



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 6, 2025

Day 107

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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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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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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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)
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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Dach
Gray
Sinclair
Stephan

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Ellingson
Johnson
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 6, 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

Members' 10th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you all know, yesterday marked the 10-year service anniversary for several members. At a ceremony earlier today I presented to two of those members who maybe weren't here. Maybe they were here; I don't know. I don't know how to get around this one. Anyway, two people were unable to be part of the photograph yesterday – there we go – and I would like to invite them here to the dais to receive their 10-year service pins: the 847th member ever elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and the 898th member, the deputy chair of committees, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. [Some applause] I don't feel like I got a standing ovation yesterday, but okay.

80th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you know, we had a very busy day yesterday at the start of question period, but I did want to take a brief moment today to note one very special occasion that did pass this week. May 5 marked the 80th anniversary since Canadian military forces in Europe were tasked with the daunting and noble effort of the liberation of the Netherlands.

From September 1944 until April 1945 Canadian troops fought the occupying German army in the Netherlands. The terrain was treacherous, the landscape formidable, and the attacking forces had all of the advantage. It was flat, soggy, or flooded, and thousands and thousands of Canadians lost their lives. By May 1945, when hostilities in Europe ended, approximately 20,000 Dutch had died from famine during what was known as the Hunger Winter of 1944-1945. However, due to the valiant efforts of Canadian and Allied troops, many more Dutch lives were spared, since citizens were provided with essential food and other supplies as the Canadian and Allied forces pushed the Nazis out of the Netherlands.

To this day the Dutch people welcome Canadian military veterans to the shores to celebrate them and the historic efforts that were so vital in securing their freedom and the freedom of their country. Today, along with the Dutch people, we remember and we honour their efforts and sacrifices.

Lest we forget.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's a great pleasure to introduce a number of constituents of mine, who also happen to be very good

friends. They are visiting from Drumheller. Their parents are visiting from India, and their nephew is visiting from Burnaby. I invite them to rise as I call their names and have them enjoy the warm welcome of the Assembly: Jatinder Singh Dhillon, Poonam Dhillon, Sukhwinder Singh Dhillon, Lakhvir Kaur Dhillon, and Harnoor Singh Ghag. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 and grade 5 Northmount students and their educators. They are on both sides of the gallery. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce the wonderful grade 6 class of Constable Daniel Woodall school along with teachers, staff, and parent volunteers. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of Barrier-Free Alberta, organizers of today's rally: Michelle Kristinson, Zachary Weeks, Kent Hehr, Dan Pederson, Chris Ryan, Kat Hedges, Petra Schulz and Millie Schulz from Autism Edmonton. I ask the Chamber to give them the welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm fortunate enough to have the Century Mile race track in my riding. I would like to introduce two representatives from the race track, Ken Maheden and Geoff Smith. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Alison Stutz, the CEO of Deaf and Hear organizations. Please accept the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly friends of mine, Joe and Brenda Goertzen. Joe and I grew up together, attended the same school. I wish you to rise and enjoy the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South has an introduction.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House four amazing Edmonton-South constituents who are passionate advocates for accessibility rights in Alberta: Arvind Bhogal, Rajesh Kumar, Blessing Obute, and Purva Kapur. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Barb MacIntyre, a parent and advocate, past president of Inclusion Alberta and former treasurer of Inclusion Canada. Barb has been instrumental in advocating for the Canada disability benefit. Please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly individuals from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind: executive director Craig Peterson, Taylor Bauer, and her guide dog, Wallace. Please accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some incredible disability advocates: Karli Drew and Susie Desrochers, Daniel Ennett, Alexandra Turgeon, Corinne Kushneryk, and Jordan Rody. Please accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Miasa Joma, Moh Joma, Yara Joma. Please accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature disability advocates from Calgary: Lesli, Linda, Lauren, Gabriella, and Tim. Please accept the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several disability advocates from Calgary: Jim Degenstein, Seanna Thornton, Allison Chapman – oh, great name – Bradley Gibb, Tenzin Kalsang, and Nathan Nikiforuk. Please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this House.

1:40

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly more disability advocates from Calgary: Clark Allum, Mara Blain, Patrick Finney, Larry Antoniuk, Merry Burkhardt, and Kneisha Peddie. Please accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly staff that work very hard to support people with disabilities: Tony, Sharon, Andrew, Emily, Erik, Jordan, Anetia, Fernando, Jovie, Nathan, and Kirtan. Please accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has an introduction.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. My guest, Marilyn Hooper, is going to be here imminently – and I encourage folks to send her notes when she does arrive – but I want everyone to know that she was Raj Pannu's right hand as outreach director in his time here in the Legislative Assembly and also has long service supporting the folks at the city of Edmonton. Thank you very much, Marilyn.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Leah Hammond. Leah has recently joined King Strategies. It was a pleasure to spend some

time with you today and support you in your work. Would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly self-advocates who had their funding cut: Colleen Huston from Disability Action Hall, Kavin Sheikheldin, Jennifer Stewart, Mike Wing, Alex Jack, Brad Robertson, Amber Cutter, and her mom/aide, Debbie Chief. Please accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and all members of this Assembly self-advocates that have had their funding cut: Keri McEachern, Florence Burton, Syndey Van Es, and M. Brousseau-Chauvet. Please rise if you're able and accept the warm traditional welcome of this House.

Members' Statements

Provincial Disability Access Legislation

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, disability access is a matter of dignity for people with disabilities. Fully one-quarter of Albertans live with a disability of some sort, and they are our sons and daughters, our mothers and fathers, and our friends. Their dignity alone, their freedom to live, work, and play, to merely exist in society is in and of itself a good reason to enact disability access legislation. Our values as Albertans who care for each other demand it. Any of us could end up with a disability at any point in our lives.

But there are legitimate economic reasons to enact disability access legislation, and I want to spend two minutes on this topic. First, in researching this topic, I was struck by the contempt that various hard-right think tanks have for the very concept that reasonable accommodation should be provided to employees with disability. The subtext through all of this biased research, involving cherry-picked data, is that disability is a person's fault and even a single dollar spent on accommodating disability is a dollar too much because people with disabilities don't deserve it. It's wrong.

Instead, let's scan through some research and modelling that respects the contributions of all people in society, including people with disability. Emile Tompa and others, writing in *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*:

Their estimate results in a surprisingly large magnitude of 17.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) for reference year 2017 in Canada. The employment component (labelled as output and productivity) is 3.2% of GDP.

These are the gains that can come from enacting disability access legislation.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. Disability access legislation is not just good for people with disabilities but for society as well and can improve economic productivity. As an alternative to temporary foreign workers, why not promote an already existing workforce that's eager to fully participate in the labour market? A few small changes can make it possible for people with disabilities to participate in the most dignified societal element, a life of employment, and for Albertans to reap . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

NDP Government Record

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the NDP took numerous hollow victory laps celebrating their accidental government from 2015, and I couldn't help but reflect on some facts that were conspicuously absent from their statements. They didn't talk about the fact that they brought in a carbon tax they didn't

campaign on. They seem to have forgotten the time they attacked family farms. They didn't remind Albertans that they raised electricity rates simply because they couldn't read a contract. They kept quiet when they raised corporate and personal income taxes, yet couldn't balance the budget once during their entire term in office. Finally, they seem to have forgotten that when they asked Albertans for a second mandate, they were promptly fired, making them the only one-term government in Alberta's history.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, the NDP doesn't want you to remember any of that. In the last election they didn't even run on their record as government; they ran away from it. And this last weekend they ran to distance themselves from their federal family. But where are they running to? The answer: straight into the arms of their new sweetheart, Mark Carney. I mean, seriously, I haven't seen a group of people swoon so hard over a new celebrity with questionable talent since it was grade 8 girls and Justin Bieber.

How is this infatuation going down with the rank-and-file members? Well, not great. Said one NDP member: it is remarkably inappropriate to take steps towards destroying unity within the NDP. Said a different member: this party is not just an empty vessel that twists itself into any position. Ooh, talk about drama. New loves, betrayal, heated arguments, and a much anticipated costume – I mean logo change coming soon: is this Alberta politics or an episode of *Gossip Girl*? I'll never tell.

Back in 2015, Mr. Speaker, the NDP talked about an orange crush. Now, in 2025, all they care about is their Carney crush. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Health Care Services for Persons with Disabilities

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, if you have a disability, as any of us may have in a moment, you lose access to so much that the rest of us take for granted. You do not even have access to the same health services as other Albertans. For those of you who think the health system is not meeting their needs, let me assure you that it's even worse for people with disabilities.

Some who depend on a wheelchair for mobility must be lifted out of their chair for an examination or procedure. But because mechanical lifts are not required in diagnostic facilities, they're simply out of luck if they require many specialized procedures, especially in the community. You also may not be able to have a mammogram while sitting in a wheelchair if the equipment where you live requires you to stand.

If your disability is invisible such as it is for those with multiple chemical sensitivities, you are at risk of severe reaction simply by going to an emergency department and you will probably be treated as a problem, not someone with a problem. If you have a child with autism that requires special care in crowded places, good luck. If you live in a rural community and have challenges accessing transportation to medical appointments, too bad. It's up to you to find a solution.

These are all examples of why we require disability legislation as recommended by the government's own disability advocate. People cannot even get access to health care because they have a health limitation. We need an accessible Alberta act. Alberta and Prince Edward Island are the only provinces without disability access legislation.

Alberta in Canada

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, Alberta makes up a mere 12 per cent of Canada's population – 12 per cent of the population – yet we contribute

nearly 16 per cent to the national GDP, not to mention the net \$25 billion a year in equalization and taxes sent to the rest of Canada. Billions of dollars are funnelled away from our hard-working province, and to add insult to injury, Ottawa turns around, passing bills designed to thwart our industries, stunt our growth, and cap our production. These federal policies impact not only those working directly in energy but the waiter in Fort McMurray, the teacher in Red Deer, and the small-business owner in Lethbridge. If the federal Liberals shut down our ability to be the economic engine of Canada, how will we maintain our Alberta advantage? We won't, and perhaps that's why the Liberals are doing it. There's a term for that kind of behaviour. It's called having a bad case of the Oedipus complex.

Federal overreach is not a new phenomenon. I can remember being a young boy when the senior Trudeau introduced the national energy program, and the crisis that ensued was devastating. People lost homes and jobs, and interest rates skyrocketed. Unfortunately, this is what we have come to expect from Ottawa. Maybe that's why Albertans are so strong, why we are get-'er-done-type people, because we have to be. To my fellow Albertans: what is this about? It's about calling out a broken and unfair relationship. Alberta has taken enough abuse from Ottawa in this dysfunctional relationship, and we are drawing a line.

It is bewildering that the Laurentian elites in eastern Canada are so bent on the destruction of Alberta's economy. To be clear, we're not asking for favours or preferential treatment. Instead, we are asking for a federal government that rewards, not hinders, our performance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

1:50 Home-care Services for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My speech today was written by disability advocate Karli Drew, the beautiful, dynamic, and bright young person with blue hair visiting us in the gallery today.

Albertans with disabilities and their loved ones have long borne the burden of an insufficient and outdated home-care system. With our underfunded and overwhelmed home-care system families must pledge their lives to providing disabled Albertans with the majority of their care needs through unpaid labour until they themselves need the care. The system has been reduced to: client, age 32, born with spinal muscular atrophy causing profound and permanent muscle weakness, unpaid family caregiver provides ongoing care – note to the Assembly – at great personal and financial sacrifice to the family.

In the current system family caregivers are expected to provide our disabled with the majority of care thus limiting their own ability to work outside of that. If we were to restrict nondisabled persons to this same condition, it would be one bathroom break per day, two showers per week, three minutes to eat an entire meal. It would be considered unconscionable, unethical, and even abusive, yet somehow that continues to be the forced reality for Albertans with care needs when hours of home care are capped at 60, and very few are receiving more than 40.

Without urgent and meaningful changes to home care, Disabled folks and [their] families will be [put] into increasingly impossible situations, such as choosing between urination or work; bowel movements or sleep; meals or showers. It's not only personal and familial autonomy at stake, but [their] continued survival, too.

Our disabled brothers and sisters deserve to lead dignified lives in their homes. Axe the tax on Alberta's disabled families and people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Support for Persons with Disabilities

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, by focusing on federal grievances, the Premier tries to distract not only from a corruption scandal but also from the policies and people she is responsible for and failing. This includes an estimated 1 in 5 Albertans who live with a disability. Every province except for Alberta and P.E.I. has passed modern accessibility legislation to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to inclusion. In a report in 2023 this government's own hand-picked disabilities advocate urged this government to also make such a law. Why has this government sat on that report and not passed comprehensive accessibility legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services is undertaking a comprehensive review of all of our programs. We know that we have issues that need to be resolved on a number of fronts. It's why we've created a brand new program, the Alberta disability assistance program, to give those with disabilities more options. We're looking at some of the wait-lists that we have in PDD. We have increased the amount of money given to caregivers who offer services to those with disabilities. There are a lot of issues that have to be dealt with in his department, and he's working through them one at a time.

Ms Gray: Two years and no work done on something that this government is responsible for.

Without accessibility legislation hundreds of thousands of disabled Albertans will continue to be locked out of workplaces, schools, and safe housing options where they could thrive. These should be priority issues for this Premier. She and her government are the ones responsible. Without accessibility legislation hundreds of thousands of disabled Albertans will continue to face barriers that keep them struggling with poverty, isolation, unemployment, and basic participation in society. When will this government finally bring forward legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, my Seniors, Community and Social Services minister has a number of different files on his desk. He is working through them, some very big and comprehensive changes that he's making. The purpose behind all of it is to make sure that we have more accessibility for those with disabilities so that they can participate to the full extent of their abilities. I'm looking forward to seeing some of the additional changes that the minister intends to bring forward. We've already made some dramatic improvements in offering out new programs in order to be able to support those who want to do more work, and we intend to do more of that.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what this Premier's minister has been working through is how to claw back \$200 from disabled Albertans. Alberta is now the only province to snatch this new federal money out of the wallets of their own disabled citizens, and it is a reprehensible choice by this UCP government. I am disgusted by it. Disabled Albertans deserve a government that will pass accessibility legislation and stop the clawback of crucial support

programs. When will the Premier and this government do their job and actually deliver for disabled Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have always been the highest rate being offered for those with disabilities and we have been the most supportive, and we intend to continue to be. We have always had policies where alternative income that is being generated for those who are on this program has to be declared. We are happy to see that other provinces are being challenged by the federal government to match the level that we provide in Alberta. We are above what the federal government has established as their benchmark of \$1,811 per month. We're at \$1,901, and we will continue to index that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

AISH Client Benefits

Ms Renaud: In 2013 I clearly recall this Premier railing against the Redford decision to massively cut disability supports. I watched as this Premier interacted with disabled Albertans, telling them: I'm here for you. Now this Premier is saying severely, permanently disabled Albertans who try to survive on \$1,901 a month will not get to keep the \$200 federal disability benefit because this Premier believes AISH is generous enough. This Premier gave her MLAs a housing allowance increase, citing affordability, but AISH recipients, nothing for you. Why?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, to be very clear, the AISH benefit in our province is not changing. It's legislated by this Chamber. It will remain \$1,901, over \$500 more a month than most comparable provinces, the highest amount in Canada. It remains indexed, something this government is committed to. We also continue to increase disability line items across the government. Over \$3.6 billion this government will invest, more than the NDP government ever dreamed of investing in disability services, because we're committed to standing with those with disabilities in Alberta.

Ms Renaud: Nothing could be further from the truth. This government's hand-picked disability advocate issued a report about the need for accessibility legislation, not just a design guide or a building guide, in 2023, and this government sat on it. They sat on the report. They contradicted their own experts by clawing back the \$200 federal disability benefit. The disability advocate was super clear. People with disabilities live in deep poverty. The \$200 will make a difference. Premier, how do you justify policywise taking away \$200 from severely, permanently disabled Albertans?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the federal government has probably too low of a threshold. We agree. It's unfortunate that member has never stood in this Chamber and called to account the NDP-Liberal coalition, her party, who has held power in Ottawa. The number one challenge for individuals who are on AISH is when they turn 65 and move over to the federal government program and they have to have a pay reduction. This side of the House Albertans invest an unprecedented amount of money in AISH. We're going to continue to do it. I want to be very, very clear. We have not cut AISH.

Ms Renaud: Albertans with disabilities are being harmed and left behind despite what this minister says in this place. After six years of the UCP services for people with disabilities are much darker. They have deindexed AISH, Mr. Speaker. They capped it at 2 per cent and say: oh, no, we indexed AISH first. Incorrect. They hid the

disability advocate report. [interjections] They think it's funny. They think it's funny.

They are taking away \$200 that was meant for disabled people. I don't understand how this government stands in this place and says that you believe people with disabilities . . .

2:00

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

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's funny. I think it's shocking, the immaturity of the Official Opposition and the NDP to continue to fearmonger on this issue.

Ms Renaud: Your incompetence and corruption are dangerous.

Mr. Nixon: They cause fear for people all across the province. AISH has not been cut; it's \$1,901. Indexation has not been removed; we indexed higher than what inflation was at the time that indexation was decided, 2 per cent this year. Over 4 per cent the previous year. That's what this government has done. We have the highest amounts being invested. Mr. Speaker, again, \$3.6 billion taking place for the disability community.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2 o'clock.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

FSCD Program Wait Times

Ms Pancholi: The Premier wants to distract with separatism talk to avoid addressing her failure to deliver for Albertans, Albertans like Sara and Amin Namazi, my constituents and parents of twin 15-year-old boys, Arian and Arash, who both have autism and cerebral palsy. The family applied for FSCD in January 2024 and were deemed eligible in August, but 17 months later this family still hasn't received anything from FSCD. Their desperation is heartbreaking. I've written twice to the minister, but all the family got was a phone call telling them they just have to keep waiting. Will the minister tell the Namazis today: when will they get the FSCD they're entitled to and that they deserve?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has increased the FSCD program by \$30 million in 2025, something that member and her party voted against; voted against supports for families with children with disabilities and the highest amount being invested ever by a government, over \$264 million in that program alone. Now, there is challenge inside family support for children with disabilities. Unfortunately, the NDP never stood up to address those challenges. We're seeing autism rates at unprecedented numbers, diagnoses for children with disabilities at unprecedented numbers. That's why we're fixing the program and fixing the NDP mess that they left us. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Pancholi: Hundreds and thousands of Albertans with disabilities continue to wait. The Namazis aren't alone. The number of calls to my office from families trying to access FSCD has gone through the roof this past year, like Karen Wisheu, whose four-year-old son is autistic and has speech apraxia. Karen has been waiting over a year just to hear back from FSCD, but they won't even give her an estimate of when she will. The window of opportunity is closing so fast for critical early intervention supports for her son. To the minister: why can't he even give Karen an estimate of how

long she will have to wait for FSCD? What is more important to this minister than supporting children with disabilities?

