



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 9, 2025

Day 96

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP),
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 1

Vacant: 2

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Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my great pleasure to introduce one of my very favourite people, certainly in the top three on the entire planet. He used to be a very frequent visitor here at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and anyone who's been around for a decade, like many of us that I see here, will have seen him when he was literally half of the size that he is today. He is my 17, almost-18-year-old son. He graduates from high school in June and has recently committed to playing football in Iowa at St. Ambrose University. I hope you'll rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, also seated in my gallery today is the family of Legislative Assembly page Clara Veldkamp. I would like to introduce Clara's grandmother Idelle Peters; Clara's mother, Andrea; and her brothers, Caleb and Jonathan. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last but not least from my page today, we're joined by new staff of the Legislative Assembly Office that are participating in a new employee orientation. Their orientation includes learning more about the legislative process, budgetary and committee processes, enabling each participant to apply this knowledge to his or her new role at the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta. I invite you to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock has a school to introduce.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a school group from the Barrhead county Covenant Canadian Reformed School. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the smartest students in Alberta, from St. Augustine school in Ponoka. All of these three grade 6 classes, with their amazing teachers, had a tour of the Legislature today. I ask you all to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and delight to introduce some amazing humans here with us today: Brenda Meneghetti, Lee Krywitsky, Terry Field, and Rayne Rousell. These are community leaders, not-for-profit leaders, energy

professionals. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd love to introduce some fantastic folks who are here today: Trish McOrmond, Isadora McOrmond-Williams, Robyn McOrmond-Williams, Will van Engen. They're here from For Our Kids, a grassroots network committed to taking action to reduce the impacts of climate change. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, Alberta ranchers and farmers who have taken their time away from their operations today to be here to express their grave concerns about allowing coal development in the eastern slopes. Rachel Herbert, Mac and Lorena Blades, Reata Schlosser, Gordon Cartwright, and Laramy Gibson, please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Ken Francis. Mr. Francis is a former Saskatchewan MLA, who I had the pleasure to work with on the Pacific North West Economic Region. He is now part of the strong oil and gas sector and the mayor of Kindersley, Saskatchewan. I ask him to please stand and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Erol Weston. Erol is a constituent of mine in Calgary-Elbow, and he travelled here today because he wants our beautiful mountains protected. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Priya Usman. She is a constituent of mine and an advocate for protecting our beautiful mountains. I ask Priya to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some more incredibly busy Alberta ranchers who are here to defend their land and to speak on behalf of all Albertans affected by coal mining in the eastern slopes. Mandy Olsgard, Jess Fallis, Rex Davis and Donna Davis, Doug Nelson, and Glenn Cass, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce some friends of mine who are visiting the gallery to express their opposition to coal mining in the eastern slopes. I invite Jennifer Klimek, Fran Hodgson, Geraldine Hofs, Dorian Smith, Kristi Anderson, and Jim Dermody to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise on behalf of the Member for Sherwood Park to introduce Dana Pugh, who lives in Okotoks, where she runs a successful photography business and raised her family; and Sheila Stacey, president of the Highwood NDP Constituency Association, who has helped them achieve a 600 per cent increase in members. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Robert Beuck from Clearwater county; Dr. Jane Drummond, a health professional in Nordegg; and Vance Buchwald, a retired fish biologist with Alberta Environment. These three people are here today to learn more about coal. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to be here today and to introduce my son, William Schulz. He loves question period, and it is great to have him back in the Legislature. Along with him is my ministerial assistant, Mason Kidney, who is a student and doing an excellent job in my office. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Calgary-Currie constituent Kathryn Pennington, who is deeply opposed to this government's short-sighted decisions on coal mining. I invite Kathryn to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my constituent Cas Bullis, animal sports therapist, activist, and community builder. Like many, Cas is worried about this government's reckless attitude towards the environment and the health of Albertans. I ask Cas to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you today my constituents and long-time environmental supporters, activists Mary Nokleby and Reynold Reimer. I believe they're probably behind me, as I don't see them here. Please rise and receive a warm welcome.

Members' Statements

Northern and Regional Economic Development Program

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is doubling down on regional growth and tripling our commitment to the communities that power our province. While other provinces talk a big game about economic diversification, Alberta is actually leading the way, investing nearly \$10 million through the northern and regional economic development program. The NRED program drives innovation, attracts investment, and creates good-paying, lasting

jobs across Alberta. This year alone our government doubled the number of projects supported through NRED, resulting more than 80 local regional projects being funded. From Indigenous-led housing affordability plans to cutting-edge neurotechnology, tourism, and support for diverse industries, Alberta's government is creating a future-proof economy that is built to last. From Taber to Slave Lake, Lethbridge to the Chiniki First Nation, local projects are being supercharged to build economic resilience and prosperity right where it matters most, right here in our communities.

1:40

We know that rural and northern Alberta face real challenges, from workforce gaps to aging infrastructure, but under our strong United Conservative government these challenges are being met with real results-driven action. We tripled NRED's annual funding, expanded eligibility, and made it easier than ever to access up to \$300,000 in grant support. We've cut red tape, empowered local leaders, and ensured Indigenous- and Métis-led projects receive up to 75 per cent of eligible costs recovered. While global tariffs and headwinds test other economies, Alberta is forging ahead job by job, project by project with smart, targeted investment that puts Albertans first.

Mr. Speaker, this government doesn't just believe in Alberta's northern and regional communities; we're building their future. Since 2022 more than 225 projects have received support through this program, and thanks to Budget 2025 the momentum will continue with another \$9 million committed over the next three years. Whether you live in a northern town, a southern municipality, or Indigenous community, Alberta's government has your back.

Thank you.

Coal Development Policies and First Nations Communities

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, back in 2021 the UCP rescinded the Loughheed coal policy and then reinstated the policy after much public push-back against coal exploration, particularly in the eastern slopes. Two First Nations, the Siksika Nation and the Kainai Nation, who have traditional territory in the area that the coal exploration would affect and who are also downstream from the eastern slopes, helped push back. I had the deep honour of providing legal education about the coal policy when the UCP were moving back and forth on the policy shifts, and today is no different. My colleagues on this side of the House have spoken about the deleterious effects from coal exploration in the eastern slopes, including selenium in the water, which is dangerous not only for our drinking water but also for aquatic life and agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, another concern that is oft not talked about: the cultural activities of the Niitsitapi on their own traditional territory. The area that will be ravaged by coal exploration is known by the Niitsitapi as Napi's playground. It holds significance among the Blackfoot people. Napi, or the old man – yes, the origination of the Oldman River – that area is referred to as Napi's playground. Napi in Blackfoot culture is a trickster but also credited with creating the world and everything in it. In that area: fish, plants, and minerals that are important to Blackfoot ceremonies and to their culture. While I cannot speak on behalf of the Blackfoot, I do recognize that they deserve to be heard in this Chamber. The right to access those lands will be affected by coal exploration in Napi's playground.

Mr. Speaker, I tabled the most recent public update from Kainai, that in clear terms: this province did not consult with them when reversing their recent moratorium implementing the new coal policy. I urge all members to review this, including the minister of energy. Respect the treaties.

Coal Industry in Alberta

Mr. Rowsell: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is thriving. Under the leadership of our Premier we're at the forefront of growth, innovation, and success. We're breaking down barriers and leaving a legacy of economic strength for future generations. While Alberta is often recognized for its oil and gas resources, we have so much more to offer. One of those resources is coal. Alberta's coal is among the highest quality in the world, yet we often hear misconceptions from across the floor about our coal industry.

Members of the opposition, particularly the NDP and their antioil supporters, argue that coal mining is responsible for selenium contamination in our water. While I agree that selenium levels in water need to be managed, Mr. Speaker, they are misinformed. It is not the coal itself that leads to selenium contamination but the overburden, the layer of sedimentary rock above the coal seam.

That being the case, are they also against all forms of mining; i.e., mining for critical minerals? Alberta's coal mining projects are fully reclaimable under provincial law. Some modern coal projects, especially in regions facing selenium concerns, use multiple lines of defence, including innovative water treatment systems like saturated rock fills. These systems promote natural processes that help remove selenium from the water before it's returned to the environment, effectively reducing the environmental impact when properly managed, yet we've heard members of the opposition criticize the coal industry while praising mining operations in their own constituency.

Mr. Speaker, now is the time when Alberta could greatly benefit from the revenue generated by this multibillion-dollar resource, one that is called a critical raw material in the EU. These funds could be used to pay down debt, support essential infrastructure projects, and fund vital social programs, and we can do all this while ensuring environmentally responsible practices are in place.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Member Irwin: One of my favourite memories as a kid was being out in the country on gorgeous hot summer days, the kind of days that you hope will never end, days spent playing and swimming in the river for hours. Often we'd be in the Freeman River, sometimes the Pembina, both tributaries of the mighty Athabasca River, a river that originates in the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Every Albertan should be able to enjoy them, like we did, for generations to come, but due to this government's reckless policies our waters across our province and beyond are at risk.

Despite the push-back of so many, this is a UCP government that is dead set on expanding coal mining in the eastern slopes. This is a government that time after time is choosing profits over people, choosing to bow down to Australian coal billionaires who could not care less about the livelihoods of Alberta's ranchers and farmers, about the sacred lands of Indigenous nations, or about preserving our stunning landscapes.

There's so much at stake when we consider the impacts of coal mining. There's the loss of habitat for species at risk like grizzly bears and bull trout. There's the severe risk to our water sources. When selenium enters the water, it causes deformations of fish, and once it's in the water, there's no known way to remove it. The eastern slopes are the water source for millions of Albertans, including folks in Rocky Mountain House, Drayton Valley, Spruce

Grove, Leduc, right here in the city of Edmonton, and many more communities. We are all impacted.

Today I'm so proud that we're joined by farmers, ranchers, scientists, parents, students, and a whole lot of regular Albertans who are again standing up and saying no to coal. These folks come from all parts of our beautiful province. They're not here for partisan purposes. They're here because they want their kids and their grandkids to be able to drink our water, to swim in our rivers, just like so many of us did. They're urging this government – and we are, too – to do the right thing: say no to coal. It's not too late. But if they don't act soon, it will be.

Borealis Gallery Exhibit on Destroyed Temples of Ukraine

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was built in 1892 through donations from a local village of the Kyiv region of Ukraine. In 1934 this monument to Ukrainian architecture was shut down by the Soviet regime, and in World War II the whole surrounding village was burned down, leaving only the church.

Despite surviving a Communist dictatorship and history's most violent conflict, the times of trial for this church were not over. In February 2022 Russian troops occupied the village as part of Putin's war on Ukraine. The occupation lasted only one month. In that time nearly all the buildings in the town were destroyed or looted, and this time the church was not an exception.

This is one of 630 religious sites which have been ruined, damaged, or disrupted across Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion. This includes a Jewish school struck by mortar shelling, an Islamic cultural centre destroyed by a missile shock wave, and churches of all denominations left scarred or ruined. Even Russian Orthodox temples have not been spared, reinforcing the destructive nature of the Russian regime, which has already sacrificed hundreds of thousands of its own soldiers for its own ambitions.

These stories break my heart. I take solace in knowing that indiscriminate violence is not going unrecorded. In 2023 the Museum of the Maidan launched the exhibit *Destroyed Temples of Ukraine* so that people could reflect on the loss of those cherished places of worship and heritage.

Thanks to the work of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and their partnership with the Legislative Assembly Office this exhibit is now freely available to the public until April 27 in the Queen Elizabeth II Building. I urge all to visit this exhibit, witness this senseless destruction, and stand in solidarity with those who must rebuild. Though destroyed in dishonour, they shall rise in glory and rise in power.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Coal Industry and Public Health

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coal mining harms the health of miners and those living around coal mines and around coal-burning power plants. This is largely due to the exposure to coal ash and the contaminants that get into the air, the soil, and the water. Inhaling larger particles in coal ash damages the lungs, and tiny particulates get into the bloodstream and damage any organ, particularly the brain and the kidneys. Contaminants within these particulates also cause damage. Silica causes severe lung disease and cancer. Other contaminants cause a long list of tissue injuries and symptoms. Radioactive materials within coal dust cause cancer.

1:50

Miners have up to eight times the risk of major lung disease, cancer, or death as the general population does due to their exposure to coal dust, diesel exhaust, asbestos, and radon. Lung diseases include coal workers' pneumoconiosis, commonly called black lung disease. Black lung basically causes slow suffocation as the lungs become scarred and stiff and cannot expand to bring in air. The disability and suffering is terrible. Modern miners face greater risks than their predecessors, and younger people are most affected.

People living in communities surrounding coal mines or coal-burning power plants also suffer from increased rates of heart, kidney, and respiratory diseases; birth defects; depression; and have increased mortality. They often have high concentrations of heavy metals.

We must stop coal mining in Alberta.

Oral Question Period

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

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, ranchers, farmers, and many others have joined us today, taking time away from their busy spring operations, to stand against this government's plans for eastern slope coal mines that will damage vital water supplies that their businesses depend on, and I thank them for being here. This government is ignoring the will of Albertans and common sense by allowing this dangerous project to proceed. What part of "no way" does this government not understand? Why are these concerned farmers and ranchers being forced once again to fight this same fight against coal mining on the eastern slopes?

Mr. Jean: I'd like to thank the member for the question. I'd like to thank all of our guests in the gallery for coming today, especially the former Green member and the former unsuccessful NDP candidates that are here today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the truth, and I think they should tell the truth, too, the truth to Albertans. The truth is not their Twitter ad from last night or this morning that shows a mountaintop actually being removed from a graphic. We've said clearly since the start that we will not allow mountaintop removal in Alberta. We will not. They are not telling the truth, and they should tell the truth to Albertans.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, here's the truth. The negative economic impact of the proposed coal mining on our province, especially on ranchers and farmers who thrive along our eastern slopes, would be catastrophic. These stewards have protected Alberta's pristine landscape for generations, but all of that could be completely destroyed by the proposed project. When so much of the way of life we have is already under threat from Trump's tariffs and the global economic crisis he unleashed, why does this government attack the very stewards of Alberta, families who have built this province, all to the benefit of a foreign company?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the truth is that no one trusts the NDP on the coal file. They had their chance, and they blew it. They blew it so bad that they actually invited billionaires from all across the world to come and invest in the coal industry in Alberta. They said, "Dig, baby, dig" not just in category 3 or 4 but category 2. We're going to protect Alberta, we're going to protect the water, we're

going to protect the land, and we're going to protect people and animals. We're not going to take any lessons from those guys over there and what they did to destroy it.

The Speaker: I might just remind the minister that it is unparliamentary to bring those members who have joined us in the gallery into the debate, and I encourage him to ensure that that doesn't happen.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Gray: This government should be upholding Peter Lougheed's 1976 coal policy. That's what they said they would do in the election, but they've ripped up that promise. Let's be clear about a few things. Coal mining in the eastern slopes has no economic net benefit, the meagre royalties from it wouldn't pay for a day of health care operations, and it is a threat to the way of life that Albertans hold near and dear. Most importantly, Albertans do not want coal mining on the eastern slopes. Why is the Premier forcing through coal mining when Albertans have said no?

Mr. Jean: My goodness gracious, Mr. Speaker, the NDP needs to start reading the press releases that we send out. We've been clear that the '76 policy is in place. It's in place. But the truth is: what is the record of the NDP, that party, just in B.C.? Well, they're the number one exporter of coal in North America. That's their cousins, the same party. We're not going to take any lessons from them. They're destroying the economy and the environment. You can't make that stuff up. The NDP Party do exactly that.

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

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I read press releases from that government during the election, and they promised not to mine the eastern slopes.

Albertans are deeply worried about protecting our pristine landscapes and waters because of environmental impacts from the proposed coal project that could be detrimental to all. The government's own data shows that selenium toxicity downstream of coal mines is a serious environmental hazard, but the UCP's plan to mine the eastern slopes lacks sufficient waste-water management. Why is the government failing to protect our water from dangerous selenium pollution?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My department currently routinely monitors selenium levels at over 100 rivers and tributary sites across Alberta, which is, of course, part of our department's long-term monitoring network. This does include 58 monitoring stations in the South Saskatchewan River and Red Deer River basins. Water levels at over 60 lakes and reservoirs are also monitored continuously, and data is transmitted in near real time. This is the second-highest area in the province where we do monitoring. We want to make sure that Albertans know that their water quality remains safe.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Insufficient monitoring of selenium water is what this government is doing.

Water is life. Without clean water we cannot survive, but this government is choosing to endanger Albertans' water. Ranchers know their animals must have clean drinking water and grasslands, and farmers know that without clean water their crops will fail. It's time for this government to stop prioritizing foreign multinational

coal mining companies and put Albertans first. Why won't the Premier do the right thing, put a stop to the currently inadequate and dangerous proposal to mine for coal on our eastern slopes?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, once again, my department does routinely monitor selenium levels at over 100 rivers and tributary sites across Alberta, of course including the eastern slopes. There is a very clear regulatory process led by the AER to manage and protect against selenium. We also funded a series of studies exploring selenium and water quality, which is being used to help inform the work being done under the Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Ms Gray: Here's the problem with insufficient selenium monitoring, Mr. Speaker: once it's in the water, you can never get it out again. The reversal of Lougheed's 1976 coal mining policy leaves Alberta's environment at risk of irreversible damage. Ripping up the eastern slopes to benefit their multinational coal mining buddies does not protect our environment. With so much at risk – tourism, recreation, agriculture, to the very essence of life with drinking water that is clean – when will this Premier protect Alberta by stopping the proposed eastern slopes mining project? Or will they just help foreign national friends?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Energy and Minerals has said a number of times in this House, the 1976 coal policy remains in place while the minister undertakes this work. Our groundwater observation well network has over 200 active wells monitoring groundwater quality and quantity across Alberta. Over 2,500 certified water and waste-water operators support the operation of about 700 drinking water facilities and 780 waste-water facilities. The members opposite do know very well that Alberta has strong regulations that remain in place to ensure our water remains safe.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a question.

2:00

Grassy Mountain Coal Project

Ms Pancholi: The Premier and the UCP are trying to push through coal mining in the beautiful eastern slopes, claiming that there is an economic benefit, but the 2021 joint review panel consisting of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and the Alberta Energy Regulator rejected the Grassy Mountain coal project not just because it would harm species at risk but also because it has very few economic benefits. To the Premier. The people of southern Alberta want to know why. Why has the UCP become the spokesperson for Australian mining companies and not for Albertans?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I'd be surprised if the NDP could ever actually spot an economic benefit and know what one is. I think that's up to the private sector. What's not up to the private sector is the regulation of this coal mining if it ever happens. We're going to be the best in the world at it. That's number one. We're going to be the best at monitoring the water, making sure that there are not pollution levels there that can't be dealt with, that we make sure that what happens is that they clean up existing sites. Whatever it takes, we're going to keep water, the plants, and the animals as our number one priority. Water is life, and we're going to take care of it.

Ms Pancholi: Sometimes it's hard to know if the minister even knows his file.

