



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 30, 2025

Day 104

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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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)

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McDougall, Myles, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
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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Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 30, 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.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to the introduction of guests today, I do have a brief statement that I would like to make with respect to the daily Routine. On April 22, 1993, ruling on the matter of tabling of sensitive documents, Speaker Schumacher expressed extreme concern about the tabling of documents of a private or confidential matter.

In his ruling on May 8, 2007, Speaker Kowalski reminded the Assembly that Alberta is one of the few jurisdictions in which voluntary tablings, those documents other than required by statute or standing orders, are allowed to be tabled, and Speaker Kowalski cautioned that the Assembly be very careful with the privilege in here we have with respect to tablings.

It is indeed the member who is tabling the document who bears responsibility for the document itself. Even though members have absolute privilege in this Assembly, that does not mean that that document produced by the Assembly could not become the content of a legal proceeding. As such, I encourage members to weigh very carefully the oaths that they may have otherwise made when it comes to tabling such confidential documents. Hon. members, further to that, I will remain steadfast that it is up to the Assembly as to whether or not they wish to continue or permit the voluntary tablings.

Introduction of Guests

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you some wonderful friends and students from Mill Woods from the Millwoods Christian school. I had the pleasure of visiting them for Read In Week. They are proud owners of a Legoslatrue, and they are here today to tour the Assembly. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly students from the Windsor Park school and their teacher Stacie Arends. I have also been to their school. They're an awesome group of kids. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce eight executive members of the largest and most active political club at the University of Alberta, the Alberta New Democrat club. I would ask them now to rise and please receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: More members than members.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you my very good friends Dr. Matthew Rowley, his wife, Joanna, and their eight-month-old adorable daughter, Alicia. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my mom, Josie Fir, and hard-working Albertan friends Diana Rowe, Lyle Rowe, Cathy Harbinson, and Craig Broddy. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sariah Seaborn and Karen Alm, my two constituency staff who serve the people of Lethbridge incredibly well. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? Seeing and hearing none.

Just by the skin of your teeth, the hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Rochelle Hartung, sister to my fiercely capable policy adviser, and Jonathan Abagre, who are here visiting us in this Assembly. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

Career and Employment Services

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are known for their hard-working, entrepreneurial spirit. Our province is full of opportunities, and it's incredibly important that we give Albertans the tools they need to build a better future for themselves and their families. I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes the need to expand employment services so more Albertans can find and maintain meaningful work.

Budget 2025 doubles the province's investments in career and employment services, ensuring we can build the workforce needed to support and grow Alberta's economy. Alberta's government is investing \$185 million, an increase of nearly \$89 million, to expand employment supports for Albertans and help employers find, hire, and train workers. This funding is anticipated to help over 820,000 Albertans find and maintain jobs this year.

Our partners are using this funding to offer Albertans the support they need to eliminate barriers to job searching and employment. Albertans have access to a wide variety of in-person and virtual services across the province, ranging from career counselling, interview practice, and resumé development to job placement, simulated work sites, work-specific courses, and workshops. This

funding will also support employers in finding, hiring, and training workers. In fact, we are doubling the province's investments to support on-the-job training in collaboration with employers, including over \$20 million in simulated work sites. Albertans can get paid, hands-on experience and training from local employers from various industries, which has the potential to open doors and change lives.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are committed to creating opportunities for Albertans to find pathways to prosperity. I'm so pleased to be part of a government that is investing to make it easier for Albertans to find a job, earn a paycheque, and build a better future for themselves and their families.

Thank you.

Political Contributions by Corporations and Unions

Ms Ganley: Democracy should belong to the people. That shouldn't be controversial, but as I stand before you today the UCP are doing everything they can to take democracy away from the people and sell it to the highest bidder.

One of the proudest days of my life was my 37th birthday and not for the usual, "Hey, I survived another year," sort of reasons but because I introduced the very first bill of the very first Alberta NDP government. It banned corporate and union donations, and to quote myself, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta "will reform election financing and give voters back their voice. It is a needed evolution in our electoral process and of our democratic rights." That was the day we took a huge step forward to make sure that elections weren't for sale, that the rich and powerful couldn't use their corporate money to buy elections, and now the UCP have reversed it.

They will allow big money back into politics. We have to wonder why, especially when the UCP cabinet stands accused of trading bloated contracts for personal perks. Even former members of their own cabinet think it smells so bad that it needs a public inquiry. The UCP are under investigation for using government money to pad corporate bottom lines for their friends, and today they ensure that corporations can turn around and donate that money right back to the UCP. Maybe it's not a closed case, but it smells so bad that it's impossible not to notice.

Democracy should belong to the people, but, see, that gives the people power, and that's exactly what the UCP don't want.

Pope Francis

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, today I rise with a heavy heart to mark the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis, who left this world on Easter Monday at the age of 88. Pope Francis was a remarkable leader and shepherd to a Catholic community of over 1 billion followers. Throughout his 12-year papacy he became a global symbol of compassion, humility, and renewal. He challenged all of us regardless of faith to act with greater kindness, to serve those most in need, and to care for the world that we share.

1:40

Born in Argentina in 1936, Pope Francis made history as the first Latin American pope, the first Jesuit pope, and a tireless voice for the poor and marginalized. His journey from the streets of Buenos Aires to the chair of St. Peter was a testament to the enduring power of his faith, service, and perseverance. Throughout his time as pontiff Pope Francis called for mercy in a world often divided by anger. He reached out to refugees, Indigenous peoples, and the vulnerable.

We as Albertans are especially lucky to have had Pope Francis visit Alberta, particularly Lac Ste. Anne, Maskwacis, and Edmonton in 2022 as part of his penitential pilgrimage. The visit was one of healing. It showed his commitment to reconciliation and his love of the global community of the Catholic faithful.

Even in the face of illness he remained active and committed to his calling. A day before his passing Pope Francis offered his Easter blessing to the world, a final act of faith and love that exemplified his lifetime of service.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Catholic community mourns the loss of this extraordinary man. His passing leaves a void, not just in the church but in the global pursuit of justice, dignity, and unity. On behalf of the people of Alberta, I extend our heartfelt condolences to Catholics here and around the world. May Pope Francis' legacy of compassion and humility continue to inspire us all, and may he rest in peace.

Alberta Separatism and Premier's Leadership

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the federal election is over but the fight for Alberta's future is not. Right now our province is at a crossroads. The Premier is leading Alberta down a dangerous path. Let's be clear. The Premier is a separatist. She has spent years pushing ideas that would rip Alberta out of Canada piece by piece, from endorsing the so-called free Alberta strategy to passing sovereignty acts to trying to pull Alberta out of the Canadian pension plan. Then she dismantled the RCMP in favour of a provincial force, and when Donald Trump introduced tariffs, she cozied up to him instead of standing up with other Canadian Premiers to protect Alberta jobs. Time and time again she's proven she's not here to build a better Alberta within Canada; she is here to break us apart.

But that's not what Albertans want. Albertans believe in strong public health care. We believe in secure retirement through the Canada pension plan. We believe in being part of something bigger, a Canada that is proud to be united. The Premier doesn't believe in that. She is flirting with separatism, sowing chaos, and risking everything Albertans have built. It's reckless, it's wasteful, and it could cost Albertans everything: our health care, our retirement savings, and our place in this country. Today we're calling on Albertans to draw the line, to say clearly that we will not stand for the Premier's separatist agenda. Being a proud Albertan means being a proud Canadian, and we're not going anywhere. If you believe Alberta is stronger in Canada, now is the time to speak up. If you want to tell the Premier that we are better together, Albertans can visit separatistsmith.ca and sign our petition.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:42.

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a proud Nehiyaw. In a fit of political rage the Premier introduced a bill that would make it easier to launch Alberta into a separatist crisis, as if threatening to break up Canada was just another wedge issue. Why now? Why in the middle of rising costs and global instability would this Premier choose the path of chaos? Separatism creates uncertainty; it drives away investment; it hurts workers; it hurts the oil and gas sector, just like Trump and his reckless tariffs.

But here's what the Premier won't say: First Nations must consent to any talk of separation. Full stop. Our inherent right and jurisdiction over these lands predates the creation of Alberta. We are signatories to treaties 6, 7, and 8, made with the Crown, not with the province. The treaties are binding. They must be respected. No

Premier, no matter how loud and reckless, can erase that. The Supreme Court of Canada has already ruled that no province can unilaterally separate, and any path to separation must include meaningful negotiation with First Nations, something this government has no mandate, no plan, and no legitimacy to do.

Mr. Speaker, First Nations in Alberta want our treaties honoured, we want our sovereignty respected, and we do not want to become the 51st state. There are many like me – Nehiyawak, First Nations people, and proud Albertans – who feel the same way. I will take the lead of the late Elijah Harper. I will never, ever vote for separatism because this is and always will be Indian land. [some applause]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Alberta Separatism and Premier's Leadership

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, if there's one thing the Premier loves more than a bad idea, it's having a scapegoat to blame for it. When her interference in the federal election backfired, she didn't take responsibility. She blamed the media. She said she was forced by the media to get involved.

Her impact was a drag on the federal Conservatives, including in Pierre Poilievre's own riding, where voters were so concerned about Conservatives like the Premier that he lost his own seat. Now, Doug Ford stabbed Poilievre in the sternum; this Premier stabbed Poilievre in the back to advance her separatist project.

When the corrupt care scandal exploded, she didn't take accountability. She fired the AHS CEO she had hand-picked, the former CEO who wasn't the problem but who tried to expose the government's corruption.

And now she's setting up the next scapegoat: Albertans. When this province is dragged into a long, expensive, and deeply divisive separatism campaign, this Premier wants to say that it's what Albertans asked for, but let's be clear. This is what she's planning. It's what she planned when she cozied up to Trump and stabbed Poilievre in the back. She's fanning the flames of separatism to distract from the corrupt care scandal, to rile up her own base, and to turn the heat away from her own failures. She needs to come clean.

Yesterday the Premier introduced a new bill to make it easier to jam through a separation referendum. She isn't defending Alberta; she's destabilizing it, and she's getting ready to blame the rest of us when it goes sideways.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans see through it. We know who's really responsible, and we're not going to let the Premier scapegoat her way out of another disaster of her own making.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Wright: I rise to table the five requisite copies of two different documents, Mr. Speaker. One is Public Safety Canada's federal what-we-heard report on contract policing with jurisdictions across Canada, indicating that staff shortages are a major issue for vacancy rates of over 50 per cent. Another one is an e-mail from a constituent of mine which showcases the extensive costs that they are having to bring forward as an association to protect their properties due to RCMP vacancies.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, I have one tabling. It's from my March 17, 2025, Auditor General submission, volume 1, section 16, including a short write-up and my personal handwritten notes prepared ahead of the February 19 cabinet meeting.

The Speaker: Are there are others? I'll go to the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings here. First, five copies of an e-mail on December 6, 2023, with the RCMP five-year plan from Deputy Commissioner and Commanding Officer of K Division. It says that the Alberta RCMP's authorized strength level is 1,799, including civilians. That's number one.

Number two, we have five copies of the Alberta RCMP HR executive summary, which says that the authorized strength level was 1,772 plus 139 civilian members. The document outlines that there are only 1,434 members, 191 on special leave: 1,625. Also outlines transfers and other things.

1:50

Another one: five copies of a letter sent on August 21, 2024, to Deputy Commissioner and Commanding Officer Rob Hill of K Division from PSES, with a cost estimate to fund an authorized strength level of 1,699 officers: 1,489 on duty, 210 on special leave. July 16, 2024: authorized positions were 1,911.

Mr. Speaker, I also have another five copies from the National Police Federation to myself on April 11, 2025, which claims that they have 3,500 members serving the communities across Alberta.

And I have another five copies of letters received on April 14, 2025, from the deputy commanding officer of K Division, Rob Hill, which states that the Alberta RCMP has an authorized strength level of 1,772 members, with 139 civilian members.

I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, what the confusion is here, but I'm pretty sure that we don't know . . .

The Speaker: Now you're heading into a statement. Prior to that . . .

Mr. Ellis: No. I tabled five. I have all these copies.

The Speaker: Okay. I saw exactly what you did. You were entirely fine until you provided your opinion at the very end, when I interjected to say: now you're heading into a statement.

Unfortunately, we're now at 1:50.

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta in Canada

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, at a time when President Trump is going after Canadian jobs, industries, and truly, our entire country, Alberta should be shoulder to shoulder with every other Canadian to build up Canada, not tear it down. But this government refuses to stand with Canada. For years they've attacked our country. They do not value the institutions we share as Canadians. They have attacked public health care, public education, the CPP, amongst others. Now, after introducing legislation to make it easier to separate, it must be asked: why does the Premier want Alberta to leave Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I may ask the member opposite why it is that they want Alberta to fail. The reason why we have tension in this country is because the federal Liberal-NDP coalition passed terrible policy that targeted our province, targeted our industry, and has resulted in a massive amount of investment fleeing this province. We need to correct that. If the members opposite want to do something constructive, they should join us in opposing the nine bad policies that we have asked the federal

government to reconsider now that they no longer have to rely on the NDP for a coalition so that we can reset the relationship with Alberta.

Ms Gray: Alberta is stronger inside Canada than outside of Canada. The former UCP Finance minister said that the Premier's dream of separation would destroy Alberta's economy. Travis Toews called her plan, quote, dangerous for the province and said it would, quote, simply undermine investment. In Quebec separatism destroyed Montreal's economy, killed jobs and investments, and hurt the province. Instead of standing up for a strong Canada, the Premier's actions will drive away investment and destroy our economy. Why would the Premier risk Alberta's prosperity at a time when we're already under attack from President Trump?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, why won't the member opposite stand up and support us in establishing economic corridors with pipelines, in repealing Bill C-69, in getting rid of the tanker ban, on making sure the federal government does not come through with an emissions cap, on getting rid of the determination of plastics as toxic, of the net-zero power regs, the net-zero vehicle regs, of trying to take over our TIER program that's been established since 2007, and on the federal censorship laws, which actually one of their counterparts at the federal level put forward? That's the reason why we're fighting the federal government.

Ms Gray: We will never support this government's separatist agenda.

The Premier championed separatism when she was running for leader of that party, and they called her plan a, quote, constitutional and economic crisis that will hurt Albertans. They also called it, quote, wrong for our party, wrong for our province, and wrong for our country; quote, useless and meaningless virtue signalling; and, quote, that it flirts with separatism. All of those words were from the Minister of Advanced Education, who was calling it like she saw it at the time. Why since day one has this Premier risked Alberta's economic security?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's sovereignty within a united Canada: that is what we have been advocating for. All we have been asking for is for the federal government to honour the Constitution, which gives us the jurisdiction to develop our resources, gives us the jurisdiction to manage the power grid. The members opposite wanted to hand everything over to the federal government to manage these things, and what did they win in the last election? Six point four per cent of the popular vote and down to one seat in the House of Commons. That is a repudiation of everything the party opposite stands for. They have an opportunity now to stand with Albertans, and I invite them to do it.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Bill 54

Ms Gray: Albertans reject this Premier's separatism. Politicians of all stripes know that it is political suicide to say out loud that they are a separatist, but what did this Premier and her government do? She tabled terrible elections laws that everyone immediately looked at and said: this is to facilitate separatism. She calls it a citizen-led initiative, but Albertans know what's going on. The government is enabling a referendum to have Alberta leave Canada. Why would the Premier rewrite already sound election laws just to make it

easier to have a separation referendum when she knows it will damage Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bastion of socialism, California, has actually been the motivator for me in looking at how we might change our citizen initiative legislation. Look at this. They have statutory initiatives that require 5 per cent of the vote who had previously voted for governor and 8 per cent of the votes cast for governor. Ours is actually a little bit higher than that, but what you've seen in California is that in 2020 they had 12 citizen initiative propositions; in 2022 seven citizen initiative propositions; and 2024, 10 citizen initiative propositions. We're just aligning with some of the practices we see in California.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are proud Canadians with no interest in adopting U.S.-style health care or U.S.-style election laws.

This is separatism, and you do not have to take my word for it. The UCP party president was on right-wing Facebook last night writing that the Premier with this law is listening to the extreme far right and that they will get their referendum on independence. Why is the Premier only willing to listen to people who want to separate from Canada rather than the vast majority of Albertans who stand for a united Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Citizen initiative is not a right-wing or left-wing issue; it is an everybody issue. In fact, I might give some encouragement to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. One of the propositions that went forward was for rent control expansion. That was one of the issues that managed to get enough signatures to be put on a ballot. Another one was the legalization of recreational marijuana. And there was another one – I'm sure they'd love this one – a millionaire tax for electric vehicles, putting a new 2 per cent tax on people making over \$2 million to fund electric vehicles. These are the kind of initiatives that could potentially be put forward with enough signatures on a petition.

Ms Gray: Despite what the Premier is saying now, it is clear what this legislation is intended to do because the UCP party president is telling everyone. He says that the new election act, quote, lowers the bar on the ability to trigger a separatist referendum. Government ministers might not feel free to say it out loud, but the party president is clearly explaining it. The UCP want to break up our country using dark money funnelled through their own referendum plans to do it. The whole thing is designed from the start to separate Alberta from Canada. Why won't the Premier be honest and say so?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the changes to these laws have been in place or in the works for a number of months. It was actually in the mandate letter for my Justice minister to look at an Election Act reform so that we could identify some issues that needed to be changed. It's actually a pretty substantive piece of legislation. One of the issues that we had heard was to address the thresholds for recalls, to address the thresholds for citizen initiative, and that's what we're doing. We believe in the wisdom of the people. We believe that they can identify issues, put them forward for fair consideration by their fellow citizens, and we invite the members opposite to start petition campaigns of their own.