Mr. Nixon: Supporting children with disabilities is a high priority for the government, as is supporting everybody with disabilities in our province, Mr. Speaker. That's why we invested in this budget – again, voted against by the NDP – \$3.6 billion to support the disability community, more than every department but four departments in government, just that line item, and we increased all of those line items, including family support for children with disabilities. We increased staffing, we increased the ability to be able to surge capacity in certain areas of the province, and we're going to continue to fix that program.

Ms Pancholi: Children with disabilities and their families are waiting for years. Unfortunately, I can keep going. There's the mother of two preschoolers with autism who needed an aide for her daughters in daycare, but she's been told the wait-list is at least two years for FSCD, and she's already waited a year. Meanwhile she's quit her job to care for her kids and doesn't know if or when she'll be able to go back to work. She needs help. The government used to share data about the FSCD wait-list publicly, but not anymore because they want to hide how badly they're doing for children with disabilities. These families are living with the UCP's incompetence. If the minister is so proud of his work, will he commit to publicly sharing FSCD wait-list data today?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I see the hon. members continue to avoid the question. Why did they stand in this Chamber and vote against \$3.6 billion in support for the disability community? Each and every time that a vote has come to the floor of this place, they voted against it, but this government ignored them, increased PDD, increased support for children with disabilities, increased AISH, and has spent the most on disabilities of any government in Alberta history. We're going to continue to do that. We will not be lectured by the NDP, who have failed on this file and every file they ever touched in government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

AISH Client Benefits

(continued)

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, my constituents demand the Premier do her job for Albertans and stop picking fights. This spring the UCP decided to claw back the new \$200 monthly federal disability benefit from AISH clients. AISH recipients deserve more supports, not less, which is why we were proud to increase and index AISH when we were in government, not cut it. Why is the UCP government making this reckless and cruel cut to AISH supports in the middle of an affordability crisis?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the hon. member did not spend any money on indexation when he was in government, not one penny. In fact, the only two ministers that ever have both have my last name. Our province spends more than any other province because we're committed to this. This is a high priority for us. At \$1,901 a month plus about \$400 in medical benefits, that puts us over \$554 higher than Manitoba, \$533 higher than Ontario, \$515 higher than Saskatchewan, and \$1,417 higher than B.C. And you know what we're really higher than? We're higher than anything the NDP ever spent on AISH.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the employment rate for individuals with disabilities is far lower compared to those without disabilities. The federal disability benefit was intended to provide extra support,

recognizing the increased costs of living and additional challenges faced by people with disabilities. By reducing the AISH payment dollar for dollar in response, the UCP government is clawing back this much-needed federal support. How can this government claim to support Albertans with disabilities while actively cutting their support by \$200 a month?

Mr. Nixon: Nothing could be further from the truth. We are not cutting AISH. AISH remains the highest in the country, \$1,901. Mr. Speaker, through you to that former minister . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nixon: That's the former minister of the NDP government who had my file, who did not index AISH, Mr. Speaker, who did not fix these situations, shamefully, and, worse than that, continued to run a program that punished the disabled who could work. This side of the House ain't going to do that. We're going to make sure everybody can reach their full potential in the great province of Alberta.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the only thing this government ranks really high in, in Canada, is corruption.

This \$200 benefit from the federal government needs to be complementary to AISH payments instead of an excuse for the UCP to pick another fight with Ottawa. The government has a responsibility to uphold the dignity and well-being of people on AISH, not use federal support as a reason to reduce its own. This is wrong and unconscionable. What will it take for this government to reverse this cruel cut and stop pushing Albertans on AISH further below the poverty line?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the federal government has been very, very clear. They expect provinces to meet \$1,811 a month without health benefits. We have, beyond that. We are \$1,901. No other jurisdiction is anywhere close to that, not even the federal government. Nobody on the NDP side of the House has bothered to stand up and even try to lobby the government to be able to make sure the federal government actually met the ambition of Alberta. What I can assure you and the whole House is that Alberta is going to continue to lead the way.

Housing for Persons with Disabilities

Member Irwin: Today we joined hundreds of advocates at the Legislature fighting for action for disabled Albertans. They're asking for the support that they need and deserve, not a UCP government who at every turn chooses cruelty, whether it's clawing back the \$200 federal disability benefit, forced changes to AISH, failing to invest in home care, or refusing to ensure safe, accessible, affordable housing. This is a government that chooses fancy red carpets, first-class flights, and living allowance raises for their own MLAs while people are forced to skip meals to pay their rent. Will any UCP member apologize to Albertans?

Mr. Nixon: A party whose plan on housing was to have people live outside in temporary structures, Mr. Speaker, where they were dying, is going to try to lecture the party that has invested more money in affordable housing, more money in emergency shelter than any government in history. We're not going to go for it. Their philosophy is the wrong philosophy. It's the philosophy that gets people hurt. When it comes to disabilities, they want us to continue with an old process that punishes those with disabilities for going into the workplace. This government rejects that, and we're going to stand with the disability community to make sure that they can do what they want.

2:10

Member Irwin: Given that that's a no and given that one of the issues that disabled Albertans raise with us so often is a lack of safe, affordable, and accessible housing and given that this UCP government has refused to make the investments needed in barrier-free units, will the minister explain to the House how many barrier-free affordable housing units exist? Will he outline his plan to create more? And will he describe the criteria he is using to determine what is and is not a barrier-free unit since he refuses to support accessibility legislation?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Municipal Affairs is working closely with my department on making sure that we can bring forward accessibility design guidelines and legislation associated with buildings. At the same time we require a certain percentage of all buildings and communities to be built accessible underneath the current standards, something that we enforced. We're also investing more money in housing than any other government and, again, the Official Opposition, the NDP, when they were in government just those short few years ago, built net-zero new houses, meaning they built no new houses. Shame on them.

Member Irwin: Wow.

Given that the Auditor General's shocking report noted that the UCP stopped tracking the deteriorating conditions of affordable housing and they actually stopped reporting the amount of deferred maintenance and given that it's clear that the UCP is not even interested in supporting people whose well-being is affected by this deferred maintenance through things like poor ventilation, mould, extreme temperatures, and so much more and given that disabled Albertans know that it's nearly impossible to find safe, accessible housing in good condition, will the minister please answer the question and explain how many of his so-called barrier-free units are uninhabitable due to his government's mismanagement of affordable housing stock?

Mr. Nixon: Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker: there's a heck of a lot more accessible housing in Alberta's housing plan than in the NDP's plan to house people inside temporary structures with no heat. We continue to build more structures than any other province, and we're going to continue to do that because we're investing and making sure that more homes get built, which is lowering rent by 7.8 per cent in Calgary alone . . .

Ms Renaud: Making stuff up.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: . . . increasing the housing stock, and putting us on track to continue to be the best province in this country to live in. I know the NDP doesn't like Alberta, but on this side of the House we bet on Alberta every time.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:12.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is home to some of the most innovative transplant programs in the country. In fact, the University of Alberta hospital is internationally recognized for its organ and tissue transplant work. However, these advancements can only reach their full potential when enough organs are available for those in need. As hundreds of Canadians patiently wait for their

transplants, every new registration offers hope for those patients and their families, potentially saving more lives across the country and within our province. Can the Minister of Health please share with the House what actions our government is doing to promote organ and tissue donations in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government is indeed continuing to take action to raise awareness about organ and tissue donation. In fact, we are even adding a check box to the T1 income tax form starting in the 2025 tax year. Following Ontario, British Columbia, and Nunavut, Alberta's T1 tax form will now include a check box that allows Albertans to ask for more information about organ and tissue donations. Recipients will receive an e-mail from the government of Alberta, which will detail how to donate and to register. I hope many will consider checking off that box.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one organ donor can save up to eight lives while one tissue donor can significantly improve the lives of up to 75 people and further given that the demand for donors in Canada far outpaces the supply of available matching organ and tissue donations, can the same minister explain more about this initiative and provide an estimate on how many Albertans are anticipated to sign up for more information?

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to do that, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Alberta Health has been working with the Canada Revenue Agency for quite a while now to add that check box to Alberta's T1 income tax form that will allow Albertans to receive information about organ and tissue donation. Currently nearly 900,000 Albertans have registered their consent to become an organ and tissue donor. Based on the response that we saw in Ontario, where 15 per cent of taxpayers checked the box, we anticipate this will add an additional 600,000 Albertans who will be organ donors in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this new addition to our tax form is an important step towards ensuring Albertans have continued access to the support and services they need and given that this initiative builds on other recognized campaign awareness efforts across the province, can the same minister please tell the House what other methods our government is using to improve organ and tissue donation registration in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Give life Alberta, Alberta's organ and tissue donation program, has numerous public awareness initiatives through public awareness campaigns, social media, and it also regularly shares stories about donations and transplantations on the website.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remember the life of Dr. Greg Powell, who passed away recently. He was the founder of STARS and a huge advocate for organ and tissue donation and transplantation in Alberta. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Linda, and their family. May he rest in peace. He had such a strong contribution to Alberta, and I think we should all remember him.

Thank you.

FSCD Program Wait Times

(continued)

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, Maysaa is a mother of five. Her 15-year-old daughter, Yara, is profoundly developmentally disabled. Maysaa has been waiting over a year for a contract from FSCD only to be told it could take another three years. She's here today with her family in the gallery. Without appropriate support Maysaa's family is collapsing under the pressure of unmet needs. Can the minister tell Maysaa and her family why they are still waiting for life-saving support that her daughter Yara is eligible for?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me ask you: who increased AISH? The United Conservative government. Who didn't? The NDP. When it comes to PDD, for example, \$1.3 billion is being invested by my department this year, an increase of almost \$100 million. Who increased PDD? You're right, Mr. Speaker. The UCP, not the NDP. When it comes to family support for children with disabilities, over a quarter billion dollars is being invested this year from this department, increased by \$30 million. Who increased that? This side of the House, not the NDP. Clearly, the NDP are all talk, but the United Conservative Party is all action.

Mr. Haji: Given that the minister has failed to respond to Maysaa and her daughter Yara, who are in the gallery, given that when Maysaa has a doctor's appointment, her other children are pulled from the school to help – it is not right; Mohammad is here in the gallery; he's pulled out of school – can the minister explain to Maysaa and her family why they have essentially stopped FSCD intake, pushing families into crisis and putting Yara's life in danger?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we have not stopped FSCD intake. In fact, we've increased the budget by about \$30 million this year as part of our \$3.6 billion that we have invested in disabilities. We also acknowledge that a multidecades-old program like FSCD has challenges, that we're working through a process to change. That program was created when 1 in 10,000 kids were diagnosed with autism. Now about 1 in 10 are diagnosed with autism. The difference between us and the NDP, though, is that we have the courage to fix these things. The NDP just want to continue to watch Albertans suffer. We won't do that. We'll continue . . .

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

Mr. Haji: Given that Yara doesn't have a respite worker and the family feels ignored, the family feels alone, the family feels abandoned by the system that was supposed to help; given that twice the minister failed to give a response to Yara and her mother, Maysaa, here; given that this isn't just about service, it's about dignity, it's about compassion, it's the right thing for every Alberta child, what answer will the minister give, for the third time again, to Maysaa, who is watching from the gallery here today, and to her daughter Yara, who is seated there . . .

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

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, \$3.6 billion is being invested by the Alberta government in disability supports, the most ever. You know what happened twice? That member and his party voted no, voted no to see that budget go to care for people with disabilities, voted no to AISH, voted no to AISH indexations, voted no to increases to FSCD, voted no to increases to PDD, voted no to the important work that the government does each and every day for the disability community. That member just wants to play politics.

He doesn't want to help anybody. It proves it because of his vote in this Chamber.

**2:20 Funding for Community Disability
 Service Organizations**

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, the minister ended funding for three organizations that provided advocacy supports for persons with developmental disabilities and their families: Southern Alberta Individualized Planning Association in Lethbridge, Self Advocacy Federation in Edmonton, and Disability Action Hall in Calgary. These groups received \$420,000 a year combined, representing all or most of their funding, despite there being a year left in their service agreements. Will this minister just admit that these cruel cuts to services suggest that this government is obsessed with bullying our most vulnerable citizens?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we have continued to make sure that the investment that we make is going directly to front-line services. The organizations that the hon. member refers to still receive almost \$33 million from the government to do their work. We're going to continue to invest in front-line services, strategically making sure that each and every one of the dollars that we have from Treasury Board goes to directly helping people. Again, that member is part of a party who didn't index AISH, who did not increase these line items. All talk, no action.

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, given that it's crystal clear that the minister does not understand that individual family advocacy is front-line direct service work and given that many people with disabilities and their families who have been engaged with these organizations are outraged and worried about losing support, I ask the minister: was anyone consulted prior to making the decision to cut funding, or was it just another deliberate, unilateral decision to inflict pain on people with disabilities and their families?

The Speaker: I just want to provide a caution to the hon. member. In the last two questions you made an allegation that the government would intentionally bully people, that they would inflict pain on people. I think that's getting very close to the level of a point of order.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, in my experience it's what you see when the other side doesn't have facts. They go down to deeply personal attacks and name-calling. Not this side of the House because we have facts, something we're very proud of. Investing \$3.6 billion: I'm proud to be the social services minister that has the highest payments for disability supports anywhere in this country. I'm proud to be under the leadership of a Premier who's the only Premier that actually invested money in the indexation of AISH. I don't need to name call because I'm part of a great government that's working each and every day to care for people with disabilities. We'll continue to ignore them and just do our job.

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, given that this government would rather spend \$280,000 on replacing carpet in the Premier's office than these important grants to supporting hundreds of people with disabilities and given that funding to support AISH recipients has been reduced along with the aforementioned cuts, will the minister admit to this Assembly that the UCP government has no interest to properly and adequately support people with developmental disabilities in this province?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, we've increased PDD funding more than the NDP ever spent, and that member is part of a federal party who has continued to prop up a government that has forced

\$1,811 payments, significantly less than Alberta when it comes to AISH. Let's talk about another NDP province, Manitoba: \$554 lower than Alberta. We're \$417 higher than another NDP province, B.C. This Conservative government won't be lectured by the NDP when it comes to keeping care of Albertans. We're doing it with action; they're just nothing but words.

PDD Program Wait Times

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, the Premier should be focused on the needs of Albertans, not picking yet another fight with Ottawa at a time when people need support. The persons with developmental disabilities program is supposed to ensure that Albertans with intellectual disabilities thrive, pursuing employment or more fully participating in community, but the system has clearly failed them. The wait-lists are so long that the government has stopped reporting on their numbers. To the minister: how many PDD-eligible Albertans are still waiting to receive supports, and what is the government doing to ensure timely access?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we continue to heavily invest in the PDD space, making sure that they have enough staff to do their work. We're seeing wait times go down across the province, actually, when it comes to PDD. It's interesting that the hon. member brings up the federal government – they were too scared to divorce from their federal party this weekend – because they have been shoring up a government that has spent nothing on people with disabilities, who has brought forward a Canadian disability benefit that has been widely pointed out as too low, and, most shockingly, has done nothing for Indigenous disabled kids anywhere in this country. This province keeps stepping up to the plate, doing our job, and doing the federal government's job, too.

Mr. Ip: Given that PDD-eligible individuals and their families face strenuous, opaque, and bureaucratic processes just to access supports; given the program under the UCP has become exclusive rather than inclusive, not only ironic but cruel; and given that PDD-eligible Albertans often only receive support if they meet the arbitrary, urgent, and critical needs criteria even when it is clear that applicants are in desperate need, will the minister commit to removing the urgent and critical needs criteria and finally end the long wait times?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what I will commit to doing is continuing to fix the NDP mess in the disability space. You want to talk about cruelty? That was continuing to bring forth consecutive budgets with no indexation, no increases to the major disability alliance, and completely abandoning the disability community and, more shockingly, continuing to force those who are on AISH that want to participate in employment to be punished, to have their wages clawed back for their hard work. Again, on this side of the House we're proud to stand with the disability community, and we're proud to make programs that work for them and are the most generous and beneficial programs anywhere in this country.

Mr. Ip: Given that a broken PDD system leaves thousands of vulnerable Albertans in isolation at home, away from community, dreams fading, health declining, and a life squandered; given that in many cases PDD refuses to issue even a formal response to support requests so that applicants can appeal a decision; given that the system is clearly designed to make it harder, not easier, to access, which is cruel and unnecessary, does the minister actually believe that Albertans with intellectual disabilities deserve to live a life of dignity? If so, why does he refuse to act?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I very much believe that those with developmental disabilities deserve dignity and to be able to live a quality life here in the province. It's why I increased the NDP's budget when it came to personal developmental disabilities. It's why I have a \$3.6 billion line item in the social services budget to invest in the disability community. It's why we have the highest AISH payments anywhere in the country, and it's also why we're refocusing the health care system to be able to make sure that those who face disabilities are not punished as they enter the health care system like they were underneath the NDP government.

Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has a job to do, but instead of focusing on the programs that Albertans need, she'd rather pick fights instead of ensuring all Albertans have the opportunity to thrive. For six years this UCP government has outright abandoned Albertans living with disabilities when it comes to employment opportunities. The unemployment rate for Albertans with disabilities is nearly double compared to those without disabilities. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: what is your plan to provide pathways to employment for individuals with disabilities?

Mr. Nixon: I'm glad that question came up, Mr. Speaker, because as we brought forward our new Alberta disability assistance program to help individuals who want to go to work, we doubled our line item on employment supports for Albertans with disabilities. That's a significant investment against something the other side didn't do because secretly they don't want people to go back to work. We already know this from their other plans. Their plan is to continue to see Alberta suffer, not see us move forward. This side of the House fundamentally disagrees with it. That's why we invest in supports for Albertans with disabilities for employment as well as other supports.

Member Hoyle: Given that 81 per cent of youth with disabilities could join the workforce if they were provided the right supports and given that persons with disabilities directly contributed \$49.7 billion to Alberta's GDP and given that with a more inclusive job market nearly 143,000 Albertans with disabilities have work potential and given that these folks deserve every opportunity to prosper in good-paying jobs but they're getting no help from the UCP, why is the minister not taking the steps to make sure that Alberta has a more accessible job market?

2:30

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, this government has doubled the budget to be able to invest in supporting Albertans with disabilities as they enter the workforce and to support employers who are employing Albertans with disabilities. The great thing, our success in that space is over 80 per cent of individuals who go through that program remain employed. That's the difference between us and the NDP government. We are investing in quality programs that provide long-term success to Albertans. They want to continue with the status quo that has people on AISH not allowed to work. Shame on them for that.

Member Hoyle: Given that persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and less likely to be employed than other Albertans and given that supporting disabled Albertans to find work opportunities can reduce disability poverty and given that this UCP government has refused to put forward accessibility legislation that would support Albertans with disabilities to find meaningful employment, with no programs in place does this UCP government

even believe that Albertans with disabilities matter in the workforce?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we believe Albertans with disabilities matter very much, which is why we're investing \$3.6 billion. It's why we've increased PDD funding. It's why we've increased children with disabilities funding. It's why we've increased line items for employment supports, all of which I will point out the Official Opposition, the NDP, voted against. They voted against AISH increases. They voted against PDD increases. They voted against children with disability increases. They're all talk. They don't want to get to work, but rest assured, Albertans, through you, Mr. Speaker, the United Conservative Party is here. We're going to continue to fix the system and make sure Alberta is the best place in this country.

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

Alberta in Canada

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are exhausted by policies that undermine our industries and violate our constitutional rights. Recently, the leader of the Bloc Québécois said that there is no future for oil and gas. Over the last decade Ottawa's Liberal government and other leaders across Canada have consistently stifled Alberta's economy, blocking our energy sector from prospering, and they ignored Alberta's democratic decision in 2021 to renegotiate the equalization formula. Can the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance please share what our government has done in response to the equalization referendum?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Over the past 25 years Alberta has contributed over \$450 billion more taxes than the province received back in transfers and services. In 2023 Alberta proposed changes that would address the fairness and size of the equalization program. So far our concerns have not been acknowledged or addressed. That's why I was pleased to see that the Premier included it in her list of items for the federal government yesterday. It is something that's brought up at the FPT table, and there are allies at that table that also want to see...

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you. Given a sovereign Alberta must stand firm in order to unleash the potential of our resource and agricultural sectors, ensuring Albertans fully benefit from the wealth they create and given our Premier gave Mark Carney clear conditions to address western alienation within his first six months including repeal Bill C-69, the no more pipelines act, the tanker ban, the production cap, clean energy regulations, and net-zero mandates, to the Minister of Justice: how will our government ensure we are treated fairly in Confederation with the new Prime Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. Alberta must stand firm and protect ourselves against Ottawa's assault. Alberta's government will work in good faith with the new Prime Minister, but until we see tangible proof of change, the Premier has said that we will appoint a special negotiating team to represent Alberta in negotiations with the federal government on a number of reforms. While these negotiations are ongoing, our government will appoint and the

Premier will chair the Alberta Next Panel. Alberta will not accept any policies or political attacks aimed directly at Alberta's free economy. Full stop.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bouchard: Merci, M. le Président. Étant donné que les albertains ont entendu beaucoup de belles paroles sans voir d'action concrète de la part du gouvernement fédéral, qui dit vouloir les traiter plus justement, au même ministre : qu'est-ce que notre gouvernement va faire si Ottawa ne respecte pas les conditions fixées par notre Premier Ministre dans les six premiers mois et qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire que les albertains soient traités justement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Merci pour la question. As I said previously, we are taking action to ensure that the federal government does not continue its pattern of destructive legislation and policies that have ravaged our provincial and national economies this past decade. Albertans are more of an actions speak louder than words kind of people. We continue to do everything in our power to counteract Ottawa's chill on investment in this province in the energy, agricultural sectors, and other sectors through various tax cuts and incentive programs which greatly strain our provincial budget, but I'm confident that with the leadership of this Premier we will continue to represent our province in negotiations, stand up to Ottawa, and represent Albertans. Full stop.

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

Support for Wildfire-affected Vulnerable Albertans

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The wildfire season has begun in Alberta. Currently there are 17 active wildfires, with two listed as out of control. Local emergencies and evacuation alerts have already been declared, and it's only May 6. Wildfires can be terrifying for disabled Albertans who require mobility supports, medication, staff, and accessible accommodations. Can the minister explain what work is being done to ensure appropriate evacuation planning is being done to ensure disabled Albertans have access to information and all necessary supports to evacuate with ease?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier and the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Of course, any time we have a fire in the province of Alberta, certainly, it is a concern for Albertans. I can tell you that Alberta Emergency Management Agency has been working diligently with municipalities and First Nations all throughout this province, and I can tell you that regardless of the issue – whether it be fire or flood or whatever the emergency is that is coming towards the municipality – they have a plan in place to make sure that people get evacuated in, of course, due course. Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that wildfire evacuations pose significant financial strain, something most Albertans who receive AISH and PDD supports cannot afford, and given that the UCP does not triage financial supports based on income level, forcing everyone to pay upfront first, and given that financial impact to AISH recipients is high because they may require accessible accommodations, emergency medication, and

could also have service animals, can the minister tell the House what financial programs are being developed to support disabled Albertans who may be forced to evacuate?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the case of evacuation, I, as a minister, sit on the emergency cabinet committee. We are right there at the table, including with my deputy minister. One of the first things that we do is contact everybody on our clients rolls that are in that area, including AISH clients, PDD clients, and families with children with disabilities. We prioritize on accessibility and ability to be able to move those individuals and what their need may be, and we divert appropriate resources to be able to make sure that those people are able to evacuate with everybody else, at the same time as making sure that we have top-of-the-line evacuation payments to care for all families who are evacuating areas like fires.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given my question was about the fact that people on AISH may not have the funds to pay up front, I would like the minister to please clarify for the record what he is doing to support individuals who may need financial assistance up front when they are evacuating, and given that we are at the beginning of the wildfire season and given that these weather changes increase frequency and intensity of wildfire and given that the impact to air quality has significant impact on the quality of life for Albertans with respiratory conditions, to the minister: what work is being done to protect Albertans with respiratory conditions from deadly impacts of wildfire smoke?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member hasn't been part of the process so she may not know that evacuation payments aren't done by receipts; they're immediately given in cash to people that are evacuating areas to be able to make sure that they get their resources immediately.

Ms Sweet: They had to pay for their hotel on day one. I know.

Mr. Nixon: Despite the member yelling, that doesn't change the facts, Mr. Speaker.

Further to that, if there was somebody on AISH or on any type of social support that needed more supports in that moment, my department would immediately flow funds to make sure that they were kept care of during evacuations, just like we did in Jasper with no loss of life because we know what we're doing.

2:40 Accessibility of Sports and Recreation Facilities

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, Albertans living with disabilities deserve a government that works for them on their priorities instead of always picking endless fights. The Alberta Sports Hall of Fame is currently inaccessible to visitors living with disabilities, including para-athletes, effectively barring our own champions from this facility that is supposed to celebrate them. Why has this government failed to ensure accessibility in their sports facilities, and how will they rectify this error to ensure accessibility for all of our champions worthy of celebration?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Sport, the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member opposite for the good question. I think sport and accessibility is for everyone. I want to make sure that all Albertans have the ability to visit the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame and enjoy the illustrious and incredible record that we have of sports

accomplishments in this province. I will certainly be looking into this, and I'm happy to meet with that member offline as well to talk more about some of the concerns they have with regard to accessibility to the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame.

Ms Goehring: Given that Alberta is currently one of the only Canadian provinces without accessibility legislation and given that recommendations in support of all-encompassing law were included in a June 2023 report that this government failed to release to the public and given that disability advocates have since called for accessibility legislation, which would make sure that venues like the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, a public space, are indeed accessible, how much longer can one of the most vulnerable communities among us expect to wait before this government applies the recommendations they were given two years ago?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things we do on accessibility is that we actually make sure that of every unit of housing we build, 14 per cent has to be accessible. The federal government only calls for 10 per cent. Just another example where Alberta continues to exceed across the country because of the priority that we have with that.

I and the minister of sport just recently invested a significant amount of monies to the amp program in both Edmonton and Calgary, working with children both with disabilities and without disabilities to be able to go through the sledge hockey program and learn about disabilities, critical investments in that space. We're going to continue to do that, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs is working on inclusion legislation.

Ms Goehring: Given that inclusivity in sports is impossible if athletes can't even enter the doors of Alberta sports facilities, like the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, and given that the current lack of accessibility legislation from this government means our public spaces will remain inaccessible, how will the minister address the many glaring oversights in accessibility to ensure the inclusion and success of all athletes in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We regularly update the building codes for residences, for sports facilities, any public buildings. It's something we do as a regular thing, and when we find that a building is short, there is an inspection process. I'd sure be interested in the building that the member is talking about. It might be one of those cases where we've got to go back and force the issue, and we'll just be glad to do that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

That concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements (continued)

AISH Client Benefits

Member Tejada: I first met Kevin Sheikheldin following the UCP's cruel decision to change the AISH payment date in 2020. Kevin came to the Calgary-Mountain View office, where I was working, asking us to table a petition urging the UCP to reverse their bad decision. The UCP insisted for years that they changed the AISH payment date to help disabled people. The Auditor General made them reverse the decision as it wasn't in accordance with

public-sector accounting standards. Their incompetence continues to harm Albertans.

Kevin told me that she didn't expect her MLA's office to take her seriously. She's been dismissed by government officials before, including this current government. But our NDP MLAs actively listen to all constituents, not just the rich or connected ones. Kevin's petition was tabled, and, as they say, the rest is history.

Kevin is a person with a disability who receives AISH and wants to work when she is well, but work is not easy to find, especially for a disabled person. Kevin is kind, strong, and a fierce disability advocate, who is here with us today. Her mom passed away October 7 of last year. Life has been hard and more expensive since then, and she's had to move into a one bedroom. She's now in Calgary-Cross. Watch for her e-mail, Minister.

Kevin has a message for the Premier and her government today: "We need the extra money. It helps with rent, short notice for transportation on medical issues, fruit and vegetables, and allergen-free products. Taking the \$200 Canada disability benefit away from AISH recipients makes us feel like we don't matter. I want the government to know that we do matter."

Mr. Speaker, Kevin is only one of tens of thousands of Albertans with disabilities who need an extra \$200 per month to cushion the deep poverty they're in. It costs nothing to let them keep it, and it is not the UCP's right to have it.

Notices of Motions

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to SO 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a motion that is urgent and pressing and which my colleague read out under Notices of Motions.

The Speaker: This is Notices of Motions. You're about to read it now.

Member Arcand-Paul: Oh, sorry. Thank you.

I would like to acknowledge that pursuant to SO 42 I have provided the members of this ...

The Speaker: No. All you need to do is read me the motion, and then I'll call upon you in a few minutes.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I propose the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) recognize that Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 between the Crown and First Nations predate the creation of Alberta, (b) acknowledge that existing Aboriginal treaty rights are recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and are binding on federal and provincial governments, and (c) take all necessary steps to prevent a referendum on the independence of Alberta from Canada, which would be a clear breach of the government's treaty obligations.

The Speaker: Excellent. Grab a seat and we'll do the rest of that in just a couple of moments.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a tabling.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two today. The first is a letter from Joan, who writes about knee surgeries that require

overnight stays at the Royal Alexandra hospital and lack of access to those under the current government.

The second is from Shannen, and it's about the cuts to coverage for eye exams for seniors.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a letter from someone named Jennifer, and she asked me to table this. It's calling out the Premier for her hypocrisy when it comes to the Premier's past record in calling out Premier Redford, and she's urging this UCP government to do the right thing when it comes to the corrupt care scandal.

The Speaker: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a *Calgary Herald* article titled It No Longer Makes Sense for Alberta to Rely on the RCMP for Policing, highlighting a policy brief titled Reforming the RCMP: The Path Forward, to end provincial and municipal contract policing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, Edmonton-South.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a copy of an article, that I referenced in my member's statement, in the journal *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* entitled The Benefits of Inclusion: Disability and Work in the 21st Century, talking about modelling showing economic gains from inclusion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from a constituent who's a member of Inclusion Edmonton Region. He shared deep concerns over the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services' decision to terminate a portion of the Inclusion Alberta family initiatives grant and how detrimental that cut is to folks who live with disabilities.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite five copies of an article written in today's *Calgary Herald* by writer Rob Breakenridge, who quotes that "it's reckless and potentially counterproductive to be enabling separatists" while speaking about the Premier and goes on to say that she now owns the issue.

The Speaker: Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of a letter I referenced that my office is receiving talking about the rates of domestic violence rising and the severity is increasing as well as the lack of wages and staff burnout.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an e-mail from Janice Manchul, who describes the last few days of her deaf-blind mother's life in an inaccessible health care system.

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, I have the requisite number of copies of two different articles. The article from the *Edmonton Journal* on

November 8, 2016, says: AISH and Seniors Benefits Will Increase with Cost of Living in an NDP Bill.

I have another article from CBC dated November 4, 2019, People with Severe Disabilities Feel 'Duped' by Alberta Government, AISH Recipient Says, when the UCP actually deindexed the benefits . . .

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Minister LaGrange, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta 2023-24 annual report; pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board 2024 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 2 o'clock the government rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose at 2 o'clock on a point of order. At the time noted, the Member for St. Albert was making a number of comments at the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services during his answer and question period. At the time noted, the Member for St. Albert said, "Your incompetence and corruption are dangerous," accusing a government member or any member in good standing in this Chamber of corruption, which is a crime. It's not the first time that it's been done in this Chamber; actually, not the first time it's been done in the last couple of days, that the opposition has accused a government member of a crime. This certainly would rise to the point of order, in my opinion, of 23(h), (i), and (j). I suspect – again, just suspect – that this even got caught by the ambient mics because it was said so loud. I have a whole list of instances when the opposition have been ruled out of order for saying that the government was, in one way or another, incompetent or dangerous. I do believe that – I think this is a point of order, but I'll take your ruling.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: I apologize and withdraw.

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

Just for the overall edification of the House, in fact, those remarks were caught on *Hansard*. Some members have recently asked: why do all of the remarks close to the Speaker get heard and remarks far away don't get heard? That is largely because of the location of the ambient mics that assist *Hansard*. But rest assured that this summer, when the Assembly undertakes a renovation, there will be additional ambient mics for the benefit of the Speaker in the future.

That brings us to the second point of order at 2:12, I believe. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a true Conservative I think that I could help the LAO save some money by just simply suggesting we keep the microphone for the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on at all times.

But all kidding aside, hoping for a bit of levity this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: I rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), again for the same Member for St. Albert, again a remark made off the record.

The member was particularly verbose this afternoon off the record and in this instance said to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services, “[You’re] making stuff up.” You can’t do indirectly what you cannot do directly, Mr. Speaker. To suggest someone is lying, making stuff up, misleading the public, et cetera, et cetera, is inappropriate and would be considered, in my opinion, a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j), but, again, it’s certainly in your very capable hands.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Sure. Apologize and withdraw.

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

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: We are at Standing Order 42, where the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday earlier at Notices of Motion provided notice of his intention to move a Standing Order 42, which we’ll allow him to do now. He has five minutes to provide his remarks on urgency.

Alberta Separatism and First Nations Treaty Rights

Member Arcand-Paul:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) recognize that Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 between the Crown and First Nations predate the creation of Alberta, (b) acknowledge that existing Aboriginal treaty rights are recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and are binding on federal and provincial governments, and (c) take all necessary steps to prevent a referendum on the independence of Alberta from Canada, which would be a clear breach of the government’s treaty obligations.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to SO 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a motion that is urgent and pressing and which I read out under Notices of Motion moments ago.

I would like to acknowledge that pursuant to SO 42 I provided the members of the Assembly with the appropriate number of copies, and I provided your office notice of my intention to move this motion as well as notified the government.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak because treaty rights must be respected in this province. Let us be absolutely clear. Treaties 6, 7, and 8 were entered into long before Alberta became a province. These are not symbolic documents. They’re nation-to-nation relationships, binding constitutional obligations that define the very legal and moral foundation of this province, yet this government is entertaining a path to separation that tramples those very foundations. Just this afternoon the Premier held a press conference and stated that treaty chiefs have their own sovereignty on their own lands within a united Canada. That admission alone is proof that this province has no jurisdiction to impose a sovereignty or separation agenda on treaty lands. All of Alberta is treaty land.

Why then, Mr. Speaker, is this government still pushing a separation referendum under the guise of a citizen initiative? Yesterday the Premier tried to distance herself from this dangerous plan, but she didn’t cancel it. She didn’t disavow it. She simply hoped we wouldn’t notice that it’s still embedded in legislation, still written into the timeline, and still moving forward. The Premier cannot claim to respect treaty rights while simultaneously preparing to breach them as early as next year. She cannot pretend to care for Indigenous communities while ignoring the constitutional

requirement for consultation, consent, and recognition of their sovereignty.

