible serving laws. We use harm reduction in smoking. That's why we have warning labels, smoking bans. We use harm reduction in opioids. That's why there are supervised consumption services and addiction treatments. Why then, Mr. Chair, would we open the floodgates to online gambling without a harm reduction framework? It's just like handing out liquor bottles to teenagers and saying, "good luck."

Let's see who is at risk without these protections. People can say that responsible adults can make their own decisions, but, Mr. Chair, the results tell us clearly who gets hurt the most without protections: youth and young adults, seniors, low-income families, people struggling with mental health or addictions. These are the people who are impacted the most if there are no protections. These are not faceless statistics. These are sons and daughters, grandparents, and neighbours. These are the people who have elected us to represent them, to serve them. They are Albertans who deserve better than a government that says: buyer beware.

A Statistics Canada study found that younger adults aged 18 to 24 are twice as likely to engage in high-risk gambling. The Alberta Gambling Research Institute reports that problem gamblers are 15 times more likely to experience suicidal thoughts. This is why I am highlighting repeatedly the importance of these amendments.

The second thing I want to highlight about these amendments is transparency and accountability. Mr. Chair, let me speak briefly about transparency. One of the most important parts of my amendment is the requirement for annual public reporting. Here's the reality. If the corporation runs a responsible gaming program but never tells anyone what it's doing, if there's no independent evaluation of whether the program is working or not, if Albertans have no way of knowing if gambling harm is rising or falling, that means that the government has learned no lessons from the past and

from other jurisdictions. Transparency builds trust. Accountability forces improvement. Public reporting ensures that this corporation remembers that it is serving Albertans, not just its own bottom line. Without reporting, responsible gaming becomes a slogan and not a reality. My amendments make sure that it's more than a check box. It becomes a real, living commitment.

Mr. Chair, before I close, let me spend a few moments talking about the cost of inaction. It's easy for governments to say we'll monitor the situation, we'll respond if things get worse. But when it comes to gambling harm, waiting costs lives. Waiting means more families falling into debt. Waiting means more kids growing up in homes hollowed by financial instability. Waiting means more people facing mental health crises alone. The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction found that problem gambling imposes an economic cost of over \$17 billion annually across Canada. That includes health care costs, lost productivity, bankruptcy proceedings, policing, family services, and even suicide prevention services. This is not just about personal choices.

As I have mentioned earlier, this is a public policy crisis, and it gets worse when governments act too late. We have seen it before, Mr. Chair. Ontario expanded online gaming without strong harm reduction initially, and problem gambling rates among online users spiked by 40 per cent within two years. Quebec's online gaming regulator was forced to ramp up responsible gaming after a surge in addiction-related ER visits.

I request all members to please support these amendments.

3:30

**The Acting Chair:** Are there others who wish to speak to amendment A1? The Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, go ahead.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the members opposite for their comments. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-West Henday – did I get that right? – for his comments. I'll admit I was holding my breath, as I wasn't sure the direction he was going to go, but it was clear that he got it. My fear through all of this would be the people that didn't get it, the people that thought we were bringing online gambling to Alberta, and we're not. Online gambling is here. What we're trying to do is make it safer. We're trying to make it a little more responsible.

You know, if we're concerned about cannibalization, the First Nations development fund, it's already being cannibalized. Land-based casinos are already being cannibalized. Bingo: already being cannibalized, because online gambling is here.

There are two parts that really are quite offensive. One is that the money is not just leaving Alberta; it's leaving the country for offshore destinations, so we don't see a penny of that, and some of these operators are repugnant. For that reason, we need to step in and make this safer. I want to be clear. Gambling will never be safe. It will always come with some danger and some risk, but there are ways to make it safer, and there are ways to make it more responsible, and that's what we're opting to do through having a regulatory environment that's going to put in player safety first.

So to the Member for Edmonton-West Henday: thank you for getting the assignment. This is about how we put player safety first and put Albertans first. Thank you for that.

For the Member for Calgary-North East, I regret that that hon. member did not get the assignment. I want to tell you that we have a Minister of Mental Health and Addiction who is absolutely brilliant, and we have had many conversations about this topic. I can tell you that we've laughed, we've cried, but at the end of the day, I can tell you that there is no light between us when it comes to putting player safety first, to putting Albertans' safety first.

One of the commitments that I gave the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction is that we need to have system-wide self-exclusion in place. This is important, because we need to have a button that players can press, and when they press that button, they can exclude for six months, for a year, indefinitely. It's up to them to decide how long. But here's the thing: when they press that button, they can't get up in the morning with some remorse and take away what they just did. That holds. That self-exclusion will be in place, and it will be system-wide through the online gaming sites, through land-based casinos, through racing entertainment centres. That is a system-wide exclusion that you cannot simply remove. We are aligned about that.

Here's why I'm going to ask the members not to accept these amendments, because this legislation is just enabling legislation. It's enabling us to build the Alberta iGaming corporation, to give regulatory authority to the AGLC to define things such as having to be 18 in order to gamble, those types of things, but we're not putting the player safety in legislation because if we want to make any changes to player safety, if we think that we don't go far enough, well, then we would have to actually amend the legislation. So my encouragement to all members is that we don't want to put player safety in legislation. We want to put it in regulation so that if we see something that we want to turn around on a dime, we're able to do it through an order in council, not a new piece of legislation.

I'm saying this to make the conversations shorter around this room. We don't have to debate player safety and gambling responsibility. There is no light between us. I assure you that we are all one hundred per cent aligned. We have a fiduciary responsibility to put Albertans' safety first, and that is what we are going to do, but we're going to do it in the most efficient and effective manner possible, and that's through regulation, so that if we have to make any changes, we can turn it around on a dime. By accepting these amendments, we're acknowledging that the player safety and responsibility is going to go in legislation. That's just going to tie our hands, and it is not in the best interest of Albertans.

My ask of everyone is to please turn down these amendments and recognize that this is simply enabling legislation and that we will be coming forward with a suite of responsibility measures that put player safety first. Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Are there others that want to speak to amendment A1? The Member for Sherwood Park, go ahead.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to rise to speak to this bill and glad we have this debate here. I know that members from the other side probably are anxious to get out there and help their friend Jason Kenney get elected as leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, but we have to stay in here, finish some debate on an important matter. I'm glad the minister got the assignment: trademark MLA for Sherwood Park. I want to thank the minister for bringing this bill forward and also for giving us the opportunity to discuss, you know, online gaming. I think the minister sits in Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, but, really, we might want to consider as an Assembly or as a cabinet that they consider him the minister of sin taxes because this is the realm that he lives in.

These are very heavy conversations, an important debate that has to happen in a society, Mr. Chair. I know we're listing all the things that have been brought forward, and I really want to appreciate the Member for Calgary-North East, who's brought forward, I think, an excellent amendment that has addressed some more guardrails to bring around this bill. With all these challenges that we're dealing with – I mean, we're talking about harm reduction, but I'm just going to come with the simple term "sinful things." But these things

that we have in our society, you know, like gambling, like opioids, cannabis, tobacco, alcohol: I think the minister and the shadow minister have brought forward really good points on them as well as the Member for Edmonton-West Henday, which I think is really important to be talking about here in the Assembly.

We have in our society all along had these challenges. How do we balance between prohibition and regulation, with perhaps taxation or harm reduction? We saw the Minister of Education, you know, address something with the technology that is getting involved in gambling now, the phone. We've brought prohibition into schools now – our young pages will know that they cannot have their smart phones in the classroom – full-on prohibition of a technology that has been found to be addictive.

So, then, as a government how do we think about addiction, and what's our best way to deal with it? We have in our society some challenges that we need to address. When we look at AGLC and we look at the substances that it needs to regulate and govern, we have harmful substances; we have harmful outcomes. We all know: everything in moderation. It's a good thing, but there are times when substances or devices or activities like gambling get the best of us and we go beyond moderation, and then we get into the costs.

When we have opportunities to talk about harm reduction and prevention – I really wish it was brought forward more, Mr. Chair. I think that too often we have a reckless, untrustworthy government that is happy to go out there, govern according to their own ideologies, in a failure to respond to what Albertans need. And Albertans do need, in areas governed by the minister of service Alberta, prevention and harm reduction. On the back end we know that then we're dealing with counselling, addiction counselling, trying to get people into situations where they're living a healthy lifestyle, back to moderation. So to have an amendment brought forward that addresses how we can bring prevention into gambling: I think that sounds like a smart amendment coming from the Member for Calgary-North East.

I'm concerned about the addictive costs, the cost of addiction. It's easy to understand it when we look at even the ability and the ease of access of being able to place a bet on a sports activity. I can see how it can be addictive.