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

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of Infrastructure tabled his cabinet notes yesterday about the corrupt care scandal. He wrote,

Athana was actually fired because she refused to scuttle an investigation into a missing \$50M . . . She refused to sign bad contracts. The board was fired because they turned over Athana's letter to the [Auditor General] and refused to allow Andre to become CEO because he was central to the allegations. Nothing I have [so far] . . . heard here justifies their dismissal.

Will the Premier admit there was political interference, followed by a cover-up, in the corrupt care scandal?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm mindful of your admonition that even though it's all right for those to share their personal theories and other materials with the Auditor General and with Judge Wyant, I do have an oath of office that I do have to honour and there are serious ramifications for not doing so. Others may not feel as seriously about the oath that they took, but I do.

I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite can read the statement of defence and they will see the two different reports that were actually withheld from the government at paragraph 40 and at paragraph 41 both of which say, "We have not identified any issues that would justify AHS refusing to proceed with the . . . Contract Extension."

Ms Gray: A missing \$50 million in taxes is offensive to Albertans who are struggling to put food on the table. A missing \$50 million may mean kickbacks, corruption, or worse. A missing \$50 million means the RCMP should have been called in immediately, but the government didn't do that. Until now they even hid that they hired PricewaterhouseCoopers to look for these missing tax dollars. Will the Premier table the report that was written into the missing money today? Will she also send a copy to the Auditor General and the RCMP?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in the statement of defence, there is a report dated October 11, 2024, by an external investigator that, yes, indeed, has been sent to the Auditor General as well as a letter dated October 31 from an external investigator that I've also quoted that indeed has been sent to the Auditor General. There are no missing dollars. There is a credit with Atabay pharmaceuticals, and we are working with Health Canada to be able to identify products that can be used to fulfill the rest of that commitment.

Ms Gray: What the former minister alleges, someone with a front-row seat at the table, is the worst cover-up in this province's history. He says that the board was fired because they wouldn't be complicit in corruption. The Official Opposition and Albertans have been asking questions for weeks about this corruption. Everyone deserves answers, but the Premier is doing things like making sure the board members have a gag order. Will the Premier release the former AHS Board from their gag orders, send all the reports to the RCMP, and finally at long last do the only acceptable thing and call a full public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, the members opposite should read through the statement of defence. All of the materials that have been identified are being forwarded to the Auditor General as well as to Judge Wyant. At the meeting

in question the Health minister gave all the relevant information for what we needed to do at that time. We were coming to the end of the final transition to be able to get AHS to be turned into a service provider. A board was not the appropriate way of giving that oversight. We established an official administrator position, and we had to appoint a new CEO because there was already an absence. That was the reason for the meeting, and that's fully disclosed.

Health Services Procurement Process

Ms Hoffman: When asked very specific questions about the corrupt care scandal, the government lawyers up and the Justice minister tells people to read the statement of defence. Well, we have. The Health minister claims she decided to terminate the CEO and the board in December, but cabinet documents show that cabinet was only asked to do it at the last minute at the end of January and that the Premier's chief of staff put pressure on at least one minister to execute her will and fire them all. These allegations are severe. Will the Minister of Health stop hiding behind her colleagues and tell all Albertans why she gave such limited information and rushed the decision when she had months to prepare?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is incorrect. We have been very transparent with the information that has been provided to all of the investigative bodies that are looking into this matter. The Auditor General has all of the materials that he needs. His office is being provided with all of the materials that they require, that they asked for. We are facilitating interviews as quickly as possible, and the Auditor General and Justice Wyant have the information they need to provide results for the investigations.

Ms Hoffman: Documents tabled by the former cabinet minister state clearly that the opinion of four independent lawyers advised the AHS Board that they witnessed evidence that is "criminal in nature and [should] be turned over to the RCMP." Shortly after the information was shared, the entire AHS Board was fired. Will the Minister of Health finally step up, address these serious concerns, and explain why she fired the board instead of forwarding the evidence to the RCMP, or will she continue to hide in silence behind the Justice minister?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, the facts are clear, and they're clearly articulated in the statement of defence that has been made available to members of the opposition and all Albertans. Nobody was fired for doing any investigation. The former AHS CEO was fired because of incompetence. It's very clearly articulated in the statement of defence. We will defend against those allegations that were made in the statement of claim. We'll let the court weigh in on who was right.

Ms Hoffman: Let's see if she'll answer one of these questions around surgical centres, Mr. Speaker.

The new contracts have been extended for Alberta Surgical Group. The minister and Premier clearly stated that they weren't going to renew or extend contracts while this investigation was under way. It is still under way today, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister answer simple questions? How long have they been extended for? How many surgeries are going to be provided? How much more is it going to cost, and why won't she actually invest in public health care when we have empty public operating rooms in hospitals? Is she so focused on breaking public health care and privatizing it further?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm happy to answer the question. The term "pause" does not mean shutting down the Edmonton public surgical clinic. It refers to holding off on issuing new contracts. That contract was extended as the investigations were going on. Those investigations continue to go on, so it's been further extended while that contract continues. The RFPs that were awarded for Red Deer and Lethbridge are on pause. That is what is on pause.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement (continued)

Member Eremenko: There is no doubt that the corrupt care scandal extends into Mental Health and Addiction. The deputy minister admitted this when he said the minister was "freaked out because... the builder that they've got building the recovery community with MNA, is the same builder with three others. And it's... connected to Sam as well." That's Sam Mraiche. We now know that the former Minister of Infrastructure echoed DM Romanow's claim to the Auditor General that Sam Mraiche was benefiting from recovery community contracts. Will the Premier tell Albertans which of their investigations will reveal that Mental Health and Addiction is implicated in the corrupt care scandal?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this government takes very seriously accusations around misuse of public dollars, which is why we have the independent former Chief Justice for Manitoba taking steps to make sure we look into it. I have taken steps when I've heard accusations. If I find anything of substance, I will turn it over. I found no substantive evidence in any way that this connects to my ministry. Of course, if there is anything, I am happy as the first one to take action because I care as much as everyone else about proper use of public dollars. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Eremenko: Well, given that of all of the investigations under way, I didn't realize that there was also the minister's own investigation being completed and given that Albertans know that the UCP do not have the ability to run health care systems or manage money in contracts ethically and given that the former minister responsible for these contracts sounded the alarm, telling Albertans that in the UCP corruption runs deep, will the Auditor General have full access and jurisdiction to include Mental Health and Addiction, all elements of the ministry, in his procurement audit?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member should take yes for an answer. The answer is the same as it was last week. It's the same as it was the week before that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I certainly had no problem hearing the question; I'm having a significant challenge hearing the answer. The hon. the minister has the call.

Mr. Amery: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As I've said time and time again, every single government department will fully co-operate with the Auditor General's investigation. The Auditor General has thus far received 13,000 records and is conducting or co-ordinating with the Justice department on the interviews. Everything that is required to conduct the investigation by the Auditor General will be furnished. The hon. member should take yes for an answer.

2:10

Member Eremenko: Given that the former minister said that this government is guilty of a cover-up if the UCP does not pursue a full public inquiry and given that the allegations around recovery communities are very serious, amounting to potentially hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars being misspent and given that the former minister showed yesterday in his tabling that compassionate intervention communities would cost nearly three times the amount the UCP are now saying, \$230 million each, Mr. Speaker, how can Albertans trust any capital procurement decisions related to Health, mental health, or any ministry until there is a full public inquiry?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, members opposite have asked if we're going to be compliant with the investigation. The answer is: yes, we will. They've asked if we've seen anything. Anything I've seen, I'm happy to provide to the Auditor General, any of their investigation. My question for the member opposite is on compassion intervention, introduced two weeks and a day ago. Will they ask a question in this House about life-saving treatment for compassion intervention, or will you hide and run under fake accusations instead of addressing the questions Albertans want when it comes to mental health and addiction in this province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Utility Costs

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker. Well, I always find it a bit rich when the NDP try and champion affordability when they created and ignored many of the affordability challenges facing Alberta today, especially with electricity. One of the biggest frustrations my constituents have is the rising transmission costs on their power bills, which was caused by the NDP's reckless coal phase-out and lack of planning in bringing renewables online. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: what are you doing to help address rising transmission costs?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, unlike the NDP, we're putting Albertans first instead of ideology. Under the NDP if a power project was built in a remote location and required millions of dollars in new transmission lines, all Albertans paid for it even if they had no benefit from it. That's largely why we've seen transmission costs skyrocket over 500 per cent. We're ensuring that the costs of the new transmission lines are assigned on a cost-causation basis. This means that moving forward, ratepayers won't be burdened with the full cost of transmission lines on their own. On this side of the House we will never sacrifice affordability, and we're committed to keeping more money in the pockets of the Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that it's important to plan ahead, unlike the NDP have done, to meet the energy needs of future generations and given that we need to build a utility system that supports the responsible development of emerging technologies and given our UCP government is looking to enable hydrogen blending into the natural gas system for home heating, can the Minister of Affordability and Utilities explain how we're balancing hydrogen development with affordability for Albertans?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Enabling hydrogen blending is about giving Albertans more choice in how they choose to heat their homes, but we also believe that it should only be those who choose hydrogen that should pay for it. We're making sure that any additional costs in the utility system will only be recovered from those receiving hydrogen-blended natural gas. We will never sacrifice affordability. Just to put people's minds at rest, our government is working with the Canadian Standards Association, the CSA, to determine safe hydrogen blending volumes. Safety for our community is always top of mind.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that earlier this week the opposition quoted an opinion piece that falsely claims that the NDP did not build new transmission lines, but we know that they overbuilt transmission lines, causing utility bills to go up, up, up and given that the NDP supported failed policies that reduced the reliability of the entire power grid, can the Minister of Affordability and Utilities explain how the restructured energy market will improve grid reliability for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. On this side of the House we will never sacrifice affordability or reliability in our power grid. The NDP didn't consider the intermittent nature of renewables and how it would work in Alberta's market structure. This made the grid and electricity prices literally as volatile as the weather. We're fixing this by moving to a day-ahead reliability market, giving more time for the AESO to manage electricity on our grid.

While we're at it, we will continue to advocate to the federal government to scrap their disastrous clean electricity regulations making it even harder for Alberta to provide what people need. We're standing up for them.

Children's Pain Medication Purchase

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned from a former UCP cabinet minister that the CEO of Alberta Health Services had commissioned a PricewaterhouseCoopers review into the Turkish Tylenol scandal right before she was fired. This is the same scandal that the government paid \$70 million for children's Tylenol and received only half of the promised supply. To the Minister of Health: do you deny that this report exists and that the former AHS CEO was terminated because she tried to investigate? Or perhaps the Minister of Justice will make this denial for the Minister of Health.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, like we've always said from day one, we take the allegations in relation to AHS procurement very seriously, and that's exactly why we're working with the Auditor General's office, working with Chief Justice Wyant, and working to facilitate all of the materials required. Let's be clear about it. The former AHS CEO concealed the results of the investigations that she commissioned because it didn't align with her agenda, and that's why she was terminated.

Dr. Metz: Given that the minister knows that the public has a right to transparency, especially when \$70 million in taxpayer money is involved, and given that the CEO was fired after commissioning this independent report and given that the former UCP minister

outlines that the Premier and Health minister withheld this information to convince cabinet to terminate the CEO and the AHS Board entirely, if this government has nothing to hide, why is the minister refusing to release the review into the Turkish Tylenol scandal?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The review that was done on the Turkish Tylenol, in fact, has been given to the Auditor General as well as to the investigator, Judge Wyant, to further look at.

What I can say is that, in fact, when we were in a situation where children and families were desperate for Tylenol, this government took action and made sure that there was a supply of Tylenol that . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. minister has the right to answer the question and be heard, just like the questioner has the right to be heard when the question is asked.

The hon. minister has six seconds remaining.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there is a credit outstanding with Atabay, and we are working with the company as well as with Canada Health to make sure that we get a product that we can use here in Alberta.

Dr. Metz: Given that Albertans were told that the government was taking action on the Tylenol procurement scandal but instead the whistleblower CEO was fired and the investigation was buried and given that the Turkish Tylenol scandal involves the same characters with shady dealings regarding private surgical clinics, recovery centres, and even a parking lot scandal, why is the minister refusing to tell Albertans what happened to their money, what happened to their medicine, and what corrupt and potential criminal activity this government is hiding?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear. We took action when there was a need for Tylenol in this province. We made sure that it was accessible to parents and to hospitals. In fact, we have a credit outstanding that we're making sure will be utilized for products that Albertans need. The members opposite would have had children suffering without Tylenol. The members opposite would close down chartered surgical facilities that are offering thousands of surgeries that we need to have done. They'd have Albertans suffer.

Bill 54 (continued)

Ms Goehring: The very first bill our NDP government introduced was banning corporate and union donations to protect Alberta's democracy. We did this because we know that dark money has no place in Alberta. This bill passed unanimously, with support from the PC and Wildrose Party. Now with Bill 54 the UCP is dismantling these protections that their own members once supported. Apparently, hockey tickets and expensive gifts weren't enough influence for their corporate friends. Can the minister explain why he believes our election should be up for sale to the highest paying bidder?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That member danced around criticizing union donations but certainly was quick

to criticize corporate donations. The reality is that corporations form the backbone of our economic productivity in this province. They have an interest just like everyone else. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The Minister of Justice has the call.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Corporations, unions, individuals have interests. They have concerns. They have questions about the political process. Most importantly, they're engaged. Having that ability to participate in the political process for everyone is important to us.

Ms Goehring: Given that the Premier claims that these changes build on integrity and trust, what Albertans are hearing is that dark money from corporate donations somehow builds integrity. Given that this is the same government that awarded contracts to donors and refuses to call a public inquiry into their corruption around health care procurement, does the minister honestly believe that allowing wealthy corporations to write cheques to political campaigns will make our elections more fair, or is this just another way for the UCP to put their wealthy friends ahead of everyday Albertans?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP rewrote the election rules, they moved the money into the PACs. There was no transparency. There was no accounting. There was no financial reporting. That is where the dark money came from. The new rules will create a new system of accountability, it'll create a new system of transparency, and we'll know exactly where candidates are getting their money from. Unlike what the NDP did, we're going to make this process transparent, we're going to make it clear, and we're going to make it accessible to all Albertans.

Ms Goehring: Given that this bill isn't just about bringing back corporate money, it's about reshaping Alberta's democracy to benefit this government, given that eliminating vouching makes it harder for marginalized Albertans to vote and banning electronic tabulators opens the doors to Trump-style election denialism and given that democracy belongs to all Albertans, not just to those with the deepest pockets or the loudest voices, will the minister do the right thing: withdraw this attack on Alberta's democracy and protect elections that should be decided by voters not corporate chequebooks?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, we're taking action to ban the PAC from donating dark money into our system. We're taking action to make sure that the integrity of our elections and the confidence remains with Albertans. I don't want to speculate on anything that the hon. member said, but certainly most of it was inaccurate and incorrect. We're bringing back confidence. We're making sure that Albertans have the ability to participate in their political process. This is a good bill, and we're going to stand behind it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has a question to ask.

Interprovincial Trade

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After 10 years under Liberal-NDP government in Ottawa, Canadians are once again facing the consequences of an unaccountable, out-of-touch, and elitist federal leadership. Canada is weaker today and more vulnerable due to a lack of federal initiative. It's alarming that we have more trade barriers between provinces than we do with the

United States. In 2023 international trade accounted for 66 per cent of our GDP while interprovincial trade made up only 36 per cent. This makes no sense. To the minister: what steps is our government taking to diversify and strengthen trade within Canada?

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has long been a leader in reducing and eliminating trade barriers between provinces. In fact, we were the first jurisdiction to substantially remove our exceptions, around 80 per cent, from the Canadian free trade agreement. We were also one of the founding members of the New West Partnership trade agreement, a western agreement that goes further than the CFTA to remove barriers to trade, and we acted unilaterally to reduce barriers to labour mobility through the Labour Mobility Act to enable skilled professional workers from across the country to bring their expertise to Alberta, and they are, and we continue to work on additional ways to improve trade and labour mobility.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister. Given that Alberta has removed nearly 80 per cent of our exceptions under the Canadian free trade agreement and given that Alberta is a committed member of the New West Partnership trade agreement, which promotes the free movement of goods, services, investment, and labour between Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade share what economic benefits this partnership has brought to western Canada and how Alberta is continuing to lead through this framework?

Mr. Jones: The New West Partnership was established in 2010 and is a trade agreement between Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. It provides a comprehensive framework to ensure the free trade of goods and services, investment, and labour mobility between the four western provinces. It creates a free trade zone for 13 million people with combined GDP of over \$800 billion. That means that each of those 13 million people are able to live and buy goods or procure services with less regulation or other barriers. In fact, a recent Queen's University study estimated that the impact has been about 2 per cent, and it's increasing.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, again through you to that minister for that answer. Given that Alberta was a founding member of the New West Partnership trade agreement, creating a free trade zone covering over 13 million people and a combined GDP of more than \$800 billion, and given that Alberta has shown leadership by removing the majority of its 27 exceptions under the Canadian free trade agreement, to the same minister: how is Alberta's leadership on international trade creating new economic opportunities for businesses and for workers, and what further steps are being taken to open up Canada's internal market?

