



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 8, 2025

Day 95

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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Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 1

Vacant: 2

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Eggen
Hunter
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the Leader of the Official Opposition, has an introduction of a school group.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the students from Grace Martin school. They are good friends of mine, and you will be glad to know they have in their school a Legoslature. Thank you so much for making that possible. Welcome to the Legislature. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be honoured to introduce on behalf of my friend from Edmonton-Glenora the wonderful school group of Mayfield school with Lori-anne Bond, 38 students here in the Chamber. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the Leader of the Official Opposition has an additional school group to introduce.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members the students from St. Elizabeth Catholic school. They are here with teachers and volunteers. They also have a Legislature at their school. The Legoslatures have been very popular in Mill Woods. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly members of the Alberta College of Optometrists: Kim Bugera, Michelle Duke, Sophia Leung, and Lee Funke. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three fantastic guests that I met today: first, Reg Joseph and Lana Solberg, who are doing some remarkable work on chronic disease management; also joining us is Dean Boyd, president of the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview UCP Constituency Association. I'd ask you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

Member Irwin: I'm here to introduce some folks who are with the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association based in my riding. They're urging the government to fund cochlear implants. I'd like to introduce James and Cheryl Bissell, Nanc Price, Carma Burgess, Caroline Schwabe, Andreas Schwabe, Galina Bogatyrevich. If they could all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you the Heritage Roots Coalition. This great organization supports seniors within the African-Caribbean community and is led by their president, Thomas Bankole. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly David Tschetter, Dan Hofer, Joe Kleinsasser, Hutterian brethren from Alberta, and also a good friend of mine from Fort McMurray, Florence Princeton. If you could all please rise and accept the warm welcome to the Assembly.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly from the county of Grande Prairie reeve Bob Marshall, deputy reeve Amanda Frayn, councillors Kurt Balderston, Brian Peterson, Karen Rosvold, and Bob Chrenek, who are joined by members of the county of Grande Prairie administration. I'd ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm also going to introduce some people who are here to urge the government to fund bilateral cochlear implants. I ask them to rise: Cindy and Douglas Gordon, Marianne Rankin, Marilyn and Doug Kingdon, Jennifer Panteluk, Greg Sheehan, Margriet Whitford, Suzanne Panteluk, Carl Wurfel, and Melvin Bosch. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Cochlear Implant Availability

Ms Renaud: As an early teen Cindy Gordon was put in a segregated behavioural class at school because she was labelled a problem student. Cindy's mom suspected her daughter's challenges at school were not behavioural but something else, and she was right. Cindy's problem was a profound hearing loss likely caused by chicken pox in childhood, as if we needed additional reasons to promote safe and effective vaccination in Alberta, but here we are with the government hesitant to even say the word.

Hearing loss is the number one disability in Canada and one that often goes unrecognized, leaving people at risk for developing secondary disabilities. When left untreated, the impacts on people and communities is immense and certainly not positive. A profound loss of connection, isolation, and strained relationships are frequently described by people with untreated hearing loss. Personal safety and well-being are markedly impacted by hearing loss simply due to the inability to hear traffic or alarms or warning sounds. Disconnection from the sounds that make life meaningful such as hearing birds or rain or music, the voices of loved ones, is the reality for people with untreated hearing loss.

Cindy and many like her are indeed candidates for cochlear implants, which have revolutionized the treatment of hearing loss. Treating hearing loss bilaterally means getting two cochlear implants, and it translates to a significant reduction in cognitive decline and mental illness. The problem here in Alberta is that we don't make cochlear implants available to hearing loss adults who are eligible, and if they're lucky, they may only get one. We know babies and children need bilateral cochlear implants for their brain development and well-being, so they receive both. Adults in Alberta, however, are treated differently and only get one implant, which brings with it all kinds of new challenges.

In 2019 it was estimated that almost 200,000 Canadians could have benefited from a cochlear implant, yet only 13,000 have received one. We are urging the government to change this story.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a statement to make.

Tourism Industry

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's National Tourism Week, and as the MLA for the beautiful constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, also known as God's country, I wanted to take a moment to recognize just how exceptional Alberta's tourism sector is.

Alberta is a world-renowned destination, and it's no secret as to why. Just come down to my neck of the woods, and you'll see the majestic Rocky Mountains and the golden prairies that make Alberta's wild side so iconic. The data makes it clear the world wants more Alberta.

Alberta's tourism industry is growing at an unprecedented rate, smashing records year over year. Annual visitor expenditures in 2023 soared to \$12.7 billion, surpassing the previous record by almost 20 per cent, and this momentum continued into 2024, with data from the first three quarters showing tourism revenues growing by 10 per cent year over year. It's no exaggeration to say that Alberta's tourism sector is putting the rest of Canada to shame.

Tourism is booming in Alberta, growing at a rate more than three times the national average. We're outperforming every other province by a mile, growing at more than double the rate of even our fiercest competitors, Ontario and B.C.

But let me be clear. It's not just the breathtaking views that make Alberta's tourism sector so exceptional. It's the true spirit of Albertans – the risk takers, the innovators, and the small-business owners – who have built a world class tourism industry that sets us apart.

This UCP government has worked to free Albertans from the burden of unnecessary red tape, enabling businesses to thrive and our tourism sector to flourish. Alberta's tourism strategy is working, and the investments that our government has made in the industry are clearly paying off.

The world is discovering what we who live here already know: Alberta is the best place to live play and visit. Thank you.

Rental Housing

Member Irwin: More than 21 months ago I introduced a bill that would have capped rent increases in Alberta. At that time we were already seeing skyrocketing rent hikes in our province, with Edmonton and Calgary leading the way with the fastest increasing rents across all of Canada.

1:40

It's no secret that Alberta has few protections for renters and is the largest province with no caps on rent, but the UCP – you guessed it – killed my bill. They were unwilling to debate, unwilling

to hear the stories of countless Albertans who've experienced shocking rent increases, who've been forced from their homes, who've lost their community, who've got nowhere to go.

But here's the thing. It doesn't need to be this way. Rent caps won't solve the housing crisis. We know that. So we proposed my bill in tandem with other measures, including affordable housing targets and clear, evidence-based recommendations like increasing rent supplements and robust investments in safe, accessible, and affordable housing. Yet the UCP said no.

To show how much UCP inaction is hurting Albertans, let's use a recent example. Annamoe Mansion, a historic apartment here in downtown Edmonton, was recently sold to a landlord who has jacked up the rents. Residents on fixed incomes who were paying around \$900 dollars a month will soon be paying \$2,700 a month. That's right. Their rent is tripling. How many Albertans can afford this? Very few. But you know who can afford it? Those UCP MLAs who had the audacity to increase their own housing allowance by a whopping 14 per cent. Why would they do that, you ask? Because their out-of-town MLAs were complaining that rents were too high in Edmonton, so they needed more money.

Make it make sense. UCP MLAs know first-hand the high cost of rent, yet they're unwilling to take action unless it's for themselves. This is a government that isn't here for you. That has to change. Renters deserve better, you all deserve better, and with an NPD government in 2027, better is possible.

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

Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past year we've witnessed an unprecedented level of investment in my constituency, investments that reflect this government's deep commitment to rural Alberta and our long-term prosperity. Significant highway 28 improvements for 2025 are under way across the corridor, with safety upgrades progressing between Smoky Lake and Bonnyville and the engineering work for Bonnyville to Cold Lake twinning nearing completion, with the construction set to begin in 2026.

In health care transition beds have opened in Cold Lake to meet the rising demand, and the Premier has announced a new urgent care centre for the city of Cold Lake, an investment that will be transformative for families in the Lakeland region. In St. Paul the emergency department recently underwent a \$3.5 million renovation, modernizing care delivery in our region.

In education planning dollars have also been committed to long-overdue solutions to address the aging infrastructure of the North Star elementary school, the Cold Lake junior high school, and the Art Smith Aviation Academy.

Municipal infrastructure is receiving critical support. The Cold Lake waste-water treatment plant was awarded \$2.9 million of provincial funding for upgrades, for a total Alberta investment of \$8.7 million. In Bonnyville the Strathcona Performing Arts Centre opened its doors with the support of a \$500,000 CFEP large stream grant while the Glendon arena secured \$1 million through the same program as it prepared to co-host the 2026 Alberta Winter Games. Bringing the region together, of course, is Elk Point arena, also awarded a \$750,000 grant through Alberta's ACI grant.

Mr. Speaker, these investments are not one-time gestures. They reflect this government's vision for a strong, thriving rural Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Sikh Heritage Month

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise here today to mark April as Sikh Heritage Month in Alberta, established by former Premier Rachel Notley in 2017 to celebrate the remarkable history and contributions of the Sikh community to our province. From the arrival of Harnam Singh Hari, Alberta's first Sikh settler in 1909, to the countless Sikhs who have sacrificed their lives alongside and as part of the Canadian and British Forces during the world wars, and to the many Sikhs who now live, work, and prosper in this beautiful province and country, it is particularly meaningful for me to stand here as the first Amritdhari, baptized, Sikh Member of the Legislative Assembly in Alberta.

The Sikh principles of humanity, justice, and equity are deeply embedded in the contributions of Sikhs across Alberta. The commitment to humanity is central to the Sikh faith, reminding us that we are all one regardless of race, religion, or background. Justice is embedded in the Sikh spirit with the belief that everyone deserves equal rights, dignity, and respect and that we must always stand up for the oppressed. Equity, at the heart of Sikh teachings, emphasizes the importance of fairness and inclusivity for all, ensuring that no one is left behind.

It is through their commitment to these values that Sikhs have made profound impacts in education, health care, business, and public service, helping to shape the diverse and vibrant Alberta we know today. Whether through charitable work, community service, or standing up for those in need, Sikhs have continually demonstrated the true meaning of seva: selfless service to humanity.

We thank the Sikh community for their continued contributions to Alberta and to Canada and for the shared history we hold, one that is rooted in respect, hard work, and service to the community. Alberta is proud of their Sikh community, just as the Sikh community is proud to call themselves Albertan, to call themselves Canadian. Thank you. [Remarks in Punjabi]

The Khalsa belongs to God and victory belongs to God. [As submitted]

Support for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, many Albertans are justifiably worried about how they can survive the economic impact of tariffs along with our high cost of living. They are scared that their government may not be there to offer support when times are tough or if they are impacted by an unexpected circumstance clearly out of their control. Unfortunately, this fear is already a daily routine for the 77,000 people on AISH who live with chronic disabilities and are unable to work.

Robert Kelly Dowhaniuk lives in my riding of Calgary-Foothills and relies on AISH due to a diagnosed chronic medical condition. He told my office that being on a fixed income while trying to cover rising costs for gas, groceries, electricity, insurance, car payments, and housing is next to impossible and has resulted in him having unpaid bills and almost \$30,000 in credit card debt.

Even children get no relief from this UCP government. Ekaterina Bondarenko applied for family support for children with disabilities in July 2024 for her son and is yet to hear any timeline from the ministry. She is unable to work, pays out of pocket for her son's therapy, and is worried her child's development is falling further and further behind.

Karen Hillis is another parent who contacted me, still waiting to hear back for supports for her child. In fact, CBC reported 70 per cent of applicants they spoke with are still waiting for a caseworker, some after two years.

Instead of helping, this UCP government callously cut AISH and removed funding for disability advocate organizations. Inclusion Alberta learned its funding is getting cut by \$500,000.

We need this government to stop attacking the marginalized and vulnerable. They are desperate and tired of waiting. Alberta's New Democrats will fight to ensure families are supported and workers are protected, and I call on this UCP government to do the same.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 50

Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hereby request leave to introduce Bill 50, the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

This legislation seeks to modify three key pieces of legislation for Alberta municipalities: the Local Authorities Election Act, the Municipal Government Act, the New Home Buyer Protection Act, with consequential amendments to the Safety Codes Act. Alberta's government is committed to ensuring that Alberta's local governments are strong and collaborative and that their investments in new homes are protected. Our proposed amendments in the legislation will build on this work by strengthening local governance and collaboration, streamlining processes, and bolstering protection for new-home buyers and builders.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 50, the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Bill 51

Education Amendment Act, 2025

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well today to request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 51, the Education Amendment Act, 2025.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot that I can say about this important bill, which I'd be happy to go into right now in this speech, but I know that might make you a little upset, so I'll save my commentary about how important this bill is for second reading.

The Speaker: Sounds exactly like what you're supposed to do.

[Motion carried; Bill 51 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

AISH Client Benefits

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, each and every day this UCP government adds to their cuts, chaos, and corruption, but the latest change for AISH recipients adds a new C word: cruelty. After years of advocacy disabled Albertans are finally set to receive \$200 a month from the Canada disability benefit. The UCP government's response: they're clawing back every penny of it. The new benefit is meant to improve the lives of disabled Albertans, not to help this incompetent UCP government with budget problems. Why won't the government let them keep \$200?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government for some time has been advocating to the federal government to help cost share on the significant cost of supporting our most vulnerable. Alberta has been a leader in this regard. Our AISH monthly payment has gone up to \$1,901. The federal government is challenging every province to get up to \$1,811 per month. We are hundreds of dollars ahead of Manitoba, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. We're very pleased that the federal government is helping to cost share this program, and we're looking forward to seeing the other provinces come up to the level we have in Alberta.

Ms Gray: Here's what the government has done during an affordability crisis. They have given themselves a 14 per cent temporary rental increase. They were at \$1,930; they are now asking people who are on AISH to live at \$1,901 so they can have a \$270 increase to their rent. But somebody on AISH can't have \$200. Those living on disability have other costs like equipment, supplies, meds, travel, treatment; it's harder if you're in rural Alberta. Somehow they get more money for temporary residences than people on AISH.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that we had heard from individuals who were receiving disability was that they wanted to have more opportunity to earn more income. So we've brought in a brand new program, Alberta disability assistance program, which will allow for those who are on disability to receive more and more money from private income so that they can address the issues that they have. We also have substantial supports for rental income and rental supplements. In addition, we're ensuring that those on AISH continue to have a full pharmacare program to cover their substantial medical needs as well.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, disabled Albertans want to be able to afford to live in dignity, and that is what this government is not allowing them to do.

Alberta is the only province in Canada that is clawing back this \$200. The minister and now the Premier have both admitted that they think the benefits for disabled Albertans in Alberta are too generous. It is absolutely ridiculous. The minister said: we can't continue to have rates as high as we have in our province. End quote. This \$200 a month in federal benefits is vital for disabled Albertans. Why would the government claim AISH recipients are getting too much?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the case is that Alberta is the only province in Canada that is exceeding the benchmark that the federal government has set out to achieve, \$1,811 per month. In NDP Manitoba they only pay \$1,347; in NDP British Columbia they only pay \$1,484 per month. I'm pleased to see that the federal government is challenging those NDP provinces to come up to the level that Alberta already has. We are exceeding the amount that the federal government has set, and we're very proud of that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for question 2.

Unused Health Services Products

Ms Gray: We continue to see a government that only thinks of themselves and serves themselves, as we have seen with this

government's handling and incompetence on the corrupt care scandal. A month ago we revealed that the UCP has wasted millions of dollars storing unusable PPE, unsafe Turkish Tylenol in warehouses. This government left more than 500 skids of Turkish Tylenol sitting and collecting dust for another month since we last asked about this, another month of wasted storage fees. Why has this government wasted money storing useless Turkish Tylenol and unusable PPE?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We now have a new oversight entity called Acute Care Alberta, and we will be asking them to look at the inventory management practices across our system. We know that during COVID it was necessary to order a large amount of personal protective equipment to make sure that it was on hand. This is always the case, that you need to be able to have supplies on hand in the event that we have a worst-case scenario, but we have to make sure that we're using up that inventory so that it doesn't expire. We now have some new processes in place, but we'll take a look at it.

Ms Gray: What Albertans need and what this government should be doing is a public inquiry to look into corrupt procurement practices that bought absolute garbage PPE that is still collecting dust. Instead, Turkish Tylenol is collecting dust, MHCare is sitting on \$49 million of Albertans' money, and the government is doing nothing. No one asked them to sign such bad deals. No one asked the government to fill a warehouse to the rafters with garbage medication and PPE they can't use. Why does the government continually demonstrate such incompetence on scandals of their own making?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When medical crises hit, people expect their government to act. So when COVID hit, we had a procurement department at Alberta Health Services, which is one of the best in the country, that was able to go out and secure personal protective equipment that they were then able to also make available to our colleagues across the entire country. When the crisis hit in children's pain medication, they went out and did the exact same thing as well from a credible company, Atabay Pharmaceuticals, that provides this medicine all over the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: Albertans expect ethical, competent government, and they haven't had it for six years now. The unusable Turkish Tylenol was supposed to be destined for Ukraine, but this government can't even make a donation properly. Instead, those cases and cases of bottles are sitting in a warehouse collecting dust. More than 500 skids are sitting for two and a half years in a warehouse. How much money did the government waste storing the risky Turkish Tylenol just this month? What's this month's number?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the members opposite know, any time you're dealing with pharmaceuticals, you're also dealing with Health Canada. We have an application in to have Health Canada approve the donation of these products. There's an intermediary nonprofit that makes them available to places around the world. As soon as Health Canada approves that transfer, then we'd be delighted to do the delivery. But at the moment, we're sort of caught up in the middle of a federal election. It could be that's

the reason for the delay in the processes. We're looking forward to that getting resolved so we can get this issue resolved, too.

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

Premier's Remarks on U.S. Tariffs

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier took a victory lap on Trump's tariffs while Albertans' retirement funds and pensions have taken a plummeting. The Premier said tariffs are a "big win." That got quite a lot of reaction. Former Harper cabinet minister James Moore tweeted, "This is not a good day for Canada or the world." He said, "When Alberta is economically attacked, it is bad for Canada." He said, "This is not a 'big win.'" All sounds like common sense to me. Who besides the Premier agrees that these devastating tariffs are a big win?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that tariffs are bad policy, whether it's tariffs on Canadian goods going into the United States or countervailing tariffs on American goods coming into Canada. We know that all kinds of businesses and individuals are facing higher costs as a result of that, and we would like this trade war to be over as soon as possible, which is why we're pleased to see that it looks like, after the election, we will see an early renegotiation of the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement so that we do not have to live under this uncertainty until 2026. I'm very hopeful we'll go back to having a tariff-free relationship with the United States.