3:40

We can even look at something as simple as the Edmonton Oilers 50/50. We're all very excited about the Oilers. We're super happy that they are making it on to game 5. Let's go, Oilers, tonight. I brought out my lucky horseshoe before game 4, Mr. Chair, and I think it made a difference. [interjection] Thank you for that question from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I just rang the lucky horseshoe, and it made a difference, or I felt it did.

Mr. Chair, I don't know if you know what the total was of the 50/50 in game 4 of the Oilers game . . .

**Member Ceci:** A billion dollars.

**Mr. Kasawski:** It was not a billion dollars.

It was \$6.5 million. That was the take. I couldn't help, Mr. Chair, but go on. What does it cost, ten bucks to place my first bet? Again, 50/50, we found a way to regulate it. It's governed by the minister. Ten bucks for my first bet.

I've got to tell you that I was on the website and it was hard to figure out how to place a \$10 bet. First option: \$100 bet. A \$250 bet was also available. It seemed like the lowest cost bet was \$80. Again, I've got on the other side the potential for 6 and a half million dollars. I guess I'll be more precise: \$6.387 million.

I had to seek through it to find out where that \$10 bet would be. That's a moderate bet to place for those odds. I was already engaged

in the game; it wasn't going to get me more engaged, but it is interesting to think that there would be people out there watching the game, getting engaged with the game, thinking about that potential winning at the end, who might go for that \$250 choice, might go for it. When you get into the choices, you can pick that a number of times. With the ability to pay online, it would be possible to see how someone could easily be \$1,000 into this bet. To know that we are taking steps to address that, that's important.

When you look at the sport betting websites, it's getting more exciting, more detailed. Again, I can't pick up a prop, but knowing the idea that you can use just your phone that you hold and quickly make that bet and that it might be fun – it's potentially addictive though, Mr. Chair, so that's where I think it's important to make sure that we are putting guardrails in place.

I come back to the Member for Calgary-North East. The amendments he's proposing will make this bill better. That is what we're trying to do, make things better for all Albertans, to have an opportunity to make sure that we're addressing prevention so that we can know that there is moderation and moderate activities being enjoyed by Albertans, so that we don't have to go to the step of prohibition because we know that creates greater challenges.

I don't know if you know, Mr. Chair, but when you're making a bet on these sport betting apps, it's getting far more detailed. It's not just who's going to win the game; I can make a bet on how many goals Leon Draisaitl is going to score in the first period of the game tonight. It might not be any; it's typically not till the third period with about two minutes left that he scores, but I could probably make that bet as well. I could also make a long shot bet that, you know, perhaps tonight is the night Adam Henrique comes to the game ready to score that goal in the first period. I could also bet if Adam Henrique is going to take a dumb penalty in the first two minutes and we are going to be faced with a power play that is destroying us each game and setting the fans with so much unhappiness, they might turn to online betting to try and get a little bit of joy, get a little bit of an endorphin boost.

Knowing that there are some regulations in place to address these sport betting apps is wise, good decision-making from the government. Again, I don't want to be too surprised. I'm glad that the government got the assignment: trademark MLA for Sherwood Park. It's an important thing to be addressing, and we know it's a growing industry because there is this growing technology that is in our place.

There is a curiosity: why is it a corporation that we're going to be using? How are we going to protect ourselves from another UCP boondoggle? We're tied up with boondoggles and corrupt contracts that are tying up this Legislature with debate, and so many are being brought forward. Is a new corporation going to be the best way to address this, especially one that doesn't have a mandate for harm reduction and prevention?

My understanding is that even within a traditionally acceptable sin like the consumption of alcohol we are in a situation in our province, Mr. Chair, where the taxes we collect on alcohol don't cover all of the costs on society and the burdens that we have with dealing with addiction, the burdens that we have with health care costs from alcohol consumption. On the one hand, we have a ministry that is trying its best to manage this without full prohibition, trying to create some revenue for the government so that we can deal with the use of alcohol, and we are then, on the other side, maybe not catching enough because we're not working enough on prevention in our society.

We're not working enough on harm reduction, making sure people know that moderation is the way to go, and we've seen that with alcohol for the most part because Health Canada came out, just within the last two years, letting us know that the recommended use

of alcohol of two drinks a day – actually, it'd be probably two drinks a week because of all the harm it causes, right? We're dealing with heart disease, we're dealing with cancers that are all coming from alcohol, that are managed by the government.

**Member Ceci:** I blame the government.

**Mr. Kasawski:** The Member for Calgary-Buffalo is right to blame the government, this government, this UCP government. That is the one to blame.

Look at prevention, look at the ways we can bring harm reduction into our systems of regulation so it's not just about sin taxes that the minister is putting out there. It is about using that money for the best use for Albertans so that we can have a healthy society with people in it that aren't challenged with what could come from addiction to gambling. Again, with the new technology, with the new businesses that are out there trying their best to get our money so that people can gamble, we have to be wise and find ways not just to get revenue – it's not just about revenue – from these corporations but also help make sure that this gambling is used in a way that is enjoyable, leads to people's more enjoyment with the game but doesn't lead to a place where they're getting into debt and running into challenges within their families.

I think at that point, Mr. Chair, it's probably worth while to just use this moment as a PSA, public service announcement, to make sure that people know that there is Alberta addictions help. There are helplines provided by health services. You can reach them at [albertaservices.ca](http://albertaservices.ca). You can also call 1.866.332.2322. If people are feeling stressed by the debts that they are getting from the overconsumption of gambling or any other substance, make sure that they try to reach out for addictions help within our province.

That compulsive gambling that could come from the use of something like your iPhone or your smart phone, you know, can lead to disorders. You could have uncontrollable urges to gamble. You're perhaps even thinking about it as a way beyond entertainment. You think this is the way you're going to pay your rent. What a disaster that would be. Something that is supposed to be just for enjoyment, just for entertainment moves into something that becomes compulsive, pushing people to make worse and worse decisions, taking over their life, creating problems with their relations, creating problems with their family.

So it's wise for the government to think that we should be working on prevention, harm reduction so that we can make sure that our relations are having good relations with the people that are in their family. We can even imagine – we've seen it with other addictive things like opioids – that we have people that it leads to a life of crime. How are they going to get their next hit? We're leading to – we could see things that would happen within our whole province that we know are related to crime and we know are related to addiction. Are we working on prevention enough? I think, Mr. Chair, I know the answer to that. We are not working on prevention enough. We are not working on harm reduction enough.

3:50

It is our responsibility here in this Legislature not just to look at "How can we tax new corporations? How can we tax sinful activities?" but: how can we work to make sure that we are creating a healthy environment in Alberta for people to live their best lives?

I would hate to think anybody here is preoccupied with gambling. I think what we're mostly preoccupied with is whether Jason Kenney is going to be running to be leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, but I want to return you back to the Legislature. This is where work needs to be done. Work needs to be done here, members. Or is it that we're so focused on the Oilers, Mr. Chair,

that we can't wait to get through debate? We need to put the time into this piece of legislation to make sure that it is enough.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate the time to rise, talk to this issue. For the last thing, I would just like to say: let's go, Oilers.

**The Acting Chair:** Are there others that wish to speak to amendment A1? We have the Member for Edmonton-South West. Go ahead.

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of the amendment to Bill 48, as introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-North East, and to also speak to the substance of Bill 48 more generally. The iGaming Alberta Act, a piece of legislation that will create a new Crown corporation charged with regulating online gambling in our province, at its face presents itself as a modern solution to an evolving industry, but the reality is it's deeply incomplete. It invites more questions than answers, and its vague provisions leave too much room for missteps that could have lasting consequences on Alberta's people, communities, and economy.

That's why, Mr. Chair, my hon. colleague introduced the following amendment, which I think is a reasonable addition to this bill because this is not just about revenue; it's about responsibility. It's about ensuring that if we choose to expand Alberta's online gaming market, we do so in a way that is ethical, measured, and safe and, more importantly, we do it with eyes wide open, fully informed and guided by a commitment to protect those most vulnerable to the harms of gambling addiction. As mentioned by my colleagues already, this is what the amendment is about. It's about how we protect those that require our support as government.

Frankly, Bill 48 does not meet that standard. At first glance, this bill appears benign. It establishes iGaming Alberta, a Crown corporation with the goal of bringing offshore gaming operators into a regulated environment. It claims this move will reclaim lost revenues, create jobs, and offer Albertans a safer platform to gamble, but what the bill fails to do is explain how any of this will actually be achieved. Let me be clear. This bill does not contain a single concrete rule, safeguard, or mechanism to regulate online gambling. It does not outline standards for player protection. It does not establish advertising restrictions. It does not address age verification. It does not define how revenues will be allocated. Instead, it defers all of these critical matters to regulations that may or may not be introduced later.

