



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, October 29, 2024

Day 61

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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United Conservative: 49

New Democrat: 37

Vacant: 1

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Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Centennial Window

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to introductions, I'd like to draw your attention to the public gallery to my right. Adding a bright spot inside this Chamber is the stained glass window unveiled 15 years ago in 2009. The window was gifted to the Assembly by the city of Edmonton in recognition of our 100th year of democracy here in the province of Alberta. Inspired by a visit of one of the artists that made it to the Legislature, the design is entitled *Alberta, the Land of Opportunities*. Its curves and lines within are a reference to the architecture of our building.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my absolute honour and pleasure to introduce to all members of this Assembly a distinguished visitor joining us today in my gallery. Lord Hugo Swire served as a member of the United Kingdom House of Commons for East Devon in southwest England from 2001 to 2019. He served in various capacities in both the opposition and government, including the Minister of State for Northern Ireland, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, where he was responsible for North and South America, Asia, Asia Pacific, Australia, and the Commonwealth as an institution.

Following his retirement from public office in 2019, Lord Swire was created Baron Swire, of Down St. Mary in the County of Devon and was appointed to the House of Lords. Lord Swire joins us today in his role as the deputy chair of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council. The CWEIC is a nonprofit organization with an official mandate from the Commonwealth heads of government to facilitate trade and investment through the 56 Commonwealth member nations.

I was pleased to host him for lunch earlier today and thoroughly enjoyed our conversation and his insightful perspective. I please invite him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the students from Cardinal Léger junior high school from Edmonton-Decore and their teacher Pascal Héту. I ask the students and the educators to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly a frequent visitor here and a faithful question period watcher, my mom, Josie Fir. She's been in question period withdrawal since May, so she's thrilled to be back. Mom, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: I wouldn't want to say she's my favourite MLA mom, but she might be.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a Christian organization based out of Edmonton called Parents and Kids Together, known as PAKT. I ask them to please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome from the Assembly.

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

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you representatives from Linde, who recently announced a \$2 billion investment in a hydrogen facility here in Alberta, and also members from Tourmaline, who last week opened up two new compressed gas fuelling stations that will help to advance their network across Alberta in the next couple of years. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you front-line health care workers from the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, representing more than 29,000 professionals across our health care system. These dedicated folks provide life-saving care every single day, and they are also advocating every single day for a stronger public health care system for all, and that is why 40 of them are here with us today. I'd now ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Kari-Lynn McLeod. Kari-Lynn is an emerg nurse down in southern Alberta, and more importantly, my best friend. Kari, I ask that you rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has a statement to make.

Health System Reform

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our health care system is in crisis, but instead of addressing the basic challenges in the system like chronically understaffed facilities, lack of family docs, serious issues with recruitment and retention, this UCP government is making a bad situation worse. They're restructuring the system so they can hve it off to the lowest bidder, a dangerous path to walk, looking to the cheapest and most expeditious way rather than the best and most high-quality way. Let's be clear. Alberta and its health care workers, like those who met with our caucus today, like those who live in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, want to see high-

quality, accessible, publicly delivered health care, not experiments in privatization.

When it comes to addictions care, they know that this government's reckless, one-size-fits-all approach will harm those Albertans who need care. Recovery, Mr. Speaker, does not look the same for everyone. Rather than this government's musings about deskilling and privatization, we know that addictions care that is provided by qualified professionals and that respects an individual's autonomy is the only way to address the current crisis.

This UCP government needs to get to work on an immediate health care workforce plan, a plan where workers are valued, are paid fairly for their time, and where there's an understanding that their working conditions are patients' care conditions. No health care worker, Mr. Speaker, wants to see patients experience negative outcomes. They should be respected as the experts and professionals that they are, listened to and consulted because they know what evidence-based health care should look like. They know how important it is that mental health and addictions care is delivered by trained professionals, and, most of all, they know that the very best health care for all of us here in Alberta is publicly funded and publicly delivered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie is next.

Alberta Bill of Rights Amendments

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Protection for fundamental rights is necessary in a free and democratic society and is highly valued by Albertans. All Albertans expect their government to respect and protect their fundamental rights and freedoms. I have heard from my constituents in Grande Prairie that government needs to do a better job of protecting their rights and freedoms, and I know that other members of this House have been hearing the same thing from their constituents.

I'm proud to say that our government has listened to these concerns and is acting now to amend the Alberta Bill of Rights. Since 1972 the Alberta Bill of Rights has been an important tool for holding the government to account but has not been significantly updated since then. The amendments we are introducing in this House would make sure this law continues to serve Albertans in an evolving society.

I would like to add that many of the proposed amendments in the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act relate to recommendations from the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel. This expert panel reviewed the legislation and governance practices of government during the COVID-19 public health emergency, and many of the proposed amendments in the Bill of Rights relate to recommendations the panel made to improve protections for Albertans and better align the Alberta Bill of Rights with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Proposed changes would broaden and strengthen Albertans' rights with protections for personal autonomy, including the right to decide whether or not to receive a vaccination or other medical procedure, the right to acquire, keep, and use firearms in accordance with the law, and strengthen property rights. If passed, the amended Bill of Rights will ensure that no Albertan can be deprived of their property without legal authorization and just compensation.

Mr. Speaker, our government is fully committed to protecting the values and way of life that make Alberta such a great place to live. I hope everyone in this Chamber will support these important updates.

Thank you very much.

1:40

FSCD Program Wait-list

Ms Renaud: The UCP government does not call wait-lists wait-lists. They call them in planning or waiting for service. They're one and the same when it comes to disability supports for children. Kids and families are waiting months, sometimes even a year for service.

Family support for children with disabilities legislation is clear. If the child meets the criteria for supports, they are eligible to receive those supports. Supports include occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, behavioural supports, counselling, and respite. Right now under this government children and families that are finally getting that all-important diagnosis for their infants and children, often at a huge financial cost, are being told they've met criteria for funding, but they will have to wait until they are assigned a caseworker. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is: welcome to the wait-list.

Every month and year that an infant or child is denied or delayed service is a significant loss of potential and puts additional pressure on future supports. This government is failing to equip families with the help they need to raise a child with a disability because they cannot manage a wait-list. To quote a 2023 CBC article, raising disabled kids is exhausting but not why you think.

The UCP government has not updated their open-data FSCD wait-list since December of 2021. Last we checked, over 4,000 families and children were waiting for services, losing time they will never get back. We hear from desperate families with disabled children and youth all across the province. Family and children are in crisis.

Families have used up any and all private insurance or savings for early intervention and cannot afford more while lingering on a wait-list. Families are collapsing under the pressure of unmet needs. Disabled children are losing ground and opportunity because this government chose not to properly fund disability supports even after announcing millions more in additional funding to address exploding wait-lists just before the last election. Funny how that happens.

Alberta children deserve more than empty promises and an evolving disaster.

Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Getson: Mr. Speaker, this summer I engaged with constituents, fellow Canadians, and many folks from other countries. Affordability was a common and a pervasive theme. Postpandemic economies everywhere saw different courses of action. Some jurisdictions required stimulus packages. Some diversified. Some mitigated the economic impacts by not overreacting. There was not a one size fits all, and no one got it perfect.

There was, however, one common, amazing understanding. No country other than Canada thought increasing taxes on private citizens to change the weather was smart before, during, or after a pandemic. When I explain the level of 'wackonomics' unleashed on the Canadians by the Liberal-NDP alliance, people were absolutely shocked. How the heck does taxing people for heating their homes, going to work, working the farm do a darned thing to change the weather? Short answer, Mr. Speaker: it doesn't. It just makes it more difficult for people to live.

If a private citizen came up with this glorified Ponzi scheme, we'd throw them in jail and throw away the key for good measure, but when a socialist government makes it law, it's supposed to be for our own good. The members opposite have the audacity to point their fingers, politicizing economic struggles of Albertans caused from something they brought in when they governed. They brought in this tax scam simply to punish us. Their Liberal-NDP alliance

doesn't and won't offer Albertans any relief, and the Alberta chapter of the NDP still supports this thing.

Now, the same group that claims to control the climate through taxation couldn't lift a finger to prevent wildfires that burned 30 per cent of Jasper this summer. They're well versed in pontification but not much for practical action. Zero effort to remove the dead trees. They're a massive fuel load surrounding that village, a jewel in all of our eyes, Mr. Speaker. The former MP warned them as early as 2017, pleading for action, and that fell on deaf ears.

The phantom of the opposition, the new and improved liberalized NDP leader, maybe should pick up his phone and call his bestie down in Ottawa and get him to axe the tax. I won't hold my breath, but neither should Albertans.

Our government, however, is working hard on provincial leaders to continue to stand up for everyday Canadians and Albertans, who all know you can't change the weather by robbing people blind.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, as we begin the fall session, I'm reminded that my voice represents thousands in Edmonton-South – neighbours, friends, and family – who put their trust in me to speak on the issues that matter to them and hold this government accountable when their best interests aren't being served, so I'd be remiss to not speak on the topic that I'm continually flooded with e-mails and phone calls about, the south Edmonton hospital.

Our health care system is truly in disrepair. We have doctors and nurses leaving the province because they're sick and tired of working under a government that doesn't listen to them, doesn't collaborate with them, and doesn't value their expert knowledge. How can this be the case when the Minister of Health speaks on platitudes of lemonade stands and pits north against south in Edmonton, or when the Premier says that constituents in my riding could drive to Red Deer, 90 minutes one way, to get the care they need?

In 2017 I was proud to join the former NDP government to announce the intention to build the south Edmonton hospital because I knew, as a resident in Edmonton-South, as a mother, as a caregiver to an elderly parent, how vital it would be to have a hospital access close to home. Back then our hospitals were overcrowded. Back then our front-line health care workers said that we needed a hospital. And back then a plan and business case was set to see that hospital built by 2026. Now where are we? No construction has started, no timeline has been given, and this UCP government fights tooth and nail when millions of taxpayer dollars have already been spent to get construction under way; \$69 million to be exact, Mr. Speaker.

I want the people of Edmonton-South to know that I will continue to speak on the need for a hospital until the day it finally opens.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Regulation of Professional Standards

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier's friend, Jordan Peterson from Ontario, lost in court, she took action. It's not the first time she has raised concerns with the court decisions and the independence of the judiciary. Instead of focusing on the priorities of Albertans, the Premier wants to review all self-regulating professions to make room for the kind of wild things her friend Jordan Peterson said. Let's be clear that Jordan Peterson admittedly encouraged people to commit suicide and made hateful

remarks about a number of minority groups of Canadians as a registered psychologist.

She also indicated that she wants to ensure that regulatory bodies are not imposing unnecessary training on professionals. Does she think the Law Society of Alberta's Path course about reconciliation constitutes an overreach and unnecessary training?

Mr. Speaker, our professionals, including medical doctors, lawyers, psychologists, and others, have a professional code of conduct to adhere to. I must ask: does the Premier think that it was acceptable for her former Deputy Premier, Kaycee Madu, to call the police chief over a traffic ticket? Or perhaps does she think it's acceptable for the former Minister of Health, Tyler Shandro, to scream at a doctor's door because this government has neglected health care? These are the failures that our professional regulatory bodies are rightly able to self-govern, and it should not be the purview of the Premier to intrude on this work.

Had the Premier read the decision, she would see that the court agreed that the college of psychologists of Ontario's decision "proportionately balanced the competing interests, protecting the public interest in professionalism in communications by members and prevention of harm, while minimally impairing Dr. Peterson's right to freedom of expression." Mr. Speaker, the Premier must stay in her lane and stop this witch hunt for professional colleges and let them do their job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a tabling, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of an article titled Nowhere To Turn: Alberta's Dismal History of Support for Youth in Transition to Adulthood, by Sarah N. Kriekle. I referred to this article in my debate yesterday on Motion 514. Thank you so much.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite five copies of an article written by Ricky Leong entitled No Saving Face Over Green Line Fiasco, which really details the timeline through which the provincial government has meddled in this fiasco and really caused a huge amount of money to be lost by the province and taxpayers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has a tabling.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to submit the five requisite copies of a great article showcasing the great work of our sheriffs with the Fugitive Apprehension Sheriffs Support Team.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bedlington, and we will return after question period.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an article entitled Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education. It's got a really great piece in here about prevention of childhood sexual abuse with comprehensive sexual health curriculums.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Food Bank Use

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, while the Premier focuses on placating her base ahead of the leadership vote, Albertans, even those with two incomes, are finding it increasingly hard to put food on the table. In a new report, the Calgary Food Bank says that usage has shot up 90 per cent since the UCP took office, 6 per cent in the last year alone. The CEO says this is a bigger increase than the rest of the country has seen. Why is food bank usage skyrocketing under this UCP government more than anywhere else in Canada?

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

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Leader of the Official Opposition for the question. We are a government who is the first to support food banks. We came through with a \$10 million support last year, \$5 million administered through family and community social supports, as well as \$5 million that was matching grants. We continue with that program this year because we do recognize an essential need that we have in our communities. As we go through the budget process, no doubt we'll also be looking at the statistics and seeing if we need to extend that plan.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, that additional funding didn't even help operations for a single day. The CEO of the food bank gave this incredibly alarming statistic: 37 per cent of Alberta food bank clients are working, and that's higher than the national average. So while the government thinks the only people who are struggling, that all they need to do is get a job, the hard reality is food bank clients are working but costs are skyrocketing while the Premier does nothing. Again, why is food bank usage skyrocketing under this UCP government more than anywhere else in Canada?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition should know that part of the reason why we are disadvantaged by the federal government's carbon tax is that the cost of everything is underscored by fossil fuels, whether it is the truck that takes the groceries to a grocery store, whether it is the truck that takes the food off the field, whether it is the equipment being used to create the food in the first place. I wish that the Leader of the Official Opposition would join us in calling her boss in Ottawa and saying that we should end the retail carbon tax. That's the way you bring prices down.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, we're seeing more use in Alberta than anywhere else and yet she references a national program. I don't think she understands what's happening here in Calgary. The CEO of Calgary Food Bank has this to say about Alberta, quote: folks are coming for opportunity, and then they get here and they're struggling to find jobs, they're struggling to find housing. The CEO says they're lined up out the door looking for help, and the Premier should know all this because she stopped by for a visit to complain about plastic bags instead. Picking more useless fights doesn't help. Why isn't this Premier listening to Albertans?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, 100 per cent of our heating of those buildings comes from natural gas, which has a carbon tax on it that is three times the cost of the natural gas. We have 90 per cent of our power grid that is fuelled by natural gas, which also has a carbon tax, which is three times the amount of the natural gas. We have gasoline and diesel that is used to transport products, which has a 35-cent federal tax on it from all the different ways that they're taking a hit. That is the reason why Alberta is specifically disadvantaged and why they should join us in our carbon tax lawsuit. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Election Voting Equipment

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this government funds education at the lowest per-student funding level in Canada and now has made everything worse with Bill 20. School boards now have to pay for the Premier's conspiracy theories, because she's against vote tabulators to count ballots. In Edmonton, counting trustee ballots by hand is going to cost \$1.9 million, money that could have been spent to hire more or pay more to our educational assistants. Why is the Premier wasting money on vote-counting conspiracies to satisfy her base instead of hiring more EAs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why does the Leader of the Official Opposition continue to align herself with her bosses in Ottawa? We have a federal carbon tax that is going to cost our education system \$61.9 million by 2030. That is the equivalent of hiring 495 teachers. At that time, schools will have spent a cumulative total of \$391 million on the punitive carbon tax, and, oh, by the way, they don't get a rebate.

One more time. Let's get the official Leader of the Opposition to stand up and stand with us. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I and the members of the Official Opposition are here to stand up for Albertans, and Albertans want their kids to get good education.

It's not just Edmonton school boards that will have to divert millions to pay for the Premier's baseless conspiracy theories. In Airdrie, the city estimates that banning vote tabulators will cost residents \$160,000 for hand counting of ballots. Clearly there are better uses for these funds. They could hire educational assistants so that a child who is a Ukrainian refugee can get the English language supports that they need. Why are you believing conspiracies?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the amount of carbon tax that the city of Calgary alone spent in 2023 would have been enough to hire 121 police officers or firefighters. Now, take that across the entire province, and the cost associated with the federal carbon tax, which they continue to support, is not good for school boards. It's not good for health facilities. It's not good for municipalities.

Please, Mr. Speaker, I'm begging you. Ask them to stand up and take a stand with us that opposes the federal carbon tax.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, governing by conspiracy theory is not good for Alberta.

Thousands of working people turned up last week at this Legislature demanding better pay for staff like our incredible educational assistants. They deserve a raise, and our kids need more of them in the classroom. But the Premier tells EAs no so that she can say yes to conspiracy theories about vote tabulators. Even the B.C. Conservatives have admitted that their election was safe, that it was secure, when using tabulator machines. Why waste millions of dollars for conspiracy theories?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's take a trip down memory lane. In 2017, when the NDP were in power, they had a mandate for zero per cent increases for front-line staff. They did the same thing in

2018 and – oh, guess what? – same thing in 2019. So they are standing here today having given zero increases to education assistants in 2017, zero per cent increases in 2018, zero per cent increases in 2019. We value our front-line workers. We're looking forward to the bargaining process completing and getting a negotiated settlement at the table.