Ms Gray: To be very clear, I'm quoting directly from the Premier, who called these tariffs a "big win." The former Premier of this province Jason Kenney said that the Trump tariffs are "nothing to celebrate." He said, "Entire Canadian industries still look to be clobbered by arbitrary U.S. tariffs." Alberta companies saw stocks plummet, WTI is now below \$60, pensioners are seeing their retirement funds erode, and the Premier: she's still hanging out with Ben Shapiro on the taxpayer dime and calling it a big win for Albertans. Why is the Premier so out of touch?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The best way for us to be able to get tariffs reversed is to talk to those who have influence on the American presidency. Ben Shapiro is one of those individuals who does. If you've watched, ever since I had a chance to sit down with him, he has been doing public videos and commentary saying how opposed he is to tariffs and bringing others outside. The Senate in the United States . . . [interjections]

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

Ms Smith: The Senate in the United States also voted with Canada, saying that those tariffs were unfair. There were four Republican Senators who broke ranks. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't because of any of the work that they did. They can't even pick up a phone to make a call to advocate on behalf of Canada.

Ms Gray: The Premier is completely out of touch. We see that even within her own party her own boss didn't want her around. Apparently, the Premier wasn't invited to hang out with Harper and Poilievre in Nisku last night. Maybe that's because *National Post*

columnist John Ivison called on Pierre Poilievre to denounce the Premier for her remarks. He said, "These tariffs are going to grind international trade to a standstill. Nowhere is an island in this chaos, certainly not land-locked Alberta." Why is the Premier so out of touch with the anxiety facing Albertans because of Trump's tariffs that she called the tariffs a "big win"?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are four areas where we have tariffs that we still have to do more work on: auto tariffs, steel tariffs, aluminum tariffs, and timber tariffs, but the vast majority of Alberta products are tariff-free. We have to do the work to make sure that all of our products are tariff-free. Yes, of course, it is causing turmoil in the world markets, and, yes, of course, the best pathway, as it has been proven, is diplomacy. It's calling people. It's pressing our case. It's demonstrating that we are stronger together in a partnership with the United States to make North America a strong free trade area.

Provincial Police Agency

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been clear they don't want a provincial police force, but the Premier does, so the minister of public safety is forcing one through. With Bill 49 he's going to spend millions in public money to build a new bureaucracy and fund a new franchise to compete with the RCMP. It's the height of arrogance and entitlement. Seventy-seven per cent of Albertans policed by RCMP say that they like the RCMP, but the minister is convinced he knows best. Why is the minister ignoring what Albertans want and spending their hard-earned money to force the Premier's pet project through?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier, the minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's clear the member still can't get beyond his urban privilege card that he has in his back pocket. I have been out in rural Alberta. I encourage the member to also get out in rural Alberta. He would hear what rural Albertans have to say.

Mr. Speaker, I don't care what the uniform is. We're going to make sure that police officers attend calls to serve, something that the folks from Edmonton apparently don't seem to understand. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Shepherd: Here's what rural Albertans had to say: we were completely caught off guard, in shock; we had no warning or consultation. That's the president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta. That's right; the minister claims he's representing the concerns of rural communities, but he didn't even bother to talk to them about his plans. And you know why? Because he knows they are opposed to a provincial police force, but the minister's got the credit card so he's forcing Albertans to fund his new franchise to produce a product Albertans have already told him they don't want. To the minister: why is he fixated on forcing through what's essentially the Turkish Tylenol of policing policy?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, it's clear the member opposite – you know, I don't want to presuppose that he may or may not have been in this Chamber. I would never do that. We passed a bill a year ago talking about an Alberta independent police service. All this is laying the foundation for the Alberta independent police service. We're going

to support rural Albertans, unlike members on the other side of the House.

Mr. Shepherd: After he passed that bill, the Rural Municipalities association passed another resolution saying that they're opposed.

Mr. Speaker, if he wants to help rural municipal leaders, he could do some of the things they're asking him to do: restore the police funding they lost thanks to their changes on traffic safety; properly fund local services to help Albertans who are struggling with housing, mental health, or addiction; restore the funding they cut for organizations helping to prevent crime in their communities. But, no, he's going to do the one thing they don't want him to do. Will the minister just admit that the UCP aren't here to help Albertans? No. They're here to help themselves and push through the Premier's pet political project. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, our Alberta sheriffs have SCAN teams. We have surveillance teams. We have fugitive apprehension teams because we have over 80,000 outstanding warrants in this province because of the policies of the NDP-Liberal alliance. We have a public safety concern in this province and in this country. We are going to support rural Albertans. I suggest the members opposite do the same.

Acute-care Funding Model

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday the government held a health care press conference. They could have announced the desperately needed south Edmonton hospital, or they could have announced the hiring of front-line nurses, paramedics, and health workers. Instead they announced the erosion of patient-centred hospital care and their desire to push through competition-centred chaos while the minister pretended that the experiment in B.C. was a hit. The truth is that it was a disaster, and B.C. rescinded it. Was the minister not properly briefed on the fact that the B.C. government scrapped the model because it didn't work, or was she intentionally a stranger of the truth?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite often is unaware of the truth. In fact, the truth is that Australia . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: . . . relies heavily on activity-based funding. About 87 per cent of its hospital funding is tied directly to patient activity funding, or activity-based funding, what we announced yesterday, yet Australia consistently is top globally in the world for health care. I'm not sure why the members opposite wouldn't want what Australia wants, which is excellent health care. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

A point of order is noted by the Government House Leader at 2:06, and one by the Opposition House Leader at 2:06 and a half.

Ms Hoffman: Given that we want excellent health care for Albertans and a competent government and given that the government celebrated moving away from a fee-for-service model for family doctors to encourage them to take their time with patients and now given that the government is telling hospital administrators to do the opposite – that's right. If you weren't sick of the "only one medical issue per visit" signs in clinics, now you're going to be treated like that in hospitals. Given that it's clear that the UCP

government doesn't want stable, responsible public health care or public hospitals, will the minister finally admit that the UCP has welcomed chaos, cuts, and corruption because they're focused on privatization?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, the member opposite, when she was the Minister of Health, actually brought in a new funding model for family physicians. You know how many they got on that model? One clinic, six doctors over the course of time. The new primary care compensation model now has over 800 doctors as of April 1 signed on. I think I call that a success, and we're going to continue to provide excellent health care to Albertans, including patient-focused funding.

Ms Hoffman: Given that yesterday's announcement was at best naive, undervaluing the varied life-saving triage care that hospitals provide and given that at worst it was a conniving move to further privatize public health care, something reports have demonstrated makes worse health outcomes at higher costs, all to move to a voucher model for health procedures, will the minister admit that she's letting UCP friends act like reverse Robin Hood, taking from public hospitals that serve everyone and giving to highly profitable corporations that get rich treating only the simplest of surgeries?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the member opposite continues to fearmonger and put out information that is not accurate.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share that the Alberta Medical Association president, Dr. Shelley Duggan, quoted yesterday on the new patient-focused funding model, said, quote: a leading-edge approach in the way they manage funding transfers, and adding, here's an opportunity for increased transparency and accountability that has been lacking. The AMA president likes this new model. Perhaps the members opposite should look at it.

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

2:10 Policing and First Nations Communities

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Communities across this province, including my constituency, are seeing escalating local crime and homelessness rates as a result of a federal government that is failing and falling short of their obligations to keep communities safe. Cold Lake First Nations along with others across Alberta have voiced their concerns, and their message is clear. More needs to be done to protect local communities. It's evident that the federal government can't fulfill their duties in protecting Albertans. To the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services: can you please inform this House of the necessity of responsive care to the Indigenous law enforcement?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier, the minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Alberta's government will continue to improve public safety through approaches to local policing. You know, we recognize that Indigenous police services are deeply rooted in their communities, and of course they possess a deep understanding of the culture. No one knows their community better than the people who live there,

and this is why we were proud to recently announce a \$6.9 million Lakeshore Regional Police Service, infrastructure upgrades to serve their growing community. We support rural Alberta, we support Indigenous policing, and that is what, really, true reconciliation is all about.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that there is a need for Indigenous policing that focuses on a collaborative approach and given that Indigenous peoples have certain cultural needs and rights that need to be honoured and met, can the Minister of Indigenous Relations please tell this House about some of the benefits of improving Indigenous policing measures and what it means for communities across this province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that important question. Local crime and homelessness are an unfortunate reality for many Indigenous communities across Alberta. Effective Indigenous law enforcement ensures that these communities' needs are served in ways that are best suited to them. This approach ensures the preservation of community values and traditions while fostering collaboration between law enforcement and community members. This government stands behind First Nations and their local law enforcement, and I look forward to a bright future for Indigenous communities as we work together to tackle crime.

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 the government has made it a priority to advance public safety for Indigenous communities like Cold Lake First Nations in my constituency and further given that we have heard that Indigenous-led solutions should be a priority to ensure that their needs are met in culturally appropriate ways that work for them, can the minister please tell this House what the government is doing to ensure public safety and policing efforts that are Indigenous led, and what can we expect as a result of these First Nations communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. Indigenous-led solutions are paramount to the success of communities across the province in all sectors, and this government has made it a key priority for First Nations and Métis communities to be at the table to ensure their cultural needs and traditions are met accordingly. I am honoured by this government's commitment to invest in expanding First Nation law enforcement, and I look forward to the results of these important initiatives.

School Construction in Camrose

Ms Chapman: Parents in Camrose have been left in the dark for months and are now shaking their heads at the incompetence of this government. Camrose is one of the few communities to get a high school not just designed; actually built by this government. Now the project is left in limbo because the Infrastructure minister wrongly assumed there were roads and utility hookups, and it turns out there were neither. The minister didn't even know who the

landowner was. Will the Minister of Infrastructure tell Camrose parents if this is what passes for a competent school build for this government?

Mr. Long: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that construction of the new Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic high school in Camrose is complete eight months ahead of its planned fall 2025 opening. However, the city of Camrose and the subdivision developer are in a disagreement over the responsibility to provide road and site-servicing access. Because of that, we now risk a delay in opening the school. Meeting the demand for new and modernized schools and ensuring students can attend classes close to home is a shared responsibility. We've done our job. We now expect all parties to work together with us for a solution. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Chapman: Given that even when this government manages to get a school built, they still can't get it open, given that the new Camrose high school doesn't have an access road to it, given that parents in Camrose want to know how this happened, who's responsible, and why the school site was not serviced properly, will the Minister of Infrastructure tell Albertans what the cost will be to fix his embarrassing mistake?

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, without servicing and road access we can't secure the occupancy permit and, therefore, can't hand the school over to the school board. We provided options to the city that would allow the school to open on time, but we have not received a firm commitment from them on following through with those options. The path forward is vital and required immediately . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I noticed that the minister listened to the question. Perhaps he deserves the same courtesy, and if you don't think he deserves the same courtesy, you're wrong because he does.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The path forward is vital and required immediately to ensure that the school opens on time, and we continue to work with all parties to find a solution as opening this high school on time is a top priority for our government.

Ms Chapman: It's a million dollars.

Given the UCP have neglected school capital requests, with school boards submitting countless site-ready projects that get passed over and given that school projects have been recklessly approved without adequate land-use planning – even the superintendent in Camrose is telling families not to get their hopes up – and given that the ADM told us just this morning that the Camrose high school catastrophe is going to cost at least a million dollars to fix, will the minister explain why school capital projects were being approved on land the government didn't even know who owned?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the kindest thing I can say about the question is that the person asking isn't revealing, I think, all that they know. The fact is that Camrose committed to having the road in and the services in before the school was built. Camrose has not fulfilled their commitment. They are responsible. That is the fact. The folks across don't like to talk about the hard truths, but the hard truths are . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Don't make me turn this car around.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Dad.

Mr. Speaker, the folks across may not want to admit the hard truth, but the hard truth is that Camrose made a commitment, and the city of Camrose has not met that commitment. They are responsible.

Energy Industry Liability Management

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, the Rural Municipalities of Alberta have made it clear that they don't support the UCP mature asset strategy or the sham consultation behind it. They say the process was nothing – it was not honest, with predetermined narratives and no room for evidence-based input that challenged this government's agenda, so why did the minister force through a flawed process stacked with industry voices while ignoring the concerns of Alberta municipalities left holding the bag on these liabilities?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, again the folks across never get tired of being wrong. The fact is that the RMA actually asked for a committee to deal with these issues, including RMA, the energy minister, me, and others. Our government's answer – wait for it, folks – was: yes, it's happening. We have the committee established. We had one meeting, we'll meet more, and we will work together on a solution for these very important issues.

Mr. Kasawski: Given that the RMA stated the following about their experience with the mature asset strategy consultation:

The ... process was not structured in a way that allowed for critical, data-supported discussion and recommendation development. It did not include a clear definition of the issue, scope, analysis of impacts ... on industry and other non-industry stakeholders, or even a clear definition ... of a "mature asset."

was RMA's expertise ignored because they refused to support a plan that uses taxpayer dollars to clean up oil company messes?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, we have committed, as I said, on a committee to work with the RMA. The energy minister is committed to being part of that process. I and my ministry are committed to being part of that process. The RMA may not be happy about everything, but they at least understand we are working with them, we are at the table with them, we won't quit until the job is done, and we will get past whatever wrinkles there are.

2:20

Mr. Kasawski: Given that the UCP is exploring ways to use taxpayer dollars to cover oil and gas liabilities while rural municipalities are owed more than \$250 million in unpaid taxes and given that instead of ensuring property taxes are paid, the government is floating corrupt changes to the assessment model that do not help municipalities, why won't the minister stand up for rural communities and get his cabinet to commit to protecting the current tax model, ensuring municipalities get paid what they are owed? Won't his cabinet colleagues listen to him?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, in case the hon. colleague wasn't listening to the first answers, the fact is that we are working actively with RMA on a committee that the RMA asked for to deal with these very issues. You know what? Sometimes, when you really want something and you hear the answer yes, you should accept it. The fact is that our government is working with RMA. We're working with the minister of energy. We'll keep working together, and as I said many times in this House, we will not rest until this issue is wrestled to the ground because it's important to us, it matters to municipalities, and we care. Unlike the folks across, we will work with them.

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

Affordability Measures

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP socialists consistently demonstrating their plans for affordability are just recycled neo-Marxist policies designed to drive up costs for hard-working Albertans, forcing them to depend on government programs. From their carbon tax schemes to their tax on agriculture, energy, mining, transportation sectors, the NDP-Liberal coalition pushes policies which will harm everyday families. With their members jumping ship or openly endorsing Liberal candidates, it's plainly obvious that they're nothing but the Liberal farm team. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: what is our government's response to protect Albertans against the damaging policies of the Alberta NDP and the federal Liberals?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that great question. The best way that we can help Albertans meet the rising cost-of-living challenges is by helping them keep more money in their pockets so they can use it where they need it most. That's why we're cutting taxes and bringing more affordable care for automobile insurance to them. We continue to pressure the Liberal government to scrap their disastrous clean electricity regulations, that will increase electricity costs by 35 per cent and make our electricity grid 100 times less reliable. We're also addressing rising utility rates and addressing more of the issues the NDP left behind.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the Liberal circus isn't led by the clown any longer but now the Carney and given that the Carney was the one who advised the clown on many of the economic environmental policies such as the carbon tax and given that the pause in the carbon tax will last only about till the 28th of April, I'd bet, and further given that the NDP here have yet to denounce the carbon tax at all, to the same minister: what is our government's plan to ensure that Albertans continue to keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta NDP were the first to impose a carbon tax on Albertans and created the framework for their bosses in Ottawa, that has hurt our families, our energy workers and farmers and job creators. They also brought in the largest tax increase in provincial history. On this side of the House we're cutting taxes, saving over 2 million Albertans nearly \$750 per year or more, and we can do more. We can vote in a federal Conservative government that will axe the tax for good and one that will work to make us and our province richer, stronger, and safer than ever before.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that the rising costs of living are putting immense pressures on Albertan families and given that every dollar saved by an Albertan family means more money for groceries, bills, and taking care of loved ones and further given that we desperately need common-sense policies right now, not platitudes, to the same minister: can you tell this Assembly on the measures that our government is taking to protect vulnerable Albertans from the rising

costs and the importance of common sense in leading the Alberta advantage again?

Mr. Neudorf: Today, Mr. Speaker, the NDP talked about cruelty. What's cruel is how the NDP put ideology above well-being of Albertans when they were in power and drove up the cost of everything. Their leader raised property taxes by 80 per cent when he was mayor of Calgary. We are putting Albertans first. That's why our government is helping Albertans who are low income or between jobs afford the rent through the rent supplement program and the temporary rent assistance program. We've provided more than \$31 million since 2020 to support food security, including \$5 million in the budget of 2025. We've made publicly funded addiction treatment free, something the NDP charged \$1,200 . . .

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

Automobile Insurance Rates

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, in Calgary-North East, where many residents are essential workers, taxi drivers, delivery personnel, and small-business owners, auto insurance isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. Yet Albertans are seeing double-digit hikes in premiums while insurance companies report record profit. Why is the UCP government siding with billion-dollar corporations instead of hard-working families? Will the minister admit that this is a crisis, or does he truly believe that the market is self-regulating?

Mr. Horner: The answer was partly in the member's question. The system currently is unsustainable. We have the second-highest auto insurance premiums in the country, behind only Ontario, and that's why we're taking what is more of a dramatic effort to actually overhaul and change the entire system. That starts with the bill that's on the floor in front of us now, that's going to lead to greater benefits at a lower cost. You won't need to use litigation to get those benefits. We think it's the right thing to do for Albertans, and we're doing this to make it more affordable.

Member Brar: Given that the people of Calgary-North East aren't just frustrated by the rising cost of auto insurance; they are baffled by the secrecy behind it. These rate hikes show up like surprise guests at the wedding, uninvited and expensive. Given that the UCP removed caps on premium increases and refuses to disclose the rationale behind these hikes, will the minister commit to full transparency, or is keeping Albertans in the dark now standard operating procedure for this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I kind of like the wedding crasher line there. I have to give the member credit for that. But I would say that this consultation has been broad, and we've been at it for a while. The one thing that I hear is how comprehensive this consultation was. We really took our time, looked across the country, looked at all of the systems that were in place. We've mentioned the different studies that were commissioned, looking at different models, not even within Canada but across the world. We think that this is the right system for Alberta. We want to take costs out of the system and provide the greatest benefits in the country.

Member Brar: Given that other provinces have figured out how to keep auto insurances fair and affordable, but here in Alberta it feels like drivers are just ATMs on wheels, given that people in Calgary-North East are paying some of the highest premiums in the country just because of the postal code and this UCP government, will the

government finally cap the auto insurance rates, or are they too afraid of offending their corporate golfing buddies who think a deductible is something that you pay your caddy?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, once again, the answer is partly in the question. That's why we're making this change. It's no longer sustainable. The Premier has put this in my mandate letter. I'd say that we nibbled at the edges in the last session. We tried to tweak the current system, and now we're changing the system overall. The member noted: why can't you look at other provinces and do this? There are many other provinces with a care-first approach. That's kind of what we're doing. We're making it an Alberta-specific model. It's going to be a little bit different. It's still going to use private enterprise to deliver it. We think that competition is healthy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Anticrime Initiatives

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans are proud of their communities, but rural crime continues to be a growing concern for families and farmers who live outside major urban centres. Yesterday Alberta's government introduced Bill 49, which proposes creating a new independent police service to enhance law enforcement capabilities across our province. To the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services: how will the establishment of this new police service improve public safety in rural communities like those in the Camrose constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Bill 49, if passed, of course, establishes a Crown corporation, which lays the foundation for the independent police service. The legislation would allow for municipalities to engage in a conversation with that Crown corporation, being arm's length from government. Despite what the members opposite want to believe, we've had 35 municipalities in the province that have taken us up on our police transition grant, and two have identified to us that they want a sheriff's detachment. We're going to listen to rural Albertans and give them what they need.