Mr. Chair, the work that we do in this House I certainly consider of utmost importance. The debate, the dialogue that we should have in this House is not meant to just be part of a box to check or something that is purely ceremonial. The process of bill debate is intended to make the bill better. For the government to simply defer all of the critical matters to regulation later I think is a way to circumvent robust debate, and it undermines the foundations of democracy. We are being asked to approve the skeleton of a system with no assurance about the integrity of the body that will eventually fill it, and that is unacceptable.

Let us consider what is at stake. Online gambling is already a significant part of Alberta's economy, and while I agree with the government's intention to bring a framework that will regulate online gambling, there is much to be desired in this bill. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year Alberta's sole regulated platform, Play Alberta, saw more than \$5.3 billion in wagers and a 27.5 increase in new sign-ups. That translated to a \$235 million increase in government revenue in a single year. Clearly, Mr. Chair, the demand is there; the money is there. It's gaining in popularity, but so, too, is the risk. For every successful story of a casual player enjoying an online

poker night, there is another story of financial ruin, broken families, or worsening mental health.

Statistics Canada tells us that nearly 2 per cent of Canadians suffer from severe gambling addiction. That may sound small, but this group contributes disproportionately to overall gambling revenues. We must acknowledge a troubling reality. A not insignificant portion of gambling revenue comes from those who can least afford to lose, and when we introduce new platforms, increase access, and saturate the market with advertising, we amplify the risk that more Albertans will fall into that trap.

This is especially concerning given that Bill 48 makes no mention of harm reduction, so my question to members of this House and to the minister is: where are the commitments to mental health supports, where is the funding for addiction counselling, where is the educational programming for youth, and where are the culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous communities? The fact is they are not in this bill. Instead, the bill relies on vague references to future regulations and possible programs, and that's not good enough.

Mr. Chair, that's why this particular amendment, one which in very clear language – and I'll for the matter of record just refer to it again. It asks that this government establish and maintain an online program to promote responsible gaming with respect to online lottery schemes based on the principle of harm reduction. This is a very, very reasonable, common-sense addition to this bill to ensure that this bill actually has somewhat of a framework to guide not only the actions of government but to ensure that Albertans are protected going forward.

Let's look at Ontario. I think we can look to other jurisdictions to look at what happens when the safeguards aren't there. This government has often held up Ontario as a model. In 2022 Ontario became the first province to regulate online gambling. In its first year it saw \$35 billion in wagers. It also created 15,000 new jobs and added \$2.7 billion to the GDP, but the Ontario government quickly learned that regulation without restrictions can cause serious problems. They saw a 78 per cent increase in the number of wagers placed. They saw minors accessing platforms. They saw a rise in gambling-related harms. Ontario had to scramble to introduce advertising restrictions, including a ban on celebrity endorsements that appeal to youth. They also placed limits on when and where gambling ads could appear.

4:00

Here in Alberta Bill 48 says nothing about these issues. It gives no direction on ad restrictions, age gating, or ethical marketing. This government simply has chosen not to heed the warning and the learnings of other jurisdictions, and this bill leaves all of us with open questions about whether minors can be protected from targeted advertising. With no safeguards enshrined in the legislation, the risk is that these protections will come too late if at all.

Let us not forget who is watching these ads. According to a Pollara poll commissioned by Mental Health Research Canada, 1 in 10 Canadians exhibit high-risk gambling behaviors. The groups most at risk: men and young adults between the ages of 18 and 34. Shouldn't we be building protections directly into the law? Again, that's what legislation is for. Shouldn't we be more proactive rather than reactive? Mr. Chair, that's what we're trying to do here with the amendments. We're trying to ensure that there are reasonable safeguards, reasonable programs that will ensure folks that need those protections as well as the principle of harm reduction are duly considered and that folks that need access to support have it.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

We know that advertisements can have a profound impact on gambling behaviour. Research around the world has confirmed that ads contribute to higher gambling participation and higher addiction rates. If we pass this bill without the amendments that the hon. Member for Calgary-North East has introduced and without some modifications, then we are essentially green-lighting the unregulated promotion of addictive behaviour.

Another major gap in this bill relates to accessibility, and I just want to take a few moments to talk about that. Once online gambling becomes more widely available – and it is becoming more and more ubiquitous – the barriers to entry disappear. You no longer have to walk into a casino. You don't need to leave your house. The slot machine is in your pocket, your cellphone, always accessible, always open, and this ease of access is especially dangerous for youth and vulnerable populations. We know how easily age verification can be bypassed. A fake birth date is often all it takes. What mechanisms will iGaming Alberta implement to ensure minors are not accessing these platforms? Again, the bill offers no answers.

And what about enforcement? Even in Ontario many offshore gambling sites continue to operate outside the regulated system. Simply creating a Crown corporation does not guarantee that grey market sites will disappear or that players will migrate to regulated options. What strategies will the Alberta government use to encourage compliance? What penalties will exist for noncompliant operators? What authority will iGaming Alberta have to take action? Again, Bill 48 remains silent.

Let us also in this House talk about community impact. Currently many Alberta charities and First Nations depend on proceeds from land-based gaming, including charitable casinos and slot machines. The First Nations development fund in particular is funded through slot machine revenue and provides grants for infrastructure, cultural programs, and crime prevention. As more players shift to online gambling, there is a serious risk that these revenues will decline, yet Bill 48 does not guarantee any replacement funding. It does not allocate a share of online gambling revenues to Indigenous communities or charities. It does not even acknowledge the problem, Mr. Chair. How can this government introduce a bill of this magnitude without consulting those most impacted by this shift? We need to hear from Alberta charities. We need to hear from Indigenous leaders. We need to hear from families and educators.

Mr. Chair, it appears very clearly that this bill needs a lot of work. It needs a lot of work, and this legislative process, now in Committee of the Whole, is intended to make this bill better. As we move forward with this bill, with legislation of this kind of scale, we must do so with a commitment to equity. We must ensure that the benefits of regulated gambling are shared widely, not just in government coffers, which brings me to another concern, another question; that's the allocation of revenue.

Bill 48 directs surplus funds to the general revenue fund with no specific commitment to where that money will go. We don't know whether any of the dollars derived from this will be reinvested into harm reduction programs, into public health, into community-based supports. Will it simply disappear into general spending? A truly responsible bill would designate a portion of online gambling revenues for responsible gaming initiatives, mental health and addiction services, education and public awareness campaigns, community programs for youth and families. This is what this amendment aims to address, to ensure that there is an online program to promote responsible gambling. We need to embed these priorities into the legislation itself, not leave them to chance into a regulatory process that lacks any transparency or accountability.

Mr. Chair, I want to take a moment to speak directly to the people of Alberta. If you're someone who gambles responsibly and enjoys

it as entertainment, I hear you. This is not about taking that away. If you are someone who has experienced gambling addiction or knows someone who has, I see you. This legislation must do more to protect you. If you are a charity leader or First Nations representative, I stand with you. Your voices must be at the table. And to this government I say: let's do better. Let's do better. Regulation is not just about collecting revenue; it's about setting standards.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** Thank you.

Any others wishing to speak on amendment A1? The Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to address Bill 48, iGaming Alberta Act. I read through the bill, of course, and want to say that I think my colleague's amendments are reasoned and reasonable. I heard the minister speak to the fact that this is enabling legislation and that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will provide a lot more information, too, through regulation if this bill is passed. I think the amendments that my colleague put could fit very easily into the bill that's before us.

**4:10**

I say that because there's some of the same language in some of the bill as my colleague has used. He talked about establishing and maintaining an online program to promote responsible gaming with respect to online lottery schemes based on the principle of harm reduction, and I think if you look down on page 19, you can see some of the standards and requirements referred to in subsection (2) that would be enabling legislation and some of that speaks to "protecting players." That's (g), and (a) is "prohibiting or restricting certain persons from entering an iGaming site or playing an online provincial lottery."

There are the same kinds of ideas in both the amendments and what's listed here in Bill 48 on page 19 with respect to further regulations that are going to get fleshed out in the future, so, you know, asking now to put those in legislation is not such a big leap, as was suggested a little while ago by the minister. I think the minister's comments about being a little more responsible, being safer, having player safety first is exactly what's proposed in these amendments.