The Grassy Mountain project already had a fair hearing and was rejected by the AER . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Pancholi: . . . for causing too much environmental damage for too little economic benefit. Then the minister of energy directly interfered with the AER to revive it. The next AER decision on the project is expected soon, but this time the UCP has made sure that the Premier's good friend and special adviser David Yager is on the board. The cards are stacked against Albertans, and the UCP are doing the stacking. If the UCP truly believe that coal mining is good for Alberta, why do they have to rig the system to make it happen?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the AER is a world-class regulator; in fact, I would suggest, the best in the world. There are experts on that board that are arm's length from the government, that are going to make the best decisions in the interest of Albertans. Now, it's something different than the NDP did when they were in power. When they were in power, they put all their hacks in the AER and caused a situation where they're working for the public and themselves and all had to be fired. We're not going to let that happen. We're going to take care of Albertans and always keep their interest as priority number one.

Ms Pancholi: If the minister truly believed the AER was so good, he wouldn't have overturned their decision and revived Grassy Mountain. That project will bring mountaintop removal mining to the majestic Rockies. My colleagues and I were in southern Alberta last week meeting with irrigation districts, watershed councils, economic development groups, and ranchers. They feel like they are David facing the Goliath of billion-dollar foreign mining companies and a dismissive and unethical provincial government. I stood on that beautiful land, looked at the very mountains that the UCP want to mine, and I was reminded that it's David, not Goliath, that wins in the end. To the Premier: which side does the UCP want to be remembered for being on?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the thing that I appreciate the most is the opportunity to see somebody from downtown Edmonton getting into rural Alberta. Now, I don't see it very much, and I invite them to come up to Fort McMurray sometime and see what we're doing there in relation to open-pit mines in the oil sands. We're doing a great job protecting the water, and we're making sure that things are happening like building schools and hospitals and bridges in all of their ridings. I like to see them ask questions to the Minister of Education because he's able to say: they get a school; they get a school; they get a school. Well, without the oil and gas sector, without industry, without mining, we wouldn't have any of that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

A point of order was noted at 2:01.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies (continued)

Dr. Elmeligi: Mr. Speaker, the environmental impacts from coal mining are well understood, from selenium poisoning our headwaters to the literal destruction of wildlife habitat in ranchlands. Evidence of public opposition to coal mining is visible through lawn signs, weekly protests, thousands of e-mails, numerous FOIP requests. We know the economic benefit of these

mines is short lived, greatly exaggerated, and far outweighed by the costs. Ranchers and farmers want to know why. Why is this government allowing foreign coal companies to industrialize ranchlands' sensitive ecosystems and our water?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, because we listened to 30,000 Albertans, and they were clear. They wanted to see controlled, managed, productive development, and they want us to use our assets properly. Like I had to remind one of the NDP members just a couple of weeks ago, metallurgical coal actually is part of a laptop and a phone and other things that we need in order to survive in today's world. Without metallurgical coal, we would not have any of the things that we take for granted, quite frankly, and one thing we should take for granted is making sure that the NDP are never in power in Alberta again.

Dr. Elmeligi: Mr. Speaker, the majority of those 30,000 Albertans clearly said that they didn't want coal mining on the eastern slopes. Oh, my gosh.

The government's new coal modernization initiative promises a ban on open-pit mining, something that isn't even possible. Montem Resources actually sent a letter to the AER asking for reconsideration of this new direction because the only technically and economically viable option for their coal project is an open-pit mine. If open-pit mining isn't allowed and mining companies can't extract coal without it, is the UCP in agreement that we shouldn't have coal mining on the eastern slopes?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I know why some Albertans are skeptical about coal mining: because the NDP screwed it up so bad and continues to do so in B.C. But the truth is that you can take a managed approach to just about any resource development, and this one in particular you can as well, but we heard Albertans clearly that they don't want open-pit mines in the foothills. It's not going to happen. They can believe we're not. We've told them clearly there's not going to be mountaintop removal. There's not going to be, notwithstanding their advertisements and their untruths to the people. We're going to make sure that we protect water, we protect land, we protect animals, and, more important than anything, we're going to protect people. Water is life, and we're going to protect Albertans' lives as our . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Elmeligi: Mr. Speaker, the minister likes to throw around these words like dressing on his word salad to convince Albertans that coal mining on the eastern slopes is going to be okay. You can put lipstick on a pig, but it still smells an awful lot like pork chops in here. The UCP talk a big game about environmental protection, but when it comes down to it, they're just about lining the pockets of foreign-owned coal companies. When will the Premier stand up for Alberta ranching and farming businesses, municipalities, and the thousands of Albertans who have been protesting for years for no coal mining on the eastern slopes?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we had a community stand up just recently and have an unbinding vote and overwhelmingly support an opportunity for a new mine and at least to be able to hear that process. Albertans should be in charge of their future, not just a few Albertans, not just NDP voters but all Albertans. We can do things responsibly. We can do it right. We just have to keep in mind some basic principles, and the basic principles are water, animals, and people. We're not going to sacrifice that for anything.

Mine Financial Security Program

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, for the last two years I asked the so-called environment minister: what is the UCP government's plan to clean up oil sands liabilities once projects reach the end of life?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Al-Guneid: She has tried to convince us that the mine financial security program is supposedly sufficient to clean up this mess, and now we're supposed to believe that she's also covering for the coal and mining mess. It doesn't require a mathematician. Can the minister explain how \$1.71 billion in financial security would cover \$57.3 billion in liabilities?

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:07.

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, it should come as no surprise that the members opposite will resort to calling names when they're not getting the answers that they like, and calling the hon. minister of environment a so-called minister is very disrespectful. The member opposite should know better. It's not her first day in this Chamber. If we're going to have robust debate in this Chamber about the issues that matter most to Albertans, I insist that we keep it high level and respectful and not degrade to petty insults like a child.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the minister's recent update to this financial security program does not address the Auditor General's warnings around the significant design issues to fully protect Albertans, who will be left responsible for even more mining cleanups, given that the minister is leaving this massive, looming liability problem untouched in Alberta, why would anyone trust this program? Why does this minister think that her ministry's program will be effective to cover the coal mess that will be left by Australian coal companies that will mine the majestic Rocky Mountains?

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

2:10

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite does know full well, as she's asked a number of times throughout estimates both this year and last, that we did in fact make changes to this program to address some of the concerns that were raised by the Auditor General. Initial security is collected as the mine is open. This is in the form of a financial instrument of some kind. No additional financial instrument security is collected until the mine reaches nearer to end of mine life. Fifteen years before end of mine life the company must shift from collateral to another financial instrument as the reserves are mined and their operation shifts to the closure phase. I know that the members opposite don't necessarily like the program because they want to shut down . . .

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation has named the environment minister in their legal action against the province due to her failure to properly fund the security program that should protect Albertans and First Nations from the mining mess, given that this program continues unrealistic assumptions about asset values and fantasies on low-cost remediation and reclamation tech, why should the ranchers with us today trust the government's plan to clean up the future coal mess in the eastern

slopes when liabilities increased by \$10 billion in just one year under the UCP?

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are a number of cases that are currently before the courts, and the sub judice rule may apply to such a question with respect to the matter of public lands and coal exploration. It has to be a much more specific question, like we just heard, as opposed to a broader question. At the end of the day, it is not for the Speaker to determine whether or not the minister would like to answer the question. Oftentimes the minister or the Solicitor General can provide details on this particular case, or the minister can answer should they choose to do so.

The hon. the Solicitor General.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member eloquently stated, the matter is before the courts. I certainly would allow the matter to proceed as it should, allow the court to make a determination in that regard. We will not be commenting on any matter before the courts or any matter that is expected to be before the courts.

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

Ethnocultural Grant Program

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a shining example of what a welcoming and inclusive society can look like. The province is home to hundreds of ethnocultural communities that contribute to our economy, enrich our culture, and strengthen our social fabric. Budget 2025 commits \$12 million over three years to the ethnocultural grant program to support community-driven multicultural projects. Can the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism update this House on how this investment is helping to foster intercultural understanding and build stronger communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is home to many vibrant cultures, which is why this province is such a great place to live, work, and raise a family. As our population continues to grow and become diverse, it is vital that we promote the value of multicultural society and intercultural connections. One way we do this is through the ethnocultural grant program, which supports grassroots, community-driven projects. These projects promote cross-cultural understanding and celebrate the rich diversity of Alberta's ethnocultural and Indigenous communities through festivals, showcases, and more.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that the ethnocultural grant program is making a real and meaningful difference in the lives of Albertans by supporting over 140 initiatives across the province this fiscal year and given that countless community organizations have shared inspiring stories about how the funding has helped bring people together, preserve cultural heritage, and foster a sense of pride in belonging, can the same minister please elaborate on how these grants are empowering community leaders to share their cultures and build unity throughout Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year alone the ethnocultural grant program is supporting over 140 projects across Alberta. These initiatives are helping build bridges between communities, preserve cultural heritage, and foster a sense of belonging. Community leaders are proudly sharing their cultures and, through these projects, discovering shared values and experiences that bring people closer together. It is a powerful reminder that while our backgrounds may differ, our goals and hopes are still the same.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just might encourage House leaders or others that if you'd like to have discussions about the goings-on of the Assembly it might be best to do that at our respective lounges or the peace lounge, and you can discuss some of the finer details of the cut and thrust of the Assembly if you'd like to do that there.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and minister. Given the importance of ensuring equitable access to government programs across the province and given the demonstrated success of the ethnocultural grant program in preserving heritage, educating Albertans, and further given that the next intake is set for fall 2025, to the same minister: please tell this House what outreach efforts and supports are being provided to ensure that ethnocultural groups in both urban and rural Alberta are well informed to apply for the funding to support their cultural initiatives.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I am proud to say that we are seeing strong participation from both urban and rural ethnocultural organizations. Promoting the program is a year-round effort through our website, direct outreach, community events, and public channels. We also provide live webinars and have service providers specifically contracted to help smaller organizations navigate the application process. This ensures all groups regardless of size or location have the support they need to apply successfully.

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

Coal Industry Modernization Initiative

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the impact on our water, land, and animal welfare, coal mining puts the economic prosperity of agriculture producers at risk. On March 25 government officials from energy and Environment and Protected Areas met with the High River mayor and council on the government's proposed coal industry modernization initiative. Since the impact of coal mining impacts everyone far beyond High River, when will the minister of energy direct their staff to meet and consult with all Albertans and their elected municipal government officials before they force through this policy?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the agriculture minister is very much on top of this. I myself have been fortunate enough to speak to some cattle ranchers, and what they tell me is that they don't want it, but if it happens, they want it done right. They want the water protected. They want the land protected. They want the animals protected. That's what our government's policy requires. I would agree with them that we do it right or not at all. That's what our government intends to do: do it right or not at all. I think that's what most people want, including ranchers, including people from all over Alberta. Do it right or not at all.

Ms Sweet: Given that they want “not at all” and given that the research is undeniable that selenium toxicity downstream of coal mines is a serious environmental hazard and given that 10 years ago the AER assumed jurisdictional responsibility for water and the environment with respect to all energy resource activity in Alberta, including wastewater guidelines, and given that 10 years ago the wastewater guidelines did not contain coal wastewater management, technology release limits, or monitoring requirements for selenium, why is the Minister of Environment and Parks okay with this glaring deficiency and allowing mining that will pollute critical headwaters?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite do know that strong regulations remain in place for all of our major industries. It is the AER’s job to assess if an operator can prevent contamination before approving any projects. The AER does have experts on staff who assess the operator’s plan throughout the application process, not the government. Alberta has very strict reclamation requirements in place as well to protect the environment and make sure that reclamation activities continue as required. The AER is responsible for implementing and enforcing the provincial standards for all of these projects in all of our . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would like to ask a question, I encourage him to get on the list, rise to his feet, and ask one.

Ms Sweet: Given that the ministerial order confirms restrictions on coal development within the categories of land described in a coal development policy for Alberta and given the ministerial directive protecting the most environmentally sensitive category 1 land states that private land and freehold minerals are exempt from environmental protections, will the minister correct this horrendous loophole to assure Albertans that category 1 lands are protected from future coal exploration or development?

2:20

Mr. Jean: What I can assure the member opposite and all Albertans is that we’re going to do this modernization of legislation right, Mr. Speaker. We’re going to protect Albertans. We’re going to protect their assets. We’re going to protect the earth and the water and the animals and humanity because we do believe water is life, and it’s important to make sure that in each step we support that as the primary principle. The rest will take care of itself. No matter what they say, we will do a much better job than what they attempted to do and failed at. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is the only one with the call.

Coal Development Policies and Water Monitoring

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, we’re sure hearing a tremendous amount about water is life. If we actually believe that water is life, then we do everything we can to respect it and protect it for the next seven generations. Albertans have repeatedly told this government that they want to see as little as possible of selenium in their water. They know selenium causes nausea, hair loss, joint pain, vomiting, and is poisonous. Why does this minister not listen

to Albertans and is asking Albertans to swallow this toxic, terrifying risk?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we are doing more research into coal remediation than any government in history, and that includes being more transparent than any other government before. We have funded research, submitted it to peer-reviewed academic journals, promoted it to our stakeholders and to Albertans so that they have access to all of the information that we have and that the minister of energy is using to design his policy. But you know what’s disgusting? Spreading fear and misinformation about drinking water to Albertans.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Well, given that without good regulation and the removal strategies it makes this government look incompetent once again and given that studies have proven that contaminants like selenium can cross continental divide, move between watershed and groundwater, and travel across jurisdictional boundaries and given that reclamation studies show that selenium levels stayed dangerously high over decades and that selenium cannot be effectively removed outside of a laboratory, will the minister admit that relying on a nonexistent technology . . . [interjection]

Mr. Shepherd: Point of order.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: . . . is failing Albertans?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:23.

The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, once again, our department has commissioned a number of studies to understand the impacts of selenium on water. Why? Because we care about our water both for humans, animals, and biodiversity in the province of Alberta. We have been transparent. All of that information has been posted very publicly on government websites and is being used to drive the policy decisions being made by my colleague in Energy and Minerals. We saw this with the members opposite when it came to the oil sands, trying to convince people that their water was unsafe when, in fact, that wasn’t true. That is behaviour not becoming of members . . .

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that, according to the numerous studies that the minister claims to have read, when selenium travels through food webs and ecosystems, it does not degrade over time, it amplifies; given that, if selenium is being released into our water, then we need to be even more mindful of regulating the other land-use activities such as unmanaged recreation on public lands, poor land use planning, so that we do not amplify selenium toxicity in our ecosystems and biodiversity, will the minister of environment please tell Albertans why she thinks coal mining in our headwaters is acceptable?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the highest water quality in the world, and we have year-round monitoring in place to keep it that way and protect it. We are monitoring water quality at hundreds of rivers, lakes, and groundwater sites across the province to make sure they all meet the national standards. Every single drinking water system must meet Health Canada standards at all times. Over 1,400 drinking water and wastewater systems are firmly in place, each one operated by certified operators who conduct spot checks, monitor closely, and work with municipalities

and communities. The opposition should not play partisan games with something as serious as drinking water. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Health Services in Rural Alberta

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government has committed \$330 million over three years to upgrade and modernize Alberta rural health care facilities, including \$15 million for the newly announced rural hospital enhancement program. Two facilities in my riding, the Athabasca and Barrhead health care centres, are among the 20 hospitals prioritized in the first phase of planning under this program. To the Minister of Health: what does the rural hospital enhancement program mean for the future of the Athabasca and Barrhead health centres, and how will these upgrades improve health outcomes for rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government is investing \$15 million in planning for the new rural hospital enhancement program. This initiative will assess rural health facilities and identify capital planning solutions to better meet the needs of rural Albertans. Assessments are being conducted at rural hospitals right across the province, including the Barrhead health care centre and the Athabasca health care centre. These assessments are essential when planning for potential future capital investments in rural health infrastructure and will help identify opportunities to improve functionality and workflow efficiency in rural health care settings. [interjections] The members opposite keep yelling, but we're going to meet rural needs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that each rural community has unique health care needs, staffing realities, and growth projections and given that effective planning must be derived from local input to ensure the best outcomes for patients and providers, can the same minister explain how this government will ensure that community feedback, workforce capacity, and population growth are factored into rural health capital planning so that investments are appropriately allocated and tailored to each community's specific needs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rural hospital enhancement program is designed to address rural health challenges and promote efficient targeted use of resources to improve access to essential health services. As soon as the detailed facility project plans are developed, it will be used to guide future capital planning and funding decisions. This program will help expedite the time between planning, construction, and feedback so that projects can begin more quickly to support the needs of rural communities as well as ensuring that they can receive timely high-quality care closer to home. That's our target, and we're going to make sure we get there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that targeted investments like the medical device reprocessing expansion at the Westlock hospital are essential to enhancing patient safety and

surgical efficiency in rural communities and given that rural health care upgrades play a critical role in strengthening the broader provincial health system, can the same minister please provide an update on the status of the medical device reprocessing expansion at the Westlock hospital and the expected completion timeline for my constituents?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question. The medical device reprocessing expansion project is currently in the design development phase, and the design development report is expected to be completed by the end of this month. I am pleased to share that the project remains on schedule and on budget, with construction expected to be completed by the fall of 2028. This critical MDR expansion will soon meet the needs of the growing community and surrounding area. I'm really happy with the progress that's being made, and I know the community will be very supportive of this as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

(continued)

Ms Ganley: When the UCP rescinded the 1976 coal policy, Albertans were outraged. They forced the UCP to back down. Before the election the UCP promised Albertans that they absolutely would not allow coal mining in the eastern slopes. Now the UCP have caved to lobbyists, gone back on their promises, and allowed mining in the eastern slopes. Is it the UCP government policy to throw out all election promises or just those related to coal mining?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, what we promised to do as a government is to think logically and to make the best decisions in the interests of Albertans, and that's exactly what we're doing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. minister of energy is the only one with the call.

2:30

Mr. Jean: We consulted with 30,000 Albertans, Mr. Speaker. We heard loud and clear what they prioritize, and we've prioritized that. In the meantime the AER has brought back and is putting in force the 1976 Loughheed coal policy, and we will continue to go forward with our modernization initiatives, protecting waterways and the environment always.

Ms Ganley: Given that after their disastrous decision to reverse the 1976 coal policy, the UCP put in place a hand-picked committee to examine the issue which made its recommendations in 2021, leading the UCP to ban coal mining once again, and given that one member of that committee has said that, quote, he feels, quote, pretty much disgusted and dismayed by the energy minister's decision to allow coal mining yet again, what does the minister have to say to his own committee and all of the Albertans who feel betrayed by this decision?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I will show up every single time for Albertans and make the best decision, just like our Premier continuously does. Her leadership is actually very inspiring. We show up. Speaking of showing up, I haven't seen No-show Nenshi around here for quite a while. I'm not sure if he's actually showing up or not. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. As I mentioned earlier to the minister of energy with respect to engaging members of the public in the gallery and provided him a caution, I now do so to you as well.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I know that they're thinking about the mothership right now in Ottawa, but it's more like a Death Star seeing what's going on with the NDP federally. I don't know what they're thinking about right now, but looking for a future new position might be one of them.