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

Support for Newcomers

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier said last week that she's done with asylum seekers coming to Alberta. These are people fleeing war. These are people who need our Canadian and Albertan generosity to find a safe and peaceful place to live. My question to the Premier is: which asylum seekers from which countries will this Premier not welcome to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were very grateful to the members of our community who helped to bring asylum to 63,000 Ukrainians who were fleeing the war in Ukraine. We have done an incredible amount to be able to support that group and, as a result, when the federal government has asked for an additional 28,000 people to be flown to Alberta without supports, we had to say: we need the money; we don't have the space; we need to make sure that we're connecting people with jobs so that they can support themselves. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this Premier welcomed thousands of people to this province with her own multimillion-dollar ad campaign. She set aspirational targets for provincial growth like growing Red Deer to a million people. Any day now Alberta's population will reach 5 million, but there aren't enough hospitals, schools, jobs, or homes for everyone. The Premier can't get more inconsistent with what she says. It feels like she's playing politics, not planning. I'd really like to ask: which is it, grow Red Deer to a million people, or close the borders?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have always been very consistent that we welcome anyone to Alberta who has a job, who wants to be able to build a business, raise their family, and build a life here, and that is part of the reason why we reached out to our friends across the country. I think we were just as surprised as anyone that 200,000 people chose to come to Alberta in 2023. Then we discovered that Justin Trudeau's reckless policies had brought in almost 2 million people in 2023. This is why we have asked for a return for more rational policies on immigration, international students, temporary foreign workers, and asylum seekers.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier talks about welcoming people but not asylum seekers escaping war and violence. It's not too late for the province to work with other levels of government to find solutions. But what Albertans need is a Premier who is focused on building up public services, not tearing them down or cancelling them, like cancelling the south Edmonton hospital. So what exactly is the Premier doing besides picking unnecessary fights, using bombastic language to fix the mess, to fund public services, and to

work with all levels of government to encourage growth for a better province?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, talk about talking on both sides of your mouth. That's what we're hearing from the Leader of the Official Opposition. We have an increase in housing prices. As a result, BILD and their associated companies have massively increased the amount of year-over-year construction for single-family homes and rental units. We have also seen that if you go to some communities, they've had to winterize their campgrounds because they don't have enough spaces for people to live in homes. They have also seen an increase in the number of shelter spaces. We are a generous place, we want to welcome people here, but coming to a shelter or campground is not an appropriate way to support newcomers.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:02.

Sexual Health Education Curriculum

Ms Chapman: Alberta currently has a well-functioning sexual health curriculum opt-out system for the minority of families who wish to do so. Now this government wants to flip the switch and have the vast majority of parents take on the burden of yet another school form, you know, those forms that you fish out at the bottom of the backpack weeks after they were sent home, and for families for whom English is a second language, the burden of administrative forms is significant. To the minister: the system Alberta got ain't broke, so what exactly is the UCP trying to fix?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that parents are strong partners in their kids' education. We know that parents have the best interest of their child at heart, and we know that when parents are working closely with teachers and other educational staff, we get the best possible results. We want to work to ensure that we're able to build the strongest possible connection and co-operation between parents and between teachers and other staff. We'll be of course working more with our school divisions and other partners as we move forward on implementing new policies but to help ensure that we have the best possible outcome for kids.

Ms Chapman: Evidence supports that children who receive good-quality, age-appropriate sexual health education results in lower teen pregnancy rates, lower sexually transmitted infection rates, and delayed timing for first sexual encounters. When it comes to sexual health, changing to an opt-in model sends a message that sexual health information is taboo. Why does this government want to politicize good-quality sexual health information, and who exactly was asking for this change?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not doing anything like that at all. We're not politicizing sex education at all. The member has it wrong. As I mentioned, we want to ensure and make sure that parents are integral partners in the education of their children. I don't know if there's anything wrong with that. I want to hear from the NDP if they don't believe that parents are partners in education, if they don't believe in the responsibility of parents and families in the education of their children. I invite the members opposite to let their position be well known. We will continue to make sure that parents and families and communities are all integrally connected.

Ms Chapman: “Puberty prepares people to function as adults with healthy bodies, choices, relationships, thoughts, and emotions.” “Positive health practices during puberty include engaging in physical activity, eating nutritious foods, and reducing stress.” These are learning outcomes directly from the grade 3 and grade 5 sexual health curriculum, so can the minister explain why he wants to add barriers between children and this important education?”

Mr. Nicolaides: We’re not adding barriers. Happy to hear the member quote directly from our curriculum, which is developed and strong, as the member has noted. It’s a strong curriculum that gives students the foundations that they need to be successful both in their academics and in their personal lives and in personal relationships as well. Of course, at the end of the day, it has always been the practice to give parents the final decision over their student’s or their child’s participation in sexual education. That’s always been the case in the province. Parents have that right currently, and they will continue to have that right. I’m happy to see that the member opposite thinks our curriculum is strong and robust.

Transmission Grid Reliability

Ms Al-Guneid: The summer season is over, but the UCP’s mismanagement of the electricity sector since 2019 does not seem to end. Albertans now experience grid alerts every season. The latest was last week in minus three degrees. The minister, shockingly, asked yesterday: who’s going to use all that electricity? Maybe to stop grid alerts, to export and make money, bring the data centres the Premier is courting. After five years why does this Premier continue to mismanage the sector, unable to keep the lights on?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the opposition demonstrates their lack of understanding of our electricity grid. This is what’s typically called the shoulder season, when it’s not minus 40 or plus 40. This is why all our thermal dispatchers do regular, scheduled maintenance at this time. Now, when we get a little bit close to the limit because the wind didn’t show up or the sun didn’t shine, we are issued an alert by our ISO. This is standard practice. We never got close to any rolling brownouts. We never got close to any lack of supply. This is why we do it now, so we have electricity all through the winter.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the UCP’s mismanagement in electricity and market uncertainty is now driving investments away, given that industry players are saying loud and clear that they are investing outside of our province and given that Ontario, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and B.C. will absorb investments, rural economic development, and low-cost power that Alberta is missing out on, why is the UCP targeting renewables, scaring away investments in the electricity sector?

Mr. Neudorf: Again, the opposition has it incorrect. Alberta actually leads Canada in renewable development. We have more wind than any other province. We have more solar than any other province. It is a larger portion of our grid than any other province can claim; 31 and a half per cent of our capacity comes from wind or solar. Investment is here because we are an open market. Every other province has to issue an invitation for them to build, whether it’s Ontario or Manitoba or B.C., begging for them to come and build a measly 5,000 or 10,000 megawatts. We’ve already surpassed that, and we continue to grow.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that Albertans continue to face grid alerts and the environment minister told us, quote, “think of a mom awake with her baby in the middle of the night and she can’t turn on the lights” and given that this minister never stopped campaigning for the UCP leadership instead of focusing on her file, given that the Premier told us that safety and lives are at risk due to blackouts, why is the UCP fearmongering for personal gain and mismanaging the sector instead of attracting investment and ensuring Albertans keep the lights on?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, our leaders and our Premier have been advocating to keep natural gas dispatchable generation available. That’s what the federal government is trying to stop. That’s what the federal government is trying to turn off. That’s what the federal government is going to risk, blackouts and increasing the costs of affordability of electricity to all Albertans. That’s why we stand up for Albertans. That’s why we are building a reliable, dependable grid with affordability at the forefront of everything that we do, to make sure that the investment that comes to Alberta serves Albertans.

Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Premier and the Minister of Justice announced that Alberta will be challenging the exemption of home heating oil from the carbon tax in court. Every MLA in this Chamber has constituents who are facing punishing increases to their home heating from Nenshi’s Liberal-NDP bosses in Ottawa, and we’ve challenged the carbon tax before. Can the minister of environment tell the House whether the carbon tax actually even does what it’s supposed to and reduces emissions?

2:10

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this question. Absolutely not. The federal carbon tax did not reduce emissions, but it did raise the cost of everything. The federal government’s own numbers continue to show that Canadians suffer a net cost, paying more in the carbon tax than they will ever get back in rebates. We know the impacts of carbon taxes here in Alberta. The sad thing is that it wasn’t even Justin Trudeau or Jagmeet Singh who had to bring it in, because the Alberta NDP did it for them. The opposition needs to do the right thing, stand with our government, and demand that Ottawa axe the tax.

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

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that our government has long opposed the carbon tax – in fact, the first bill the United Conservative government passed in 2019 was the repeal of the largest tax increase put on Albertans, the carbon tax – and given that their federal bosses then imposed one on us anyway, can the Minister of Energy and Minerals tell the House: if home heating oil gets an exemption, should natural gas get one as well?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are frustrated when they see the carbon tax on their heating bill is more and higher than the actual cost of the gas they’ve consumed. Albertans are also shocked to know that Atlantic Canadians are using a more carbon-intensive and more polluting fuel and at the same time don’t pay any carbon tax on their heating. That’s simply not fair. Trudeau and Guilbeault

are out of touch. The NDP backed this carbon tax. We should axe the tax as soon as possible. Tax fairness equity across all provinces across the entire country: that's what we need. The NDP should be ashamed of themselves for backing the carbon tax.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that the federal government exempted home heating oil from the carbon tax, stating that it was due to "given the pressures faced by households and small businesses," and given the NDP's bosses in Ottawa are putting pressure on every household and small business across the country, can the Minister of Affordability and Utilities tell the House how axing the tax would help families and businesses in Alberta?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for such a great question. Axing the tax would save every small business and family in Alberta hundreds of dollars each year. More than 80 per cent of Alberta households would save nearly \$500 a year on home heating alone. The carbon tax increases inflation, input costs for businesses, making everything from buying groceries to filling up your gas tank more expensive. Axing the tax is the best way to put more money back into the pockets of Alberta's families and small businesses.

HSAA Contract Negotiations

Dr. Metz: Earlier today I met with several members of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. They have clear asks of us, including, quote, that trained professionals should be providing mental health and addictions care. Given that it is not compassionate to download the important work onto untrained community members and that a five-day orientation is not training as an addictions counsellor, why is the government ignoring the importance of proper training for this work, and do they realize it is impacting morale and both client and worker safety?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking all of Alberta's health care workers, especially those who are working in Recovery Alberta with Mental Health and Addiction. We, happily, had close to all 15,000 members of HSAA come over to Recovery Alberta with the exception of 15, who continued within AHS, and I know that they will continue to do great work. As negotiations are ongoing, the appropriate place for that conversation is at the bargaining table, but I can say right now that the Alberta recovery model is working. If we look year over year from April all the way to June, July, we see a 40 and 50 per cent decrease in opioid deaths. We are going to continue down this path.

Dr. Metz: Given that their members have travelled from as far south as Lethbridge and as far north as La Crête and given that they work in addictions and mental health, recreation, radiation, X-ray, public health, EMS, and home care and given that they came here expecting to meet the Minister of Health but their meeting was cancelled at the last minute and a meeting with this minister was not even set up, to the minister: you are missing a chance to hear from front-line workers. Will you agree to prioritize and meet them today?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, it was 2,500 workers – pardon me – to correct the last answer. I'll also say that the appropriate place for a conversation with board members and president and others from the

union is at the bargaining table, and I don't want to disrespect the bargaining process by trying to have that conversation on the floor of the Legislature. That being said, the members from La Crête and others – Trina, nice to see you – I'm very glad to have you here, and I'm very happy to work with HSAA members and members across every union when it comes to building the Alberta recovery model. Happily, we're seeing increasingly positive numbers when it comes to our outcomes. We are going to continue this work, and we know our front-line workers are a part of that solution.

Dr. Metz: Given that the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction declined this meeting with essential health care workers and given, again, that they travelled across the province to meet with this minister to share their experience and discuss additional solutions that could be included, including a need for a broader scope of addiction care, will the minister please reconsider, show some respect for these health care workers who travelled purposely to meet with him, and actually meet them today?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, the appropriate place for conversation with board members from a union surrounding negotiations is at the bargaining table. That is a process I do not want to disrespect or circumvent. That being said, if somebody wants to offer solutions when it comes to addiction and mental health, I'm all ears if your solution means recovery, if it means helping those with health care to heal, but if, instead, members opposite want to talk about solutions like we saw my critic mention earlier this week when it came to unsafe supply, the answer is no categorically. This province will not further endanger those in addiction and our communities with more drugs on the streets.

Jasper Wildfire Recovery

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, this summer Albertans and Canadians alike watched in shock as Jasper, the jewel of the Rockies, suffered devastation from an out-of-control wildfire. This fire did unspeakable damage to the community and to the economy of Jasper, with many of the hotels and small businesses suffering catastrophic damage. These businesses lost more than half of their busiest season and will likely not see business return for years to come. Why is this government standing by and not providing relief to these businesses?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a group of ministers led by the Premier in pretty much constant contact with Jasper, her citizens, her businesses, providing all the support, all the relief we can. If the hon. member has ideas for what more we could do, we'd be happy to hear it, but I can tell you that just about an hour ago, before question period, I spent some time dealing with the people that are scheduled to take out the foundations of the burnt-down homes so that we can get at full-fledged construction next spring. The work goes on. It hasn't really stopped on this side of the House, and if the hon. member actually can contribute positively to it, I'm all ears.

Mr. Ellingson: Well, we should chat, because we have been talking to businesses and the administration in Jasper about those ideas.

Given that the economy of Jasper is almost entirely dependent on tourism and the town is faced with the additional blow of CN announcing that they'll move their operations yard, given that these businesses are labour-intensive businesses employing hundreds of workers, many now faced with both relocating and finding new work, why is this government not stepping forward with their relief plan to support these businesses, their employees, help them plan for the future and their workers so that they can stay in Jasper?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I'm actually in shock. I am genuinely in shock with the nature of that question. To suggest that this government has not stepped up in a whole government approach in collaboration with the federal government and with the municipal government of Jasper and Parks Canada to make sure the community of Jasper gets back on its feet as fast as possible – I am almost at a loss for words except it's my job to answer this question. The Minister of Tourism and Sport has committed \$2.5 million to manage reputational damage to make sure that tourists continue to come back to Jasper from around Canada and around the world. The minister of community and social services has been there. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has been there. I have been there. Has that member been to Jasper?

2:20

Mr. Ellingson: I have been meeting with businesses from Jasper and with the CAO, and we've not heard an announcement to get the businesses back on their feet. Given that the town of Jasper is located within the jurisdiction of Parks Canada and Environment Canada for planning, there is precedence for the province working with the federal government in other industries, including agriculture, to provide business relief after natural disasters. Why is this government not stepping forward, working with the town and with the federal government to provide relief for the businesses? Stop fighting the feds, and help those businesses.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has actually been to Jasper, he would know that this government and the federal government are stepping up to support Jasper. We're investing significant amounts of money to be able to make sure that the crown jewel of our community, of our province, of the Rockies will be able to continue forward. Just the other day I announced \$125 million going to create interim housing to be able to make sure Jasper can continue to do their job going forward. We were there the day after it was burnt down. The Premier was there. Ministers have been there consistently ever since, and the community of Jasper has said that they're very appreciative. So let's stop playing politics with people's lives and not play NDP games. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a question.

School Construction and Modernization

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is growing exponentially with record numbers from Canadians from across the country and ambitious newcomers choosing to call our province their home. They are choosing to work and raise their families in a dynamic province with a government that is committed to creating jobs, attracting investment, and delivering high-quality education. With a rapidly growing population, Alberta is boldly confronting new challenges and opportunities. To the Minister of Education: what actions has Alberta's government taken to build new schools to accommodate increased enrolment and ensure students can reach their full potential?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great question. Of course, the MLA knows some of the significant pressure that many municipalities are feeling with this influx of new people choosing to call Alberta home. To help accommodate this significant pressure in enrolment, we have announced the school construction accelerator program, that aims to add 200,000 spaces over the next seven years. In addition, we're also accelerating

approval timelines and processes so that a school project can move from one stage to the next as fast as possible. And we aim to see those schools be built and those new spaces be full and occupied as soon as possible.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. An \$8.6 billion investment in new student spaces is tremendous news to every single MLA in this Chamber and to families across this province. Given that the Minister of Education has committed to opening 200,000 new and modernized student spaces and given the rapidly emerging opportunities in Alberta's diversified economy and given the importance of ensuring students have the skills required to begin rewarding careers and succeed in the economy of tomorrow, how is the minister ensuring that these new and modernized schools will support students in pursuing jobs and higher education?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, that's one of the exciting pieces of this new program, Mr. Speaker, that as we look to build and design these new schools and modernize additional schools as well, we have the opportunity to make sure that the spaces in these schools are aligned with the needs of our workforce. We can look at adding, of course, CTS spaces, spaces for dual credit and other career exploration opportunities so that students can explore various career options and, of course, be ready to go, whether to postsecondary or to the career, after they graduate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's encouraging to know that students have so many academic and career pathways to help prepare for the future. Given that Alberta's government is committed to ensuring communities of all sizes of the resources needed to grow and to thrive and given the importance of supporting the needs of our big cities and rural communities, how is the minister ensuring these schools are delivered in the communities where they are needed most?

Mr. Nicolaides: As we look at the various projects that our school divisions have submitted to us, we will be taking a close look to explore utilization rates to explore demand, to explore pressure and need. Of course, one of the key priorities of this program is to build schools in communities of greatest need, those, of course, being communities that are experiencing the fastest growth and the most significant growth. So we will be evaluating the various submissions and, of course, looking at those variables to decide where those projects should move forward.