Mr. Speaker, this is not just a legal oversight; it is a moral failure. The Premier has said that a referendum on separation wouldn’t require Indigenous consultation, that it is non-negotiable. This statement alone should set off alarms across this country because a referendum that ignores treaty rights is not only illegitimate; it’s unconstitutional. It disrespects the Crown-Indigenous relationship. It violates section 35 of the Constitution Act, and it endangers the stability of Alberta’s economy by threatening the very agreements that undergird resource development, land access, and the social contract in this province. Treaty rights are not an obstacle to be worked around. They are the very conditions that made Alberta’s prosperity possible and made this province exist.

First Nations leaders from treaties 6, 7, and 8 have been unequivocal just today. They have said that any move towards separation would be a direct violation of their rights and a breach of their treaties, and they’re ready to respond in kind. They are right. That’s why we’re calling on this government to take all necessary steps to prevent a referendum on Alberta’s secession, not pass laws to make it easier. This emergency motion is not about partisanship. It is about principle. If the Premier truly believes in reconciliation, then she must denounce separatism clearly, unequivocally, and immediately. She must commit to amending Bill 54 until full, meaningful consultation with First Nations has occurred because no government in this province has the right to tear up the treaties that define this land because treaties were entered into with the Crown.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is stronger when we respect treaty. Please grant unanimous consent. Let us do the right thing. Let us respect the treaties, and let us reject separatism before this government takes a step that cannot be undone. Hay-hay. Nanaskamon.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 allows a member of Executive Council up to five minutes to respond to the motion as proposed. The hon. the Government House Leader is rising.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to state unequivocally that our government is entirely committed to protecting, upholding, and honouring the inherent rights of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Any citizen-initiated referendum question must not violate the constitutional rights of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and must uphold and honour treaties 6, 7, and 8 should any referendum question ever pass. This is non-negotiable, and it is irresponsible for the NDP to suggest otherwise. For this reason, I would recommend that unanimous consent not be provided.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a request for unanimous consent to set apart the ordinary business of the Assembly for the remainder of the afternoon. As such, only one question is required. Is there anyone opposed to the motion? If so, indicate now.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: That means we are at Ordres du jour.

3:00

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

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I’d like to call the committee to order.

Bill 53 Compassionate Intervention Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I will recognize the Government House Leader.

Member's Apology

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief. The last time, I believe, we were debating this bill, we ended with remarks from the Member for Edmonton-West Henday. During his remarks I had misheard the member. I thought he had said that the hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction had perjured himself. Upon review of the video and *Hansard*, I was incorrect. I had told the member to his face that if I was incorrect, I would apologize. I do apologize and withdraw my incorrect interpretation of the member's remarks.*

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Chair: I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Currie to speak.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the brief period of time that we have today, we're going to be debating two amendments, that I look forward to putting forward. The first one here is on Bill 53, Compassionate Intervention Act.

The Deputy Chair: Just wait until we get the copy at the table.

Member Eremenko: You bet.

The Deputy Chair: The member may proceed. Read the amendment into the record, please.

Member Eremenko: Certainly. Sorry. Right from the top, Mr. Chair? The whole thing?

The Deputy Chair: Yeah. Please read the amendment into the record.

Member Eremenko: Okay. The Member for Calgary-Currie to move that Bill 53, the Compassionate Intervention Act, be amended by adding the following after section 93:

Review of Act

93.1 A committee of the Legislative Assembly must

- (a) within 3 years after the coming into force of this Act, begin a comprehensive review of this Act, and
- (b) within one year after beginning the review, submit to the Assembly a report that includes any recommendations for amendments to this Act.

Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to be able to stand in regard to Bill 53, the Compassionate Intervention Act. Goodness knows there is an awful lot of room for amendment, but I sincerely hope that the minister and the members opposite will be considerate of this amendment to essentially require a very fulsome review of the full implementation of the act after three years of it coming into force. The amendment is very much similar to an addition that was made in the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, that required a legislative review after five years with, similarly, a year in which to actually deliver the findings to the Legislature. It's very much in the spirit of that in which I put this amendment forward, and the reason being for a couple of points.

This, of course, is a brand new piece of legislation. Compassionate intervention, forced treatment, has never existed in regard to

substance use disorders in this province before, nor has it existed in most jurisdictions around the world. The Premier has said that even though there isn't any evidence that it doesn't work, there is no evidence that shows that it does, so the only way to find out is if we try. The only way to find out is indeed if we try, but actually the only way to find out at that point is if we effectively and objectively evaluate the program to see if it actually works. We can only say it works if we measure and evaluate the program by an agreed set of standards, Mr. Chair, and it really is in that spirit that I put this amendment forward. How will we know if it works if we don't evaluate?

Something that is so critical as taking away fundamental freedoms and rights from an individual, something as fundamental as a half billion dollar project to actually implement, requires, I would say, the most objective evaluation and measurement framework and process that we can possibly deliver. That is why we're suggesting that after three years of this act being sworn in, it be fulsomely evaluated by a committee of the Legislative Assembly.

Now, perhaps the minister may stand and say that this is what we have the Centre of Recovery Excellence for, but, Mr. Chair, I would argue that that is not sufficient. The Centre of Recovery Excellence, also known as CORE, is very much an arm of government. The opportunity for the minister to weigh in and to influence the kind of research and the findings of CORE would, I think, bring into question the quality of the findings of this review that we are putting forward today. That is precisely why we're asking for a legislative review. It has been done in the past, and I would certainly think that Bill 53, the Compassionate Intervention Act, would hit a threshold of requiring the utmost accountability and transparency.

The benefit of the legislative review as completed by a committee, very likely, probably, the Families and Communities standing committee, is that the findings would be recorded, the investigation fully recorded in *Hansard* and captured in transcripts for reference and accountability and transparency to the public. It would require recommendations that would come back for debate to in fact improve and enhance the Compassionate Intervention Act.

I don't want to presuppose the findings of an investigation nor, frankly, what the many, many issues that I personally hold and that so many stakeholders and Albertans hold when it comes to forced treatment, but, again, we're not going to know if we don't ask the questions, and we're not going to trust the answers to those questions if it is not done with the greatest of transparency and accountability to make a system better moving forward.

I think it's really important to note that forced treatment in Bill 53 is not a pilot project, Mr. Chair. For something that has so little evidence, there is no pilot plan here. The UCP has, very unfortunately I think, eliminated some incredibly effective pilot programs, particularly in regard to mental health and addiction, that, sadly, they have chosen not to continue despite overwhelming evidence that they have been effective, yet here we are going full tilt toward an incredibly costly and incredibly problematic program with very little evidence and no suggestion that this is going to be operational for a period of time by which we can fully evaluate and then decide whether or not it's going forward.

What this amendment seeks to do is bake in that requirement to evaluate, bake in that requirement to in fact report back on the effectiveness of the program, and I would certainly hope, if that review demonstrates that this has not, in fact, achieved what the Premier hopes it would, that we would have some very serious conversation about changing it in significant ways.

What we're looking to do, right at the very tail end, is establish the process by which it will be measured and evaluated. I think it raises a critical point that has already been borne out in the debate on forced treatment, which is how we actually evaluate whether or

*See page 3143, left column, paragraphs 5 and 7

not it works, quote, unquote. The very little research that currently exists on forced treatment does not evaluate voluntary versus involuntary treatment. It evaluates involuntary treatment versus no treatment at all.

Furthermore, whether or not it, quote, unquote, works depends on what it is that we're actually looking to measure. If we're actually looking for the program to reduce or eliminate substance use, there has been one study, Mr. Chair – one study – that shows that substance use actually went down following involuntary treatment.

3:10

Another measure, an indicator of whether or not there was actual impact achieved by the program, is around recidivism. Essentially, did a person's drug use following involuntary treatment result in further incarceration or re-entry back into the criminal justice system?

The UCP have made it very clear that this is not supposed to be a criminal justice lever. It's not a carceral lever. It's supposed to be about health care. Again, when we're actually evaluating whether or not forced treatment, quote, unquote, works, we have to decide and we have to agree upon and be incredibly transparent about what it is that we're measuring when we actually talk about it, quote, unquote, working or not.

I would argue that the minister has made it clear that recovery isn't abstinence. If we believe that this actually is trying to achieve what the government hopes it does, then I would expect that change in substance use would be a most fundamental indicator that we need to be evaluating and measuring very fulsomely and with the fullest of transparency by the Legislative Review Committee, that I have put forward in this amendment.

With that, I'll rest my case. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Members, the amendment as introduced by the Member for Calgary-Currie will be referred to as amendment A1. Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this thoughtful amendment from my colleague from Calgary-Currie. It would certainly be my hope that we would hear from some member of the government. It would certainly be my hope that we would hear from the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction on something so serious, related to a piece of legislation which will have profound impact on the lives of many Albertans.

Let us be absolutely clear, again, about what we are speaking about here today, Mr. Chair. This is legislation by which the minister intends to allow a decision of a tribunal on the recommendation of specific individuals from the community to take away an individual's free will in terms of their consent to treatment, to the administration of medication, to hold those people in confinement against their will.

This bill is being instituted with no plan for review, no legislated requirement for review. The only other piece of legislation, Mr. Chair, and what this legislation is looking to emulate, which affords that kind of power has a built-in mechanism requiring regular legislated reviews.

That is the standard in this province, Mr. Chair. The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, despite his claims that he put a great amount of thought into this legislation, despite the claims that he has put forward about putting in significant checks and balances, despite his claims that he has deep respect for the individual rights and constitutional rights of Albertans, has not built any such clause into this legislation requiring a legislative review.

Now, there is the opportunity to correct that, Mr. Chair. My colleague has brought forward a very thoughtful amendment. There

is nothing that should be controversial about this amendment. I cannot understand why any member of this House would object to what is already the process for the only existing legislation which has this level of power to abrogate the rights of any individual in the province of Alberta.

As my colleague ably noted, there is no evidence for this profound change that the minister is bringing in. There's no evidence it works. The minister said that there is no evidence that it does not work. Well, Mr. Chair, I think as legislators it is our responsibility to ensure that if we are going to pass a bill that will take away an individual's rights, that will say that the government has the right to have them forcibly confined and given treatment against their will, we would build in a process to ensure there would be a legislated process, not something that's handed off to a creature of government, not something that's handed off to a third party that the minister appoints the members of, but to an actual committee of the Legislature, as we have done with the Mental Health Act.

In fact, I have participated in that review, Mr. Chair. That is what we do as the elected representatives of Albertans. If we can stand here and pass this bill today – though I can say quite likely that our members are not going to be supporting this bill. If the minister is going to stand and say that he can pass this bill today with the support of members of this House, then the minister can stand and support an amendment to ensure that members of this House will review this bill, will review the evidence that comes forward with this bill. And if the minister cannot stand and do that, then I would question the minister's belief in his own legislation.

This is a moment of accountability, Mr. Chair. This is one of the most profound pieces of legislation this government has brought forward so far: the rights it will take away from Albertans, what it will impose on these Albertans. They owe it to those Albertans to have a legislated process for a legislated review. Nothing else is good enough for the power this government is about to try to take, should they pass this legislation.

That is why I support this amendment, and I certainly hope that the members of government or at least the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, whose legislation this is, could at least have the courage to speak to the amendment and certainly to vote for it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill. Any members wishing to provide comment or question? The Member for Calgary-Currie has risen.

Member Eremenko: Let's try another one, shall we? I look forward to hearing some thoughts from the opposite side in terms of what I think is yet another thoughtful, substantive amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: This amendment will be referred to as amendment A2.

The member can proceed. Read it into the record.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Member for Calgary-Currie to move that Bill 53, Compassionate Intervention Act, be amended by striking out section 17(1)(b)(vi).

Mr. Chair, it is with great consideration that we read Bill 53 line by line, word by word to identify ways that we could make a very concerning piece of legislation just a little bit better. I think this is ultimately the job that we all have when we come into this room

every day, to speak on behalf of the good folks that we represent, whether they voted for us or otherwise, to do the important work of putting forward legislation that makes our communities better, that makes our communities safer, and that ultimately delivers on the promise that the legislation is meant to do, on the mandate that the legislation is meant to do.

3:20

I mean, I heard some laughter on the other side when my colleague mentioned that we would not be supporting Bill 53, but that is not for lack of trying to make the bill a little bit better. I don't think anything about Bill 53 and forced treatment is a laughable matter. This should be dealt with with the greatest of consideration, given what it proposes to do, given the power that it places in the hands of people to make decisions on behalf of others.

This particular amendment that we've put forward is what I again think is a good amendment, Mr. Chair. I certainly hope that we can have some members opposite speak to it and give us some of their thoughts and consideration on what it's all about. Let me get into what it is that we're looking to improve here on Bill 53, that being that section 17, for my friends opposite, lays out the individuals who are permitted to submit an application for apprehension. These are broadly family members, some identified health care professionals, and then police and peace officers, who may go online, submit an application for review, that will basically manifest in an apprehension order to have somebody picked up by police and peace officers, held for up to 72 hours before they are actually provided with an assessment on their substance use disorder to determine if it hits a particular threshold, that they can be detained for three months, six months, three plus six months, or any iteration thereof. It is incredibly serious. We are talking about a group of folks who are potentially incredibly vulnerable, maybe even more vulnerable, I would add, by an apprehension that is done without the greatest of care and consideration.

The health care providers that are listed in section 17, Mr. Chair, those individuals who can actually initiate an application, saying, "This individual sitting across from me has a substance use disorder that is serious enough that I'm going to make the challenging decision to seek their apprehension under the Compassionate Intervention Act" – and I would add that from what I have heard in many dozens of conversations with health care providers, that is never a decision that is made lightly. Community treatment orders and apprehension under the existing Mental Health Act is taken with more gravity than I can even describe. It's enacted with sometimes moral injury, with trauma, and sometimes in real violation to the professional code of ethics that individuals sign up for. It is not an easy decision to make.

Compassionate intervention, forced treatment, is giving the authority to a nurse, a physician, a psychologist, all of whom are regulated members of their, you know, appropriate college; a social worker, a regulated member in good standing with the Alberta College of Social Workers; a paramedic, a regulated member in good standing with the Alberta College of Paramedics; and then the sixth professional category, Mr. Chair, is addictions counsellors. It's addictions counsellors that I am asking for the members opposite to consider striking from Bill 53, the reason being that addictions counsellors are not regulated. For two years I have been playing this record over and over again, asking the UCP why they insist on dragging their feet on regulating addictions counsellors, counselling therapists, and child and youth care counsellors. They made some progress on counselling therapists, I will say that, though we haven't actually seen anything substantive from that. There was an announcement a while ago, March last year, but never any movement on addictions counsellors.

Let's recap. Here is a profession that – yes, there are addictions counsellors out there, Mr. Chair, who call themselves addictions counsellors, who have gone to college – typically, it's a two-year diploma program – and they are equipped and trained with some pretty basic skills around how to support someone with substance use disorders. But there is absolutely no requirement that an addictions counsellor has anything more than an online, week-long training session, yet we are granting them the authority to submit an application for someone to be put away for what could amount to nine months or more based on, potentially, the flimsiest of education and professional rigour.

They are not regulated, Mr. Chair, so there is no accountability to their profession. There are no kind of public safety assurances that addictions counsellors are operating with integrity and to the greatest of their abilities. There is no kind of check and balance to ensure that they are not overreaching or overestimating or overrepresenting what their skill sets actually equip them to do. Yet we are literally putting the authority in their hands to lock somebody up for their substance use disorder, a substance use disorder that very often exists in concurrence with significant mental health issues.

We have people with good credentials, with reliable regulations, whose minimum standards of practice Albertans can count on for safety and security and quality of care – nurses, physicians, psychologists, social workers, paramedics – well-trained, transparent, accountable to the public good. And then we have addictions counsellors: no regulations, no minimum standards, no controls over who can call themselves an addictions counsellor or not.

I will use this opportunity once more to make reference to a practitioner in Grande Prairie, who calls themselves an addictions counsellor only after they lost their medical licence because of inappropriate practice with a client who had substance use disorder. Currently there is absolutely nothing in Alberta that prevents that person from continuing to practise to the scope that they believe they are capable of providing. It is a disservice to the other professions in section 17. It is a disservice to the spirit of the bill, and I certainly look forward to hearing from the minister to hear justification on why we would include addictions counsellors.

I strongly encourage the minister opposite and members to consider this amendment. It is small. It is three words, Mr. Chair, but in their strike out, we are in fact assuring a little modicum of improved service, safety, and security for the people who are going to be most impacted by Bill 53.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to provide comment on amendment A2? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to this amendment because, frankly, this needs to be debated. This is not an idle change brought forward simply for the sake of wasting time in this Assembly. This is not about frivolous opposition. Again, what we are debating here today is likely one of the most profound pieces of legislation that I've seen on the floor of this place since I was elected 10 years ago. But, unfortunately, no member of the government, including the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction himself, whose bill this is, seems willing to speak to it, seems willing to consider any change to what they have brought forward, even a thoughtful amendment such as this one brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Currie.

As she noted, Mr. Chair, we have a list of individuals who have the ability to start the process, to tip the first domino in a process, a system that could lead to an individual being forcibly held against their will, being administered medications and given treatment against their will. These individuals, aside from direct family,

which again is in line with what we have seen in the Mental Health Act, all of the people that are listed here, all of the professions that are listed here except for one, are regulated.

3:30

Now, what does that mean, Mr. Chair, that a profession is regulated? If a profession is regulated it means it is governed by a provincial or territorial or sometimes a federal law. It's controlled by a regulatory body. It requires licensing or certification to practice. The existence of the regulatory body: that's important. That regulatory body ensures competence and ethical conduct to protect the public interest. Often that's done by setting very specific standards, which are codified and publicly available.

A registered nurse can make this application. If I want to know what the requirements are for someone to serve as a registered nurse, what their ethical requirements are, what the standards are that they are held to in their profession, I can go to that website for that regulatory body and I can read it. If I want to know the process by which I could make a complaint against a registered nurse for failing to live up to those standards set by their regulatory body, I can go and I can read it.