Thank you. [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that scrap metal theft, particularly of catalytic converters and copper wire, has surged across Alberta by 93 per cent increases since 2021 and given this criminal activity not only endangers public safety but disrupts critical infrastructure, leaving many rural communities vulnerable, and given Alberta's government introduced amendments targeted at combatting this theft, can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services explain how these changes will deter scrap metal theft and improve safety in rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. She is correct. The federal NDP-Liberal government has created an environment that's allowed organized crime to thrive with little to no consequences. This is why in this piece of legislation we're filling in the gaps to the existing legislation to make sure that proof of ownership will be needed and

to be recorded and reported by the buyer. Recording this information makes each sale more traceable and discourages people from stealing and selling scrap metal. Again, on this side of the House we're going to make sure that we protect the people within Alberta. This is a crime problem that's been created by the policies of the federal NDP-Liberal alliance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that rural Albertans have long felt that they were being left behind when it comes to public safety and given Alberta's government has taken bold action and made targeted investments to reverse that trend and make communities in every region of our province safer and given that support includes boots on the ground, advanced technology, and strong partnership with local law enforcement, can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services update the House on the broader strategy to stop crime and make safety for every Albertan a priority?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and again I thank the member for the question. As we continue to build on the Alberta sheriffs, and they continue to augment and support police services right throughout the province, we have our safe communities and neighbourhoods teams, which, quite frankly, we have requests from all over this province to have the teams placed within their municipalities. We have our fugitive apprehension teams. We have surveillance teams that have been augmenting and supporting, of course, the RCMP in rural Alberta. What we're trying to do is get more boots on the ground because more boots on the ground – officer presence matters, and we're going to support the people of Alberta.

Support for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Ip: The family support for children with disabilities program is a critical lifeline to supporting families with children with disabilities staying together, accessing opportunities in the community, and empowering parents to remain in the workforce, but far too many families are facing long delays to get support if they're even approved at all. A report by Inclusion Alberta shows families are waiting on average three years to access services only to find out that the offered supports fall short of their needs. Why is this minister leaving families on long wait-lists without needed FSCD supports?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is proud of the investments that we're making in the disability community in our province. We're investing \$3.6 billion this year, including in FSCD, where we have increased the funding this year to the family support for children with disabilities program. We've also committed to evaluating the program, which has existed a very long time. It was created in a moment when autism was being diagnosed in 1 in 10,000 children. Now it's being diagnosed in 1 in 35 children. We're going through that review process with the industry to make sure that we continue to have the best FSCD program going forward in our province. Again, we're committed to unprecedented amounts; \$3.6 billion for those with disabilities.

Mr. Ip: Given that funding for FSCD has not kept up with population growth or increased demand and that leaves many children with disabilities left without support and given that for tens of thousands of Alberta children the delay in accessing FSCD has

resulted not only in lost developmental opportunities; it also has negative impacts on the entire family, from forgoing employment to mental health challenges, leaving people struggling and burnt out, why has this government not addressed the backlog of applications, and where is the plan to provide service to thousands of families who have been waiting for years?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the FSCD budget increased by \$30 million in this budget that was approved by this place and, interestingly enough, was voted against by the NDP, who continue to vote against critical supports to those who are facing disabilities in this province. This side of the House doesn't think the NDP is right and continues to invest heavily in this area and will continue to do so. The FSCD program faced challenges by the NDP, who would not fix the disability programs in this province. This government is doing it. Hold my beer; we'll get 'er done.

Mr. Ip: Given that this government clawed back the Canada disability benefit from AISH-receiving Albertans who are already living below the poverty line and given that the UCP continues to nickel and dime vulnerable Albertans by taking away critical supports, including funding to grassroots organizations that support Albertans with disabilities, a move that is simply cruel, and given that UCP MLAs voted in a housing allowance for themselves that's more than the entire AISH benefit that Albertans with disabilities live on, does the minister believe it is acceptable that Albertans with disabilities have to live on less than the minister's own rental allowance?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what I think is unacceptable is that the NDP did not bother to index things like AISH when they were in government. I'm proud to have been part of a government who did it. Our AISH payments in our province, as the Premier said earlier today, are \$554 higher than Manitoba, \$533 higher than Ontario, \$515 higher than Saskatchewan, \$417 higher than B.C. Right here are the most generous benefits when it comes to those who are facing disabilities who need AISH. We're going to continue to have them. We've guaranteed that through our indexation program. Here we are getting it done again, fixing the problems the NDP created when they were in government.

Surgery Wait Times

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, seniors know the health system they depend upon isn't there for them because they are not getting the care they need. In fact, only two months ago, in February, over 15,000 Edmontonians were left waiting for surgeries. The seniors that I've spoken with don't trust that a government embroiled in corrupt care will help them, nor are they happy about this government's plans for more privatization to help their insider friends. When will this government acknowledge the fact that they are responsible for the increased waiting list and a system that is failing Albertans who are waiting for surgery?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, we've increased the number of surgeries. The members opposite should be listening. We continue to share the information. When they were in office, about 40 per cent of surgeries were being done in clinically approved times. Now we're over 60 per cent. We're going to keep going until it's 100 per cent of surgeries done in clinically approved times. But we need to make sure that it's all hands on deck, including our chartered

surgical facilities, which have expanded the number of surgeries that they're able to do from 40,000 to over 62,000.

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, given that my constituent Lorna, a retired LPN, has been waiting almost two years for knee surgery, given that Lorna faces increasing pain as she waits and it's having a negative impact upon her quality of life and given that public hospital spending has declined while funding for private facilities grows and that private surgical facilities won't take Albertans with complex needs like seniors, what will this UCP government do now for Albertans like Lorna to get them off waiting lists, into surgery, through recovery, and back to enjoying the full life they've worked so hard for?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the only way to get rid of the backlogs is to have more doctors doing more surgeries. That means having the surgeons able to do more in hospitals. That's why activity-based funding will actually compensate hospitals for doing more surgeries and actually looking at extending hours or maybe using operating rooms after hours. Also, these are all publicly funded surgeries: over 310,000 last year, over 316,000 next year, and more and more coming as we go further along.

Ms Wright: Well, given that this government refused to listen to what surgeons at the Royal Alex said and given that in 2019 90 per cent of Edmontonians waiting received knee replacement surgery within 39 weeks but now that number is 56 weeks, given that that means many Albertans like Lorna continue to wait for well over a year – increased pain, decreased mobility – given that this government is more focused on rewarding friends with bloated contracts than on making sure Albertans receive the surgery they need, when will this government apologize to Lorna and the thousands of Albertan seniors and commit to using public health care dollars for the public health care that they desperately need?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we're always using public dollars for public health care because we believe that every Albertan should have their surgery done in clinically approved times. That's what we're aiming for. That's why we brought in PFF. We're going to get the job done.

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

2:40 Federal Carbon Pricing

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After years of struggling under the federal carbon tax, Albertans finally get some relief. Removing the tax on consumers acknowledges what we have said, that it drives up the cost of living, burdening families and businesses. This decision has lowered prices on gas, home heating, and essential goods, a step in addressing the harm caused by the failed policy. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: what are the benefits of removing the federal tax on consumers, and how does this validate Alberta's long-standing opposition to this harmful tax?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After more than five years of lies and misinformation from the left, the federal Liberals and their NDP followers finally admit that the carbon tax did nothing for the environment, just raised the cost of everything from fuel to food. We're glad to see this tax taken off the backs of working families. The members opposite, quite frankly, should

apologize to each and every Albertan for their constant support of this carbon tax that not only did they bring in; a tax that they didn't campaign on. Albertans were right all along. The NDP could not be trusted on this file.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Alberta's key industries – energy, manufacturing, and agriculture – continue to pay this tax, raising production costs and hurting global competitiveness, and given that these costs are passed on to consumers through higher taxes for goods, energy, and groceries as a tax on industries is essentially an indirect tax on Canadians, can the same minister explain how maintaining the carbon tax on industries undermines affordability for Albertans?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The federal government currently imposes an arbitrary and, quite frankly, unattainable standard on all systems throughout Canada, whether or not a province maintains its own system or is subject to the federal backstop. This is a violation of our constitutional jurisdiction. It makes our industries less competitive. It drives up costs at the worst possible time. It puts the delivery of safe, affordable, reliable energy at risk. It drives away investment and therefore impacts energy production, which, of course, is an area of provincial jurisdiction. We support a system that gives all decisions related to energy development back to the provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given this government's consistent opposition to the federal carbon tax, warning it will raise costs, drive away investment, and hurt Alberta's economy, and given the ongoing impact on Alberta's industries, raising costs, and reducing competitiveness, can the same minister outline how Alberta is continuing to push back against the federal carbon tax and advocating for full relief not just for consumers but for industries as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that question. We here on this side of the House will continue to advocate for Alberta and our major industries. We know that provinces have to be able to put programs in place that reflect the unique needs of our people and our industries. All decisions related to carbon pricing should be provincial, not federal, especially when it impacts competitiveness and production, which matter right now more than ever before. We support the federal Conservative leader's commitment to return our jurisdictional authority back to provinces to regulate our own emissions. We'll continue to push back on behalf . . .

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table a petition that was presented by the people that were here earlier

today to urge the Alberta provincial government to provide sufficient financial coverage for bilateral cochlear implants and embrace the opportunity to enhance quality of life for those who have hearing loss.

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

Mr. Wright: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a number of articles. One calls out that Mark Carney's vow to keep antipipeline law will weaken Canada in the fight against Trump and kneecap us in the international markets.

Second is: election watchdog calls it election interference by Beijing to influence Chinese Canadians.

Third is a *Toronto Sun* article calling out Carney as being wrong for continuing to support Bill C-69 as it weakens Canada on the international markets.

Fourth is a *Bureau* article showcasing that Canada Is Losing the Battle for Its Own Sovereignty.

Then five is an article calling out Retired Toronto Police Executive Who Joined Chinese International School Flagged in Canada's Election Interference Inquiry Replaces Paul Chiang as Liberal Candidate, showing blatant People's Republic of China interference in our election.

Lastly is an urban privilege reality check, a *Vancouver Sun* article calling out that the feds are looking to end RCMP policing contracts in rural Canada and determining the RCMP's future as a national police force.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce the requisite copies of two articles, a *National Post* article titled What the Mixed Verdict in the Coutts Freedom Convoy Blockade Trial Really Means, by Adrian Humphreys on August 19, 2024; and then a second, Controversial Bill Targeting Rail Blockade Protesters Soon to Be Alberta Law, by Janet French from May 2020, as juxtaposition of the use of the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of an article from today's *Calgary Herald* titled No Need for Alberta to Panic, Premier Says, as Oil Prices Fall amid Recessionary Worries. Quote, she says: nothing I can do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, followed by Edgemont.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two documents. The first, an official statement from the Rural Municipalities of Alberta: The RMA Formally Opposes the Creation of an Alberta Provincial Police Service.

The second being Resolution: Accountability in the Establishment of an Independent Agency Police Service in Alberta, in which they again ask for public itemized costing and make it clear they expect consultation, which we know the minister is not engaged in.

Thank you.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five letters from the constituent that I read yesterday during bill debate for Bill 208, sharing her support on why a psycho-ed assessment would have benefited her life. I am truly disappointed that we were not able to work together, Minister, to support Alberta students.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on my member's statement today around rent caps, I'd like to table an e-mail from Amanda. Amanda is a constituent of the Member for Rimby-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and is incredibly upset about the rent increases that are happening to folks all over Alberta, including at the Annamoe Mansion in Edmonton.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none. Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:06 and 2:06:30 points of order were called and subsequently withdrawn.

At 2:08 the hon. Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Standing orders 23(h), (i), and (j). I believe, without the benefit of the Blues, at that time the Minister of Health said in response to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, "The member opposite continues to fearmonger." I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j) simply because, based on the Speaker's past rulings and the practices of this House, the minister's reference to an individual and, in this case, what they intend to do, et cetera, would be a point of order. I would ask that the minister apologize and withdraw.

Member LaGrange: I do apologize and withdraw.

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

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 38 Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned March 24: Member Ceci speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has nine minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 38, the red tape reduction act, and I rise to speak to one particular element of this bill, which I find to be utterly egregious and an abdication of the government's responsibility towards the young people that are legally their responsibility and for whom they act as guardians.

2:50

This is an insult to injury to call this red tape reduction, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely appallingly callous and cruel by this government to refer to understanding the circumstances under which children and young people in their care have died or been seriously injured as red tape. That insult aside, I think it's important for this entire Assembly and Albertans to have a full understanding of precisely what has led us to this moment.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Let's be clear about what Bill 38 does. It makes changes to the Child and Youth Advocate Act so that the Child and Youth Advocate, which is an independent officer, no longer can review the deaths of individuals, young people over the age of 20 who previously were in government care and receiving child intervention services when they die or pass away. It offers the discretion to the advocate to do such an investigation into the death when that young person is between the ages of 18 and 20, meaning within two years of receiving child intervention services. This is a significant change from both the current situation but also from what the case was before the UCP became government.

Now, I've had the opportunity to look over the comments of many of the members on our side because I understand there's been a real failing of any government members to speak to this particular part of Bill 38, which is the most egregious. My colleagues have done a really good overview of what historically led us to the point that the Child and Youth Advocate was given the authority and, in fact, the requirement under legislation to investigate the deaths of young people in care.

Maybe some people are new to our province and may not know the history of this, but it was appalling to find out – and it was between 2012 and 2014 – to hear about the lives of young people. We're talking about children who are in government care. The government is their legal guardian, the ones responsible for them, because their own parents are unable to take care of them or are abusive or, in the case of most of these children, there is intergenerational trauma, there is mental health, there is addiction. These are children who are placed in government care.

For many, many years in this province the deaths of those children never came to light. They were dealt with in the shadows. Thankfully, there was a realization in this province that that is inhumane and we can no longer refuse to acknowledge the death of the children that are in the responsibility of this government and that are the responsibility, frankly, of all Albertans because we are all responsible for the health and well-being of all children in this province. There were changes that were made that gave the office of the Child and Youth Advocate significant independence and authority so that Albertans could hold government responsible but also hold ourselves responsible to making sure that these children were provided the supports they need.

In 2019 – and this is where this story of this government begins – despite an enormous amount of work that was done to improve the child intervention system, this government tried to sneak in, in fall 2019, a little change that they really hoped that nobody would notice, and that was that they cut off financial supports under the support and financial assistance agreement program to those young people aged 22 to 24. They cut it off. They tried to not have anybody notice it, but it affected 500 people and cost – it took months and months to try to decipher from the government and the minister at the time as to how much it was actually saving the government to cut these 500 vulnerable young people off the financial supports. It was roughly about \$14 million. If you think about it, that was about half of the annual budget for the war room. But they insisted on going forward.

That decision to cut those vulnerable young people off financial supports resulted in a legal challenge, a legal challenge that actually said that it was a Charter breach to the security of that young person to have those financial supports cut off from them. Eventually there was an injunction that was put in place over the pandemic, and that was the only reason that the government did not go forward with cutting them off those supports for at least over a year, because a court prevented them from doing so because they found that there was – a preliminary case was made that this was a cruel cut that was going to affect the security of these young people.

Then the government went ahead with that cut even in the middle of the pandemic. They went forward with that cut, and this is where the track record of the deaths of young people in care needs to be brought forward and brought to light. If you look at the statistics – and thank goodness. For now – I imagine soon this is going to change – the public statistics are made available about how many young people who are in care and aging out of care die or have serious injuries. If you look at those numbers, they are heartbreaking. They are literally devastating. These are the most vulnerable young people.

Since this government was elected in 2019, we've seen that number skyrocket from 33 to 34 to 49 to 50. Now we're back on track at 38 so far this year, Madam Speaker. We are once again on track. No improvement has been made. Where we have seen the largest increase in the deaths of young people is actually those who are transitioning out of care, those who are 18 and older. That is where we've seen the biggest increase.

Now, for years, Madam Speaker, I had the privilege to serve in this House as the critic for children's services and to demand and ask for accountability from this government on what they were going to do about that. Of course, I'm only one person doing that. One of the most important people who's been doing that is the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. They have been doing reports, and they come and review the death of every single young person who's either in care or transitioning out of care and provide recommendations, and that is what the office has been doing for youth up to the age of 22 since they made their change and they cut off the financial supports for those over the age of 22. They have been consistently doing that because that is how we learn and that is how we can hold government to account for the outcomes.

The government does not and cannot cease responsibility for these young people as soon as they turn 18. That is what they want to do, Madam Speaker. They want to say that at age 18 they wash their hands of them. Except every single person in this Legislature, in this Chamber, who is a parent will know, whether your children are young, you're not going to stop being responsible for them when they turn 18, and I would hazard a guess that many members on both sides of this House who have adult children have remained an important part of their children's lives, even providing financial, emotional, all kinds of support to them long after they turn 18.

Why would the government be willing and eager to cut off that support to the children who are legally their responsibility, particularly because these are young people who have suffered from intergenerational trauma? They are overrepresented in terms of addiction, mental health concerns, medical concerns. They don't have that family network of natural supports. These are the very people who actually need the supports.

We've all talked about the brain studies that talk about how actually a young person's brain doesn't fully develop until they're 24 and 25, yet this government is eager not only to pass on the supports, but now they don't even want to talk about them and they don't want anybody in Alberta to know about them, know about their death, know about how they fared the moment after they turned 18 and they were no longer technically legally the responsibility of the government of Alberta. That is cruel and callous, and I can tell you that it is certainly not red tape.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the information that has come out of these investigation reports, because these reviews that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate do are critically important to helping to develop recommendations that, frankly, up until today this government has been trying to ignore. Most recently, just, I believe, on Monday of this week, Madam Speaker, the Speaker of this House tabled the most recent letter from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, listing the number of

reports that they have done. These were just tabled in this Legislature on Monday. There was a report done into the death of 21-year-old Aiyanna, 21-year-old Madison, 21-year-old Chantal, 21-year-old Maggie, 21-year-old Kaydence, 20-year-old Vincent. That was just on Monday. None of those investigations and those reports are going to happen anymore because this government is saying: we don't want to know what happened to those young people; not only do we not want to know because we're going to be held accountable for doing something about it, but we want to make sure that Albertans don't know about them. These are young people who are already living on the fringes of society. The light is not shone on them, they are struggling to get supports, yet this government wants to push them further into the shadows.

