



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 16, 2025

Day 100

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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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)
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Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Chair: Mr. Sabir

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Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 16, 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.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a visitor to introduce to you, one who is no stranger to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the hon. Deron Bilous, the former Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. [interjections] I don't know if I'd be that excited. He is not going to invite me for supper anymore.

He is accompanied by Gabriela Gonzalez, the director of government relations for Telus. As you know, Telus is hosting their kits for kids tomorrow in the Queen Elizabeth II Building between 10 and 12 noon. I trust that all MLAs will attend to stuff backpacks tomorrow to assist this very worthy cause for kids in need. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also seated in my gallery today is Mr. Tim Schindel, who is the founder and national director of Leading Influence. They provide spiritual and emotional support to politicians across the country, and he has become a good friend of mine. Tim, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last but not least, introductions from me – and I'm sure you are all very excited about this auspicious day, of course, that being the 100th sitting day of our session, which is very, very exciting. Perhaps more exciting than that is the birthday of my good friend. I'm not sure if he's made it into the gallery yet today or not, but I'll introduce him anyway. It's his 40th birthday. One of my greatest friends in politics and a wonderful servant to many around the Assembly. Mr. Andrew Koning, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Minister of Finance, the President of Treasury Board has an introduction.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce superintendent and trustees of Clearview school division. I don't get to introduce many of my school divisions in this House just because of the distance, but please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of immigration.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce Jamal Ahmed, a proud Albertan who immigrated to Canada in 2002. With a background in engineering and the oil and gas sector, Jamal is now helping open several child care schools that create dozens of jobs and support early learning. Jamal is far more than a constituent of mine; he is an amazing volunteer. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you two lovely ladies who came from Calgary this morning to visit the Legislature for the first time, Sharyon Boussad and Nancy Hong. Please rise to receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the Peniche and the Hogan families. They do home-schooling for their kids. I have here today Jessica, Zachary, Madalyn, Bethany, Myla, Shyanna, Christina, Bria, Jenna, and Judah. I ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you Abdulrahim Mohamed and Khadra Mohamed, two amazing young leaders in the riding of Edmonton-Manning who also happen to work in my constituency office. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly DeAnn Hunter, Rayden Cardinal-Hill, and Shandell Pozzolo, who are here from enCompass drug treatment court service. It's a free court-supervised program for those dealing with addiction. Rayden and Shandell are both graduates of the program and now work for enCompass, which provides an alternative to incarceration while keeping the community safe. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you and to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my friends Shane and Danni Dell along with over 40 students and parents from their home-schooling group in Airdrie. I ask that they all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we know, nothing can compete with an introduction from the Speaker. However, I would like the opportunity to introduce my constituent and my friend Gabriela Gonzalez to you and through you to the entire Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Anti-Semitism

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past decade the number of hate crimes in Canada has increased by more than 250 per cent. Despite being only 1 per cent of our country's population, the Jewish community is the most targeted group for hate crimes and in 2023 were the target of 70 per cent of all religious-motivated hate crimes. The Hamas-led October 7 attacks on Israel have incited

and emboldened anti-Jewish hate, and unfortunately we continue to see anti-Semitism rise.

Last year B'nai Brith Canada recorded an unprecedented number of anti-Semitic incidents across the country, including nearly 1,000 in Alberta alone. Jewish Canadians are being harassed simply for their faith. Hate marches have become a regular occurrence, and we are seeing disturbing outbursts of anti-Semitic violence, including synagogues being firebombed and Jewish elementary schools being shot at. Even more horrifying, Canada has become a staging ground for terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, and radical leftist anti-Semites from Alberta have been arrested overseas for terrorism. Not only are many silent in the face of brazen anti-Semitism, but an alarming number of Canadians are denying the atrocities committed against the Jews and openly celebrating and glorifying hate-fuelled terrorism.

Anti-Semitism has no place in our communities and must always be unequivocally condemned. The alarming rise of anti-Semitism is a danger not only to Jewish Albertans but to the democratic foundation of our society. As elected officials it's our responsibility to take immediate and meaningful action to fight the threat posed by this previously inconceivable rise in anti-Semitism.

To the Jewish community: you are not alone. You should feel proud of your faith and should never have to hide it to stay safe. Alberta's government stands with you and will continue to fight for your peace and security.