Mr. Jones: Our work on internal trade includes reviewing the remaining party-specific exceptions in the CFTA, co-leading the conclusion of the financial services chapter with Ontario, working with the forum of labour market ministers to reduce administrative burdens and establish a 30-day limit on the review of out-of-province applications from certified workers. We're also currently negotiating agreements which will allow for direct consumer

alcohol sales across Canada, and we're working to improve the flow of trucking and consumer goods between all the provinces. Alberta has and will be the leader in internal trade and labour mobility across Canada.

Alberta in Canada
(continued)

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, the dust has barely settled from the federal election and the Premier is already opening the door to the idea of Alberta separating from Canada. The Premier says that she's allowing Albertans to directly participate in democracy. But we know that when there's smoke; there's fire. She's fanning the flames of division and mistrust instead of focusing on national unity in a time of global uncertainty. Will the UCP government stand up today and say outright that Alberta should remain part of Canada and put an end to this divisive separatist rhetoric?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I wish the members opposite would take yes for an answer. We believe that Alberta has a place in Canada. I know that the members find it so funny when we're trying to talk about Alberta being part of Canada. We want Canada to be part of Alberta's success as well. I don't know what's so funny about that. What I think is funny is that their overlords in Ottawa were decimated on Monday night, and I'm curious to know what their next steps are.

Member Hoyle: Given that the Premier's track record recently has been to cozy up to far-right political commentators and use taxpayers' dollars to finance lavish trips to Mar-a-Lago so she can schmooze with President Trump and given that we've seen the Premier pick fights with experts, with municipalities, with the federal government so that the UCP can place blame for their failure to serve Albertans with anyone other than themselves, how can Albertans trust that the UCP isn't using rumblings of separation as yet another tool in their self-serving political agenda?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the people that we serve are the people of Alberta, the ones who elected us in 2023, the same Albertans that repudiated the members after four years of dismal performance and racking up deficits never seen before in this province. We will take zero – and I mean zero – lessons from the members opposite on diplomacy and how to defend Alberta.

2:30

Member Hoyle: Well, I beg to differ. We've seen six years of dismal performance.

Given that the Premier explicitly said that she will no longer accept the status quo and will instead lead a discussion on our province's future and given that the Premier has not stood in this Chamber and outright denounced the idea that Alberta should leave the federation, flying in the face of the fact that Albertans are proud to be Canadians, what is this UCP government's plan to address the national unity crisis that they started?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, March wants their talking points back. It is ridiculous that the members opposite continue to go on this diatribe about how we don't want to be part of Canada. We love this country. We want this country to be part of Team Alberta, because Alberta for decades has been supporting our neighbours to the east and to the west with our world-class products, our oil and gas, making sure that our neighbours to the east and the west have the same services that we enjoy right here in Alberta. All we ask for is a fair deal within this province, and our Premier is leading the way.

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

Career and Employment Services

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has always been a land of opportunity where families grow, businesses thrive, and hard work is rewarded. But with ongoing tariff threats and growing uncertainty in global trade, many Albertans struggle to find work, especially in our major cities. Recent data shows unemployment at 7.2 per cent in both Calgary and Edmonton and 8.5 per cent in Red Deer. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: what immediate steps is the government taking to reduce unemployment and help Albertans get back to work?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is resilient and our government is committed to ensuring every Albertan has the opportunity to succeed. Despite global uncertainty, we are taking action to reduce unemployment through investments in infrastructure projects which create thousands of jobs. We're also supporting job seekers through targeted training programs like the Alberta industry skills grant and the training for work programs and to businesses through strategic training and employment initiatives. We're focused on helping people across Alberta connect with meaningful, high-value employment. Alberta is a place of opportunity, and we're steadfast in making sure that opportunity is available to everyone.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that Alberta's youth are feeling the brunt of labour losses with unemployment among young people jumping from 13.1 per cent in February to 15 per cent in March and given that students and entry-level workers are struggling to break into the workforce in today's competitive market, to the same minister: what steps is the government taking to ensure young Albertans, especially students and recent grads, can access early career opportunities in today's market?

Mr. Jones: Our government is committed to ensuring that young Albertans, especially students and recent graduates, have access to meaningful employment opportunities. Alberta's government is offering a variety of summer student positions within the Alberta public service. We're also supporting programs that connect young people with employers such as job fairs and expos that showcase the many career opportunities across our high-demand sectors. Additionally, we're investing in programs like transition to employment services, which connect unemployed youth to jobs through the youth employment services program. Reducing youth unemployment remains a top priority, and our government will continue to explore new ways to support young Albertans in developing their careers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that many unemployed and underemployed Albertans are actively seeking to gain new skills to re-enter the workforce and given that supporting these individuals is essential to maintaining a strong and resilient labour market, to the same minister: how is the government working with industry and training providers to align workforce

development with in-demand careers and ensure unemployed Albertans are prepared for those roles?

Mr. Jones: Supporting unemployed and underemployed Albertans in gaining new skills is critical to the long-term strength of Alberta's workforce. The government is collaborating with industry leaders and training providers and unions to align workforce development with high-demand careers, especially in sectors like tech, natural resources, construction. Training for work programs focus on helping unemployed and underemployed Albertans, including youth, newcomers, Indigenous people, and women, access training opportunities that grow their skills and help them secure high-value employment. We're committed to providing the tools necessary for success and also attracting the investment that will ultimately provide them a job.

Upper Smoky Subregional Plan

Dr. Elmeligi: Caribou are an essential and highly threatened species in Alberta's boreal forests. Task forces of experts have been working for years to define recommendations for subregional plans designed to enable caribou recovery, yet the recently released Upper Smoky subregional plan ignores detailed expert recommendations, doesn't include any objectives to recover caribou or targets to restore their dwindling habitat. To the minister: why were the recommendations of experts ignored in this plan? Why does the plan not contain an objective to recover caribou populations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I am grateful to the member opposite for the question. This is part of our engagement process, to ensure all Albertans can provide input on the draft plan for the Upper Smoky subregional plan and regulations for our province. Public engagement has opened. It's running until June 25. Albertans can give their feedback any time.

Mr. Speaker, the goal here is to balance, of course, economic development and environmental protections, and that does include caribou habitat. We take all the feedback from the task forces, and now it's out there for Albertans for engagement.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that it appears the goal here, Mr. Speaker, is to promote development and forget about caribou, given the Upper Smoky caribou plan allows clear-cut logging to nearly eliminate the remaining old-growth forests that 2 out of 3 caribou herds require for winter range, given that science recommends leaving 65 per cent of caribou habitat undisturbed to ensure recovery, and habitat loss is already a key contributor to population decline, and given that the plan included no analysis of the implications of timber harvest on caribou survival or recovery, why has the minister given up on caribou recovery and decided to log what's left of their winter range?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we do understand that caribou recovery will take decades. We have goals, of course, to double oil and gas production. We also have goals to maintain and protect caribou and their habitat. The challenge and the goal of these subregional plans is to do both.

We know, of course, Mr. Speaker, the activist approach is to shut in and shut down production, kill jobs in Alberta, sell out Albertans to the federal Liberal-NDP government and their activist base. That's not the approach that we're going to take. We're going to listen to Albertans.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given Albertans of diverse stakeholder groups were involved in these task forces, Mr. Speaker, and they provided recommendations to recover caribou populations and their habitats, and those recommendations were not included in this subregional plan, the government continues a predator control program to cull wolves in the name of protecting caribou and given that program was meant to be temporary until caribou habitat could be restored, but there's no plan to restore caribou habitat, given this plan is just another justification to keep killing wolves and extirpate two caribou herds, when will we recover caribou, Minister?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I would love to share with the members opposite that there is \$40 million for caribou recovery work in Budget 2025. The woodland caribou, of course, are listed as a threatened species. More than \$70 million has been invested into replanting and restoring caribou habitat through the caribou habitat recovery program.

But let me tell you this: we have a lot of things to balance. Of course, we want to focus on habitat for caribou and other species in the region, we want to enable our industries to grow, and we also have to manage wildfire risk after what we saw in Jasper. Mr. Speaker, that's why this plan is out for engagement, and we appreciate the feedback of Albertans.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding and Programs

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are seeing program closures and job losses at postsecondaries across Alberta. Some of the most recent examples are at Lethbridge Polytechnic and Bow Valley College. Bow Valley is closing the language instruction program, which leaves about 1,300 ESL students without a program and 120 instructors without a job. Lethbridge is closing its English language program centre; another 19 instructors out of a job. We've known for 18 months that federal funding was changing, so what has the government done to ensure that we still have the supports in place for these learners?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, we are working with the federal government to ensure that they provide adequate funding as is necessary to support additional learners. I know that the Minister of Advanced Education has been working exceptionally hard to ensure that we continue to receive adequate funding from the federal government in these spaces.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we are working to support our postsecondary institutions by investing more into programs that have demonstrated market demand and need because we want to ensure that Albertans are able to find successful and rewarding careers after graduation.

2:40

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this UCP government has done absolutely nothing to ensure that these ESL students are getting the supports that they need and they're left out in the cold as a result, not being able to upgrade their skills and be productive and move forward in our society, given as well that we have qualified international graduate professionals who are not able to use their education and experience because they can't be recognized because they need the language for supports, why does this government continue to cut programs that would enable these professionals to work in their trained fields and support the industries that actually so desperately need their skills?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're actually doing the complete opposite. Over the course of the past six years, we've been working hard to ensure that our postsecondary institutions are aligning their programs to labour market need and demand. That's why we created the Skills for Jobs Task Force, to ensure that programs are oriented to those objectives. We want to make sure that students have rewarding careers after graduation. We want to make sure that their programs are oriented towards successful career outcomes, and we're going to continue to do that because that's what Alberta students deserve.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that program closures are happening in almost every postsecondary program across the province, that students are struggling to access the education that they need – 1,300 students at Bow Valley College without a program that they need – this government has been doing absolutely nothing to support these students, and we need to make that investment now. How could we possibly keep pace with not only continuing the number of people moving to this province, new students that need education, students coming out of the K to 12 system? Why are we not building the capacity we need in postsecondary in this province?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we are working exceptionally hard to build capacity in our programs. We are investing hundreds of millions of dollars into our postsecondary institutions to expand spaces in some of our most in-demand programs.

Mr. Sigurdson: Veterinary programs.

Mr. Nicolaides: As the minister of agriculture rightly points out, next to me, including in veterinary programs, including in a variety of different areas where there's significant demand for individuals. We want to expand spaces in these programs because there is demand, and we're doing precisely that through investments of hundreds of millions of dollars to our postsecondary institutions.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we were at tablings, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora was next.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Like the minister who went right before the recess, I do have a couple of tablings. I'll start with my first one, which is from a constituent who chooses to remain anonymous but also sent this to the Premier. It's specifically about the eye exams for seniors being cut and additional changes to surgical care that are leading to privatization.

The second one is around surgical wait times. This is from Cristy Rusnell, who talked about her husband having to wait so long while in pain to have his hip replacement.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The Member for St. Albert, followed by Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from a constituent to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services outlining the hardships of living on AISH, having a disability, and it really talks about the dangers of what this government is proposing.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter from Ranchlands constituent Meghan that I read during Bill 210 bill debate about protecting tips that should be going to the people who worked for them. I urge all members to have a read as it impacts a worker's income during an affordability crisis.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Long, Minister of Infrastructure, responses to questions raised by Ms Pancholi, hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, March 20, 2025, Ministry of Infrastructure 2025-26 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 1:42 the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Imputing Motives

Referring to a Member by Name

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order, 23(h), (i), and (j). During the time noted, the Member for Edmonton . . .

Ms Sweet: Manning.

Mr. Schow: Manning. I appreciate you, but I'm about to do this member's point of order against you. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Manning for that help, but I will proceed.

During the time of the member's statement, which – it is convention that there are no interruptions during Members' Statements, and I'm finding that they are being used as an opportunity to make personal attacks against members of the government, particularly the Premier and other members of cabinet, without the ability to have any interjections or points of orders called during that time. Respecting this convention, I called the point of order when the member's statement was complete, and in the time noted the member said: "The Premier is leading [Albertans] down a dangerous path. Let's be clear. The Premier is a separatist." Mr. Speaker, this is clearly breaking the rules of 23(h), (i), and (j), imputing false motives and also insinuating something that the Premier is not. We believe strongly in a united Canada, one that believes in Alberta and one that will support Alberta. To suggest the Premier is a – not even suggest. To state that the Premier is a separatist is inappropriate.

Further down the line, Mr. Speaker, the member also said in the closing remarks that Albertans can visit separatist-Premier's-name-dot-ca. This has also been ruled out of order and been noted by the Speaker in 2009, April 7, when he said:

The hon. member will receive an absolute failing grade for that statement. He violated a basic standing order rule of [the] Assembly. He violated it twice during his speech, and that is a no-no. He should know better if he stands in this Assembly and claims to be a former educator of some repute.

That was in reference to a comment that the member's statement prior noted a website that people could visit.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the Member for Edmonton-Manning's first day in this Chamber. A member in good standing, but I think this conduct is certainly unbecoming.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence I believe we heard two points of order, and the good news is that on the second one I agree that that is likely a point of order. I did hear the name of a member, and I will leave that to you whether you agree or not.

But bad news: on the first one I have to say that I disagree with the Government House Leader. This is clearly a matter of debate. The entire member's statement was talking not about an individual but about the head of state of our provincial government, the Premier of this province, and the Premier's actions and record, specifically talking about the history of endorsing the free Alberta strategy, passing the sovereignty act, pulling Alberta out of the Canada pension plan. I would add to those things flagship legislation; railing against Ottawa 24/7, 365; and yesterday introducing legislation specifically to make a referendum on separation easier, something that not only is a matter of debate in this Chamber but is being discussed widely in the media. Not just in Alberta, not just across Canada, but globally people have noticed, and the language around the Premier being a separatist is certainly happening.

Now, distinguishing when we are talking about an individual versus the Premier in the Premier's role is something that we have encountered in this place before. At times I have called points of order that I maybe ought not have called because it felt like the members opposite were talking about an individual.

2:50

On November 5, 2024, Mr. Speaker, in one of your rulings you said, "I think the Premier's record is a matter of debate on which members will have a variety of opinions." I think in this situation we have a matter of debate with a variety of opinions. We here in this Chamber have a variety of takes on, particularly, our political stances, certainly with members opposite referring to members of the opposition as socialist, communists, this, that, or the other. In this case we are referring to a pattern of behaviour that leads us to believe that this government under the leadership of this Premier is taking actions that will lead to enabling separatism in our province.

I think this is a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to your ruling on the two parts of this point of order.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. The reporting of the facts with respect to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning said, I would say, are largely correct, where she said the following words: "Let's be clear. The Premier is a separatist." Much of the debate today has been around whether or not the Premier is an individual or, more broadly, the head of state. I think it's impossible to separate those two things, and as such the comments were made directed to an individual. The Speaker is of the opinion that the comments are directed to an individual, which brings us to the next point.

Can you call someone in the Chamber a separatist? The only argument that I'm sympathetic to that the hon. Government Opposition House Leader made is that on occasion groups of people are referred to as socialists or communists or capitalists or some other type of "ist," but I don't recall on many occasions, and I stand to be corrected, that individuals are specifically referred to as any of those things on the record. [interjection] I'm certain that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who likes to on occasion provide opinion, whether by chuckling or directly, has referred to people as all sorts of things in this Chamber that he ought not.

I am of the opinion – well, let me proceed by saying this. On April 14 of this year we got very close to a point of order when the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said, "Why is the Premier threatening a national unity crisis and encouraging separation in some sort?" Now, on that occasion I referred to that

language as certainly provocative and could be used by the Leader of the Official Opposition. I'm of the opinion that on this occasion this is a dispute of the facts. I continue to say that just because something is a point of order on one day doesn't mean it's not a point of order on the next and vice versa.

I think that, largely speaking, referring to individuals as separatists in this Assembly is going to consistently lead to disorder. It's not to say that an individual can't be fanning the flames of separatism, you might say, or other types of language more broadly, that we heard here on numbers of occasions today, which I don't believe is a point of order. But I do think that referring directly to the Premier as a separatist is a point of order, and I'll ask the hon. member to apologize and withdraw.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw.

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

I do agree with the Leader of the Official Opposition. Saying "separatism" will be ruled out of order on every occasion, and I would expect that all members of the Assembly will refrain from doing that. On the off chance that there is persistence in that, I can assure you that the Speaker will interrupt on those occasions to prevent any use or the benefit that might come along with saying those words here inside the Assembly.

I consider both matters dealt with and concluded.

Mr. Schow: I had a second point of order.

The Speaker: I don't have it accounted for, but I do recall you rising and me not saying it. If it's on "separatist," I think that's been dealt with.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: It indeed is, Mr. Speaker, and I'm happy to be quick with this. It's more just for the edification of the Chamber. This will continue to cause disorder if the members opposite will continue to say that the Premier is a separatist or is stoking the flames of separatism. That is the false motive that I'm referring to. In this instance during the member's statement – and again I'm drawing a blank on the member's constituency. Not the previous one, Edmonton-Manning. They said: "Now, Doug Ford stabbed [Pierre] Poilievre in the sternum; but this Premier stabbed [Pierre] Poilievre in the back to advance her separatist project."