Ms Ganley: Given that the economic impacts of coal mining are disastrous, costing far more in tourism, agriculture, ranching than they could possibly generate and given the impacts on our water alone far outweigh any possible economic benefit and given that Albertans should have the right to rely on election promises like the UCP's promise not to allow coal mining in the eastern slopes, this decision is economically illiterate and lacks all integrity. Is the minister of energy embarrassed?

Mr. Jean: No, Mr. Speaker. I'm embarrassed about what the NDP has done to coal in the Elk Valley in British Columbia. I'm embarrassed about what the NDP did during the four years of trying to be in power here in Alberta and what they did with coal. I'm embarrassed about that. But what I'm not embarrassed about is great leadership from our Premier, who's doing the right thing, making sure that Albertans' priorities are always number one and that we're protecting the environment, we're protecting the water, and we're protecting Albertans.

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

Wintertime Highway Maintenance

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta experiences what many would call chaotic weather with many cold snaps . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Relevance.

Ms Pitt: . . . during our spring season.

Mr. Schmidt: Relevance.

Ms Pitt: Snow removal and ice precautions on our roads impact our constituents.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. member knows exactly what he's done, and he will refrain from doing it.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East can start again.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta experiences what many would call chaotic weather with many cold snaps during our spring season. Snow removal and ice precautions on our roads impact our constituents. While these winter maintenance efforts are critical for road safety, we continue to hear from constituents about vehicle damage caused by rock chips along with inconsistent, ineffective snow clearing that often leaves roads in poor condition. Can the minister please tell me: how does the ministry audit the effectiveness of snow and ice removal on Alberta's roads, and what is being done to balance the impact of rock chips and vehicle damage?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's highway maintenance contractors work year-round to ensure our roads are safe, especially during winter weather events. We have nearly 600 snowplows operating

across the province, and they follow strict performance standards, including timelines for clearing highways after snowfall. Transportation and Economic Corridors just wants to keep you safe, and that's exactly what they're going to do.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that experts have advised using salt, sand, or a combination of the two called a pickle mix, further given that either option is important for ensuring safety of high caution areas – so many of us are annoyed by the rock chips in our windshields – Minister, can you please tell this Assembly about the processes in place to ensure that the appropriate sizes of the sand and salt are being used on our highways?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the choice and amount of material used, whether that's sand, salt, or pickle mix, is based on several factors, including road temperature, traffic volume, and current weather conditions. Contractors are required to follow strict application guidelines and are monitored closely to ensure they are using the right materials. I can assure you that this is as much of an art as it is a science.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents in Airdrie-East have called about . . .

Mr. Schmidt: That's good because she doesn't understand science.

Ms Pitt: . . . the usage of snow and ice measures around the area and given that the concerns of . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Pitt: . . . the cost-effectiveness of existing measures, especially with such unpredictable weather in Alberta, to the minister: what measures are being taken to ensure greater transparency and accountability in the auditing process for ice and snow removal so that Albertans can have confidence that their tax dollars are being used effectively to maintain our roads?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:36 by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we take transparency and accountability seriously when it comes to winter road maintenance. That's why our ministry uses real-time monitoring tools, including 511 Alberta, where Albertans can track plow locations and highway conditions across the province. When you're planning that next family vacation, 511 should be the first call you make.

Grassy Mountain Coal Project (continued)

Member Miyashiro: The Oldman River watershed provides fresh water for around 200,000 people and our multibillion-dollar agrifood industry in southern Alberta. Let's think of ranching in the foothills, feedlots of finished meat and poultry products, products from Cavendish Farms, McCain, Frito-Lay, Lamb Weston, of a thriving pulse crop and vegetable protein industry, of canola oil and canola meal from Richardson Oilseed, Taber corn, fresh vegetables grown inside and out, and processed veggies as well. I would ask the energy minister: why would you support jeopardizing all of this for a coal mine with negligible economic benefit?

Mr. Jean: I would never jeopardize that, Mr. Speaker. Neither would our Premier, neither would our government, neither would one member of this cabinet or caucus. We would not do that. The NDP stand up today, and I've never seen more questions on one topic in this place since I've been in this place. I just wonder why they didn't stand up between 2015 and 2019, when it mattered, when they could have actually done something about coal and modernized the policy. There's no question the coal mining policy needs to be brought up to date where it reflects the priorities of Albertans: safe water, safe earth, safe animals, safe people. They didn't do that. We are getting it done.

Member Miyashiro: Given that the former water services manager for the city of Lethbridge has spoken out publicly about the inability to filter out selenium and given that the proposed Grassy Mountain mine does not consider the extreme winds which have resulted in toxic minerals deposited over 50 kilometres away and given the risk of catastrophic failures in tailings ponds and settling ponds, especially after rainfall or during runoff after the winter despite engineering solutions available, why is the Minister of Affordability and Utilities supporting this mine that will harm Lethbridge?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member that when the community of Crowsnest Pass voted on whether they wanted the coal mine to go ahead or not, more than 70 per cent of them voted yes with more than a 53 per cent turnout. The other thing that I would tell the hon. member is that you can buy selenium supplements online or at your local drugstore. The bottom line is that if you're going to mine coal, you do it right or you don't do it at all. That's what our government will do. We'll do it right, or we won't do it at all.

Member Miyashiro: They're killing me.

Given that the UCP government refuses to release its report on the environmental impact of the Grassy Mountain coal mine and given that the strong case against coal mining in the eastern slopes was presented by a group of five retired fish and wildlife biologists to the Coal Policy Committee in 2021 and given that the potential downstream harm to Canada's premier agrifood corridor would create existential devastation to our way of life in southern Alberta, when is this government going to come clean about the real reasons for allowing mining of our eastern slopes?

2:40

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have spoken clearly that they want us to manage Alberta. They fired them. This is a management issue. You know what's dangerous? Too much selenium in water. You know what's also dangerous? No selenium in water. It's a management issue, and we're going to manage it properly. [interjections] They can laugh all they want, but they're not listening to the scientists. We are, and we're going to do the right things for Albertans.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies (continued)

Mr. Schmidt: The UCP promised Albertans that they had changed, that coal mining was out of the question because Albertans had said, clearly, no to coal. But that was before the election. As soon as the election wrapped up, the UCP let their true colours show. The minister is ignoring Albertans, ignoring environmental experts, ignoring ranchers, and ignoring their own promises. My question is

to the energy minister, who seems to fancy himself a scientist. What possible reason is there to trust this government when they so clearly broke their promise to stop coal mining in the eastern slopes?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we did no such thing, but let's be clear what we did do. We said that we would stop mountaintop removal. We did that. They never even talked about it. We said we would not allow selenium in our waterways and we would manage it. They didn't say that; we did. We said that we would not allow open-pit mining in the foothills. They had the opportunity just a few years ago to say that. Did they say it? No. They stand up and pounce all fancy-dancy, but the truth is that they didn't do anything for Albertans when they had a chance. We are. We're protecting Alberta waterways, the environment, and people. We're going to continue to do that.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the Alberta Energy Regulator has a horrific track record of reporting environmental issues, most notably during the spill at the Kearl site, where the AER was told by Imperial Oil about a tailings pond leak and the regulator chose not to inform the public, given that they also chose not to tell nearby Indigenous communities located downstream and given that these spills are bad and keeping them hidden is the definition of unethical, incompetent government, how can Albertans have any confidence that future coal mining environmental disasters won't be kept hidden from them?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. It is not acceptable to have leaks done by any industry and not report them. We are not going to let that happen again. We have placed guards for things to happen and things to be reported as necessary and as needed, and when companies or individuals violate that, they will pay the price, as has happened in this case. We are not going to allow that to happen again, and as much as possible guard it. But let's be clear: 99.3 per cent of all spills on sites are on sites. They're not off sites; they're on sites. We have a great system. It works.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given the minister seems to fancy himself a mathematician as well as a scientist now and given that one of the Alberta Energy Regulator's directors is David Yager, a man moonlighting as a special adviser to the Premier, who is trying to justify sticking Albertans with the bill for cleaning up the oil industry's messes, and given that coal mining also makes messes that are extremely expensive to clean up, how can Albertans trust the government to make coal companies clean up their messes at the same time that they're being stuck with the bill for the oil companies' messes?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to brief these folks more often because I don't know where they're getting their information. Taxpayers are not going to be on the hook for any cleanup. We've been clear on that. I don't know where they're getting their information from. It's just ridiculous. First, they say that we're going to allow mountaintop removal. We've talked about it clearly; we're not going to allow that. Then they talk about selenium in the waters. One thing is clear. The best way to make sure that we manage Alberta properly, the coal industry properly, the oil and gas industry properly is to make sure the NDP never get elected in Alberta again.

The Speaker: The time for Oral Question Period has now elapsed. In 30 seconds or less we'll continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a couple of articles. One is a 2023 article from the *International Tax Review*. The article highlights: Brookfield faces allegations of tax avoidance ahead of their AGM. The Centre for International Corporate Tax Accountability and Research claims that Brookfield operates through tax havens.

Another article, from the CBC, calling out Carney's former firm Brookfield having been accused of breaching Indigenous rights in Canada, Brazil, Colombia, and the United States. During this time period Carney operated as chair and vice-chair of the board.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters here – one from Randall Burke, another from Raven Sinclair, another from Nicole Smiley, and a fourth letter from Abby Ingraham – condemning the Premier's trips to Florida and signing up with Team Trump.

I also have a letter from Edward Alberts asking for more support for soccer facilities in Calgary for kids.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a press release from the Sheriff Branch Officers Association here in Alberta in which they express deep concerns about Bill 49, the minister's plans for a provincial police force. They say they're deeply concerned, that he has no clear plan, and that they have not been consulted.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a few of the many, many e-mails my office has received about coal mining on the eastern slopes. I've got one e-mail from Roger in Edmonton and another e-mail from Dallas and Ronda, who are in Taber. All of them are calling on the UCP to stop the destructive coal mining in the eastern slopes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Sherwood Park.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five copies of a very strong letter that was sent to the Premier and copied to the minister of energy. It is from a constituent of mine who is expressing her concern and asking the government to stop coal mining.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Sunday the Sherwood Park United Church celebrated their anniversary of being an affirming Christian congregation. They not only tolerate but welcome and affirm members from diverse identities. I have 24 letters from members that want the government to rescind bills 26, 27, and 29 and more to come.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter from Andrea, who is actually from Edmonton-Castle Downs. It is an angry letter describing the heartless elimination of the Alberta child and youth support program. This soul-crushing decision will lead to more children not having families and does not serve Albertans. It's a cruel cut.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling the five requisite copies of a page from a report put together by Shannon Phillips of the NDP when she was environment minister that calls for the ending of all four coal categories.

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

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have four letters from AISH recipients talking about the extraordinary disability-related expenses they have and why the clawback of the \$200 benefit is wrong.

Mr. Boitchenko: I would like to table an article showing that selenium can be successfully taken out of the water, rivers, and streams.

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, I have the requisite number of copies of four different tablings. One from the February 25 city council meeting in Lethbridge where council unanimously affirmed opposition to coal developments threatening the Oldman watershed; an e-mail that was sent to the Premier and minister of energy from Trent Takeyasu of Lethbridge asking that the government stop coal mining in Alberta; a letter sent by e-mail to Minister Brian Jean that was CCed to me in January from Lethbridge resident Henriette Plas, who ends every paragraph of her letter with the words: no means no.

I have a letter to the Premier from the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment about the environmental threat that the Grassy Mountain coal project presents in southern Alberta and the economic threat that coal mining poses to the agrifood industry.

2:50

The Speaker: I might just provide a friendly reminder to the new Member for Lethbridge-West that the use of a proper name, particularly when describing a minister of the House, would be wildly inappropriate.

Hon. members, now for the moment you've all been waiting for, points of order. At 2:02 the hon. the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, I rose on a point of order 23(h), (i), and (j) against the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. At the end of one of the member's questions the member said, "Sometimes it's hard to know if the minister even knows his file." Certainly very disrespectful language to a minister of the Crown. It implies the minister is ignorant, and this has in fact been ruled unparliamentary on March 6, 2023, on page 498 when the Speaker said, "I would say that that language is always likely to create disorder, and as such she can apologize." Now, it also implies the minister is not qualified. "You do not deserve this job" was ruled unparliamentary on November 22, 2023. I'd read the quote, but I suspect you know what it means.

This language is generally abusive, and frankly it's kind of like bullying. I think the member should apologize and withdraw and refrain from using language like that in the future in this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I disagree with the Government House Leader. It is true that referring to an individual member can sometimes cause a point of order and can be likely to cause disorder when that happens, but in this case the member

specifically said, "It's hard to know if the minister even knows his file." I would note that knowing your file is a key facet of the job of a government minister. Questioning knowledge of files is what we do here every day in question period, and I would mention that there are ministers who I recall heckling "learn your file" millions of times in this Chamber.

I realize that referring to an individual can often cause a point of order or cause disorder. It would be best if we didn't refer to individuals for decorum's sake. In this case I don't think it's a point of order. I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Millions and millions of times.

Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and it is a fact that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said, "Sometimes it's hard to know if the minister even knows his file." I agree with the Official Opposition House Leader that sometimes that language can cause disorder, and on occasion in the past very similar statements have been made and have been ruled a point of order. However, in today's context, while mildly unhelpful, I'm not sure that it rises to the level of a point of order, and I do not consider it one. But I do consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:07 the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, I rose on a point of order against the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. The member said: the so-called minister. I do believe that you have raised a caution a number of times about altering the names of ministers or belittling the title of minister. I suspect that if there ever was a chance – heaven forbid – that the members opposite form government, they would not appreciate the opposition of the day disrespecting their title as minister, but again, we'll do our best on this side to make sure that never happens. I do believe this is a point of order on 23(h), (i), and (j). It certainly created disorder on this side of the House, especially when talking about the hon. minister of environment. It was out of order in my opinion.

Ms Al-Guneid: I apologize and will withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I appreciate your apology and withdrawal. I do consider it a point of order, but I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

That brings us, I believe, to a point of order that was raised at 2:23, which was the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre. I see the Leader of the Official Opposition and Official Opposition House Leader has risen.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Yes. This point of order was called by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre but was heard by almost all members on our side of the House. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically "uses abusive or insulting language" as well as the general practices of this House. Earlier in question period we heard the Government House Leader talking about childish behaviour and reprimanding some of the members on this side. Meanwhile, while the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was asking a question about water in the context of coal mining, the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services not only was loudly yawning in an attempt to distract from her question, incredibly childish behaviour, but was also heard to say repeatedly: this is bullshit; it's bullshit;

this is bullshit. This type of language in this Assembly is completely unparliamentary and inappropriate, and I would ask a point of order to be found and for him to apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, that language is most certainly unacceptable in this Chamber. I didn't hear it first-hand. If it happened, I'd be more than happy to have the member withdraw and apologize, or withdraw and apologize on his behalf. I didn't hear it specifically, so I leave it in your hands.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues. As members of the Assembly know, on page 624 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the Speaker "cannot be expected to rule in the absence of a reliable record." I would say that if he said it, it certainly would be unparliamentary and rise to the level of a point of order, of which he should apologize and withdraw.

Having said that, I have no reliable record. I did not hear that language. And I'm not sure if a yawning sound can actually be attributed to the minister or not. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded as I am unaware of what transpired in the Assembly.

That brings me to point of order 4. At 2:35 the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction was answering a question from the Deputy Speaker, the Member for Airdrie-East. At that time the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I believe, could be heard saying: that is because she doesn't understand sincere. I don't think I have to elaborate too much on what it'd be like if a member on the government side, a male member of the government side said that to a female member of the opposition side. I think that is totally disrespectful. It's certainly a misogynistic remark, suggesting that the member doesn't understand something. I think it's disgusting, frankly.

This is not the first time that member has been called to order. We even had egregious actions called against him against female members of this Chamber, members in good standing. The female members of this Chamber deserve respect. On this side of the House I have endeavoured to ensure that our members show respect for the opposition.

I know that sometimes we all make mistakes, but that member knows better. That member absolutely knows better. That language will create disorder in this House, it has, and the Member for Airdrie-East deserves an apology. That member needs to do better. I believe it's a point of order 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did not hear any heckles at the time of 2:36. I leave it to you.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues. One of the unfortunate ramifications for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is his close proximity to the Speaker and my ability to hear his sultry sounds and boisterous voice. Not only did I hear it, but it's also become part of the official record. What he said, according to the Blues, of which I have the benefit: "That's good because she doesn't understand science." That is the Blues that I have.

As members know, the context in which an offence has taken place inside the Assembly is of utmost importance to the Speaker. I have some high level of concern with the conduct of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He had a negative interaction with the

Deputy Speaker just last night, then during her questioning today as the Member for Airdrie-East he interjected on numerous occasions in such a manner that I interrupted the question and reprimanded him for doing that, although I didn't expand on it at the time. Then he went on to insult the hon. Member for Airdrie-East by making a suggestion that "that's good because she doesn't understand science." I do think this rises to the level of a point of order, and on this occasion I'll allow the hon. Official Opposition House Leader to rise on his behalf.

3:00

Ms Gray: On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. That brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 46

Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 46, the protection of privacy and access to information statutes amendment act, 2025.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, this bill makes minor but necessary amendments to Alberta's privacy and access legislation to ensure clarity, consistency, and stronger protections for Albertans' personal information. This is a key part of our government's ongoing commitment to modernizing and strengthening Alberta's privacy and access laws to keep pace with technological advancements and best practices. Last December this Assembly passed the Protection of Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act to replace the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and since then the government has been working with the public bodies responsible for administering this legislation to ensure a seamless transition. The amendments introduced in Bill 46 are the direct result of the valuable feedback from public bodies during consultations in January and February of this year.

One of the key changes is the clarification and strengthening of privacy protections for nonpersonal data and data derived from personal information. Public bodies emphasized the need for stronger language to ensure that even when data is anonymized or aggregated, it remains protected under the Protection of Privacy Act. In plain language, Madam Speaker, we want to make sure that this information is not accessible for reidentification, so we are clarifying the legislation to ensure stronger privacy protections are in place.

Bill 46 also addresses inconsistencies between the Protection of Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act, particularly in relation to judicial administration records. Previously there were slight differences in wording between the two acts. The bill corrects these discrepancies to ensure both acts are aligned, making it easier for public bodies to apply the legislation consistently. For those who are curious about this change, essentially, we are changing a reference that used to say, "for a judge" to instead say, "on behalf of a judge." This is a minor tweak to ensure the original intent is preserved.

In addition, we have a change that affects the Office of Statistics and Information. The Office of Statistics and Information plays an important role in providing statistical analysis and support to government in regard to programs and services. The proposed clarifications ensure that there is no confusion in how they go about serving Albertans and fulfilling their responsibilities.

Another important amendment is the introduction of new regulation-making authority to support the transition to the new privacy and access legislations. Given the significant number of laws that reference the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Bill 46 grants the Lieutenant Governor in Council the authority to make necessary updates through regulation. This will ensure all legislative references to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act are properly replaced with references to the new acts. A simple way to think about it is that we have many pieces of legislation that have hundreds of references collectively to the old freedom of information and privacy act which now need to refer instead to the new Protection of Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act. This change will simplify how we carry out a simple find-and-replace function for these consequential amendments.