You know, I took a look at the report that was recently filed on Monday by the Child and Youth Advocate about 21-year-old Aiyanna. I want to be clear that the names of these young people have been changed to protect their dignity and their humanity, but they all do have names and they are real people and they're real young people who, like every child, deserve to have love and support throughout their entire lives, not just until the age of 18.

Now, according to the Child and Youth Advocate's report Aiyanna, when she turned 18 years old, had one of those support and financial assistance agreements that was cut off by this current government. When she was aging out of care, she did qualify for AISH and PDD. An application was started, but it was not completed because she didn't have the proper support. Even though she was – yes – technically of age to be eligible for those supports, she didn't have the natural supports that she needed from a caseworker to help her get this. So she never actually got AISH and PDD although she would have qualified for it.

It also says that Aiyanna became a parent herself at the age of 19 and then again at the age of 21. When she passed away, she had two babies. Yes, child intervention had also been involved in her file with her children, and according to the Child and Youth Advocate's report caseworkers were trying to work with Aiyanna to come up with some safety plans, return her to her First Nation, but "it does not appear that caseworkers between jurisdictions collaborated, and several months later, involvement ended. Shortly after, intervention involvement for Aiyanna ended at the conclusion of her SFAA," and she died shortly afterwards.

3:00

So here we have a situation where, by the advocate's own report, there was a failure. There was a failure of the system. There was a failure of the caseworkers in both the government and the DFNAs, whoever the case may be, but there was a failure. Now two young babies don't have a mother, and that young person who was raised in care is gone. Her community is devastated, her nation is devastated, the people around her are devastated, and the government doesn't want anybody to know about that. That's exactly what they've done by saying that it's red tape for the Child and Youth Advocate to be investigating the deaths of these young people.

You know, when we first saw the cuts to the SFAA program, I wondered, as the critic for children's services, whether one of the reasons why they cut off those supports – was it going to mean they were going to stop reporting on those young people who are dying at that age? I thought that eventually these statistics, that are damning, frankly, Madam Speaker, in terms of the ability of our province to support the most vulnerable young people – I thought: they're making this change so that they don't have to report on those young people anymore, so Albertans don't even know about it. Turns out that wasn't their initial plan, because I think there was such an outrage, and in fact they had to bring in a new program

which they renamed and re-everything but, frankly, still continued to cut off financial support from young people transitioning out of care. But they maintained the reporting.

But now we know, and when I wondered, "What is the government going to do?" when First Nations and Indigenous advocates asked, "What are we going to do?" when the office of the Child and Youth Advocate asked, "What are we going to do?" when my colleagues who have worked with children in care in the child intervention system and the almost 80 per cent of children in care who are Indigenous – when they were asked, "What are we going to do?" now we know what the government's answer is: "We're going to do nothing, and we're going to stop reporting on it. That's what we're going to do. We're not actually going to take any steps to improve the outcomes for these young people."

You look back on these investigation reports that came forward from the advocate, and it talks about making sure that we have a youth opioid strategy. We do not in this province still. They talk about making sure that there are safe transitions to housing for these young people. We still do not have that. They talk about making sure that there are appropriate supports, wraparound supports for these young people as they transition between programs. We still do not have that. So rather than doing all of that, as is the government's obligation to do, legally is their obligation to do, for young people who are in there under their guardianship, they're not doing it at all. Instead, we hear that it is red tape to report that, so simply the government is going to stop reporting it.

Now, the Minister of Children and Family Services has not yet risen to speak to this bill. I look forward to him doing that because I think he should need to answer for this. We do know from public statements he's made that he believes that he wants to focus his energy on young people under the age of 18. That's what he's going to focus his resources on. And I want to say to the minister that it is his responsibility to do all of it. He can, he must, and he should provide support to young people who are under the age of 18, just like any good parent would do, because that is what the government of Alberta is for these young people. They are the parent. They're also responsible for making sure that those young people have the supports they need to be successful as they transition into adulthood.

Rather than do that, they want to push these young people back into the shadows, and I think it is disgusting, Madam Speaker. I think it is shameful that this government is doing this. I think it is appalling, but I also think it is one hundred per cent on brand. I think this is an appalling piece of legislation. It's an insult to Albertans and to these young people and to their families and to Indigenous people and to their community to say that they are not even worth the time of an advocate to look into how and why they died and: can we do better? But that is our responsibility. It's the responsibility of every member in this Chamber to make sure that they do better. Unfortunately, the only way Alberta is going to get that is if we get a change of government because this government is committed to not doing better. But better is possible.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members who wish to join the debate on Bill 38? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some comments on Bill 38, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Before I address the parts of the bill that I'm particularly concerned with, I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud for her passionate advocacy for children in care in the debate today. I know that she has been very consistent

in her entire legislative career in being a strong advocate for Alberta's children, and I want to thank her for her continued efforts. I know that Alberta's children are in better hands because of people like the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud speaking up on their behalf. Thank you to that member.

Now, at the risk of sounding very dissonant, I want to spend my time talking about the section of the bill that amends the Boundary Surveys Act, Madam Speaker. The Boundary Surveys Act sets out the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia, which runs from the international boundary between Canada and the United States along the continental divide to the 120th meridian, and then once it reaches the 120th meridian, it follows that to the 60th parallel.

Now, when the minister introduced this bill and addressed the Boundary Surveys Act, he mentioned that the section of the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia that runs along the 120th meridian is a straight line. I want to correct the minister on that statement because, as most people would agree, Madam Speaker, the Earth is round, so the 120th meridian is actually an arc in 3-D space. It is not a straight line.

Now, normally I wouldn't feel compelled to point this out. In any normal government this would probably just be an oversight, a slip of the tongue, but this is a government that has repeatedly engaged with conspiracy theories. We know that they continue to support antivaccine advocates. They continue to support quack treatments for cancer. They promote ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine as treatments for COVID, Madam Speaker.

We know that they introduced legislation banning voting machines at municipal elections based on unfounded conspiracy theories about vote rigging in those kinds of elections, and they have a certain fondness for hanging out with conspiracy theorists from the United States, especially the likes of Tucker Carlson and Ben Shapiro.

It's probably safe to say that there are members of the opposite benches that genuinely believe that the Earth is flat, and when the minister stands up and says things like that the 120th meridian is a straight line, I just want to make sure that the members opposite understand that is an expression. I hope that it's not an admission that they believe that the Earth is flat. It is not flat.

Now, just establishing that basic fact that the Earth is not flat, Madam Speaker, I do want to say that the history of the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia is actually more interesting than I thought it was going to be when I did some research. This was established by law in 1871. The boundary between Alberta and British Columbia was more theoretical than actual for a number of decades because surveying the continental divide from the international boundary to the 120th meridian was an incredibly complex endeavour and one that wasn't really necessary until the province of Alberta began engaging in coal development. Then at that time it became very important to understand where the boundary between British Columbia and Alberta was in the foothills and in the Rocky Mountains because we wouldn't want to be allowing a coal mine that thought it was setting up in British Columbia to accidentally be setting up operations in Alberta or vice versa.

I find it interesting, Madam Speaker, that we are dealing with amendments to the Alberta Boundary Surveys Act at a time when Alberta is also engaging in extensive promotion and development of coal mines in the Rocky Mountains, the very same activity that prompted the boundary commission to conduct the initial surveys in the early parts of the 20th century in the first place. Of course, I suspect, Madam Speaker, that the enthusiasm behind overriding the wishes of the people of Alberta and allowing coal mining

development to proceed apace in the foothills and in the Rocky Mountains is more driven by a desire for their friends and insiders to profit off of that, but I suspect that there may be a secondary objective in cutting red tape. If you think about it, if that area between the international boundary and the 120th meridian was as flat as the boundary from the 120th meridian along to the 60th parallel, well, that would simplify surveying the boundary a great deal. Just think of all the red tape you could cut when it comes to maintaining the boundary between British Columbia and Alberta if there were no foothills or Rocky Mountains to be concerned with in the first place.

3:10

But it's not actually the section of the boundary that's referred to in the Boundary Surveys Act from the international border along the continental divide to the 120th meridian that I'm concerned about or that my constituents are concerned about, Madam Speaker. It is that initial starting point for the boundary that has become an issue of great concern to the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and that is the international boundary between Canada and the United States. Over the constituency break I had been asked by a number of my constituents who have seen the billboards that have popped up all over the province that say: tell Danielle that we should become the 51st . . .

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I realize you're talking about a billboard that you read, but we all know you cannot use proper names in this House, so please apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schmidt: I withdraw the statement, Madam Speaker.

Of course, I also recognize that these billboards that I've referenced have caused a great deal of concern among my constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar because it's not the issue of whether or not people are telling the Premier that we should become the 51st state that has caused some concern; it's the issue of whether or not the Premier is listening to them and acting on the things that they're being told. Now, there is plenty of reason to suspect that this government has sympathies with the people who are behind this advertising commission.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but I'm having a hard time understanding what this has to do with the bill and not just because there's a mention of a border in the bill as it's certainly not the appropriate kind of conversation given the context. I'm going to – great caution. Great caution.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, I appreciate your caution, Madam Speaker, but we are discussing the Boundary Surveys Act. The Boundary Surveys Act stipulates that the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia starts from the international boundary between the United States and Canada.

With that established, Madam Speaker, I am of course expressing my constituents' concern about the status of the international boundary. We suspect that the UCP government has a great deal of sympathy for the people who are behind this advertising campaign to tell the Premier that Alberta should become the 51st state. We know from discussion with Public Accounts that the *Western Standard*, that has been running the ads for this advertising campaign . . .

Mr. Williams: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Yup. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know of no standing order to allow me to call a point of order on filibustering, so instead I will call a point of order on 23(b)(i). We've had a lovely conversation up to now discussing a meandering road about arcs and straight lines, which we're happy to engage with as it tangentially addresses the substance of the legislation, but the stretch that because the interprovincial boundary touches on an international boundary and that international boundary has a connection to international politics, of which there are billboards that address, has about seven different layers removed, zero content to do with the legislation.

I think it's an abuse of the use that we have here for us to continue down this path. I think it is something that the member should redirect his comments towards the legislation at hand. I think that Albertans who pay for us to debate in this place, to have this important provincial dialogue in Chamber would be happy to see us debate the legislation in front of us, not to filibuster and postpone the vote for no reason other than oppositional gain.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's not a point of order at all. The Deputy Government House Leader referred to 23(b), that the member speaks to a matter other than the question under discussion. I was listening to the member's comments with interest, and the member was talking squarely about a change that is contemplated in this legislation if passed. He went into the history of that change and demonstrated why it's important, and he was speaking on behalf of constituents who have raised similar issues.

I think that once you intervened, Madam Speaker, at that time I should have asked for a little bit more explanation. We are at second reading. I am looking at relevance in debate, chapter 13, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I will read from that.

The rules of relevance and repetition are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. The requirement that speeches remain relevant to the question before the House flows from the latter's right to reach decisions without undue obstruction and to exclude from debate any discussion not conducive to that end . . . These rules remain difficult to define and enforce not least because such enforcement must respect the freedom of speech enjoyed by all Members.

It goes on to say that unless you have heard the whole argument that the member wants to make, you cannot prejudge whether it's relevant or not.

I think the member was clearly talking about a change that is within the legislation. He went into a history of that change, why it's relevant, why it's important, why Albertans should be concerned about it, and why his constituents are concerned about it. I think it's not a point of order at all.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I listened actually with great interest when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was speaking and making his point. I think I learned something at that time, and I appreciate that, but there was a point at which I intervened where the topic at hand was certainly not relevant to the legislation. That's no secret. When I intervened, the member did not take my intervention into consideration and continued on with an irrelevant matter which is not about this legislation in this debate. There's a great amount of time – in fact, there are only six minutes remaining in the member's speaking time in which we have been talking about

this, in which the point has not been made. We've jumped to something entirely different.

This is a point of order. The member will go back to relevancy and talk about the legislation at hand.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you . . .

Point of Clarification

Mr. Sabir: Madam Speaker, I rise on 13(2). I think it would be helpful if you could explain your ruling so we can understand what exactly was not relevant such that you are declaring it out of order so that everybody can better . . .

The Deputy Speaker: A hundred per cent. I did mention that when I intervened in the member's first moment, when the member is now talking about billboards, after using a proper name, I might add, that quite literally have nothing to do with the red tape reduction bill that mentions an international border. The two do not make sense to me. They do not make sense to members of the government, on which a point of order has been raised.

I know this member has lots of relevant things to talk about this legislation that would be important to all members, to his constituents, and to all members of this province, and I look forward to that.

I did explain my answer when I made the ruling. I've provided further explanation, and I hope the hon. member takes that into consideration. Otherwise perhaps we will move on, but for now Edmonton-Gold Bar still has the floor.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Just so that I'm clear, if I understand your direction correctly, the issue was with billboards and not necessarily the reference to – I guess I'm also rising under 13(2), just for further clarification of your ruling. So the issue of irrelevance was specifically related to billboards?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I've already explained this in all of the different ways. I can appreciate that you don't like it, but that is the ruling. You know what's relevant and what's not. Let's continue on with relevant, interesting things in this House that make sense, which is what we're here to do. I've explained my ruling. We're not discussing this any further. If you would prefer not to continue with the rest of your time, we can move on. I'm offering you one more opportunity to make the points that you need to make that are relevant to the legislation.

3:20

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I guess, then, that I'm just going to have to continue to speak and then hope that it meets the test of relevance, that I don't fully understand, in the debate.

Regardless, the concerns that my constituents have raised are with respect to the integrity of the international boundary, which is the subject of the legislation that we are discussing here today. You know, many of my constituents certainly doubt the UCP's sincerity with respect to protecting and preserving Alberta's boundaries, especially when it comes to becoming an independent province, an independent state, or becoming the 51st state of the United States. There is a very detailed history, a recent history, of this government engaging in activities that put the integrity of our boundaries at risk.

We know that the Premier's chief of staff, Rob Anderson, is also the primary actor behind the free Alberta strategy, which consists of a number of pieces of legislation that this government has passed that put Alberta's boundaries at risk, Madam Speaker. You know,

looking through the free Alberta strategy, there are a number of proposals that Rob Anderson made in 2021 that this government has followed through on. The Alberta sovereignty act: check. The Alberta provincial police force: we just heard the public safety minister go on about the establishment of an Alberta independent police force just today in question period, so check. Equalization termination: we had a referendum on that in 2021, and the people of Alberta voted in favour of equalization termination. Check. Alberta pension plan: this continues to be a live issue with this government. They refuse to back away from establishing an Alberta pension plan.

All of these things are designed to promote what the chief of staff of the Premier calls the free Alberta strategy, Madam Speaker, putting Alberta's boundaries' integrity at risk.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Hon. member, I'm sorry that you don't get it, but that is nothing to do with the legislation that is before us. There are plenty of opportunities for you to talk about the things that you want to talk about in the space and the time that is relevant to that. This is not that. If you would like to speak about the legislation, this is the time to do that. If you don't want to speak about the legislation, there are other times to do that. At this point I'm not sure what you're getting at.

I've made a ruling. This isn't relevant to the legislation at hand at all. I get that you don't get that, but I think that perhaps it's time to move on to a different member. You had three minutes and 20 seconds remaining. You don't seem to want to talk to the relevancy at hand, so I'm going to recognize a different speaker at this time.

Are there any members that wish to speak to Bill 38 in second reading? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 38 this afternoon in the Legislature and continue on a little bit of the conversation of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in a slightly different vein.

I want to talk about the part of the bill that talks about the Boundary Surveys Act as well in a slightly different way. Of course, the Boundary Surveys Act is contemplated under this bill as being altered so that, indeed, the minor changes that the provincial government might contemplate could be done in a way which doesn't require a referendum. I think it's important to note that there are times when the boundary definitions and the precise location of the boundaries are pretty critical, particularly now when we're considering major infrastructure possibilities in the Rocky Mountains, new developments of resorts and so forth that the government is hoping to facilitate. Certainly, we don't get in the way of that possibility, but it is important to know where these boundaries are for any potential development that might take place because, of course, as we know, when Sunshine Mountain ski resort was developed, that boundary had to be determined very precisely so that indeed the development occurred within the provincial limits of the province of Alberta.

As the act attempts to say, it's no small thing or not a huge deal, but it is important to make sure that the boundary locations are precisely located for times when development is going to take place. I think many Albertans don't really understand where part of that boundary actually lies. Of course, it lies on the Great Divide, and that is a pretty important piece of our geography between the two provinces, British Columbia and Alberta, because to the west of the Great Divide rivers flow towards the Pacific, and on the eastern side of the eastern slopes the rivers flow towards the Atlantic and actually up towards the Arctic Ocean. So the boundary

between Alberta, which is in part the Great Divide, is an important topic for headwater discussions as well.

Now, on a personal note, I certainly like to know precisely where that exact location of the provincial boundaries is because my will actually states that I want my ashes scattered over the Great Divide, and I'd like to make sure that they actually go in more than one direction.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Williams: Madam Speaker, what year is this, 1905? Are these members seriously considering this debate as some serious question of where the boundary is when we're looking at the red tape reduction act? We're now discussing which direction the water flows from the Canadian Rockies. This is not a question of debate for the Alberta Legislature. We are certain that on this side of the continental divide it flows towards the great province of Alberta and on the other side towards British Columbia. The legislation doesn't address that, the red tape reduction act is not anywhere near that, and I ask again on 23(b)(i) that we caution the members opposite to substantively contribute to this debate.

We saw an incredibly compelling, even if I disagree, speech from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talking about the substance of this bill in great detail. That is a member that did her homework. As much as I disagree with the content of it, it is meaningful debate in this Chamber when we address it in that substantive way. What we see here is what the Americans call filibustering. It's what Canadians call a waste of taxpayer dollars and an abuse of the role that we have here in the Alberta Legislature on behalf of the Albertans we represent. Of course, I'm happy to defer for the first four and a half minutes to the member opposite's meandering ways, but we have yet to get to substantive questions surrounding this piece of the legislation. I ask that we caution members to sincerely debate it. If they do not have matter for debate, we are happy to vote on this side of the House.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's not a point of order. I think the member just started speaking, was not even four minutes into it. [interjection] If Taber-Warner wants to contribute to this debate, I'm sure that with the House leader's permission he should be able to do that, but for now I hope that for once he would listen to what I have to say, whether he understands it or not.