Mr. Speaker, you may not rule this as a point of order today, and that is your prerogative, but this is going to continue to cause disorder in this Chamber if the members opposite are going to say that. I would ask that you take this into consideration in today's ruling and future rulings, that targeting the Premier, particularly during Members' Statements as they are being used as an opportunity to personally attack members of the government benches, is not going to help decorum, and it's certainly not going to help us get through this legislative agenda.

Ms Gray: This is not a point of order. This is completely different from the ruling that the Speaker just introduced, and if the Government House Leader is going to try to use points of order to prevent us from talking about the separatist agenda with legislation that was just introduced yesterday, I will say that the Official Opposition has a very large problem with that. I absolutely accept the Speaker's ruling that saying that the Premier is a separatist is out of order, and I will so caution my caucus, but the Premier advancing her separatist project would include things like the legislation we saw yesterday. I don't think this is a point of order,

and I don't think that the Government House Leader should go down the path of trying to rule it out of order. Rather, I think the government should stop introducing things that lead us to believe they are separatists.

The Speaker: My apologies to the Government House Leader. He did raise a point of order at that time that I failed to note.

One thing that I'm certain of is that this particular point of order is quite likely to continue to be a matter of some disagreement in the Assembly over a period of time. As I said, just because something is a point of order today doesn't mean it's not a point of order tomorrow or vice versa. That said, I am confident in saying that if members say that the Premier or an individual member is a separatist, that will create disorder, as I mentioned in my ruling, and consider that a point of order. While we don't have a list, certainly that is one that gets close to being able to be on the list because of its direct nature.

Having said that, I don't consider this a point of order. I consider it a matter of debate, and we will govern ourselves accordingly. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Now we're at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 47

Automobile Insurance Act

[Debate adjourned April 16: Mr. Dach speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung does have a number of minutes remaining should he choose to use them.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is on her feet. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is fine with me.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak not just as a legislator but as a voice for Albertans who are being crushed under the weight of this government's reckless Bill 47. It will cause more harm than good.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Let me begin with a story. Last week I met with a single mother. She works two jobs, drives a 10-year-old minivan, and pays over \$3,000 a year for auto insurance. Last month her premium jumped 15 per cent. She told me through the tears of her eyes and under duress that she doesn't know how much longer she can do this. Everywhere she turns, it feels like the government is making life harder, including her daycare fees, groceries, and now car insurance. Speaker, her story isn't unique; it's the reality for millions of Albertans.

3:00

Instead of offering relief, Bill 47 pours gasoline on the fire. This government yet again chooses corporations over people. The UCP claims that this bill will save drivers \$400 a year. Let's be clear. That number is a mirage. First, the UCP's own report, the Wyman Nous study, admits that switching to a public no-fault system like B.C. or Manitoba would save drivers \$700 to \$750 a year. That's nearly double the UCP's hollow promises. But instead of choosing real savings, the UCP picked a private for-profit model, a system designed to protect insurance company profits, not Albertans. Second, this bill lets premiums rise by 15 per cent over the next two years. Let that sink in. While families like the one I met and talked to are having to choose between groceries and gas, never mind to

pay for things like gymnastics or extracurricular activities, the UCP is handing insurance companies a blank cheque.

Let's talk about the elephant in the room: the \$3.25 billion hailstorm that happened in Calgary, the wildfires in Jasper, and the rising cost of repairs. These disasters have already pushed insurers to the brink. The UCP's magical \$400 savings does not account for any of these incidents. It's a number pulled from a report that's already outdated. It's a report the UCP is ignoring when it's convenient.

The UCP had said that this bill modernizes auto insurance. Let's translate. It strips away your rights to hold reckless drivers accountable. Under Bill 47 if you are hit by a drunk driver, you can sue. But if you are hit by someone texting behind the wheel, someone who blows a stop sign, or someone whose negligence leaves you permanently disabled, tough luck. You're trapped in a system where insurance companies call the shots.

Let's talk about the fine print. Section 10(2) lets insurers cut off your benefits based on a medical assessment that your recovery is "not likely." Who decides what is likely? Well, a doctor that is hired by the insurance company. This isn't care; it's a corporate loophole to deny support. They can hire the doctor who decides whether you are likely or not likely to recover. Based on your medical assessment the insurer then can decide what you will be or not be covered for. It is a loophole to deny support to Albertans.

Even worse, the UCP's new tribunal to the so-called care-first: it's really a wolf in sheep's clothing. Its members are appointed by the minister, with no guarantee that they'll represent everyday Albertans. Imagine appealing a denied claim to a panel stacked with insurance lobbyists. That's not justice; it's a rigged game.

The UCP loves to say that there's no alternative. That's a lie. Their own report proves that the public no-fault system saves money and protects more people. In B.C. drivers pay nearly \$800 less per year. In Manitoba care for catastrophic injuries is unlimited. Here the UCP's private model caps support, leaving families to drown in medical debt. Let's debunk the UCP's job myth. Their report admits a public system would create 4,500 to 5,000 new public-sector jobs, good-paying jobs right here in Alberta. But the UCP would rather ship profits to Toronto boardrooms rather than invest in our communities.

Well, let's follow the money because the money tells a story. Insurance companies donated \$600,000 to the UCP in the last election. Let me restate that. Insurance companies donated \$600,000 to the UCP in the last election. The Insurance Bureau of Canada, coincidentally, lobbied for this exact model, and now the UCP is repaying the favour by letting premiums soar and stripping away the rights of Albertans. This is not a reform; this is a shakedown. This isn't about partisanship; it's about priorities for Albertans. Do we stand with the single moms who are driving the minivan for 10 years or the senior citizens on a fixed income or the young workers struggling to make ends meet, or are you going to stand with the CEOs who already make record profits off Albertans' pain?

New Democrats believe a better way is possible: immediate relief, reinstating a cap on premiums, and reversing the UCP's 15 per cent rate hike. Public insurance, a system that puts Albertans first. We wouldn't be the first province to do this. There are other provinces who are implementing this: British Columbia, Manitoba. We have seen that this works, that it supports families and single moms and folks who are struggling with extracurricular activities for their children. It allows that their car insurance can be attainable.

What happens when you are a struggling parent and you can't afford to pay your insurance? What happens to drivers when they need to drive somewhere and they can't afford insurance? They

likely get pulled over and get a fine, which compounds the debt. Rather than supporting struggling families and compounding their debt, let's make sure public insurance is something that could be offered rather than protecting corporate rights.

We need to make sure that Albertans who get injured have the rights to hold folks accountable, that Albertans can hold negligent drivers accountable, that the mechanisms to protect the rights of injured Albertans are stable. As governors, as legislators you have to make choices. You can rubber-stamp a bill that's written by lobbyists because \$600 million is a tremendous amount of support, or you can support Albertans.

The Premier said that this is the end of the line for insurance companies. She said that the only option left on the table after this model would be public auto insurance. Well, to my colleagues: why have you not gone there? Let's see what's possible with public auto insurance. Alberta's auto insurance rates have fluctuated between the highest and the second-highest in this country. For many new drivers, especially in Calgary and Edmonton, these are the most expensive cities to live in in the country. When I think about the single parents who are juggling between groceries and gas and insurance and extracurricular activities and doctors' appointments, all of the things: this is a simple fix. This is an easy way to support families in Calgary and Edmonton and the rural.

Alberta's current auto insurance system is largely classified as a private tort system. Unlike with no-fault insurance, collision victims who have sustained injuries are allowed to sue the insurance of drivers. As I mentioned earlier, what happens if you're in that car accident? What happens if you are forever disabled and need those supports to live a fulfilling life? God forbid that happens to anyone and they aren't able to get the coverage that is necessary, but that is what is possible with this legislation.

There are 3.4 million new auto insurance policies that need to be developed by January 2027. This government has continuously claimed that lawsuits are driving up auto insurance costs. Lawsuits are undoubtedly one of the reasons for the rising costs, but so are the large increases in prices of cars and, of course, as I mentioned earlier, the natural disasters. The forest fires, the hailstorms, the acts of God: these are all contributing to the large increase in prices.

3:10

Young drivers are going to pay the price, particularly young men, who pay the highest premiums in Alberta as it is. This is going to be devastating for many young families, particularly as the affordability crisis is crushing them, as folks are struggling to pay their bills because the cost of groceries is so high. The rents have doubled for many Albertans. It is unlikely that people will be able to actually save what they are being told with this new increase over the years.

Despite all of this, we are watching a bill come forward that is potentially going to cause more harm than good for Albertans. Albertans are watching, history is watching, and we are not making the best decision possible for our young children up to becoming new drivers. We are making devastating decisions. We are taking away the ability for people to have independence in our province.

Well, how much more time? Time check?

Ms Hoffman: Three minutes. Talk about your 10-year-old bougie minivan.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Well, let me go back to the 10-year-old minivan. Oh, goodness.

Ms Renaud: Intervention?

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Yeah, I would love that. Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Was this the first speaker, though?

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: No, no. You can intervene if you want.

The Acting Speaker: An intervention?

Ms Renaud: Sure.

I have a question. I couldn't help but hear you were talking about, you know, that this really sort of takes away the ability of people to be heard in court and go to court and get a settlement if there's just a life-changing, devastating injury. Motor vehicle accidents are the cause of many, many injuries, as I'm sure we all know, whether it's traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, so many injuries. I have a number of friends that are quadriplegic, and thankfully they did get a settlement. They were able to adapt a house or retrofit a home, get a vehicle that's accessible. Thank God they had the ability to do that, but without it, you're stuck on AISH and you're stuck on using programs like aids to daily living, which are – to say overburdened or stressed out is an understatement. Maybe you could expand on the real dangers of removing that ability from people who are injured in severe accidents.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: I thank you for that intervention. I appreciate that.

Yeah. When we think about folks who are struggling already and then we add the complexity of ability levels, particularly with those suffering from a brain injury or that are already using, as you mentioned earlier, our stressed services, this is only going to compound that when folks don't have the ability to potentially sue so that they can hold folks accountable to ensure that their daily living needs are met, so that folks who require physical therapy and drivers and all of those things in their recovery are able to have those things covered.

However, this legislation will remove that ability for drivers to take people to court, and it will put absolutely more pressure on the government to compensate for those expenses when we're already seeing folks struggling with the AISH payments, that aren't enough as it is. This no-fault system won't provide any relief to any Albertan. In fact, it will make things tremendously harder.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Hoffman: I have an intervention.

The Acting Speaker: An intervention? Yeah, go ahead.

Ms Hoffman: Are you okay with that?

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Yes, go ahead.

Ms Hoffman: Okay.

Thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I have heard some people say: well, in other jurisdictions there are some places where they have public auto insurance and no-fault, and it's less problematic there because you're not bringing in no-fault just to allow corporations to get rich. If people aren't getting the support through the auto insurance company, which is already public, then they get it through the government services that are provided.

I was thinking about that, that this does seem like a downloading and, if you care about taxpayer money, not a very conservative notion. Rather than people getting compensated or accommodated through a private insurance company, this bill would enable those

corporations to pocket that money that they would otherwise pay out, then they have to fall back on things like aids to daily living and other initiatives to get their support.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: What do I have to say now?

Ms Hoffman: I think you have a few seconds. Just say I'm smart. Say you agree with me.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you to that member for her statement, and I appreciate those interventions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 47 and discuss the UCP government's plans for auto insurance in the province of Alberta. Now, as we've raised many times in this Assembly, we know that Albertans under this government have been living with the highest rate of inflation in Canada, and we know that has been in part directly due to many of the decisions of this government.

Under this government for multiple years Albertans were left to struggle with skyrocketing utility rates, paying far above what other Canadians paid for electricity and natural gas. [interjection] Now, the Minister of Affordability and Utilities is heckling and saying that's the fault of the NDP government. The record is, Mr. Speaker – they were talking earlier today about transmission lines in the province of Alberta, and that transmission out-build, despite the spin from the UCP, occurred under the Progressive Conservative government of Alberta. Their Minister of Municipal Affairs was the only member in this House that was at the cabinet table when that decision was made. It was that decision that led to the overbuild in the system. Indeed, that led to the creation of the Wildrose Party, from which they have selected their current Premier. If they want to point fingers, they can point them right back at themselves.

Under this government Albertans were left to pay far above what other Canadians were paying for electricity and natural gas. This government sat back on their hands and left Albertans to face those costs.

Additionally, under this government Albertans were left paying some of the highest insurance premiums in Canada. How did that happen, Mr. Speaker? Again, that happened directly due to decisions of this government. Shortly after they came into power, they removed the cap on insurance rates in the province of Alberta after, as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford noted, being helped during the election by significant donations from insurance companies. We saw insurance premiums skyrocket over the next year and continue to skyrocket while this government sat back and did nothing. They left Albertans to twist in the wind and continue to pay those higher costs.

That has largely continued, Mr. Speaker. This government has done very little to help Albertans with those soaring costs. Albertans currently are paying the second-highest premiums in Canada, behind only the province of Ontario. Now, as I mentioned, as we consider the steps that this government has taken and whether these steps are going to be beneficial to Albertans or beneficial to insurance corporations, it is important to highlight what my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford noted about the millions of dollars that have been spent by insurance corporations in this province to lobby this government to support third-party advertisers and others during elections to get this government to implement policy that is favourable to them.

I would note, Mr. Speaker, as I debate Bill 47 and talk about this that we have also now just received Bill 54, by which this government intends to allow corporations not only to go to third-party advertisers but to actually donate directly to a political party, directly to political candidates. It just goes to show us that you have to look very closely at the proposals this government puts forward because they are not acting in the best interests of Albertans so much of the time. As we consider the corrupt care scandal – again, sweetheart contracts given out to folks who have been friends and benefactors of the UCP government, that take them to hockey games – this is a government that is far more interested in corporate benefit than it is in helping individual Albertans, and that is exactly what we see in Bill 47 and what we are likely to see far more of as they push through Bill 54.

3:20

Now, the government did finally, Mr. Speaker, after a number of years, after kicking that can down the road actually do some consultation with some different groups, and they had a report issued. What that report said is that the best system that would give the most benefits to Albertans at the lowest cost would be a public insurance system like we see in Manitoba and British Columbia. That report said that it would cut premiums for Albertans by an average of about \$732 a year. To quote from the report:

The largest reduction in required average premium for Albertans would be a change to the British Columbia model, a no-fault public system ...

A no-fault public system. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker.

... with the automobile policy as second payer for disability income benefits, followed by the Manitoba public system ... as first payer for disability income benefits. This reduction in average premium is driven by lower claim costs, expenses, and exclusion of a profit loading.

Now, did this government listen to the report? No, Mr. Speaker. What they did is they read the "no-fault" part and they left out the "public." So they are taking the no-fault portion and going with private no-fault insurance, something which no other province in Canada has, and what has been described as the worst of all models, which is going to leave Albertans paying more.

Indeed, let's be clear. This new system that they're going to implement isn't going to be around for another two years, and in those intervening two years Albertans, who are already paying the second-highest premiums in Canada, who are already facing the highest inflation in Canada, will pay 15 per cent or more for their insurance premiums before this government even gets close to offering a reduction. They're projecting that potentially, after Albertans see their insurance premiums rise by up to 15 per cent, they may see a \$400 savings.

So let me be clear. Where Albertans are going to end up with this government proposal, Mr. Speaker, after six years of the UCP government, is they are going to be locked in at significantly higher insurance premiums than any other province in Canada. That's the Alberta advantage under the UCP. We are going to be left with this model, while Albertans are going to be paying more.

A quote from Mark McCourt, auto accident and injury lawyer:

It's probably an understatement to say that this is starting to become a habit with UCP politicians: selling out Albertans to unjustly enrich their corporate buddies. There were the Turkish Tylenol and ASG scandals, and now you can put this auto insurance fiasco in the same contemptible category. Maybe the Finance Minister will get to attend some more Oilers games on someone else's dime, but ordinary Albertans are getting the short end of the stick.

He also raises a valid concern, Mr. Speaker, one that we have raised with many, many pieces of this government's legislation, and

that's that this largely will leave a lot of the details to be worked out in regulation because this is a government that is apparently allergic to actually having substantive debate on their decisions here in this Legislature, as we've seen by their repeated use of closure, their decision to ram in as many bills as possible in as little time as possible in this Legislature. On this bill we are seeing a similar thing. To quote again Mr. McCourt:

As is the UCP's typical modus operandi, Bill 47 leaves much of the government's devious no-fault plans to be developed through regulations, where the UCP won't have to bother with democratic niceties such as public consultation and open debate in the Legislature. A few naive or perhaps eternally optimistic lawyers hope the UCP will soften the blow to Albertans' rights and freedoms with regulations far kinder and gentler than this reprehensible bill. But when someone shows you who they are, it's best to believe them.