I can go to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, a regulatory body which protects Albertans, a regulatory body which some members of this House have held meetings where they were called pedophiles. But despite those members' disrespect of that profession, we know that regulatory body is in fact an honourable one. That college serves to protect Albertans by ensuring that physicians and surgeons in this province are held to standards and a code of practice. I can do the same for a psychologist, a social worker, and a paramedic.

Those are people who can start this process, Mr. Chair. But I cannot do so for an addictions counsellor, despite the fact that we began that process during the time we were in government, began the work to stand up a regulatory college which would have embraced addictions counsellors, given them that support. Let's be clear. When you regulate a profession, it is not just about protecting the public. It is about supporting the individuals in that profession to have the trust of the public.

In my role as a shadow minister for public safety I have spoken about this many times. I support and respect the work that this government is doing to improve the oversight process for police in the province because when we have good, robust processes of accountability and transparency in place, that means that helps support those individuals who have significant responsibility to maintain the trust of the public and to be able to do their work well.

There are no such supports for addictions counsellors in this province. As my colleague ably noted, as a result there are no standards for addictions counsellors in the province of Alberta. They could have a small degree from a community college, less than a year, perhaps, of training. They could simply be someone that was hired off the street into the position of an addictions counsellor, no formal education or training, but they've been given that title.

Under this minister's legislation that individual will be allowed to make an application that could start the process by which somebody could end up in forcible confinement, being given medical treatment against their will. In my view, Mr. Chair, that is far too low a bar. Far, far too low. It would be my hope that the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction might rise and speak to why he feels that is an acceptable standard, that somebody for which there is no regulation, there are no formalized requirements for training, for which there are no standards, should wield that kind of power.

This is a government, Mr. Chair, that talks about wanting to protect people from the abuse of power. They speak very loudly about the Constitution, they speak very loudly about their rights as a government and having accountability and having those standards in place and demanding their rights under that, but in this case they are empowering individuals for whom there is no consensus on what their training or experience is, where there is no regulation that holds them accountable for their work.

I don't find that acceptable, Mr. Chair. I find that deeply concerning. I think it betrays a significant flaw in this legislation, and I thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-Currie for bringing something forward to correct it.

This is an important consideration in terms of protecting Albertans within this system. Even if you believe that this is an appropriate process to put in place, that there will be appropriate times when an individual should be forcibly apprehended, held against their will, and given medical treatment without their consent, I would hope that you would want to see very robust standards and nothing less than a regulated profession being allowed to make the application to trigger such a profound and impactful process.

That is why I will be supporting this amendment. I certainly look forward to hearing from the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction or any member of this government about why they would or would not support such a thoughtful move.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction has risen.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you. I appreciate the vigorous debate here on Bill 53, Compassionate Intervention Act, a bill I brought forward, especially around this piece. I'll make a short comment on it.

I think the members opposite would be aided by an understanding that the same section they're looking to amend, section 17(1)(a), has somebody who has no formal training, who has been given that title and no requirement for particular regulation. It's "an adult family member of the individual who is the subject of the application, including a person applying to be designated as a family member under section 18." What this says is that guardians or parents can apply. These are not individuals with medical training, these are not individuals that are regulated, but they are the ones intimately and immediately closest to the trauma and chaos that exists because of that addiction that is likely to cause a danger to themselves or others within a reasonable amount of time.

Mr. Chair, there are a number of regulated health professionals that are not included. You know, midwives and massage therapists are not intimately and closely related to the addiction crisis, and they are not well suited to be the ones making the application. There are some regulated health professionals that are; there are some members in our community that are not. That includes parents and adult family members. Of course, they should be integrated into this closely.

I think it's very clear why we included addiction counsellors in the section because they are intimately related to this crisis, to those individuals that are being shepherded through what is a difficult time in addiction to get them into recovery. So it's not a question of whether or not they are officially regulated. No parent is necessarily regulated by any profession, and God willing it never happens that a college has to oversee you. It's a title that's given by circumstance of fate and your choice to raise a child and to love that child.

I think that that obviously should not be stricken, just as we shouldn't be striking and keeping addiction counsellors out of the ability to start the application, which is the second point. It's a

catalyst and an initiation of the process. I want to remind members that the decision-making power lies in section 45(3), and, of course, the panel makeup of who decides this has nothing to do with section 17. It has to do with section 41(2), “a care plan hearing panel must include a lawyer . . . who will be the chair of the panel, a physician member, and a [member of the public].” That is where the decision-making is made.

Any number of frivolous and vexatious cases could be launched by anyone, including health professionals or family members, and they will be sorted out with rigorous and robust protections for the civil liberties, of course, while also trying to address the crisis at hand in that individual’s life.

With that, Mr. Chair, I ask that we vote against this amendment.

Member Eremenko: Perhaps the minister had received correspondence from the registered psychiatric nurses of Alberta, who wondered about maybe just an involuntary omission, just a mistaken omission, about why they wouldn’t be included.

Mr. Chair, we are not talking about physiotherapists and midwives. We are talking about regulated professions who are intimately involved in the decisions of their patient. Patient relationships are incredibly different from that of a family member, a spouse, a parent, a grandparent. To suggest that addictions counsellors know as much or as little as the family member that has been caring for that individual since they were a babe, that it is the same thing, is outrageous. It should be an offence to every single one of those family members who are desperate for a solution.

3:40

For the minister to suggest that the addictions counsellor has the same capacity, care, consideration for the future of that individual as the family member should raise some significant concerns for every single family member who has been strung along in believing that the Compassionate Intervention Act is the only thing that will save or could have saved their child.

They are in different sections for a reason because there are different considerations to be made by family members for their loved one versus a paramedic or an addictions counsellor. I would wager that their expertise about that person that they have known their entire life is a whole lot more than the addictions counsellor could ever have. We should never diminish the input that that family member is looking to have in the well-being of their loved one.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A2 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The Minister for Mental Health and Addiction has risen.

Mr. Williams: It’s been an important debate, one that I know we’ll continue. I can’t wait to respond to the comments made by members opposite. But we will be asking this government to adjourn debate on Bill 53 and continue with other legislation. Of course, we will be bringing back Bill 53 for further debate.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 52

Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to provide comments, questions, or amendments to Bill 52? The Member for Calgary-Glenmore has risen.

Ms Al-Guneid: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak on Bill 52. But before I do that, I do want to thank the Minister of Affordability and Utilities for leading the work on this bill. It’s hard to lead the redesign of the electricity market. There are many stakeholders and conflicting interests, so that part I do acknowledge is hard. I do want to thank the minister for his kindness and openness to answering all my questions on this work during budget estimates and in general.

Bill 52. For starters there is a jumble of things in this bill. There’s a bit on the restructured energy market, there’s a bit on hydrogen blending, there’s a bit on the rate of last resort, and then there is this random expansion of the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission board from seven to 13 members. It is a random addition. I’m very curious why the government had to add all this to an electricity bill.

Let’s start with the things I agree with the minister on. I do recognize the innovation in hydrogen blending to reduce emissions. I encourage the government to ensure the proper safety protocols when introducing hydrogen into existing gas infrastructure. While using hydrogen blending can be a cost-effective way to decarbonize, it may not be the most efficient in the long run because of the small amount of blending taking place here for safety. We’re talking about 5 per cent blending, a maximum of 20 per cent. So I do encourage the minister to look at every tool in the tool box to scale up emission reduction.

Now, I do agree with the minister that we need market reform. I have said this in last year’s budget estimates, this year’s budget estimates, and I say it again here today. We do need to modernize our grid and market to meet the future electricity demand with all types of energy, especially if we’re trying to attract data centres and bring more investments to Alberta. Let’s not forget that our grid was designed initially for coal generation mainly, but now we have natural gas, renewables, hydro, energy storage, and more. We do need a diversity of energy sources on the grid to make our grid more reliable.

The key here is redundancy, Mr. Chair. Redundancy helps with reliability, and all sources of energy need backups. We have seen with the near blackout situations that two gas plants failed, and it was a cold, bitter night, so we had low wind and, obviously, no sun at midnight. So whatever restructured energy market we end up having, it has to provide reliable, affordable, and low-emissions electricity for Albertans. This new market has to be an investable market.

Now, it has been over 18 months of deliberations on the restructured energy market with electricity stakeholders. I have to share with the Assembly that there has been an immense sense of confusion and uncertainty in our market. On a high level the government has thrown a lot of market features and distortions in this restructured energy market all together at the same time, which has confused the electricity market participants. The government has been throwing ideas out there and then walking them back and throwing some more new ideas: let’s just throw everything and see what works.

I’m going to say that to date the minister walked back the day-ahead commitment and the congestion avoidance market, and it’s not that I have a preference or a specific liking for any of these features. I’m talking about the pattern of throwing a few ideas at the sector then walking ideas back. Respectfully, what has been walked back represents the mass, the vast majority of the restructured energy market, and importantly it represents a hundred per cent of

the consumer-focused initiatives of the restructured energy market. To be clear, the consumers are Albertans.

What we're left with is simply the old market design with a 300 per cent increase of the price cap and a 100 per cent increase of the AESO's budget, evident from fancier offices from which to manage this gold-plated market. This seems like an excellent deal for the power companies that own the majority of the market. They get less competition thanks to the UCP's moratorium on renewables and the UCP's new punishing regulations on renewables, they get more market power thanks to the massive merger between generators, and now, thanks to the new market's higher price cap, we will see more economic withholding.

Now, since the government and the minister backtracked many of the market features they put forward, are they going to also backtrack on increasing the budget of the AESO? That's the system operator. With the market redesign the system operator's budget has doubled. It increased from \$51.6 million to \$109.3 million. You know, we understand now from budget estimates that the AESO is saying that with the new market design it requires more experts, more staff, more software, and more resources. How does the minister of affordability plan to make this market design affordable for Albertans? The REM, or the restructured energy market, is projected to increase costs not only for the AESO but will also increase costs for Albertans. So now is he going to decrease the AESO's budget since he has now backtracked a lot of the market features?

Let's not forget that the AESO is completing a corporate office move in Calgary downtown, and it's costing Albertans and taxpayers \$9.3 million just to move chairs and desks across the street. I just want to emphasize that the AESO's expenses are ultimately recovered from consumers, that is you and I, Albertans. Conservatives are fond of saying that there's only one taxpayer, but now they're trying to wiggle out of the accountability for the AESO's wild and rising costs by claiming that it will be paid by power consumers, not taxpayers. But taxpayers are power consumers, aren't they, Mr. Chair? What other costs are in this \$9 million moving bill? I certainly hope there are no Oilers box seats in this.

3:50

Now, I want to take a moment to say that this bill expands the definition of ancillary services, and it makes it more vague. To be clear, so we're all on the same page, ancillary services refers to the functions that are beyond basic generation and transmission essential for maintaining a stable and reliable power grid. Section 17 of Bill 52 makes the ancillary services scope a broader category, and it also places a broad mandate for the system operator to procure ancillary services. Why is this definition so broad and vague? Now, we absolutely need ancillary services for reliability – there's no question – but the government needs to define what that means so investors understand what they're working with here. Is this battery storage? Is this a contract with natural gas, nuclear? What are we talking about?

Section 41 of Bill 52 allows the minister to make regulations to specify ancillary services. With all due respect, no minister should hold this power at their office. This is a technical question. This is a lot of power centralizing and across different bills we've seen this session, like Bill 45 yesterday, which also wants the UCP ministers and the government to own oil and gas emissions data. Now, why is the AESO allowed to have a stake in generation and transmission and storage? For decades Alberta's electricity market has been based on the concept of a fair and open competition, so why is the regulator owning a stake here?

With this bill we have power centralization with the minister, we have a bloated AESO budget, and we have market uncertainty and confusion, that the industry has experienced in the last 18 months

dealing with this market redesign. But, Mr. Chair, my biggest challenge right now with this bill – I shared this with the minister at estimates – is the removal of our checks and balances in this market design process. Why is the minister deciding to bypass the oversight of the Alberta Utilities Commission in order to pass the initial rules to implement the restructured energy market? Removing the regulatory checks and balances by skipping the AUC oversight is extremely problematic, especially with the power concentration at the minister's office, and back-loading just means that the prospective investors cannot trust the market design until a year after the market is already running.

The minister chooses to give himself and his government more powers and more concentrated powers by skipping the commission hearings. The minister's mandate specifically notes that the AUC operates independently of government to ensure "fair and competitive market operations." What message does bypassing the commission send to the investor community, Mr. Chair? Does the minister fully recognize that skipping the AUC process will introduce significant risks to market confidence and long-term affordability and system reliability?

Can the minister confirm whether his UCP government are a hundred per cent comfortable to bypass the independent AUC regulatory review to ensure that these new rules are fair, transparent, and aligned with the long-term interests of Alberta's electricity consumers? Generally, is the minister anticipating that skipping the AUC oversight could open up the province to possible lawsuits from stakeholders, investors, and companies who might challenge the new rules, especially that the rules will not be tested and validated through the AUC oversight and public hearings?

We have heard in the Legislature in the Premier's sovereignty act motion that the Premier wants to launch, possibly, a Crown power company to pick and choose her favourite energy types. What is the minister's backup plan if the Premier creates a Crown corporation in our energy-only market, especially right now with this whole flirtation with the idea of separation from Canada?

Mr. Chair, really, to be clear, the system operator's job is to ensure our system is reliable. The commission's job is to protect the broader public interest, to validate, to test this market with experts, and to ensure due process is taken and it's fair and it's in Albertans' interest. The minister chooses to consolidate the power at his office and bypasses all the checks and balances here.

Now, interestingly, through the restructured energy market in Bill 52 the minister and the government will be tripling the price offer cap to \$3,000, which is an interesting move because all I can think of, Mr. Chair, is the impact of this new price cap on economic withholding. My question to the minister is: given that he's tripling the price offer cap, would he triple the stringency of the market power mitigation he put last summer? How will he protect Albertans from the exercise of market power? These rules not only impact Albertans but investors who want to put money in our province.

Is the minister aware that the AESO commissioned an expert report by E3 Consulting to present an independent assessment of the design? Does he know that the expert report, which is on the AESO's website, if you're interested, expects wind and solar projects to become uneconomic under one of the minister's draft rules? Is he revisiting this important technical report to ensure that the market remains fair and competitive for all types of energy? That's the question.

Mr. Chair, I would say that Texas and Alberta have a lot of similarities. We're both big oil and gas producers, we both have market-based electricity grids that are free of some layers of regulation found in most other jurisdictions, and we are both electricity islands with minimal connections, that is interties, to our neighbours. These are the pipelines to export and import electricity. Yet while Texas is rapidly

expanding their renewable power options as well as battery storage, Alberta is putting up roadblocks against the same technologies, including through its own new market design.

Because of the threat of U.S. tariffs, Alberta needs to strengthen the electricity market and improve its policies to attract investment, create jobs, and create new opportunities. Our biggest trading partner is becoming our biggest threat right now, so why is the government against the expansion of all types of Canadian energy and energy security? Why? It is unforgivable, Mr. Chair. We need to bring all these investments, all types of investments to our province, especially with an aggressive neighbour like Trump. We need to reform the electricity market, we need to keep our checks and balances, and we need to bring all types of energy projects to this province.

There are so many issues with this bill and with the restructured energy market. It needs to stay fair and competitive for all types of energy and technology, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Any other members? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and offer some thoughts on Bill 52. I want to focus my comments on the sections of this bill that deal with hydrogen. The Gas Distribution Act and the Gas Utilities Act are both being amended to allow for increased use of hydrogen gas in gas distribution systems here in the province of Alberta.

I think we need to be realistic about the potential for hydrogen as an alternative fuel. There are significant economic and technical challenges that need to be overcome before it can be adopted widely for uses in residential and commercial heating, but fortunately the scientists at the University of Alberta are on the case and are working diligently on a number of research projects that aim to reduce the energy required and the costs involved with the production of hydrogen.

4:00

I want to highlight a couple of research projects in my comments today. Scientists at the University of Alberta have devised an innovative method to split water into hydrogen and oxygen using sunlight, urea, and nanowires. This could potentially transform the way we produce hydrogen fuel, making it a more viable and sustainable alternative to fossil fuels. By eliminating the need for expensive electrolysis, this technique promises to be more efficient and cost-effective, paving the way for a cleaner energy future.

At the heart of this innovation is a process of splitting water molecules using sunlight. The team, led by Dr. Karthik Shankar, employs a novel approach that utilizes carbon nitride, a material that absorbs sunlight and then energizes its electrons. This process involves a chemical transformation called thermal condensation polymerization – there will be a test for MLAs at the conclusion of my remarks – where urea is converted into carbon nitride. When sunlight hits this material, it excites the electrons, creating electron-hole pairs. These pairs are crucial for the subsequent reactions that produce hydrogen and oxygen gases.

To prevent the recombination of these electron-hole pairs, titanium dioxide is introduced. This material forms a junction with carbon nitride, effectively keeping the electrons and holes separated long enough to react with water molecules. The electrons interact with protons to produce hydrogen gas while the holes react with hydroxylamine to release oxygen gas. This technique not only leverages abundant and low-cost materials but also minimizes

energy loss, which is a significant drawback of traditional water splitting methods.

One of the standout features of this method is its ability to harness diffuse sunlight, meaning it can work on cloudy days and doesn't rely on direct sunlight. This capability is achieved through the use of nanowires that capture sunlight from various angles, making the system more versatile and efficient.

Another significant advantage is the elimination of large storage batteries. The hydrogen gas produced serves as the energy storage medium, allowing for easy transport and use. By using materials like urea, which is inexpensive and widely available – Mr. Chair, you might be asking, “Where can I find urea?” and I won't go into the details, but I will say that we have urea production facilities right here at hand on our desks – it means that the process can be both more environmentally friendly and economically viable. This breakthrough could accelerate the transition to clean energy, reducing the reliance on fossil fuels and decreasing carbon emissions globally. This approach has tremendous potential for global energy independence, meaning that countries can harness their resources that they have at hand for clean energy production.