The thing is that at second reading you can talk broadly about the principles of the bill, what's contained in it, how it will impact the province, how it will impact the existing landscape, any concern that you may have with respect to those changes on behalf of Albertans, on behalf of your constituents. I think that for a member rising for the first time to speak, at four minutes in, there is no way that you can determine relevance. Again I will quote from chapter 13 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which says:

It is not always possible to judge the relevance (or the repetitiveness) of a Member's remarks until he or she has spoken at some length or even completed his or her remarks. The Speaker must exercise his or her discretion: if the rules are applied too strictly, they have the potential for severely curtailing debate.

3:30

I think that a point of order on relevance is just the Deputy Government House Leader wanting to curtail debate. The member is just four minutes into it. I think bear with the member, have some patience for the debate. You have included a change with respect to the boundaries, so hear us out, what we have to say, what Albertans have to say about it. I think that it's fairly relevant what the member was talking about, and he should be allowed to exercise his right to speak freely and talk about the bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I think what I heard is the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung just about to make his point in relation to the bill, and I will allow him the opportunity to do just that.

The hon. member.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I truly thought I was engaged in debate germane to the bill. I'm trying very much to focus on the point of the importance of the boundary between the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. As I'd mentioned, on a personal note it was important to have real knowledge for myself and those who look after my final remains to make sure that they plant them on the right side of the Great Divide so that they flow in the right direction. But for other reasons it's important to know – and I was mentioning this earlier in my remarks. For development purposes it's exactly critical to know that the precise location of the border can be described as it changes over time for development to take place. I mentioned the example of the Sunshine Village Ski Resort, which required that precise marking of the boundary take place so that the development would be built in the province of Alberta and not straddle the boundary.

Anyways, I'll continue on to other parts of the legislation, Madam Speaker, in the hopes that I'll be permitted to continue without further interruption, I think unjustifiably, by members opposite. In any case, let me focus on the bill in hand and talk about the part of the bill, that other members have also exposed, that is most abhorrent to Albertans and especially those who have children in care or have known somebody who has children in care, knowing that the individuals who may reach the age of 20 years plus and, unfortunately, die while still in care or having received services while younger: those deaths are no longer required to be reported, if this legislation passes, as if the death didn't matter.

It's a cruel disregard for the value of those individuals, Madam Speaker, that I think is right on brand for this government. I'm sad to say that it seems to be just another example which causes Albertans to ask: who indeed is the UCP government trying to protect with measures such as this proposed under Bill 38?

Young adults who died while in their care: to the UCP government it appears these vulnerable adults are simply red tape. Even worse, Madam Speaker, they're bad press. That is what it appears that Bill 38 is attempting to override or to bury. Once these young adults are dead and buried, the government then wants the facts surrounding their deaths to be buried along with them. That is extremely disturbing. The only explanation for it that I can come up with and my constituents could come up with is that the government doesn't want the bad press surrounding the deaths of these individuals to blemish their record or to see the light of day.

I know that even in my family there have been family members who have had children in care, and they've fortunately lived many years longer, but to imagine that one of my relatives might have not had their death even acknowledged had it occurred between the ages of 20 and 24 while having received government care would

have been more than troubling. I can't imagine the grief that family members who suffer this indignity have to go through.

The piece of Bill 38, Madam Speaker, which permits the government to no longer report the deaths of adults in care who are beyond the age of 20 is something that I think the government should seriously reconsider. This appears to be borne out of a fear of the bad press that these deaths may generate, but let me say that the bad press that this piece of legislation is generating might end up being worse than the bad press they're hoping to avoid by not reporting these deaths. It's bad press all over for the government to bring in this measure to avoid having to report these deaths of individuals between 20 and 24. I'm hoping that they see the light of day and that the government reconsiders at least this piece of the legislation.

Even the Child and Youth Advocate responded publicly, which is not something that you see the Child and Youth Advocate do in direct response to a government proposal or a piece of legislation, not just a regulation or a policy change. This is actually a response to legislation that's very deliberate and very public and pulls no punches, Madam Speaker.

The Child and Youth Advocate responded publicly in news articles, saying that they are the only body that is reviewing these deaths and that we're not going to hear about them should this legislation go through. Further on she goes to give an example, Madam Speaker, about a family situation that anybody can relate to, and that is, you know, if we do have children who are reaching adult age, 18-year-olds, as the Child and Youth Advocate says: I think the guardian is responsible to provide additional support past 18, in my mind up to 25 at least, because that's just their responsibility.

This is the Child and Youth Advocate responding in a news article, publicly stating her opposition to this proposal in Bill 38. That's a pretty gutsy move on the part of the Child and Youth Advocate to take, and I think the government should really take to heart what Madam Pelton is saying to them directly without pulling any punches. She's saying: you're wrong; this is not a good thing to do. She's saying that these people deserve the dignity of having their deaths reported even though they are beyond the age of 20 years old, from 20 to 24. This alteration of policy that's embedded in this Bill 38, this piece of legislation, is a wrong move to take, and it's not something that she as the Child and Youth Advocate supports. It's something that she believes Albertans won't support either, and I believe she's right. It's a shocking alteration in the policy of reporting deaths of people in care in the province of Alberta.

Further to that, the Child and Youth Advocate goes on to say: how are we going to track the data? What indeed are we going to do to change and improve services for those individuals who we served while they were under the age of 20 in the event of having somebody pass away beyond that age? I quote: ignoring the facts isn't going to improve the services we can provide to our children and youth. Unquote. Indeed, it serves another purpose, to better and improve the offerings of the Child and Youth Advocate and the government of serving children in care if these deaths and the facts surrounding these deaths are properly reported and form part of the database that inform future ministers and future policy-makers in this province so that we can perhaps avoid some of these deaths that have occurred in people who are aging out of care and beyond the 18-year-old adult limitation, which some services are ended at.

3:40

Madam Speaker, I hope the government gets the message that this is a serious matter, that people who happen to have the benefit of government services when they are in that age range of 18 to 24 years old have the dignity of their deaths being valued by the

government and, in relation to that, by the people of Alberta, who want to know what circumstances led to these individuals dying either while in care or while aged out of care but having been in care of the provincial government and receiving services from them. Not doing so is a callous disregard of their humanity, and it really devalues the life they lived. That's not a province that I want to live in. I think that we want to be known as a province where everybody's life is valued and the dignity of every human being in this province is something that's preserved by the legislation that we pass in this House. Bill 38, this particular piece of it, frankly, I'm ashamed to see it actually come before this House.

I'm hoping the government will take the advice of the Child and Youth Advocate and of many, many of my constituents and every member at least on this side of the House and withdraw this piece of the legislation that they propose in Bill 38, to revert back to the reporting mechanism where adults who have received care up to age 20 to 24 and who die in that age range have their deaths reported and the circumstances surrounding that death reported.

I'm going to turn now briefly, while I have a moment or two left, to talk a little bit about one other element.

The Deputy Speaker: A very brief moment.

Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 38? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to pick up on, you know, some of the things that I was hearing from my colleague speaking earlier about Bill 38, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, and say: yes, shouldn't we be living in a place where we value the lives of all Albertans? It is shocking to me that we, in fact, live in a place where we're discussing changes to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate investigating the deaths of youth that had been in our care as part of a red tape reduction amendment act. That alone, full stop, should give everybody pause to think about what we are doing in this Chamber, the decisions that we are making, and how we value or don't value the lives of Albertans. This is incredible.

Also, in talking about the changes to the work of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate suggested in this bill, with a little bit of liberty, Madam Speaker, I'm going to step back in time a year. In my still limited experience in this role, for me, this is the second time that I have seen this government try to take away from the work of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Last year I had the opportunity a little bit earlier than this time of year to sub into the Legislative Offices Committee, where we were hearing about the budgets proposed from those legislative offices. One of those, of course, was the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. In that meeting I saw clearly laid out from the office their responsibilities, their expenses, their needs in a report from Legislative Assembly staff that clearly showed examples of, you know, comparisons, cost comparisons and work comparisons, across this country. I sat and listened to the members opposite talk about how we shouldn't be funding the OCYA to the level that we are because Alberta's population is lower than British Columbia's population and they get less money than they do in Alberta.

Meanwhile, the report that we were looking at clearly stipulated, showed, that in Alberta the population of youth is higher than it is in British Columbia, so there's justification for the expenses of the OCYA. The OCYA, I also learned in that committee meeting, has additional responsibilities that also seem to be ignored by the members opposite when we were discussing the funding for the office of the OCYA.

Now here I am one year later looking at a bill that is undermining the work of the OCYA and stripping away this incredibly valuable

work so that we can understand the impact of the work that we do in supporting children that are in our care. We're talking about children and youth who are, again, the most vulnerable in this province. They had been through the course of their life until now under our care, the government's care.

Now seemingly with the changes in Bill 38 we're no longer concerned with what happens to these children. Somehow miraculously we're absolved of any responsibility for having raised these children to where they are so far. If we were asking parents if somehow at the age of 20 they no longer cared about the future of their children, that if after the age of 20 something happened to their children they'd say, that's okay, they're over 20 now and they're no longer our legal responsibility – you know, we talk a lot in this House. We've certainly heard from the members opposite so frequently in this House about the role of parents in parenting.

As we heard from my colleague from Whitemud earlier, for these children their parents had been the government of Alberta, and now the government of Alberta is saying: "We don't care about you anymore. You've reached the age of 20. We don't care about you anymore. We don't care about what happens to you. We don't care about whether or not we've given the children the opportunity to live a fulfilling life that all the rest of us have been given the opportunity to live."

This bill is now going to take away the work that the CYA does to investigate the deaths of youths that are aged 20 and older when previously that went to the age of 24. I think we need to ask: what were we learning from these investigations that somehow we no longer feel is important for us to know? What are we learning from these investigations that would guide how we support these children when they are under our care before they have aged out? Is there something about – and this is not a small number of children that are dying, of youth that are dying. Why do we no longer want to pay attention to our lessons learned so that we can do better so that fewer of those youth die?

3:50

Shouldn't our goal be to instead, rather than what we hear in this bill, that maybe we want to save a couple of thousand dollars – instead, shouldn't we be striving towards an outcome where all children who are in the care of the government of Alberta have the opportunity to live fulfilling and successful lives? Isn't that understanding and that work worth the couple of thousand dollars that we're going to save when we enact this bill? I think that we should be ashamed at what we are proposing here, at what our values are, and question: what really are our values?

While we have the opportunity, while we still have reports available to us about some of these youth, maybe we should take a moment to hear about some of their stories. One of the investigations conducted by OCYA: Madison, who passed at the age of 21. She

was 21 . . . when she was hospitalized for significant burns to her body. She was receiving Child Intervention through the Transition to Adulthood Program . . . at the time of her serious injury.

Madison [was] a kind, soft-spoken young woman [who enjoyed] music, cosmetology and spending time with friends. When she was a young teenager, Madison began to use substances,

when she was under the care of the government of Alberta. She was exploited and found it difficult to manage her mental health.

Madison [was] from a blended family and is Shawna and Jason's only child. Her parents separated when she was young, and she did not have a relationship with her father. When she was three years old, Madison and her infant sister were apprehended and placed in a foster home because her mother and stepfather . . .

[were using] substances, had housing instability and there was family violence. Madison and her sister were adopted by their foster parents . . . when she was seven years old.

Before [she] was three . . . Child Intervention was involved with her family five times because of concerns related to parental substance abuse and family violence. During that time, the parents separated. She entered into a relationship with others, and while caseworkers reviewed and cautioned . . . about the reported concerns, it does not appear that [the father] was contacted before involvements ended.

When Madison was [just] three years old, Child Intervention received a report that she and her newborn sister were left with inappropriate caregivers, and were exposed to . . . substance use, family violence and . . . criminal activity. Caseworkers obtained a Supervision Order . . . that addressed housing, relationship, and addiction issues. Efforts to locate [the father] were not successful. [The parents] did not access services, and over the following six months, caseworkers received ongoing reports. Days before her fourth birthday, Madison and her sister were apprehended and placed in [foster care, where] she started preschool to enhance her socialization and early learning skills.

Caseworkers obtained a Temporary Guardianship Order . . . and over the following year, case planning focused on addressing the substance abuse in the family, the violence, the instability.

They had inconsistent visits with their children, and [a parent] was incarcerated. Madison began seeing a therapist after her foster parents noted she struggled with impulsivity and healthy boundaries. Caseworkers located [the father] and explored whether or not he or extended family could care for Madison. They could not, and they were unable to have contact with her.

Shortly after her fifth birthday she became the subject of a permanent guardianship order. The mother acknowledged using substances while pregnant with Madison.

Caseworkers developed a permanency plan for Madison and her sister that included them being adopted together. Therapeutic services including parenting strategies that focused on behavioural and attachment issues were provided to the foster parents. Over the following year and a half, Madison had sporadic contact with her parents.

Mother moved out of province, stepfather incarcerated, and over time visits and telephone contact were stopped because of the impact on Madison's behaviours.

She started school, loved to socialize, and by grade 2 she had challenges with math and received extra support in class. When she was six . . . she was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity . . . and was prescribed medication. The following year, a neuropsychological assessment found [that] she had mid-average intellectual functioning.

Despite caseworkers saying that substances were likely used during the pregnancy,

this information was not reflected in that assessment. Recommendations included continuing to provide extra help in math, counselling . . . monitoring her behaviour and medications.

Days before [her] eighth birthday, she and her sister were adopted . . . Intervention involvement ended after her adoptive parents were connected to the supports for permanency . . . program.

This report about Madison goes on for another nine pages. There's considerable information and data here already about just the first six years of her life. It's important that we take the time to review this information. I think we've already heard about, just in this one person's life, what they were going through, what we learned from that process. We saw already that in one evaluation a pretty important, you know, period of her life in pregnancy, when there was substance abuse, was not included in an evaluation.

I think we can learn from these things, Madam Speaker. I think it's important that we continue to learn from these cases that it is

our responsibility in this House that we care for all Albertans. These particular Albertans are directly in our care, and we should be considering what we have learned from their lives, respect and value their lives, and say that we're going to continue to do this investigative work, that we're going to continue to support the OCYA in their work. We should be sending a signal to all of the children in care in Alberta today that we care about them.

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been a debate that has meandered but finished on a very substantive and important note. I ask that we adjourn debate for now on this piece of legislation. The government will return to it later.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 45

Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 45, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025.

If passed, this bill would make changes to the legislation to address the needs of all Albertans, including securing the economy, provincial jurisdiction, and our international border in the south. Madam Speaker, hon. members may recall that the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act received royal assent in June of 2020. This act protects essential infrastructure from trespassing, interference, and damage that could cause significant public safety, social, and economic consequences.

Madam Speaker, the first amendments that we're proposing would help secure our province's economy and provincial jurisdiction. These amendments would update the definition of essential infrastructure to add facilities where oil and gas production and emission data and records are held. Hon. members will also recall passing the Alberta sovereignty within a united Canada motion in December 2024 in this Assembly to protect Alberta's economy and citizens from a federal oil and gas emissions cap.

4:00

Madam Speaker, Albertans are proud Canadians, and we want to ensure that our voice remains strong on our priorities, our interests, and all of our concerns. We need to be prepared to stand up to federal overreach that interferes with our provincial jurisdiction. Alberta will not let Ottawa stand in our way. The federal Liberal government in Ottawa for the past decade has not understood that section 92A of the Constitution gives the provinces, not the federal government, the exclusive jurisdiction over nonrenewable natural resource development. Alberta will continue its pursuit of doubling our oil and gas production to meet the growing global demand for energy. We will not tolerate the continuous unconstitutional overreaches made by the federal Liberal government. Measures like the emissions cap, the clean energy regulations, the electric vehicle mandate, and Bill C-59 must be scrapped right now. Albertans and Canadians, in fact, want pipelines to be built and not to be reliant upon other trading partners. Make no mistake. Alberta will do whatever it takes to shield our economy from the Liberal growth-killing policies.

These amendments would include denying federal workers access to our facilities and the information they contain when that

access would be unlawful. Alberta's government will continue to fiercely and unapologetically stand up for Albertans and defend the best interests of our province, our economy, and all of our industries. That's why defining facilities where oil and gas production and emissions data records are held as essential infrastructure and amending the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act to explicitly state that it applies to the federal government will help us do just that, Madam Speaker.

The next amendment we are proposing will ensure that the definition of essential infrastructure is contained in a single space. The Critical Infrastructure Defence Act allows cabinet to make regulations that prescribe buildings, structures, devices, or other things as essential infrastructure. In the fall of 2021 the critical infrastructure defence regulation was introduced to include health facilities in its definition of what we refer to as essential infrastructure. The regulation was needed to respond to concerns that protests occurring at hospitals could impede timely access to health services. In the fall of 2024 health facilities defined as essential infrastructure in the regulation were moved to the definition of the act itself, ensuring that the definition of essential infrastructure was fully captured in a single place and ensuring that Albertans would receive timely access to essential health care that they rely on whenever they need it.

The Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025, also sets out to combine the definition of essential infrastructure in a single place. The two-kilometre border zone was designated as essential infrastructure in the regulation in January 2025. It was intended to enhance security at our border and help promote and protect public safety. Again, as all hon. members of this Chamber know, security at the international border is essential to Alberta's economy and prosperity, and this government has made concerted efforts to strengthen security in that area. Defining a two-kilometre border zone of the entire Alberta-United States border as essential infrastructure gives peace officers additional tools that they need to protect our province.

Of course, Madam Speaker, individuals who are legally working or travelling or living in this two-kilometre zone may continue to do so. The act only applies when individuals have no lawful right, justification, or excuse to be in that area. With the act being amended, it makes sense to update it as well so the definition of essential infrastructure is fully captured in one place and to ensure that peace officers can officially protect the border zone when they need to.

Madam Speaker, Bill 45, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025, contains very important amendments that would protect essential infrastructure and provincial jurisdiction while securing the international border and Alberta's economy. These amendments would further support the government's recent motion under the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act and help improve the efficiency of our systems, ensuring that legislation is up to date and reflective of current issues that we are dealing with.

With that, I hereby move second reading of the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to support it. Thank you.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 45, just a page and a half long bill. The minister went on to claim that it will protect international borders, sovereignty, economy, Albertans, and everything. But what this bill does: it adds the two-kilometre border that was already in regulation. The government

already had the power to do whatever they want to do in that two kilometres, but they chose to move that to the legislation.

The second thing it does: the government is using its legislative power to declare an industry's data, private information, as their own proprietary information. This bill represents a fundamentally unconstitutional overreach of this government. It's just another political stunt, performative stunt that the Premier and this government are pulling in the midst of one of the most serious existential crises facing Canada, facing our economy.

I think I will start with giving some background of why I think this is a performative political stunt and why I think that this is not what Albertans need and want. I'm sure that many members on the other side do go to events, may meet constituents, and they are also hearing the same things. People are worried about tariffs. People are worried about their jobs, their businesses. That's what they are telling us on the doorsteps.