I'll go on and talk about some other parts of this bill that are somewhat confusing, I guess, and wonder what's behind them. I guess the first thought would be: why is there an additional board being structured? When we were government, 2015-19, under the Finance minister and Treasury Board president AGLC was one of the departments that reported to me, and thinking back to the introduction of cannabis in Alberta after it was legalized federally, I don't believe we set up a separate corporation for cannabis. I think it kind of fell under the main AGLC board and was additional work for them to set up a program to address the distribution of cannabis and the licensing of distributors across the province and the regulation and the investigation of complaints and things like that. There wasn't an additional board is what I'm trying to say, and in this one we do see that, so I wonder if there's something that is specific to iGaming that is different than other controlled substances that are regulated in Alberta.

Another thing that I didn't see identified in here – and maybe the minister can address it. Some of my colleagues have been spending time on it. It's around the research around addictions. There was a team that was funded through AGLC profits, I guess, or revenues, and it was located, I think, at U of L and U of A,

potentially at U of C, too. They would provide feedback and relevant research on addictions related to alcohol and cannabis and give that to the board of AGLC so that we could together or the board could provide a solid framework around what would be best protective of individuals who are using those products in this province. I think it's an omission that there's no reference to any of that work that's currently done, nor potentially an increase to that team that provides that support.

You know, I do see in here that there's talk about social responsibility, consumer protection, any other matter that the LG will provide by way of regulation. I think it would have been more – perhaps comforting is not the word – clear and transparent that when getting into gaming, as my colleagues and I have kind of argued, there are people who will be quote, unquote, losers as a result of being involved in perhaps heavy gaming to the point where they're affecting their own lives, their families' lives, and they'll need some support. But we're not seeing any of that talked about in terms of additional supports to the research that's necessary to be able to provide the best kind of gaming opportunities to Albertans.

I know it's kind of going down the road a little bit, but I think there have already been profits as a result of Alberta getting into gaming. I just think of that \$235 million in 2023, 2024, that was counted as revenue to AGLC as a result of getting into gaming. I just wonder how those revenues come to Alberta. It looks like a percentage of the revenues that the iGaming sites make themselves is taxed or has to go to the province of Alberta. Potentially those numbers could go significantly higher in the coming years. I haven't really heard from the minister about what the purpose of those monies will be other than general revenue. But I think some of those monies should go to research, some of those monies should go to supports for Albertans who require that. It would have been more helpful, I guess, to hear that from the minister. I don't remember him saying those things when he introduced this bill.

Mr. Chair, I think I've addressed some of the concerns that I had when I reviewed this bill. Why is the separate corporation being set up? Why isn't there an introduction of the amendments into the bill as the bill speaks to some of that already? This would provide more clarity, as my colleague has done, and I look forward to further discussion as we go forward on this bill.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to provide comments?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:18 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Ellingson	Ip
Brar	Elmeligi	Kasawski
Ceci	Ganley	Miyashiro
Chapman	Goehring	Schmidt
Dach	Haji	Tejada
Eggen		

Against the motion:

Amery	Hunter	Petrovic
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jean	Rowswell
Boitchenko	Johnson	Schow

Bouchard	Jones	Schulz
Cyr	LaGrange	Sigurdson, R.J.
de Jonge	Long	Singh
Dreeshen	Lovely	Turton
Dyck	Lunty	Wiebe
Ellis	McIver	Williams
Fir	Nally	Wilson
Getson	Neudorf	Wright, J.
Glubish	Nicolaides	Yaseen
Horner	Nixon	

Totals: For – 16 Against – 38

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

**The Deputy Chair:** We are back onto the main bill, Bill 48. Any members wishing to speak to Bill 48 in committee? The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

**Ms Chapman:** Well, I thought we were doing something different here, but are we adjourning debate? I will move for us to adjourn debate. There we go.

**The Deputy Chair:** The Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Williams:** I move that we adjourn debate. Okay. Also happy to move that this committee rise and report progress on Bill 48.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 48. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

**The Acting Speaker:** Having heard the motion, all those in favour of the report, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 39 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned March 25: Ms Sigurdson speaking]

**The Acting Speaker:** Are there any members wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Exciting in here. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 39, and I'm going to speak to a very specific section of this bill because it is near and dear to my heart and I think that it is incredibly problematic. It is, sadly, the sort of thing that doesn't always get an enormous amount of public attention, but it is something that will impact the lives of people throughout this province probably for years to come.

[The Speaker in the chair]



In this act, page 16, modifications are made to the Legal Professions Act. Those modifications – so section 7 of the Legal Profession Act is amended, and essentially what it amends is something called the Alberta Law Foundation. What is the Alberta Law Foundation? Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth setting out where the money comes from to explain why it isn't the government's money and they shouldn't be appropriating it in this way.

Essentially, the Alberta Law Foundation is money – so lawyers have trust accounts. You put money in there when you buy a house, you put money in there if you retain a lawyer, and those trust accounts, like any other account in this province, generate interest. That interest goes into the Law Foundation. So this isn't the government's money. It has nothing to do with the government. It didn't come from the government. It didn't start with the government. It's private individuals whose money is held in trust by a lawyer, and that money earns interest.

4:40

It would be a conflict of interest for the lawyers to keep the interest on that money because that would give them an incentive to keep the money in trust for longer – right? – which is not necessarily good. We don't want that incentive in the system. That's not how we do it. The lawyers don't get to keep the interest on the money sitting in their trust accounts, which is, you know, in the case of a house purchase, potentially quite a lot of money, so quite a lot of interest. They don't get to keep it, and there are good reasons for that.

What do we do with that interest? Well, we don't give it to the government because it's not their money. If the government would like to have money, they can use the mechanisms available to them, like taxes, which are transparent to the public so that the public can look and say: this is the government taking money from me. It's government for the people. People should be able to see that. There should be an element of transparency there.

So it goes into the Alberta Law Foundation. Now, historically, because arguably the legal system has some interest in legal aid, some portion of the money has gone to legal aid. Why is it the government's responsibility to fund legal aid? It's the government's responsibility to fund legal aid because the government is who's prosecuting. When the state chooses to take its sort of collective and large resources and target them on one individual – this is an individual accused of a crime, so quite rightly the state is using its resources to target that person. But in our legal system that person is entitled to defend themselves. They are entitled to a defence, and in instances where that person cannot afford a defence, it becomes the state's problem to provide it for them. I think that is very good and very valid. But let's be clear about whose responsibility it is. It is the government's. It is us collectively. It is the government who is responsible for providing that funding for legal aid in those instances.

Now, legal aid does do a few other things, things that make our system run better, things that arguably lawyers have an interest in. Historically, because of this, the Alberta Law Foundation has put 25 per cent of the money that's coming again from lawyers' trust accounts not the government's money – I thought these guys were libertarians; apparently not so much. That money goes into legal aid. Everyone has agreed to this. It's been the case for a number of years. There are boards who have agreed to it. Everyone has agreed that this is a just system. You could argue it potentially either way.

What's happening now is that the government has doubled their take. They are taking private money, money that belongs to private citizens, that is interest on private trust accounts, that has nothing to do with them. They have taken it and taken power over it. First

of all, they're appropriating a bunch of that money to give it to legal aid, to backfill for their obligations that they are not fulfilling, constitutional obligations, I might add, that they have chosen not to fulfill to allow people to defend their rights. The government has appropriated money.

Whose money is it that this UCP government has decided to take? Well, it is money that goes to organizations that do things like sexual assault prevention or protection of domestic violence victims. It is organizations that do human rights work, that do reconciliation work. It is organizations that do work to provide legal information, to provide information to the public about human rights. That is who the government has chosen to take money from in order to fulfill the obligations that they, I guess, don't feel they should fulfill. This is incredibly problematic.

Might I add that this is a government, the UCP, who ran on small government, who ran on not being interventionist, who ran on, you know, the government should stay in its lane. Well, this is a government not staying in its lane. Not only is it appropriating private money that isn't theirs in a very nontransparent fashion; in addition to that, they have now brought in a requirement that the Law Foundation, who was deciding where these grants went, can't decide anymore. Nope. The minister is going to take that over. Apparently private interest, private people, private citizens, civil society, governance boards: this UCP government doesn't trust them to govern themselves, so they're going to do it for them.

This is massive interventionist government. It is the government stepping in and saying: "We're not going to let you, civil society, decide what your good is. We're going to tell you. We're going to tell you what's good for you. We're going to tell you what you're allowed to fund. We're going to tell you what you're allowed to think is important." It's like *Nineteen Eighty-four* over there.

This is incredibly problematic. Like, let's discuss a little specifically what it is this government has chosen to take money from, to defund. There has already been \$10 million in grants denied, no particular reason given, primarily because those were monies going towards human rights based programs or things that the government doesn't like, essentially. I mean, human rights is a large portion of what this government doesn't seem to like. They also apparently don't like the public being able to make their own decisions about what's in their interest.