This government, indeed, Mr. Speaker, has repeatedly shown us who they are. This government does not actually believe in consulting with or listening to Albertans. They are a government that believes in listening to their corporate friends, a government that is not willing to consider a Crown corporation to lower the costs in a public insurance system for Albertans but will absolutely pursue multiple Crown corporations to use public dollars to backstop the oil and gas industry in cleaning up their abandoned wells, a government that wants to corporatize and privatize the benefits and saddle the public with the risks and the costs. That is the repeated pattern of behaviour we have seen from this government.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that there's a lot of work that needs to be – and let's be clear. Absolutely, there needs to be a solution here. We were starting to work on that in our time in government. We had put in a cap on insurance rates while we sat down to begin on that work, talking with insurance companies, working on others to begin to find that system. After the 2019 election the UCP chose to abandon that and let Albertans just simply sit with rising costs until they found the time to get around to trying to find a solution, which, again, is going to raise Albertans' costs.

We do know that there's going to be 3.4 million new auto insurance policies that will need to be developed by January 2027, so there is real work that needs to be done here. We do need something that's actually going to solve the problem for Albertans. This does not solve the problem for Albertans; this puts the burden on Albertans. It certainly solves a problem for the insurance industry. It ensures that they will be able to lock in their profits while Albertans saddle the costs.

The impact on Albertans has been profound. We know that young drivers and families with kids that drive are amongst those who pay the highest premiums. Drivers in northeast Calgary in particular have seen some of the highest increases to premiums in the province. Residents of Redstone and Skyview Ranch saw average rates go up almost 50 per cent from 2019 to 2023. This government's solution? To allow those rates to go up another 15 per cent or more in the next two years before they even start working to find them some savings.

Now, the Minister of Finance has claimed that this is a model that was based after Manitoba's model, but again, recognizing that Manitoba has a public no-fault system, which is significantly different from the privatized no-fault system this minister has implemented, and despite the fact that this model that they're implementing has significant restrictions on the right to sue.

We do recognize, Mr. Speaker, that natural disasters have put some pressure on the system. We had the hailstorm in Calgary. We've certainly had the wildfires. We've had a number of things that are creating additional pressure in the province, which is all the

more reason to be considering the possibilities that might come with a public insurance system which would allow us to help off-set the impacts of that for the Albertan public and Albertan drivers.

There are some other concerns that have been raised about this legislation, Mr. Speaker. I know that some members of our caucus, stakeholders have also raised concerns about a tribunal that's created under this bill. Section 83 creates the Alberta automobile care-first tribunal. Now, the members of that tribunal will all be appointed by the minister. Again, we have seen that this is a government that tends to favour voices from the corporate sector, folks from within the UCP universe. Of course, we know now, as they are moving towards with Bill 54 more corporate donations and more opportunities for dark money in the system – just who are these folks that this minister is going to be appointing to this tribunal that are supposed to be looking out for Albertans?

Certainly, what we've seen, Mr. Speaker, is that the pattern is these are friends and insiders of the UCP government, a government that puts corporate interests ahead of Albertans. The members of the tribunal will have to meet the prescribed qualifications and eligibility requirements, which will be determined by, well, the government cabinet in regulations, which we will not see until they have been done behind closed doors in cabinet as opposed to debated here in the Legislature. So will we end up with a tribunal that's stacked with industry representatives, perhaps relatives of individuals who buy them tickets to hockey games?

I'm guessing it's not going to really represent too many of the everyday Albertans who are paying through the nose for their insurance due to multiple decisions from this government. But that tribunal is going to be responsible for governing the appeals process. Now, we don't know how much it's going to cost to be able to submit an appeal. That will be determined, I guess, in the regulations.

We have many questions, Mr. Speaker, and many concerns, and I will not be voting in favour of Bill 47. Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to add my voice to the debate on Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act. I guess I'd just like to begin – you know, I think that the UCP has been put under some pressure by the industry. Certainly, the insurance companies seem to make this argument that the reason that fees are being increased – and we know there's been a significant increase in premiums in our province, some of the highest rates, oftentimes the highest, sometimes the second-highest, but some of the highest rates in all of Canada – is because of the increased insurance claims that are going to accident victims.

You know, they want people to think that that's the reason that this legislation is needed, yet the insurance companies, I think, have neglected to just talk about how much they are profiting, actually, in this sector. We know that in 2019 they made \$5.4 billion in Alberta, and in 2021 they made \$6.1 billion. That's pretty significant earnings for these companies. The number went up quite dramatically there, and it's a lot to do with what happened when the UCP became government in 2019 and Premier Kenney, at the time, lifted the cap that we in the New Democratic Party as government put on because we needed to make sure that people weren't being gouged and that we were standing up for citizens of Alberta. But that changed when the UCP was elected and they decided to take the cap off. Kenney took the cap off, and, of course – guess what happened? – premiums skyrocketed and insurance companies made even more money.

Just more recently, in 2024, insurance premiums went up 3.7 per cent, and they're slated to go up again in January 2026 by 7.5 per cent. We know that this is also in addition to the other significant cost-of-living issues in Alberta. You know, we're in an affordability crisis. We have some of the highest rents in the nation. Groceries are expensive, energy costs, and the UCP's decision to, you know, not really care for the people and make sure that premiums are capped, our people are protected, is just another way the UCP is not supporting Albertans.

Certainly, you know, there are some vested interests, and my colleagues who've spoken before me have identified some of those, some of the political contributions by the insurance companies to the UCP. But also I just wanted to make note that Premier Kenney's former press secretary and now CEO of the Insurance Bureau of Canada is certainly someone that the UCP has been listening to. We know whose best interests are involved here: it's the companies, not so much everyday Albertans. That's kind of where this legislation has come from, which is certainly disturbing to me as an Albertan, and certainly I've heard quite a bit about this from my constituents as well. So let's just not be naive. We know where this is coming from.

Bill 47 is going to create a new system, and it'll mean the majority of the claims will be settled without going to court. So it's changing from our tort system at the moment. Oftentimes claims are litigated in courts of law, so lawyers are involved with it, advocating for their clients, making sure that they get settlements that are fair because oftentimes people have serious injuries after an accident and oftentimes they're in a very vulnerable position. It's very difficult for them to be able to advocate for themselves, and oftentimes their legal support sort of takes care of everything and helps them get the proper assessments, go to the professionals that know about the impact of certain injuries like a brain injury, for example. People could look completely fine, but they may have a brain injury after a motor vehicle accident.

You know, their own self-assessment might be skewed because oftentimes that may take some of their intellectual ability away, their ability to function in specific areas, perhaps impair some of their, I don't know, emotional regulation. There's a significant amount of trauma that can happen physically and emotionally from an accident. Those lawyers who work for their clients understand this very much in detail and know what to do and what kind of resources are needed for these people and are the champions for them.

But, of course, this bill removes the fundamental right of Albertans to hold at-fault drivers and insurance companies accountable in court. It takes that away, and insurance companies will be given broad discretion to make benefit decisions without the proper expertise. Doesn't that sound like a conflict of interest to you? It does to me, that insurance companies get to say that for this person, you know, they'll do their own assessment. I mean, as far as I know with any company, they care most about their bottom line. Will they be advocating for the best interests of people when probably they're given bonuses or things like that so that they keep the costs down of these claims?

I mean, that is a significant concern to me. I know last week I met with one of my constituents who is an occupational therapist, and she is sort of an expert in this world. She oftentimes will be called to courts to discuss, you know, do her own assessment of an injury that someone might have and give her expertise regarding that. Now it's like that's not needed anymore. The insurance company just gets to make those decisions. They're also the ones who are deciding how much funding this particular person should get, so it seems like, as I said, those are conflicts of interest. I would see that as a conflict of interest.

Also, the lawyers not only are litigating in the court system; they're also helping people access resources, know what kind of assessments to get. They're helping them navigate the whole system. Again, as I've just said, if you're not functioning well, if you've just been in a serious accident, how can you handle that all by yourself? Oftentimes you can't. Oftentimes maybe your loved ones want the best interests for you, but they don't know that system either. It's really kind of a very key role that the lawyer plays, even beyond the court system, to make sure that some of the complexity is taken care of and people can get the resources they need.

I know a story that this occupational therapist that I met with told me about. It was in one of these systems somewhere else, and it was a registered nurse. She had a brain injury and she looked completely fine, but she had some cognitive delays. Her job was always working in the operating room. That's very important and a place where you have to have quite a bit of rigour, like, you have to make sure. If someone's on their operating table, and you're the OR nurse there, and you need to get the instrument tray ready for the surgeon and make sure everything's okay, you don't want to mess that up because if someone's on the operating table just about ready to be cut into, you want to make sure that everything's in place. In one of these systems this gal was in the operating room, because the insurance company said: go ahead; you're fine; everything's good. But she dropped the tray. She couldn't figure out what she was supposed to give. I mean, it was a disaster.

3:40

I really question, you know, whether insurance companies should really be given this kind of authority, to have the discretion to make these decisions. It seems like the professionals who are aware of what is needed and what is understood are somehow now being sort of told that their expertise isn't needed and that, you know, someone who is also trying to keep the budget down for his or her company is also going to make the decisions on how much someone is going to need. None of us are naive. I think that we all can see how that's not going to work.

Sadly, this seems to be the focus of this government, you know, not only in this area but other areas, really trying to attack professionals in our province. What has happened with teachers, with the Alberta Teachers' Association, taking away their ability to self-regulate and to discipline their own members, all of that, sort of not trusting their professional discretion. This feels like just another reason that this government is wanting to attack professionals.

I know in my own profession as a registered social worker in the province – I mean, one of the fundamental pieces of being a profession is self-governance. Those are all part of that. You have expertise, and you understand what is happening in a certain situation, and an outsider may not understand that and can't understand how exactly it works. So we're really dumbing down what needs to go on, and we need to have more respect for professionals.

Certainly, this occupational therapist that I spoke with was quite sort of appalled at this legislation. I mean, mostly she was concerned about her clients, you know, who, after a serious injury, no longer can function. She talked a lot about just daily living, so beyond the diagnosis. Maybe they have a brain injury or something. But what about just functioning in daily living? People need extra supports for that. You know, there are medical professionals who can diagnose you for things like that, but an occupational therapist is the one who can sort of see you in your environment, understand what aids to daily living you need, and be able to properly assess what's there. Oftentimes that can be missing, but with our current system, lawyers who have expertise in this area will know that.

She's been brought in many times to be an expert witness, and then in cases where she's not working with somebody on an ongoing basis, you know, is seen as an expert and someone who will be able to assess what is actually needed. It's heartbreaking to think about vulnerable people not aware of what needs to happen within these systems, and then at the discretion of an insurance adjuster, or whatever the term is for folks who are working in this sector, they're told that they only have this much, and it's really not enough for them to function. They may not be able to go back to their regular work. It's a revolution, really, for their lives.

Certainly, in a just society we want to make sure that people do have the support they need to live well even after they've experienced some kind of major accident and been hurt. We want to make sure that people receive the supports they need and that there's a proper assessment to ensure that people get the supports they need. You know, I really would love the UCP to really see the significance of bringing in this legislation and the impact it's going to have on Albertans, especially very vulnerable Albertans who are doing their best to recover from a negative situation. You know, a lot of times we don't have control over so many things in life. I mean, a fair and just society does have those checks and balances in place, and it shouldn't be about corporate profits and, really, having people suffer because corporations are making billions and billions of dollars.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Acadia to speak.

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak against this proposed bill and to join debate.

I wanted to start debate today, or my debate today, to just remind ourselves again what the goal or the purpose of government is. Of course, our job is to serve Albertans and to certainly serve in their best interest. We've heard from many of my colleagues already on this particular bill, sharing what we already know, which is that auto insurance inside the province of Alberta is highly unaffordable. We have seen year after year that increase under the UCP government, so something does need to happen, Mr. Speaker. However, this particular proposal isn't really a win for Albertans because, when we think about it, the minute that we start putting private industry into a system that is supposed to serve the public good, you've put profit before people. You just have. It's just the way the systems work. This feels very out of touch with what Albertans need right now.

I want to share a little bit about my own personal experience with different types of insurance over the years. I grew up in Saskatchewan. During the time I was there, it was public no-fault. Learning how to drive at 15 and have my licence at 16, like many drivers I might have had a few little bumps and bruises here and there, unfortunately – it happens – but, because there was no-fault, public insurance, I still received the care I needed, the vehicle received the care it needed. Yes, I had to pay a deductible. Yes, it was a lot of money for me at 16. Did it improve my driving? I don't know, but I didn't recognize the privilege it was to learn how to drive and how to kind of – I don't know – shake off those young driver nerves under a public, nonprofit insurance system.

I then moved to Texas, and we've talked. Actually, Texas comes up a number of times inside this House, surprisingly, and in Texas, it's private insurance. So as a mature driver with a clean record, because, again, it was like 16 when I was having those troubles, when I got – you know. Those go away eventually under no-fault public insurance. When I went to insure my vehicle in Texas, I was delighted. Because of my driver's record, my age, my gender, suddenly my insurance was incredibly affordable. However, not

everyone could afford private insurance, a similar situation that we have here now, Mr. Speaker.

So when I moved back to Canada, when I moved to Alberta, suddenly my insurance rates went through the roof. My car is the same, I'm arguably a better driver, I'm a little bit older, my record is still clean, but I'm still paying a ridiculous amount for auto insurance. Mr. Speaker, there's no argument that Albertans need support here, but what they don't need is a government that is not putting them first, that is saying: "Oh, you know what? The next two years your costs are going to go up, and maybe it's three years. Maybe it's four years. We don't really know, but trust us. They'll come down at some point."

Mr. Speaker, I struggle to understand how this government possibly believes that Albertans have trust in them at this point. The corrupt care scandal, the ongoing, ever-growing corrupt care scandal, has completely rocked Albertans' trust of this government. To think that Albertans would be totally cool paying way more money for, well, fewer services: that's just going to go up and up and up until maybe a change of government in 2027. Sounds pretty good to me.

3:50

Now, the other thing, Mr. Speaker, that is concerning about this bill and about many of the bills that we're hearing about in this House this session is removing guardrails, removing regulations, allowing private industries, entities to have, well, really strong influence on what's going on. I want to just remind us of a few times that this same UCP government has removed other guardrails, other regulations, and how Albertans have suffered. I know this House will never get tired of me bringing up the E coli outbreak of 2023. Yes, that will forever be something you will hear me speak about, because I was a brand new elected official and there was a massive E coli outbreak because this government cut red tape, quote, unquote, and kids got sick. It wasn't immediate. It took some time, a change in minister, for instance, or three or four. But those actions caused harm. It was predictable then; it's predictable now.

This doesn't serve Albertans, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are going to suffer so that private entities can get rich. Pretty sure Albertans have told many Conservative governments before that that's not what they want and that's not what they need. When we think about the best way to serve Albertans, it's about meeting them where they're at. It's not about hoping they eventually get to wherever it is you want them to get to because that's where you're willing to support them. It is about looking at what is actually happening right now. It is about providing those things they need right now.

Mr. Speaker, I would go out on a limb and say that no one inside this House right now would go on the record saying that they want Albertans to pay more for less. However, that's exactly what this bill is doing, and we haven't yet heard from the government side today. I would love to hear them respond to any of the fantastic arguments that we have made on this side. I would love to have something better to go back to my constituents with than: yeah, we stood up and provided solutions, and the government didn't. That is a waste of House time if they're not going to engage in debate.

Now, we can talk about other things that Albertans are struggling with, other places that we could be supporting them so that hardships such as really expensive auto insurance don't break the bank. We're dealing with utility rates that continue to climb. Yes, we've heard a number of different solutions, we'll call them, from this government, none of which is actually supporting Albertans right now or supporting them where they are.

I believe in debate. We heard from the government side a little bit about how going to a public no-fault insurance – that there would be a loss of jobs. Now, I'm curious which jobs they're concerned

about exactly because that's not what the research shows. So is it that they're concerned that the private insurance companies may continue to suffer and maybe, like a number of them have already, pack up their bags and get out of Alberta because of decisions that this UCP government has been making for the last six years?

With that Mr. Speaker, I strongly encourage the government to defend their bill. That would be fantastic. I look forward to continuing to hear debate hopefully from both sides on this issue. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Horner: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard a lot today. I'll be charitable and call it confusion from the other side. I'm happy to correct the record a little bit here. I'll be brief. The last speaker said that they'd like to hear some solutions, that they were proposing solutions. I didn't hear any solutions in those last comments.

Bill 47 is a solution to an admittedly very complicated situation. What Bill 47 does is that it sets the framework for a new auto insurance system in Alberta, a care-first system that will be privately delivered. This has been multiple years of research and study and consultation to land on this outcome that we think is the right thing for Alberta right now.

I've heard comments about taking away the right to sue. I think you're looking at this wrong. We're taking away the reason to have to. It makes very little sense to need to enter the court system, hire a lawyer, so that you can go see a physiotherapist. What we're doing here is making it easier to get the care that Albertans need.

We've looked closely at other jurisdictions. We mimicked the Manitoba benefits framework in a large way, but we also put an Alberta spin on it, which we thought was the right thing to do, by making the income support even higher.

This is the highest level of benefits of any care-first model in the country.

I heard some talk about, in the past, caps. Caps do not work in a system like this. Yours didn't work; ours aren't working. That is a finger in the dam where pressure continues to build. This is a regulated system. The AIRB, the rate board, controls the profit provisions of insurance companies. This government actually lowered that from 7 per cent to 6 per cent last term.

We have tried to, I would say, tweak around the edges of the system that we're in. It's obviously a very challenging time: vehicle costs, the hailstorm. It's an expensive system. We're seeing that around the world in other jurisdictions. But the one thing that governments have done is that they've used the one lever that they have and they've taken the legal expense largely out of the system.