Thank you.

Health Minister

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, time and time again this Minister of Health has shown that she is the most incompetent Minister of Health in the history of our province. It's time for the Premier to finally fire her. The latest act of incompetence was failing to renew the contract of the chief medical officer of health and not having an interim person available during a major measles outbreak. Albertans would be forgiven for thinking that the moment he said, "You should vaccinate your children," he would not be the chief medical officer of health for long, which tracks.

This government has consistently failed to advocate for effective public health measures that keep Albertans safe. They believe in bodily autonomy unless, of course, you're trans or suffering addiction or anyone other than a convoy participant. It's no wonder that they don't even have an interim public health officer. Rumour that is rife in the medical community across Canada is that they have made this offer to over 200 public health professionals, and every single one has said no because they do not want to work for a government that doesn't believe in public health.

This is a minister who continuously ducks ministerial responsibilities by blaming bureaucrats, front-line workers, the opposition, her perceived enemies: anyone but herself. Every time she blames someone, she knows that she is incapable of actually running our health care system. Albertans know that there is no one else to blame. The Premier needs to fire this incompetent Minister of Health now.

1:40

Easter

Mr. Stephan: Easter celebrates the infinite atonement of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Prior to doing the hardest thing that ever was done, Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Jesus climbed the hill to the garden still.
His steps were heavy and slow.
Love and a prayer took Him there
To the place only He could go . . .
He felt all that was sad, wicked, or bad,
All the pain we would ever know.
While His friends were asleep, He fought to keep
His promise made long ago . . .
The hardest thing that ever was done,
The greatest pain that ever was known,
The biggest battle that ever was won –
This was done by Jesus!
The fight was won by Jesus!
Gethsemane. Jesus loves me,
So he gave His gift . . . in Gethsemane.

Whatever the questions or problems the answer is always found in the life and teachings of Jesus. He descended below all things, death in hell, and endured and prevailed above them all. He is a God of truth and love. Where can we turn for peace? Who can understand? He; only one. There is always hope in Christ.

May the spirit of Christ, the love of God rest in our minds forever.
Happy Easter.

Health Minister

Mr. Deol: It's time to say what Albertans already know. This Minister of Health is leading the ministry through the most incompetent and corrupt period in Alberta's history, and it's time the Premier fires her. This minister failed to renew the chief medical officer of health during a public health crisis and didn't even have an interim in place. We have heard that the job was offered to over 200 public health professionals across Canada and not a single one would take it. Why? Because they don't want to work for a corrupt government that doesn't believe in public health. This is just the most recent example.

The minister fired the AHS CEO just days before the CEO was set to meet with the Auditor General about corrupt care contracts – the CEO has explained that her dismissal was retaliatory, tied to her efforts to expose corruption – and then fired the entire AHS board when it approved RCMP getting involved. She pushed public servants to route communications through external lawyers to block the Auditor General from investigating the corrupt care scandal. The AG said that this was not normal and not approved.

She defended motel medicine, cut Popsicles from children receiving cancer care treatment, and forced privatized American-style health care, costing Albertans more for private surgeries than ever before. Mr. Speaker, this is corruption, not leadership, and it is costing Albertans their trust and their health care. It is time for the Premier to act. Fire the Minister of Health now.

Choice in Education

Mr. Dyck: Well, Mr. Speaker, just last week in my constituency of Grande Prairie I had the honour of announcing design funding for the permanent addition to the Grande Prairie composite high school. Our government is ensuring that kids in every single corner of this province receive a world-class education taught by world-class educators. We're proud of our educators, and we're building schools that reflect their pride.

Alberta is growing, and unlike the NDP, we're not asleep at the wheel. This isn't just an investment; this is leadership. The UCP is stepping up and moving Alberta forward while the NDP stands in the way, clinging to tired, failed ideas. Here's the bottom line. We trust parents with their kids' education; the NDP doesn't. They want to centralize, standardize, and sterilize Alberta's education system,

stripping away choice, ignoring parents, and telling families how to raise their children. Not in Alberta. In Alberta parents are in the driver's seat, and they're making the best decisions for their kids, by empowering parents with options that fit their needs, not a government checklist.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. As long as there are conservatives living and breathing in this province, there will be conservatives defending the freedom to access high-quality education. As conservatives we trust families. We support them. We build them up. The NDP want control; we want freedom. They want conformity; we want excellence.