Some of the areas that they have gone after, some of the areas that are funded by the Alberta Law Foundation include Student Legal Assistance. This one is near and dear to my heart because I worked there. I'm guessing, based on the decisions being made, that the minister probably never did.

Student Legal Assistance does some amazing work. It does two things. It's an organization where law students have the opportunity to represent people who would essentially otherwise fall through the cracks. They're people that don't qualify for legal aid either because their income is too high, which under Conservative governments has sometimes included people on AISH, just FYI. Too high an income. So it's people who would fall through the cracks that way. It's people who potentially would qualify for legal aid but their matter isn't sufficiently serious. They're not, you know, facing incarceration in this particular instance. Those are definitely people who deserve representation.

I would argue that Student Legal Assistance serves another function. It teaches lawyers not just the sort of mechanics of their profession but the obligations of their profession. It teaches them about the position they serve. I went to law school, Mr. Speaker, and I went there with some people who I would say had a very particular experience of the world. They had grown up with parents who were other lawyers or sometimes doctors, sometimes judges, and often their articling job that they got out of law school was the

first job they would hold at what was at the time \$80,000 a year, probably over \$100,000 now. Sure, that gave them some experience in life, but it gave them a specific type of experience, a type of experience that is only experienced by those who are incredibly high-income earners.

I believe that as a legal profession, as lawyers, we have an obligation to understand the society we serve because only we have the ability to do that work. Other people are prevented from doing legal work. Only a lawyer can do that. There are a lot of good reasons for that: ensuring that, you know, the work is done competently and that the person has the right training. I totally get it. The result of that, though, is that we have the market cornered. Only lawyers can do legal work. So those lawyers need to understand. They need to understand the society they serve. They need to understand that most people's experience is not their experience, that most people's income is not their income, and that most people's circumstances in which they grew up or which they came from are very different than their own.

Student Legal Assistance, in my view, fulfills that function. It allows us to have conversations and interactions with people who are coming under the justice system who just haven't had the opportunities that we have had in life, who if they were fortunate enough to grow up here with a public education system didn't necessarily have the supports they needed, or if they needed outside tutoring, didn't have parents who were able to provide that, or their parents were working evenings, and they were coming home by themselves and having to figure it out themselves. They have just had a very different experience. They didn't have something like someone like me would have, where I could leave my job and I could go back to school. If I were to fall ill, I could go live with my parents, right? If I were to suddenly get cancer, I didn't need disability insurance. My parents would be there to protect me. Not everybody has that.

4:50

So I think that Student Legal Assistance really does serve not just the public, not just the clients it serves but the public more generally by making lawyers, who often come from backgrounds of incredible privilege, aware that not everyone comes from that background of incredible privilege.

Those are the sorts of organizations that are being affected. Calgary Legal Guidance is another organization that will be affected by these changes. And not just in Calgary. There are legal clinics throughout the province that do information work, that do education work, that do representation work for people who would otherwise be without representation that are in serious trouble.

I did want to read a quote because I thought it was really, really good. This is quoted in the Alberta Law Foundation's news release. The executive director, Kathy Parsons, is saying:

This bill puts community legal services at risk at the exact moment when... Albertans need help. When economic conditions worsen, we see increased demand for support in areas like family breakdown, domestic violence, and housing instability. These are... clients we serve every day, and this legislation makes it harder for us to meet that rising need.

So these are victims of domestic violence. They are folks who are trying to get maybe child support to feed their kids. They are people who are trying to make sure that they can keep their children housed, and those are the people that this government thinks it should take money from. I think that is as problematic as it can possibly be. Mr. Speaker, I would strongly urge all members to vote against this bill for that reason alone.

This piece about the Legal Profession Act is incredibly problematic. Are there other things in the bill that are good? Sure,

there are other things in the bill that are good. But I have a lot of experience with this, and I guess the three things I would say to sum up the importance of this are that this is a government who is appropriating money that is not theirs. The money has nothing to do with them. It is interest on lawyers' trust accounts. They are appropriating money from people who are incredibly vulnerable, from people just trying to feed their children or get out of a domestic violence situation. They're appropriating money from human rights. Incredibly problematic, and, Mr. Speaker, last I checked, this was supposed to be a government who didn't believe that the government was meant to interfere in civil society, and that is exactly what they are doing. It is absolutely shameful.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Haji:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 39, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. It's an omnibus bill which comes up with changes to eight different acts. My colleague spoke about the Legal Profession Act. I would like to highlight the problem that I have with the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

Albertans are among the hardest working people in the country, Mr. Speaker. They are proud of their communities, proud of their work ethics, and very proud of their contributions to the province's economy and cultural diversity. Despite that, too many are being left behind. I think a lot of us talk about numbers and statistics in this House; let's just talk about some stories that I hear from Albertans.

Let me tell you about the story of Steve. Steve is a construction worker who lives in my constituency, Edmonton-Decore. He's a father of five. Every day Steve wakes up early, works long hours, and comes home exhausted but grateful for the opportunity to build a better future for his family. Steve is doing everything that we ask as a government, elected representatives who make policies here: working hard, contributing to the economy, raising a family. Yet despite these efforts, he's falling farther behind. Last year Steve made about \$44,000 annual income. But over the past years his rent has been going up by 20 per cent. His grocery bills have shot up. His utility bills are climbing month after month. In fact, last year, 2024, Albertans paid the highest utility bills, almost 40 per cent more than the rest of the country. How is it fair that somebody like Steve, who plays by all the rules, is unable to cover basic needs like rent, food, and clothing for growing children?

Steve's situation is not unique, Mr. Speaker. Since 2019 real hourly wages in Alberta have fallen by 4.5 per cent, the worst performance in the entire country. Alberta is now the only province where the average weekly earnings are lower than they were five years ago – it seems like coincidence here – when the UCP government was elected. Families like Steve's are being squeezed harder and harder every year, working more, earning less, and falling farther behind.

And this isn't just in Edmonton. I'm using the story of Steve to illustrate what's happening across the province. It's happening in Calgary, it's happening in Lethbridge, it's happening in Grande Prairie, it's happening in Medicine Hat. It is happening in our cities, in small towns, and our rural communities. Alberta families should not have to fight this hard just to get by. They deserve better.

"What does Bill 39 actually do?" is the question that one may ask, a bill that this government says is about affordability. It's actually the government's affordability plan. So let's walk through it. Bill 39 will introduce a new 8 per cent personal income tax bracket for incomes up to \$60,000. Now, on its face, tax relief sounds like a good thing, but let's be honest about who this bill

helps and who it leaves behind. Only Albertans earning at least \$60,000 will receive the full benefit of this tax cut, and that's the number that the government has circulated around, developed flyers, mailed to every Albertan. The maximum this saving does is \$2 a day at best and less than a dollar for the majority of Albertans, and if you receive other tax credits like, let's say, raising children or paying off student loans, your savings are actually less than that amount.

Now let's put Sandra's case in the lens of Bill 39, specifically around the personal income tax saving that the government has spoken as its affordability strategy. In Sandra's case, she's a single mother and health care worker from Lethbridge. Her total savings will be \$283 a year. If she makes \$38,000 – that's the average amount that an average woman in Lethbridge makes – that's just 78 cents a day. Mr. Speaker, what is 78 cents a day supposed to fix when it comes to affordability? It's not enough to cover the bus ride. It's not enough to buy a piece of bread. It's not enough to change the reality of working parents juggling bills, rising rent, grocery costs, and others outpacing their paycheques.

Meanwhile it doesn't stop there. The government also introduces education property tax, meaning that Albertans will pay more for their homes. Use the case of Sandra, use the case of Steve: they will have to be paying more.

5:00

It introduces 38 new fees, adding to the already rising costs, starting with vehicle registrations. Steve has to pay more, and Sandra has to pay more. Any savings that you may think of – let's use even the \$2 that the government is saying is the affordability plan that we have put in place.

Let's not also forget the broader impact. Who doesn't benefit from it? Thirty per cent of Albertan income tax filers pay no income tax at all, so they are not among – don't forget. Those are the ones who need affordability support the most. You may wonder who is included in these 30 per cent who are not tax filers. This includes students struggling with tuition and housing problems. They won't benefit from it whether it is 78 cents or whether it is \$2, whatever amount we debate. It includes seniors on fixed incomes. It doesn't do anything. It includes Albertans living with disabilities who are already stretched thin. This affordability plan leaves out the very people that are hit hardest by inflation, by rising housing costs, by stagnant wages, or by a fixed income.