Now, under Bill 47 there still will be tort access, the largest window to tort access of any care-first model in the country so that in those egregious circumstances you will be able to sue a driver who's driving under the influence, a potentially distracted driver, egregious circumstances, but largely you won't have to, and you'll be better off, and you'll get the care quicker.

We believe that this is the right thing to do. I didn't hear any arguments about: what is someone supposed to do? It's really hard to sue an at-fault deer if you hit a deer in the middle of the highway in the night and you're injured. This is about taking care of Albertans and doing it quickly. Having to wait three years to get your settlement: does that make sense to anyone? This will be about speed. This will be about care and getting people into the rehab and medical care that they need quickly.

There was talk about the Wyman report and some of the studies that were commissioned. They did also talk about, you know, building a publicly delivered system at a cost of over \$3 billion. My team thought it would take five years to stand up. There are some logistical challenges even if that was the way you thought that this should go. We believe in the private sector. We believe that brings competition and brings prices down and, obviously, mitigates a lot of the job losses that we're faced with, with this large system change.

I would recommend that everyone in the House if you do care about the affordability of auto insurance support Bill 47. It's the right bill for Alberta.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved second reading of Bill 47, Automobile Insurance Act.

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

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

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Batten	Hayter	Renaud
Boparai	Hoffman	Schmidt
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Kayande	Sweet
Eremenko	Metz	Wright, P.

Totals: For – 41 Against – 18

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a second time]

Bill 50

Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned April 17: Ms Sweet speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has 11 minutes remaining should she choose to use them.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 50, the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Bill 50 seeks to amend four unique

acts. They include the Local Authorities Election Act, the Municipal Government Act, the New Home Buyer Protection Act, and the Safety Codes Act.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

This is now the third bill, including Bill 54, which was just introduced yesterday, in this first legislative session that we continue to be in here that seeks to really upend our systems around voting, around democracy, around governance, around respecting municipal guardrails and various orders of government and the important relationships between each of those orders. It's verging on obsessive, Mr. Speaker. Bill 20, Bill 50, now Bill 54 are seeking to change some very fundamental systems on which the public has to rely on when it comes to them being able to exercise their democratic rights to vote, to participate in their governments, to participate in society, frankly. Bill 50, you know, in many ways seeks to improve on Bill 20. I don't think it quite cuts the mustard on that front. Bill 20 is going to need a whole lot more than Bill 50 to be better than what it currently is, but here we are.

Of those four acts that I've already mentioned, there are two in particular that I'm going to focus on in my remarks today, those being the Municipal Government Act and the New Home Buyer Protection Act. Because of the unintended consequences, Mr. Speaker, of the reckless way the UCP brought forward Bill 20 about a year ago now, we're faced with Bill 50 trying to clean up the mess of Bill 20, and it still falls short, as I said.

4:20

In researching media coverage, in researching, you know, *Hansard*, and what various associations related to municipalities have given as feedback to Bill 50, it is clear that one of the gravest concerns is the elimination of the codes of conduct that prevent councils from passing bylaws that relate to councillor behaviour. This was something that was initially introduced by an NDP government, when we were in power, to provide greater decision-making and the actual infrastructure to do so when it comes to councillors of a particular government kind of monitoring themselves. I think that actually had a great deal of promise. It allowed for some of the flexibility between jurisdictions, between municipalities, large and small, so that we weren't saying that the same rules had to apply when, in fact, some of those rules really differ, depending on the context in which they're being made.

What's happened, though, with Bill 50 is that from the point of proclamation all of those codes of conduct within municipalities, large and small, will be eliminated. It is the next step in a very clear pattern of behaviour from this government that is deeply paternalistic. Even the minister said so in his opening comments, I think perhaps at one of the early press conferences, Mr. Speaker. He recognized that that was going to be some of the feedback. This is paternalistic, and indeed he's not wrong. It's patronizing, and it undermines a very important and, I would say, increasingly important order of government.

Our cities are growing. They are bursting at the seams. These are councils that are democratically elected and represent significant swaths of our total population. Where I'm from in Calgary, we have a population of 1.3 to 1.4 million people, Mr. Speaker, and it is certainly growing every day. This is a council with a great deal of decision-making responsibilities on their plates, and, you know, a mayor plus 14 councillors have an awful lot to manage in a very busy and successful city like Calgary.

To suggest, you know, to kind of fall back on the tropes that the UCP have used over and over again, that cities are simply a creation of the province, that they don't deserve the kind of autonomy and legitimacy that I would suggest a general election every four years

grants them – here we are facing the challenge of once again diminishing the legitimacy that they have before the people that they represent.

In Calgary in particular, Mr. Speaker, at least four councillors have been found to be in violation of the council's code of conduct since 2016. I'm curious if the minister – does he have issues with the way that those rulings were made? Is he simply seeking to eliminate codes of conduct across the board in every corner of this province because he just disagrees with the findings that are made through those individual and unique codes of conduct?

That, in my mind, would track with another trend that we've seen from the UCP government since they've come in in 2019, and that is just an insatiable desire for power and for control. Whether it is somebody else's lane or not, whether there is a democratically elected, transparent, and accountable government or not, they will step where they feel they are entitled to step and intervene where it may very well not be their place to do so. We don't know if the codes of conduct and where people have actually been found in violation of those are going to be eliminated because the minister simply doesn't agree with the rulings that were made.

We should be partners with municipalities, Mr. Speaker. It begs the question of whether or when municipalities were consulted at all prior to this legislation. In preparation for my remarks today I did go on to the AB Munis website. Of course, as folks listening at home may know, we have AB Munis as an association of largely mid-sized and large cities, and then we also have RMA, which is the Rural Municipalities of Alberta association. These are two entities that, you know, speak as one. I'm sure that there is disagreement amongst them in terms of the best path forward, but when they agree on advocacy, when they agree on a position, I really think it is done with a unified voice to be able to approach provincial and federal governments in advocating for what is best for their members.

When doing some of this research, I went on to AB Munis and learned a little bit about their position on Bill 50. They note that there were many areas of Bill 50 on which they were not consulted. They were not consulted on the elimination of council code of conduct bylaws, they were not consulted on specific changes designed to alter the arbitration of ICFs, nor were they consulted on the requirement of the CAO in a couple of different areas, and they were not consulted at all on proposed changes to the Local Authorities Election Act.

This is not the way that we should be dealing with our partners, Mr. Speaker. These are people who are experts in their field. They are democratically elected. I mean, does the government want to eliminate municipal elections altogether if they simply have the right to dictate how decisions are made and who makes them? I don't think that is what Albertans are looking for in any way. You know, unfortunately, this bill really does reek of, again, that kind of patronizing attitude towards other orders of government.

Government seems to be in quite a rush to quash municipalities' codes of conduct, but currently there's nothing to replace them with. According to the legislation in Bill 50 right now local codes of conduct will be eliminated when Bill 50 is brought into proclamation, when it's actually sworn in, but right now I have heard nothing, nor have AB Munis or RMA, about what's actually going to take their place. We have a municipal election coming up in Calgary this fall, Mr. Speaker, as do many if not most municipalities in Alberta, and I think it's going to be incredibly important for the candidates and for the newly elected to have a very solid understanding of what the codes of conduct are going to be when it comes to actually completing their role. Currently after this comes into proclamation, there will be no guarantee about what those will be at all. No clarity.

Once again I'll quote AB Munis here.

While not addressed in Bill 50, the Minister of Municipal Affairs has indicated that the ministry will engage municipalities in 2025 on the potential creation of a municipal ethics commissioner. Both ABmunis and RMA have long-called for the province to create an independent office to advise and investigate council code of conduct complaints.

They've been asking for a long time to have support in their local and internal codes of conduct, not to replace them. If this is something that they've been asking for for so long, Mr. Speaker, why has the minister insisted on expediting the elimination of local codes of conduct and not actually heeded some of those requests and advice from AB Munis to provide some form of a replacement? This can't be coming as a surprise. They've been asking for it for a long time, and unfortunately they decided to just, maybe in their eagerness, move ahead with Bill 50 without actually thinking about what comes next.

AB Munis also goes on to say that they

[understand] that the creation of a municipal ethics commissioner will require new legislation in 2026, meaning the ethics commissioner may not be in operation for at least a year. This is problematic unless the province is willing to delay the removal of codes of conduct until the officer of the ethics commissioner is operational.

Has the minister spent any time considering this as an option? I think it's a very important question to answer. When we see in my own city that in the last 10 years four individuals have been found to be in violation of codes of conduct, this is a risk. We've seen it in other municipalities as well, Mr. Speaker, where the code of conduct has been applied where people have been found to be in violation, and, you know, decisions have been made following those. In the absence of those codes of conduct that is a major concern. I think all voters, all constituents, of those particular municipalities should be very concerned.

4:30

On that same note, that they are taking these codes of conduct away without actually offering anything substantive by way of an alternative, Tyler Gandam, mayor of Wetaskiwin and president of AM, said: I hope the minister understands that taking away these codes of conduct will then put the onus on him. It will be up to him to figure out what that replacement is going to be.

I want to make it clear that a lot of these associations and probably many of the members recognize that there was room for improvement. It's not a knee-jerk reaction in opposition to what is actually being proposed. I would say that it's in response to the absence of any kind of alternative when something is so directly and immediately eliminated following the proclamation of the bill.

I will just touch briefly on the Local Authorities Election Act. It brings us back to something that nobody asked for, Mr. Speaker, and that is the creation of municipal political parties. It has added such a cumbersome layer of complexity when it comes to the Election Act, that raises some significant concerns around financing and really not creating a level playing field in any way between candidates who belong to a municipal political party and candidates who do not. What's essentially happening is that candidates who belong to a political party at the municipal level are allowed to double-dip. They don't have the same kind of spending limits. There is a spending limit that applies to the party, and then there is an additional spending limit that applies to the candidates themselves. What I would hope we would see and what I hope from people here in this Chamber on both sides is a desire, though it doesn't necessarily manifest in action all the time, to create a more level playing field when it comes to access to democracy, when it

comes to candidates having a fair shot at being able to represent themselves to potential voters and perhaps even be successful in that endeavour to become elected.

Bill 20, further reinforced with Bill 50 when it comes to financing, does nothing of the sort. It's I think really unfortunate. I know in my own city in Calgary, as we are about six months away from a municipal election, there has been some trepidation about how to approach municipal political parties.

The very last thing I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, is around the New Home Buyer Protection Act. I'm deeply concerned about what it does around consumer protection and how we protect people and their most important investment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I will recognize the Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to speak to Bill 50, the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, here today. It is a pivotal piece of legislation, reflecting some really good things our government is doing, our commitment to modernizing municipal processes and strengthening our local democracy. On this side of the aisle we're about democracy. We're about seeing our culture continue to grow and also have both young people – we often go, people on this side of the aisle, to our grade 6 classes talking about democracy, talking about how to be engaged, what we do as a province and what we are doing and how this country runs. I'm a big fan of what this is going to accomplish, and I look forward to having everyone's support.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I think our entire government – I'll speak for myself – recognizes that a significant importance of strength lies in the vibrancy and effectiveness of local communities. I think every single member in this House, and particularly on this side, absolutely has a great relationship with our municipalities. We've seen growth, we've seen consistency, and we're just seeing many of our communities right across the province be very effective. They're growing in their leadership, too, as municipalities. For the municipalities up north I'm always very thankful for their leadership and for them taking the helm and serving the community. Without them we would not be able to do the work we do here either. So I just want to give a big shout-out to the municipalities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is also experiencing some unprecedented growth. While there are challenges with this, this also presents quite a bit of challenges but also huge opportunities for us as a province but also as municipalities, to be able to be prepared and manage this influx of people. They need to be able to do this both effectively and sustainably. This is pretty pivotal. Now, in some ways Bill 50 does address this need, directly benefiting Albertans right across by making local elections more accessible and the municipal governments more effective as well.

Now, one of the first things I just want to talk about is also improvements to the local elections introduced by this bill, including electoral assistant terminals. These terminals are specialized technology that enable voters with physical and visual impairments to mark their local election ballots independently and privately. I think this keeps the relationship between those individuals and what they're doing on their ballots private. I think that's a key thing here in our democracy as well and for them to be able to vote. This maintains the integrity of the vote while ensuring that they have the full democratic participation for Albertans with disabilities. Thank you to Minister McIver for bringing this in.

An Hon. Member: Oh, names.

Mr. Dyck: Sorry. I apologize.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there has been some conversation prior just as well, and I just want to set the record straight on a couple of things. When it comes to Bill 50, there is some historical context which leads to us here.

Now, obviously Bill 50 and then also Bill 20 – Bill 20 really strengthened and also refined campaign financing rules and transparency in the past. Bill 20 brought in a \$5,000 limit donation for third-party advertisers. Prior it was \$30,000 when the NDP were in government. We brought that down to \$5,000. Bill 20 required donors to be Alberta based. We saw some prior municipal elections overrun with U.S.-based interest groups instead of local voices donating. I think this is really important that Albertans donate the money and also be able to donate to who they want to. These are very important in the long term and also short term here.

Last spring we also brought in annual disclosure for third-party advertisers really to increase transparency. I think people want to know who's supporting these third-party advertisers. Then as well the candidates and local political parties also require annual disclosure. These are important parts of making sure that we are transparent in our legislation and also in our elections.

Now, we further refined campaign financial rules for local political parties in both Edmonton and Calgary. As we all know, formal political parties are allowed to register in Alberta's two big cities for the municipal elections coming up this fall. As part of this bill our government is also proposing to allow funds to transfer among candidates of a local political party, promoting fairness and collaboration amongst that as well.

We're also bringing in clear recount procedures and simplified candidate withdrawal rules, which will further enhance voter confidence and election transparency. I think part of this as well, Mr. Speaker, is that for those that are elected, we want to make sure that people are confident in that vote as well. If you're duly elected, you've got to be able to trust the count, to have voter confidence. That's what we're building upon, that those that are duly elected can have the confidence of that vote as well. That's part of this.

As well, expanding past the elections, Bill 50 also tackles the misuse of council codes of conduct. While initially intended to promote respectful interactions, they have sometimes become sources of unnecessary conflict and challenges between members. By removing the requirement for council codes of conduct bylaws, the bill aims to eliminate potential political misuse and refocus councils on their core responsibilities. As I said prior, Mr. Speaker, for us to do our work for Albertans to move their communities forward, we do need our municipal partners on board and able to focus on their work instead of being worried about other codes of conduct in any way. I think this is a good opportunity for all our municipalities to be able to play and partner even with each other.

4:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, our government also remains committed to establishing both clearer, more consistent, and province-wide standards for municipal council and committee meetings, and we're also exploring an independent ethics mechanism to strengthen accountability across municipalities. There's opportunity there, I think, for us to just see right across the board some standardization. I think people would appreciate that, as they move to different communities or potentially move across our province, and for people to understand that there is a path forward and that there is going to be some consistency across.

Now, this government also understands that it takes working with municipalities to find the right balance and proposes working on that shared solution should this bill pass. Also, Mr. Speaker, municipalities have already expressed interest in contributing to that conversation and sharing what worked and what didn't with

their codes of conduct, so I look forward to seeing that. I know they were certainly relieved to see Bill 50 recommend that these types of council disputes should be handled by an independent body rather than placing CAOs in the middle of a council dispute, which is an awkward position for that individual. I think the CAOs come into this thinking and wanting to serve the community, not get in between surprising disputes should they happen or if they happen, so this cleans that up and allows us to move forward and have good relationships between the CAO and the elected members.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this bill also enhances and strengthens the intermunicipal collaboration by mandating effective co-operation in essential shared services, including emergency services, water infrastructure, and recreation facilities. Now, I think, to be clear, municipalities have always had the right to include more in their ICFs if both parties agree, and I think that's key. There's an opportunity to partner. There's an opportunity to work together and build infrastructure together. Now, should the two municipalities find it in their shared interest to include something like stormwater, which sometimes is included and sometimes is not, they absolutely can. Now, this is an opportunity to cost share. It also can prevent unilateral decisions and provides rural municipalities the flexibility to opt out of unnecessary frameworks. By doing this, this also reduces bureaucracy barriers that could happen, so that's very important for us to be able to streamline that and make sure that those are continuing both in opportunity and also for them to be able to have those single municipality conversations, too.

Now, speaking of stormwater, Mr. Speaker, throughout the debate we've heard specific concerns raised about stormwater not being included in the list of mandatory services in the ICFs. This list in Bill 50 is the original list established in the initial ICF legislation, which includes transportation, water and waste water, solid waste, emergency services, and recreation. These services were selected because they are widely recognized as the most common and essential intermunicipal services and their inclusion was generally supported by municipalities. This bill is really, at its core, about building stronger communities, enhancing our democratic engagement, and safeguarding Alberta's families' investments in their homes in the future here.

During the second reading debates, Mr. Speaker, there have been some accusations that suggest that Bill 50 was drafted without any stakeholder consultation, and this is simply incorrect. The proposed changes to intermunicipal collaboration frameworks, the ICFs, were drafted based on feedback from consultation with stakeholders, and in March and April, 2024, Municipal Affairs held in-person and virtual engagement sessions with municipal administrators, elected officials, and municipal associations. Many municipalities are happy with the ICF changes, and that's because they asked for that. That's a big deal. We're working with our stakeholders in order to bring in legislation that can work for them. Bill 50 is a massive stakeholder consultation effort. Despite what the opposition would lead you to believe, there has been consultation that has happened.