Second thing. We are losing six Albertans every day to the drugs crisis. These are our neighbours. These are our loved ones. That's been going on for a while, and that situation has become worse.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Then we are hearing from people across this province that there are more than 800,000 Albertans who don't have access to family doctors, to primary health care. And at any given time – I think UCP MLAs will know better than I do – there are 30 rural health care facilities, emergency centres that are closed in their communities. That's on Alberta Health's website. That's their own data. People are concerned about that.

A couple of months ago, Mr. Speaker, one of my constituents and a friend had some chest pain. He went to emergency in Peter Lougheed Centre, and the doctor there recommended that he should get an open-heart surgery immediately. Foothills Centre didn't have space for him to go into the surgery right away, so he was parked in a room in Peter Lougheed Centre for nine days so that there could be some room available in Foothills Centre so he can get the surgery. Not only was his surgery delayed; there was one room occupied at Peter Lougheed Centre so they could monitor and treat him there until space became available at Foothills Centre.

4:10

Then – the government doesn't want to hear about it – there are serious allegations of corruption, bloated contracts, kickbacks that government is facing in relation to Alberta Health Services, its procurement. Instead of making things better there, things are getting worse under this government. These are the things that people share with us.

The minister claimed that it will protect international borders. The neighbours on the south are openly threatening to annex Canada. They are openly using their economic power to weaken our economy, and government is claiming that adding a two-kilometre buffer zone with the United States border will somehow protect our sovereignty. The federal government, all the Premiers: like, they are coming together as Team Canada to address those threats. Alberta doesn't want to be part of Team Canada. They're, rather, on Team Trump and think that moving a provision from regulation to legislation somehow will help them protect their borders.

Same thing. They are saying that they can somehow protect the oil and gas sector from the emission cap by declaring their data as government's and taking over that data by the dint of law, that that somehow will protect our industry from the emission cap. I do recognize that Alberta has many policies and regulations to manage its emissions. There is industrial carbon pricing. This government still brags about it, supports it. There is another emission cap on oil sands, and there are other policies that do impact the industry.

Then there are also concerns with respect to the environment that many Albertans, many Indigenous communities have raised. There are concerns with respect to consultation. I think if this government wants to help the oil and gas industry, they need to work with all concerned. They need to work with industry, they need to work with environmental groups, they need to work with Indigenous communities, and, above all, they need to work with the federal government to push back on policies they think are not good for Alberta's economy instead of doing these performative stunts.

Mr. Speaker, you would be surprised to know that government added in this bill – I think the minister knows what he added – that this bill binds the government of Canada. Let that sink in. Provincial parliament is passing a legislation, and they think that by stating in it that it binds the government of Canada, this bill binds the government of Canada. And the minister was giving lectures to the federal government to stay in their lane.

I can bet you, Mr. Speaker, that if you put it as a true-false in a first-year law class, that the government's Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025, binds the government of Canada, true or false, a hundred per cent of the students will say it's false. I think, except for the UCP, nobody would think that this bill binds the government of Canada. Instead of focusing on the priorities of Albertans, instead of addressing the challenges facing our province, our nation, our economy, the government came up with this performative, purely performative, political stunt that will only add to the uncertainty that our economy is facing.

The government thinks that they can deny federal workers access through this bill. Again, whether or not they are able to deny access, it does create uncertainty for the industry. It creates uncertainty for the people who are carrying out these jobs on behalf of the federal government in the province of Alberta. They are also Albertans, by the way. They live here, they work here, they raise their families here, and now here is a government so hostile that their only trick to governing is, from morning till evening, just to say that everything is the federal government's fault.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this bill is a dishonest and unconstitutional attempt to communicate to Albertans that somehow their government is doing something about the border crisis, about international borders, or about Alberta's economy. This bill will jeopardize investment in the oil and gas sector as well. These projects are long-term projects, and people investing in these projects do need some certainty that government will not take away their investment, that government will not use their legislative power to take over their data and put their investment at risk. Again, those kinds of bills are coming from a party who prides itself on free market; like, here they are taking over the proprietary information of private investors as if it belongs to them.

At the end of the day, I think this bill doesn't represent the priorities of Albertans. It doesn't represent sound public policy. It creates more problems for one of the most important sectors of our economy.

If the government really wants to deal with international border issues and threats, they would also know that those things are within the jurisdictional competence of the federal government and they need to be part of Team Canada, join hands with them, represent Alberta's interests, and push back against the threats from the States of annexing Canada as the 51st state.

4:20

They do take, I guess, credit for things that they didn't even do. Earlier the Premier mentioned in response to a question that there were four Republican Senators who sided with Canada against the tariffs or some policies. I think what they have been doing is that they have been going to different cocktail parties, taking selfies, and

when asked in estimates, the Premier herself confirmed that none of those meetings were official because those legislators have some restriction that before those things become law they can't meet or talk about those policies before they are confirmed by the Senate, that they couldn't make decisions or get lobbied on those important issues, so taxpayer money was used essentially for trips down south where everybody was avoiding even travelling to the United States.

Then the Premier used taxpayer money, flew down to Florida to meet with Ben Shapiro, who is on record saying horrible, wildly inappropriate things about so many communities that call Alberta home – Arab communities, Muslim communities, immigrant communities – and when we objected to that, when Albertans raised concerns about that, the explanation was that that trip somehow might help us to ward off Trump's tariffs. Last week when tariffs were imposed on Alberta, on Canada, across this entire nation, the Premier was the only person who thought that it was a huge win. The next day they realized that it was not a win for anyone, and they started battling.

The other thing I do want to mention is that there are many things that Alberta can do to protect the international border, to protect its economy, but this bill is doing none of that. We have put forward a sensible plan, suggestions for this government to take. They could be working with fellow Premiers, with the federal government to reduce trade barriers instead of flying down to Florida and talking to Ben Shapiro. That's one suggestion. So far we have seen nothing.

We also know that because of those tariffs people are struggling. Just last month Canada lost 33,000 jobs. Alberta lost jobs. People are fearful. They are struggling. They need to have some evaluation, some assessment of how these tariffs will impact Albertans. They should be transparent about it instead of taking victory laps, and they should be putting together programs that could help Albertans, that could help businesses, and in particular Alberta's small businesses. But we have not seen any such plan from this government.

Finally, they could be working with the federal government and all the fellow Premiers to come up with a Team Canada approach and stand together with people from coast to coast to coast to push back against any efforts of annexing Canada, any attacks on Canadian workers, their economy, their livelihood.

This bill, in short, does nothing. It's a performative political stunt that may be good for their fundraising e-mails, but it doesn't offer any meaningful solution to Alberta's economy, to Alberta's border issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of Bill 45, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025. I noted with some irony that the member opposite was quite concerned about political performative stunts and then went on to list numerous issues that had nothing to do with the bill, which some Albertans might consider the definition of political performative stunts. I'm actually surprised he didn't use his time to endorse Mark Carney. Maybe it's so obvious that he didn't feel he needed to.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Lundy: I'm happy to speak, Mr. Speaker, about Bill 45.

To me, Bill 45 comes down to a couple of important issues. This bill is going to protect our oil and gas sector and protect our most important industry in Alberta. It's going to help our economy. It also helps protect our jurisdiction defined in the Constitution, which is a very important issue that the Minister of Justice has spoken to

quite regularly. Bill 45 is really important in my riding. Leduc-Beaumont is, of course, home to Nisku, the Nisku Business Park, as well as the Leduc Business Park, which plays an integral role in the energy sector and supplies in the supply chain to Fort McMurray. It's very important that we pass pieces of legislation like this that can protect our oil and gas industry.

My constituents talk to me all the time about the importance of that industry and how they hope that our government can continue to stand up for them. They also talk to me about just how important Alberta's role can be within Canada. We know that a strong Alberta is important to a strong Canada, and our government, of course, is willing to support that. We want to make sure that our oil and gas industry can be the engine of economic growth in Canada.

I also heard from some of the members opposite that they are concerned about jobs and job numbers and job losses. You know, they are concerned, Mr. Speaker. They're very concerned that the Liberal-NDP alliance has been working against our sector now for some time and that that's going to continue into the future. They're concerned about the damage that that's going to do to their jobs and their livelihoods. Well, the good news for those hard-working Albertans is that, if passed, legislation like Bill 45 is going to be able to address that issue.

It's really important that when our industries come under threat, it should be a concern to all of us. We all share the responsibility of protecting these industries from terrible federal policies and, of course, from forces beyond Canada's border. These are some of the reasons that I support Bill 45, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025. If passed, this piece of legislation will continue to protect essential infrastructure, ensuring that the industries that run our province remain protected.

The Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, or CIDA, was first introduced by our government in 2020 to protect essential infrastructure from trespassing, interference, and damage that could have significant public safety, social, economic, or environmental consequences. This was in 2020. I think we can all agree that the world looks a little different than when this legislation was passed, so it's important that we pass this bill with the amendments.

These amendments would clarify the application of the act, update the definition of essential infrastructure, and incorporate the portion of the definition currently set out in the critical infrastructure regulation into the act. This amendment specifically includes facilities which store oil and gas production and emissions data, in addition to the two-kilometre deep zone north of the Alberta-U.S. border. I think we can all agree that it's an important area. I know that the minister of public safety has certainly taken the time to make sure that we are securing our border, and I think that's an important piece alongside this.

With this bill our government aims to protect not only our oil and gas industry but the workers who depend on that sector, and we all know that this is a sector that fuels our economy, which, in turn, makes investments into our schools, our hospitals, and our businesses that make up our great province. We know that we rely on our oil and gas sector to make sure that we can make these important investments for Albertans.

We've seen record amounts of investment in not only health care and education across our province in Budget 2025, and those investments are made possible by a strong oil and gas sector and strong oil and gas workers throughout our province. We're fortunate to have such a strong sector so that we can make these investments that Albertans are looking for. I already mentioned both health care and education. We were lucky enough in Leduc-Beaumont for a new school site, and that's made possible because of our oil and gas industry. That's why it's important that Bill 45 is passed, so we can continue that.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, not only is this bill important because of the economic interests, but it also enables us to hold the federal government accountable and ensures that we have our autonomy under the Constitution. The Minister of Justice made reference to the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act, which precedes CIDA and defends Alberta's interests by giving our province a legal framework to push back on federal laws or policies that negatively impact the province. Albertans know that for too long our province has been sidelined by our federal government, that overlooks the concerns of the best interests of Albertans. This bill stands up for Alberta, making sure that we have input regarding policies that directly impact us all.

For example, the federal government's proposed oil and gas emissions cap regulations would require Alberta to cut production to meet emissions targets. Mr. Speaker, this is terrible policy. It would harm the province and would provide no tangible benefit. This cap would harm workers and their families who rely on the oil and gas sector for their livelihoods. It would also harm our economy, which depends on these industries to drive growth.

We know it's not the only piece of federal policy or legislation that harms Alberta. We also have heard about the clean energy regulations, the no-more-pipelines act, or Bill C-69, the tanker ban off the coast, not to mention numerous pipelines that have been cancelled by the federal government. These all cumulatively harm Alberta, and it harms our ability to fully realize our economic potential and have that economic potential help the rest of Canada as well.

That's why Bill 45 is important. Bill 45 would help us with these unconstitutional threats that threaten Alberta's economy and industry and prosperity by limiting our nonrenewable natural resource development. According to section 92A of the Constitution Act of 1867, provinces have jurisdiction over nonrenewable natural resource development. Our amendments will address these unconstitutional federal laws and policies which violate Albertans' Charter rights and interfere with our provincial constitutional rights. Mr. Speaker, our government will work to protect the autonomy that is guaranteed to Alberta under the Constitution.

Alberta is a place where hard work and determination will always have a place to thrive, and our government will similarly work tirelessly to protect Alberta's economic interest to ensure that our economy is able to contribute to Canada's economy and that Albertans are able to fully participate and make sure that they can provide for their families and their communities. This is an important piece of legislation that is going to help us do that, Mr. Speaker.

In closing, I certainly want to thank the Minister of Justice for putting forward this legislation. This is an important step towards securing a future where Alberta continues to grow and where we are free from interference from the federal government. We're exercising our constitutional rights as a province. I would ask, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members of the House to support this legislation, to continue to support our vital industry, and to make sure that Alberta continues to be strong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against Bill 45. At the outset, what I am not sure of is: why make these amendments to the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act when the province failed to even implement this act in 2022, when several disaffected Albertans and, surely, other western Canadians came to

the border crossing at Coutts, Alberta, to protest? Those protests itself were two kilometres from the border of Canada and the U.S.A.

From a *National Post* article, which I tabled earlier today, we know that of the protests across Canada, including the one in Ottawa, which had the most boisterous of protests, Coutts was where the most dangerous known criminal activity was uncovered, where the most serious criminal charges were laid, where a cache of guns and insignia of an extremist network stoked fear, and where the private voices of hard-core protesters, including a plot to kill RCMP, were highlighted in the criminal trial relating to this protest. The government of Alberta did not intervene in that situation and left the federal government to be the bad guys. To this day the federal government still bears the responsibility for bringing peace and order during that protest, which cost the Alberta economy \$44 million a day and which lasted for 17 days.

Listen, Mr. Speaker, I believe in peaceful protest. I believe in that being our democratic right as Albertans and as Canadians. Although I do not empathize with the message that these protesters believe they were standing up for, we have to look at the lens of this bill's enabling legislation that this amendment act intends to change. In saying this, I would be remiss to offer a juxtaposition of the historical context in which the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act was initially implemented to attack, which is the democratic right of protest. Premier Kenney introduced this against the backdrop of protests across Canada, in which groups blockaded rail lines, commuter train routes, and roadways in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs opposed to the construction of Coastal GasLink Pipeline through their territory in northern British Columbia.

In a quote from another article I tabled this afternoon in this House, then Minister of Justice Schweitzer was quoted in the Legislature with the following:

We had lawlessness across this country, where critical infrastructure was being obstructed. That is simply unacceptable. Here in the province of Alberta we expect the rule of law to be upheld.

I know what the other side is going to say because we've heard their defences to us, calling this piece of legislation undemocratic and being dismissed as ridiculous. One even went so far to say, "[Your] right to protest and express yourself in democracy... this government will always fight to make sure." To this, I say: for whom? When we position the economy before people's democratic rights, well, we see what happens. This government puts their ledgers' bottom lines before the rights of Albertans time and time again.

On this side of the House we have a bottom line which is commitment to supporting Alberta families so they can afford the increasing cost of groceries, utilities, and housing while transitioning to a lower carbon economy. The world is moving in this direction, and we need to be riding along that curve as well, or we will be left in the dust. At the end of COP 28 and again at COP 29 we saw the world signal a shift away from fossil fuels. This cabinet had representation at the latter, yet their advocacy just did not shift the world's opinion, sadly, despite their best efforts. This includes the advocacy that our energy respects human rights.

Mr. Speaker, this bill effectively does affect the right to protest in this province. When the UCP goes out to speak to our energy sector, they are sullyng it by putting forward this type of legislation. That is not standing up for our energy industry. That is creating complications.

To me as a Nehiyaw, a Cree person, I'm entirely concerned that this far-reaching amendment to the extremely undemocratic enabling legislation strips the rights of Indigenous peoples rather than protects the right to democratically and peacefully assemble,

which is protected under section 2(c) of the Charter. Further, there's case law, *R. v. Leconte*, which clarifies that peaceful assembly is allowed but not riots. To reiterate in this Chamber, the enabling legislation was really to affect Indigenous peoples. If we look at the arc of history in this country, Indigenous peoples are the ones who are often turning to protest because no government has found the right formula to address their concerns or to consult with Indigenous peoples in a meaningful or respectful way.

4:40

Just last year the Woodland Cree First Nation, whom I know many of you have met with just a few days ago, was protesting at an area that this bill intends to cover. In May of last year the Woodland Cree First Nation set up a protest camp at an Obsidian Energy pipeline expansion, where the First Nation was standing up for its right to meaningful consultation. This is an issue I raise in this House so often that I'm shocked this government has not committed to actually changing anything. Following that standoff, the chief of Woodland Cree issued this statement to media that, quote: I'd rather work with industry and the provincial government, but if they're forcing me into a corner, I will have to pursue a legal challenge. End quote.

Thankfully, things resolved in that area, but, Mr. Speaker, this legislation now complicates the relationship with Indigenous peoples in this province. I know of many nations that have serious concerns with developments in their territory, and I do see that legal challenges will come because, clearly, the government is not listening to Indigenous nations in this province. This legislation makes that relationship even more fraught than it already is.

Let's look at what this change intends to do other than taking away the democratic rights of Albertans, Indigenous peoples, and anyone who has any concerns that they want to protest and bring attention to the province and the world about what this government is intentionally ignoring and sticking its head in the sand. I'm also thinking about the fact that Alberta is home to multiple head offices of multinational oil and gas headquarters, and I wonder why section 2(b) includes an amendment to the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act to include the head offices of oil and gas companies.

It was not too long ago, in 2018, that a pro-oil rally in Calgary was just across Centre Street from Tobinsnet Oil & Gas and a stone's throw from the offices of Orintiv and Suncor towers. In another not-well-thought-out introduction of political theatre the UCP has shown that they really don't know what they're doing. At the worst, I'd worry that some on the other side may also be still lobbying for oil and gas given their previous and perhaps future career ambitions.

At that rally that I just mentioned, there was a very special guest some of you may know who delivered comments about having been very vocal advocates for Canada's energy industry, and it's important that we do so publicly so that people across Canada can hear our voices and understand what's happening here because our energy sector deserves defence. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the person that said that was none other than the leader of the Alberta NDP, Naheed Nenshi. I know the other side likes to think that this side of the House will not stand up for Alberta's energy industry. [some applause] We do, and we will continue to do so. I'd like to mention to the member opposite who just clapped for us: we do stand up for energy. I thank his applause, because we do stand up for energy. Thank you for that.

Mr. McIver: I'm waiting for it.

Member Arcand-Paul: I digress. Let's not litigate that. Thank you, Member. I know your other side puts its nose up to facts and,

as I just found out yesterday, is also against truth with respect to the truth and reconciliation calls to action.

I am truly curious as to how much taxpayer money this government will waste on legislation like this, which is, in my view, unconstitutional, and the inevitable court challenges while Albertans are struggling with affordability and health care crises. The waste of taxpayer dollars is concerning when this government has stated that security at the border is essential for Alberta prosperity. Well, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the Coutts protest, which cost Alberta an estimated \$748 million with the closure of the crossing for the entire 17-day demonstration. Really, this government alleging that this is for Alberta's prosperity is laughable as they were nowhere in sight when Alberta's economy took a hit during that protest.

Critical infrastructure defence is only a priority when it is Indigenous peoples protecting their land or standing in solidarity with our sisters and brothers across Turtle Island. Mr. Speaker, I remember very vividly when those rail blockades were being erected and this discussion of Bill 1 at the time, which is the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, was implemented. I remember that time vividly because as an Indigenous person we understand that our rights are always on the table by governments. No one has ever stood up for our rights.