Now, the team is busy at work exploring the use of melamine as an alternative to urea as well as adapting the production techniques to methanol, which would broaden the technique's applicability.

One of the other projects that I wanted to highlight is another team of researchers at the University of Alberta who have developed a new catalyst that could revolutionize how we generate power and purified water. Now, when placed in any type of water and provided with a small amount of power, this catalyst produces hydrogen that can be fed into a fuel cell to generate electricity along with distilled water that is safe to drink.

This catalyst was discovered almost entirely by chance when Robin Hamilton was creating an electrode for an undergraduate student working on a waste biomass upcycling project. He mixed up a combination of powders and allowed them to sit overnight in water, intending to finish the cell the following day. When he returned in the morning, the mixture was bubbling, a reaction that was extremely out of the ordinary. Robin Hamilton said that “it ends up being that when you mix these [two things] together, they interact, they work together and hydrogen comes off.” They were floored by this discovery.

Robin Hamilton is a senior research associate in the department of chemistry at the University of Alberta. He consulted with chemistry professors Jeff Stryker and Jonathan Veinot, sharing the unexpected discovery and drawing on their respective expertise. The team quickly realized that they had something remarkable on their hands. The specific combination of powders could serve as a new type of catalyst. The catalyst that they've created is made with material that is nontoxic and plentiful. Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, the article that I read about this doesn't divulge what the catalyst materials are specifically, so I guess we'll have to wait for more details to be provided, but it makes an affordable and accessible alternative to current catalysts that are on the market, which require materials that are expensive and in limited supply.

What's interesting about these catalysts is that they can be used with any type of water, another factor that gives it an edge over current ways to generate hydrogen such as conventional water electrolysis. As we know, there's a scarcity of potable water, and that's one of the biggest obstacles to achieving widespread adoption in creation of hydrogen gas. With this particular catalyst, you don't need potable water. You can take something that's dirty, that's undrinkable and generate hydrogen and electricity in a fuel cell. You could turn, for example, oil sands tailings ponds into usable fuel while purifying water, which sounds almost too good to be true, Mr. Chair.

Another benefit of this catalyst is that it transforms what's typically an energy-intensive process into something that can be achieved with far lower temperatures and less energy input. The new catalyst-driven process also results in little oxygen, making it less volatile than current methods. When using a hydrogen fuel cell, the most common method to generate hydrogen is through water electrolysis. That process splits water into hydrogen and oxygen, separating them, and then recombines them in the fuel cell to generate electricity. This can be an explosive mixture, Mr. Chair, so if you have to separate them, that needs to be done safely. With this method that was developed by the University of Alberta, they sequestered the oxygen without the use of expensive membrane separators that are normally used and can generate the hydrogen and have it go directly into the fuel cell. You don't have to separate it.

Now, Dr. Veinot, who was involved with this project, provides this example. He says: "Think about having your garden hose providing you with water that can be converted, basically, on demand to the fuel that you want. It takes away transport; it takes away storage; it takes away negative explosive possibilities." I don't think explosive possibilities are anything that anybody in this House desires.

The researchers are looking to craft off-grid devices that could help remote communities or aid in disaster relief when access to natural gas and potable water is an issue. They're envisioning an all-in-one system that is relatively compact and easy to use. They kind of compare it to a SodaStream system, but instead of getting a fizzy drink at the end, you end up powering your house, Mr. Chair.

Those researchers have spun off a company and are seeking to commercialize it, and I think it's very interesting to highlight this research at the University of Alberta, Mr. Chair, just because we have a lot of important work that's going on in our universities that can serve to advance humanity, potentially reduce some of the economic and technical barriers that prevent widespread adoption of hydrogen fuels, and it's really a shame that this government is putting up so many barriers to the smart and hard-working people at places like the University of Alberta by cutting their operational funding, blocking federal funding for research and infrastructure.

If the government is serious about promoting hydrogen as a fuel, they need to be investing in research like this, so I just highlight these interesting research projects as a way to encourage the government to continue supporting fundamental science at the University of Alberta to keep humanity advancing.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for some interesting and very thoughtful comments about hydrogen. In large part I do agree. This bill doesn't cover the funding of those kind of things, nor does my ministry, but I do agree that we have to allow for innovation for hydrogen to continue to develop within this province. We are global leaders. More hydrogen is developed in Alberta than any other province in Canada. We're very proud of that, and we expect to be a huge part of the global market. This bill helps take another step forward; it is technology agnostic to allow for that innovation to continue to evolve and develop.

4:10

I, too, went to the U of A and saw that incredible demonstration. I think it's fantastic technology. I'd love to see it commercialized so that it can be implemented, through this bill, into homes all across Alberta in a safe way.

A couple more thoughts on that. Within this bill we are trusting the Canadian Standards Association on levels of blending for safety; that is, upholding safety principles that are the very highest regard of our government and ministry to make sure that Albertans are safe no matter what they choose to use as fuel within their homes and businesses.

It is also allowing choice while protecting affordability. For those who want to take steps forward to reduce their emissions, this is one very innovative new way to do that, and they do that with full knowledge and choice, which we believe is a principle that Albertans would love.

Going from there, I'd like to go back to address some of the comments from the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I think there's an interesting debate to be had there. Bill 52 at its core is about reliability. This is the difference in our approach than the NDP when they were in government, when they did the rapid change off of coal. That cost Albertans \$2 billion to make that change. Not only that; it instantly doubled the price of electricity because natural gas at the time was double the cost of coal. They did that without thought, and they did that without realizing the long time it would take to pay that off. Albertans are still paying that and will pay for another five years. Literally, nearly \$100 million a year to pay for that transition which was rushed.

The other consequence of making that change is they opened the doors wide open to renewables without considering the unique characteristic of renewables, which is intermittency, and that intermittency really matters. What they did to guarantee that renewables would come is they offered, through the renewable energy program, contracts to generators of wind and solar. This year, for instance, while we have achieved very low prices for electricity generation, averaging somewhere between \$20 and \$30 a megawatt, or 2 or 3 cents a kilowatt, the Alberta taxpayers are having to pay these generators a top-up charge to their contract agreements' price per kilowatt hour, which is somewhere between 7 cents or 9 cents a kilowatt hour. That is costing Albertan taxpayers over \$70 million just this year.

Great. We finally made it. We are saving ratepayers money on their utility bills, but because of contracts signed by the NDP, the taxpayers have to pay them to get up to that cost. It's just some of the lack of foresight they had when they were setting up these programs. They didn't understand our system and what intermittency would actually do to our industry.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

It's also why we have to ask our AESO, the Alberta Electric System Operator, to procure more ancillary services to bring back that reliability. If there's an additional cost for that, it's because we have so many renewables in our marketplace causing such volatility that we have to find different ways to stabilize the electricity within our grid so that it is there when and where we need it, whether it's a cold winter day or a hot summer day or anywhere in between, when some of our dispatchable generation isn't online.

I'd like to address the comment about how we've removed all the checks and balances. In fact, we've removed none of those. What we have done is we've asked the AUC to review it after we've made all the decisions about our restructured electricity market so that we're basing their review on actual data and evidence, not forecasts and assumptions. Every industry participant is making different assumptions as would impact their business. We've asked them to do that review when we have all the facts in front of us. The AUC agrees this is the way to go forward, the AESO agrees this is the way to go forward, and it helps us move forward in a timely manner so we can get the decisions made that Albertans expect us to make.

The AUC will still review this with 100 per cent certainty that they have the best interests of Albertans at heart.

In terms of transmission what we're moving towards is efficiency. We need to make sure that we are using our transmission lines that Albertans have built and paid for over the past 20 years, billions and billions of dollars, to the highest efficiency and that we're not adding more generation where we don't necessarily need it. That's backed up by the cost-causation principles that we have saying that if it's population growth or industrial growth that is causing these costs to rise, great; those consumers should pay for that. If they're building an area where we don't have population growth, where we don't have industrial growth, they can still build there, but they should pay that additional cost. This is fair within industry, and it's fair to Alberta ratepayers where they had no defence prior. We are still moving forward with all the laws and regulations that we had for a fair, open, and competitive market. Those principles still exist; they will still exist. They are how we govern our market. We are, however, changing the priority order of purchasing to add reliability because Albertans have found out over the last few years that reliability matters. When we have energy alerts within our grid, when we have rolling brownouts, which we've had, reliability matters and making sure that you can deliver the lowest price and consistency. Those things matter to Albertans.

The Member for Calgary-Glenmore didn't mention market power mitigation legislation. Yes, that is still in place, and, yes, with industry and our regulators we will be reviewing that to make sure that it continues to manage any market participants from not overly exerting their market presence to manipulate market prices.

That's what we have regulators for. We have the Alberta Electric System Operator, which operates the grid in terms of reliability and the day-to-day, minute-to-minute, second-to-second flow of electricity. We have our Alberta Utilities Commission to allow for the review of projects to make sure they fit the conditions that we need, make sure environmental standards are protected. And we have the Market Surveillance Administrator, the MSA, who is the watchdog, to make sure that all entities within our marketplace are doing their job and fulfilling the commitments that they've made to Albertans. All of these regulators are funded by industry and outside of government. It's not within our budget. We don't tell them how much they can renovate for. We don't set their targets. They charge fees to industry, and they grow as industry grows. There's a lot going on right now. They are required to do the work to make sure that we have reliability, the lights turn on when we hit the switch, and we have it when we need it.

In terms of the costing of our marketplace, what we're allowing for is something that we didn't have in place when we reached that brownout and we sent out the emergency alert a couple of winters ago, January 13, I think it was, or January 9. I forget the exact date. Many Albertans will remember getting the emergency alert on their cellphones, going, "What is going on?" when the Electric System Operator asked people to turn off all unneeded, unnecessary electricity. That was in part because we didn't have the ability under our market cap structure to purchase electricity from other jurisdictions. California, British Columbia, Montana were all experiencing alerts and demand on electricity as well. They could buy up to \$3,500 U.S.; \$3,500 U.S. they could pay for electricity. Who do you think is going to — where are they going to sell? Are they going to sell to Alberta at \$999 Canadian or to California, who is offering up to \$3,500 U.S.? They sold to California. That's why we were short.

This isn't how it's going to be priced and bid. That's not how competition works. This does allow for those emergency circumstances for the AESO to buy it at the market price no matter what jurisdiction has it to sell. It's a safety measure to make sure that in our coldest nights

and our hottest summers we have the market capacity to purchase the electricity that we need.

One last comment, Madam Chair, is that Alberta has nearly the same percentage of renewables in their market as Texas. Very, very similar. We are very similar. Texas is less than 20 per cent, and we are over 15 in terms of generation. I see the member shaking her head. Check the facts. We are very close to Texas in the number of renewables on our system. Where we lack is that we don't have enough storage, which the NDP didn't do anything about, but we have 600 megawatts of storage, three times the current level, coming on, and we're very proud of our AESO for making our system more reliable, more affordable, more predictable.

We'll have electricity where and when we need it not just today but decades into the future through this bill. I ask all members to support Bill 52.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise to Bill 52. I've devoted a few years of my career to valuing electricity assets in deregulated power markets. I remember graduating from business school. My first job was on the Gulf coast working for a power company that owned a variety of unregulated nuclear assets in a variety of different producing jurisdictions, from regulated jurisdictions such as Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi to unregulated jurisdictions such as New York in the PJM interconnect. That's Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland although it encompasses the entire Midwest now, from Illinois all the way to the eastern seaboard as well as the New England Power Pool. [interjections]

4:20

The government whip is speaking up to try and interrupt me to talk about what I know about electricity generation, you know, kind of like the kid in the back of the class who's, like, chirping away at the nerd. I'm proud of being a nerd here because I made a lot of money for my employers and I made a lot of money for my clients, and I made this money by understanding how power markets work.

I worked on a consulting basis. At my time working at the power company in New Orleans, I helped an unregulated power sales subsidiary, you know, plan its power purchases to ensure that its customers had reliable power in the deregulated market of ERCOT, for example, which is how power people say Texas is, which is to say that I know a thing or two about deregulated power markets.

It is extremely untrue that Alberta is at a level that renewable power generation is impacting reliability or that renewable power generation alone is impacting reliability. We are at less than half of the level of renewables production of Texas and California, and they enjoy more reliable power than we do. It's a fact.

Now, the reason why. This is not about, like, you know, throwing rocks or whatever, points of debate, whatever. Nobody can really assert whether I know what I'm talking about or the minister knows what he's talking about although let's face facts. I've worked in this business; he has not. The important thing here is that there were decisions made by this government and by the Kenney government to make our power prices more expensive. One of them was the way that the Jason Kenney government vilified the Balancing Pool. Well, it turned out the Balancing Pool actually kept prices down for consumers. Took that away. Prices exploded. That is on this government. Prices exploded on this government's watch, so nobody needs to trust me on this. It is on this government's watch that electricity prices exploded.

Now, one of the things that I did when I was working in power all those many years ago was I was involved in an acquisition for a suite of assets that included the Three Mile Island unit 1. That's not the one that exploded; it was the other one. I remember we described this to

our executive committee as an incredibly good house in a terrible neighbourhood. That terrible neighbourhood is defined by the power congestion charges that that particular unit faces. One thing that I like about this bill is that it is including the potential for locational marginal pricing, which will most definitely reduce congestion.

But these are supremely technical – technical – discussions. I am a user of power markets; I am not a creator of power markets. Just like I can use a computer and I can use a car, I cannot design a computer or design a car or design a cellphone. What we are trying to do here in this bill is create a whole regulatory process to create an entirely new power market that is going to be implemented by regulatory fiat, by the minister acting alone. It is risky, and it is dangerous, and it is a bad idea because there are many, many things that can go wrong.

I earned my stripes in the post-Enron world. I worked on a variety of different generation assets. I also, in the last two years before I became a politician, worked for a renewable energy analytics company that specialized in power market design and implementing those power market designs and explaining them to a wide class of investors. I know what I'm talking about here. This is dangerous. Don't do it.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate on Bill 52? I will see the hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: It's a terrific debate, quite a technical one as well, which I appreciate in the Chamber. Unfortunately, we'll have to bring this bill back for our debate later. We move to adjourn debate for now and continue on with more Committee of the Whole.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 37

Mental Health Services Protection Amendment Act, 2025

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Madam Chair. Happy to stand and speak to Bill 37 just for a few minutes before I hand it off to my colleague from Calgary-Varsity. It's really just to recap. Frankly, Bill 37 is, bizarrely, kind of around housekeeping, which feels underwhelming when we continue to have the kind of fatalities in this province that we do.

I was just looking at the figures for opioid death rates in the province, Madam Chair. Certainly, they peaked in 2023 with an utterly tragic 1,874 people who passed away. That's five people per day. Last year, January to December, it was 1,182, down to three people a day. I think we've got a really long way to go. But instead of – oh, I don't know – accelerating the eight recovery communities that this government has promised but has yet to actually build, we're changing the name from residential treatment to bed-based treatment. We're changing it from supervised consumption sites to drug consumption sites. Okay. It's really not the problem. It's not the problem that we call it withdrawal management now instead of medical detox.

The problem is that we still have three people a day who are dying, and this UCP government has been in power for six years. Six years of promises that have gone undelivered. Six years of promising 11 recovery communities, three of which are open. Do people feel safer, Madam Chair? We should be talking about policing, health care, housing. Instead, we're putting Band-Aids on bullet holes with name changing. I fail to understand the urgency and the priorities that this minister has laid out in Bill 37. Increasingly, I'm convinced that maybe it's because they actually have no plan at all.

We learned just last week that the compassionate intervention facilities were originally going to cost \$230 million each to build

and that they could be open by 2027. But the minister's plan, that had been released back in February or March maybe, is that the compassionate intervention facilities would cost merely \$90 million each and open in 2029. Which is it? That is a huge chasm between \$230 million each and \$90 million each and two years farther down the road. How is this honestly a process and a plan that we can trust? I don't think we can because I don't think there's actually a plan at all, Madam Chair.

Bill 37 is prioritizing all of the wrong things. It doesn't matter what the sign says above the door; it's the quality of the service that's actually happening inside. Whether we call them this or that, whether we call them withdrawal management, intensive treatment, and nonintensive treatment versus – it doesn't matter – whatever it was, is that actually going to be saving lives? Is it actually going to be replacing the \$20 million that the minister has cut from prevention and early intervention services? I would argue that it doesn't.

Those are the priorities that Albertans would expect. After six years of hearing the minister pontificate about recovery-oriented services of care and the Alberta recovery model, we are still losing three people a day. Many people do not feel safer, and the need for permanent supportive housing is greater than ever. Bill 37 does nothing to address any of those things.

4:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much. I am pleased to speak to Bill 37, the Mental Health Services Protection Amendment Act, 2025. I thank my colleague from Calgary-Currie for speaking to this bill again and giving us a lot of background information on what's in it.

I have a number of questions that I think are really important for Albertans. The first one is that with this bill the minister will have the power to exempt facilities from specific requirements if it is deemed by him or them that it is in the public interest. What are the risks to Albertans if the minister chooses to waive all of the minimum licensing requirements on all of these facilities?

We've already seen major issues with the lack of regulation of addiction counsellors. Anyone can be called an addiction counsellor if they're hired into a position that names them an addiction counsellor. Not only does this take away from the integrity of people that are trained in that category, but without regulation we have no way of ascertaining that there is really any expertise. We don't know whether people that come into those positions even know about the basics of confidentiality that are core to all kinds of health care services. Anyone can be brought into that.

What happens when we start waiving the regulations around minimum standards for these facilities? Those are minimum standards. These are standards that are there so that people can expect to be safe. In the midst of the current corrupt care scandal, where we're seeing massive amounts of money being paid to chartered surgical facilities to do work that can be done at less than half the price in our public hospitals, is this a way to shovel money off to people that want to set up addictions facilities and provide services?