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

Veterinary Diagnostic Services Funding

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The diagnostic services unit at the University of Calgary offers fee-for-service veterinary pathology and diagnosis services to the veterinary community and researchers. The mission of the diagnostic services unit is to advance education, research, and scholarly programs at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. It was recently announced that the DSU received funding under SCAP and is extended to March 31, 2025. To the minister: given that this is a shared funding model between the federal and provincial governments and given that March 31 is only six months away, [interjection] can the minister guarantee that

there will be funding for the important animal health and human health services past March 2025?

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

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this question because this gives a chance to really highlight the excellent work that UCVM does. Of course, our government understands how important veterinary medicine is to our province here in Alberta, being a province that actually has more cattle than we do people at over 5 million, so of course over the years we've invested \$67.4 million to create 50 new seats within the UCVM. We're training more veterinarians so that we can deal with the shortage that we're seeing right now in the province of Alberta. We have \$3.44 million in a CAP partnership and funding to start new a diagnostics pilot to build more.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta actually provides the least amount of funding across the whole country for DSU services and Alberta-supported services provide affordable, accurate in-province livestock diagnostics and given that these diagnostic services can prevent industrial infection and support human health and given that bird flu has been transferred to workers from dairy cows in the United States and given that without DSU in Alberta, samples will have to go to Saskatchewan, to the minister. DSU plays a significant part in ensuring the health and welfare of animals and protects public health. For the benefit of the industry and Albertans will the government fund a five-year funding cycle, not one?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Speaker, again thanks for the question. I'll continue on the funding that this government has provided to this DSU, funding that was nonexistent when the NDP was in power. They didn't even see or put any importance in this area. We put \$3.44 million in the CAP partnership funding to start the veterinary diagnostics pilot to build access to more affordable and accessible diagnostic services. We're seeing the impact of that right now. We have an additional \$2.26 million in the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership grant to continue to expand the pilot, and we talk about \$568,000 in CAP funding to continue the work we do.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the minister was so excited to have questions from me, you'd think he'd have the answers. Given that the impact of Alberta's supported livestock diagnosis includes more timely diagnostics for producers with a fee and given that in 2022 over 30,000 tests were sent from Alberta to Saskatchewan alone because we didn't have the capacity and given that SCAP funding is federal funding and provincial funding and with Bill 18 this is up in the air, will the government commit today that they will not use Bill 18 to refuse the accepted funding to support animal welfare, human health, public health and provide it for five years?

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying here is that you're seeing a list of massive funding that this government has put around the DSU and the work that UCVM is doing. The \$568,000 in 2022 CAP funding we put, the \$1.2 million additional funding in

2023 for renovations: this shows this government understands how important the DSU is to our livestock industry here in the province. I continue to meet with UCVM and have conversations to make sure that the work they're doing, the excellent work they're doing, they're going to be able to continue in the future, and I can assure you that we will make sure that work continues.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order was noted at 2:25 by the Official Opposition Leader.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has a question to ask.

Continuing Care Spaces

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused on improving long-term care capacity in Alberta. It is an issue that my constituents and Albertans are all very interested in addressing. The recent conversations with my local private health care providers: they shared with me that in Bonnyville, for instance, there are 80 available spaces and 19 slated for closure by 2027. However, the demand forecast shows the need for 95 beds by 2029 and 112 beds by 2034. To the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: how will the government ensure my communities have the spaces they need?

2:30

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. Under the NDP health care system we saw a disaster when it came to continuing care. Thousands of seniors living in acute-care beds rather than in appropriate spaces all across the province and being forced to leave, particularly from rural communities to have to go to urban areas to receive care. That's why the government has invested \$654 million in capital over the next three years when it comes to continuing care and over a billion dollars for transformation when it comes to continuing care. What I want the hon. member to know is that the government is going to continue to take this seriously. We're going to make sure everybody has a place to stay that is appropriate, and we're going to make sure rural Alberta is not forgotten like the Official Opposition always does.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that there is a current and a significant wait-list for the Bonnyville health care centre long-term ward and that the residents have been looking for additional capacity for some time and further given that significant funding was announced in the 2024 budget for continuing care, can the minister please share an update on funding for the increased capacity in my constituency?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're investing over a billion dollars in transition and almost \$654 million in more capital. That is available if anybody is looking for information on that, on alberta.ca, on the continuing care page, for anybody who would like to see how that may impact their community going forward. We're also going to continue to work with both Alberta Health Services as well as our other providers across the province to be able to look for new, innovative ways to be able to face the challenges that we're seeing with continuing care. And, most importantly, we're going to take the capital side of seniors' lodges and the continuing care side of the health care system and bring them together like they were

before the NDP broke it, when they were in power in 2015, which is going to get more buildings built.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that I have met with health care providers that are looking to partner with the government and invest in additional capacity and further given that this concern is a priority for my constituents and this government, can the minister please share if there are any developments or discussions that are happening for additional long-term care spaces in the Lakeland region?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are having conversations all across the province, including the hon. member's constituency, to make sure that we have targeted investments to be able to make sure that we can keep caring for people that need continuing care from north to south, from east to west. I want to stress again for the hon. member that rural Alberta will be taken seriously. I know that during the Official Opposition's time in government it was not taken seriously. We have a tremendous amount of work to be able to fix the mistakes that were made during that time, where we saw wait-lists go up by over 70 per cent for this type of housing, but we have a plan. We're going to work together with the industry, and we're going to make sure that we get it fixed.

Halal Financing in Alberta

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, during a town hall on April 12, 2023, in the middle of the month of Ramadan, the Premier promised Alberta's Muslim community that under her leadership Muslim Albertans will have access to financing for home ownership under sharia law, otherwise called halal financing. The Premier reaffirmed her promise in a letter pledging the implementation of halal financing in Alberta. But 18 months down, can the Premier inform the House of when her government will introduce halal financing in Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Thank you for the question. I know it isn't tabled yet, but if the members can wait one more week, I think you'll have an answer. I know you've been very patient, and I've tried to communicate with you behind the scenes, but we're almost there, and we'll be bringing something forward shortly.

Mr. Haji: Given that seven months ago I asked the Minister of Finance similar questions and he responded, "We have a task force working . . . with the credit union and other lending institutions to . . . build this product" and given that I have spoken with experts in halal financing and financial institutions in our province, and none of them know who the government is consulting with, can the Premier disclose who the government has consulted? Did the government reach out to institutions like the Canadian Halal Financial Corporation, who has been offering these products in the province?

Mr. Horner: I can share with this House that there've been extensive consultations. I'd be happy to chat with you about that offline. We've been working with the financial institution that brought this forward. You know, they came to us and said: "Hey, can you change some of the regs so that we can offer this financial instrument to the community? We think there's a great need for it." That's the work that we began, with a lot of consultation from the community. I can give you more details offline.

Mr. Haji: Given that in the spring session the minister informed the members of this House, "We're trying to work with all of the subjects to make sure we have something that works for everyone" and given that over the summer I've engaged directly with members from the Muslim community and none of them seem to know what is in the making, why is the Premier consulting only those who are friends with the UCP instead of undertaking an inclusive consultation with Alberta's diverse Muslim populations?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I've been in this House before where the other side doesn't take no for an answer well, but this is unique that they're having a hard time hearing that it's a yes. We're almost there. There's been much consultation. We've been a facilitator in that consultation because it's been between the financial institution and the community. We're the ones changing the regulations to enable it, and we've been helpful in the consultation process, but it's been theirs.

Deaths of Aboriginal Children in Care

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to, first, send my deepest condolences to the families affected by the unacceptable numbers of deaths of children in care in this province. This summer 18 young Albertans died while receiving child intervention services, with 89 per cent of those being Indigenous. Any loss of youth in the care of the province is too much and an act of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples. Will the Minister of Children and Family Services acknowledge that this is an unconscionable number of Indigenous youth who have died, and will he commit to addressing this as the crisis that it is?

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

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. The death of any child is a horrendous event, and my heart grieves alongside any of the families affected. I want to again stress that any time a serious incident happens to any child within the child intervention system, it's taken extremely seriously. We look at it, we work with the OCYA to look at every possible solution that we can find to make sure that children here in the province are looked after and protected. This is something that is near and dear to my heart, and it's something I think about each and every day when I'm here at the Legislature.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that of those who died, eight were in care, two were not, and eight were receiving postintervention support, which can be accessed by young adults over 18 who have previously been involved in child intervention, and given that elders, practitioners, and Indigenous leaders have been asking this government to commit to action on addressing this colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, will the minister take a decolonial approach, as has been asked by experts, or will Indigenous peoples expect the status quo where we continue to lose our youth?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Turton: Yeah. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for that question. Since being appointed as Minister of Children and Family Services, I've been meeting with First Nations leaders and community leaders throughout the entire province, looking at ways that we can increase cultural connections because we know that this makes an incredible

difference for the lives of Indigenous children. That's why I have pledged to meet with any First Nations leader that is looking for additional ways that we can provide programming and services, and that's why we have enhanced family resource networks and have made strategic investments, looking for ways to increase those cultural connections for our Indigenous children.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's very first call to action is to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care, yet we know that the data shows that in 2017 Indigenous youth made up 61 per cent of youth in Alberta's care and given that in 2024, following the election of the UCP government, 74 per cent of youth in care are Indigenous – to be clear, that is an increase of 13 per cent. If the UCP is indeed focused on reconcili-action, will the minister commit to reduce the number of Indigenous youth in care, or is it all talk and no action?

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

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for that question. We are making tangible steps to improving the lives of Indigenous children here in the province. We're ensuring that a cultural plan is developed, we're working with our kinship care providers throughout the entire province to ensure that they have the proper supports that they require to be able to look after Indigenous children, and we're ensuring that Children and Family Services staff have the skills and cultural understanding to serve the Indigenous families that are so near and dear to our heart. We are making tangible steps to ensure that Indigenous children are looked after, and we will continue to work with Indigenous leaders, families, again, towards a spirit of reconcili-action so that we can ensure that our children are looked after.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question to ask.

2:40 Tourism Promotion in Livingstone-Macleod

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Livingstone-Macleod is positioned to become a destination for four-season resorts, which can significantly enhance local tourism and drive economic growth for our communities. God's country has breathtaking landscapes and abundant outdoor activities. Our region is ideal for attracting visitors year-round. However, to realize this potential, we must ensure that we have the necessary levels of investment, including infrastructure and fire safety. Can the Minister of Tourism and Sport explain what is being done to attract investment and promote the growth of tourism in my region?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod for that fantastic question. She has a great constituency, and her constituents are lucky to have her. Alberta boasts some of the most beautiful vistas and scenic landscapes around the world, and as a result, we want more people to come and see and visit those. That's why we'll be tabling the all-season resort act later this session, to make sure that we are streamlining and reducing red tape barriers for building all-season resorts in this province. We want more people to come to our landscapes, more people to visit, more people to know what we already know best, which is that Alberta is the best place to live, to play, and to visit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for that reply. Given that the development of resorts could lead to increased tourism and economic benefit and given that it is essential that our local communities are prepared to handle the influx of visitors and further given that this includes expanding infrastructure, including roads, utilities, and more, can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors explain what is being done to address these critical needs to ensure the infrastructure needs of both the residents and the tourists?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to compliment the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for her tenacious advocacy for transportation projects in her riding, and just to name a few: highway 22 passing and climbing lanes between highway 3 and Longview, highway 22 Wildcat Creek bridge replacement near Lundbreck currently being built, highway 3 Rock Creek wildlife underpass and fencing that is also being built, highway 3 twinning from Sentinel to Blairmore with engineering under way, highway 507 Mill Creek bridge rehabilitation, and highway 811 between highway 3 and highway 519. Incredible work being done in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that response. Given a heightened risk of wildfires in mountainous areas which pose a significant threat to both the resort areas and surrounding communities and given the recent concerning testimony regarding the federal response to the fire in the community of Jasper and Jasper national park, can the Minister of Forestry and Parks outline what provincial fire safety measures are in place to ensure the growth of safe and sustainable tourism in Livingstone-Macleod?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. We've started the community fireguard program, that's working hard with communities to make sure that we protect them from wildfire. We know that there's been good work done with FireSmart in the past, and we know there's more good work to be done protecting our communities and making sure that when visitors come to our province, they can enjoy a safe and enjoyable time enjoying Alberta's beauty.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

I would just like to remind members prior to departing the Chamber that it is important that no one tweets from inside the Assembly. If you're present and your Twitter account is tweeting, it's very difficult for the Speaker to assume that it isn't you and perhaps someone tweeting on your behalf. I would encourage members to govern themselves accordingly.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table the requisite number of copies of an excellent briefing document that was shared with me earlier today by members of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and it will be available in the library for all to read. They have three very clear asks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has a tabling.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I rise to table five copies of the latest data from September 2024 from Homeward Trust, that clearly identifies 4,697 unhoused folks in Edmonton, contradicting the 1,700 to 1,800 the minister wrongly noted yesterday in question period.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five requisite copies of a letter from a constituent and a teacher of 30 years sent to the Premier's office requesting this government stop their harmful policies targeting trans and gender diverse youth.

Ms Hayter: I rise to table the five requisite documents of a letter from Gemma Hickey, who visited Alberta to receive the Governor General's award in commemoration of the Persons Case, to the Premier, inviting her for lunch and a meeting and about the government's harmful antitrans legislation.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Ellis, Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, Law Enforcement Review Board 2023 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:02 the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order, which she subsequently withdrew.

She also rose at 2:25. The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rose at 2:25 under 23(j), in particular, "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." During this moment the Member for Edmonton-Manning was asking a question. The minister of community and social services was heard to heckle: we've got room for you over here, honey. I rise under the standing orders but also under *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, both unparliamentary language, which is on page 623, "the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order," as well as names and titles on page 619, where members do not refer to one another by their names but use "title, position or constituency." I would suggest that a pet name like this is not appropriate. I do believe that it was insulting, and I would ask that the member apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did not hear the comments. I would agree with the Opposition House Leader that if the

comment was said, that would be language that would not be appropriate and rise to the level of I think common debate in this place. So I would have to defer to the member. But I do agree if it was said and if it was caught in maybe your record with the Blues or on the ambient microphones. Happy to take your direction.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to provide comments?

I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 624 and 625, discusses the principle that the Speaker is unable to rule on a comment that isn't made on the record, that he or she did not hear, of which I did not hear such a comment. I agree with the Government House Leader. If he said it, it would be a point of order and he ought to withdraw it. Having said that, I did not hear that, and so it will not be a point of order. I will consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 24

Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 24 at second reading. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? The hon. the Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024, a piece of legislation that will affirm and reaffirm the values that make Alberta one of the freest jurisdictions on the planet.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to standing up for the rights of Albertans, and this legislation is one more way that we're doing that. It is imperative that government recognize the rights of individuals are paramount and that government must respect those rights. I should probably give a little bit of my framework and history for understanding where we're coming from when I look at the issue of rights.

2:50

John Locke was a philosopher from 1632 to 1704, and he was the father of our modern liberal democracy. He believed that all people were born with three natural rights, inalienable rights, that were inherent within each individual. The right to life was the first; number two is the right to liberty as long as exercising one's liberty did not conflict with the liberty of others, the idea that your right to swing your fist stops where someone else's nose begins; and, three, property, the right to own what they create or gain through trade or gift as long as it doesn't impact another's life or liberty. This was really the foundation of modern liberalism. We have rights that are independent of particular laws. They exist regardless of what the laws are. It's not that the laws grant the rights; it's that the laws codify the rights that already exist. We are naturally, just by the endowment from the Creator, free and equal.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

We have a social contract, though – this is the other part of Locke's understanding – where we agree to give up some part of our liberty, some part of our rights in exchange for the protection of those said rights and the protection of the public good. But he also

pointed out that rulers who fail to protect those rights may be removed and replaced. That's the very foundation of democracy. It's why we have elections every few years, so that the people can render their judgment on how we do in protecting these foundational freedoms.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Bill of Rights was first introduced in 1972. It was a full decade before the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it was introduced on the heels of the 1960 Diefenbaker Bill of Rights. But since that time, despite society evolving, the Bill of Rights hasn't changed that much, and if the Bill of Rights doesn't reflect the lessons learned and the changes needed today, then it loses its power and Albertans are at risk of having their rights overlooked and overruled.

We think this is unacceptable, and that's why I'm so pleased that the Minister of Justice has tabled amendments that will protect Albertans' personal autonomy, their property, and their expression. Mr. Speaker, these amendments stem from recommendations in part from the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel, that we created to review the legislation and governance practices of government during the COVID-19 pandemic. These amendments relate to those recommendations to better protect Albertans' rights and to better align the act with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and with natural law.

I mention this because the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms has an important section, section 26. What it says is that "the guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed as denying the existence of any other rights or freedoms that exist in Canada." It allows for the fact that it might not be a complete list. Unfortunately, from time to time the courts have acted as if certain rights don't exist as a result of them not being enumerated. So we're going to fix that, Mr. Speaker.

If you look at the act, one of the first things that we're changing is the preamble. I want to read this into the record so you understand the framework that we're coming from in doing this exercise on this side.