Prior to getting elected, this galvanized me. This galvanized me to see the UCP go after the rights of Indigenous peoples to defend their territory and stand up for the land. We have a distinct responsibility and honour to stand with our ancestors that have marked these territories since time immemorial. We have a responsibility to defend that land, and this act and these amendments prevent us from being able to do so. That is unconscionable, and not only is it unconscionable; it is unjust. It goes against our rights under the Charter's section 2(c) of peaceful assembly.

I heard the minister mention that the prosperity of Alberta is also to be protected and ensured through this legislation. Well, Mr. Speaker, Indigenous peoples in this province also deserve to be part of that prosperity, but for the arc of history throughout Alberta's existence Indigenous peoples have been ignored, including through the Natural Resources Transfer Act, which was done without consultation of Indigenous peoples. At the time that was created, we weren't even allowed to leave our nations without the approval of the Indian agent. We were not allowed to hire lawyers to represent us.

I have the distinct honour of also being a lawyer mere years, decades, after we were given the right to even hire lawyers. I follow in the footsteps of my ancestors to defend the land because I see what unbridled use of our lands does to our territories. I went medicine picking with my late mushum Dan in Smallboy Camp, where I saw the devastation. I saw the sadness in my mushum's face when he saw the land ripped and barren of our medicines and of the trees in the area only to turn around and be met with the sight of a gas structure. Thankfully, there was a little culvert where we were able to go and find those medicines.

Mr. Speaker, this is the reason I stand in this Chamber and speak against this really deleterious amendment act. I look at this amendment act and all I see is an attempt to appease Donald Trump for the purposes of stopping illegal immigration and smuggling of opioids such as fentanyl into the United States. Well, let's again look at the facts. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection data show the agency seized 9,570 kilograms of fentanyl at the U.S. border with Mexico compared to the U.S. customs and border services at the Havre Sector, which services the entirety of the Alberta-U.S. border, where less than .2 kilograms of fentanyl has been seized in 2025. This is not to contrast with our fellow partners

in CUSMA, and many of the members opposite like to vacation in Mexico, but the demands from Trump have seemed to elicit such conflicts within our very own province.

Albertans are waiting and writing to me every single day, and I know the Premier and the members opposite are included in those pieces of correspondence. We all know that Albertans want this government to be on Team Canada, but hearing the other day a member threaten Team Canada, I really don't see this bill being introduced as being in line with what Albertans are asking from us. The minister in his remarks in second reading said, "Albertans are proud Canadians," and right now their government is asking them – we need to make them feel less weary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am against this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise in the Chamber today to support government Bill 45, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025. These necessary proposed amendments update the definition of essential infrastructure and will ensure that Alberta continues its important work of producing clean, responsible, and ethical energy reliably.

4:50

They also demonstrate our United Conservative government's commitment to improving public safety. First, a two-kilometre-deep border zone north of the Alberta-U.S. border would be declared essential infrastructure, allowing peace officers to be provided with additional tools to protect the area from trespassing, interference, or damage. Next facilities for oil and gas production and emission data and their respective records would be declared essential infrastructure. This would ensure that Alberta's economy and the province's ability to continue to produce energy are protected from any unlawful or unconstitutional interference.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the original Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, which was first introduced in 2020, was to defend essential infrastructure and protect Alberta's public safety, our economy, and our general well-being. I think we can agree that significant changes have occurred since 2020 related to our energy sector and border security, necessitating the important updates outlined in Bill 45. Further, these important amendments clarify the act's application, incorporate the portion of the updated definition of essential infrastructure currently set out in the critical infrastructure regulation into the act itself, and specifically state that the act applies to the government of Canada as well.

These proposed amendments also aid the government of Alberta in using the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act motion passed by this House on December 4, 2024, opposing the federal Liberal government's unconstitutional overreach to cap oil and gas emissions and therefore their production. Let there be no mistake. Production is based on what is technically and economically feasible. Rules that would impede the ability to technically and economically produce are a production cap.

It also states in Bill 45 that all emission data are to be exclusively owned by the province. This ensures that no provincial entity would be able to participate in the enforcement or implementation of a federal production cap, and it prohibits any individual, including federal officials or contractors, from entering interest holder facilities except for interest holders themselves, the employees or contractors for the site, or those specifically licensed to enter the site by the government of Alberta.

In this case the use of Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act is precisely why our Premier brought forward the act

in the first place. Once again, we have seen the federal government attempt to impose legislation that is an unconstitutional violation of Albertans' Charter rights. Mr. Speaker, section 92A of the Constitution clearly states that each province has jurisdiction over nonrenewable natural resource development. The federal government's proposed oil and gas emissions cap regulations would require Alberta to reduce production to meet these targets.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a proud Albertan and a proud Canadian. I love Canada, and the ability to keep Canada strong and independent and sovereign is related to our ability to keep itself economically strong. When you look at the Constitution, why is the Constitution – to be a Canadian is to respect not only the specific words of the Constitution but the intent of the Constitution. Let us look back. If we're going to be a good Canadian, we should be respecting that Constitution. The current federal government is violating the intent of the Constitution, the intent of why natural resource development and natural resources are part of provincial jurisdiction. It is what helps keep our country together.

It's the reason that in 1867 this right was given to Ontario and Quebec. It's the reason that in 1930 it was also provided to Alberta and the other provinces. It was recognized at that time, the way it was before, that we were treating Alberta and other provinces like colonies to feed resources and feed money into central Canada. At that time, in 1930, it was recognized that this was unfair and that to keep Canada secure, to keep Canada united, this had to change.

This was reiterated again in 1982. I have a few grey hairs, and I was around at that time as a political science student at the University of Calgary when this whole constitutional issue was being discussed and debated. Let there be no doubt that in 1982 the NDP supported this incorporation and strengthening into the Constitution. Now, why they have betrayed what everybody recognized in 1982, that for Albertans we needed this strength – again, you know, not only did we hear this from the NDP; we heard it from Albertans. It was a response in part in recognition of a separatist movement that was gaining strength in Alberta at that time that didn't feel that they were a part of Canada, that they were being violated by interests in central Canada, and that we needed this to keep Alberta strong and to find its place within Canada.

I had the benefit of having a course by Mr. Lougheed, who was, of course, at the table in 1982 and was the person who championed this inclusion into the Constitution. It was very clear in that course, called Canadian federalism, why it was there. All the provinces and the federal government at that time agreed to that because everybody recognized that the Constitution was not going to come back to Canada unless it was there. People seem to forget with the passage of time, you know, what happened in 1982, what was going on in 1982. We have a lot of new people that have come and have been born in Alberta since that time, and perhaps we need to remind them of that fact.

The only remaining person alive who was around at that table, Brian Peckford, has reiterated very clearly that the intent at the table at the time and the recognition at the time was that the policies of the federal government currently, the Liberal federal government that is appointed right now, were unacceptable and needed to be protected against. The only person at the table in 1982 still alive has made that very clear. Why the NDP wants to betray that understanding, that they agreed to themselves back in 1982, is beyond me. You know, the best strategy to retain our sovereignty as a country and as a province is to be strong economically. That is the strategy that we need.

Now, the member opposite talked a little bit about, you know, went on about some of the challenges we face in wanting to create jobs, provide for government services that we all want and cherish.

Well, how do you do that? We have to take advantage of what our competitive economic advantages are, and what they are to a large degree are the natural resources we produce and the other spinoffs, the Alberta advantage of low taxation and high government spending, that the natural oil and gas reserves provide us. Without that, we would be paying higher taxes, and we would not be able to fund the services that we have. That's why it's important to protect these things.

We assume that about \$20 billion will go into government coffers alone. So over and above the jobs, over and above the personal taxes that flow to the federal government and the federal corporate taxes that flow to government, we get about \$20 billion this year, more or less, depending on what actually happens in terms of oil prices, plus corporate taxes. Last year about 33 per cent of all Alberta government revenues came directly from the oil and gas sector. That's equal to about a 10 per cent provincial sales tax. You know, the low tax advantage that we have and the quality of government services that we have and the strong environmental stewardship that we have are what attracts other companies and other people that want to locate here in Alberta. We talk about diversification. It is this advantage that the natural resources industry provides to us that provides us another competitive advantage so that we can attract a lot of these other industries. It's integral to the prosperity of Alberta.

5:00

So who are we here to protect, who are we here to serve? Radical environmentalists who get elected in Montreal, who don't feel any direct impact to what the federal government is trying to do? We have to be strong. We have to be strong economically, and we have to protect our jurisdiction, as was done and understood and recognized by the fathers of Confederation and the people who sat around the table in 1982 that reinforced the provinces' jurisdiction over natural resources.

The unconstitutional regulation would limit the development of our natural resources, irreparably harming its economy, our international reputation among investors, and ultimately our prosperity. You talk about the uncertainty created by this argument that we have with the current federal government. Yes, investors are very concerned about that, but they're not concerned about Alberta's position. They're concerned about the federal government's position. We've seen what has happened to investment in Alberta and Canada under the last 10 years of the Liberal administration. Our productivity levels are stagnant. We're about last of all industrialized countries in the world in terms of productivity growth over the last 10 years. Only one country, Luxembourg, you know, a population the size of Red Deer, is the only national jurisdiction that has done worse than Canada because of federal government policies.

Mr. Speaker, ultimately, the proposed amendments to Bill 45 are our government's use of the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act, which are about accountability and ensuring that the federal government stays within its lane. The ability of Alberta's oil and gas producers to operate in our province is critical to ensuring that our energy industry remains prosperous and that those of us who need this industry can feed our families. This is why I support Bill 45.

As our Premier has stated, our government will continue to use every tool we can to defend the best interests of Albertans, our economy, and our industry. These amendments will further assert Alberta's exclusive provincial jurisdiction to develop its natural resources and secure our southern border. We will not tolerate the continuous and unconstitutional overreach of the federal government. Alberta will continue its pursuit of doubling our oil and gas production to meet the growing global demands for energy

and will not let Ottawa stand in the way of our province's future prosperity. I couldn't agree with her more, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

If Bill 45 is passed, this vital designation would be structured into the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act. Mr. Speaker, this will ensure that our peace officers have the additional tools they need to deter drug traffickers, particularly the deadly opioid fentanyl. To the member opposite who was talking about the relatively small quantities of fentanyl that were intercepted at the border: what is intercepted doesn't talk about what actually goes through. If you're not enforcing the border, if you're not monitoring the border, you might not see anything. It doesn't mean that nothing is going through. We have 50,000 people in Canada that have died so far because of this terrible thing. You know, this is a real problem, and anybody that says it's not a real problem doesn't understand what's actually going on.

I'm in favour of Bill 45, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025, and I strongly encourage my colleagues on all sides of the Chamber to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to appreciate members from both sides of the House giving fully articulate arguments in this last debate around Bill 45. The government will examine and consider those. Thanks particularly to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Member for Edmonton-West Henday for their thoughtful contributions. However, I will move that we adjourn debate on this bill to be revisited again later.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 47 Automobile Insurance Act

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance, the President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to move second reading of Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act.

Right now auto insurance in Alberta isn't affordable, second highest in the country behind only Ontario, nor is it easy for Albertans to get prompt health and well-being support following a collision. Currently if an Albertan can't work after a collision, they lose income, may have to go to court, and may have to wait for a settlement. Mr. Speaker, we propose to change this under this new piece of legislation. The Automobile Insurance Act proposes key changes to make auto insurance in Alberta more affordable and stable. Most importantly, the legislation puts a care-first auto insurance system into place so Albertans who are injured in an accident can better access the supports they need to recover. In fact, if this legislation is passed, Alberta will be the first province in Canada to adopt a privately delivered care-first auto insurance system.

This legislation establishes the benefits Alberta drivers may be entitled to if they are injured, under what conditions they could sue the at-fault driver for additional expenses, and how Albertans can appeal care and treatment decisions made by their insurance company. Under this care-first insurance system everyone injured in a traffic accident will have access to medical and rehabilitation benefits to support their recovery. Those who are unable to work while they recover will have access to income support benefits, and

those who suffer a permanent injury that will never fully resolve may be eligible for a permanent impairment benefit.

Why does this matter? What we heard in consultations was that many people sue for two main reasons, because they need to access better coverage for care and treatment as well as their lost income needs. That, in turn, drives up costs for auto insurance while also making it more difficult for people to get the help they need to move on. That's why this proposed legislation will put the focus on providing good access to care for those who are injured in an accident.

I'd now like to touch upon key components of this legislation. The Automobile Insurance Act establishes when benefits would be payable to Albertans who are injured in an auto accident. It also sets out what insurers would need to pay or reimburse Albertans for medical rehabilitation and other benefits. Those benefits would apply as long as the services are needed so the injured person recovers from injuries caused by the accident. As well, this legislation establishes an income replacement benefit as a bridge forward for those who are unable to continue their employment due to an auto accident. This would also apply if injured individuals are denied Employment Insurance Act benefits or are unable to continue their studies due to an injury. There would also be a benefit established for those who sustain a permanent impairment from an accident as well as a death benefit for the spouses, adult partners, or other dependants of someone who passes as the result of an auto accident. These benefits would put the care of individuals first so that they don't feel the need to sue before they get the help they need.

In reality, reducing litigation is the only real way to materially lower the price that Albertans pay for their auto insurance. Again, what we're trying to do is remove the need for Albertans to have to turn to litigation to cover their care, treatment, and lost income needs. However, as I have said before, fault does still matter. That's why those injured in collisions would still have the ability to sue at-fault drivers in some cases such as if the at-fault driver is responsible for causing an injury and is convicted of certain driving offences or if losses exceed the benefit amounts provided by the insurance policy. Of course, at-fault drivers will continue to pay more for their insurance.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation would help us make necessary changes to Alberta's auto insurance system. If passed, this act would bring the province one step closer to a care-first automobile insurance system that better serves the needs of Albertans and supports them when it matters most.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move the second reading of Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills has the call.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act, I am not pleased with the content of the bill. A privately delivered no-fault model is not a win-win for Albertans. It is potentially a lose-lose. Higher premiums, lower benefits: that's what's at risk.

5:10

We did just hear the minister acknowledge that high and escalating insurance rates in Alberta required the government to act. On that, Mr. Speaker, we agree. Alberta has the second-highest insurance rates in this country. On average the lowest rates can be found in Quebec, where drivers pay approximately \$500 a year less than drivers in Alberta. To put that into perspective, \$500 a year is

two-thirds of the tax changes for those earning over \$60,000 a year in Budget 2025, so two-thirds of those tax changes already erased from what we pay in auto insurance. Put another way, that \$500 makes up 25 per cent of the monthly AISH payments received by Albertans who cannot work, those payments that we're so incredibly proud of, that maybe allow somebody to buy auto insurance; probably not. That \$500 is also approximately equal to how much an Albertan would pay for groceries in a month, so this is considerable.

Before we even begin to look at Bill 47 on its own, in order to achieve the environment insurance companies need, according to them and changes already introduced by this government, for them to be profitable, we need to increase the premiums for good drivers by 7.5 per cent this year and an additional 7.5 per cent next year. Mr. Speaker, that results in the average Albertan paying another \$100 or more this year and an additional \$100 or more next year.

You know, the communications surrounding this bill are saying that Albertans will save \$400 a year when the bill is fully implemented, probably about two years from now, probably longer than that. We could talk about that for a while. I'm a little unclear, however, Mr. Speaker, whether or not the \$400 that Albertans will be saving is \$400 less than what they're currently paying today or \$400 less than what they'll be paying two years from now, when we already know that they'll be paying \$200 more than they're paying today. If it is \$400 below what they're going to be paying in two years, I think the communications surrounding the bill are disingenuous.

But, Mr. Speaker, let's look at some of the nuts and bolts of the bill. The bill will introduce privately delivered no-fault insurance in Alberta. As the minister acknowledged, we're heading into new territory that we haven't seen anywhere else in Canada, so we can't really be certain of what the outcomes are going to be. The government has referenced the insurance system in Manitoba as a model that we're following in drafting this legislation and for the benefits that would be paid out for the future auto insurance system here in Alberta, but there is one fundamental difference between Manitoba's system and the system proposed in Bill 47. That fundamental difference is that auto insurance in Manitoba is publicly delivered by a Crown corporation, not by private insurance companies. Bill 47 entrenches the private delivery auto insurance model here in Alberta, and that difference is important.

A poll conducted by Ipsos in 2021 found that fewer than 25 per cent of Canadians are satisfied with their insurance provider. People don't trust insurance companies. I think we all know that these days they also don't trust government, and they don't trust lawyers, but they don't trust insurance companies, and with good reason. For this reason, the current auto insurance model includes an individual's ability to litigate because litigation has been necessary.

Insurance companies have been well known for denying claims, offering payouts well below the actual benefits for which their clients are eligible. They're well known for cutting short benefits, including physiotherapy. They're well known for requesting clients to have medical assessments conducted by their own doctors and medical staff, which are probably going to make different recommendations than that client's family doctor, if they have a family doctor.

How many in this House, Mr. Speaker, I wonder, have heard a story from family or a friend that is struggling with their insurance company? How many have heard stories about people being denied claims, being cut off from benefits before they'd returned to full health, before they have recovered to the point where they can resume work?

Alberta today has a mixed tort system to ensure that Albertans receive the benefits that they need to recover from accidents. If

private insurance companies were already paying out the benefits that Albertans required to return to health or to the extent possible return to their normal lives and return to work, if private insurance companies were already doing what we hoped them to do in Bill 47, we wouldn't actually need the right to litigate in Alberta, but we do have litigation in Alberta because we don't trust insurance companies.

This brings us to a question, Mr. Speaker. What makes us believe that insurance companies are ready to change their behaviour and turn their current model upside down? As I've said in this House before, private companies have one goal and one goal only, to generate profit for their shareholders. Insurance companies might use words on their website to say that their mandate is to serve their clients or to ensure the well-being of their clients or they might advertise that they're out there to help Albertans, but I think most of us know that the decisions that they are making aren't based on the well-being of their clients. They're based on profitability.

The changes to auto insurance in this bill take away the rights of Albertans to litigate for the benefits that they have a right to, and the government has determined that somehow Albertans' insurance premiums are going to go down when we remove the right to litigate. While the government references Manitoba as a model that they are following, they're not mentioning Ontario, which has a hybrid no-fault system. It's the only jurisdiction in Canada where the rates are higher than what we see here in Alberta.

How do we anticipate that removing the right to litigate is going to lower premiums? It seems to me that insurance companies will return to the practice of paying benefits less than what people actually have the right to receive because the benefits are going to apply, as the minister said in his opening remarks, as required. And who determines those requirements? The insurance companies that are in control of all of this.