We see in this bill that what a service is is pretty loose. A prescribed treatment will be defined in the regulations, so we don't know what that could be. That could be anything. That could be helping the person look in a crystal ball. Who knows what a prescribed treatment is going to be? In this bill a service provider is redefined as any person who offers or provides one of these prescribed mental health services, excluding individuals when working as employees. The employee could be the therapist, the mental health therapist, and the service provider is the company or the industry.

Without standards, without using evidence around what is being provided and going with treatments that are known to be beneficial to people, we are not only potentially harming all kinds of people, taking them down a pathway that is at best experimental and at worst potentially negligent. It's just terrible what we could be doing to Albertans with very serious diseases, lethal diseases – addictions are lethal – and without requiring standards and without requiring training.

How are the comorbidities that exist in these people going to be even recognized? Mental health problems are frequent amongst people that have addictions problems, but they don't have labels on them. They need to be recognized and teased out. This requires professionals. This requires standards for a facility. This requires using evidence-based models of determining what a diagnosis is. This requires therapists that know how to manage patients rather than potentially just being hired and trained on the job to provide perhaps babysitting services while people stay in there for a period of time.

What is this going to do to our workforce? We have professionals. Are people going to want to work in Alberta in this milieu and provide care? It's going to have a very bad reputation when the standards are removed. We've already seen that we cannot hire a chief medical officer of health in this province because nobody that is properly trained in that area wants to work here under this government because they are not permitted to do the things that are needed to provide leadership for public health, and we're very likely to see the same problems if we go to this act.

I really think that we need to have a full public inquiry of what's going on with procurement before we start going down the road of getting these treatment facilities that have no standards and have no real rules around who is going to work in them so that we know that we have a proper process of not just giving dollars away to people that say the right things or are connected. We need to be more than performative. We need to not be taking measures that we just promise will provide an outcome when, in fact, there's no evidence for the path that we're going down. We need to look at what's going on in our own health system and look at what can be done and proceed down the route of proper treatments that are verified and known to be effective.

How can Albertans trust this government to provide appropriate addictions care when they're embroiled in the worst health care scandal in our province's history and when they're now in the midst of removing standards for treatment facilities and not moving forward on standards for regulating counselling therapists? What exactly will be the risk to Albertans? We expect that the risk to Albertans will be that a lot more of them will die. This is a lethal condition. What will be the risk to our budget? Well, we're spending lots, and we have no real outcomes. We're not collecting data on what is happening to these people, and the timeline to get all these promises on board is very long. In the meantime people continue to die.

Will this proposed exemption align with the government's claims to protect vulnerable Albertans from harm? How is this going to protect people? By scrapping the minimum hours of care in our long-term care, we have seen devastating results. How can we trust that this new framework is going to have anything even matching the colossal failure of removing care standards in long-term care?

I find these parts of this bill very challenging to accept and hope that the minister will reconsider removing these standards and move forward on regulating counselling therapists.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate on Bill 37?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 37, the Mental Health Services Protection Amendment Act, 2025.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 37 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

4:40

Bill 38

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Chair: Are there any members that wish to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to take the opportunity, of course, to rise and speak in opposition to this bill once more and just, again, remind the House that Albertans haven't asked for this. There's no reason to have this. Folks are concerned, as am I, that this bill, its utility, is to hide, basically, the bad outcomes that have come from this government's treatment of our children and youth in care in Alberta. You don't have to take my word for it. In fact, I have some lovely quotes from some graduates of our youth in care.

I just wanted to share a few things, their reactions to this bill, and I quote: "If we die, it doesn't matter." "To me, it seems like they just want to cover up their own tracks." "I'm scared," from a former member in care. "They are just going to report on them because what is easier than to make the numbers go down if you erase them?" "It's dehumanizing, continues to slap us in the face, and shows us what we mean to the government. It's dehumanizing." "The numbers are people. They have a voice. They have a story." "I've lost a lot of good friends because of a failed system, and nothing was done about it, and it was marked as another statistic. Dead kids are not red tape." "Just because someone is no longer legally your problem doesn't mean that you aren't responsible."

The point, of course, of the Child and Youth Advocate is to give voices to youth in care, whether they're dead or alive, and this bill takes away some of that power.

I know I have a lot of colleagues who would like to speak against this bill, so I will sit down and let them continue. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to my colleague for her brief notes. I'll see if I can be a wee bit less sort of focused on brevity, but we'll see how that goes. Brevity is truly not my particular personal friend.

Bill 38, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is an omnibus bill, and I will say here in front of all of my colleagues on both sides of the House that I am certainly not a fan of bills like this. One of the reasons why I'm not a fan is because of the number of pieces of legislation that end up being impacted by a bill such as this. We know that what we're looking at is amending seven acts across five ministries. It ends up being incredibly comprehensive even as we hear that it isn't actually that comprehensive. There are just sort of a few minor adjustments here or there. The trouble is that when you have one particularly egregious section, which, of course, is the section I'll be focusing the bulk of my remarks on today, without really any sort of ability to pull that particular section out although I know we've had some amendments, and we'll continue to have them, it makes it extraordinarily difficult to support, really, any aspect of a bill like this.

As I alluded to, one of the things I'm most concerned about in terms of Bill 38, Madam Chair, of course, is that this bill amends the Child and Youth Advocate Act. As my colleague just talked about, this is really about children in care. It doesn't matter how long they were in care with the province. It doesn't matter what their age is presently. Their stories deserve to be heard. What will happen as a result of this bill is that certainly for a certain portion of those kids it will be as if they simply didn't exist. But these kids are deserving of dignity, and they are deserving of having their stories be heard. They are deserving of having these investigations made after their death, regardless of the reason for their death, regardless of how long they were out of care.

They were, in effect – and I think about this as a teacher. You know, when you are a teacher, you are responsible for all of those children in your classroom. As a principal that principal is in charge of and responsible for all of the children in a school. That's why when there's an emergency in the school, the teachers act and the principals act, because that's the job. It's that old *in loco parentis* sort of rule, and in very many similar respects that's exactly what this government is when the government is responsible for children in care, regardless of the reason, as I say, why those kids happen to be in care.

We've had many discussions over the past number of weeks about what it means to be a child in care. We know, for instance, that there are, of course, certain difficulties that can happen when you're a child in care. Obviously, you're in care; there were some things that were not too pleasant in your life. But the idea that this government would simply let go of all of its responsibilities just because a child happened to be a particular age, quite frankly, Madam Chair, is reprehensible to me. I can't imagine saying to my kids when they turned 18: "Oh, it's okay. Off you go. You're on your own." I can't imagine doing that, and I would imagine that, you know, many of us on both sides of the House really couldn't imagine doing that either because we're talking about our children. These are the province's children. We need to treat them with much more respect and much more honour and certainly much more dignity than this act will allow us to do.

Let's start with what it is that we know. We know this bill comes to us during a time when there is an increase in the number of serious incidents and deaths seen in kids who are over 18 years old. We know that more than 70 per cent of children and youth in care are Indigenous. We know that there has been a record number of deaths and serious injury under the UCP. As I've mentioned and, of course, my colleagues have mentioned as well, we know that youth who happen to be between the ages of 18 and 24 are deserving of our respect and deserving of this government's support.

As I said, these were children that were in care, and the province was in effect their parent. Too often the voices of children like this end up being missing from the equation. It's too easy to forget about them, but none of these kids should be disposable. They aren't disposable.

I'm mindful of the fact that in my teaching career I was shocked beyond recognition about three or four years ago when I recognized a child who, unfortunately, ended up in the news, and it was a child that I had taught when they were in elementary school. Now, this was a child who while I was teaching them was in fact apprehended. Obviously, what happened during this child's life over the course of their life ended up with this really, really bad result. I was mortified because what I wondered was: had I done enough to protect this child? I was saddened because I had had a chance to know them when they were in my elementary school. I was shocked to find that just because this child happened to be the age they were – I think at the time they were about 25 or 26 – in the case of this bill passing, that child's life would not be told, would not be part of the record of this province.

We need to learn from people like this. We need to learn what went right; we need to learn what went wrong. We need to learn what systems we need to change, and we need to change a lot of systems on behalf of all of these kids. Right now there's more going wrong than there is going right.

We've had many discussions with many, many bills from Bill 53 to Bill 37, and we've pointed out again and again and again the nature of all the risks that are involved when the government is making decisions on behalf of the most vulnerable. Certainly, with Bill 38, in our view, these decisions should not be part of this bill because, as we have heard as well, these kids are not red tape. These are kids. They could be anybody's kids. They could be my kids. They could be your kids. They could be relatives. They could be friends. We could be an auntie or an uncle. We need to treat them with much more respect than I believe that this bill does.

We know as well that the Child and Youth Advocate has previously called upon the UCP to provide better and increased supports for all of those kids who are transitioning to adulthood, so all of those kids between the ages of 18 and 24, and this is the direct opposite of that. Without appropriate tracking of these incredibly vulnerable young people, again, as I've already said, regardless of the amount of time they may have spent in care and regardless of the situation they may have found themselves in, we are doing a disservice to them.

As my colleague from Calgary-Acadia said a couple of weeks ago, these outcomes have to be measured in order for us to even remotely evaluate if we're doing the right things for these children and youth, and you cannot measure outcomes unless those outcomes are available to you. One of the things that the reports and the investigations that the Child and Youth Advocate gives us is data, both quantifiable as well as qualitative, Madam Chair. We find out much about these kids and about the context of their lives, and the context of their lives sits beside statistics. We need to look at both. These children should not be ignored.

4:50

As I said, in these circumstances the province is taking over the role of parent, and that's the point because parents, of course, provide structure and guidance. We know as well that we are not the only people saying this. There was an advocate from the national council of youth in care, and that person stated that parents don't disown their children at the age of majority and push them out the door, particularly as we also understand that they'll be faced with additional barriers that they face simply because they've been in care.

Certainly, when I consider the focus that question period had today, we also know that children with disabilities sometimes end up in the province's care, too. If somehow something was lacking or the support given wasn't quite what was needed or the child or young adult travelled a much more difficult and challenging road only to have their life end, then the only thing that's left is the story of that child's life, not just as a lesson – quite frankly, those of us here have a certain amount of power to legislate things and make those things better – but when it's possible to tell that story, if some context of that child's life during their life was lacking respect, was lacking dignity, the very least we can give them is that respect and that dignity in their death.

The Child and Youth Advocate in the *Beyond Barriers* report provides a place for disabled children and youth's voices, and I'd like to read some of what some of them had to say. "We need help to become independent, we don't have any parents, so we don't know how to do things." "I needed more life skills. Someone to help me get a job and manage my money better. I still haven't learned

that stuff properly. Just because I have a disability doesn't mean I don't also need support with regular everyday stuff."

One young person shared with the advocate's office that they had lived in multiple placements, sometimes youth shelters, but they had a developmental disability and wished they had received more help when younger, and their experience was that, of course, help was harder to find as they got older and simply ended once they became an adult. In that person's words:

There was no transition to adult services. Once I was an adult the help stopped, and I was treated differently. It's hard to explain it—kind of like they gave up on me completely. I can't even go to the youth shelter anymore, and I am not safe at the adult shelter. I need to figure out a place to live.

Far too often we do these children a disservice while they live, and as I've said many times in the last five-ish minutes, the least we can do is to not continue that disservice in the event of their death.

APTN News a long time ago, four whole years ago, did a feature on the National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, and those advocates talked about the fact that kids in government care should get the very same level of opportunities and supports that their peers get from family, community, and friends. That group was comprised of provincial and territorial advocates with lived experience, so that means children who were previously or were at that time in care. They had lived experience in the child protection system. They came together in youth in care networks and also with key allies. The national council came out with a statement that said that they believed all youth in care deserve ongoing and unconditional love, support, and encouragement just as their peers who were not in the child protection system received from their parents, friends, and communities throughout their entire lives.

They went a little further and talked about their mission. Their mission was and still is to seek to improve the life outcomes of young people in the child protection systems across the country by ensuring they are not forced to transition to adulthood before they are ready, before they have securely achieved financial stability and employment, before they've accessed housing, before they've had long-term access to health and wellness services and, beyond that, connections to their culture and supportive people and community around them who can be there for them. Quite frankly, those supportive people and community also include the province if they happen to have been a child in care.

Four years ago youth advocates in B.C. presented the standards and recommended to provincial governments and the federal government to uphold and follow them. In fact, they listed eight standards that government should be using when they were discussing kids like these. There are financial standards, educational and professional development, housing. For housing they say that every young person should have a place they can call home without strict rules and conditions to abide by. They talk about culture and spirituality, health and well-being, advocacy and rights. Every young person should have their rights respected and should experience environments where their voices are heard and their silence is addressed holistically.

Madam Chair, if we go forward with this bill, these children will lose that opportunity to have their voices heard, to have their lives kind of set down in a meaningful context, and I think that would be a real loss. It's not just a disservice; it's a dishonouring of these kids who far too often have really difficult things happen to them, and we owe it to them to not simply sort of toss them aside in an omnibus bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 38, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Bill 38 is a bill that would amend seven pieces of legislation across five ministries, and I must say that the most alarming of these changes

proposed are amendments to the Child and Youth Advocate Act. As a parent my heart goes out to these young people who will fall through the cracks because of this UCP government's negligence and reckless policies.

A January 27 government report shows there were about 8,800 children receiving intervention services in this province, and nearly 7,500 of them were in government care as of December. Seventy-six per cent of the children in the government's custody were Indigenous.

If passed, Bill 38 would stop reporting youth deaths who are 20 years and older, and this while we've seen a record number of deaths and serious injuries under this UCP government. For youth ages 18 and 19 investigations will only be performed at the discretion of the Child and Youth Advocate.

I want to be very clear, Madam Chair. Dead youth are not and should never be considered red tape. It's the government's responsibility to be transparent and accountable in identifying and reporting and investigating what youth in government care are experiencing.

It's confusing as to why the UCP sees this as a necessary change to the Child and Youth Advocate Act when the advocate herself says she opposes this government's move to stop her office from investigating the deaths of vulnerable young adults age 20 and older. She stated, quote: because we are the only body that's reviewing these deaths, we're not going to hear about them; there might be a spike in young people who are dying at the age of 23 from opioids who had previously been involved with child intervention, and we're not going to know that. End quote. This is horrendous, Madam Chair. Can the members opposite really sit in this Chamber and suggest that doing the critical work of reporting and the transparency of deaths is merely red tape?

Bill 38 will result in the advocate's office no longer receiving notifications from the government or medical examiner about the deaths of young people 20 and older. This is vital information. The advocate's office needs to know whether children who were receiving intervention or who were in government care are dying so that they can change the way they serve children and young adults who now live in precarious circumstances.

Youths aged 18 to 24 still deserve support, especially when they've been cared for by children's services. We should be empowering the advocate to provide proper resources and programs to at-risk children and youth and not reducing it.

5:00

Bill 38 shows that this UCP government is only interested in serving their own agenda and not the needs of Albertans, far less for young Albertans. They have no interest in fixing our public services like health care, protecting the CPP, or finding ways to combat the rising cost of living. We see it every day in their actions of wasting taxpayers' dollars while Albertans continue to suffer under higher utility rates, highest insurance rates, and one of the highest inflations in the country.

You don't have to take my word for it, Madam Chair, because the Minister of Children and Family Services had the gall to say that Bill 38's proposed changes — quote, these are young adults, they can vote, they can access other services, and for us it was really important to ensure that those children that are under the age of 18 are actually receiving the services and supports that they need. End quote.

Yes, these are young adults. Yes, they can vote if they even have access to that. Yes, they technically have access to other services, but these are young adults who have experienced abuse, neglect, witness or suffered from addiction and alcoholism. They've had life throw incredible obstacles at them and many have relied on this government to act as their guardian when they had no one else to lean on.

What's the message being said here, Madam Chair? That everything these youth experience prior to the age of 18 doesn't matter and should be forgotten, too bad, so sad? Youths from 18 to 24 still require significant support as they're continuing to develop, especially for children and youth who were in care, which is why the advocate has previously provided support for this specific age group.

Between April 2024 and January, 35 children and youth died while receiving intervention services through CFS. The purpose of reporting by the Child and Youth Advocate is to provide information into the details of youth who died in care or who died recently after having been in care so that the system that Alberta supports and administers can be improved so fewer people die.

Bill 38 will also change requirements for reporting so that it's done less often, making it once a year instead of twice. The Minister of Children and Family Services has said that these changes will help streamline reporting requirements, leading to a more efficient recommendation process so that the government can make systemic improvements faster. But how does less frequent reporting achieve this, Madam Chair?

If the UCP was paying attention, they would remember that the advocate had previously called on this UCP government to provide better and increased supports for youth transitioning to adulthood, and Bill 38 does the opposite. All Bill 38 will do is allow the government to bury and ignore poor outcomes and areas where they are failing.

These are serious injuries and deaths we're talking about. The government has suggested that Bill 38 is necessary so that the office of the advocate can be hyperfocused on children under the age of 18, but the advocate has explicitly said they don't need to refocus.

I'd like to ask: did the minister even sit down with the advocate before putting forward Bill 38, or is this just another example of the UCP's track record of reckless incompetence? Between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, the office conducted 48 individual reviews of youths, one who was seriously injured and 47 who died. A reoccurring theme in the report shows that 26 of the 48 youths had mental health or substance use related concerns.

Young people said that they found it challenging to access services due to long wait-lists and not having supports available in their community. When the minister says that he wants to ensure children are more resilient before they reach adulthood, how does he think this will be accomplished without ample supports in place?

Of course we want children in care to grow up and develop skills, get good-paying jobs, continue to contribute to our economy, have a family, and be stand-up citizens in our society, but we can't ignore the fact that these kids are coming from truly heartbreaking environments at times.

Bill 38 shows that this UCP government is more interested in covering up their failures than taking the needed steps to correct them, as this is a grave disservice to all Albertans. Madam Chair, Albertans deserve an ethical, competent government. They don't need a government that panders to their own extreme base and interests, and that's what they're getting here with Bill 38. This is another attempt by this UCP government to shirk its responsibility to Albertans. This government does not know and understand the needs of Albertans. This government does not care, based on this bill, about the youth in this province and the future adults in this province, and I will not be supporting Bill 38.