Whereas the free and democratic society existing in Alberta is founded on principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God and the rule of law and on principles, fostered by tradition, that honour and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, the dignity and worth of the human person and the position of the family in a society of free people and free institutions;

Whereas human rights and fundamental freedoms are of foundational importance to Albertan society, including during times of emergency.

There are two things that are underscored in this, Mr. Speaker. One is that these are rights endowed to each of us by virtue of being human. They are not rights that are granted by this Legislature. They are granted by virtue of being human. They are inalienable. Also, they don't get suspended in times of emergency. Rights, being inalienable, exist at all times.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a few areas that we found in recent years where governments haven't necessarily respected this overarching edict, and the first, I would say is, in the area of property rights. The Speaker may know that I began as a property rights advocate all the way back in 1997. As the founding director of the Canadian Property Rights Research Institute one of the things I learned at that time, studying Locke and others, was that there was an omission in our Bill of Rights. They currently include the right of individuals to the enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived of this enjoyment except by due process of the law, but one thing that was missing is that the taking of property should also come with just compensation. If the public is going to benefit from taking private property, the public should pay for it. If you take

something that is not yours without paying for it, it is theft, and this government will not stand for that to occur.

So what we are going to change in the Bill of Rights is that law of Alberta means an act that is enacted before or after the commencement of this act: any order, rule, or regulation made under it is subject to be repealed, abolished, or altered by the Legislature. But, importantly, the taking of property means in respect of real or personal property – real property is real estate; personal property is movable property, and I'll say more about firearms in a moment. A transfer of ownership of property without the consent of the owner, that is called a "taking." Number two, an owner of property being deprived of all reasonable uses of that property, that will also be deemed to be a taking of property, which then has to be subject to fair compensation.

The amendments will make Alberta a leader in the area of property rights.

I can continue on because one of the things that we are going to modify under section 4 is that currently it states that "liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property" are protected. We're going to change that to "liberty and security of the person" but make it even more clear how important we believe protecting property rights is by adding the right to the enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived thereof except to the extent authorized by law and except by due process of law and, importantly, (a.2), "the right not to be subject to a taking of property except to the extent authorized by law and where just compensation is provided." We think that this is going to recalibrate the relationship between provincial governments and all those who get the power through provincial legislation to ensure that every action that they take is done through a lens of ensuring that they respect the property rights of those that they govern.

The other area where we think it's vitally important for us to regulate on is the right of an individual with capacity not to be subjected to or coerced into receiving medical care, medical treatment, or a medical procedure without consent. There are two parts to this issue, and I'll explain why it is that it's separated into two. Under the amendments that you'll see, (h):

the right of the individual with capacity not to be subjected to, or coerced into receiving medical care, medical treatment or a medical procedure without the consent of that individual, unless that individual is likely to cause substantial harm to that individual or to others.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have a very serious addiction crisis in this province, and we've already indicated that we are going to begin consultation on compassionate intervention, which would be taking a person who is causing harm to themselves or others and incapable of making decisions in their own best interests and ordering them into treatment so that we can restore their individual agency, so we can get them on with their lives. So this language that we're using is specifically to allow for the fact that watching somebody slowly kill themselves is not something that we will do in a free and democratic society. We are going to make sure those folks get treatment.

However, notwithstanding that, we believe that the right to – the individual with capacity should not be subjected to or coerced into receiving a vaccine without the consent of that individual. We felt it was really important to identify that particularly, Mr. Speaker, because I think that what we observed in recent years is that that was not a provision that was honoured by the provincial government. We heard about it from our citizens, and they wanted us to correct that. So we are correcting that in law, that a person will always have the right to be able to say yes or no to getting a vaccine. Remember, vaccines will be and will remain an individual choice. You take a vaccine to protect yourself. That's why we want to make

sure that every person is able to talk to their doctor, talk to their medical professional and be able to get the advice that makes the most sense for them. But you cannot coerce others to take any medical procedure that they do not wish to take.

We have to remember: why is this necessary? Well, back in the day the NDP were proposing going door to door with teams of health professionals to coerce people into getting jobs at the door at a cost, I think they estimated at the time, of \$45 million. Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this government will never do that, and this is our guarantee. This is why we are bringing forward this amendment and putting it into law.

3:00

I should also mention that there is another important omission that we find in the current Bill of Rights, and this is on the issue of firearms, a type of personal property. Amendments will be introduced to reinforce an individual's right to acquire, to keep, and to use firearms in accordance with the law. The amendment reaffirms our commitment to standing up for lawful firearms owners in Alberta. You may wish to know, Mr. Speaker, that there are 362,000 possession and acquisition licence holders in Alberta, 10 per cent of the adult population, including myself, I must tell you. It also affirms our government's intent that provincial law should not interfere with the right of law-abiding firearms owners who purchase and use their firearms legally.

We will continue to advocate to the federal government against their unfair restrictions on lawful firearms owners. We believe the federal government has an important role to play in making sure they address the criminal use of firearms, and there are lots of criminal uses. You see firearms being smuggled across the border. You see them used by organized crime. You see them used by gangs. You see them used in the commission of a crime. We accept that that is a role for the federal government to play, but we also have a long history in this province of hunting, of sport shooting, of collecting, of farmers and ranchers using it as a tool to maintain and protect their property against predators. Those are the legal uses, the safe uses that we will continue to support and enforce in Alberta.

One of the things that I would point out is that under our Constitution Alberta does retain the right to legislate in areas of property and civil rights, and that is the reason why we are asserting our right to be able to make changes in this regard and make sure that we're protecting our law-abiding firearms owners.

One other area the Alberta Bill of Rights has a slight omission is that it already includes the right to freedom of speech, but the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel recommended that we add freedom of expression beyond written and spoken language, and we are. What might this include? Well, somebody recently gave me a very funny editorial cartoon. He was pillorying me a little bit, but you know what? That's okay in a free and democratic society. Artists have the right to be able to express themselves in their work. It may not always be through the written and spoken language, and we want to make sure that is affirmed as well in law.

I should also mention, Mr. Speaker, that when talking about the role that this will play in, I think, creating a new relationship between ourselves and the courts, I would say a couple of things. One, the application of this bill is going to be only to the Legislature and government of Alberta in respect to all matters within the authority of the Legislature of Alberta. We recognize that we have a lane, but I can tell you – you've probably already seen this – that we intend to ensure that every area that we are responsible for, we are going to exercise our full authority. So that would be number one.

Two, I would say that when looking at how this legislation is gauged relative to others, it is a statute, and as has been indicated, statutes can be revised and they can be in conflict with other laws, but we are putting in clear language that this law has paramountcy. Paramountcy means that any law of Alberta that is inconsistent with the provisions of this act is to the extent of the inconsistency of no force and effect. What this means is it takes precedence over all other laws passed by this Chamber. I should also mention that there is an opportunity if any future government decides that they want to be explicit. If there is an area that might conflict with the law, they have to be explicit in doing so by saying that it operates notwithstanding this act. I am quite certain that there will be very few areas, Mr. Speaker, where that will apply.

Mr. Speaker, I believe deeply in the principles of individual freedom and responsibility that have guided and built this province for generations. This updated Alberta Bill of Rights will ensure that our province continues to be home to freedom, to democracy, and a way of life that we have come to cherish. I am so proud of the amendments before us in this Legislative Assembly, and I look forward to some robust debate. These updates are not only changes that Albertans are asking for; they are changes that ensure that every day, no matter the situation, every one of us can be confident of our rights and freedoms, that they will be protected and supported. That's why I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join the debate? I see the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 24, and I would start my comments by saying that rights are important; there is no disagreement. They are the cornerstone of a free and democratic society, and we should respect them. We should protect them. Albertans want us to stand up for their rights.

The Premier mentioned natural rights: right to life, liberty, right to property. Since that time, I guess, we have come a long way towards the establishment of civil society and modern liberalism. Since then there have been many developments. I won't go over all of them, but in the context of Canada I will say that we are fortunate to be living in Canada, where we have a comprehensive framework of rights that is enshrined in our Constitution. That's the highest order of the law in Canada, the supreme law of the land, the Constitution. It protects our freedoms and our rights, and it's fairly comprehensive. It protects freedom of thought, freedom of belief, freedom of opinion, freedom of expression. It protects fundamental freedoms and democratic rights. It also protects our legal rights: right to life, liberty, and security of the person. It also protects our right to equality. It protects us from state overreach, from unreasonable search, from arbitrary detention, and when citizens are up against states, it also protects their right to legal counsel.

Many of these rights were initially signed on to by Canada under the international covenant of civil and political rights. Around that time, in the '60s, there was the Canadian Bill of Rights. There was the Alberta Bill of Rights in '72. All these documents predate the Charter, and one could say that, based on those documents, based on those ideas, the Charter was put together and it was made part of the Constitution to make sure that these rights are protected for every Canadian, for every Albertan, for everyone, wherever they are living in this great and vast country. The Premier mentioned the amendments, that they will affirm and reaffirm the values that we hold dear. I think that the values that Canadians hold dear are their Charter rights, that are guaranteed by the Constitution. That's the set of universal rights, the set of universal freedoms that bind us together as Canadians.

3:10

These amendments, which are mostly symbolic, reaffirm most of these rights that are guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; for instance, the right of the individual with capacity not to be subjected, coerced into receiving medical care, medical treatment. Section 7 rights, the right to life, liberty, and security of the person: there is a whole jurisprudence on that section alone, how that section protects Canadians', Albertans' right to life, right to liberty, and right to security of the person.

There is case law that explains that the right to security of person, in fact, includes medical treatments. If you will subject somebody to a medical treatment that they do not consent to, that will be offside the rights protected by the Charter. There may also be remedies in civil court as well that will amount to battery if some medical professional is subjecting to some kind of forced treatment. So our laws do protect that.

Similarly, the bill talks about any individual with capacity not to be subjected or coerced into receiving vaccines. I think I will talk about that as well and the comments that the Premier made, but I would say that the UCP continues to focus on antivaccine positions rather than addressing the real needs of Albertans. These amendments appear to be nothing but virtue signalling aimed at the UCP AGM on November 2, and I will explain why that's the case.

In Alberta – anybody can correct me if I am wrong – there's no history of mandatory vaccinations. There is no history of that. In fact, in 2021 the UCP government, this government, made changes to health statutes to make sure that there are no mandatory vaccinations in Alberta. So the law as it stands now in Alberta is that there is no mandatory vaccination. No person can be forced, no person can be coerced into receiving mandatory vaccination. That's the law of the land. This provision uses the word "capacity," and the Premier gave a very liberal interpretation of that word, which courts may or may not agree with. They would look at it when it reaches the courts. But I don't think that this creates anything new because the law already says that there is no mandatory vaccination in Alberta.

The second thing. The Premier is talking about individual rights, protecting their autonomy, but they are creating that exception so that they could force an individual into receiving addiction treatment. I do understand that addiction is a huge issue. It's impacting many individuals. It's impacting our communities, and there are a lot of things that the government can and must do to address that. But at the same time, like, starting from the idea of natural rights and going straight into picking up people from the streets and forcibly putting them into treatment centres will also run afoul to the Premier's idea of individual liberties and freedoms. There are many things that we can do on the recovery front, harm-reduction front, enforcement front that would require this government to be willing to engage with experts, willing to engage with those who know this area and work with them, leaving their ideology aside.

Again, I think it's just another virtue signal to the UCP base, that they are showing something which was already done by the previous, I guess, version of the UCP in 2021. The rationale the Premier provided was that there was a campaign by the NDP that we should go door to door and give people a jab, as if we were holding those syringes and asking people to go door to door. What that meant was that due to the conspiracy theories, which were given credence by many right-wing politicians, there was vaccine hesitancy. The idea was to give people information, ask them to talk to their health professional, and at times I think it was important to meet them where they are at.

Then the same UCP government did in fact take that suggestion, did in fact set up community clinics at different community centres, in Genesis Centre in my riding, at Dashmesh Culture Centre in my riding, at many community places to facilitate people. Certainly, those were not, I guess, supervised by politicians. Calgary-area health professionals were there to provide that service. As a result, 99.3 per cent of people in the upper northeast decided to get vaccinated, as compared to 82 per cent for overall Alberta. That was the result of that awareness campaign. That was the result of facilitating people to make that choice. Again, nobody was forcing anyone to take vaccines. That would be against laws of Alberta. That would be against people's Charter rights.

The Premier often talks about staying in her lane, but the right to acquire, keep, and use firearms in accordance with law: I think it's good advice. It doesn't change the law in Alberta. It's really good advice that whenever you want to acquire firearms, you should do so in accordance with the law, and that law will be set by the federal government because it's in their constitutional jurisdiction. Whatever law they make, that will be applicable here, and people should follow the law. That's what rule of law means. It's good advice, but it's not creating any rights, and many people in Alberta from academia have warned that this might give people a false impression that somehow they now have some newly created right. There's potential that it may be misunderstood. Again, it's virtue signalling, which can be dangerous.

3:20

While these rights were discussed in this bill, there are many rights that are not touched on in this bill, existing rights that people already have. The day before yesterday, on Sunday, I had a town hall in my riding, and people from many different communities, many different backgrounds, different walks of life came to share their concerns, came to share their priorities. Certain themes that emerged throughout the evening were that people want to have access to health care. It's their right. If they are sick, if their loved one is sick, their right is to have timely access to proper health care. What we are hearing under this UCP government: there are close to 1 million Albertans who do not have access to a family doctor. That's what's going on, under this UCP watch, with Albertans' right to access health care.

Then people have the right to quality public education as well. We are seeing in our communities that every single school is operating over capacity: 35 to 45 kids are being crammed into one classroom, and their right to quality education is being compromised under this UCP watch.

Also, if we are talking about property, there are many Albertans who are struggling to have a roof over their head. Just outside this building, in the city of Edmonton, close to 5,000 Albertans don't have a safe place to call home. There are record numbers of people across this province struggling to find an affordable home. I think Albertans have the right to a safe, affordable place to call home, and government has ignored that right as well.

Under this UCP's watch postsecondary education has been out of reach for many except the few who can afford it. People have a right to quality education, to university education. That right is in jeopardy under this government's watch.

People also have a right to dental care. People also have a right to reproductive health and reproductive care. Even when another order of government is willing to work with this government to make sure people have access to those services, this government is just there to grandstand and not work in the public interest.

At the end of the day Albertans have a right to live a life of dignity, of respect. What we are seeing as a priority for this government is that their first bill will just be designed as virtue

signalling to secure the leadership vote for this Premier. There are three more bills that, the government shared, will be coming, and those will take away rights of the most vulnerable in this province. In fact, they will put their lives in danger, too. Although the Premier wants us to believe that this has something to do with Albertans' right, no, it's all about this Premier, this government's politics. The UCP doesn't respect Albertans and their rights, and I think we will be bringing forward changes to make this bill a bit better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Grande Prairie has risen to speak.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very, very much, Mr. Speaker. Greatly appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House this session. I want to just rise and speak to Albertans about what this really means, about the Alberta Bill of Rights, and about some of our conservative values as well, that I believe are Albertan values. I believe that when we speak about Albertans' values, we talk about freedom, we talk about personal choice and individual responsibility. These values present the foundation of Albertans about our identity and guide us in our governance of this great province. These are key aspects for us to be able to lead this province. These are the key beliefs that Albertans have across our province, and they expect us to hold these values as well. We believe in the freedom to make our own choices, take responsibility for our lives, for our futures, and make the best choices for ourselves and our families. This is so key. Whether in rural or urban Alberta, we share a spirit of hard work, a can-do attitude, and entrepreneurial spirit.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to speak for a moment on the position of the family. It's just so key in this that not just parents but the whole family unit is the healthiest and best way forward for Albertans to become and grow throughout their lives. As part of this I think of my own upbringing, as a younger child spending time on the ranch, learning to ride. In construction and farming there have been multiple opportunities for me to experience multiple opportunities to grow, to experience encouragement, to experience care, experience the opportunity to be trained in various skill sets.

When I was on the farm when I was 15 years old, I had the opportunity to actually develop the skill sets and develop some leadership skill sets and be able to train the other farm workers on our farm. Pretty impressive, I think, for a 15-year-old. But what was key there is that the community came around, multiple people built into me, and in that instance I was able to build into other people, too, and train other individuals. The interesting part for this is that a couple of them didn't speak English, so this has been a long history for myself as well, working with international people who are coming to Alberta, being able to train them and also participate in heritage with them.

Along with this, in my constituency, in Grande Prairie, and in the surrounding area we have strong industry. Some of the forestry, agriculture, and energy industries have allowed us to develop a really robust, thriving economy. We are heavy hitters right across this province who contribute significantly in large ways to local business, in patents, entrepreneurs coming out of Grande Prairie and the surrounding areas, and many also technological improvements. Not just Grande Prairie but the surrounding area does this, too. We continue to drive forward this passion of hard work, can-do attitude, and entrepreneurial spirit.