Mr. Speaker, no one disputes that tax relief can be a helpful tool, but when that relief is so narrowly distributed, when it offers so little for those who need it the most, and when it's paid for by making life more expensive elsewhere, whether it is new fees or new taxes, it's fair to say that this bill misses the mark.

Let's come back to the story of Sandra. She works in the health care system, a sector where, we all know, workers have been under immense strain over the past few years. Sandra makes \$36,000 annually. She is raising her children. She is providing essential services to her community. Under Bill 39 Sandra will save less than 70 cents. Sandra's cost of living has gone up by hundreds of dollars each month. She faces soaring grocery bills. She pays higher rent. She pays more for utilities. It's the same story that I have spoken about Steve.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that families like Steve's and Sandra's are not asking for handouts. They want a real plan that will take them out of the affordability crisis. They are asking for a fair shot. They are asking for leadership that understands these struggles. They're asking for a government that values working people, not just introducing new fees or new taxes.

While \$2 a day or 78 cents a day is advertised as an intervention for the affordability crisis, if the government truly wants to address

these affordability issues, it must invest in affordable housing to ease pressure and reduce the soaring wait-lists for social housing. Conditions are deteriorating for those units that are in my riding. People are calling my constituency office complaining about the conditions where they live. It must introduce policies that lower utility rates so that Albertans don't have to pay utility prices that are 40 per cent more than the rest of the country. It must take on rising insurance costs while not jeopardizing the right to sue. It must work to ensure that wages keep pace with inflation and productivity growth.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are proud, resilient, and hard working, but they cannot be expected to solve a systemic affordability crisis. They need and deserve leadership that stands with them. I appreciate the attempt, but Bill 39 misses the opportunity. It is a half measure at a time when bold action is really needed, especially on the rising cost of living. It offers less than \$2 a day while ignoring the deeper working inequalities across our province.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support Bill 39, because families like Steve's, families like Sandra's, the 30 per cent who are the most hard hit by the affordability crisis, that includes students, that includes people with disabilities, that includes seniors on a fixed income, and families that are really struggling with affordability deserve a better plan, a plan that tackles the cost drivers of family budgets, a plan that addresses the real pressures that they face because Alberta families deserve better, because dignity should not be preserved for a few, because real leadership means tackling the affordability crisis head-on.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, better is always possible, and I ask all the members in this House to vote for better and to vote against Bill 39. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 39. Is there anyone else wishing to speak to the legislation?

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

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a second time]

#### Bill 46

#### Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate April 9: Mr. Deol]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 46? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some comments on Bill 46, the Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. I want to focus my comments on the following clauses in the bill. The first is an amendment to the Access to Information Act.

The following is added after section 97:

Consequential amendments

97.1(1) For the purposes of making any necessary changes as a result of this Act, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by regulation, amend any Act or any regulation filed under the Regulations Act.

(2) The regulations authorized by this section may be made notwithstanding that a regulation being amended was made by a member of the Executive Council or some other person or body.

That's the first clause of the bill that I wish to address in my comments today.

[Mr. Rowswell in the chair]

The second clause is quite similar to the first clause, only it is being added to the Protection of Privacy Act, and this clause is 62.1(1), which says:

For the purposes of making any necessary changes as a result of this Act, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by regulation, amend any Act or any regulation filed under the Regulations Act.

5:10

The reason that I want to address these particular clauses in this bill, Mr. Speaker, is because these are what legal scholars and legislators call the Henry VIII clauses. I want to discuss at length the history of Henry VIII clauses and why they are not a good idea and why I hope the private members of the government caucus will agree with me that this is an inappropriate delegation of powers that properly belong with Members of the Legislative Assembly to cabinet and Executive Council. I hope the private members of the government caucus agree with me and my colleagues here on this side of the House that implementing these Henry VIII clauses in this particular bill is not the way a Legislative Assembly should be giving up its power.

I just want to quickly define what a Henry VIII clause is. That's when the government adds a provision to a bill which enables the government to repeal or amend it after it has become an act of the Legislature. That's exactly what we have here in these clauses. These provisions enable the amendment of legislation using delegated or secondary legislation. The reason they're called Henry VIII clauses, Mr. Speaker, is because the original Henry VIII clause was contained in the Statute of Sewers passed in England in 1531, which gave the commissioner of sewers powers to make rules which had the force of legislation, powers to impose taxation rates, and powers to impose penalties for noncompliance.

Mr. Speaker, I also did a bit of a deep dive into Wikipedia to find out a little bit more of the Statute of Sewers, which, as I said, is the first instance of these Henry VIII clauses. It has the power to impose penalties for not paying taxes. The wording is something that I find really intriguing. It specifically could charge a rate on any person "who hath or holdeth any lands or tenements, or common of pasture, or profit of fishing, or hath or may have any hurt, loss or disadvantage." What's also strange about the sewers act is that for some reason it created commissions of sewers for all of the areas of marshland within England but exempted the Romney Marshes in Kent. One can only wonder how many lobbyists the Romney Marshes of Kent must have hired to bend King Henry VIII's ear to get them exempt from this sewer statutes act, but there we are. It was exempt from the act, and the reasons for that are unfortunately lost to history.

King Henry didn't stop there, Mr. Speaker. In 1539 parliament passed a Statute of Proclamations which allowed him to issue proclamations which had the force of an act of parliament and essentially made parliament a subsidiary of the King's power, if you will. The Parliament of England thereby gave the King power to make laws as he saw fit.

Now, I know that not everybody is familiar with history, Mr. Speaker, so just a reminder of who Henry VIII was. He was a bad King.

**Mr. Long:** That's a little harsh.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I hear the Minister of Infrastructure saying it's a little harsh. Perhaps, you know, the Minister of Infrastructure shares King Henry VIII's penchant for wives. I don't know. For his wife's sake, I hope he doesn't. If anybody knows anything about Henry VIII, it's how he treated his wives, and it was not well. The good news is that the act of proclamation of 1539 was repealed when

King Henry VIII died in 1547, but Legislatures throughout history have continued to try to bring back these Henry VIII clauses.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In fact, there have been a number of cases in the United Kingdom where these clauses have been implemented. A 1932 report of the Donoughmore Committee found that between 1888 and 1929 only nine acts of parliament in the U.K. contained such clauses. Thereafter there were none until the Second World War, but then they returned in growing numbers, and concerns were more frequently expressed in the '70s and '80s. Controversy reached a height during the passage of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act of 1994, which also contained such clauses.

Now, one thing that the U.K. was concerned about at the time was that the proliferation of Henry VIII clauses in the '70s and '80s and '90s reflected the influence of civil servants, that it was the unelected deputy ministers and higher functionaries in government who were responsible for writing these clauses into legislation and hoping that, you know, the work of the Legislature could be given to them. I assume that they thought that they would do a much better job than legislators were doing.

Now, there are a number of concerns that have been raised time and again with these Henry VIII clauses, and the first among them is that these types of clauses bypass the authority of the Legislature. Sorry; I've got a number of notes here, and I'm just trying to read them. We need to remind ourselves that in the Westminster system in Parliament or, in our case here in Alberta, the Legislature we are supreme and we do not answer to anybody else. We are masters in our own house.

It's quite concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite, who are always very concerned about the federal government not taking powers that don't belong to them and taking them on themselves – they are strongly opposed to those kinds of things, but when it comes to defending the powers that we already have, they don't seem to be interested. This is a very clear-cut case of the Legislature ceding its power to Executive Council. You know, if this were a provincial and federal play, this would be like the backbenchers of the UCP caucus voting to turn over management of natural resources to the federal government. They would never do that. I hope that private members of the government caucus realize what they're doing here in surrendering the power that rightly belongs to us as private members to members of Executive Council.

The second concern with these types of Henry VIII clauses is that there's no way of assessing at the time of their enactment which future statutes the power will be used against. It's certainly been suggested by some legal scholars that in the context of emergency powers legislation, which may be used in relation to all primary legislation, enacted after the act conferring the powers, such prospective Henry VIII clauses constitute a fetter on the power of future parliaments. That's something that I think members should give thought to as well because, as everyone here knows, we are only here for a certain time, and then after the next election the next Legislature assumes its responsibilities. Not only are we ceding our power to make changes to the Access to Information Act and the Protection of Privacy Act; we're preventing future Legislatures from using the power that it should rightly have to make those amendments and leaving that with the Executive Council of the day.

5:20

I don't need – well, I should remind members that to be a member of Executive Council you don't even need to be an elected member of this place. Certainly, in the run-up to the 2015 election the Health minister was the unelected Stephen Mandel and held that position

for a number of months before he took a seat briefly here in the Legislature. He was the one who had been given the power to administer the health care system.