Now, further proposed changes to the Local Authorities Election Act are a direct result of this government's listening to concerns of Albertans. The special provisions for elector assistance terminals were drafted through direct consultation with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, so we have consulted and consulted, I think, the right people here, too.

Bill 50 also expands eligibility for voting and running in Jasper's municipal election for folks who were displaced by Jasper's fire last summer.

Mr. Speaker, our government is listening to Albertans, and Bill 50 is a great example of us listening to Albertans. I humbly invite the Chamber to seize the opportunity, to seize hold of the

opportunity to have meaningful change in Alberta, very good, lasting improvements that will benefit all Albertans. I would encourage everybody to support this very important bill. Together we can build a stronger, more prosperous Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 50, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Before I get into some of the comments that I wanted to share with the Chamber, with the Assembly, a couple of things that the Member for Grande Prairie, I think, if I'm not mistaken, offered the House I thought I would just comment on, the first being one of the things that this legislation does.

Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you know, it allows elector assistance terminals in local elections for voters with disabilities. That is quite right, but I'd like to be clear. I don't believe that this government had much to do with this. This was a national campaign by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. They have been leaders in accessibility, and they have been pressing not only provincial governments and territories but the federal government as well. I am very grateful for the CNIB for their work, for their outstanding work. Because of their work pushing governments across the country to do this, we're seeing this. That's a good thing. I think that's something that we can agree on that is a good thing.

Now, what I thought was kind of interesting is that this is happening, we're introducing legislative changes to allow this equipment to just create accessible pathways for people with disabilities to be able to vote and participate in democracy, at the very same time that we're doing the opposite, Mr. Speaker.

We know that this government's own hand-picked disability advocate, Mr. Greg McMeekin, actually published a report in 2023. I thought it was really well done. He clearly has done a great deal of consultation. He laid that out, how he did that. He certainly wasn't just looking for: do we need accessibility legislation? Pretty much everybody with a disability knows that we've needed this for decades. What he did was he laid out a plan economically why this makes sense for Alberta, how it strengthens Alberta, how it opens pathways to employment, and so on and so on. He touched on all of the areas in addition to some other things, but you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? That report, through a disability advocate – and that position is not very old at all. Actually, it was MLA Sandra Jansen, after she crossed the floor, I think, that brought this in as a government bill that created the office of the disability advocate.

Now, the only comment that I would add to that is that the disability advocate is not an independent office. I hope that when we form government in '27 that will be a change that we look at making, because then you won't see things like this happening. You know, an office that's over a million dollars a year – we have offices, I believe, in Calgary and Edmonton, if I'm not mistaken, and certainly this advocate does a great job of travelling the province. But we're spending this money to get this information. It's called consultation. That's what we do, and we hired somebody to actually do it for us. Actually, the government picked the person to do it for them, and they hid it.

Yet they're going to bring in this legislation that is really awful legislation in a number of areas, but they're going to make it seem somewhat better by putting this piece in that the CNIB has called for. Sure. Am I grateful for that piece? Yes, because the CNIB has been calling for accessibility legislation as well. They're disappointed with this government that you have failed to even

table any kind of accessibility legislation. I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that they're still confused about what it is. They still think it's safety codes and building codes.

Anyway, let's move on to Bill 50, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act. Honestly, it's really just more evidence of their desperation. They know their agenda is self-serving and not popular. I would suggest their little venture down this separation highway is going to make that even worse.

4:50

This government, Mr. Speaker, has done a great deal to demonstrate their disdain for other orders of government, whether that is municipal councils, school boards, or even corporations, Crown corporations, agencies, boards, and commissions. I would suggest we hear from all kinds of organizations about the intimidation that goes on, or the interference. That's becoming a regular thing, and that, to me, tells me that this is a desperate, angry government that is looking to cause a distraction or control, and that's what they're doing again with legislation. It's a power grab, a Republican MAGA-style governing power grab. This should surprise nobody. This is a government rife with incompetence and corruption, and we see it almost every day.

Now I'm going to go a little bit more local. The St. Albert *Gazette* published an article on April 20, 2025, and it was tabled I believe on Monday. The writer was Tristan Oram. It talks a bit about Bill 50. Now, I will give them credit. The current St. Albert council I think works really hard at being – I don't want to say nonpartisan, but they work really hard at, you know, trying not to instantly say: that is horrible, and this is good. They try to find the good and the bad in things, and I think they approach it in a really healthy manner. They did talk about some of the things that were positive. I think, though, the underlying message, the underlying premise of this legislation is that it is again seeking to control and interfere where they do not have any business.

"Bill 50, if passed, would eliminate council codes of conduct as a requirement for municipal councils, as well as prevent them from implementing their own locally developed codes." I thought that was really important because, although I understand that the minister wants to make the same rules for everybody, as we all know in this place, all 87 of us, each one of us represents a group and an area of this province that is very unique. Not one of us has the same configuration of constituency.

So it naturally makes sense, Mr. Speaker, that cities or municipalities would want to – sure, maybe there's a standard set that we could adopt. Like, we're all working from the same song sheet here; we're following the law, we're doing these things. But they also develop their own codes of conduct that address some of the local challenges. I won't bore the Chamber with some of the local challenges that have been had in St. Albert. If you want to google, just google city council activities. You might find some entertaining stories. But you know what? There are local issues that councils address. This summarily just removes everything and says: "No, no. We're the boss. We know better. We will fix it for you." And that's too bad.

"As part of the legislation, the province said it would engage with municipalities on establishing common practices for councils, as well as an independent ethics commissioner to address matters involving municipal council members." That's all great. Then the mayor of St. Albert said that it was just another example of the province listening to a few select mayors and municipal councils and then throwing everything out instead of improving it.

Now, the Member for Grande Prairie stood up and said that he had a great relationship with his council, and that's fabulous. I would expect that we all do. I think that's part of our job, to

understand and work with other orders of government. I'm glad that he does have that relationship. That's perfect.

But I think that what we're hearing from the umbrella organization that is Alberta Municipalities or the Rural Municipalities association, that represent the bodies that we're talking about, because we only are really working directly with one – they are saying, this collection of elected people and experts are saying: this isn't working for us, and these aren't our priorities.

I think that's one of the things that makes me so sad about this. There are so many other things that Alberta municipalities are really asking for that they understand, at their grassroots level, will help their cities. I'll tell you that doing this, taking away their ability to establish their own code of conduct tailored to their own needs in their own municipality, is not that.

I would suggest that for multiple years now this collection of municipalities has been very clear. There are all kinds of struggles that they're dealing with, all kinds of pressures, some of which are around safety. We have some crime problems, very real crime problems, escalating problems in lots of different places in the province. We have escalating poverty. We know that food bank usage has exploded, not just in the big cities. Some of the smaller places have been the hardest hit, places like Morinville, Gibbons, Airdrie, Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, and Spruce Grove, many of them. Poverty doesn't just stick to boundaries in the big cities.

Municipalities have said: hey, government; we're here to help you make good legislation and good decisions, and what we need is an increase to FCSS. For those of you that don't know, that's family and community support services. This is a partnership between the government of Alberta and the municipality, and it's an 80-20 funding split, so 80 per cent of the money comes from the government of Alberta, 20 per cent from the municipality. They're very clear about – this is preventative social work, right? Not social work, but preventative social work is what I mean, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I'm sure every municipality is very, very different. I was at one little town where they used – well, it wasn't a town. Actually, it was a little city. They used some of their funding at their library, which was super cool. They had these unique programs for teaching people sort of how to budget properly, how to do some really basic things that some people don't know. They were teaching skills, maybe improving your resumé, and then tracking: is this helping? Are you getting a job? Are you getting a better job? They're actually doing some really cool work with small amounts of money, improving their situation in their own municipality.

They know what they need, and what they don't need is for the government of Alberta to write their code of conduct for them. That's not what they need. What they need is the government to step up and give them the funds that they need to do the work that they were elected to do, just like this government squawks about Ottawa not giving us the money that we need to do the job that we were elected to do. It's kind of simple that way. I mean, it's a bit hypocritical for them to say, you know, "Bad Ottawa; bad feds," and then they do the same thing to their partners that are municipal. That's not good.

Now, I agree with St. Albert councillors – and it went on to identify this in the article that I referenced – who fear that the new process will be weaponized against other members, as all complaints will go through a process of investigation, thereby weaponizing the process. We all know that. I don't know if anyone's ever been the target of any investigation, whether it was through government – oh, wait. There are some of you going through some of this right now. I imagine that's quite stressful when there are RCMP investigations or the AG is investigating, or

whether it's your own internal investigation that's going to report to yourselves. I guess you're less stressed about that.

But you know what? If you've ever been the target of an investigation, that whole process is really unnerving and really can be damaging to a council. Imagine you have a council where, you know, one is complaining about the other – believe it or not, it happens – and then they go through this process through the government of Alberta, and that gets held up, and that's stressful. That makes things even worse. Whereas at a grassroots level in the municipality I believe that they have the ability to manage their business.

Now, I think that we've seen some examples of that. I'm not going to beat a dead horse with that, but we have seen some examples over the past six years of this government's tenure where they have failed to even step in to help municipalities. They wouldn't even lift . . .

Member Irwin: Jasper is a great example.

Ms Renaud: Yeah, Jasper is a great example.

I think the Calgary city council was a great example. Isn't that fellow still on there?

Member Irwin: Yeah. Sean Chu.

Ms Renaud: Wasn't he a police officer, and didn't he assault somebody or something? But he's still on city council, and the government of Alberta could do nothing to remove him. Huh. Interesting.

Instead of focusing on what we really need to focus on, which is affordability and improving health care and not through, you know, padding contracts with private operators – we need to focus on education. We need to work with our partners and municipalities to actually address their priorities, and they have been clear. I talked a bit already about the FCSS increase. I think, actually, this last – I think it was maybe 2024. I think that was actually their very first priority. When they published information about what they were looking for, that was number one. But you know what? I think this government maybe gave them \$5 million. Same amount they gave to the food banks. They're going to claw back the \$200 from AISH recipients, but don't worry. We're going to give the food banks more money. See how we work?

Anyway, rather than constantly bullying municipalities and leaders, why not bring them in as partners instead of targeting them? Why not stop and actually consult instead of rushing through sloppy, unwanted legislation? That's what it is. You know, it's like you bring in something, it's not well done because you didn't consult, and the next session we're back fixing your problem. That's a waste of legislative time.

Can I get a time check, Mr. Speaker?

5:00

The Acting Speaker: One minute.

Ms Renaud: Just one minute, so I am going to wrap up. Anyway, let me just say that it's been incredibly disappointing to see. You know, they're opening up legislation, Municipal Affairs, and again they're opening up – we're so hopeful that they're going to make positive changes, and instead we're seeing a government so focused on protecting and spreading their own little private ideology and silencing people and interfering when yet . . . [interjections] Well, it's kind of funny that they're giggling about this as there are – what? – four, five investigations going on right now. I wouldn't be giggling.

In any event, I wish that this was a piece of legislation I was super proud of; I am not. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise here to speak to Bill 50, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. I must say that there are some very problematic components of this bill. Ultimately, Bill 50 is about control. The Premier and the UCP are looking at every corner of this province to see what they can get their hands on, it seems: pensions, police, health care, schools, local councils, and any dollars spent anywhere in the province and any decision made by anyone. It seems like everything.

The UCP is once again doing anything it can to exert its dominance over municipalities, which is what we saw when the UCP government introduced Bill 20 last year. Bill 20's sweeping changes are strongly opposed by many groups, and the massive piece of legislation felt like it was just rushed through. It was a wholly undemocratic piece of legislation that required an individual to be on the permanent voter register and have a valid ID to vote. It also removed the ability to vouch for someone who wants to vote but doesn't have ID. We know that such strict regulations will no doubt have grave impacts and will particularly disadvantage a number of racialized, Indigenous, and Black communities as well as those who are low income and facing houselessness.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the UCP is trying to clean up some of this mess made by Bill 20. It's something Albertans didn't ask for in the first place, Bill 20, back in 2024, but now they're stuck with its fallout. It's the constant back and forth and constantly making a mess of something and then needing to go back on that decision that shows Albertans that they can't trust this Premier or this UCP government and its reckless policies.

At the end of the day, the UCP's only concern seems to be power, consolidating it and ensuring that it's locked in their grasp. This government doesn't appear to see municipal governments as a legitimate, fully elected order of government. The UCP is increasingly showing Albertans that they see municipalities as a wing of the provincial government, which is not how local voters feel, especially as they've gone out to the polls, you know, and local councillors and Reeves have been duly elected by the people.

Bill 50 eliminates local municipal codes of conduct, bars municipalities from making bylaws or resolutions that address council behaviour, and terminates all current code of conduct complaints and sanctions against councillors. This means that councillors can't face code of conduct sanctions if there is no code of conduct.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think it's important to state clearly that codes of conduct keep municipal councils in line and make life better for all Albertans. Currently these codes are mandatory, but the minister recently said, quote, it's been used as a weapon to try and silence and diminish and hurt their fellow council members. End quote. While the stated plan is to get rid of 330 codes of conduct and have one universal code of conduct across the province, Bill 50 doesn't include any details of what this code will look like or when it will be implemented.

Numerous stakeholders, including Alberta Municipalities and Rural Municipalities of Alberta, have pointed out that, should Bill 50 pass, the municipal codes of conduct will cease with nothing in place to hold councillors accountable while the provincial code of conduct is developed. Instead, municipalities are being directed to take more serious allegations with legal implications to the RCMP for investigation while other complaints could be directed to Municipal Affairs. This will no doubt take away protections for councils, for staff, and for communities across Alberta.

If the whole reasoning for doing away with local codes of conduct is that they've been weaponized, it's unclear how Bill 50 does anything to rectify that. As the Mayor of Millet said: "The provincial government mandated municipalities to adopt their own code of conduct bylaws, which we have all done. Now they want to eliminate these bylaws within Bill 50 because in some municipalities the bylaws have been used against some councillors and mayors, weaponized because the rest of council doesn't have the same views or goals or there are personal vendettas. If this bill passes, Municipal Affairs will develop a universal code of conduct for all municipalities. However, I'm not sure how this code of conduct will be written to eliminate these issues."

Municipal leaders have noted that there have been a few instances where there have been issues. However, there are several hundred municipalities in Alberta who all have their own code of conduct bylaws that are operating without issue. Once again, it's unclear why the UCP government feels the need to take such drastic steps to deal with the few outliers without having a new system to replace it with. In fact, most municipalities have said that they have rarely had to enforce their codes of conduct because they have relied on them as a tool to ensure they are conducting themselves in a manner that promotes respect and good governance while representing constituents.

We need to ensure that councils are always held to account, not just whenever the UCP thinks it's convenient. Bill 50 is just one more piece of evidence of how desperate they are to rush in their unpopular, self-serving agenda. Instead of demolishing the whole system, why is the government not concentrating on fixing specific issues that they've identified? How does removing every single code of conduct serve Albertans in a real way? Municipalities cannot just have their codes of conduct removed without a ready-made solution to fill that gap. When I see this in Bill 50, what I see is the UCP has no interest in hearing anything that anyone has to say that draws attention to the terrible job that they're doing in leading our province and serving Albertans.

The Premier and her cabinet have complained ad nauseam about overreach into provincial jurisdiction from Ottawa, but when it comes to municipalities, they continue to insist on overstepping and overreaching. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that this UCP government can and should be doing more to support municipalities, and Bill 50 does nothing to address the challenges that our cities and towns have been facing related to funding for community infrastructure, affordable housing, provincial property taxes, and grants in place of taxes, all of which are due to this government's inaction and poor leadership and governance.

Alberta's government has an obligation to adequately fund and support municipalities, including smaller towns and villages, but it seems that this fact has just been lost on this UCP government. The steep and ongoing growth of Alberta's population has created heavy pressure on municipalities to meet the need for affordable housing and core services, but with the Premier focused almost exclusively on picking fights with the federal government, it seems that this government is set to ignore the needs of municipalities. What does that lead to? That leads to the detriment of Albertans, with Alberta Municipalities putting out a statement saying:

If more provincial funding for local infrastructure is not provided, municipal councils will face one of two difficult choices – either significantly increase property taxes on Albertans, or delay the replacement and building of community roads, transit, water and wastewater systems, recreation centres, and other facilities that Albertans use each [and every] day.

Rather than work with municipalities and serve Albertans based on their needs, the UCP would choose to adopt a top-down approach, like we see here in Bill 50, that doesn't solve anything.

5:10

The government of Alberta increased provincial property taxes by 9.2 per cent in Budget 2024. An additional increase of 4.5 per cent is forecasted for 2025-26. These provincial tax increases are communicated to Albertans through their local property tax bills and are often mistakenly attributed to decisions by their local council and not the provincial government. When residents see property taxes going up, they tend to direct their frustration towards local government officials even though a substantial portion of every property tax bill is a provincial tax.

Provincial legislation requires municipalities to balance their budgets and not run deficits. Is it unreasonable to expect local governments to balance their budgets when municipalities' annual costs keep going up and additional provincial funding cuts are frequently introduced?