We are builders of strong Albertans and of doers, Mr. Speaker, and these principles of freedom, personal responsibility, and the opportunities that come from this responsibility, along with some focus on red tape reduction, have given hard-working Albertans the freedom to build and grow their businesses, make significant

contributions to us socially and economically, and continue to choose family values and be able to pursue these values. I think of many companies, well, one company in Grande Prairie that is a tech company in the energy industry that has streamlined how they're measuring energy across northern Alberta and the digitization of that. There's incredible talent, there are incredible patents, and there's incredible work happening in our area. But this all just really comes down to those values, the can-do attitude, the hard work and entrepreneurial spirit that Albertans value here in this province. This is about the very foundation. These values are built on the very foundation of what we are talking about today in the Bill of Rights.

Now, freedom, particularly, Mr. Speaker, is very important concerning health care. I firmly believe that the government should not be dictating the personal medical decisions we make. This is a relationship of trust between an individual and their primary care provider, Mr. Speaker. Individuals in Alberta should be allowed to choose whether to receive vaccinations or any other medical procedure. When we do this, we allow trust to be built. We allow trust to be built between that individual and future health decisions that they have to make with their primary care provider.

3:30

I think of myself when I was rodeoing and I broke my ribs. I got stepped on in a rodeo. It was the first rodeo we could ever convince my grandma to come to. Mr. Speaker, she's got this amazing photo of me getting not just bucked off but the cow stepping on my ribs. So that's hanging on the wall. I bring that up because the amount of medical care I received – I believe I was 13 or 14 years old at that point – just built trust to get shipped off to another city just to make sure I didn't have any internal damage. That just built trust because they chose the opportunity, and we were able to choose that way forward as well.

When I broke my collarbone in the great constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, up on the ski hill there: great response by the locals, both on the ski hill and at the local hospital there. Each one of these things – when we allow individuals to dictate and be able to have their own choice in this opportunity along with their primary care provider, it allows that trust to be built. Mr. Speaker, this is about building trust with Albertans. It is about building trust and allowing continued trust in our health care system between doctors and also, I should say, primary care providers and patients, between Albertans and everyone involved. So this is a key piece of legislation that I believe we need to continue to move forward. It's very key.

Now, Mr. Speaker, also, this must include freedom of speech. Albertans do discuss. We have thriving debates. We have thriving conversations, and we Albertans want to be able to discuss, debate, and be able to disagree in discourse with each other without fearing the punishment of censorship. This is what the Bill of Rights is also about, making sure that we have the freedom of speech, the freedom of discourse, and the ability to go out and, I believe, change people's minds for the better here on the Conservative side. Respecting freedom of speech means protecting the right to question, discuss, and pursue the best path forward. This freedom of expression empowers individuals and strengthens public trust and accountability. This is super key. I believe as a young man, like, as a home-schooled individual I saw that this was very much brought up into my education, and we spent significant time debating with rigorous debate, and I believe that was very key to this whole conversation.

Now, part of this as well is firearm ownership. We have a proud tradition, Mr. Speaker, of proud firearm owners here in this province and especially in the rural areas, but even in cities, like myself in Grande Prairie. While many Albertans do depend on

firearm ownership for managing farmland and deterring predators and ensuring the safety of their livestock, I can think of many times as a young man that I spent time shooting tin cans with my father and spending good times on a Sunday afternoon enjoying the sport of shooting as well as protecting our cattle. So I can think of these great opportunities in sport as well as the use of a firearm for their appropriate action.

Mr. Williams: Will the member give way?

Mr. Dyck: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, for allowing an intervention on the topic of this bill, the human rights amendments that we're bringing forward. The member has spoken repeatedly throughout, whether he's talking about free speech or about property rights surrounding access to firearms, responsible gun ownership, that there is always with rights a relationship to responsibility. I wonder if the member could speak more, especially on this topic surrounding property rights and firearms and also freedom of speech, how when there exists a right, there is a corollary counterpart of responsibility that exists always, that this is true even if the law doesn't articulate that right, that that responsibility exists in society nonetheless by virtue of you having the ability, the God-given right to do X, Y, and Z, that we're articulating now in the law with this amendment.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you so very much just for that question. I greatly appreciate it. I think of my time on the farm, where we would spend significant time, obviously, not just harvesting but also spending a lot of time in the tractor planting. For us it was a lot of hay farming, sending hay, actually, right across the world. The farm I worked on: we had some top-grade hay, putting it in small bales. Part of this was also sending it for racehorses in England. The farm I worked on: we would make sure that it was both, that we would harvest during the right weather conditions, but also we would be sending away our hay for sampling to make sure it also had the right minerals that racehorses needed in order to give them the best shot of winning those races.

Now, that doesn't start just at the cut. That doesn't just start at the end product. It starts far before, with a lot of planning to make sure that you have the right minerals and nutrients in the soil. And this is much of what this is about, too. Landowners want to be able to take care of their land and to be able to take care, have the clear direction, as this legislation presents, to be able to long term look after. Mr. Speaker, I don't know a single farmer or rancher that doesn't leave their land in a better spot, and they take that responsibility very, very strongly, to make sure that their land is left better for whoever comes after, whether that's family or that gets sold to another person, but to make sure that land is better at the end of it.

Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the minister's question. Thank you so very much for that. This builds upon that ability and strength of those landowners to be able to continue to improve their land across Alberta.

Continuing on as well, I do want to just talk a little bit more about firearms, too. I think of one of my family members who actually as a young man – I believe he was 14, 15 – tied the Alberta record for trap shooting. It's been a few years now, but I just think of that. There's enjoyment in the sport, and it needs to continue to be protected, Mr. Speaker. And I do believe that responsible gun ownership just builds on those foundations of that education component, that training component, and respect for safety. And this freedom and responsibility go hand in hand in this. I think Albertans understand this, and this is why we're putting this in.

However, Mr. Speaker, we see in Ottawa that Prime Minister Trudeau and his NDP allies consider firearms a threat to public safety. This is greatly concerning to us. This stance has tragically failed to curb crime on the streets. Since the federal government's recent ban on handguns violent gun crime has risen across the country, particularly in major cities. The Toronto Police Association has reported a 45 per cent increase in shootings and a 62 per cent rise in gun-related homicides in Toronto compared to last year. This is appalling.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government needs to continue to see that responsible gun ownership is key to this problem. It is not legal gun owners that are causing these problems; it is the use of illegal weapons across Canada. He just fails to see and recognize that banning firearms for law-abiding Albertans will not improve urban gun violence outcomes. He sees sweeping federal mandates aimed at generalizing gun violence unfairly punish the responsible gun owners in Alberta. We see this, that his sweeping mandates are not fair. They only target people who have gone through an incredibly hard process to acquire a firearm.

Interestingly, it's harder to get a gun licence in Alberta than it is to get your – I'm blanking on it. No, not driver's licence. The other one used for travel.

An Hon. Member: Visa.

Mr. Dyck: Visa. Thank you. So your passport.

It is easier to get a passport in Canada than it is to get a licence to buy a gun, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I do continue to believe that our provincial government must continue to stand up to the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa. We also have the responsibility to push back against policies that undermine western values, Albertan values, and disregard Alberta, disregard Albertans and their rights to be able to use guns responsibly.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, a sensible federal government should work within the parameters of the federal and provincial jurisdictions set out in our Constitution. Their blanket policies fail to address the root cause of crime and unfairly undermine individuals' responsibility, rights that we are upholding in Alberta right now. Overreaching regulation only erodes the rights of law-abiding citizens when failing to address the actual causes of gun violence, which have nothing to do with rural Albertans who are responsibly using their firearms.

Concerning the need to reduce violence, our United Conservative government favours specific legislation solutions rather than blanket policies which unfairly restrict responsible persons. The responsible gun owners of Alberta accept the personal and legal responsibility associated with safe gun storage, use, and transportation, and we will continue to oppose Ottawa's overreach into the rights of responsible Albertan gun ownership. Our government is committed to protecting these freedoms cherished by Albertans right across Alberta, particularly in many of our rural communities, because they are essential to the character of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise in this Chamber today to support Bill 24, and I truly believe these amendments will continue to make Alberta one of the freest jurisdictions in the world. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured today to rise as a UCP MLA to speak to the proposed amendments to the

Alberta Bill of Rights as contained in Bill 24. This bill is a significant step in our commitment to protecting the personal freedoms and individual rights of all Albertans. The folks that chose me to represent them have made it clear that they expect their government to respect and protect their fundamental rights. After all, these rights are necessary in a free and democratic society. Today I will speak to the essential freedoms these amendments seek to preserve and protect, including greater autonomy in health care decisions, the protection of private property, and the lawful acquisition and responsible use of firearms.

Before I begin, I want to highlight that the Alberta Bill of Rights has been an important tool for holding the government accountable since 1972. However, it has not been significantly updated since then, and our society has evolved considerably since then. The amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights being introduced by Bill 24 would make certain that it continues to serve Albertans well in an evolving world. The amendments reinforce our government's commitment to personal autonomy, including when it comes to health care. Albertans deserve the assurance that their health care choices belong to them. These amendments enshrine the right for every Albertan with the capacity to do so to make personal health decisions in the way that respects personal autonomy.

Health care decisions have become increasingly complex and, in some cases, even politicized. Albertans should never feel pressured or coerced into receiving a vaccination or any other medical procedure. I would like to add that many of the proposed amendments in the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024, relate to recommendations from the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel. This expert panel reviewed the legislation and the governance practices of government during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Almost a year ago the panel provided the government with a report containing many recommendations, and many of the proposed amendments in the Bill of Rights relate to recommendations the panel made to improve protections for Albertans and better align the Alberta Bill of Rights with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Alberta's government believes in empowering its people, not restricting them. Personal autonomy in health care is fundamental to individual dignity, a right we proudly uphold through these amendments.

The next cornerstone of these amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights is the protection of private property. For generations Albertans have held private property rights as essential to freedom and to prosperity. Our land, our homes, and our assets represent the hard work, the dedication, and investment of individuals and families who have contributed to the growth and the strength of our province. Reinforcing these protections sends a clear message that Alberta stands for the rights of those who work and save and invest, and we're dedicated to ensuring that what Albertans have earned remains under their control, safe from overreach or unwarranted claims. Land and property ownership is important to many cultures and people of this province. It is simply a no-brainer to ensure that these rights are protected to the utmost degree. Alberta's growth has always been driven by individuals free to invest, expand, and contribute. Restricting or hampering property rights would only restrict innovation and growth, placing unnecessary burdens on those who drive our economy and are building our communities.

Our goal is an Alberta where businesses can thrive, where new Albertans are welcomed, and where property ownership is secure, free from overreach. The proposed amendments in Bill 24 would expand property rights. If passed, government would be required to compensate individuals or businesses if government took ownership of their property or if the law deprived the individual or business of all reasonable uses of their property.

I should also point out the proposed amended Bill of Rights would serve as an additional tool for Albertans to challenge a government decision. If passed, individuals could challenge the decision under the Charter, the Bill of Rights, or both. And before I move to my last point, it's important to note that the amended Bill of Rights would not contradict anything in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and this is important.

Lastly, I want to address the last key component of these amendments, the right to lawful acquisition and responsible use of firearms. Alberta and my family have a proud tradition of firearm ownership rooted in the heritage of hunters, farmers, and responsible sportspeople. This amendment does not challenge federal legislation. Rather, it protects Albertans' rights within the framework of the law. We believe Albertans who obtain proper permits and handle firearms responsibly should feel confident in their right to own and to use them. Firearms are integral to Alberta's rural lifestyle and hunting traditions, and I know, coming from a hunting family, where I grew up on wild meat. These amendments reinforce our respect for these traditions, acknowledging the value of safe and legal firearm ownership.

Let me be clear. We are not promoting unrestricted access or irresponsible ownership of firearms. Our government respects lawful firearm regulations, and nothing in these amendments contradicts those laws. Instead, we're safeguarding the rights of law-abiding Albertans and honouring those who handle firearms responsibly and legally.

In Canada we have one of the highest rates of civilian firearm ownership. Actually, according to World Population Review Canada ranks in the top 10 countries globally, with 34.7 firearms per 100 people. Canada's stringent licensing process, as we've heard from my colleague, requires applicants to pass both written and practical tests, which I have done, face waiting periods, and undergo daily background checks. Despite these strict standards, recent Statistics Canada data and testimony from police chiefs show that most firearm-related crimes are committed with illegal firearms, not those legally bought and registered. We will continue to fight against unfair restrictions on lawful firearm owners by the federal government, and through the amendments proposed in Bill 24 we reinforce our commitment to standing up for lawful firearms owners in Alberta.

In closing, the Alberta Bill of Rights is more than a legal document. It's a statement of our province's values. These amendments reinforce our commitment to individual autonomy and health care, to the safeguarding of private property, and to the responsible, legal use of firearms. We're standing up for an Alberta that prizes freedom and responsibility, where rights are respected and communities thrive because individuals have the liberty to live as they choose. This is Alberta's identity. This is Alberta's legacy, and this is what we are protecting today. I urge every member of this Assembly to move and vote in favour of Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to Bill 24?

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, members of the Chamber, and all Albertans, I stand before you to address an issue of great importance, our government's commitment to protecting the basic rights of Albertans through the proposed amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights contained in Bill 24. The protection of these rights is not just a legal obligation; it's a moral priority that lies at the very heart of our free and democratic province.

3:50

Albertans expect their government to respect and safeguard their rights and freedoms, and I'm so proud to say that our government is taking decisive action to ensure that this happens. I've had the privilege of engaging with my constituents on various issues, and a constant theme has emerged, a strong desire for the government to enhance its effort in protecting their rights. I know that many members of this House have heard similar sentiments echoed by folks in the constituencies they represent. The message is clear: Albertans want assurance that their rights will be upheld, and they want the government to stand as guardian for those rights. In response to these concerns, our government has listened.

We recognize that since the enactment of the Alberta rights in 1972, significant changes have occurred in our society, and it's crucial that our laws evolve accordingly. The amendments introduced in this House through Bill 24 are designed to ensure that this critical piece of legislation continues to serve Albertans effectively in an ever-changing world.

Now let's look at the proposed amendments in detail. One of the most significant changes is the reinforcement of personal autonomy, particularly regarding medical choice. The amendment will preserve the right of every Albertan who has the capacity to do so to make their own decision about medical treatments. This amendment has been informed by the recommendations of the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel. This expert panel conducted a thorough review of legislation and governance practices during the COVID-19 health event. The report, presented to our government nearly a year ago, provided valuable insights and recommendations aimed at improving protections for Albertans and better aligning the Bill of Rights with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is not just about public health; it's about respecting the inherent dignity of each individual and affirming their right to make their own choices regarding the medical treatment they receive.

Another important amendment now. Bill 24 aims to clarify and strengthen the rights surrounding lawful firearm ownership. For many Albertans firearms are an essential part of life, integral for recreation, agricultural, and personal safety. The proposed changes will ensure that provincial laws do not interfere with the right to own legally acquired firearms in accordance with the law. We must stand firm against any unjust federal restrictions that target responsible and legal firearm owners. By protecting these rights, we honour the traditions that are deeply rooted in our communities while recognizing the realities in everyday Albertans' lives.

In addition to these first two amendments, we will also look to bolster property rights, a cornerstone of our democracy and way of life. The amended Bill of Rights will guarantee that no Albertan can be deprived of their property without legal authorization and just compensation. Property rights empower individuals to build wealth, invest in their communities, and create opportunities for themselves and their families. It is our duty to ensure that these rights are not only protected but strengthened, providing Albertans with the security they need to thrive. These amendments are not merely a response to recent events; they are a proactive step towards ensuring that Albertans have the tools necessary to challenge government decisions that infringe upon their rights.

The amended Bill of Rights will empower individuals to seek justice and fairness, reinforcing the belief that our government is ultimately accountable to the people it serves. Furthermore, the proposed changes will guarantee that the Alberta Bill of Rights applies not only to laws but also to all provincial government actions, including policies and programs. This is a vital update that recognizes the reality of how government operates. By expanding

the scope of the Bill of Rights, we are safeguarding that all forms of government action are subject to the same rigorous standards that protect individual rights. As we move forward with these amendments, it is crucial to remember that they do not undermine the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Rather, they complement it and enhance it. Our goal is to create a stronger framework for protecting individual freedoms, one that reflects the unique values and aspirations of Albertans.

As well, these amendments will reaffirm the importance of freedom of expression. At a time when diverse viewpoints must be respected and protected, it is essential that we preserve the right to express oneself without fear. Freedom of expression is fundamental to our democracy, and it must be safeguarded to ensure a vibrant and engaged citizen.

To put it bluntly, the amendments before us today reflect our unwavering dedication to the principles of individual freedom, property rights, and responsible gun ownership. They are a reaffirmation of our values as Albertans.

Our government is fully committed to protecting the values and way of life that make Alberta such a great place to live, and these amendments are a testament to that commitment. Collectively we can ensure that the Alberta Bill of Rights remains a strong protector of the freedoms we hold close. Let us stand united in our resolve to safeguard the rights of every individual in our province. As we consider these amendments, let us remember the individuals and families who depend on us to uphold their rights. Let us listen to their stories and recognize the importance of these principles in their lives. We are here to serve the people of Alberta and protect the rights and freedoms that define our way of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my fellow members for your attention on this vital issue. Let us ensure that Alberta remains a place where individual freedoms are cherished and upheld. I urge every member of this Assembly to vote in favour of Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the House to support the amendments put forward for the Alberta Bill of Rights. The amendments proposed for the Bill of Rights listed in Bill 24 will enshrine and protect the fundamental rights and freedoms that many Albertans hold dear. Rights and freedoms are an integral part of our culture. The Alberta Bill of Rights was introduced all the way back in 1972 as a way to protect Alberta's freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and many others, freedoms that we take for granted today.