Madam Speaker, these amendments are essential for the effective implementation of the Protection of Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act. By making these amendments now, we are setting up for a smoother transition later. The supporting regulations for these acts are set to be finalized and proclaimed later this spring along with the acts themselves. I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 46 as we move forward to strengthen Alberta's privacy and access to information legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to respond to Bill 46, the Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. As the minister has already mentioned, Bill 46 is legislation that will harmonize language and ensure a smooth transition between FOIP, the previous legislation, to bills 33 and 34. At its face the changes are administrative, and my understanding is that it does not materially change bills 33 and 34. But I think there are missed opportunities, and I want to take my time in this moment to actually talk about some of these missed opportunities and sort of the bigger landscape in which we're faced as a province.

While we're talking about modernization and privacy protections, which ultimately bills 33, 34, and, I guess, Bill 46 address, I think we can't ignore the elephant in the room. I've mentioned this previously in this House during debate in December, when we were talking about both bills 33 and 34, and that elephant in the room, Madam Speaker, is artificial intelligence. Generative AI has changed the landscape dramatically around the world. From large language models to deepfake technology, we are witnessing the rapid expansion of tools that can create, manipulate, analyze vast amounts of data, including personal data, yet Alberta's legislation does not adequately address this shift, and we are ultimately falling behind.

For example, this legislation doesn't talk about whether or not public bodies can use these kinds of technologies and how private data of individuals will be handled should these tools be used, things like ChatGPT. As members with constituency offices there may already be staff who are using these tools. How is data being safeguarded and protected, and what are the provisions around the use of artificial intelligence? This piece of legislation does not

address that. When bills 33 and 34 were introduced, I raised that very specific point at that time, that it is a little bit too narrow. It does not look at the landscape in its entirety when it comes to privacy legislation and the protections that are necessary to adapt to the modern world.

Let's look abroad to what's happening in other jurisdictions. The European Union in many ways is leading the way with its AI Act, a landmark piece of legislation that classifies AI systems by risk level and imposes strict rules on high-risk applications such as biometric surveillance, facial recognition, and algorithms used in hiring or lending decisions.

I think the fact is that across government departments right now I would venture to guess that there are already algorithms being used, AI tools being used to perhaps screen applicants, to perhaps do the work of the functioning of government, from security systems to perhaps HR algorithms to help funnel through the many, many hundreds of applications that the government of Alberta application portal typically gets. It is already part of our reality, yet not only do bills 33, 34 not address this reality that we're all faced; I think Bill 46, a piece of legislation that could have amended and addressed some of these challenges – it simply isn't in there in there. I think, Madam Speaker, that is what I mean by the missed opportunity here.

Back to this example of what the European Union is doing. The AI Act includes mandatory transparency requirements and clear mechanisms for enforcement. It complements the European Union's strong General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR, which already ensures individuals have rights over how their data is collected and used, including the right to be informed when automated decision-making is involved. Again, Madam Speaker, that is missing right now in Alberta, and it's a missed opportunity in this piece of legislation.

3:10

Canada, too, is beginning to move. The federal government introduced Bill C-27, which includes the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act, or AIDA. It's a first attempt to regulate high-impact AI systems and ensure their use aligns with our values and human rights. While it has its critics – and I think it will eventually make its way through the House after this election – it does signal an important first step.

I guess the question is: what has Alberta done? Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, Alberta has done nothing. We have no dedicated AI regulation. We have no clear rules around how public bodies can or cannot use generative AI or what obligations they have to disclose to citizens. There is no mention of algorithmic transparency, no requirement for impact assessment specific to AI, and no protections around automated decision-making beyond what's generally covered by broader privacy laws.

Let's consider how these systems work. Generative AI is trained on massive amounts of data often scraped from the Internet without explicit consent. This data may include copyrighted material, sensitive information, and personal content that was never meant to be used for training artificial intelligence. This raises major questions about how data is collected and whether individuals have any meaningful control over their digital footprint.

Beyond privacy we must confront the issue of bias in algorithms, and I've had the opportunity to have quite a few conversations with stakeholders working in the AI space about bias in algorithms and how that can impact the hiring of applicants, for example. In cases where it's deployed in health care, as an example, it can actually impact the delivery of care for patients. These systems learn patterns from the data they are trained on, and if that data includes racial bias, gender bias, or economic bias, as it often does, the

outputs will reflect and reinforce these same biases. Madam Speaker, this can lead to real-world consequences. I already mentioned that from an HR perspective it could lead to discriminatory hiring tools, unfair credit assessments, or biased law enforcement profiling. Without clear rules we risk entrenching inequality through technology, and without transparency Albertans may not even know that an algorithm is making decisions about them or whether they have any recourse to challenge these decisions.

This is why, Madam Speaker, again – I'll say it over and over – Bill 46 is a missed opportunity. It's a very routine piece of legislation, but there is so much that could have been in this piece of legislation to address what I think are the glaring gaps in bills 33 and 34.

I also want to mention that other jurisdictions are acting. In the United States several states, like California and Illinois, have passed legislation requiring transparency around AI use in hiring and facial recognition. The U.K.'s Information Commissioner's office has published detailed guidance for organizations deploying AI systems, including expectations for bias audits and human oversight. Frankly, Alberta cannot afford to lag behind. If we are truly serious about protecting Albertans' privacy, we must confront the realities of new technology head-on. That includes rules for public bodies that use AI in decision-making processes, it includes clear limits on the use of biometric data, and it should include mandatory reporting when algorithms impact people's lives, whether it's assessing services, receiving benefits, or applying for jobs. The tools of the future are all already here, Madam Speaker. We're probably using it already, and it's absolutely paramount that pieces of legislation that we pass in this House, particularly as it pertains to privacy, are modernized and reflect the changing nature of the world. Alberta cannot afford to be stuck in the past.

You know, as members of this House we are all of us collectively responsible for protecting the rights and freedoms of Albertans, and one of those fundamental rights that we don't often think about is the right to privacy. Privacy protects more than just our personal data; it protects our identity, our autonomy, but fundamentally it is about protecting our trust in government. In today's digital world, where we all have a digital footprint – there is information about nearly everybody on this globe on the Internet somewhere, particularly as public members – that trust, particularly that trust in government, is more important than ever before. And let me be clear. On this side of the House we support updating Alberta's privacy laws. We support, I think, the intent behind Bill 46, the intent behind modernizing FOIP, which hasn't been modernized since 1995 is my understanding. The question here is: is this the right approach, and what are the missed opportunities?

As I mentioned, the original Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act from 1995 has not been updated in preceding decades. What we've seen from this government are essentially two new laws, the Protection of Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act, bills 33 and 34. At that time when we were debating those bills, I did note in this House that bifurcating FOIP into two separate pieces of legislation was a mistake, that there were risks with cohesion, with alignment. While I appreciate that Bill 46 is meant to fix some of that, it doesn't go far enough with dealing and confronting the changing global landscape and risks. I think Bill 46 raises for me some big questions about how seriously this government takes privacy, transparency, and accountability in, really, a dynamic and ever-changing world, and I'll come back to that theme.

I want to raise some questions within the bill, and specifically that I want to talk about the exemptions being granted to the Office of Statistics and Information. Respectively, sections 17(4), 18(3),

19(3), and 21(3.1) of the bill will allow this specific office, the Office of Statistics and Information, to bypass several important privacy protections. This includes rules around data matching, the use of derived data, and the creation of nonpersonal data. Of course, you know, my understanding from this government is that these exemptions are meant to avoid disrupting the office's current practices. Madam Speaker, that is fair. We want to ensure that government business is not disrupted, that the key functions, which the Office of Statistics and Information certainly plays a part in, continue to be met and to be carried out.

3:20

I should note, but I think it does beg the question: what are the mechanisms in place to ensure that current practices meet modern privacy standards? The Office of Statistics and Information is a public body, a very important public body. It's funded by taxpayers, and it holds large amounts of sensitive information. I think it needs to be held to the highest standards, which I'm sure it is right now. But I think it also begs the question for me: how are we modernizing the practices of the Office of Statistics and Information? What kinds of safeguards will apply to the office in the absence of specific rules now that it's exempt? And was the Information and Privacy Commissioner consulted about these changes? Were concerns raised and addressed? Albertans have a right to clear answers. Their data should not be exempt from the same protections everyone else receives, so I'll leave that question with members of this House: are we adequately modernizing the Office of Statistics and Information?

I also want to address within Bill 46 what's called a paramountcy clause, which says that the Protection of Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act: if they ever conflict, the privacy rules win. Now, it's true that privacy and transparency sometimes are pulled in different directions, and Albertans' privacy is certainly very, very important, but I do have some concerns about the mechanism to give automatic priority to privacy without proper review and whether that could make it harder for Albertans to get information they deserve to see.

I think it also raises the question: how do we balance privacy and information in the public interest? For example, what does that mean for journalists investigating government decisions, for researchers and watchdogs, for citizens just trying to understand how their tax dollars are being used? How do we balance privacy and the public interest? We certainly can't let privacy become a convenient excuse for withholding public information. That's not real protection; it's a step backward.

Unfortunately, this isn't just a hypothetical concern. Alberta in some ways already has not a great reputation in Canada when it comes to transparency. Might I remind this House that it was this very government that refused to provide routine information requests from certain media outlets that they deemed unfriendly in 2023, which led to an investigation by Commissioner McLeod. I think, Madam Speaker, that should have been a wake-up call for all of us. Instead, we're seeing a government that is determined to dig in its heels, not on just this bill but on other pieces of legislation where control is something that this government values, and I think at times it's to the detriment of the interests of Albertans.

Here's what's missing from this bill. In fact, I think it's one of the most glaring omissions. Bill 46 says nothing about notifying Albertans when their data is breached. Earlier in my comments I talked about artificial intelligence and the use of generative AI, and there is . . . [Mr. Ip's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members that wish to join the debate on Bill 46? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much. I appreciate having the opportunity to speak to this bill. Sorry. I just want to make sure that I'm not going too long here. Getting my timer ready.

I'm speaking to Bill 46, the Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. It's absolutely true that privacy legislation is very important, and the existing legislation is out of date. Albertans do deserve to know when their personal information is compromised, and we need to modernize rules to govern the use of data for administrative and for research purposes. But this legislation also gives the cabinet the ability to amend any legislation that references the former Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This is presented as an administrative necessity, but this is really a very significant delegation of legislative authority to the executive branch. Allowing this government to make decisions on government transparency will really allow them to adjust the rules about how they can hide information.

This is information that should be shared with Albertans. Secrecy has already been a pattern that we have been witnessing more and more. Instead of reducing transparency, we need to improve access to government information. *The Narwhal* and the *Globe and Mail* have both identified Alberta as the only province that refuses routine information requests.

Eighteen months ago Commissioner McLeod signed a joint resolution with other information regulators across Canada, which highlights the persistent challenges with freedom and information laws and the need for advanced access to government information.

What are the consequences of hiding information? Well, one consequence is that the government can waste millions of taxpayer dollars at best due to incompetence and potentially, as alleged, due to corruption. Due to FOIP as it now stands – and it's already difficult – we know that the Premier was well aware that the purchase of the Turkish Tylenol was not a wise decision. We know that it was recommended against from within. She was advised not to purchase it because it would not even likely arrive before the shortage was otherwise resolved and the volume that needed to be ordered was many times greater than what could possibly be used in this province before it was expired. We know that because of current FOIP.

This bill will let this government, who hid this background information, make whatever rules they want about the release of future information. We know that it's going to get harder and harder to find out what decisions are made and on what basis.

Then, of course, we have the corrupt care scandal. It has been alleged that this government pressured the former CEO of AHS to sign off on really outrageous contracts with friends of the government, including Sam Mraiche, who was a part owner of a private surgical clinic. The amount that was to be paid to that particular private surgical clinic: we now know through availability of information that that amount per surgery was more than double what it costs in the public system. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars, and the pathway that this government is going, privatizing more and more with our health care system, means that we need to be more transparent, not less transparent.

3:30

Once the contracts are signed, we have very little information about what the contract is about. We know that these contracts – for example, the same one with the facility that involved Sam Mraiche – were paying for two nights' accommodation for every surgery. We also know, based on science and data, data from Alberta, that only

about 10 per cent of people having this type of surgery require one night in hospital and that it's very rare that two nights are required, so why are we paying for two nights for every single person that has surgery at that particular facility? Something fishy seems to be going on here, and it would be really nice to get to the bottom of it, but we wouldn't even know about this if we didn't have access to this information.

There's other information in these surgical contracts that we also need to know. We need to know what the deliverables are. We need to know what these facilities are expected to provide. How can we measure whether they are doing their job if the information isn't made available?

We also need to know what other guarantees are given to them. We have seen in the recent report by the Parkland Institute that while surgery numbers are going up in these facilities, that's not surprising because there are guarantees built into their contracts. They're going to have a minimum number of cases sent to them, which is them in preference to our public hospitals, and they are getting preference for anaesthesia coverage. We do not want more and more secrecy so we cannot understand the underlying plans and rules that are going on and changing the landscape of our health care system. We need to know by seeing the information, and not making FOIP more strict so that information isn't available, whether good decisions are being made, whether the government is making incompetent decisions, and whether they're perhaps making corrupt decisions.

We also have seen that there was an investigation going on into these particular procurement deals. This investigation had been started by the former CEO of AHS and was to be presented to the AHS board, who were all fired on the same day that information was to be presented to them. More hidden information like this is not in the best interests of Albertans, and you would think it would not be in the best interests of this government, who would like to be trusted, but at this point I would say that that trust is very lacking. We need openness to have trust, and we should not be giving the power to the cabinet to decide what rules there will be around what information can be released. If we pass this bill, the government will have unchecked power to set new rules around FOIP.

As further evidence of hiding information, this government is refusing to undertake a full public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal. Instead, they have called a few limited investigations, all of which have a number of guardrails and do not overlap, and they do not have the power of a judge, under section 3 of the Public Inquiries Act, to actually compel evidence from the people they speak to. No one has to tell the RCMP anything. No one has to tell the other investigators anything.

We know that hiding information has become somewhat of an expert skill carrying on with this government. Transparency is limited by nondisclosure agreements of many of the staff and former staff, and while to some degree that would seem reasonable, these employees are not allowed to disclose anything that would make the government look bad, true or not. They can't tell the truth if it makes the government look bad, and the only way they can do that is if we have a full public inquiry. This is evidence that we do not have the goodwill of the people, you know, in our best interests. We really know that lawyers have advised these people that they can't talk other than through a full public inquiry.

That said, I feel that it would be very risky to give this government the power to set up all the future rules around FOIP. They just have proven time and again that they cannot be trusted.

Other things that we need to think about are that we are continuously told: "Yes, we're doing that. We have that plan. We have plans, for example, for schools." But there's nothing in the budget. Nothing happens most of the time. We're told about plans

for things in the health care system, but there's no way that we can find out anything else about what that means. Other than a plan, that there is a plan, we can't find anything out, and giving more ability for this government to hide things is going in the wrong direction.

We need to be very cautious about who gets to set the rules. Already we have seen that many of the rules around ethics reporting have been changed. That's along the same lines of secrecy as changing the rules on FOIP reporting. It's another example that we need to be very careful about how much power is given to government and removed from legislative authority.

I'm very concerned. We should not be looking at this legislation without considering what I would call the dangerous parts of it. We do indeed need to make updates. We need to recognize that we're in a different world today around data than we were in the past, and we do want to make it so that we can use appropriately and for the benefit of Albertans the data that's available there for research. But by including within this bill the ability to hide things, we're really degrading good legislation by mixing in things that are giving powers inappropriately where they really cannot be trusted.

I would urge this government to think very carefully about what gets combined in bills. When there are good and reasonable and housekeeping parts, it would be good for that to be put separately so they're straightforward, they're easy, they make sense, and they do not add risk to the public. But when the bill is including things that give more powers, especially more powers to be secret, to the government, I would urge them to put that separately and have a big, fulsome conversation about what they're trying to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

3:40

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. We do understand the protection of Albertans' privacy is a very important matter, and we also understand that to safeguard the privacy for the dignity of Albertans, strong legislation is very important. We are aware the existing legislation is outdated and it needs to be updated. What is concerning: we saw in this Bill 46 – as well, we have seen previously, when government introduced bills 33 and 34, replacing the FOIP Act, that government is missing the marks in all its sections while replacing the FOIP.

Madam Speaker, we strongly believe that Albertans deserve to know when their personal information is compromised, and our concern is that this legislation fails to address this entirely. Any time there is an information leak, a compromise to someone's privacy, it can result in lifelong consequences in many ways. That's what we hear from my constituents in a number of ways. My colleague from Edmonton-South West spoke very eloquently and in depth to his study related to the world we are living in, technology use.

And not even, though I can go on and on – when I and one of the government private members visited to participate in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, that was their biggest concern and biggest challenge after the – no. It was called U.K.'s referendum – I'm losing the word – when the United Kingdom decided to come out of the European Union. Their biggest struggle was on recruitment to protect the personal information and basically the security – security of government departments, security of the individuals at large – because after that big, big change a number of qualified professionals actually decided to move back to their countries.

We also, you know, not the general public – we also experienced, many of the politicians, maybe a number of people from this House, becoming the victims of losing their identity on social media, a

number of things. That's the daily challenge that we are facing, not only the general public but the professionals and the responsible people in this House and in the society. I have people who came to me when their ID was stolen. They were spammed and they were harassed and they were scared, and they even rushed to police stations right away. Unfortunately, their situation was not resolved. They were under threat, and many have ended up losing so much money that the financial loss took years to come out of and the mental trauma as well, still going through.

My reason to share this information is this. I'm very happy to discuss, and I appreciate the ministry, who has proposed something along this line, but this issue is very broad and very, very serious. So when we bring these topics to debate in the House, it's important we understand the consequences of this topic properly and we are aware of the concerns and feedback we are receiving from our communities.

The other thing the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity expressed: the trust about privacy or security comes from transparency. Transparency is of utmost importance to democracy or the democratic society. We have many, many examples in the last six years of my experience in the House when, you know, important information that's supposed to be out for the public was not available. FOIP was addressing that issue to some extent, but there were recommendations. There were recalls. There was feedback from the communities to address it. So that needed updates. When FOIP has been replaced now, it's important to see those recommendations have been addressed in new legislation.

Recently we are experiencing some unprecedented challenges. I'm just trying to find the very nice and parliamentary word any time I'm speaking. What we have seen in health care, AHS, that gained a very popular term of corrupt care, was that people needed to know what was happening. This act actually has some issues; I will raise those questions and concerns around that. However, health care has never ever been in a situation, in crisis, in this province like what we are experiencing today. The shortage of staff is one thing. The funding or the system of procurement of equipment and the charter facilities introduction or enhancement over public-sector and public facilities and all the pain those Albertans and our constituents are going through due to that, the painful experiences they are sharing to our office: we need to know how this act will address all those issues so we have effective answers for all of our constituents.