Thank you.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today as well to speak against Bill 38 like my colleagues before me, and I'm going to be

looking at this bill, kind of the deeply gendered impacts that haven't been acknowledged in this legislation that has been written. In particular I want to address the proposed changes to the Child and Youth Advocate Act, the Residential Tenancies Act, and the Post-secondary Learning Act. These are not administrative tweaks. They are decisions that will affect real people, and disproportionately they will affect women.

When we talk about ending mandatory reviews of deaths and serious injuries for young people who aged out of care, we need to talk about those who we are erasing. Young women aging out of care between the ages of 18 and 24 are already more likely to face steep barriers. According to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate's *Calling for Change* report, nearly one-third of young women who age out of care are already parenting. For young men that number is closer to 1 in 10. These are young mothers, often without support networks, trying to parent while navigating poverty, housing insecurity, and mental health needs.

A 2019 report from A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness found that 59 per cent of homeless youth in Canada were female or gender diverse and may have had prior involvement in the child welfare system. The Canadian Women's Foundation in 2021: girls in care are 2 to 4 times more likely to experience sexual exploitation than girls who are not in care. This is a staggering and heartbreaking reality, Madam Chair.

If we remove the obligation to investigate deaths and serious injuries of young people who have aged out of care, we are erasing these gendered patterns. We lose the opportunity to learn why these young women fall through the cracks. Was it lack of access to social supports? Was it unsafe housing? Was it lack of access to child care or reproductive health care? As Alberta Child and Youth Advocate Terri Pelton warned: without mandatory reporting and oversight, the death of young adults who were formerly in care may go unnoticed; their stories will not be told, and the opportunity to learn from them will be lost.

This is part of a broader pattern of this government reducing oversight and reducing accountability, and when we reduce oversight, it's always the most marginalized who are at risk. We're talking about racialized and Indigenous women and women with disabilities aging out of care, about women fleeing violence who rely on safety nets that are being quietly dismantled. Many young women aging out of care have already experienced trauma, racism, and instability in the system. When they turn 18 many supports that they had vanish. As a result, they're more likely to become unhoused, experience mental health crises, enter into abusive relationships, be sexually exploited, and end up in shelters.

The people who run those shelters see the patterns. They know how many of the women they serve were once in government care, but unless the OCYA is mandated to investigate these outcomes, no one in power is required to listen. There is no record, no accountability, no policy change. The system fails quietly and people die. Oversight doesn't protect bureaucracy; it protects people. When we gut it, we're saying that some lives are not worth examining.

5:10

Let's have a look at the Residential Tenancies Act portion of this bill. This bill proposes allowing landlords to serve eviction notices and rent increases by e-mail. On its face that might seem like modernization. But who gets left behind? Women. Particularly single mothers, seniors, and newcomers make up a large share of vulnerable renters in Alberta. According to Statistics Canada nearly 60 per cent of low-income renters in Alberta are women. Groups like ACORN have raised red flags; 1 in 5 low-income women lack consistent Internet access or the digital literacy to navigate e-mail

securely. For many tenants the only time a landlord even shows up at the property is to post a notice. If digital notices become the only method, that relationship becomes even more distant. If someone misses a critical e-mail, they could lose their home. Why is this the only RTA change we're seeing prioritized? Not rent control, not stronger pretensions against illegal evictions, just an easier way for landlords to send bad news.

Finally, on the changes related to the occupational associations and the trades I want to raise a gender equity concern. Women are still underrepresented in both skilled trades and STEM. Alberta labour data shows women make up 5 per cent of apprentices in construction trades, and women account for just 20 to 25 per cent of students in STEM programs at Alberta's postsecondary institutions. Any redefinition of trade unions or occupational associations must be done with an intentional gender lens. We should be asking: has the government consulted with women's apprentice programs or gender equality organizations in the trades? These programs do exist, and they do critical work. If they haven't been consulted, then, once again, women are treated as an afterthought in legislation that will shape their access to economic opportunity. At a time when women remain vastly underrepresented in the skilled trades and STEM, this government is proposing structural changes without so much as a nod to gender equity. We don't know how these changes will impact women. No one asked. That's the problem.

In conclusion, I want to be clear. What looks like administrative streamlining on paper can have life-altering consequences in practice. Whether it's denying dignity and accountability for young women who die after aging out of care, increasing housing insecurity for vulnerable renters, or introducing changes to oversight of trades without a gender lens, Bill 38 fails to see or address the gender impacts of its measures. This bill isn't reducing red tape. It's cutting through safety nets. It's women, especially those already facing systematic barriers, who are most at risk of slipping through our cracks.

I will not be supporting this bill.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 38, that has this kind of innocuous name of the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. It's an omnibus bill, which often seems to be one of the ways that the UCP likes to hide the legislation they're presenting instead of doing it in sort of a more appropriate way.

Certainly, on page 7 of this legislation it indicates that, sort of, investigations into the death of youth involved in our child welfare system doesn't apply to children 20 or over and that investigations are at the discretion of the Child and Youth Advocate after 18. That's a pretty significant declaration there and change in the current practice, where the Child and Youth Advocate can up until the age of 24 investigate tragic deaths of children that are involved in the child welfare system.

I just want to take the members on a bit of a journey down memory lane. Back on April 1, 2012, Premier Redford at the time proclaimed that the Child and Youth Advocate was an independent office of the Alberta government. It no longer reported directly to the minister. I mean, the ministers have had many names over the years, but child welfare is often the generic term we use for it. This was something that certainly my professional college advocated for for years, and I was very much part of that advocacy work.

A young MLA at the time named Rachel Notley was also working with us and advocating strongly for this office to be independent. Of course, the significance of that is that if an office

is independent, then when they do reporting, they must report to the whole Assembly, so it's not just a report to the minister, who can then say: no, I don't want this part in there, and I don't want this part in there. It's much more transparent and accountable, and, of course, when we're talking about children's lives, that's a very good thing because they're sacred, they're important, and we need to be making sure that all Alberta children are cared for.

This was a significant win for, I think, all Albertans, and that happened back in 2012, but certainly this piece of legislation is eroding the independence and the accountability and the transparency of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Of course, I stand very proudly against this legislation because it will erode the ability of the Child and Youth Advocate to care for some of the most vulnerable children in our province. If we do not know, if we do not understand what caused deaths – this is a serious matter of young people in our province who have been involved in the child welfare system – how can we make it better? How can we make it better? We can't. This is just like putting a blanket over it all. It's hiding it, and that, of course, is an erosion of democracy.

[Mr. Rowsell in the chair]

You know, if we don't know about something, how can we change it without measurement? Sadly, we're looking at measuring the deaths of children involved in the child welfare system, but without measurement it's impossible to know if progress is being made, if actions are effective, or if resources are being used efficiently. Measurement provides objective data that allows us to understand what's happening and make informed decisions.

So guess what? We're putting the blinders on with this legislation. This isn't about, you know, buying books or something; this is about children's lives. It's very disturbing to me as a social worker of 30 years, a social worker that used to work in child welfare on the front lines as a case manager and also a supervisor and then to work with families in the treatment aspect of child welfare for many years, to see how much the government is wanting to hide what's happening with vulnerable children in our province.

We know that this type of measurement gives us understanding, it helps us with resource allocation, accountability, and transparency. So it's ridiculous. This is just ridiculous that we would take away our knowledge of what's happening in this area. I mean, all of us should be really, I think, very troubled and disgusted by this legislation. To call this bill Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, I mean, it just hides it. It's like a misnomer. It says nothing about the lives of vulnerable children in our province. I just really ask the government to, you know, give their heads a shake. This is not okay, that we're hiding the deaths of children involved in the child welfare system.

5:20

Some of my colleagues who spoke earlier talked about, you know, how we know quite a bit about child development, of course, and we know that even if you're 18, you're not magically an adult, and you can't necessarily figure things out, especially a child who may have gone through the child welfare system that has probably experienced a fair bit of trauma.

I know that when I was a worker in the system, I would get files, like, this big, and that kid was maybe six and they had had, like, 20 placements. You know, they've been shuffled from here to there to there. That kid is probably trying to find out: does anybody love me? Am I okay? Are there any soft spots for me on the planet? Guess what? Those kids grow up, and they become angry, and they need further support. But instead this government thinks: "No. You know, we don't even care enough to support them and make sure that they have resources."

We know that the development, also, of brain development, many kids are – I can tell you with my own kids. I have three boys. They're all adults now. Well, the youngest is 23, 26, and then I have a 38-year-old. I must say that the 38-year-old has launched, okay? He's no longer living in my basement, which is good, yeah. He even made me a grandmother, so that's very good news.

You know, actually in the academic literature they call it launching, that we launch our children, and that is more and more delayed. Of course, with COVID that was delayed even more. Kids who were, like, getting in their late teens around the time when COVID hit us, oftentimes their launching is even more delayed.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

So just imagine kids that have gone through the child welfare system and the chaos oftentimes that has been in their lives, how much more difficult it is for them to launch.

This is so important, that we support young people within the system and make sure that they have the resources. If we just close our eyes, if we just pretend that these things are not happening, we're not going to make good choices, we're not going to invest resources, we're not going to be accountable and transparent, we're not going to be a government that cares.

So for that reason, I am definitely voting against this bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Chair. Today I rise to speak on Bill 38, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. At first this bill may appear to be a technical and administrative change, perhaps aimed at making processes more efficient. However, the reality is far more concerning. Bill 38 is not about cutting red tape; it's about cutting crucial protections for vulnerable youth in Alberta, particularly those transitioning out of the child welfare system.

This bill makes a series of changes, the most troubling of which target the Child and Youth Advocate Act. It strips away protections for young adults who have aged out of the care system, leaving them without the oversight and support that they desperately need.

Rather than reducing red tape to improve services for vulnerable children and youth, this bill adds bureaucratic hurdles that will leave them exposed. These young adults need support more than ever, and Bill 38 does the opposite. It undermines their safety and reduces their chances for a successful transition into adulthood.

As the Official Opposition the NDP stands firmly opposed to Bill 38. While the government is presenting it as a harmless set of technical changes, the truth is that these amendments will have far-reaching and harmful consequences for some of the most vulnerable people in our society, Alberta's youth, especially those who have been in government care.

I and my colleagues stand in opposing Bill 38 because it represents a fundamental failure to protect the rights and safety of vulnerable youth. Instead of improving services, this bill removes crucial oversight and diminishes the government's accountability.

Let me outline the most serious reasons we are opposed to this bill. Eliminating investigations into deaths of youth aged 20-plus. Perhaps the most concerning aspect of this bill is the complete elimination of investigations into deaths or serious injuries of youth aged 20 and older. Young people aged 18 to 24 are still navigating their transition to adulthood, a time when they are particularly vulnerable to mental health struggles, substance abuse, and dangerous behaviour. Removing oversight for this age group is essentially telling them that they no longer matter, even though they still need advocacy and support. For youth who have been in care, the challenges they face are even greater. Youth aged 18-plus who have been in care have often already experienced trauma, neglect,

or abuse. These young people are often without family support and face a much higher risk of dying from preventable causes like substance abuse or overdose. Bill 38 makes it more likely that we will miss these tragedies, and that is simply unacceptable.

Discretionary investigations for youth aged 18 to 19. Bill 38 also places investigations into deaths or serious incidents of 18-to-19-year-olds at the discretion of the advocate. This is another dangerous step backward for vulnerable youth in Alberta. If these cases are left up to discretion, there is a real risk that cases will not be investigated at all. In some cases it might depend on how much attention a particular case receives or whether the advocate has the resources or political will to pursue an investigation. This means that many cases of serious harm or death could be ignored. These young people should not be subject to random decisions about whether or not they deserve to have their deaths or injuries investigated. We need to ensure that every life counts.

Now, decreased data collection and transparency. Another troubling provision of this bill is the reduction in reporting requirements. Currently the advocate is required to report on incidents every six months. Bill 38 reduces this to just once a year and without the requirement for these reports to be made public or tabled in the Legislature. This effectively shields the government from scrutiny and prevents the public from understanding the state of child welfare in Alberta.

What impact will this have on Albertans? These provisions in Bill 38 will have a serious and far-reaching impact on Alberta's most vulnerable youth, those youth who have been in care and transitioning to adulthood. Let me break down some of the real-world consequences. Increased risk of harm for vulnerable youth. By eliminating the investigation, reducing oversight, this bill makes it much more likely that we will miss cases of substance abuse, suicide, mental health crisis, and violent acts among youth 18 to 24. These young people will be left to navigate a complex world without the resources they need to survive and thrive. Their mental health struggles and substance abuse problems require proactive intervention, and Bill 38 removes that safety net.

This bill will disproportionately affect Indigenous youth. In Alberta over 70 per cent of children in care are Indigenous. These children and youth are already facing systematic barriers in education, health care, and community support. Bill 38 takes away critical protections, making it even harder for Indigenous youth to get the support they need.

The NDP strongly opposes this bill because it abandons young people when they need us most. We must stand for these young people and ensure they are not left behind. We cannot let this government sweep these issues under the rug.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise again. I would like to introduce an amendment.

5:30

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

You may proceed. You don't need to read it all into the record, but you do need to move it.

Member Batten: Excellent. Member Batten to move that Bill 38, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 – and everyone will receive the amendment here shortly, as it is long. The point of this amendment is to ensure that children and youth who have previously been in care and unfortunately suffered either grievous injuries or tragically passed away will continue to be investigated. It will keep the Child and Youth Advocate Act in its current state, which

does not limit the investigative abilities of the advocate herself. The Minister of Children and Family Services has spoken about wanting to limit her scope to focus specifically on those 18 and under.

I wholeheartedly support the minister in wanting to increase support for these vulnerable children under 18; however, children who were previously in care will not magically stand on their own two feet the day that they turn 18. Many of these youth are experiencing long-term trauma that they continue to require resources, support, and care for. It does not go away on the night of their 18th birthday. They deserve support, they deserve care, and they deserve to know that someone is watching over them. They most certainly do not deserve to be treated as red tape, as this UCP government is doing.

This amendment will ensure that these vulnerable youth will continue to be investigated in the case of serious injury or death. Unlike this bill, it will not lower the age of investigations for the advocate but keep it the same so that the advocate can monitor children who were in care. This is an important amendment to protect our youth in this province who have suffered. This is about accountability. Madam Chair, this is not about scoring political points; it is about protecting our youth who may continue to need support despite being 18 and over.

Like I said earlier, the need for help does not disappear overnight when they legally turn 18. In fact, data shows that deaths of the young who are receiving intervention services in Alberta see the highest rates amongst those 18 and older. The purpose of reporting these deaths is to provide information so that the system and its administrators can be improved, so fewer youths pass away.

The office of the advocate does incredible work. It's often underresourced and underappreciated but so incredibly important. Under this UCP government we have seen some of the highest counts of youths in care who have passed on, and, as has been mentioned a number of times in this Chamber, there's a disproportionate number of Indigenous children and youth. This is not acceptable.

To have the minister of red tape reduction put forward a bill that simply ends reporting of youth deaths does not actually change the deaths. It just means we lose the data, we lose the transparency, and we lose the ability to continue to serve these youths, who deserve so much more. There is so much that can be done to help children and youth in care, none of which includes reducing the transparency of numbers in care nor taking away the advocate's ability to investigate and report on them.

I encourage all members in this Assembly to vote in support of this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any members to join the debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:34 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Hayter	Schmidt
Boparai	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Kayande	Sweet

5:50

Against the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz
Bouchard	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Singh
de Jonge	Lovely	Stephan
Dreeshen	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	

Totals:	For – 15	Against – 44
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 38?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 38 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 38 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For:

Amery	Johnson	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz
Bouchard	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Singh
de Jonge	Lovely	Stephan
Dreeshen	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:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Hayter	Schmidt
Boparai	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Kayande	Sweet

Totals:	For – 44	Against – 15
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[Request to report Bill 38 carried]

Bill 47
Automobile Insurance Act

The Chair: Are there any members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont – Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: I mean, we are office roommates, so I can understand the confusion.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to rise and once again speak to the challenges in Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act. I've got to say that I was pretty excited to see all of the members from the other side of the House come back to hear my four minutes in bringing us home to 6 o'clock on discussing Bill 47.

Bill 47 is brought forward to allegedly reduce insurance premiums in Alberta, and I think we all agree that changes are needed to reduce premiums. According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada Alberta had the second-highest rates in the country in 2022, and in 2022 the average annual auto insurance premium in Alberta was \$1,587, outpaced only by Ontario. The lowest in the country was Quebec at \$939 and Prince Edward Island at \$948. Our neighbours in western Canada, all with public auto insurance systems, all pay less. In British Columbia the average premium is \$1,411, in Saskatchewan \$1,347, while in Manitoba only \$1,193.

I should point out that since that time this government has permitted insurance premiums in Alberta to increase. In fact, just earlier this year they lifted the amount to 7.5 per cent, increasing premiums by 7.5 per cent this year and 7.5 per cent

again next year. Madam Chair, this results in hundreds of dollars more in insurance premiums for Albertans. This is all before Bill 47 is going to be enacted and implemented. It's going to take a couple of years before it's actually fully implemented, going through the regulations, going through insurance companies, going through their work in factoring in what their premiums should be, getting those premiums approved by the insurance rate board, and then, of course, as people cycle through renewing their auto insurance contract.

It's going to be a couple of years before we start to see any of this, and I regret to say that when that time comes, it's highly unlikely that Albertans are going to see a reduction in premiums. In fact, they'll probably see premiums staying largely the same while losing the right to litigate.

The report that the government itself commissioned shows that if we really wanted to reduce premiums, the examples to follow are Manitoba and British Columbia with public insurance systems. Only in those, in all of the other systems that were used as comparisons, that included some kind of private mix, premiums would go up, yet this government refuses to look at the use of a public system to lower premiums.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the committee is now recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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