I want to read to the House what is currently written in our Alberta Bill of Rights, something I find very important to note, something that must be protected, "the right of the individual to liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law." Our leader, the hon. Premier, and our party have stated that Alberta was built on the principles of individual freedoms and responsibilities, and through these proposed amendments we are strongly reinforcing these foundations. The proposed amendment states that every law in Alberta must be interpreted and applied in a manner that does not limit or interfere with the rights enshrined in the Alberta Bill of Rights.

It is essential to remember as a government that all Albertans have the freedom to choose, which includes responsible Albertans making their own choice, their own medical decisions. We must ensure that medical freedom remains in the hands of the individual,

which is why the first amendment to the Bill of Rights ties to personal autonomy in context of medical care. If the individual has the capacity, they should not have their medical decisions made for them.

The second amendment put forward for the Alberta Bill of Rights pertains to the right for responsible firearm ownership to acquire and keep and use firearms in accordance with the law.

Lastly, we will be introducing an amendment to further protect the individual's right to property, as the protection of property rights is a cornerstone of living in a free society. I would like to expand on this amendment first and foremost. We can all agree that no Albertan should be deprived of their property without legal authority and just compensation. The Alberta government should be required to compensate all individuals and businesses if their hard-earned property comes under the ownership of the government, and the same should go for any incidents where a law enacted would deprive an individual or business of the reasonable uses of their property.

Last term I was on the property review committee that toured the province and went to many places and listened to people, and we heard a lot about legislative takings or legislations that were passed and made a person's property of less value. Now, they understood that that might have had to be the case, but they wanted to be compensated, and some of them had problems even accessing that. I think to enshrine this should help us out there. I fully support this amendment to protect property rights for all Albertans, and I know many of my constituents will agree.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to note that many of my constituents have spoken to me in regard to their rights to acquire, keep, and use firearms in accordance with the law. Many of my constituents make their living on the land as farmers and ranchers, hard-working Albertans who use firearms as a tool of their trade, a tool which has become a fundamental part of their culture. The second amendment put forward in Bill 24 reinforces the right of lawful firearm ownership and affirms the government's intent that provincial law should not interfere with their right to own acquired firearms.

4:00

The federal government has unfairly targeted my constituents who enjoy responsible firearm ownership. Law-abiding firearm owners across this province should have the liberty to use the tools of their trade to engage in their hobbies in accordance with the law, without government stepping in unnecessarily. Responsible firearm owners should not be punished by having their legally acquired firearms taken away due to the whims of the government. Unfortunately, we have a federal government that does not fully respect the rights of responsible firearm owners across the country, including here in Alberta. Thankfully, we have a leader who will continue to put the needs and priorities of Albertans first and foremost, a leader who will ensure our provincial government will never tread on responsible firearm owners.

Now, in my hometown of Vermilion we have the Vermilion Gun Club. I'm not a gun owner myself, but they've invited me down to some of their target competitions that they have, and the pride of ownership – there are some firearms that have been passed down for many generations, and under the new laws they may have to give these up. Just seeing the passion they have for these things, we should do all we can to protect them.

I along with my colleagues on this side of the House believe that individual rights and freedoms are paramount for a stronger Alberta. We believe in preserving, protecting, and celebrating our individual rights and freedoms. It's what makes Alberta the bastion of freedom we are known for today. The amendments put forward in Bill 24 support stronger individual protection against government

overreach, allowing Albertans to live free from unnecessary restrictions in an ever-evolving world, as we as citizens and elected officials must remain vigilant to ensure our rights and freedoms are maintained and protected as our individual rights and freedoms are a firm foundation of the free and democratic society we all enjoy here in Alberta. Albertans expect their government to safeguard and protect the rights and freedoms promised in our Alberta Bill of Rights, and that's exactly what we're working towards with this legislation.

I strongly support this bill for the good of Albertans across the province, Albertans who want to safeguard their right to legally own and acquire firearms, Albertans who wish to make their own informed medical decisions, and Albertans who wish to enjoy their hard-earned private property in accordance with the law. For these reasons I will be in support of the amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to speak to the Assembly on Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024. First, I would like to extend my thanks to my colleague and Minister of Justice for their work and input on this proposed legislation, which reinforces the freedoms and protections of Albertans. This bill is essential for safeguarding Albertans' rights on fundamental issues that impact our daily lives.

The Alberta Bill of Rights is a vital document, a cornerstone of Alberta's democratic fabric and a powerful protector of our civil liberties, as it has been for decades and as we wish it to for decades to come. The Alberta Bill of Rights has long enshrined principles that resonate deeply with every Albertan: the freedom to speak one's mind, the right to practise one's faith, and equality before the law. These rights define who we are, and they remind us of the value Alberta places on personal freedoms and responsibility. However, as our society evolves, so, too, must our laws. The Alberta Bill of Rights has served us well, but it is time to make some key adjustments to ensure these cherished rights are effectively safeguarded in a rapidly changing world to meet our current realities.

There have been some comments before about: we already have certain – you know, rights have already been protected in other places. It's been mentioned about article 19 of the universal declaration of human rights, which sets out in broad terms the human rights that each of us has and which was later protected by a raft of international and regional treaties. What wasn't mentioned, of course, is that many of the signatories of this very universal declaration violate this on a daily basis in very explicit and open terms.

Nor do we talk about what has transpired even with our Canadian Charter of Rights, where not only our federal government violates the principles of our Constitution on a regular basis but where we have a situation where Supreme Court justices reinterpret contrary to the very words that have been used by the people who sat around the table and drafted our Constitution and were the intention of the provisions within the Constitution. We don't have to look very far to see where governments have worked in conjunction with private-sector media players to censure, contrary to their own constitutions and Charter of Rights and Bill of Rights, the freedom of speech of their citizens and their ability to speak unhindered by such censorship.

We as legislators in Alberta cannot impact things like United Nations declarations or our federal Constitution, but what we can

do and make very clear is make changes to our provincial rights, where we do have jurisdiction, and ensure that the government of Alberta adheres to the principles that we so admire. Those principles are universal in terms of the arguments as to why we have – it started with John Stuart Mill and continued on to Voltaire, who said: I may not agree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. Of course, that is about the freedom of speech and expression. So we're going to add expression to the Bill of Rights because it hasn't been there and, as was discussed by some earlier, the way society has mentioned, it's not just in the written word or the spoken word that we express but many other ways, so these need to be protected.

Why do we need these types of protections? We need them because we agree or at least in a liberal, small "l" liberal, society we have agreed that governments need to be constrained. They need to be limited. As Thomas Jefferson said in his *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, "History has informed us that bodies of men, as well as individuals, are susceptible of the spirit of tyranny." History has shown over and over again that all of the world's worst examples of tyranny and pain inflicted upon citizens have come from governments, because they have coercive power, so they must be limited. We must outline: what are those rights of the individuals that cannot be constrained by governments?

We'll address these gaps in rights protection in those areas where the Alberta Bill of Rights currently does not encompass the critical areas that Albertans state, and that includes health care, property rights, firearm ownership, and free expression. This bill will empower Albertans to make decisions and ensure they have the power to make their decisions about their own lives and homes and health care, ensuring that their rights are respected and held by this government or any future Alberta government, freedom in health care decisions as every Albertan should have the right to make their own health care choices without undue influence.

The member opposite made mention some minutes ago about the fact that he understood that such protections already existed. Well, you know, that's one argument we can make. But if many people feel that it hasn't been protected in the past, do we not have a responsibility to make it clear to all that those types of protections are available explicitly so that there is no doubt? Bill 24 ensures that individuals have power over their personal health decisions, respecting their values, needs, and preferences. This amendment will protect against mandated treatments or interventions, reinforcing the citizen's right to its personal health decisions. If the member opposite agrees that such rights already exist, then there should be no problem in supporting this addition into our current Bill of Rights.

4:10

This amendment emphasizes the importance of private property as a fundamental right which is central to Albertans' sense of security and ownership. By strengthening these property rights, the amendment prevents unwarranted government interference in private property without legal authorization and just compensation. It would also protect the rights and promote this ability in home and land ownership, fostering economic growth and community trust.

As I mentioned before, this amendment ensures that Albertans have the freedom to express their views and participate in public discourse without fear of reprisal, and it encourages open debate and respectful exchange of ideas, which are fundamental to our democracy.

By reinforcing free expression, the amendment prevents unjust limitations on individual voices in the public or private arenas. There's a lot going on in our society these days that seeks to limit this type of conversation, and we need to reiterate and make clear

to everyone that we do not agree with that trend or that deviation from the rights.

This will be a stronger Alberta Bill of Rights. For any provincial law that is cleared by a court to be inconsistent with the Alberta Bill of Rights, the inconsistent part of the bill could not be reinforced and the Alberta Bill of Rights will provide the evaluation yardstick for all government actions, policies, and legislation going forward. Albertans will have greater confidence that their rights to property, personal health choices, and expression are respected and guaranteed. This amendment makes clear that Alberta values and defends its citizens' autonomy and choices. By addressing these essential rights, the Alberta government shows its dedication to the people's will and well-being.

Some people have expressed worry that these amendments will limit the government's ability to enforce policies, but the response is that this Bill 24 aims to balance individual freedoms with public safety and responsibility, preserving each citizen's personal liberties without impeding the government's duty to ensure public safety. Some may argue that these rights in property and firearms would lead to misunderstandings, and I would say that the safeguards within Bill 24 ensure the rights are clear and specific, preventing any misuse of freedoms while enforcing individual rights for all in accordance with the law.

Some may argue that this bill limits the ability of private individuals or corporations who enforce restrictions regarding nonvaccinated access to offices and private property. However, while the bill reaffirms individual rights, it does not prevent private entities from implementing their own policies. It simply ensures that government actions do not infringe upon these individual liberties. This balance allows for the protection of both personal freedoms and the rights of private individuals and corporations.

In conclusion, Bill 24 is a reaffirmation of Alberta's commitment to protecting its citizens' fundamental rights. I urge members to support Bill 24 as it reflects Alberta's core values, respecting individual autonomy while fostering a free, safe, and responsible society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Camrose has risen to speak.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so, so, so excited to address this piece of legislation as I know it's very important to my constituents. I consider myself to be very fortunate to live in this free and prosperous province. I believe much of this freedom and prosperity originates in the governments of our province and country understanding their primary purposes: first, to protect the citizens and their citizens' property and, second, to guarantee the rights of those citizens.

The residents of my constituency expect their elected officials to share that view of government. They do not mind paying their dues if that means their families and communities can be protected. However, they do take issue when government policy infringes on their ability to lead law-abiding lives. Mr. Speaker, my constituents are also realists when it comes to government. They realize that even if their rights are not being infringed upon by the government of the day, future governments may still try to impede those rights. They also recognize that life in rural areas requires individuals to rely on themselves and their neighbours for safety and security at times of greatest need. This is one of the number one issues I'm hearing about in my community, as there seems to not be enough law enforcement officers, and criminals are taking advantage of that fact.

Since its inception the Alberta Bill of Rights has been an incredibly important piece of legislation that reinforces the main purpose of government. The fact that fundamental rights and freedoms are recognized by statute in this province I think all Albertans can appreciate. Much has changed in our society since the passing of the Bill of Rights. The federal government in particular seems intent on leaving law-abiding Canadians to fend for themselves, all while putting restrictions on our way of life, which is why I appreciate the Minister of Justice for all the work that he has done by putting forward the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024. Amending this key piece of legislation is vital in addressing the evolving needs of our society and ensuring our freedoms remain protected.

One change this bill proposes is to affirm the rights of Albertans to keep and use firearms in accordance with the law. Many Camrose constituents are responsible firearms owners. Some keep firearms for sport, some for hunting, for the protection of their properties and families, or even all of the above. This is why I share their frustration with a federal government which has passed several laws restricting legal gun ownership. This is especially true since the Liberal-NDP coalition's soft-on-crime approach has left us with decade-high gun crime in Canada, despite the restrictions.

Mr. Speaker, hearing my constituents' complaints that they feel targeted while criminals who steal their property and make them feel unsafe go unimpeded has made this area a personal priority. That is why I intend to introduce a private member's motion recognizing the unique challenges related to crime, rural community space, and urging the federal government to strengthen individuals' rights to protect themselves and their property. Reaffirming responsible ownership as a legitimate and respected aspect of life in Alberta in the Bill of Rights will also send a strong message to the federal government that our province opposes their overreaching restrictions on law-abiding people. This amendment would also prevent future provincial governments from attempting to restrict gun ownership and use if those attempts were inconsistent with the Alberta Bill of Rights.

[The Speaker in the chair]

On top of strengthening the position of the province on law-abiding gun ownership, the proposed bill will also strengthen property rights, another cornerstone of a free and democratic society. Strong property rights are a necessity for economic stability and personal freedom across Alberta. Places where people's personal property is subject to confiscation by the government without a fair process or reasonable compensation are places where people have little reason to acquire and develop property.

The constituency of Camrose is home to many growing communities and many farmers who pride themselves on the prosperity they have generated for not only themselves but their families. It's also home to countless local businesses kick-started by entrepreneurs with dreams they have turned into a reality. Amending property rights not only supports the rights of property owners in my constituency but will also promote confidence that their investments and hard work will be safe from government appropriation. In circumstances where the government must use an individual's property to run a new power line or road through the field, for example, the proposed amendments to the Bill of Rights would require that the individual is fairly and properly compensated.

As Alberta's story unfolds, the governments come and go. Broader property rights will protect my constituents' property and the right to legally owned firearms. I know I have focused on only two elements of this bill, because they speak most clearly to the

priorities of my constituents, but the other elements of this bill also align with the two purposes of government at the beginning. Other changes would add protections for individuals who have capacity to not be coerced into medical treatment without consent unless they are likely to cause substantial harm to themselves or others.

4:20

The amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights being proposed will also make a much stronger civil document. Currently it only applies to laws in Alberta such as statutes or regulations. However, many government programs and policies are not specifically authorized by a statute or a regulation. If the proposed changes are passed in this House, the Bill of Rights will become more encompassing, meaning any provincial government action will be covered by the act.

Mr. Speaker, when I first rose today, I talked a bit more philosophically about the purpose of the government, but the proposed amendments are far from just philosophical. The right to make one's own medical decisions, the right to legally and responsibly own firearms, and the right to one's own property should all be strongly reinforced, in my view. It will also send a strong message to Ottawa that we here in Alberta have not forgotten the fundamental purposes of our government. Our government is fully committed to protecting the values, freedoms, and way of life that make Alberta the best place to live, start a family, be safe, and prosper. We are keeping that commitment with the proposed amendments, which I hope all in this House will support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has risen.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since its inception the Alberta Bill of Rights has recognized the fundamental rights and freedoms that are essential to a free and democratic society. It has served as a safeguard for our civil liberties and freedoms for decades and is paramount to democratic continuity. However, as our society grows and evolves, so too must our laws to ensure that these protections are evolving with our society.

This is why our government is seeking to amend and strengthen our Alberta Bill of Rights. Amending the Bill of Rights is vital to addressing the evolving needs of our society and ensuring our freedoms are protected in the face of modern challenges. Our proposal to amend the Bill of Rights is our way of better reflecting the diverse values and experiences of all Albertans, ensuring that everyone's rights are upheld and that justice is not just an ideal but a reality for all.

To achieve this effectively, we are considering specific amendments that will align with contemporary values and challenges. First, we will reinforce the right for every Albertan to make their own choices regarding medical treatment they receive. This includes ensuring that every individual in our province with the mental capacity to do so will have the right to decide whether or not they receive medical procedures. Individuals also have the rights to understand what, if any, these medical procedures entail to ensure informed decisions about their health and well-being. Informed consent, Mr. Speaker, is crucial for Albertans to make an educated and intentional decision when it comes to their health care.

On top of strengthening health care rights, we are also strengthening property rights, another cornerstone of living in a free and democratic society. Strong property rights are necessary for economic stability and personal freedoms all across our province. Expanding property rights not only supports the rights of property owners, but it also promotes a sense of confidence and security in

investments which Albertans make, which in turn encourages economic growth and entrepreneurship.

It will ensure that no Albertan can be deprived of their personal property without due process of law and just compensation. This will strengthen Albertans' rights where the Expropriation Act may fall short. The government would be required to compensate individuals and businesses should they take ownership of an Albertan's property or if any law deprives them of reasonable use of that property. We want to protect property rights, ensuring that they are respected rather than arbitrarily violated. Broadening these rights through these amendments will do just that, Mr. Speaker. For many Albertans such as those involved in our agricultural industry or small-business ownership property rights are crucial to their livelihood and financial security.

Our province is home to countless local businesses kick-started by entrepreneurs who had a dream they could turn into reality. It is vital that Albertans engage in economic activities without excessive regulations or government interventions. Our government firmly stands against the overreach of federal regulations, focusing instead on advocating for the interests of Albertans. To do this, we must adapt our legal framework to our current societal values and challenges. Property is not constitutionally protected, Mr. Speaker. Our amendment to do so is going to ensure that we reaffirm the right to own and enjoy property that Albertans have worked so hard to earn, free from undue government interference.