3:50

I can share the likelihood of those complaints. Only one complaint I will share, where my constituent had one knee surgery and was scheduled for the second one after two months, and the doctors stopped picking up the calls. After numerous, numerous tries they tried to personally visit the clinic, but there was no one to see there. After so many attempts, when they got to talk to someone, they got the answer: talk to your MLAs. There was so much uncertainty. They approached my office. I tried to contact the clinic. I tried to contact the ministry. I'm continuously in touch with the constituent, but there is no resolution, just daily pain and suffering for that constituent. That is the kind of outcome Albertans are experiencing when something happens at that large scale on the top. We need to have a system where – is there transparency, the people have clear information? We need to see that there is accountability also around that.

In this bill there are provisions. You know, they are concerning because they are restricting at some point the release of that information. Without that information we wouldn't have known the political interference that came out from the Premier's staff that were directly trying to intervene. I know we have made so many

changes under Bill 33 and Bill 34 where the political staff's information, communication is not allowed to be shared anymore. That is a huge concern. Specifically in the context of what we are going through every single day, there is the former judge investigating the procurement practices and all those things, and there's so much going on. We need to have those answers from the minister. How will that tackle those situations?

Madam Speaker, I would really appreciate if I knew how much time is left.

The Deputy Speaker: Two minutes.

Mr. Deol: Two minutes. Okay. Thank you.

My question to the minister is: why is it necessary to grant the cabinet such broad powers to amend any legislation referencing the former FOIP Act rather than bringing specific amendments through the legislation process?

What specific privacy safeguards will apply to the Office of Statistics and Information given its exemption from key provisions of the Protection of Privacy Act? Has the Information and Privacy Commissioner been consulted about these amendments? What was their assessment, particularly regarding the exemptions for the Office of Statistics and Information?

Also, can the minister provide specific examples of feedback from public bodies that led to these amendments? How will the paramountcy provision impact Albertans' ability to access information when there is a conflict between the two acts? Given that these amendments are being made before the acts even come into force, my question is: what processes will be in place to monitor implementation and address any unforeseen issues that arise?

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn the debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 48 **iGaming Alberta Act**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 48, iGaming Alberta Act.

I'm pleased to be able to talk about a piece of legislation that my department has put a lot of work in over these last 18 months. As you'll recall, one of the items in my mandate from the Premier was to work with Indigenous partners to finalize Alberta's online gaming strategy. The strategy would focus on both responsible gambling as well as revenue generation.

Before I get into the strategy, I think it's important to set the scene of what the market looks like right now in Alberta. By definition, online gaming, or iGaming, includes sports betting, online slots, live table games, live poker, and blackjack. Right now Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada that operates a private, regulated iGaming market. It's been in operation for about three years.

We know that there are many other private operators running online gaming and sports book sites in Canada and Alberta. For years the Internet has enabled many private operators to provide online betting services to Albertans outside of provincial and federal legislative regulatory requirements and frameworks. We refer to these operators and their markets as the grey market or the illicit market because they're not operating under any rules that protect consumers.

There is an online gaming operator in Alberta that is doing things exactly right. Currently Play Alberta is the province's only legal, regulated iGaming site operating through Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis. Play Alberta started up in the fall of 2020. It has grown to become the place that Albertans can safely gamble online. The folks at AGLC are very proud of Play Alberta, and so are we. It's simple, user friendly. It offers a wide variety of sports betting options as well as casino games.

We're also proud of Play Alberta's customer service experience and how it responds to consumer demands for enhanced features and secure, responsible operations. Above all, it protects its users, Madam Speaker. For example, Play Alberta currently integrates AGLC's GameSense, which requires that players have the ability to set limits as well as betting limits or self-exclude if they want to take a break from gambling. Play Alberta is also integrated with social responsibility messaging to help ensure that gambling stays fun for those who do choose to gamble. Play Alberta has done well, striking a balance between ensuring social responsibility in iGaming and revenue generation.

Right now, Madam Speaker, about \$1.5 billion in revenue from gaming sources is sent to our general revenue fund every year. This past year Play Alberta contributed about \$235 million into that grand total, an increase of more than \$42 million from the prior year. As you might imagine, some of that spike was the result of the extra business brought by the Edmonton Oilers' fun and exciting playoff run all the way to game 7 of the Stanley Cup.

Now, Madam Speaker, I just spent the last few minutes bragging about Play Alberta, and for good reason. It's a success story. But our estimates show that Play Alberta is only capturing approximately 45 per cent of Alberta's online gaming market. This means that more than half of players in the province exclusively place bets on unregulated sites. Importantly, these unregulated sites may not offer the robust social responsibility or consumer protection tools that Play Alberta has.

It's quite disconcerting to know that there are Albertans gambling on sites where they face a higher risk of developing gambling-related harms. They could be exposed to risks like unsecured financial transactions or unresolved consumer complaints regarding potentially unfair play. In other words, there are a significant number of Albertans who are potentially being preyed upon by grey market sites or illicit sites. This legislation proposes to change that.

When we set out to build our own strategy for iGaming, we wanted something that was truly made in Alberta, but we also knew that we had to find out what works elsewhere and what doesn't. Last summer my department met and spoke with representatives from the gaming sector in Alberta, including First Nations operators of casinos as well as racing entertainment centres. I also had opportunities to meet and speak with industry representatives at events in both Ontario as well as Nevada. We learned a lot from what we heard and what we observed.

Madam Speaker, if this bill is approved, it would take the first steps towards implementing a regulated market for private companies to legally operate online gambling sites in Alberta. We would create a new organization called the Alberta iGaming corporation to oversee the private companies operating in our market. This is similar to our counterparts in Ontario, and we know it would work well here.

4:00

We would also designate Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis as the regulator of the iGaming market just as it does for other parts of the gaming sector as well as the liquor and cannabis sectors. Further, we would align the legal gaming age for online platforms with the existing minimum age of 18 for land-based casinos. Our

goal is not to create new gamblers but to make existing online gambling safer.

As the gaming industry continues to evolve globally and in Alberta, it's important that we modernize Alberta's approach to gaming to protect the health and safety of Albertans, particularly our youth. Key regulations and policies related to revenue, consumer protection, and social responsibility will be brought forward for consideration later this year following further engagement with our Indigenous partners as well as industry leaders. As I noted earlier, Madam Speaker, we know that unregulated grey market sites pose higher risks in terms of providing consumer protection and upholding social responsibility, especially for vulnerable groups and those experiencing gambling-related harms.

I can tell you that one of the protections that we would bring to the marketplace if this legislation is approved is centralized self-exclusion platforms. This platform will provide online gamblers who want to take a break from gambling with the ability to block or exclude themselves from being able to access online gambling sites, just as Albertans who choose to gamble on Play Alberta or at Alberta's casinos and racing entertainment centres can exclude themselves from gambling at those places, all thanks to AGLC's program. We would also require iGaming operators to register to be able to operate in Alberta and to follow any rules, including rules about advertising, that will be set out through the policy of standards and regulation later this year.

Once the regulated market is established, Alberta's government will be able to capture gambling revenues currently lost to unregulated sites often located outside of Alberta. This new revenue can be used to support First Nations as well as social responsibility initiatives and other government priorities.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I want to make sure that this bill isn't about opening a new revenue source for the government. It isn't a cash grab, and we're not looking to create new gamblers in Alberta. I want to be perfectly clear: if you don't gamble today, please don't start tomorrow. That is not the purpose of this. We know that gambling will never be safe, but there are ways to make it safer. There are ways to make it more responsible. That's what we aim to do, and I invite the support of the House to give second reading to Bill 48.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate? The time for interventions has passed. Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to address Bill 48, the iGaming Alberta Act, which seeks to legalize and regulate online gambling in our province. As we delve into the details of this bill, it is crucial to examine its potential impacts, both positive and negative, and to scrutinize the competence or lack of the UCP government in handling this significant legislative change.

Bill 48 introduces the Alberta iGaming corporation, a new Crown corporation tasked with overseeing and regulating online gambling in Alberta. This bill aims to cut through the illegal gambling market, establish guardrails for these sites, and allow the government rather than offshore companies to profit. While the intentions seem noble, the execution leaves much to be desired.

I will start with the first one, which is the lack of specific regulations. One of the most glaring issues with Bill 48 is the absence of specific rules and regulations for online gambling sites. The bill merely enables the creation of standards and regulations by the LGIC after the legislation is enacted. This approach is just like

buying a car without knowing if it has brakes or a steering wheel. It's bound to lead to a crash.

Without clear regulations, Madam Speaker, we are left in the dark about how the Alberta iGaming corporation will operate. Will it prioritize player protection? Will it ensure responsible gambling practices? These are critical questions that remain unanswered. The UCP government seems to be taking a wait-and-see approach here, hoping that details will magically fall into place after the bill has been passed in the Legislature. This is not how governance works.

The bill fails to address the potential harm and impact of greater advertising exposure on children, young people, and Albertans already at risk from current gambling activity. Education and policies to limit exposure of advertising are essential to reduce the overall impact, overall harm that lead to higher risks of gambling addiction, yet the UCP government seems to have overlooked these critical aspects of online gambling. We all know that advertising is a very powerful tool. Companies have figured out how to use this tool so effectively to reach out to the audience they want to target, and when it comes to gambling, it can be particularly insidious. International research has shown that advertisements for gambling increase the number of people with gambling addictions.

Many jurisdictions have taken precautions by restricting advertisements, especially those targeting minors. Companies can hire influential people from sports. They can hire influencers from other fields to advertise on their behalf, and that can influence the behaviour of minors, and that can influence the behaviour of young people. There must be some sort of regulations, there must be some sort of rules around these advertisements of gambling websites. As I mentioned, many jurisdictions have taken precautions, and they have put some rules and regulations in place. This Bill 48 does not include any provisions to limit or regulate gambling advertisements. This oversight is not a minor flaw, Madam Speaker. It is a significant failure to protect vulnerable populations.

Managing the transition from unregulated to regulated online gambling is a complex task, and Bill 48 does not address the complexities involved. It's just like the UCP government trying to build a bridge without considering the engineering principles required to ensure it doesn't collapse. They have done that in Camrose by building a school with no utilities and with no roads. This government is good at doing that.

The transition from unregulated grey sites to the regulated system will require robust compliance mechanisms. How will the government ensure that offshore operators adhere to Alberta's regulations? What penalties will be in place for noncompliance? These questions are left unanswered, leaving us to wonder if the UCP government has truly thought through the practicalities of implementing this legislation. This bill does not assure Albertans that the increased revenues and jobs will be realized by Albertans, by all Albertans, including First Nations and Métis people. The UCP government seems to have forgotten that inclusivity is not a buzzword for a fundamental principle of governance.

First Nations and Métis communities have historically been marginalized, and it's crucial – it is very crucial – that any new legislation considers their needs and ensures that they will benefit from the increased revenues. They must be consulted on every piece of legislation before the government introduces that in this Assembly.

4:10

Bill 48 directs surplus funds that will be generated to the general revenue fund but does not specify any allocation for responsible gaming, player protection, or other harm reduction programs. Maybe this government doesn't even believe in harm reduction. This lack of specific regulations and specific allocation of funds is

a concern, and it clearly tells us that the UCP government is more interested in creating more revenue than in supporting vulnerable communities. The minister has mentioned in his remarks that this is not the intention of the bill, but when we look at the bill, when we look at the details, when we dig into the details and we look at the impacts, we can easily find out that that is exactly the intent. Otherwise, we would have been debating about the specific guardrails, the regulations in this bill. We shouldn't be debating about the revenue; we should be debating about people who we need to protect from addictions.

Gambling addictions and player protection are another issue that I want to highlight and discuss. While most Albertans can gamble without serious addictions, there is always a population that develops serious addictions, Madam Speaker, and Bill 48 does not include safeguards around player protection and gambling addiction prevention although it allows for regulations to be passed after the act is enacted. We don't know how many people will be involved in those discussions. We don't know who will decide those safeguards. Will it be decided behind closed doors, or will the government go out and talk to the real people in the communities who will be impacted by this bill? This is not the uncertainty that Albertans should be facing at this point.

Albertans should be included in decision-making. They must be consulted before any bill is introduced. Bill 48 does not include any of these regulations. This reactive approach is like putting a Band-Aid on a wound after it has already become infected. Gambling addiction is a serious issue that can lead to financial ruin, family breakdowns, and mental health problems. It can impact the lives of not only one person; it can impact the lives of the family and the next generations to come. This is a very serious issue. The UCP government has acknowledged the need for a self-exclusion program similar to the one currently in place for physical casinos. However, this is just one piece of the puzzle. Comprehensive player protection measures must be in place from the outset, not as an afterthought.

This bill also impacts charities and First Nations. Alberta charities and First Nations currently benefit from revenue generated in physical casinos. Those charities have been doing amazing work in Alberta. If I may, I want to specifically highlight the work that those charities have been doing in my riding and in the entire northeast Calgary. I have met with seniors' associations. They got some money from physical casinos, and they have bought some computers and they are providing computer literacy to new immigrants who are of their age trying to learn computers, trying to learn English, trying to learn the rules and regulations, and trying to learn about where to get their drivers' licences: all those things.

They have done amazing work in our communities. There are so many associations who have been working on women empowerment because of the money that they got from casinos. There are associations who have done amazing work especially during the pandemic because they had some reserve funding with them from casinos; they provided meals to the people who were impacted. Under this bill those charities will be impacted. The entire revenue will go into the general revenue fund, and this bill does not specify any allocation for responsible gambling, player protection, or other harm reduction programs. This government seems to be playing a game of chance with the livelihoods of these communities.

Charitable gaming activities generate significant revenues for the delivery of programs and services in communities across Alberta. The First Nations development fund is funded by revenues from government-owned slot machines located in First Nation casinos. It provides grants for economic, social, and community development projects identified by First Nation communities. Bill 48 does not

address how these funds will be impacted or how the government plans to ensure that these communities continue to benefit from gambling revenues.

The minister has also mentioned that this bill is almost similar to the one that was passed in Ontario and that this bill takes that model as an example. However, despite Ontario's efforts to regulate online gaming sites, many offshore online gambling companies continue to operate unregulated. The UCP government seems to be betting on a model that has already shown its limitations. We should be learning from those limitations, not copying the same model. Ontario's experience with online gambling has been mixed. The province has seen significant economic benefits, including an increase in jobs and GDP, but it has also faced challenges in regulating offshore operatives. Alberta must learn from Ontario's experience and implement robust measures to ensure that the benefits of regulated online gambling are realized without compromising player protection and responsible gambling practices.

Let's delve deeper into the economic impact and job creation potential under this Bill 48. The UCP government has touted the economic benefits of regulating online gambling, pointing to Ontario as a model. In Ontario regulated gambling contributed around 15,000 jobs and \$2.7 billion to the province's GDP in the first year of operation. The numbers are impressive, but they come with costs. While the potential for job creation and economic growth is significant, we must ask ourselves: at what cost? Increase in gambling activity can lead to higher rates of addiction, which in turn can strain public health resources and social services. The UCP government must ensure that the economic benefits do not come at the expense of the well-being of the most vulnerable Albertans.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Public health and social services are another issue that I want to discuss. Gambling addiction is a public health issue that requires a comprehensive approach. The UCP government has mentioned implementation of a voluntary self-exclusion program, but this is just one piece. We need to work more to protect vulnerable Albertans. And who can trust the UCP when it comes to public health?

An Hon. Member: We do.

4:20

Member Brar: They can trust themselves, but Albertans don't, Mr. Speaker.

We need a multifaceted strategy that includes public awareness campaigns, support services for those struggling with addiction, and robust regulations to prevent harmful practices for Albertans, and by "Albertans" I mean people who have elected us, not these Albertans who stand with Donald Trump on economic issues. [interjections] You can laugh at yourself. The government must allocate a portion of the revenue that they generate from online gambling to fund these initiatives. This includes providing resources for mental health services, financial counselling, and support groups, and by investing in these areas, we can mitigate the negative impacts of the increased gambling activity and ensure that those who need help can access it.

Transparency and accountability is another important aspect that we need to discuss. Transparency and accountability are crucial when it comes to regulating online gambling. The UCP government must be clear about how the Alberta iGaming corporation will operate, how it will be funded, and how it will be held accountable. This includes regular reporting on its activities, financial performance, and the effectiveness of its player protection

measures. We must also ensure that there is independent oversight of the corporation to prevent conflicts of interests and ensure that it operates in the best interest of all Albertans. This oversight should include representatives from public health, social services, community organizations, people from the First Nations and Métis community. Then only can we have a balanced perspective.

We can also learn from other jurisdictions, international jurisdictions beyond Ontario, and we can learn the best practices. If we look beyond Ontario, we can learn from other jurisdictions like the United Kingdom. They have implemented strict regulations to protect players, including limits on advertising, mandatory self-exclusion programs, and funding for addiction treatment services. These measures have been effective in reducing the harm reduction with gambling while still allowing the industry to grow. The UCP government should consider adopting similar practices to ensure that Alberta's online gambling market is safe, fair, and responsible.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, let's work together to ensure that any legislation passed in the House is inclusive.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 48, the iGaming Alberta Act. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 48, the iGaming Alberta Act. This legislation underscores our government's commitment to modernizing Alberta's gaming industry, safeguarding consumers, and bolstering our provincial economy. Currently there is only one regulated online gaming site allowed to operate within Alberta. However, a great number of concerns that I brought forward to the minister – we have seen unregulated iGaming activity remain widely available without protections to those using it. Not only do these unregulated sites expose Albertans to potential risk due to the absence of provincial protection measures, but it also results in significant economic loss within the province.

This legislation seeks to address this issue by creating the Alberta iGaming corporation to oversee the rapidly expanding iGaming market. Bill 48 will achieve two key goals, reducing the illicit iGaming market by offering Albertans a broader choice of regulated, socially responsible online gaming websites. Our goal is to not create new gamblers but to make existing online gambling safer, making sure that there are consumer protections in place for those that are taking part in online gambling. Secondly, it will enable our government to capture portions of the gambling revenues currently lost to unregulated sites. This revenue can go towards supporting the needs and priorities of Albertans, like responsible gaming initiatives, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 48 will designate Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis as Alberta's iGaming regulator and establish appropriate ministerial oversight to support the integrity of the market. Our government is here to serve the good of Albertans by outlawing all forms of underage gambling, including iGaming. This legislation establishes critical regulatory requirements which protect Albertans and reduce the red tape burden.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about an organization called CSG West. This is a trinational organization with representatives from Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. I had an opportunity in December to go to one of their events. When we were there, we actually had an opportunity to discuss online gambling and the impacts that it has on individuals in all three countries. The number one risk that came in this conversation was specifically around the unregulated market, where bad actors were taking advantage of people by not having responsible gaming, by not having regulated rates that were advertised as to what the actual winning capabilities could be for

somebody who is gambling. They were intentionally pushing folks to the limits. These are unacceptable risks that create absolutely devastating results because they are unregulated. We are taking the steps to address these types of concerns that were raised not just by members from Canada but the U.S. and Mexico.