When it comes to payouts, there's going to be a range of benefits that apply based on the needs of the person who has been injured, and that range is going to be assessed by the insurance companies, and profitability comes from the practice of paying out fewer benefits than what people have the right to receive. It's that delta that allows them to lower their auto insurance ratio, the ratio that is the difference between the average premium paid and the average claim. When auto insurance companies have the ability to increase that delta, we're now going to rely on them to pass those savings along in lower premiums.

Mr. Speaker, we're relying on the Automobile Insurance Rate Board, that has the role of keeping insurance companies honest and their profits in check. Those current rules hold insurance profits to 6 per cent. Now, we also have to ask the question: if profits are currently below 6 per cent and they're permitted to achieve 6 per cent, doesn't that mean that the aforementioned savings won't actually all be passed along to the client but actually withheld until that insurance company achieves that 6 per cent profit level that is their target?

5:20

We're apparently saving Albertans money by taking away their right to seek benefits that they need to recover. It seems the government understands that we can't actually trust insurance companies because this act creates a tribunal to review insurance company decisions. It seems it's already embedded here that we don't entrust insurance companies to do what we hope they're going to do because we're creating a tribunal to make sure that they do that.

The minister is going to determine who sits on the tribunal, and I certainly hope that we're going to include members such as judges that have previously heard cases against auto insurance providers

to hold them to account. I hope that the minister will commit to those tribunal members being focused on the premiums and the benefits provided to Albertans and not just the profits of insurance companies.

Mr. Speaker, now we know there's going to be a tribunal. Who's going to represent the injured as they bring their case to the tribunal? Will the legal profession still be engaged in this process, and who's going to cover those legal costs? If an insurance company is going to end up paying those legal costs that come to the tribunal, are we really saving as much as we think we are? If the tribunal finds that insurance companies aren't actually shifting their model of delivery, that they remain focused on profit, what consequences do they face? What processes are in place for insurers to make this shift to care first and away from profitability?

The legislation makes the carrot clear for insurance companies, but what about the stick? Will the tribunal have the ability to levy penalties against insurance companies that have set precedents for not serving their clients? While the Auto Insurance Rate Board regulates the rates charged by insurance companies, the AIRB does not regulate the practice of the insurance industry. The AIRB does monitor the profits earned by insurance companies, but they don't regulate the practices of those insurance companies to achieve those profits.

It seems that the premium savings goal with this bill is spurious. It feels like the benefits Albertans will receive when injured might be no better than they are today. Albertans might not be seeing any savings in their premiums, and they might not be seeing better benefits. Now, what's also curious, I'll throw in here, Mr. Speaker, is that the government of Alberta levies a tax on insurance premiums paid, so the government is actually incentivized by higher premiums because they get a higher tax when they do that.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left?

The Speaker: Five minutes and 53 seconds.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you for that precision.

I'd also like to chat a little bit about: if this looks like it might not actually deliver what we hope that it would deliver, that begs the question what options we might have had in front of us. The government actually commissioned a report by Oliver, Wyman Limited to give some of these suggestions, and there are some recommendations in that report. The report looked at the impact on the cost of average insurance premiums of various auto insurance models. They compared Alberta's tort model for at-fault insurance to systems across several other jurisdictions, including a proposal from the Insurance Bureau of Canada. The report assessed those models and gave kind of the economic impact of each.

Some of the findings, Mr. Speaker, are interesting. It found that the greatest cost savings to Albertans would be to switch to a B.C. model, where the public insurer offered both bodily injury and vehicle damage coverage, which would result in premiums of about \$1,200 versus the Alberta current system of \$2,000. While this report looked at several other jurisdictions and came back with a recommendation that a publicly delivered model would actually serve Albertans the best, this government chose to reject those recommendations and instead tread down a new path, an untested path, a path that doesn't really have the checks and balances in place to really truly protect Albertans and ensure that they're getting lower premiums and better benefits. The report told us that generally public auto insurers have the greatest cost savings to drivers. We do have higher set-up costs, but the goal here is lower premiums for Albertans.

We do of course have to have the conversation around jobs, jobs that are currently held by private insurance companies that would

likely be replaced then by public servants, jobs that are currently held in the legal profession that may not be translated if in a public system we actually paid out better benefits and didn't need the litigation that the current system needs.

It just seems that the government has put forward this bill not necessarily looking at what their own report told us was best for Albertans. They're putting forward a bill where we're going to trust insurance companies that have a history of not doing what is best for their clients. We're putting forward a bill where it's already embedded that we know we can't trust insurance companies, because we created a tribunal. We're putting forward a bill where we already know that Albertans over the next two years are going to be paying even higher insurance premiums and burdened with those premiums when they're currently feeling the crunch of cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, I really think that this bill needs to go back to the drawing board. We can't accept the bill as is. We need to have that consultation, as the minister has said, take place. I think we need to go back to the drawing board and duly consider what we learned from the report that was commissioned and what we have heard from all of those consultations. On this side of the House we have also had extensive consultations around this bill with insurance providers, with insurance brokers, with the Insurance Bureau of Canada, with litigators, with people who have been dealing with insurance companies in their own claims. We think, quite frankly, that we need to pull this bill, go back to the drawing board, start again and do better for Albertans.

While I have one more minute, I think I will graciously give all of the people here the benefit of stop hearing my voice and go on to the next voice that is going to rise and talk about this bill and, hopefully, also share their thoughts on how this bill does not do the best for Albertans. We can do better, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that, you know, we don't like to deal with insurance. It's a necessary evil, though. If we're going to drive, we need insurance. We need to protect ourselves in case the unexpected happens. So we're going to have it. We've got to make the best of it and make the best program that we can have. That's exactly what the Alberta government is aiming to do with Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act.

This monumental change to how we handle auto insurance in this province, while it may sound like just another policy shift, is designed to make things better for everyone, especially if you find yourself in an accident. Right now Alberta's auto insurance system is costly and complicated. We have some of the highest premiums in the country, like has been said before here, second only to Ontario.

5:30

When an accident happens, it's not just about getting the right care; it's about the possibility of getting tied up in a long, expensive court battle. The current system focuses too much on lawsuits and not enough on actually helping people get back on their feet after an accident. It takes time, money, and effort, and sometimes that means people don't get the care they need when they need it most. If you've ever been in a more serious auto accident, you can attest to these problems.

The care-first system is a simple idea: let's shift the focus from courtrooms and lengthy legal fights to providing care for those

who've been injured in an accident. This isn't just about saving money; it's about making sure Albertans get the medical treatment, rehab, and support they need right away. Whether it's chiropractic care to get you back on your feet or income support if you're unable to work, the system is designed to put people's needs first.

Not only that, but it can affect one's whole life with uncertainty, time, and money. With today's economy many Albertans can ill afford to sit and wait around. One of the best parts of this system is that it cuts out a lot of the unnecessary legal costs. I know when I was involved in the consultations, that was what the insurance companies brought to us, how big a portion the legal cost was to the entire premium. Under the new rules lawsuits won't be as common unless someone is really at fault like in a criminal case. Instead of spending months or even years in a courtroom, people can focus on healing, getting the help they need, and moving on with their lives.

That doesn't mean people won't still have options. If you feel your insurance isn't doing right by you, you can appeal the decision. If you've been injured in a way that leaves you permanently damaged or worse, there will be options to make sure your family is supported. It's a fair system that balances care and accountability.

Now let's talk about the part Albertans really want to hear, the savings. We know that auto insurance is expensive, and for a lot of people it feels like a constant burden. Under the care-first system Alberta drivers can expect to see savings up to \$400 a year once the system is fully rolled out in 2027. That's real money back in your pocket, making it a little easier to manage the cost of living, especially as prices continue to rise all around us. Mr. Speaker, let's mark down another savings win for the Conservative government to the people of Alberta.

This new system won't just be about cutting down costs. It's also about ensuring that when you or your loved ones are in need, you're not left waiting or wondering how to get the care you deserve. It's about cutting through the red tape and making sure people get the help they need as quickly as possible, without a hassle.

Of course, like any change, this will take time. The Alberta government is working closely with insurance companies, health professionals, and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition. We want to make sure that everyone has access to the best care possible without the stress of fighting through a complex system.

While we might all grumble about insurance, we can agree on one thing: when the worst happens, we need a system that'll help us recover quickly and doesn't make it harder for us. The care-first system is a step in the right direction in ensuring that our insurance system works for us, not the other way around. It's about protecting our health and finances and our peace of mind. Let's make insurance better for all of us.

It's been a long, long process that I know the minister has gone through. I've gone through I don't know how many meetings on this one. I think I've talked to just about every insurance broker around and their associations and the legal associations, and everyone's definitely had their input, and we've come back with this bill. I think it, hopefully, takes away some of the court battles that we're experiencing now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 47. This is a bill that promises affordability but doesn't have affordability as an outcome. It's a bill that government claims would make auto insurance more affordable for Albertan families, but, make no mistake, this bill doesn't deliver affordability. It delivers risks, risks to injured Albertans, risks to working families. It delivers risks to everyone who relies on a fair and accountable

insurance system when the worst things happen. It's being sold as a fix for rising premiums, but the truth is that this is a high-risk, low-accountability model that will shift the financial burden of accidents away from insurers and on to everyday Albertans at a time when Albertans are struggling with the cost of living.

Let's be clear. This bill is not a fix. Do you know what it is, Mr. Speaker? It is an experiment. It is enabling legislation that leaves nearly all critical decisions to regulation. All benefits will be done through regulations and won't come to this floor for a conversation or discussion. This is happening when we all know, as some of the members of the government would also mention, that there is a health care scandal, when there are contractual scandals. Imagine that, such an amount of change that is being centred within the cabinet and within the minister's office. This is a process that lacks transparency, it lacks proper public consultation, and it's expected to be in place by January 2027 without Albertans ever being shown the full details of costs and benefits.

The government claims that this is a way to lower premiums. We all from this side of the House have been speaking to insurance premiums and how Alberta is one of the leading provinces when it comes to higher cost of insurance. The government's key argument is simple. Premiums will come down eventually. That is the argument that is being made through this bill. The government says that this will save about \$400 per year under this no-fault model according to the report. That is the Wyman and Nous report. But even the government admits that in the first two years premiums that you expect will come down – no – will go up. And that is assuming every simple assumption works perfectly.

Let's not forget that we have heard these types of assumptions built into policies and government decisions. We have seen this before under the Alberta pension plan. It was a promise that was based on assumption until the evidence showed up, but the government now doesn't talk about it.

We need to stop gambling with people's financial well-being, Mr. Speaker. We need to focus on ways of addressing affordability without putting people's lives and financial well-being at risk.

The idea that a no-fault system automatically lowers premiums simply doesn't hold up to scrutiny. Ontario, which uses a hybrid model with no-fault features, saw premiums spike by 25 per cent in 2024 alone. It's the only province that competes with Alberta when it comes to high premiums. New Jersey and New South Wales both introduced no-fault systems in the name of affordability only to later reverse course when costs continued to climb. Even Manitoba's model, which the minister cites quite often as an inspiration, is publicly delivered, not a privately delivered model, with significant restrictions on the right to sue.

5:40

Here is the difference. Those systems that I've highlighted are public. Bill 47 creates a privately delivered, no-fault model, a combination that is largely untested. It's the worst of both worlds: less accountability for insurers and less protection for Albertans. This is not a premium reduction; it is a shift. It's a shift of the cost.

Let's talk about what happens when you are in a crash under this proposed bill. Unless the at-fault driver is criminally convicted, you lose your right to sue for pain and suffering, your full wage loss, your future care needs. That's not a small change, Mr. Speaker. That's a massive change with a significant risk, with significant cost implications.

Now, imagine you're a truck driver, a tradesperson, or somebody who drives for a living. If you're injured and can't work, you will be stuck with capped benefits set by insurance, and this ensures no way to recover your full loss. That's not a relief. That is actually not a cost reduction but an abandonment.

All this is happening while motor vehicle injuries are on the rise. Not that long ago in a committee the minister acknowledged that we are “seeing an increase in personal injury claims.” Imagine that at that particular moment, when we’re seeing such an increase. It’s not a time to reconsider in terms of how much the right to sue and the claims could be put in danger.

If affordability doesn’t improve and protections are reduced, who will actually benefit from Bill 47? That is an important question that we should be asking ourselves. The answer is clear. The privately owned profit companies will be the ones who will be benefiting from it. They will face less legal liability, they will gain greater control over treatment approvals, and they will continue to raise premiums because this bill includes no caps, no public rates review, and it’s mostly centred in cabinet decisions. How do we make sure that accountability is in place? How do we make sure that we won’t be talking about Mraiche infiltrating into this?

The affordability crisis is real, but this bill is not the solution. We have the highest or the second-highest premiums, but this bill is not a solution. Alberta families are struggling with affordability. Insurance costs are a real burden. Young drivers and families with teens pay the highest rate. We’ve heard this afternoon in question period that residents of northeast Calgary in communities like Redstone and Skyview Ranch saw premiums increase by 50 per cent since the UCP government came to power.

Alberta often ranks first, as has already been alluded to by the Member for Calgary-Foothills, the second highest in Canada for auto insurance if not the first, for the most part. But this bill doesn’t fix that. It actually asks Albertans to give up their legal rights now for savings that they may never see, with no guarantee, no timeline, no accountability, nothing comes to the floor here for discussion, and no proper consultations where Albertans can provide their perspectives for a better system.

Three point four million new auto insurance policies need to be developed between now and 2027. Polls show, Mr. Speaker, that most Albertans support the current at-fault system and overwhelmingly want affordable, fair premiums. This bill delivers neither. It is not what Albertans are asking for. Albertans want a system that protects victims, not profits, a system that holds reckless drivers accountable. Albertans want to keep insurance affordable but not exploitable. This has significant loopholes that will make it exploitable.

If this government was serious about reducing the cost, there are better ways, Mr. Speaker. Stronger oversight to protect drivers from unjustified increases. Above all, we need transparency and public consultation, not enabling legislation that hands everything over to private regulation behind closed doors. This bill fails Albertans on every front but especially on affordability, which is the very reason the government says that we need this bill. It is unproven, it is unaccountable, and in the long run it is unaffordable. It gives up Albertans’ rights in exchange for vague promises that don’t hold up under scrutiny. It rewards insurers and leaves victims with fewer options, higher risks, and less protections. We can and must do better.

I will not support Bill 47, and I urge my colleagues to stand with Albertans for their right to protect their rights and to struggle to reduce the rates. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this bill. The issues discussed in this bill are of critical importance for my constituents, insurance in particular. It’s a very important issue, the reason being that my constituency, northeast Calgary, has been hit

by three hailstorms in the last few years, starting in 2016. That was a relatively light one. Then in 2020 northeast Calgary was devastated by a hailstorm that cost almost \$1.3 billion. And then in 2024 again there was a huge hailstorm that caused damages, insurable damages somewhere to the tune of \$2.8 billion. These storms are the costliest among any Canadian natural disaster.

What happened after those storms? Insurance companies started to jack up the price of insurance premiums for our constituents. In particular, if you are in that particular postal code, some will just deny insurance coverage. At the time of renewal many companies decided to send notices to constituents that if you have made two claims in the last five years, you would not be eligible to renew with your insurance company.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, that pretty much was everyone living in northeast Calgary. Calgary was hit by two major, major hailstorms in the last two years. As a result of that and as a result of the UCP policies, my constituents, and for the most part all Albertans, are paying some of the highest auto insurance premiums in the country. That’s on top of the fastest rising rent, highest inflation, unemployment, and the lowest minimum wage across the country.

During those hailstorms – that’s important background – we asked the government both times. Nobody wants them to act as insurer for those people; all people asked for was that government be transparent about how many claims have been received by insurance companies, how many have been processed, and how many have been pending. The second thing people were asking from government was to provide a list of contractors so that people can find somebody to do the hail repairs from some trusted source. Another thing people were asking for was that they hold insurance companies to account and that their claims be processed in a timely fashion. In both hailstorms there were similar asks, but government did not do anything. They didn’t help northeast Calgary.

During those times there were other claims, other disasters in Alberta. For instance, one that comes to mind is the flooding in Fort McMurray. That was, Mr. Speaker, also an insurable event. There were 13 insurance companies in the province of Alberta who were able to insure those damages, but government rented a helicopter and five, six of them went with a cheque the next day to Fort McMurray. Out of \$250 million damages government provided almost \$150 million.

That’s really good that government provided them support, but government ignored northeast Calgary completely, and what we got instead was the rising cost of insurance. We have been asking this government to look into this issue. Government commissioned some reports as well, and based on those reports, based on cross-jurisdictional analysis, government picked up the worst model that they could choose to fix the problem that they have created.

We were in government until 2019. There was a cap of a 5 per cent insurance premium increase, and at that time we didn’t see insurance companies go out of business. In fact, their profits are published publicly, and clearly they were making money. But when the UCP came into power, many of the people who were campaigning on the UCP election campaign became insurance lobbyists, and they campaigned the then UCP government and Premier, and they handed the pen to insurance companies. Now we are seeing skyrocketing insurance costs all around. Not only that; there are some insurance companies, as I mentioned, that are limiting coverage, even in some cases refusing to provide coverage.

What this bill will do is that it will fundamentally change how insurance works in Alberta. They will get rid of, you know, tort-based auto insurance in Alberta and bring in a no-fault private insurance scheme. I have talked to individuals who understand this

area. I have talked to lawyers; they have reached out to us. We have talked to medical health professionals who deal with that. I think the only beneficiaries of this change are the insurance companies.

The government claims, completely wrongfully, that somehow the costs within the system are to blame for rising insurance premiums. For instance, there was a case – I will try to research and table it. There was one physician who worked for insurance companies and had submitted some 17 or so reports, and not one of them was in favour of the victim. They were all in favour of the insurance companies. The court has to intervene, ask for a different medical opinion, so that that person can get the benefit they were entitled to.

The other thing that they are doing – one, they're introducing a model that would not benefit Albertans, would not result in any significant savings, and make things even worse and make insurance expensive – they are also putting together a tribunal, mostly in consultation with insurance companies, made up of insurance companies. Now they will decide what benefits injured Albertans are entitled to.

They are taking out the oversight function of courts that we had in place for a long, long time so that now when people who have

some defined benefits in the legislation, if they are not satisfied, their recourse is that they will go to the tribunal that is made up of insurance industry people and they will decide what their benefits should be. What they are doing is that they are adding a strong curative clause in the legislation. What that means is that no action lies from the decision of the tribunal and their decision is final. They are putting that into the legislation as well.

I think this entire scheme is designed to save money for insurance companies at the expense of injured Albertans and it won't help Albertans lower their premiums or have insurance that is affordable. While we are in the midst of an affordability crisis, Albertans expect their government to stand on their side and not on the insurance company's side, but in the last six years this government . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt; however, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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