Our government is also committed to enhancing protections of freedom of expression, serving as a reminder of the importance of freedom of speech in a democratic society. This proposed amendment ensures that Albertans can freely express their opinions, their beliefs, and ideals openly and without fear of retribution. In an age where public discourse can be stifled by surrounding pressures, this amendment serves as a safeguard for individuals wishing to engage in meaningful discussion on various issues. Our government aims to create an environment where diverse perspectives can be shared, debated, and recognize the importance of open dialogue and how that fosters a healthier community.

Freedom of expression also encompasses the right to peaceful assembly. In recent years this right has become increasingly more important, evident in public protests and other gatherings that advocate for social change. It is vital that Albertans feel confident and comfortable in expressing their beliefs without the fear of government intervention by punitive means. Active participation in democratic processes is essential for our healthy communities, allowing Albertans to engage constructively with one another and with their government.

Finally, there is an amendment to make clear that in Alberta we respect the rights of individuals to legally acquire, keep, and safely use firearms. For many Albertans firearms are critical to providing for their families and critical to their livelihoods and way of life. They are integral to their lifestyle, whether it be in activities such as farming, ranching, or recreational hunting. This amendment acknowledges and validates these practices.

Our government is committing to standing up for lawful firearm ownership. Provincial law should not infringe upon the rights . . .

Mr. Getson: Intervention?

Mr. Wright: Absolutely.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. I appreciate it. Again, Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat country, down there you're also our military liaison, which you've been doing a phenomenal job on. You're getting to the firearms rights. If you could comment a little bit, I'm not sure if

you've heard some of the similar things. Some of the veterans in my area, when it came to firearms rights, had this very large concern that they could go serve for our country, they could throw lead down range, they could go do all those things in peacekeeping missions but when they came back and became civilians, then all that service and everything they did was basically washed away when it came to the firearms rights file. Can you maybe comment a little bit on some of the things you've heard from our veterans out there in respect to how this is going to help stand up for them as well as other firearms owners in light of, you know, the service they've done and the things they've done for us?

Mr. Wright: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank my colleague from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. A number of veterans have reached out to my office to express their desire to ensure that we are enshrining into provincial law the legal ownership of firearms and to be able to acquire them because it is part of their culture. It's part of their training. They have often, in most cases, survived in some of the worst conditions imaginable knowing that their friends to their left and their right plus their firearm were able to keep them alive during those points, so it's become a point of personal usage and personal identity in many cases.

Our government is committed to standing up for lawful firearms ownership. Provincial laws should not infringe upon the right to own firearms in any case where Albertans are adhering to the law. Law-abiding firearms owners, like those members of the Medicine Hat Rifle and Revolver Club, have faced unfair targeting by the federal government for decades, which has highlighted the importance of this amendment. We aim to better protect the rights of Albertans, especially our farmers, ranchers, outfitters, and hunting enthusiasts. Firearms have a vital role in the livelihood of many of our rural communities. Ensuring access to firearms can support agricultural practices and contribute to local economies, especially those that are in the outfitter trade or participate in the hunting tourism sector.

4:30

We seek to balance individual rights with community values and economic realities in Alberta. Reflecting a commitment to local perspectives on gun ownership, our government is dedicated to creating an environment where responsible gun ownership is recognized as a legitimate and respected aspect of life. Mr. Speaker, we hear what Albertans want, and what they want is to ensure that their rights are protected, that their property that they have acquired through hard work is protected and theirs.

Our proposed amendments are essential for individuals' freedom and autonomy. They're fundamental for a just and equitable society. By explicitly enshrining these updated rights, our amendments foster a sense of security and respect amongst Albertans, promoting civil engagement and reinforcing the importance of local voices in our governance process. We are not just proposing these amendments as mere legislative formalities. They represent a powerful affirmation of our commitment to the values and needs of Albertans, to the needs of our communities across this province. Such amendments are necessary to ensure that the voices of Albertans are being heard and fortified, especially in the face of broader federal overreach.

Our government is giving Albertans another tool in their belt to challenge a government's decision. We are not only seeking to protect the freedoms of today; we're also laying the groundwork for a more just future. Our government is committed to defending the rights of Albertans, especially those in rural and agricultural communities. This is a bold step forward, a society that honours its

heritage and where it came from while confidently embracing the challenges of what tomorrow may bring.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? I believe that the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has already spoken to the matter.

Mr. Getson: No.

The Speaker: No. Okay. My list is incorrect.
The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for giving me a chance to speak to this very important bill, Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024. Now, Christmas only comes once a year, but this is awesome. Coincidentally, I was speaking to my wife this morning, and she was asking how things were going, and I said, “You know, a lot of times we get in there, we represent our constituents, we talk about all the good things that are going on, and sometimes we say that, but we don’t – it falls short sometimes. It’s kind of tough days.” When I got to see that this bill was on the docket, it absolutely made my day. This is an honour and a privilege to stand up and talk about a piece of legislation that’s going to amend our Bill of Rights, that hasn’t been touched up since Premier Lougheed and his original group came together and put that on the table.

You know, we’ve heard a few conversations. We hear the relevance of it. We’ve heard: what does it really matter to some of our constituents? Maybe it’s different in a few different pockets around the province, but I can tell you full well in my capacity as the parliamentary secretary for economic corridors and not only that but – in my constituency, this is very relevant – as a strong advocate for personal rights and freedoms, for firearms ownership, responsible ownership, this hits on a number of cylinders. Mr. Speaker, I’m just going to jump into these very wonderful points that I had put on the paper here for me today so I didn’t lose my spot.

Back in the day the hon. Peter Lougheed and his Conservative government introduced the Bill of Rights, which I had said, and this was to the right of the individual’s liberty, security, personal enjoyment of property; the right to not be deprived of these except due to process of law; the right to equality before the law and the protection of the law; freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of press; and the right of parents to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children. So we brought forward some new amendments on this, Mr. Speaker, and it’s aimed to strengthen the Bill of Rights brought in by the Conservatives of old. This world is changing, and a few of the items that we went through here in the last number of years might make a little relevance.

The first item that was updated here was actually the preamble. You know, we kind of went through that first part, and it covered off pretty much everything that a person would want, except the exceptions, which seem to happen as life goes on. The preamble is being amended as:

Whereas the free and democratic society existing in Alberta is founded on principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God and the rule of law and on principles, fostered by tradition, that honour and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, the dignity and worth of the human person and the position of the family in a society of free people and free institutions;

Whereas human rights and fundamental freedoms are of foundational importance to Albertan society, including during times of emergency.

Where that might make a lot of relevance is in what we went through in the last couple of years here. Major changes in the proposed amendments on medical choices reinforce the right of Albertans to make their own choices regarding the medical treatments they receive, including the right to decide whether or not to receive a vaccination or medical procedure. That’s paramount from what we’ve gone through, Mr. Speaker, regardless of the conversations of choice, the medical requirements, law, the ability to work, provide for your families. Based on those choices, we needed to touch that up.

Expanding the property rights. The government would be required to compensate individuals or businesses if government takes ownership of their property or if a law deprives the individual or business of all reasonable uses of their property. Right now there are a lot of grey areas when it comes to property ownership. The folks in the country get this often, like if there’s an easement going through their locations or areas or if there’s some work they do on their properties or you put a trail or something in. There’s a lot of this that takes place in some of the environmental decisions. Sometimes when that happens, whether there’s an easement or otherwise, it’s not necessarily expropriation, but it impacts your access to your land.

A number of times, even though it was with good intent, some of our ministries may have inadvertently done that and trapped assets of landowners. In that case, what it does is it makes sure that for those property owners their property rights are upheld and they’ll be duly compensated for that, for reasonable use or access to their property. It’s kind of a big deal. It’s like, you know, somebody in the city: you have your backyard, you built your patio, and then all of a sudden the city decides to do something different. You can’t get access to your patio anymore, but you get to watch your neighbours use it.

Legal firearms protection. Through the proposal of the firearms amendment we reinforce our commitment to standing up for lawful firearms owners in Alberta and affirm the government’s intent that provincial laws should not interfere with the right to legally own firearms. One of the members opposite had spoke and said, “Yes, this is federal jurisdiction,” et cetera, et cetera. Yeah, it is. It didn’t used to be. You know, back in the ‘60s there was this nice court case that took place that took it from firearms being actual property to something else different. Now it’s been managed by them for a number of years.

When I was first elected, Mr. Speaker, it wasn’t all but a year getting into it that these wackadoo policies from the feds were coming out regarding firearms ownership, and it was all over the map. I’ve spoken here at length on that, of how they were starting to determine whether a rifle or a handgun was good or bad or otherwise, and a lot of it seemed to be an emotion. It was never about calibre. It was never about the size of it or anything else or the functionality. It was literally somebody making up a decision on that.

That made a lot of people very nervous because, again, firearms owners are the most scrutinized people in all of Canada when it comes to criminal record checks. Literally your name, mine as a firearms owner, would be going through a database every single day and being scrubbed to see if I had done anything untoward, unlawful, or otherwise. With that they’re basically picking on the safest population in the entire country to have that privilege of owning a firearm.

Coming back to that point, we want to reinforce and make sure that folks understand in Canada and also in Alberta here that if you’re an Albertan, yeah, we’re going to stand up for you, for your property rights, and we believe that within the jurisdictional law

you should have the absolute right to responsible firearm ownership.

Medical autonomy. Every Albertan should have the right to make their own health care choices without government overreach. Everyone is different, and Bill 24 ensures that individuals have autonomy over personal health decisions, respecting their values, needs, and preferences. We aim to get away from that one size fits all.

Property rights are intrinsically linked to the culture within Alberta, and it's a fundamental right to security Albertans should possess. Our government wants to strengthen property rights to prevent government interference in private property without just cause. I kind of spoke about that a little bit earlier, Mr. Speaker. A strong economy demands a stable understanding of property rights and the linkage to the longevity of people settling down, doing business, and growing Alberta's economy.

4:40

The other one too is that, you know, a man's house is his castle as the old saying goes. Your property is the same thing. You want to know that if you're investing in something, if you're buying that, if you're sticking your neck out there to purchase more land and pick it up, you will actually have the ability to use it, to function, to grow the economy, to grow your business, to raise your family, to do all those things that we oftentimes just take for granted unless it's really written down in words of law. This Legislative Assembly, I hope, will work with us on this to get it passed. We want to enshrine that and make sure that there is no question about that at all.

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Mr. Getson: I'd love an intervention.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his comments surrounding this legislation. I was wondering if the member could, on that point he was just raising, elaborate on the notion, the natural law principle, that the law we create here needs to reflect the true law that exists already, that these rights are not created by us but precede us, that mankind, humankind, pre-exists the state. The laws that we're entitled to and the responsibilities that come from it are not created by us, whether it be property rights, as the member was mentioning, in relation to lawful gun ownership or property rights more broadly, talking about just compensation for land, et cetera, that those rights exist before the government decides to recognize them, and this is simply an act of us recognizing those rights. Maybe talk a bit about the danger when a state thinks that it gets to create rights and they don't exist in some important way beyond just this body opining and passing laws.

Mr. Getson: Well, I appreciate the intervention from the minister, and he's spot on. You know, right at the very start of this we go back to the preamble, and it states as such, and we make reference to God. That's not by happenstance. We believe as free people, as society, that our country was founded on and the countries we came from originally as well and the Indigenous here as well, the First Nations folks that were here originally – they have this inalienable feeling, this internal knowledge that they are free people, we are free people. Everything that we've assembled, everything as lawmakers that we come in here and have these debates on is simply reinforcing that truth that we know to be true right in our soul, right in our gut, right in our being. In essence, what we're doing is just making sure that that's reinforced, that that inalienable understanding is there.

The items the hon. minister touched on is when the state – and that's just people. That's just people winning a popularity contest, typically, is how that happens. When those folks win those contests and they start thinking that they know better or can overreach those areas, that's when things go sideways in a hurry, and that's when people's rights get trampled on, and that's when you have to fight, literally fight, to get those freedoms back.

As society we've seen that through armed conflicts or otherwise, where those scales, those injustices, had to be righted, and I believe a number of our veterans have done that. It was my comment back to the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat as we talked about our veterans standing up for those inalienable rights. In fact, we've gone to other countries to make sure that their rights and freedoms are there.

Some of the overreach we've experienced over the years, some of the items that we've seen here in our own country: this is very salient and very to the point. Even if I'm not to reference the pages in the audience, there are pages here. They're our next generation. We're literally doing these things to make sure that you have these rights, that you can continue to go forward with them without that being compromised. When I'm at home looking my kids in the eye and again when I'm referencing my wife this morning, this is a very critical piece of information, a very critical piece of legislation that we're putting forward here to make sure that your rights and freedoms are respected within this province and within this country.

The freedom of speech and expression. That was another item we touched on, Mr. Speaker. Free speech is there. You know, the amendment ensures that Albertans have the freedom to express their views and participate in public discourse without fear of reprisal. In other words, I should be able to say something that's completely wrong, if it's still my opinion and it's wrong, and somebody else should be able to correct me and have their opinions heard just as loudly. Heaven forbid if my thing that I'm saying, that is wrong and inaccurate, becomes the law and anyone else who wants to speak against it all of a sudden is the criminal.

I mean, when we talk about freedom of speech in this country, that is one hundred per cent under attack by a number of different items that were sitting here from federal law. If we say the truth, if we talk about what our good energy sector does and all the good things they're working on, we just had laws passed federally that will take that now. We've seen our Internet usage basically taken down. We've seen a number of things where people are expressing themselves. It used to be that open, public discourse was encouraged. You've got this cancel thing where people are going out there.

Maybe it's tokenism or otherwise, but we're reaffirming what we know to be true and what should be right. Support for diverse opinions. Encourage open debate with the respectful exchange of ideas, which are fundamental to democracy. You know, I know full well that I am not the smartest person in this room. I know that every time I walk in here with that attitude. Some of the members are laughing. They agree with me, and this is good.

Ms Hoffman: I agree.

Mr. Getson: I agree. This is right, and if that member took the same attitude, I'm sure we could have more civil discourse. This is the part where I know to be true, to come into this room and know that, because what it makes me do, Mr. Speaker, is to listen more. I know when I listen to other people's ideas, even though I may not agree with them, that I'm going to get something out of that. It's that humility of understanding that maybe you aren't the smartest person in the room, and if you treat it as such, you might have some pretty good ideas coming forward.

Protect against censorship by reinforcing free expression. The amendment prevails to unjust limitations in individuals' voices in public arenas.

In short, it's a stronger Bill of Rights for any provincial law that's declared to the court to be inconsistent with the Alberta Bill of Rights. The inconsistent part of the Bill of Rights could not be enforced, so this is, in a sense, setting precedence that this Bill of Rights takes precedence over everything else that we're putting in place, that everything underneath that has to be subject to it and make sure that it's contemplated, that it isn't actually infringing on our Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights will provide the evaluation yardstick for all government actions, policies, and legislations. The amended Bill of Rights does not contradict anything in the Charter. The proposed amended Bill of Rights will serve as an additional tool for Albertans to challenge a government decision.

We're at a pivotal point in history here, Mr. Speaker. We have a really good opportunity to reinforce what we've already had and what, you know, the founding Conservative group did back in Premier Lougheed's age. We have a chance to look at everything that's taken us up to this point. We have an opportunity, I believe, in our country, where we've never seen such polarized views or opinions being put into law that are contradicting a lot of things and a lot of principles and truths that we know to be right. We have a chance here in this Legislative Assembly for Albertans, and I'm hoping for other provinces that will follow our lead, as many times it happens when we take that first leap of faith, to go out there and make sure that we identify what we know to be true and reinforce that Bill of Rights.

There's a couple of other items in here, but without actually . . .

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Mr. Getson: Sure, I'll take another one.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, increasingly it's important in debate to understand the intent of the legislation, especially when it comes to interpretation of the courts, and that is the purpose of second reading, to scrutinize the intent of legislation, the purpose and goals. So when this member, as a legislator, is looking at the legislation in front of us, obviously respecting the responsibility of the different levels of government, what is the member's understanding of why we're bringing forward legislation within provincial jurisdiction when it comes to protecting, say, property rights or protecting, within our own purview of responsibility, autonomy of an individual to make health care decisions for themselves? Is it the member's intent to drift into a federal lane, or is it the member's intent, with this legislation and how he understands it, to stay squarely within provincial jurisdiction when it comes to property, health, et cetera, in legislating and Bill 24?

The Speaker: For the benefit of the member, he has two minutes and 40 seconds remaining.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question on that. To the minister: no, actually. We're going to stay well within our lane, well within our wheelhouse.

With only having two minutes left, it's going to be to the benefit of everyone in the Assembly if I just get right to the point. The way our country is made, the way our Constitution sits, the provinces and the country, essentially, are in level playing field. There's a dissemination of the chores, the duties of what's been handed down from the country and what the country takes care of as Canada and what the provinces take care of. This legislation that we're putting in place stays squarely within our lane, stays squarely within our responsibilities. So if you look at health care, education, if you look

at the energy side of the equation, that is all well within our wheelhouse. This only reinforces what we know to be true, the property rights within our wheelhouse. What we've had is history taking place: when the provinces don't fill those lanes, you tend to get a little bit more scope creep. I've talked in here before about the good-neighbour policy of folks poking their fingers over your fence. Sometimes you've got to make sure they know which side of the fence they should stay on. It makes good neighbours.