Let's be clear on this as well. Our government is committed to protecting and serving Albertans while continuing to cut red tape across all industries. The economic rationale for this legislation is compelling. By regulating and taxing online gaming, Alberta can reclaim revenues lost to these illicit online gambling sites. These taxation dollars are then able to be reinvested in programming, whether it's in health care, mental health and addictions, gaming responsibility programs, a number of different avenues that will help with the betterment of our society. For context Ontario's regulated iGaming market generated approximately \$2.2 billion in revenue. This opportunity to reinvest these funds into essential public works is a way that we can build in sustainability and should be a nonpartisan issue.

This past year Play Alberta contributed about \$235 million to Alberta's gaming resources, an increase of more than \$42 million from 2022 and '23. The increase in revenue that this bill will create could build schools, hospitals, roads, fund Alberta infrastructure projects better than ever before, but it can also do one more thing. It can provide additional dollars to make sure that there are responsible gaming supports in place for Albertans.

Our government has prioritized extensive consultation with stakeholders, including First Nations communities. These discussions have revealed great interest among stakeholders and communities. This inclusive approach ensures that we establish an equitable regulatory framework which reflects diverse interests within our province. While the gaming industry continues to evolve globally and in Alberta, we must modernize Alberta's approach to gaming to protect the health and safety of Albertans, particularly the youth. Key regulations and policies related to revenue, consumer protection, and social responsibilities will be brought forward for consideration later this year, following further engagement with our Indigenous partners, industry leaders, and community leaders.

We acknowledge the concerns surrounding the potential impact of online gaming on existing land-based casinos. Our government has met and spoken with representatives from the gaming sector in Alberta, including First Nations and operators of casinos and racing entertainment centres. Bill 48 would implement a regulatory market for private companies to legally operate online gaming sites in Alberta. Unregulated online gaming already exists in Alberta. By implementing a regulatory framework, we aim to allow these operators to compete fairly while ensuring Albertan consumers' protections are in place.

4:30

One of the protections we would bring forward to the marketplace involves a centralized self-exclusion platform. We know that unregulated grey market sites pose higher risks in terms of providing consumer protections and upholding social responsibility, especially for vulnerable groups and those experiencing gambling-related harms.

If Bill 48 is implemented, thanks to AGLC's programming provincially regulated iGaming platforms will provide online gamblers who want to take a break from gambling with the ability to block themselves from accessing online gambling sites. This isn't a cash grab. We are not looking to create new gamblers or make people addicted to sports betting. This is an avenue to regulate a market that is currently being run by illicit grey sites that do not have the best interests of Albertans at heart.

Gambling in all forms cannot be made a hundred per cent safe, but it can be made safer. That's what this bill aims to do. Mr. Speaker, Bill 48 represents a forward-thinking approach to modernizing Alberta's gaming industry. This balances economic opportunity with consumer protections and stakeholder engagement. I urge all members to support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 48, the iGaming Alberta Act, with more than just a few questions, some to do with what the bill proposes but also for what it seems to me the bill omits. There are gaps, and while the bill indeed, as referenced by the minister earlier, could be seen to be a beginning, a path forward, the path is also one that should it not be formed with care, planning, forethought comes with a great deal of risk, particularly for those who are most vulnerable: children, youth, and anyone else who might be experiencing addiction.

While I very much appreciate the need to regulate this particular industry, particularly since we know gambling in all its forms has become nothing if not ubiquitous in recent years, it is unfortunate that this bill such as it is, and as my colleague mentioned, lacks the detail required to provide at least a few of those safeguards that we should be talking about, those safeguards that are necessary to ensure that it is crystal clear that this government's priorities begin and end with protecting Albertans as well as to ensure that the transition from unregulated to regulated gambling is managed appropriately.

To hear that regulations are coming in due time, particularly when the daily lives of Albertans are involved, just isn't good enough in this instance. As this House has seen in many recent times, many bills lack similar details and clarity. Too often as a House we are assured that there will be much – so much – consultation before regulations are released, including consultations with experts, experts perhaps in addiction and recovery, community members, nonprofits, folks from provinces that have been on this path before us, but given past history, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that we can trust that an appropriate level of consultation before regulations are released happens.

Without some specificity in terms of all these rules and expectations the bill is found wanting. Certainly, as we know, the bill creates a new Crown corporation, iGaming Alberta, that will be responsible for managing and regulating online gambling in the province, that really important oversight piece. But, as I said, there is a framework for change. There are details, and it does sound straightforward until you realize that the bill doesn't include an enforceable regulation or player protection policy. It leaves the door open for future regulations to be decided later by the minister, by cabinet without consultation or transparency, at least consultation that the rest of us get to hear about.

As a colleague of mine noted, it's like approving a blueprint with no structural engineering. It's asking us to pour the foundation without knowing what kind of building it is that we're actually constructing. It's a blank cheque, and that can indeed lead to some measure of risk if not danger just because of what it is we're talking about here.

We know that it deals with bringing that grey market, those online gambling sites into a regulated, more controlled space. It will provide, one hopes, some better oversight and will of course generate revenue. The trouble is that this shouldn't just be about the revenue that's generated; it should be about the people that are behind that revenue. For instance, what standards will online

gambling companies be required to meet? How will this government protect children and youth from online gambling exposure? I can tell you as a kind of stepgrandmother to someone who's 13, a grandmother to a child who's 11 that they know absolutely how to get around all those safeguards. It will not be hard for them to figure out how to pretend they are 18 online. How will the government enforce that age verification? Will advertising restrictions be meaningful? These are not minor administrative details; they are life-altering and community-shaping policies.

We know that this government, too, has got a bit of a track record of saying one thing and doing another, doing just enough for it to seem like it's okay but not really providing all the background, all the specifics, all those extra supports that are actually necessary to make something work the way it should. We know that there's repeated underfunding of mental health supports. We know that there have been some cuts to addiction services, a hands-off approach to some of our industries. And we know that there's a generalized lack of trust in terms of whether or not the government is indeed doing things in all of Albertans' best interests. Particularly when the stakes are so high as to ensure the protection of all of our population, I would think that this is something that there's a wee bit more discussion on.

We certainly know from experience, and we've heard as well from jurisdictions like Ontario that when you move forward to regulate online gambling, there can be unforeseen consequences. And without some sense of what the legislation truly offers, which we know will be found in regulations to come, things like wraparound supports, supports that include not only information and details about how that newly minted Crown corporation will operate, all the expectations it's going to be required to fulfill but also some measure of protection for the folks to be engaged in this, the bill is found wanting. I am hoping that as we progress in debate, we'll find some of those answers.

What we can't forget as we move toward the establishment of this new Crown corporation is that the sector itself is everywhere, so easily accessible at any and all times of the day. In this world of digital gambling the platforms are always on. You think about the number of hours each one of us spends on our phone. It's too easy to download that app. Even I have Lotto Spot on my phone. This isn't like walking into a casino once in a while and playing the slot machines. This is a 24/7 highly targeted endeavour that is specifically designed to keep people engaged. Like, I've done a number of casinos in my work as a teacher to support my music programs, and just walking into those casinos and knowing how completely different they are than kind of the life that's outside the door is quite something. I can imagine that online gaming is not dissimilar. That level of accessibility is incredible and at all levels, and I think probably something that just simply increases. So we would want to see a bill, then, that includes that level of understanding and that depth.

Again, I do understand and very much appreciate the intention, as articulated by the minister and other folks earlier, the intention in terms of the creation of the legislation. Quite frankly, as a person who's inherently a rule follower, I also appreciate the need to regulate this particular sector. But we also know that right now somewhere around 50 per cent of Albertans are already using the current Alberta government regulated program, and we also know something like that means, like, 300,000 who are registered players. What we don't know are the numbers of Albertans who use those unregulated, unlicensed sites, but we can imagine that it's probably a comparable number.

There is indeed a revenue argument to be made when one considers all of those wagers that are made on Play Alberta, with year-over-year increases. It is an exceptionally quickly growing

market, a quickly growing sector. I do also appreciate that the minister in earlier remarks has also reflected more than once on the need to ensure all things gambling are managed in both a safer and more responsible way and that gambling inherently will never be safe. But the minister has also noted that there is a great potential for an increase in revenue, which, of course, is part of the mandate of the AGLC already. Again, this can't just be about revenue and the generation of revenue. It has to be about the people that that revenue represents.

Even as we're sitting here in this lovely place engaging in this debate, I think it's also important to note that one of those guardrails that often helps people as they run into personal challenge, including addiction, is all of those lovely nonprofits, those smaller community-run organizations. We depend upon them. They run peer support groups. They connect us to experts. They provide research. They provide someone who's had some measure of the same experience that we are presently going through, someone who's already lived that experience, folks who've lived through what we might be in the middle of.

4:40

Unfortunately, one of the outcomes of our recent budget, given the need that exists even now and given the fact that we have this bill before us, is that the government recently ended a funding contract for the Problem Gambling Resources Network, an Edmonton-based organization that has had government funding, an agreement with the government in one way or another since 1993. This group was told, much like other organizations my colleague from Calgary-Currie told us about last week, that their three-year funding was being pulled. So even as we debate this bill today, people in Alberta are now at heightened risk.

That network provides support through a drop-in centre, a phone line, and their website. They direct folks to resources. They also help people enrol in what we've also heard about, the AGLC voluntary self-exclusion program, which bans them from casinos. Certainly, in terms of prevention I think, even though a very small organization, their impact cannot be overstated. They focused the last number of years on educating young people within the city particularly. They've created a really in-depth education program where volunteers give presentations in schools and workplaces, and they estimate that in over 10,000 presentations they've reached around 250,000 people, all those lovely young people out there.

But what their volunteers also know is that they've noticed over the last number of years an increased need for the information they present. One of their volunteers, in an article that I read, said that she can have kids rattle off lists of 10 or 15 gaming sites, but they have no idea of what's available for them if they need to go somewhere for help. They have no idea the organizations or the people who might be available to help them if they find themselves struggling. They have no idea who's there, who might be on their side to help them through those challenging times. And while we've been told from the folks opposite that funds are being reallocated, right now those services, this help is unavailable even as this bill is before us.

It is very true that in Ontario things seem to be going fairly well, but it is also very true that in Ontario there have indeed been some unintended consequences. Last year Ontario commissioned a report that was tasked with looking solely at the economic end of Ontario's regulation of iGaming. If you're only interested in the economics, it is, as my colleague noted earlier, really good news. They looked specifically at its second year of operation. They found there were 47 licensed iGaming operators with 77 licensed iGaming sites and about \$2.4 billion in revenue, and there were indeed increases in jobs. In fact, they increased full-time equivalents by

about 2,800 over the first year of operation, a job contribution up about 24 per cent. It was Deloitte doing it, and Deloitte said: yes, we've made our five-year projection already in our second year.

Overall, it was estimated that the regulated industry contributed \$2.7 billion to the GDP, and as my colleague already noted, about 15,000 full-time equivalents were created. It also supported provincial and municipal government revenue in Ontario – that's probably a good thing – also an indirect contribution of an estimated almost 9,300 jobs, so no small measure of improvement to jobs and sustainability. However, again, it's just about the revenue. It's not about the effect, the impact on people in a daily way. It's also not about prevention. It's also not about safety for all of those folks who just click that app on their phone.

As we've already heard, gambling, the addiction part of it is not a fringe problem. It is a public health issue. It can destroy families. It can deepen poverty. It can lead to mental health crises. According to StatsCan nearly 2 per cent of Canadians suffer from some form of a severe gambling addiction. Sounds small, but that 2 per cent generate a disproportionate share of gambling revenue, and this bill, because it doesn't seem to include prevention, does nothing to address that.

It doesn't mandate funding for harm reduction. It doesn't require licensed operators to contribute to addiction support. We've heard that it will, but again, regulations to follow. It doesn't require advertising limits or content moderation to reduce emotional targeting or exposure for minors. The word "addiction" doesn't appear in the bill. While the minister has said that a self-exclusion program might be introduced later – and certainly that is one part of the puzzle that can help people – it's only just one part. We certainly need more than just a checkbox. We need a plan that will indeed protect Albertans.

In terms of advertising this probably is one of the most harmful effects of what's going on now in iGaming. There have been some jurisdictions like the United Kingdom that have done some studies on advertising and the increased number of gambling messages that fill up our screens every day. We know that in Ontario, in fact, between a four-day period of October 2023 Marketplace researchers found 3,500 gambling messages across all broadcasts. That meant 2.8 every single minute or one-fifth of viewing time. That's a shockingly high number. If any of us, you know, watched the lovely playoffs last year, we know how often we saw, especially our hockey heroes, advertising for those gambling sites. That is something that this bill doesn't address either. It makes gambling something that isn't just fun; it makes it something that you want to belong to because your hockey heroes are telling you that you should.

All of this means that we do indeed need to be mitigating some of these issues. I'm hoping that we can find some of those mitigations as we discuss further.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has the call.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand up and support this bill. I'm honoured to rise and speak about Bill 48. It's an important bill. It's not something to be undertaken lightly and be talking about regulating the iGaming market.

Mr. Speaker, as we're speaking, I just want to pinpoint something. As conservatives we deeply care about Albertans. We deeply care that Albertans have jobs, deeply care that they have high-paying jobs, that they have a future, and their families and kids have a future. Even as we were looking and debating this here today and prior, we are not advocating for more gamblers at all. One of the challenges that I came up with as an individual is: are we not

just putting people in harm's way? But through chatting with the minister and chatting about the unregulated market – and may I remind you that currently in Alberta we only have Play Alberta, the only regulated gambling site in Alberta, but many people gamble on many other sites, many of them unregulated, playing in the black market.

The challenge of this is that there aren't protections for Albertans. As we move forward in this bill, we are talking about protecting those very key elements by making this a regulated market, by protecting those families, protecting the futures of our kids, and the future of our industries, specifically by making sure that they aren't getting tempted or being drawn in with illicit practices.

This is one of the challenges. As I've chatted with the minister prior, I have personal friends who have had gambling addictions. I stepped into this as we were conversing with friends very close to me who racked up tens of thousands of dollars worth of debt in their early 20s, trying to step into college with \$60,000 worth of debt. How do you overcome that, Mr. Speaker? Well, it takes a long time, and thankfully those friends of mine were able to get help and also overcome that. As we were talking about it, there was a context here of: how do we protect people?

Mr. Speaker, just to reiterate, we're not advocating for more gambling, but we are talking about safely protecting people so that they can gamble responsibly. One of the ways that we're planning on doing that in the future, my understanding is – and many of the good gambling online providers currently have methods for both pop-ups. If you start changing your gambling habits, then all of a sudden their internal software pings and says: this person's changed their gambling; maybe went from 50 cent bets to \$5 bets, for instance, or \$20 bets, or \$50 bets. Those changes are significant on a person's wallet. They're no longer gambling with purpose. They're truly gambling.

The good providers of online sites have mechanisms internally in order to say: here's how we want people to responsibly gamble. Something else, Mr. Speaker, is that the responsible gaming sites: those providers want to be responsible providers; otherwise, their clients leave as well. We need the opportunity to also make sure that there are rules around our online iGaming sites in order to properly maintain and also regulate those things.

4:50

One of the other things that the minister brought up is that when somebody is seeming to be gambling in a nonregular manner, they would get a phone call. That is important. They're going to say, "Hey, you seem to be struggling today," or "Maybe there is an opportunity; maybe you need to stop gambling today." Those things are responsible ways forward for us as a government to protect the families, protect children, not that they're gambling, but to protect the future of those and also protect people's livelihoods. Once again, we're not advocating for gambling or growing the sports betting world. We're trying to make online gambling safer, more responsible while also making it accessible and legal, as I mentioned, for Albertans. Because there has been this rise in popularity of online gambling, it is responsible of our government to make sure that we allow Albertans a way forward in a thoughtful market that is not predatory or is lacking of safeguards. We need to continue to see that our market is safe.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was watching hockey the other day, and online there were advertisements of online betting companies advertising a hockey game here. When I realized that, that's part of the challenge as well. Currently, we can watch hockey, for instance, in other jurisdictions, who have the ability to advertise. Personally, I could have gone on and tried to sign up for one of those sites, and that would have been illegal. But Albertans don't know that. They

are already seeing those advertisements. We need to be a responsible government, which we are, and this is part of bringing it in by saying that we are going to make sure that Albertans are protected by responsible gambling here in Alberta.

This is significant legislation, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe I've said it yet, but I support the bill going forward because this is about being responsible. It is about making sure that we are taking care of Albertans and that they have a way forward in order to go and use their excess money in a way forward that they would consider safe gambling. We need to continue to do that. We can't ignore the growing market or the unregulated online gambling market. It needs accountability, and this is what this bill does.

Now, speaking of following someone else, we've looked at the Ontario market, Mr. Speaker. It operates in a private, regulated iGaming market. We've borrowed some of the good things, and we've also made a few tweaks, too. That's been a successful market. It has protected people, but it's also been able to capture much of the illicit market that was there prior and also has set a high bar of responsible gambling. So we are aligning much of Alberta's model with Ontario, where it makes sense. We need to be able to see that both markets have some similarities. This will also help us streamline our regulations. It will also allow companies to enter in sooner and faster because we can be able to potentially align there. It also attracts some of those operators and companies to Alberta, so they are no longer being illicit, but they have operations legally here in Alberta. We are building upon Ontario's successes, and we're making a few tweaks while considering the unique needs of Albertans.

Now, as well, Mr. Speaker, there are also revenue benefits, so I want to talk about that. By actually regulating those illicit markets here in Alberta, we will be able to retain some revenue as well. This is a new revenue stream. Now, there have been some challenges to make sure that those revenue streams – or there's conversation like: oh, isn't that new money? No. The money is already going into these sites. This is simply a way to actually make sure that Albertans are playing on sites and also capturing some revenue as well.

As I keep mentioning, this isn't about attracting or creating new gamblers, Mr. Speaker, but it's about protecting those existing gamblers, specifically in the illicit market, which is there. It is about bringing them into the protections that we do offer and the opportunity to make sure that we aren't losing revenue, which is currently being lost to these unregulated sites. Now, regulating these sites ensures the safety of these sites and makes them more socially responsible for those that choose them. There's opportunity, as I mentioned, for more safety. Regulating gambling within Alberta ensures the safety of these sites and makes them more responsible, as I said.

Additionally, recapturing the lost revenue will allow it to be used to support government priorities, including safe gambling initiatives and Indigenous revenue generation. Our strategy does reduce the scope of the illicit market by channelling unregulated operators into the regulated market and specifically where we can enforce more social responsibility and consumer protection standards, some of which I've already talked about.

These are key, Mr. Speaker, because the illicit sites: many of them aren't responsible. Some are. We have some very good operators, and there are some that are not good operators. We want to be able to regulate the good operators and allow them to play in a space that is legal while also making sure that they follow our social responsibility markers there. Now, capturing this revenue also depends on future policy decisions, including the percentage of gaming revenue to be shared with private operators and our First Nations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we also understand that there's some concern around iGaming potentially taking revenue away from the charitable gaming model of First Nation groups. However, many unregulated iGaming companies already operate in Alberta, as I've said multiple times, regardless of whether we regulate them or not, and those illicit iGaming companies are not here. They are not paying taxes here, and they are not putting money back into our economy. Some of them aren't even putting money back into the Canadian economy. So the iGaming need and the opportunity to regulate these actually brings in the opportunity for a greater input into Alberta and our economy here, which is our job as a government, and this is a responsible way of doing it.