Over the past six years this UCP government has stifled municipalities, especially the program where the province gives municipalities grants in the place of property taxes it would owe on buildings located in those cities and towns. In 2019 the UCP government cut those grants by over 50 per cent over a two-year period to reduce provincial expenses, and these cities have no legal recourse to demand the province pay up. If the UCP paid \$80 million that is withheld from Edmonton alone from 2019 to 2024, it would eliminate the city's deficit this year and reduce a planned 13 per cent tax hike by .8 per cent in future years.

Of course, Bill 50 doesn't address these concerns because this government doesn't have respect for municipalities, it seems, and is more interested in their own self-interests. This is the same government that just recently threw a tantrum and said it's considering new legislation to prevent the federal government from going directly to municipalities and providing funding for projects such as housing and transit, things that Albertans so desperately need and want. This as the federal government announced more funds for prefabricated construction with a \$600 million price tag. What did the UCP do in the face of that funding that could help hundreds of Albertans access housing while they don't provide any adequate funding? Threatened to cut ties between municipalities and Ottawa while pitting rural versus urban in Alberta. This is not good governance, and this is not good leadership.

This happened all while, according to the 2024 Rental Market Report published by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Calgary's rental vacancy rate sits at 1.4 per cent, now on par with Toronto. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment is around \$1,695 a month, up by 14.3 per cent year over year.

How can the UCP even begin to suggest that they're acting in ways to support municipalities when all they really want to do is maintain an iron grip over them to further their political agenda? This government demands accountability and transparency from Ottawa. It's laughable because it's not even willing to give that to Albertans. This is truly the pot calling the kettle black.

Bill 50 does nothing to support municipalities. If anything, it takes away important guardrails for local elected officials. It's the duty of every member in this Chamber to uphold the principles of our democracy, and that means protecting the divisions of power that have been in place for decades in Alberta.

With that, I cannot support Bill 50. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 50. Are there others?

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

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

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

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Boparai	Hoffman	Renaud
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Kayande	Sweet
Eremenko	Metz	Wright, P.
Hayter		

Totals:	For – 41	Against – 16
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[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a second time]

Bill 52**Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025**

[Adjourned debate April 28: Member Miyashiro]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has six minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has the call.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to speak to Bill 52. I have some thoughts. Obviously, utilities and affordability is a significant issue that is important to all Albertans, especially as we continue to face an affordability crisis and Albertans continue to worry about how they're going to pay for their basic needs such as heating their homes; as we get into heat, how we're going to ensure that our seniors are in places where we know that their health and safety are being taken care of; and just as we look at grocery prices, mortgages, rents, and all the other factors that Albertans are facing.

My hope was that when the government brought in a bill that would speak to utilities, they would bring in an affordability measure that would somehow help deal with some of the concerns that Albertans continue to talk about. We do see in the legislation a look at the RRO. However, that doesn't address the overall piece of this.

Many of my colleagues this week were at an energy efficiency summit where we were talking to innovators, builders in the green energy space as well as home builders and many retailers and distributors that provide energy to our communities in Alberta. One of the things that came up was about the fact that there is a lack of data and understanding of what actual energy production is happening in the province.

One of the tools that was being discussed while we were there was the advanced metering infrastructure, or the AMI. Basically, for those who are wondering what that is, it's just a two-way communication tool that automatically transmits electricity usage to the distributor. So, let's say, someone like myself who may have solar on their roof would have an AMI because there needs to be some kind of recording of the energy production that's happening, and it then gets automatically reported, and it's sent back either to the retailer or distributor depending on what model you're looking at.

The issue with it is that it's not consistent across the province. In Edmonton EPCOR just went through a major upgrading of their monitoring systems, and the benefit of these monitoring systems, just to kind of back up a little bit, is that they actually, if the technology is being used appropriately and to its full potential, could do real-time data analysis. If I'm running my dryer, it'll tell me how much wattage I'm using in that moment versus how much, maybe, I'm producing if I happen to be green and using solar, or it will tell me what time of day it makes more sense for me to be using my different systems. Should I be doing laundry in the morning? Should I be running my dishwasher? How much does my dishwasher use? What kind of wattage does that look like?

It also helps around energy efficiency, so people would be able to say: "You know what? Maybe I could get a better consumption if I upgraded my dishwasher or my dryer or any of that kind of stuff." There are some really great, innovative opportunities there, but of course the issue is that EPCOR went ahead and decided to install all of these on all the homes in Edmonton because they want that information because it helps them then plan and project whether or not investing in green technology or what we'd need to look at for distribution and all of those things – they're able to do some forecasting. But it doesn't happen everywhere else.

We're hearing that there's other jurisdictions that want to do this, but the problem is that each monitor costs money, or each metre costs money, and right now the legislation doesn't necessarily allow for mass upgrading of that technology, so there's a gap there. I would encourage the government to look at that. It's not in this piece of legislation, but it definitely relates to what the government is currently trying to do, and I also think it really does address the gap, which is: if we're not collecting the data to demonstrate what kind of consumption is actually being used, then how do we forecast what energy we need to create?

If we're looking at solar farms or if we're looking at putting more solar in residential areas or commercial areas, are we generating more power than we're consuming, or is there an opportunity for storage that we can use that same energy at a different time? How do we then educate the consumer to be able to either do appropriate investment in their homes to help bring down their energy consumption and save them money? But maybe it's also those conversations around: maybe battery storage in your residence makes sense. That's farther down the line, I would say, but it does give us knowledge that I think will ultimately bring down costs. It's an opportunity, and I think it's a great – as we move past this piece of legislation, looking at those other opportunities, looking at changes that maybe will support municipalities to help their residents bring down their costs and address affordability, I think, would be a great part of the discussion.

I will actually sit down.

The Speaker: The hon. minister, for an intervention.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for allowing an intervention. I think she raises a tremendously

important attribute that we do need to look at and we are planning to do in the future.

For those listening – and I know there are thousands listening to this intense debate – there are four parts to our electricity system: generation, transmission, distribution, retail. We've addressed three of those, two of them in this legislation, transmission and generation, in terms of our market restructuring. Distribution is yet to be looked at. Doing the things that the member opposite has proposed is exactly where we need to go so that we can put power back into the hands of Albertans so that they can make good energy choices and thereby save themselves money. Those are the attributes of distribution that we need to address in regulation and potentially in legislation to allow for our distributors to take the next step in the evolution of our system so we can increase efficiency.

5:40

One of the things I want the member to know is that we're working on optimal transmission planning. We look at the whole province together and how it's integrated and not just parts at a time.

I thank the member for the debate.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Would you like to continue your remarks? Your remarks are concluded?

Member Irwin: She wanted to end on that mic drop there.

The Speaker: Excellent.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate this evening? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in support of the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, and the changes it will make to affordability and reliability on our grid. I've listened to some of the criticisms from the NDP, and it's clear the opposition doesn't necessarily understand the electricity market. Exiting coal-powered . . . [interjections] Not necessarily yours. I'll give you yours. We had some great comments.

When we take a look at some of the questions that have come through in question period and other folks speaking on this, you know, they don't necessarily understand the impact that their early exit from coal-powered electricity led to the unreliability that we dealt with. They also didn't understand it then, they don't understand it now, which is why we are currently creating affordability and reliability changes to the challenges that Albertans face with electricity. Perhaps that's why they stood in opposition of policies that our government has brought forward to bring about lower electricity prices than what Albertans have seen in years.

The Speaker: I might just – an hon. member is seeking an intervention. I don't know if you'd like to take one or not. It's entirely up to you.

Mr. Wright: No. I'm going to just keep going.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Wright: Thanks.

Following their defeat in the 2019 election, their disastrous capacity market proposed was rightly scrapped in its entirety. I'm pleased that part of the proposed reform included the implementation of day-ahead market. Day-ahead markets are a common component within the pure jurisdictions to work to ensure reliability and price stability in our electricity system. In short, Mr. Speaker, a day-ahead market for electricity is beneficial to our province, its people, its industries, and businesses.

To clear up some of the confusion, there are several versions of a day-ahead market. In recent weeks, because of exhaustive engagement processes undertaken by the AESO, the decision was made to move forward with a different version of the day-ahead market than what was previously being considered. Feedback was heard, and refinements were made to the proposed reforms to ensure the best outcome for Albertans.

The NDP seemed confused by this. Shortly after Bill 52 was introduced, the NDP attacked our government for going back on its word as a change. We felt that we had a better system lined up. They claimed that the day-ahead market was scrapped despite the changes proposed in the bill. That could be no further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. As per the AESO stakeholder update, released April 4, 2025, the AESO wrote:

We have listened and are refining the proposed REM design by not moving forward with two of the three markets we have been exploring as part of the detailed REM design: the proposed day-ahead commitment market, and the day-ahead energy scheduling market.

The opposition failed to read or acknowledge the rest of the paragraph, which says:

The day-ahead market for [available] products will be retained and expanded.

This bill does in fact include a day-ahead market, which will make sure that there is always enough power available to meet our demands. I'd encourage the opposition to read the bill in full so that they can see that it not only defines the day-ahead market, but it also includes the term 16 times.

I would also respond to the NDP's insistence that renewable energy is cheaper, bidding into Alberta's market often at zero dollars. Again, Mr. Speaker, this assertion is misunderstood at best, and it misrepresents at worst. While renewable energy can bid in at zero dollars, when the wind is blowing and the sun is shining, they do not actually get paid zero dollars. Generators don't get paid what they bid in; they get paid at the average of multiple bids. The renewable energy can afford to do this because they get paid for more than just actual electricity they produce. They get it by selling their renewable energy credits on the side to massive international corporations looking to reduce their emissions, at least on paper.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue to move forward and look at the REM design process, our government and the AESO have been working closely to ensure the details of any proposed design elements are aligned with the province's objective of affordability and reliability. Our government and agencies like the AESO are confident that REM will achieve these goals. Industry agrees, and if elections are any indication, the public trusts us to bring about the change necessary to keep money in their pockets and their lights on.

If Bill 52 passes, it will lay the foundation for more reliability and affordability on the electricity grids for all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I call on all members to really understand and agree that these changes will make positive differences for Albertans, and I hope that they and all members of this House vote in favour of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Hoffman: Love the enthusiasm for the passive-aggressive drive-by without taking an intervention.

I am happy to rise and speak to Bill 52, the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. I will say that energy is something that comes up regularly when I door-knock, and I do that often. I enjoy connecting with my bosses, whether it's election time or not. The main thing people ask me for is concrete actions to make their bills

less expensive. That's the main thing they want, and, unfortunately, there isn't a silver bullet in this. There isn't actually a lot of initiative in this to drive down those bills. So I am disappointed by that, Mr. Speaker.

There has been a lot of effort over the last six years to restructure the electricity system here in the province of Alberta and the way that we engage with energy and to try to emulate the only other market of its kind, being that in Texas. I will say that extreme weather in both jurisdictions is absolutely a significant issue. When folks in Texas – was it last year or the year before? My concept of time is somewhat warped – were without power for several days and there were people who died because of their failed electricity system, it was of deep concern to folks there and I think folks globally.

In our province we absolutely need reliable, consistent energy, and we need to make sure that it's available for all Albertans. When I talked to folks recently, a lot of them have been bringing up the public awareness campaign on the rate of last resort, essentially the last option, and how much money has been spent actually campaigning to tell people that government hasn't continued to regulate their electricity. We know that this has been ongoing for many, many decades, beginning under Progressive Conservatives. People say, you know: "How much money is being spent telling me that I might not be getting a fair deal for my electricity? Couldn't that government instead focus on putting safeguards and measures in place to actually regulate the electricity system so that I don't have to feel like buyer beware because I need electricity?" So many of the people that, I think, the government's attempting to reach on this are on the rate of last resort because they have very, very busy lives.

When I think about the single mom driving a 20-year-old minivan – a 10-year-old minivan seems too bougie for some of the folks I know, and many have newer vehicles as well. But when I think about driving that 20-year-old minivan, struggling to keep your kids on a good path, taking them to and from school, working multiple jobs often, sitting down and doing your taxes before midnight tonight, all of these things that people have on their plates, then to also say that you also want to make sure that you're not getting – I was thinking of an unparliamentary term – taken for through your electricity bill: you probably need to sit down and do some work, right? Everyone's thinking of an unparliamentary term right now, trying to guess which one I was thinking of. Surprise, I'm not going to tell you.

When I think about what we could do to actually reintroduce some actual regulation to just keep everyone's costs lower to make sure that everyone has an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to be able to get the best available rate possible – and I certainly welcome the intervention from the minister.

5:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. I appreciate your willingness to take an intervention. You're correct. We are trying to do exactly that. The challenge within our electricity system is that there are so many sunk capital costs under contract, transmission and distribution, certainly. They don't bid like generators do, where they bid into a price into the market. Those transmission towers and lines and wires for distribution are typically set up over 50, 60 year contracts, so if they're built, we have to pay for them. We can't get out of that. That's why it's so hard to drive that price down. I do take your point.

In terms of the rate, that's why we've really tried to increase Alberta's consumer awareness for the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

They can do a tremendous amount to help people know what their choices are. We have over 50 competitive retailers offering all kinds of products, particularly for those on limited income. Some of the innovations by our private market to be able to offer lower prices to those who don't have good credit is incredible, and I would ask anybody to go to the UCA for help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much, and I appreciate the minister's attempt to add to this debate and certainly welcome him, if I say other things that he thinks would be beneficial in the next few minutes, to add to the context. What I will say is that telling somebody that there are 50 options to choose from when they're overwhelmed with how much is going on in their life for something that they need to stay alive and to keep their families safe is for many people quite paralyzing.

You know, there's a Costco across the street from my riding, and one of the reasons why I love Costco is because I know everything there is good and there's not a lot of choice. I know it's going to be good. If you want chicken wings, they're going to be good chicken wings. They might not be the best chicken wings, but everyone's going to think they're good. That is, essentially, I will say, leave it to the capitalist to figure out how to make people happy with less choice and paying for a membership where you have to line up, show your papers, you know, prove that you belong, and get what you're entitled to.

What I have to say here is that saying that there are 50 different options and you can go to a variety of competitors and find out what's best for you, like so many people, it's a basic need of living here that you have electricity. They don't want to have to be consumers and be super vigilant in figuring out how to navigate the system and ensure that they're not being treated unparliamentary language-wise.

Please, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I did have the debate from the previous member to this member. Part of the benefit of a distribution system that has AMI or advanced metering innovation: it allows for companies to do that for you. That is where we are trying to go, where they can literally help individuals save money by the technology and advanced artificial intelligence that these systems allow, where places where these have been applied, like Texas, like California, can actually, on your behalf, set your thermostats to preheat or precool your house at the lowest cost electricity rates per day. We see it now with all the different Siri applications and home and smart thermostats where you literally talk to it. Yes, there is still always a responsibility on every consumer to know what they're buying, and we're providing as much help as we can with the Utilities Consumer Advocate, like I said before, but we are trying to get to a place where technology can be maximized for those who do have a million other things on the go. It is hard, and that's why information is their best ally.

I do take your criticism to heart. I am hearing what you're saying. That is where we're trying to go to make sure that Albertans have choice, make sure Albertans have the information that they need to make those choices, and make sure the system is technologically advanced to allow them all the help that they can get.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Minister. I think what I will pass on from my constituents through me to you, Mr. Speaker, and on to the minister in turn, is that what they just want is a government that's going to act in their best interest and make their bills cheaper. They don't want to have to be buyer beware and call different companies and have to invest in additional technology. They want a government that's going to provide proper regulations and oversight and drive down costs.

How much are they actually being – there's an addition here around the piece, around the buyer beware. I think it's got a different name, but that's my short form for it. The consumer awareness surcharge, having to pay more to make sure that you're providing consumer awareness: how much will that actually pass along to individual households? That is one of the questions I have in relation to this bill.

I'm just going to take another minute to touch on something else that they regularly raised with me, which is the opportunities that we are letting pass by when it comes to renewable electricity opportunities in our province. I have spent some time door-knocking in Lethbridge and have seen many homes that have very small, little wind turbines. That's very exciting for me. But again I am reminded that just over a year ago the current government chose to outlaw wind production on private property and large swaths of the province. A lot of people say to me: why would they do that when there's an opportunity for us to harvest our own electricity close to home, close to where people need it, and for that to be done in a sustainable way?

I will say that a lot did happen to incent renewable electricity between 2015 and 2019, but a lot continued to happen without the incentives between 2019 and 2023. I think a lot of why it continued to happen is because good momentum was in place. Now that's being put to a halt, which has had a significant impact on consumers of electricity but also on those good union jobs in terms of building those turbines and providing those opportunities, especially in southern Alberta for good employment opportunities. When I talk to some of those unionized members who work, you know, from Fort McMurray down to Pincher Creek, about the types of work they do, they say that the work is the same; it's just whether you get to go home at night and what kind of lifestyle you'll have at the end of the day. They would love to be able to continue working on those large industrial projects in southern Alberta.

With that, I think on this many of my colleagues have offered a great deal, and I am grateful to the minister for the interventions. I think when both sides come to this place with a desire to debate, to learn, and to bring things to the table that are beneficial to the people of Alberta, we have a good energy in this place. And, hopefully, maybe I've convinced you to vote no.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Waived.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has waived that opportunity.

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see the clock is nearing 6 o'clock, so I move to adjourn the Assembly until this evening at 7:30.

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

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