4:50

I think that this goes to show that with what we have, knowing full well what our responsibilities and our accountabilities are within the province, we're going to fill those spaces, make sure Albertans' Bill of Rights is held to be true within our areas of jurisdiction and that they'll be here for generations to come, and, moreover, respect the intent of how our country was meant to be governed in the first place and the laws and privileges that have been afforded to us.

With that, I'll end my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? I earlier saw the Minister of Energy and Minerals rising, and he will be likely followed by the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An absolute honour to stand today and talk about a bill that is so important. People may ask why it's important. Often people look at the opportunity for individual rights and how important individual rights are so that people aren't oppressed by the state. Well, I'm going to take a different view of it today. We've heard a little bit about the belief on individual choice, and we've heard a little bit about property rights and also respect for lawful actions, but I really believe that we haven't talked enough about how important property rights are.

I say that because the system of law that we use is called the Torrens system of law. It's from South Australia. What they did was that when they first settled Australia, they decided they would come up with a different system of law of land registration so that people would know the plot of land they own, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like it's a simple process and it would make sense to a lot of people, but land registration and the ability to register land and have a title that is guaranteed by the registrar is an unusual concept in most of the world. But I would argue that that is one of the greatest parts of our system of law, the law of property rights because people can actually have and know that within a central registry here in Alberta is the specific legal description and municipal description of their land that they own, and they have certain rights within that land.

Mr. Speaker, you've heard before, I know, as many people coined the phrase: my home is my castle. Well, your property should be your castle. We've seen the true difference between places with the law of property with a registration system, the law of property of Torrens system – like Canada, the United States, Australia – that have amazing opportunities to build wealth, and we see other countries that don't have the ability to pledge their land or build things upon it. Even here in Canada we have that same situation with some of our Indigenous friends and some of the Métis communities. In fact, I would suggest those are some of the things that have been holding those individuals up, those communities up.

I believe that our opportunity with land and the opportunity that we see in this particular bill, Bill 24, today is something that's extremely important, and many people don't understand how important it is. I say that it's really important, Mr. Speaker, because it allows people to come up out of poverty and truly find opportunity. I saw it in Fort McMurray, for instance, when 1,700

people lived there in 1968, and today there's 70,000 people there. We did get up to 110,000. We were able to do that so quickly because people could actually borrow on the land that they owned. They could sell that land, sell parts of it.

But, Mr. Speaker, the law of property and property rights has been diminished somewhat by – you're not going to believe it – the state, by governments. They have actually limited people's individual property rights, corporations' individual property rights to be able to do what they need to do on that land, to have opportunity, to seize it, to make their lives better and the lives of their family better. This bill does exactly that. It strengthens property rights for individuals so they don't have to worry about the oppression of the state, the state coming and seizing that property.

You can think, "Well, that doesn't happen here in Alberta," but it does. In fact, I saw it happen in Fort McMurray, believe it or not, just over a decade ago. The municipal council there at the time decided, in their wisdom, that they would start a hockey arena, they would build a really nice hockey arena for our junior team – we have a great team, by the way, the Oil Barons – and they decided that they would negotiate on the land and buy out all the buildings in a certain area of downtown Fort McMurray. Then, after they bought out all the buildings, they would strike the deal with the hockey team. Not a very great concept.

But what happened, Mr. Speaker, is that they bought all the downtown, they in fact levelled the buildings, and now we have a park there. And you know what? I don't know if you've seen what most of the parks are inhabited by in Alberta right now and across Canada, but let's just say that it's not little kids playing basketball. There are a lot of homeless people there and some homeless issues there. What they've done is taken out about 40,000 or 50,000 square feet of office space that had been there for 50 years. Those businesses argued about it. In fact, there were two law firms in those businesses that argued about it, but the state still oppressed them. They took that land away from them.

I'm not saying that this would be a perfect solution to that, but it certainly moves us more in the direction towards individual and corporate property rights and the ability to seize opportunities when they arise, and that's why I like this bill so much.

Now, there's no question that recently we've heard loud and clear from Albertans that they want the ability to make those personal health decisions that are important to them. That's a reflection of bodily autonomy and the ability to make decisions for themselves, but I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that the biggest, longest term positive result of this particular bill will be property rights, will be the ability to expand the property protections to Albertans so that when they have ownership, when they borrow money against that property, they know that they can use that property for long-term investment and a return for their family.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we'll see a tremendous opportunity there, making the state actually pay for their actions. I say that because I've seen across this province over the last number of years developers not developing property, and that's probably, in my opinion, from my experience as a developer in my past life, a result of so many different pieces of legislation and so many barriers put in place for people that want to exercise that right for opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is another situation where we're going to see less government interference in the opportunity for individuals to pursue their dreams, and I hope that we will see a real change in investments in Alberta as a result of that and that Alberta will actually lead the country in investments. Well, guess what? We already do.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you another story about why it's so important that we have this, and I'm talking particularly in regard to the energy file. Our geological organizations here in Alberta have

both a warehouse in Edmonton and a warehouse in Calgary, and those warehouses include samples of water and soil and core samples from the energy sector over the last 70 years, and that couldn't have been done, in my opinion, without the great legal framework that we have under the Torrens system of law. You see, the reason why we are the best geological formation on the planet, or one of I think two right now, as a choice for carbon capture and sequestration is because the Torrens system of land is alive and well here. Most of the land, most of the geological formations here in Alberta belong to the Crown. As a result of that, we don't have the long contracts of, you know, 300 or 400 pages that they have in the United States when they're trying to do CCUS operations.

We have, Mr. Speaker, here in Alberta the opportunity for the Crown to designate particular zones for that use exclusively because the Crown has that. That would not be available in most jurisdictions around the world; in fact, I would suggest very few. In the United States it's so cumbersome that, as I mentioned, they have lawyers upon lawyers that deal up and put together contracts that, frankly, as most people know, absorb a lot of the opportunities for profits for those landowners.

So I just say to you, Mr. Speaker, that these expanded property protection rights and the opportunity to be a leader in Canada and North America on property rights I think is nothing short of an opportunity to provide compliments to the Premier, and I would do so. I've been watching this file come forward, and I can't tell you how much I wish that we could expand these property rights to all individuals in Alberta, not just the people that live on a Torrens system of land and land registration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and speak to Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024. I would like to thank the Minister of Justice for bringing up this bill and the important issue to the Assembly. I'm proud to represent many legal firearm owners in my riding. These law-abiding, responsible citizens are individuals who already follow the strict laws that are in place here in Canada. Many Albertans across our province are in the same group. They are responsible firearms owners. These responsible firearms owners take the required safety courses in order to become licensed, and they must get their firearm registered. They must also go through a personal history section that asks for their criminal history such as misuse of firearms, mental health, and suicide. Through these processes, authorities are well aware of who is owning firearms.

5:00

Illegal firearms owners skip the process. Adding more laws to legal firearm owners is not solving any issues with illegally owned guns, which cause a lot of the related gun violence. We can see this reality unfolding across Canada today. The current federal government has added many restrictions on firearm ownership, including a national freeze on handguns, expanding the definition of prohibited firearms, and increasing licensing requirements. However, despite these changes, firearm-related violent crimes in Canada have gotten worse, not better.

The amendments proposed to the Alberta Bill of Rights are about our province. Over the years governments and MLAs come and go, and attitudes change. Adding the right to acquire, keep, and use firearms in the Bill of Rights would make future provincial governments reconsider before attempting to implement

restrictions on these rights. Thankfully, the provincial government I am proud to be part of understands this issue very well.

In 2021 our government asserted its provincial authority by appointing a Chief Firearms Officer to stand up for the rights of law-abiding firearm owners in Canada. We also passed the Municipal Government (Firearms) Amendment Act, 2020, in 2021, which prevents municipal councils from restricting legal firearm use without ministerial approval. We understand the need to continue through processes for gun licensing, which require training to become competent with their safe usage, storage, and transfer. However, the federal government's recent moves do not improve public safety and only unfairly target law-abiding gun owners.

I'll tell you a little story. My father, when I was very, very young, put me in his rubber boots and we would go duck hunting or prairie chicken hunting, and anyone who has ever done that knows that it is very exciting. And as a little girl I got to go every time. Once I'd see he'd get his gun ready, I was there, ready to go. The other thing that also my dad did was keep the coyotes away from the chicken coop, because, as we know, those coyotes are really bad in rural Alberta, and if you don't contain them, those chickens are gone.

Mr. Boitchenko: Yep. Happened to me.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Happened to you? Okay. There you go. That was food for the winter.

I'm happy that the rights of those law-abiding citizens will be further reinforced with made-in-Alberta legislation if these changes are passed. We all know that Alberta is an amazing place to live, and part of that is the unique identity we have. For instance, many of us are farmers or have parents who are farmers or even spent our childhood hanging out on our grandparents' farm. Many of you who grew up on farms or had relatives on a farm know that having a gun is a valuable tool. It's a necessary tool. Owning a firearm is not a matter of safety for you and your family but also for your livestock and your farm in general. Predators such as coyotes, cougars, wolves, and others also target livestock and poultry on farms, which can cause significant loss of income for farmers. With firearms farmers are able to use this tool in order to protect themselves, their families, and their livelihoods.

Something that I and many Albertans who grew up around firearms understand is that firearms are powerful and valuable tools. Growing up around these weapons teaches you that there is a right place and time for them. In fact, the respect lends itself to responsible ownership. Doing the training required to be a licensed owner doesn't just mean learning proper procedures for use, storage, and transfer of firearms. It also means learning the consequences of not following those procedures, and one thing my father taught me was the consequences. Trust me. I felt it. There are consequences that have to be taken seriously.

Responsible gun owners encourage others to be responsible gun owners, but we have legislators in Ottawa determining gun legislation in areas they know nothing of. This is why amendments being debated today are so important. I know many gun owners in my constituency who have expressed their concerns over unnecessary restrictions by the federal government. Those attempts to communicate have fallen on deaf ears. My hope is that a strong statement by a provincial government united behind these changes will be listened to, and having an Alberta Chief Firearms Officer ensures that our unique voices are being heard at the federal level.

I know that this provincial government will continue to advocate for responsible firearm ownership. I would like to thank again the Minister of Justice for bringing this forward in this legislation, that will help protect the rights and freedoms of law-abiding gun owners

in our ever-changing world. I'm honoured to speak on behalf of my constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and all Albertans who feel the same way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024. I stand here in support of the amendments that are being proposed, and I believe that it's more than just virtue signalling. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall was essentially, in his speech, alluding to that the government is just in the process of doing some virtue signalling. I will attempt to address some of the areas where I think it's much more than virtue signalling.

It's needed changes within our Bill of Rights to ensure that Albertans, all Albertans, are protected from anything that would go against their individual rights, whether that's property rights, whether that's their freedom of speech, freedom of religion. Whatever it might be, it's important that we review these things on a regular basis. I believe the current Bill of Rights was enacted in 1972, prior to even the Canadian Charter being enacted in the early '80s, in 1982, 1983, something like that, I believe. So we are revisiting the Alberta Bill of Rights at this time, and I would suggest it's well overdue.

I think I would agree with the Minister of Energy and Minerals in how important the changes to expanding the property rights within the province are to everyday Albertans. Everyday Albertans are continuing to grow their own personal equity and their ability to realize their opportunity in a free and democratic society. We need to protect that ability and what they have been able to gain through those actions, to ensure that the government is not able to impede them or, essentially, penalize them by taking property without proper compensation.

This is a good day in Alberta, that we are able to stand here, and something that we've been discussing for probably a better part of two decades, to ensure that the property rights are expanded to compensate individuals or businesses if government takes ownership of their property or if a law deprives the individual or business of any reasonable use of the property. They now have due process that will be made available to them. They are protected under due process, and if they feel like they've been harmed in any way, they are able to then go to the courts and ask for a ruling by the courts to ensure that they are protected.

One of the things that is changing also in the Bill of Rights is just the strengthening of the preamble. Adding some words can have a huge impact on the intent of a bill and also help those that come after us to ensure that they understand the intent of this Legislature when enacting the bill. There's just, you know, a couple of minor changes to the preamble. The government is proposing that it "acknowledge the supremacy of God and the rule of law." We're adding three words there. The rule of law is recognized as an important part of the individual's rights.

5:10

And it goes on to add "human rights and fundamental freedoms, the dignity and worth of the human person and the position of the family in a society of free people and free institutions." So what's being added is the wording "the position of the family in a society of free people and free institutions." I would suggest to you that our civil society is largely founded on the foundation of family. Earlier on today we heard from the Education minister on the importance

of parents being involved in the education of their children and how important that family aspect is to a society of free-thinking people, that that society is able to recognize that family is an important part of the very foundation of civil society.

It's being added into the preamble here, and it might seem like virtue signalling to the members opposite, but I think what it's sending is a message that this government, the UCP government on this side of the House, recognizes the importance of family within our society and how we work towards developing strong families and work towards helping those families in all that they do to grow as a family, to continue to thrive as a family, to be able to realize their opportunities within this society as a family. So those words are incredibly important, I believe, to be added in the preamble of the Bill of Rights, and it helps the next generation and generations after that to understand that at this point in time people in Alberta understood that family was at the centre of the foundation of individual rights and free and prosperous society.

I think there are other changes that would help to identify and clarify with regard to the gun ownership, firearm ownership, and for people legally obtaining and use of firearms. Mr. Speaker, it's no secret I come from a farming background. I currently farm, and we utilize that tool on occasion to ensure that, whether it's livestock or whether it's family, they're protected from danger and protected from any threat that might come from whether it's wildlife or others.

You know, like, law-abiding citizens that have firearms respect law. We need to understand that they are utilizing firearms in a manner that continues to keep society civil but that they need firearms to ensure that their families are safe and to make sure that their livestock are well taken care of and safe as well. These additions and the clarification on the right to acquire and to keep and use firearms are an important part for especially my constituents who live out in the rural areas of the province, where they may encounter difficulties with wildlife and with other threats to their well-being.

I think that pretty much covers what I need to cover with regard to Bill 24, second reading. The intent of the bill, I believe, is very good. I believe the areas that it addresses help to clarify some aspects that maybe were in question, but I also believe that the increased protection on property rights is probably a big part of how we are going to continue to succeed in our society and grow families that will be able to exist here for many generations to come.

With that, I would encourage all members of the Legislature to support Bill 24 and the amendments that are being brought forward, and I will be voting in favour of second reading of Bill 24.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate. The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is, as always, a pleasure and an honour to have the opportunity to rise here to speak to this important bill and this important matter and to provide some closing thoughts for this afternoon's robust debate. I want to take this opportunity to thank all members of this House for engaging in this robust debate.

Mr. Speaker, I've had the honour and the privilege of taking this role for a little over a year now. I've gained an appreciation for the foundational role that rights and freedoms play in our democratic

society and even more so with some of the challenges that our province has faced in the past few years.

As part of this democratic process we've heard from Albertans that they would like more government accountability when it comes to protecting their rights and freedoms. Mr. Speaker, we've heard from countless Albertans. We've listened, and we've taken action here before you. Our government is responding with updated amendments to Alberta's Bill of Rights. The Alberta Bill of Rights was enacted in 1972 specifically to protect Albertans from the actions of their provincial government, a suite of rights so comprehensive that Alberta's Bill of Rights predated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by a decade.

I've heard a little bit about virtue signalling from members of the opposition. I want to point out to all members in this Assembly that in 2023 in the Ingram decision, Justice Romaine described the rights in the Alberta Bill of Rights as real and absolute, Mr. Speaker. This is not virtue signalling. This is the court's interpretation of what this Bill of Rights truly confers upon all individuals in this great province. This makes it the most appropriate law to update in response to Albertans' concerns about actions infringing on their rights. The Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel agreed when they made a number of recommendations to amend the Bill of Rights. Several of these proposed amendments in Bill 24, the bill before this Assembly today, relate to recommendations in that panel's final report.

If the amendments pass, Albertans will have a truly modernized Alberta Bill of Rights that adds to and reaffirms the rights available to them in the areas of medical consent, property rights, firearms rights, and freedom of expression. Further amendments would make the Alberta Bill of Rights a more robust civil rights document, Mr. Speaker, that would allow for better alignment with our provincial act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it will provide more effective tools for making sure Albertans' rights are protected against all government action.

While there's been, rightly, a focus in this Assembly on the new rights that we're adding into these amendments, I would like to take a moment to emphasize the importance of making sure that the Alberta Bill of Rights has an enforcement mechanism as well. After all, there is little value in granting Albertans any rights if they're easy for government to breach. Our proposed amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights demonstrate our commitment to upholding the rights and freedoms and all of those that Albertans hold dear.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the further proposed amendments reinforce Albertans' shared values in making updates to the preambles of the act that refer to freedom, family, and the rule of law as of utmost importance. As the sponsor of this bill I truly endorse the proposed amendments to Bill 24, and I encourage every member in this House to support it.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had an afternoon of high-minded and decorous debate. I am certain that Albertans at home watching feel the same way. With that, I would move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 tomorrow, Wednesday, October 30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]

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