The minister is making the way forward to address this issue, as I've been mentioning, in a way that makes sense for our unique gaming needs. Alberta has a unique need. It needs to serve the interests of Alberta, and we also have to uphold our social responsibility and the government's commitment to social responsibility in the iGaming market.

We are going to be capturing some revenue that's been lost by the unregulated providers which are, as I mentioned, often outside of Canada. We'll also be able to support the programs and services that Albertans rely upon every day.

Now, as I have mentioned before, some have argued that expanding Albertans' gambling market to include private operators will actually cause more Albertans to struggle with gambling-related harms. I want to emphasize right now that the unregulated iGaming market is already operating in Alberta and that our strategy is not about creating new gamblers. It's about making online gambling safer for Albertans who choose to participate. As I've mentioned, the good operators are utilizing technology, internal technology, to make sure that somebody is on their sites and not truly just gambling or trying to outbid prior sets and doing it in a nonstrategic way.

We do know that gambling does carry risks, whether in a regulated market or an illicit one, and by legalizing and regulating the private market, we can better ensure that important social responsibility tools such as easy-to-use self-exclusion platforms are available to Albertans who choose to gamble online, reducing the risk of gambling-related harms.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to encourage all members to support this bill. It is a good bill, and I'm very thankful for the minister for bringing it forward. It will provide better protection for Albertans who choose to gamble online.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to move to adjourn debate on the bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:00

Bill 41 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand before you today and move second reading of Bill 41, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025.

This bill represents a significant step forward in our commitment to ensuring the responsible stewardship of Alberta's wildlife populations and the lands that they inhabit. It also reflects our dedication to modernizing our wildlife management regulations to better serve Albertans, ensuring that we maintain healthy, vibrant, and incredible landscapes for future generations.

At the core of this bill is the idea of balance: balancing the needs of wildlife, the interests of hunters and trappers, and the protection

of our landscapes and wildlife. As we update the Wildlife Act, we are doing so with respect to the traditions and culture of hunting in Alberta while also making sure that we align ourselves with the evolving needs of modern hunters, our federal laws, and best practices around the world.

Bill 41 proposes a series of amendments designed to improve wildlife management, enhance the humane treatment of wildlife, and bring Alberta's regulations in line with modern technological advances. More importantly, it seeks to reflect the values that Albertans hold dear: responsible hunting, the ethical treatment of animals, and the protection of our natural heritage.

Through this bill we are not only addressing existing challenges but also looking to the future. We are empowering our hunters to be better stewards of wildlife and improving the ability of our fish and wildlife enforcement services to maintain a safe, fair, and accountable system for all involved.

There are several proposed amendments in Bill 41 that I want to highlight, each of which brings a vital benefit to Alberta's wildlife management system, our hunters, and the overall well-being of our environment. First, if passed, this legislation will address the definition of a resident hunter. Under the current rules anyone can come to Alberta and be considered a resident hunter on day 1. This is not how most other provinces define residency for hunting purposes.

Bill 41 introduces a six-month residency requirement to become a resident hunter or trapper in Alberta, ensuring that individuals genuinely establish themselves as part of our community before benefiting from Alberta's wildlife resources. This change reflects similar regulations in other provinces and will help maintain the integrity of our wildlife management system.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

As technology continues to evolve, it is essential that our laws evolve with it. The Wildlife Act has not kept pace with the rapid integration of digital technology in our lives, and Bill 41 addresses this gap. Proposed amendments will allow hunters to use electronic tags for big game animals, streamlining the process of tracking harvested wildlife. Use of mobile devices for logging harvests will make hunting more convenient and efficient, reducing the administrative burden on both hunters and regulatory authorities, and it also allows for immediate data collection to support wildlife management. Furthermore, this change aligns with the growing role of technology in modern hunting practices, ensuring that Alberta remains in line with other jurisdictions that have adopted similar practices.

Bill 41 also proposes amendments to the use of laser pointers for aiming. The simple reality is that laser pointers are just an aiming device similar to the high-powered scopes that are already legal and commonly used by hunters to improve accuracy. This change is about removing excessive red tape and aligning the regulations with modern practices. In this amendment we are ensuring that completely illuminating the target is still prohibited, preserving fair chase hunting principles, while disentangling regulations that are outdated and overly restrictive. This change reflects the growing need to keep regulations in line with advancements in technology without sacrificing ethics or safety.

Another change being proposed in Bill 41 is the removal of the mandatory requirement for hunters to wear orange or red clothing. As any hunter and many Albertans know, this outdated requirement has not been enforced for decades. It brings Alberta in line with the modern realities of hunting where safety is maintained in more effective ways such as through communication, responsible firearm handling, and awareness of surroundings.

One of the other changes proposed in Bill 41 also concerns the hunting rights of young Albertans. Currently, Alberta's Wildlife Act requires youth to be directly supervised when hunting even if they hold a valid minors' firearms licence under the Firearms Act. This creates confusion, as minors with a valid firearms licence from the RCMP are allowed to possess and use firearms independently under federal law, subject to any conditions their minors' licence might have.

Bill 41 proposes an amendment to section 31 of the Wildlife Act, which will align provincial regulations with the federal Firearms Act. This change will allow minors who hold a valid minors' firearms licence to hunt in accordance with the conditions attached to their licence. This is already permitted by federal regulations. Section 8(3) of the Firearms Act notes that

an individual who is twelve years old or older but less than eighteen years old is eligible to hold a licence authorizing the individual to possess, in accordance with the conditions attached to the licence, a firearm for the purpose of target practice, hunting or instruction in the use of firearms or for the purpose of taking part in an organized competition.

As part of the permit application process, the Chief Firearms Officer must consult with the parents before issuing a licence and may place conditions. Some of these conditions could be that minors shall be supervised by a licensed adult when using the firearm; minors may only hunt with specified individuals such as their parents, family members, or family friends; firearms shall only be used for target shooting; firearms should only be used for competition; firearms shall only be used for hunting. Those are some of the conditions that could apply there.

The change we are proposing acknowledges that minors who undergo the same Canadian firearm safety course training as adults have the right to be able to operate as guaranteed by the Firearms Act. This is especially important in our rural communities, where hunting is an important part of the culture and children are raised in environments that promote safe, ethical hunting practices. It also acknowledges the reality that the federal Firearms Act already covers the use of firearms by individuals younger than 18 very extensively, and there is no need to have contradictory regulations that may not even be enforceable on a provincial level.

Another important amendment involves the use of dogs to track wounded game. Bill 41 will allow the use of leashed dogs to track big game animals, helping hunters recover animals that have been shot. By allowing dogs to be used for recovering game, we are improving the recovery rates of harvested animals and supporting ethical hunting practices. This change aligns with similar rules in other provinces and other parts of the world while ensuring that we are promoting responsible wildlife management.

For waterfowl hunters Bill 41 will also bring about a change in the rules for using motorized boats. Currently hunters are required to anchor their boats before discharging a firearm. Under the proposed amendment hunters will no longer need to anchor their boat as long as the forward motion of the boat has ceased, which means the boat is actually stationary. This proposed change is in line with federal regulations under the Migratory Birds Convention Act. It reduces unnecessary regulations while still ensuring that the safety and humane treatment of wildlife is maintained. I think many of my colleagues would agree that a hunter should be able to recover and harvest animals responsibly. It benefits no one if that animal is lost.

Bill 41 also seeks to streamline enforcement procedures by removing the need for judicial orders in certain situations. Currently fish and wildlife enforcement services must obtain judicial orders in some cases before they can act on enforcement issues. By

eliminating this requirement, Bill 41 will allow fish and wildlife officers to act more quickly and effectively, ensuring that violations are addressed in a timely manner. Additionally, we are proposing to remove the requirement for judicial orders when wildlife or wildlife parts are voluntarily given up. This will give enforcement officers the tools they need to act without unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, enabling them to focus on protecting Alberta's wildlife and ensuring compliance with the law.

Another key change is the removal of permit requirements for transporting injured wildlife to rehabilitation centres or veterinarians. Under current law individuals must obtain an additional permit to transport sick or injured wildlife, even if they are trying to get the animal to the nearest rehabilitation facility or veterinary clinic. This can delay the process and result in unnecessary harm to the animal. Bill 41 will allow individuals to transport injured wildlife using the shortest reasonable route and without the need for an additional permit as long as the animal does not pose a risk to public safety. This will reduce the administrative burden on both the public and enforcement agencies, and, most importantly, it will help injured animals receive the care they need quicker.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 41 is a forward-thinking piece of legislation that reflects our commitment to sustainable, responsible wildlife management, and it demonstrates our ability to adapt to changing times. By harmonizing provincial laws with federal regulations, integrating modern technologies, and simplifying enforcement procedures, we are positioning Alberta as a leader in ethical wildlife management. These changes are not just about regulations; they are about making Alberta a place where hunters can continue to hunt ethically, where wildlife can be managed sustainably, and where future generations of Albertans can enjoy the same natural resources that we do today. We are ensuring that the spirit of fair chase hunting remains alive and thriving, that our practices are humane, and that we can continue to build a safe, responsible, and competitive system for wildlife conservation.

5:10

I urge all members of this House to support Bill 41 and the amendments it proposes. Together we can ensure that Alberta continues to be a place where wildlife and hunting traditions are respected, protected, and sustained.

With that, I hereby move second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Forestry and Parks has moved second reading of Bill 41, Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025. Are there any others wishing to speak? I recognize the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is that right? Mr. Speaker. Sometimes I don't know what to call you. My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Okay. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 41, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025. I would like to thank the minister for bringing forward this bill. I'd also like to thank the minister for giving us so many opportunities to talk about wildlife in the House this spring, which is great. That's why I became an MLA, to represent wildlife in this room. There are a lot of really good things in this bill. It does introduce technical updates to hunting regulations. In particular, I am pretty fond of the requirement that no domestic sheep and goats will be accompanying hunters while hunting wild sheep and goats. This is one of the only truly conservation-minded parts of this bill, but that is actually about protecting wild goat and sheep populations from diseases that can

be carried by domestic sheep. I would say that that is the part of the bill that is the easiest to support and truly get behind. It really is about protecting wild populations of sheep and goats.

The minister talked a lot about balance and stewardship in his opening remarks, and I echo that. Hunting plays a very important role in our society. It is also one of the many ways that Albertans have an opportunity to appreciate and recreate on Crown lands. It is a thing that Albertans do, my husband included, for which I am very grateful. I certainly appreciate his efforts when we have a moose in the freezer.

That being said, I also believe that ethical hunting is very important, and there are parts of this bill that improve our ethics in this realm of hunting. I know that I have received some questions about the use of lasers for sighting. I actually agree that this is an important technology to improve accuracy and to reduce the risk that an animal will be wounded in the field and then not actually harvested, which, of course, is the scenario that nobody wants to see, right? I also like that.

I do have some questions that I feel we can explore as we debate this bill; in particular, how some of these things will be reflected in regulations. I do appreciate the clause of using electronic tags issued; however, I am curious how that will be enforced in the field. What if a conservation officer or fish and wildlife officer finds somebody hunting, asks them for their tag, and they don't have their phone, or their phone is dead because it's cold outside and it doesn't have enough battery? I feel that we need to really kind of flesh out some of these scenarios and the application in the regulations as they're being developed to make sure that people are hunting with a valid tag and not just hunting without the proper licensing or the proper permissions from the government.

The other thing that I think is really important in the regulations piece is this idea of minors using firearms. In my conversations with constituents and stakeholders this is definitely the part of the bill that, I would say, Albertans are the least comfortable with. It does conjure images of minors running around with guns, because that's kind of what it is. I do appreciate that this bill is actually bringing provincial legislation in line with federal legislation, and I thank the minister for clarifying that parents can place conditions on a minor's license.

I also know that this is important for rural communities, that a lot of rural Albertans are growing up learning how to hunt ducks on the back 40 pond or, you know, in their back 40 forest. I think that that is an important part of rural life and rural culture, but we also need to make sure that when we're talking about any kind of legislation that involves firearms, we are prioritizing safety. I encourage some conversation and some reflection on: how do we guarantee safety when we are allowing minors to hunt on their own with loaded weapons? In thinking about this whole clause and minors with guns for hunting purposes, I was trying to imagine what it would be like.

As the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis the Ghost public land-use zone is in my riding. It is an area where I frequently recreate. I go hiking. I take my dog out there. My husband hunts out in the Ghost although not with much success – he's going to hate that I said that – in large part because the Ghost is this crazy landscape full of people recreating and motorized vehicle recreation that is not very well managed, and the population of people recreating in the Ghost PLUZ and in the Kananaskis PLUZ continues to increase regularly.

If I am imagining minors with guns or really anybody with guns hunting in the Ghost and in the Kananaskis PLUZ, if I'm prioritizing public safety, I think it's very critical in this conversation to separate people who are hunting and people who are target shooting. Overall, I would say that shooting in general on public lands is very poorly managed, and it does make people feel unsafe.

I, for example, stopped going for hikes in the Ghost a couple of years ago because the last time I went with my dog, there was gunfire all around me, and I didn't actually know which direction I could walk in safely. I recognize that most of those people are target shooting and not hunting, but it does create an opportunity for us to be very thoughtful and considerate about how we manage shooting in general on public lands. I think it was last summer that the minister introduced a shooting restriction in the Ghost associated with the TransAlta Road, but all that has done is push shooting to a different part of the public land-use zone.

If this legislation is going to increase the opportunity for more people to have loaded weapons on public lands and actually increase the opportunity for youth to have loaded weapons on public lands, I think that there's a very important conversation about safety that needs to happen. That doesn't necessarily have to be reflected in the legislation, but I do hope that we engage Albertans in this conversation and reflect some of those needs for safety in the regulations around this idea of minors using firearms.

I want to also go back a little bit and just kind of talk about the overall intention of this bill. It is to increase opportunity for people to hunt and for perhaps people who are not currently hunting to explore hunting as a way to gather food or as a way to recreate. Modernizing this, modernizing the technology behind hunting may help to do that. Decreasing the weight for bows, for example, can enable smaller framed people, women and youth, to engage in bow hunting. I mean, I'm not opposed to that.

However, I will say that the thing that this bill doesn't do is actually address the biggest concern that Albertans have right now, which is that hunting and trapping quotas are increasing beyond sustainable limits for wildlife and not based on science. This bill does not address that big concern of Albertans, and why that's problematic, Mr. Speaker, is because if we are creating a bill that promotes or encourages more people to hunt and at the same time lifting hunting and trapping quotas for everybody, then it does kind of raise questions around the sustainability of hunting and the sustainability for our wildlife populations over the long term. That I think is the biggest concern for me in this bill.

5:20

You know, the bill itself contains modernization pieces, which, as I said, I do support, and I do support hunting, especially hunting for subsistence, in Alberta. I mean, I don't know how to say this any other way, but I really like having a moose in my freezer, and if my husband is watching this debate right now, please bring home a moose or an elk. An elk is also acceptable. Wild game meat in Alberta is awesome, and we do have a lot of it available for us.

The important thing to remember is that I do also truly believe that the definition of hunting quotas, limits, tag numbers: all of that needs to be defined by the best available science and data on population size, population density, immigration, emigration, reproductive age and rate, and a whole bunch of other biological factors of these species. We need to make sure that hunting and trapping are sustainable activities so that we can continue to do them and that I can continue to have elk in my freezer, hopefully.

I want to emphasize that currently science is not the foundation of how decisions are being made for hunting and trapping, and that lack of use of science has also created considerable public distrust in this minister's ability to sustainably manage hunting and trapping limits. I see that distrust reflected in the e-mails that I receive from constituents who really look at this bill and have pretty serious concerns about it not because of the contents of the bill but because they don't actually trust this UCP government to sustainably manage our wildlife populations. This bill doesn't go anywhere

towards addressing that significant concern that the public has and that I have also.

There is a clause in here that dogs on leash can be used to recover animals responsibly. I appreciate that also. As I have said, I appreciate the need to recover wounded animals in the chase. The minister also made reference to fair chase. I will just point out the irony here that the only people now who are allowed to have off-leash dogs in wildland provincial parks are those people who are hunting cougars and using dogs off leash to hunt cougars and that, arguably, that is not fair chase.

There are ethical questions about how we hunt cougars, and I think that even though that is a long-standing practice and that, you know, a lot of Albertans do engage in that activity, I do think that sometimes it's worth as a society examining the things that we assume to be true and the things that we assume to support just because it's always happened that way. There are many Albertans who are not comfortable with the knowledge that the only people who can have an off-leash dog in a protected area is somebody who is there to hunt a cougar. I think there's a broader public conversation that we're not having with this bill, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker.

The idea that hunters don't need to anchor boats in order to hunt waterfowl also raises concerns for me with the regulations and enforcement. I'm just imagining somebody out there on a wetland, and they're hunting some ducks, and they're cruising around in their little boat. What is to stop that person from rushing ducks on the edge and flushing them into the air and then turning the engine off and hunting them? That also brings to mind questions around fair chase like: what is fair chase? There are people who are concerned about this idea of not having boats anchored in the water and what that might do for fair chase with waterfowl. I recognize it brings us in line with the migratory bird act, and I'm grateful for that. But, again, I think this is a deeper conversation that we need to have when we're developing the regulations for these things.

The removal of permit requirement to transport injured wildlife. Again, I'm curious to see how that plays out in the regulations. Which species will be included? Which ones won't be? I can't imagine that bears and wolves and cougars are included in that list of animals that you can transport without permission – at least, I hope very much not – but even birds of prey can be very difficult to handle if they are only minorly injured. So in the regulations will there be sort of tips and tricks for people to use if they do happen to hit an owl or a hawk and need to transport it to a wildlife rehabilitation facility? I think there are some details that I don't expect to see in legislation but I definitely want to see in regulation.

Section 103(1) in this bill is amended to include clause (z.1) around "respecting feeding and attracting wildlife, including prohibitions." As somebody who has spent a large part of my career focusing on human-wildlife coexistence, a large part of conflict is caused by inappropriate feeding and wildlife attractant management on property. I love that this is in the bill that we are debating, that there is recognition that feeding and having food available for wildlife is a problem, and we need to be able to enforce that.

However, I will also comment, Mr. Speaker, that in order to hunt black bears, we bait them. We set bait, and then hunters sit in a tree and they wait for a black bear to come, and then they hunt that black bear. I have problems with that not being fair chase, too, I will just say. However, that is how we hunt black bears, and that is how it has always been done. That doesn't mean that we can't question that right now. In particular as a bear biologist I have had pretty significant concerns – I know some of my other biologist colleagues do as well – of creating these bait traps specifically for black bears in one area, where also within that same bear's home range we're

telling people to reduce food and attractants to reduce conflict. There is a very mixed message here.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to think that bears are very, very smart, and they're capable of weighing a whole bunch of information and making decisions, but I will also tell you that they are very food driven. I don't think that bears are going to be able to distinguish: well, this bait is food, but this is because somebody wants to hunt me, and this food over here in somebody's yard I can't have because that puts me in conflict. I appreciate having something in legislation that is about attractant management, but, again, I think we need to consider how we hunt black bears in this province and how those baits potentially increase human-bear conflict risk in areas where we allow that.