Now, if, for some reason, the responsible minister for the Access to Information Act and the Protection of Privacy Act were to be an unelected member of Executive Council, would private members agree to turning over legislative powers to that person? I don't think they would. I want private members of the government caucus to realize here what they are doing, that they are saying that they are okay with turning over power that rightly belongs to us as elected officials to potentially somebody who could hold the position of the minister who isn't elected, is just put there because the Premier likes that person. That goes against the very democratic values that we hold.

Now, like I said, this has been a subject of much study and concern in the United Kingdom. The Constitution Unit at University College London published a set of proposed legislative standards for the scrutiny of bills, and it, unsurprisingly, contained a large number of suggested provisions for addressing the effect of Henry VIII clauses. I thought maybe it would be useful to read into the record that unit's recommendations for limiting the scope of these Henry VIII clauses because – oh, I only have a minute. Darn it. Well, I'll get through as many as I can, and members can ask me for the written report if they're so interested.

Delegations of legislative power should be framed as narrowly as possible.

The policy aims of a ministerial power should be included in the bill itself.

I'll remind members that we do not have any policy aims stated here for including these Henry VIII clauses.

The scope of a Henry VIII power should be limited to the minimum necessary to meet the pressing need for such an exceptional measure.

The use of Henry VIII powers should only be permitted if specific purposes are provided for in the bill.

Ministerial powers should be defined objectively.

Ministerial powers to make secondary legislation should be restricted by effective legal boundaries.

Members, don't vote in favour of this legislation.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills has the call.

**Mr. Ellingson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar for both the history and the legislative lessons that he just presented. I'd like to pick up not specifically where he left off but also in the context of where we are today with these Henry VIII clauses in Bill 46.

Bill 46, Mr. Speaker, is actually part of a series of bills that have been brought forward by this government that creates a shroud of secrecy that prevents Albertans from seeing into the work of the government and the propositions of the government. My colleague just referred to how these Henry VIII clauses and what's included in Bill 46 kind of take away the power of this Legislature. I take it one step further and say that it's taking away the power of the citizens of this province, of Albertans themselves.

I think one of the reasons why we bring forward legislation into this Chamber is so that Albertans can see what that legislation is, so that Albertans can see the debate and hear the debate, so that Albertans can hear that debate and engage with us through the course of first reading, second reading, committee. This Henry VIII clause: by including that clause, you've stripped away not only the rights of this Legislature but the rights of Albertans to be engaging with government and understanding the legislation that is coming forward and how it's going to impact them.

This legislation is just another piece of legislation that centralizes control in this government. As I said, Mr. Speaker, it's part of a series of actions by this government to make it more difficult for Albertans to see the work of government, to access information, and to discover the implications of the decisions being made by this government.

I'd like to just take a moment to talk about the last couple of years and the storyline, the arc, of legislation for this government in centralizing control, limiting access to information. As we heard, Bill 46 does this by introducing a clause that circumvents the work of this Legislature, a clause that allows Executive Council and cabinet to make changes to privacy information, access to information without bringing it to the Legislature so that those decisions can happen behind closed doors without Albertans, without this Legislature ever being aware of what is coming forward.

In the context of where we are and the storyline of this government, Albertans should be very concerned with this clause. This government has a history that we need to pay attention to. Just a couple of years ago this government and the Premier felt that they needed greater latitude in accepting gifts in the course of their work. In understanding this, you know, the solution was Bill 8, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, that amended the Conflicts of Interest Act to change the rules of the acceptance of gifts.

This government talks about how they care about transparency and accountability. But as they say, actions speak louder than words. Why, if they're concerned with transparency and accountability, would they include a clause in Bill 46 that allows Executive Council to change legislation without bringing those changes to this Legislature, without engaging with Albertans? Why would that same government have introduced Bill 8 to make changes to gifts that they can receive without disclosing to Albertans? Again, this is just a part of a trail of breadcrumbs that brings us to Bill 46, Mr. Speaker.

After Bill 8 this government made one step further as a committee was struck and reviewed the Conflicts of Interest Act. Recommendations were brought forward that were included in further legislation. That committee heard from multiple stakeholders, including the former Ethics Commissioner, but most of those recommendations from that commissioner were ignored. Some important changes that were not recommended by the commissioner that are connected to Bill 46 came forward in Bill 34. In reviewing the Conflicts of Interest Act, the government recommended changes to close more doors in accessing information and line of sight into the actions of the government of Alberta.

**5:30**

Bill 34, among other things, excluded senior staff and political staff from freedom of information requests. Those exchanges between cabinet and senior staff and political staff now became part of executive privilege, cabinet privilege and could not be accessed through FOIP requests. Bill 34 expanded the definition of cabinet confidentiality to include political staff. Again, why is a government concerned with transparency and accountability expanding the definitions that make the public's ability to access information harder? Mr. Speaker, just as we don't know with Bill 46 and their Henry VIII clause: further changes, we will never know.

Bill 34 made appealing FOIP responses more difficult. While formerly it could go directly through the Information and Privacy Commissioner, now Albertans need to first file complaints through the body that initially responded to the FOIP before they can go to the commissioner. Again, these changes are being made by a government that is apparently concerned with transparency and

accountability, this government, again, that is now proposing Bill 46 and making further changes to privacy legislation without coming through this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, now might be a good time to remind the government and all Albertans – just trying to read the Speaker's thumbs up, thumbs down; not sure if he's agreeing with what I'm saying – that this government is currently embroiled in the worst corruption scandal ever experienced by a government in Alberta. A corruption scandal that alleges that members of cabinet stepped in to intervene in the decisions being made by public servants. A corruption scandal that now appears that members of cabinet are firing public servants and government-appointed board members to hide information. This government is allegedly hiding information from members of this Legislature and Albertans as they provide bloated private-sector surgical contracts to their friends.

In this context we have Bill 46, that will allow Executive Council to make further restrictions and changes to access to information without coming to this Legislature. But, Mr. Speaker, that isn't all because this government also passed Bill 33, that changed the protection of privacy information ostensibly for the better, and yet, while saying that we're making it better, the Information and Privacy Commissioner recommended mandatory breach reporting, that public bodies report privacy incidents to their office and provide the office with the power to require public bodies to notify affected individuals, but those recommendations were not included in Bill 33. Instead, Bill 33 limited the oversight of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and added layers to an Albertan making a complaint to the commissioner.

Again, leading up to Bill 46, which includes a clause to make changes to privacy and information without coming to the Legislature, without being honest with Albertans about the changes that are being made, throwing another veil of secrecy over the work of this government. This government is doing that after having already changed legislation reporting on gifts received when they appeared to be problematic so that now members of cabinet can be provided gifts or receive gifts to attend events with lobbyists or those receiving government contracts without ever reporting those gifts to the Ethics Commissioner or to Albertans. The government considered making changes to conflicts of interest to make it more difficult to access information by including an extending council executive privilege, all incorporated into Bill 34.

Then the government attempted to improve personal private data, but instead limited the oversight of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, did not make it required for public bodies to report breaches, and made it more difficult for Albertans to file complaints about those breaches.

Now, after consulting with stakeholders about bills 33 and 34, this government has decided apparently that those bills just didn't go far enough and that we needed to centralize more power in cabinet, once again bringing us back to Bill 46. As laid out by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, that includes a clause that allows this government to make legislative changes to access to information without coming to this Legislature and without Albertans knowing. Bill 46 is just part of a series of bills and actions by this government to throw up a veil of secrecy instead of being transparent and accountable.

In fact, instead of being transparent and accountable, this government is the exact opposite. This government is reinforcing the need to have a cloud of secrecy around their work when they're in the middle of the biggest corruption scandal in Alberta government history. Mr. Speaker, it seems that there's no end to how far this government will go to hide their decisions, to hide their intentions from Albertans, and I think that we should all ask: why is this government going so far to hide so much information from

Albertans? I think Albertans, quite frankly, should be asking this government why they're willing to go so far.

On this side of the House I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we will stand against corruption, that we will stand for democracy and transparency and accountability and lift the veil of secrecy of this government, and we are absolutely going to oppose Bill 46.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Last sitting the government brought two pieces of legislation, Bill 33 and Bill 34, and they made sweeping changes in how we deal with freedom of information and how we protect Albertans' privacy. As usual, they did not consult with anyone. A few days after the introduction of those bills, the Information and Privacy Commissioner gave government some feedback, pretty scathing feedback, about how they're making it harder for Albertans to access information and how they are creating loopholes where they would be able to hide information, any information that exists between a political staffer – they are yet to define it – and executive, that was exempted. Also, with respect to privacy there were many things that were left out. Those two letters from the Information and Privacy Commissioner are available on their website.