There are a lot of things in wildlife management, Mr. Speaker, that become very complex when you actually start to think about how they are implemented on the ground. That is the reason why wildlife management needs to be founded in data and science and not public opinion. The people have very strong opinions about wildlife, myself included, but when we use science to inform decision-making, particularly around hunting and trapping quotas, we might find that we would manage hunting and trapping differently.

I keep hearing from some people that hunting contributes to conservation in the province, and that is true. Money from hunting tags does go to the Alberta Conservation Association, but I also just want to acknowledge that a lot of conservation in this province happens outside of this world of hunting and trapping. Hunting is not the only way that we fund conservation efforts in Alberta, so let's just keep that in mind and remember that there are many, many stewards of this land. Many of them are not hunters and trappers, and just because somebody doesn't hunt or trap doesn't mean that they can't be part of this conversation around how we sustainably manage hunting and trapping.

I really cannot emphasize enough, Mr. Speaker, how much I wish science and data were part of this conversation or even part of this bill. I have not seen data that demonstrates that some of these things are needed although some of them do make sense to me as a wildlife biologist.

The last thing that I'll say, Mr. Speaker, is glaringly missing in this bill is that there is no mention of Indigenous people, Indigenous youth, treaty rights, or hunting access. When I talk to Indigenous elders and leaders and residents in my riding and more broadly in Alberta, the number one thing they tell me is that they wish they had more access to exercise treaty rights, including hunting and trapping for subsistence. How were Indigenous communities consulted in this bill? What will this bill do to increase Indigenous access for hunting and trapping and the exercising of treaty rights? I feel confident that some of my colleagues will get much more into detail on that than I will. But I will just say that when we talk about managing wildlife, Mr. Speaker, it is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how we live truth and reconciliation and that we don't just talk about it; we actually implement it.

5:30

While this bill is decent – it doesn't make me angry, which I think is a huge move forward – there are some pretty significant pieces missing, and I look forward to debate and hearing how those may be addressed.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta holds a rich, coveted culture of responsible, ethical hunting and trapping. For generations hunting and trapping have helped shape our beautiful province according with a crucial part of our heritage and culture. While it's helping to strengthen bonds between families and their friends, connecting us to the land is most important. We must not forget that hunting and trapping are more than just hobbies for many Albertans.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we must adapt and grow our hunting and regulations to stay up to date with the ever-changing world, ensuring that we maintain respect for our wildlife. I thank you for the opportunity to speak in favour of the proposed amendments to the Wildlife Act and wildlife regulations in Alberta. These proposed changes are not just minor tweaks or small administrative updates. They are necessary steps to maintain responsible stewardship of our province and our stance on wildlife and hunting. Since this lifestyle has shaped countless Albertans, we must reflect on the importance of maintaining and preserving these traditions while adapting to the modern world.

Alberta is home to some of the most beautiful, diverse, and breathtaking natural vistas in the world. From the Rocky Mountains which scrape to the sky to the scenic and beautiful prairies, Alberta's landscapes are second to none. We all know our province is not just a place to live; it is a place to thrive and grow a family, where our children and grandchildren can call home. Based on this we must ensure health and sustainability of our wildlife and ecosystems. All Albertans share responsibility, and we must champion it for the future generations of Albertans.

I won't go through every proposed change today, but I will touch on a few that particularly stand out to me. The key change is the introduction of a clearer residency requirement for hunting and trapping. This amendment confirms that local communities who rely on wildlife food for livelihood more than sport and game are primarily the ones with access to it. This change reflects a balance between ensuring that sustainable harvest opportunities remain available to those who work and live in rural communities while also maintaining integrity for our wildlife populations. Any good hunter knows the importance of ethical harvesting. Allowing for devices like minor laser aiming systems to assist in ethical harvesting ensures for the most precise and ethical harvesting possible.

Now, looking at amendments to safeguarding the ethical nature of our hunting, we must also look at the hunters themselves. For you in this Chamber that may not be aware of how the tagging systems work, let me educate you. Once you have purchased a physical tag and permit, you must carry this with you on the hunt. Doing so poses the potential for you to misplace or ruin it in the bush. If you're not able to produce this tag to the wildlife officer, you may face some significant fines. This outdated style of tag retention is archaic. We live in a digital world, Mr. Speaker, and should be adapting our hunting lifestyles to incorporate this. The option for electronic tags and permits streamlines this process, making it easier for hunters, trappers to hunt while enabling the wildlife officer to do their job effectively.

Now, let's talk about safety. We all know that human-wildlife conflicts are a growing concern. Whether a bear wanders into a neighbourhood or an elk roams onto a busy highway, these interactions can be dangerous for both people and animals. The proposed amendments tackle this issue with clearer rules around wildlife attractants and feeding, helping to reduce the risks of conflicts. This will help ensure that we live in harmony with the incredible wildlife that call our province home.

These amendments also empower our fish and wildlife officers to take swift action against the violators, removing outdated judicial order requirements. This will facilitate more effective, responsive enforcement, providing better protection for our wildlife populations and giving our wildlife officers the support they need to do their job.

Our Conservative government has been a leader in red tape reduction everywhere – thank you to the minister of service Alberta for his stewardship here – so why don't we do it here in environment and parks? By reducing the unnecessary red tape, by clarifying definitions and rules, we are making it easier for hunters, trappers, landowners, and wildlife officers to focus on what matters the most, maintaining the balance of our spectacular ecosystems and safeguarding that our wildlife continues to thrive and grow, just as we as Albertans thrive and grow.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, these amendments are preserving some of the most important things to Alberta: our great traditions, our heritage, and our sense of community. Ensuring that our children and grandchildren can carry out these same traditions in the beautiful province we call home, I think, is something that everybody in this Chamber wants to aspire to. I thank the minister for putting forward this legislation because I can tell you that when it comes down to protecting and conserving our environment, I know that he has got this as number one on his priority list, and I feel as if our province is in very good hands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 41, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025. I was listening to the minister speak and introduce the bill, and he spoke, and I quote, about honouring traditions and the culture of hunting and trapping. End quote. That really resonated with me as a First Nations woman because the traditions of hunting and trapping are from the Indigenous peoples on these lands. I was deeply saddened to read the act, that actually had no mention of permitting access or ensuring that Indigenous access to hunting and trapping is increased and made accessible.

As a reminder the province of Alberta became a province on the 1st of September, 1905, and Treaty 6 was signed September 9, actually, in 1876. Our treaty relationship to honour each other and to look after one another as relatives is deeply rooted prior to Alberta becoming a place of legislation, so I want to remind this minister that it is imperative as a treaty relative to make space for First Nations and Métis hunters and trappers. That includes inviting treaty hunting groups to be partners. That also means including First Nations in the wildlife responder network because we also care about the conservation of the species because we have lived here since time immemorial, ensuring the sustainability of all species.

When we think about science and data collection, as my colleague mentioned earlier, this is something that we did organically, or the intergenerational knowledge was passed on through generations. For example, my grandfather would take myself as a young girl to the river every morning, and we would go every morning, and we would count the beavers deliberately. We wanted to know the population count because you never harvest more than what is available to you because sustainability matters, so data is very important to First Nations. We never take down a cow because we want to make sure that we have meat for the next season, for the next winter. While this bill addresses many things, it needs to go further. We need to ensure that there is science and

data collection on the species so that we are monitoring and ensuring that conservation is done to protect generations of Albertans' future of hunting and trapping and coexisting with species.

5:40

Last night I had the honour of attending the Alberta Outfitters Association dinner with the minister. He spoke so eloquently of a story about how in Africa big game hunters pay money for the tags and licences to hunt elephants, and then those elephants are later butchered to feed the tribal peoples, and that money from those tags and licences would go to support tribal education, tribal health. I thought, "Wow, this is such an important moment," as the minister was introducing the Wildlife Amendment Act, that under section 74.1 there could be space and innovation around how we ensure that when there is an animal and the meat is there, we have the Crown transport it to a local butcher, to meat inspectors to build that economy and then take that meat as an innovative approach to solving some of the food insecurity crisis that we have in First Nations and Métis communities so that meat would find a home in families that are struggling to feed their families. I think when we think about the solutions around food insecurity, around, you know, the affordability crisis, sometimes the solutions are right before our eyes, building the economy of meat processors, butchers, and inspectors.

I want to also thank the minister for addressing in this bill hunting as a minor. As a young girl, you know, I got to spend time along the river hunting, and my brother Robbie in Fort Chip at 12 years old actually would go out on his own and take down a moose by himself. For Indigenous peoples, you see, we are taught very young how to responsibly manage a firearm. It is something that is ingrained in us as children, about how you respect the rules of a firearm and that relationship with that wildlife. Tobacco is given, and you've been taught your entire life that relationship of how to harvest in a respectful way, ensuring that others are protected and that you're following the rules that your grandfather set out for you.

We want to make sure that young people have access to their traditional and inherent rights, but we also want to make sure that they're able to do it safely. We are seeing now that there's a disconnect between children and their grandparents, so now not all children are getting those traditional lessons of how to harvest in an ethical way, how to carry a firearm in a responsible way. That's why this bill could have gone further on how to ensure that children are following protocols properly.

Another piece of the bill that I think we could have expanded on was, as I and my colleague mentioned earlier, the science, the data, including treaty hunters, the tags and licensing fees, making sure that we're not just investing in conservation but that we're also investing in innovation solutions, honouring traditions and the culture of hunting and trapping. That really caught me off guard a little bit because when we think about honouring traditions and culture and there's no mention of First Nations or Indigenous people or Métis hunters in this whatsoever, it really disintegrates the notion of honouring tradition. What it means to honour a tradition is to recognize the root of where it comes from. What that means, then, is honouring a tradition or a practice of a culture means that we acknowledge where something has come from.

There is no doubt, unequivocally, that hunting and trapping in Treaty 6 territory originates with the First Nations and Métis people, and I think it is of decency and respect just to include Indigenous and Métis people in the act and to make sure that access is included and, again, that relationship building with the wildlife responder network, with the treaty hunters. You see, they gather every year in person and have quarterly meetings to talk about the

regulations, to talk about species to ensure that we as treaty hunters are also hunting and harvesting in a sustainable way, as our forefathers did.

It's not just about a practice or a trophy. It's about a way of life. It's about ensuring that the fridges of those who don't have meat get filled, and it's not just the meat. In all things we use everything. My daughter uses the bones of the legs of a moose or a deer. She takes off all of the fur, and that becomes a hide-scraping tool, and we scrape the hides of the animals. When we scrape those hides, we stretch them. We stretch those hides so that we can make moccasins, drums, rattles, shoes for babies, bonnets: all kinds of beautiful things.

Then we use all kinds of bones and teeth. Elk teeth are considered the most prestigious thing that a woman can wear because an elk only has two teeth, so those teeth of an elk are really hard to come by. It's not like we are harvesting elk just for their teeth. A woman who is wearing prominent elk teeth talks about her level of governess, that she is seen as a clan mother, that she is seen as someone who is respected in the community. Every item of the animal is used, and nothing goes to waste.

When I talked earlier about innovation and ensuring under section 74.1 that the meat is made accessible, let's also make sure that the bones are made accessible, that the teeth are made accessible to First Nations and Indigenous people and Métis people. Now more than ever we have First Nations and Métis children in child and family services, and more often than not there are lots of caregivers trying to connect them to their culture through art. Let's make sure through this bill that we go beyond and make sure that the bones, the teeth, the furs, the skins, the feathers, and the meat are made available to people and that they're not just left there to rot, that these gifts can be carried on so that truly the culture and tradition of trapping and harvesting can be perpetuated and carried on as intended in an Indigenous way of knowing and doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has risen.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Forestry and Parks, the Member for Central Peace-Notley, for not only his hard work but also his unwavering dedication to our province. We've heard many times about his service and even last night at the outfitters how he represented our province and is doing so abroad, and I thank him for that.

Bill 41 addresses an issue that is not only of great importance today but also crucial in laying a strong foundation for future generations. The introduction of Bill 41 by the member on this side of the House is a step forward in ensuring that Alberta remains a proud supporter of hunting and trapping, like my family has been, activities that have been integral to our province for generations. Hunting and trapping have not only provided many families with the means to put food on the table but have also been a vital part of sustaining livelihoods and strengthening bonds with loved ones. Bill 41 represents a common-sense approach that ensures Alberta continues to be one of the best places to enjoy and participate in these important cultural and social traditions. This bill modernizes our laws while still respecting the values and traditions that have shaped our province.

The updates to the Wildlife Act through Bill 41 are critical to keeping Alberta at the forefront of wildlife conservation and management. In today's rapidly changing world, it's necessary to recognize the need to adapt to new technologies, to new knowledge and data in order to continue preserving this heritage that we hold dear. By embracing the opportunities offered by research and

technological advancements, we are better equipped to protect our wildlife and natural resources for future generations.

Bill 41 brings Alberta's hunting and wildlife management laws in line with the rest of the country. This has been achieved through extensive consultation with Albertans and wildlife experts, some of whom were here yesterday, whose valuable input has helped shape the necessary changes to improve our systems. The changes proposed in this bill will simplify the process for hunters, trappers, landowners, and wildlife officers while reducing unnecessary regulatory red tape. Our government is committed to ensuring that Alberta remains a leader in wildlife management.

5:50

Let me highlight some of the key changes included in Bill 41. First, regarding bow draw weight. This change provides hunters with greater flexibility in choosing the right equipment for their needs while still ensuring safety and effectiveness in the field.

Second, wheelchair accessibility is an important step forward, ensuring that hunting is accessible to all Albertans, including those with disabilities. By redefining "vehicle" to accommodate wheelchair hunting, this bill ensures that more Albertans can participate in this cherished tradition.

Next, the bill addresses the use of modern tools, ensuring that Albertans stay up to date with ethical, efficient, and cutting-edge methods of hunting and wildlife management. For example, the bill includes the use of laser aiming devices that do not illuminate the target, which will help maintain ethical hunting practices. This will allow hunters to be more proficient, ensuring no animal is ever lost to waste and every opportunity is consistent.

One of the more significant changes is the update to the minimum round size. The bill raises the minimum round size to .22 calibre such as the .223 Remington, reflecting advancements in ammunition technology while ensuring humane and effective hunting practices.

Youth hunting is another area being addressed. Under Bill 41 hunters as young as 12 years old will now be able to hunt unsupervised, provided they meet the proper safety and education requirements. This aligns with federal regulations, and it ensures that Alberta's youth can continue to engage in our rich hunting heritage.

Additionally, high-visibility clothing will no longer be required while hunting, based on feedback and a growing understanding of hunting safety practices.

Finally, the bill allows hunters to harvest animals like bears or cougars for meat without the obligation to process their hides. This change provides hunters with greater flexibility while still respecting ethical hunting standards.

It's important to note that many of these changes are in alignment with federal regulations. The same federal government that chose to ban thousands of firearms, targeting law-abiding citizens, has allowed the .223 Remington round to be legally accepted for hunting in many parts of Canada. This very round is also a popular calibre for modern sporting rifles, firearms adapted for the times.

Bill 41 reflects a forward-thinking approach, recognizing the value of both modern tools and traditional hunting practices. By acknowledging the legitimacy of tools like the .223 calibre, we're ensuring that hunters have access to the best available equipment while maintaining ethical standards. To restrict these tools, as the federal government has done through the 2020 and 2024 OICs, is nothing more than overreach and misinformation. A tool is a tool. This is something we as Albertans and common-sense Canadians across the country understand.

As times change, so too must our approach. Bill 41 takes the best aspects of our deep-rooted hunting and trapping traditions and adapts them to meet the needs and reality of today's world.

In conclusion, Bill 41 represents a modernization of Alberta's hunting and wildlife laws, ensuring that we continue to lead in wildlife conservation, safety, and ethical hunting practices. It reflects the necessity of evolving with the times, adopting new technologies and methods, while still preserving the integrity of our cultural practices. Through this bill we're not only preserving Alberta's hunting traditions but enhancing them for future generations. It will ensure that hunting remains a valuable part of our social fabric and a sustainable ethical practice for years to come. I urge all members to support Bill 41 as we work together to build a future where our cultural heritage is respected, where wildlife is respected and protected as well, and our communities continue to thrive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some thoughts on Bill 41, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025. Recognizing that the time for the legislative sitting for today is drawing to a close, I will have to keep my focus and talk about only those things that are most important to me and to my constituents.

I want to thank all of the members of the Legislature for their thoughts on this bill. One of the themes that I've heard from the comments from the minister and the Member for Banff-Kananaskis and the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford and my friend from Lacombe-Ponoka is the discussion around the culture of hunting here in Alberta. I think it's important to recognize that, unlike what the other members have said, hunting is not just confined to the culture of rural Alberta or Indigenous Alberta. I have many hunters who live in Edmonton-Gold Bar. It is also something that urban people do.

In fact, I would suggest that probably most of the hunters who come to Alberta for hunting from outside of the province probably reside in big urban centres. I don't think that the people who spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on minister's special licences in auctions in Salt Lake City live in small towns in the rural United States. So I just want to emphasize for everybody here that hunting is an important part of every community in Alberta, not just rural communities and not just Indigenous communities.

Now, the second piece is something that's incredibly important to me but also very important to the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar,

and that is the units of measurement that appear in section 24, the schedule that is on the final page of the bill. Mr. Speaker, this may sound ridiculous, but it's not. Alberta is governed by legislation that requires the metrification of all of the units of measurement in every piece of legislation that the Alberta government passes. In fact, this was something that we did when we were in government, and it's something that the members opposite are failing to do.

Canada has been on the metric system officially since 1971, and it was shortly after that the government of Alberta passed legislation requiring all Alberta legislation to use the metric system. Yet here we have, in section 24(b)(ii), "in sub-item 7(b)(ii) by striking out '40 pounds' and substituting '35 pounds.'" This is with respect to the draw weight of bows. Now, we know that the pound is an imperial system. You know, we have been on the metric system for 55 years. Especially when our sovereignty is at stake, we need to reassert our sovereignty by taking pride in using the proper units of measurement, Mr. Speaker. For the members opposite to be bringing forward this offensive use of the enemy's units of measurement, I think, betrays American sympathies by the... [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members, we have one person that has the floor at this time. I'd appreciate to be able to listen to the member's perspective.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At the appropriate time I will be bringing forward amendments to change the units of measurement here so that they properly reflect Canada's metric heritage, so rather than 40 pounds we would have 18.1 kilograms, and then substituting 35 pounds: that would be struck out and substituted with 15.9 kilograms.

Now, in section 24(c): "in item 5 in sub-item 2 by striking out '9 inches or more'" – of course, 9 inches converts to 22.86 centimetres – "and substituting 'more than nine inches'." I'm sure that the members opposite have used the phrase "more than 9 inches" on many occasions, Mr. Speaker, probably not any of them believable. Regardless, again, that would have to be 22.86 centimetres.

I find it incredibly insulting...

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt.

Pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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