Clearly, government did not consult. Clearly, government did not get those two bills right. Hence they are now bringing forward a piece of legislation to correct some of their mistakes that they made in bills 33 and 34. Instead of going back to the drawing board, going back to the consultation process, now they think that they can put clauses in this piece of legislation that will give them authority to rewrite, amend laws without bringing it back to the Legislature. The Henry VIII clause. My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar went into super long and interesting detail of the Henry VIII clause, when it was used, who brought it up. I won't go that far, but I would say that we've come a long way from King Henry and these authoritarian kind of clauses that allow the executive to bypass the normal legislative processes and write laws as they see fit without any legislative oversight. We have come a long way from that.

5:40

Around the 20th century, latter half of the 20th century everybody was moving towards democratic regimes, and democratic government emerged as ideal for everyone. However, Mr. Speaker, since 2011 Democracy Watch noted that things have changed, and since 2011 the adoption of democracy has declined. They also gave some reasons for that as well, why that's the case that democracies are declining. One of those reasons was that the reduction of checks and balances on executive and legislative powers was the result of erosion of the rule of law and democracy.

In short, how well a government cares for its citizens, rich and poor, is fundamental to democracy and the rule of law. When government, instead of admitting that they got something wrong, wants to put clauses in this legislation that will give them power to do whatever they see fit, amend any act or regulation as they see fit, I think they are doing a disservice to this House. They are doing a disservice to the rule of law. They are doing a disservice to democracy in this province. This clause clearly undermines the principles of parliamentary democracy, parliamentary sovereignty, and it allows executive to circumvent processes that are in place for good reason.

Government wants us to believe that this clause is there to correct some minor grammatical errors, typos, and change the name of the

legislation. As you would know, Mr. Speaker, over the years we have a bill called miscellaneous statutes amendment act that comes at the end of every session. If there are things like some minor errors, if there are things like typos, if there are some changes, updates to legislation, names, or legislative provisions, that's the statute we use to correct those mistakes. That doesn't take too much time. That usually is shared with the opposition and passes through the Legislature quite quickly. If the government really wants to correct some of those kinds of cosmetic mistakes, they could also bring forward a miscellaneous statutes amendment act that could cover and provide for these corrections. However, the government is giving themselves power to amend laws.

Back in the day when Premier Kenney was part of the Legislature before being kicked out by, in his words, people – I don't want to use that word. Before that he also tried to put a similar Henry VIII clause in the health statute, and quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that didn't go well for him either.

There are other governments that have tried this clause as well, and again that didn't go well for them either. This government also lacks any kind of trust or credibility to be taken on their word. They cannot be trusted. They will say one thing and will do quite the opposite.

I'm sure the Minister of Education will be interested in some examples. I will try to come up with some examples. Before the 2023 election this government promised Albertans that if they get elected, nobody will be touching their pensions. They dropped the Alberta pension plan idea. Throughout the campaign they put that on the back burner. If pressed, they would say: your pensions are safe; we are not doing anything about pensions.

When they got elected, they passed the legislation paving the way for an Alberta pension plan. They do know that it's a deeply – deeply – unpopular idea among Albertans. The only thing that may be more unpopular among Albertans that I can think of is the corrupt care scandal, the corruption, bloated contracts, and allegations of kickbacks in health care procurement. That may be more unpopular.

Another example I can provide is that during the 2023 campaign they also abandoned that they will pursue an Alberta provincial police force. Again, during Premier Jason Kenney's time they commissioned a report, the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, and that report pegged the cost of an Alberta provincial police force between \$732 million to \$754 million. It also included costs like \$360 million in start-up costs and subsidies that we would lose that we get from the federal government for contract policing. During the election they promised Albertans that they will not pursue that. Earlier this sitting they introduced a piece of legislation again paving the way for an Alberta provincial police force.

There are countless examples that I can give where this government has lost the trust of this House, of Albertans, and they cannot be trusted on what usually they say they are doing.

Again, if they want to correct some mistakes in bills 33 and 34, they should put those changes in a miscellaneous statutes amendment act and should not try to include clauses that would give cabinet authority to rewrite the laws. That authority belongs to this House. Albertans do elect us, and Albertans do want their representatives to make laws through proper legislative debate and not through backroom cabinet decisions.

As I said, it's important for the proper functioning of our democracy that laws receive full scrutiny by the elected representatives, who are answerable to their constituents, and adding a Henry VIII clause completely defeats that process and that purpose. The legislative process specifically exists to prevent government from making sweeping changes, from making decisions behind closed doors, from making changes through

regulation and governing without any accountability, and if we pass this piece of legislation, this will give government that power.

5:50

To all members of this House, in particular those who are not part of the executive: you would never see how this power will be exercised. You would not have any control of cabinet decisions. You would only hear about the decision when it's made, so do not give up your power. Do not give up your responsibility to debate legislation in this House. That's not helping your constituents, that's not helping our constituents, and that's not helping us strengthen the legislative process and strengthen our institution of democracy.

One last thing I would say is that this clause in this day and age is a contempt to the democratic process and to this House. My appeal to all members of this House is to vote against this piece of legislation.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as I've been reading through this bill and connecting with constituents, an example that was brought forward by one of my constituents is the thought of scrolling through on their phone and the example of where they were talking about a hockey camp idea for their kid to be able to attend. What are the next ads that pop up on their phone? They were around hockey gear and hockey camp.

I have to think that it's more than just a little bit odd that sometimes when we mention to friends or family or even colleagues in passing now, we end up getting this type of advertising that's now specifically tailored to conversations that we've had. It's this moment that, you know, really made me realize just how much of our own personal data is out there and how it's being used. If you have an online presence, really, of any type, even if that means just using Google, your data is being collected and stored somewhere constantly. Often our data is shared without our knowledge.

Now, let's consider another perspective. When we go online to search maybe about government services or request our own information from public bodies, it should be simple and transparent, don't you think? I think so. But in reality navigating these systems can feel like a bit of a maze sometimes. Technology has made our lives easier in so many ways. However, it's also sparked concerns over protection of personal privacy and others.

It is for this reason that I stand here in support of Bill 46, the Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. If passed, this bill will be a step in the right direction towards the necessary protections of everyone's personal information while ensuring transparency in how public data is shared.

Mr. Speaker, recently I bought an electric toothbrush. It was an Oral-B, and they ask you to download the app, and when you're going through, they give you the option to check off: accept terms of service. If you just click that box without reading what that terms of service actually entail, you actually find out that your personal information on how you brush your teeth, how much time you spend brushing your teeth, actually gets shared with third-party advertisers through the app. That can be rather problematic because this kind of warning of your personal information being used is not part of the app's initial information. You have to go searching for that. I thought it was pretty interesting that when you start looking at even things like our Alexa devices at home or the Amazon Fire devices, again, your personal data is collected and shared.

Mr. Speaker, this last fall our government passed legislation that will repeal the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy

Act, or FOIP, and split it into two separate pieces of legislation, the Protection of Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act. Since this we've worked to implement the feedback from consultation with the public bodies about drafting regulations, which our amendments reflect. These minor administrative housekeeping amendments that we're proposing are required for clarity and streamlining in both the Protection of Privacy Act, or the POPA, and the Access to Information Act, the ATIA, which were passed in December of '24. Our corrections are limited to spelling, grammar, punctuation, numbering, lettering, spacing, formats, and clearly unintentional redundancies or omissions of specific words. Simply put, we aren't looking to change the act; we're just looking to provide clarity.

I want to make it clear that these amendments serve as a bigger purpose than just refining technical details. They reflect our ongoing commitment to protecting personal information in a new digital age, where privacy is increasingly at risk. These updates show our commitment to creating a system for accessing public information that remains functional, transparent, and accessible for everyone. The changes that we would like to make may seem small, but they're important. We are continuously working to ensure that the laws governing how this information is handled remain current and fit for purpose. As more of our lives move online, more of our

data is being shared, stored, and processed in ways that we may not fully realize. Our privacy is not merely something that we should take for granted. Frankly, I believe that we need to do even more.

To wrap things up, Mr. Speaker, we're living in a time where technology plays a huge role in our daily lives, and while this has made so many things easier, it's also created a lot of grey areas and a lot of questions around how our personal information is being protected. While some may find it inevitable that our information is going to get out into the world, I think that we need to ensure we have as much control as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a second time]

**Mr. Williams:** Mr. Speaker, it's been a productive afternoon debate. The government will be returning to more bills, but for now I ask that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]







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