We're building a province where every child can take part in the Alberta advantage to be freedom-loving, hard-working, can-do people in every classroom, in every field, and anywhere in the world. No matter where they go, they'll still call Alberta home. They'll know it was a Conservative government that believed in them, that stood up for their future, and be proud to call themselves Albertans. That is the Alberta advantage.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, over the past few months Pierre Poilievre and the federal Conservative Party's poll numbers have plummeted. What once looked like a guaranteed election victory has become a real battle for seats across the country. One of the people who has done the most harm to Mr. Poilievre's chance of becoming Prime Minister is our very own Premier. Over the last month she said that he's in sync with Donald Trump, asked the Trump administration to intervene and help him get elected, championed Trump's tariffs and said that they're a big win for Canada, and talked up a national unity crisis of her own making, going so far as to embrace Alberta separatism, just like Quebec's sovereignty movement. Rather than sit on the sidelines, she's interjected separatist rhetoric into a national debate. She's been praised as the most MAGA Premier in a profile in the *New York Times*.

Why is this, Mr. Speaker? It's theatre. The answer is theatre. The Premier is putting on a play where she claims to be the hero, but she needs a villain, and who plays a better villain and keeps her the centre of attention? That's the Liberal Party of Canada. This Premier is only standing up for herself and never for Albertans. She needs the Liberals to win, for if not for the Liberal government, then who else can she blame for the failures in Alberta? The Premier and her government? Not likely.

Without a Liberal federal government the Premier would have to govern, would have to take responsibility for the decisions her and her government have made, would have to be able to focus on and take responsibility for her actions and lack of leadership and inability to govern. She is so focused on her own need to keep power that she's willing to sacrifice anyone, even her Conservative friends in Ottawa. If and when they lose this election, all Albertans need to do is look around and look at the UCP and blame them.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five requisite copies of an article from The Bureau titled Canadian Police Raid Sophisticated Vancouver Fentanyl Labs, with millions of pills.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table bylaw 28-2024 for Strathcona county. It is the council code of conduct. With Bill 50 the UCP will be repealing this bylaw.

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

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I would like to table my February 25 resignation letter from cabinet.

Mr. Nixon: Two tablings, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the Antisemitism Reaches Record Levels report from the anti-Semitic team here in Canada as well as the League for Human Rights for Canada's 2024 Annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the document published by the Alberta Law Foundation with the details of the cut the UCP has made to the AFL grant to various organizations pursuant to the power they granted themselves under Bill 39.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a number of e-mails from constituents all across Alberta who are urging the UCP to reverse their changes in clawing back the Canada disability benefit. I urge all members of the House to read these e-mails and do the right thing.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. I rise today to table the five requisite copies of the ADL Global 100 Survey: Antisemitism Exists on the Margins of Canadian Society.

I also rise to table the B'nai Brith Canada seven-point plan to tackle anti-Semitism and also the five requisite copies of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's Reflections on Terminology for Holocaust Comparison.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table four letters, five copies each. The first two are from constituents that oppose Bill 47, the automobile act, asking the UCP government to reconsider. The others as well are from constituents that we all would have received letters from that are not my constituents saying that they as well do not support the UCP's Bill 47 and will be probably voting for the Alberta NDP in the next election.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for tablings. Should there be more, we will return to it at the conclusion of the Oral Question Period.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health Minister

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, there is no question the current Minister of Health is the worst our province has ever seen. She has failed Albertans on her most important responsibility, delivering high-quality public health care. She's presided over the worst corruption scandal in Alberta's history, a scandal of political interference,

kickbacks, bloated surgical contracts, and wasteful spending. She fired the CEO of AHS and then fired the whole board of AHS after they thought the RCMP should be brought in to investigate. Why won't the Premier say that enough is enough and fire the Health minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the honour of worst Health minister goes to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

The minister we have now has made bold changes in health care. She's created four new agencies. We have a record number of doctors. We have a record number of nurses. We have a record amount of funding for health care. We have a record number of surgeries. Mr. Speaker, that is a record of success, and I'm proud to stand behind the Minister of Health. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Gray: A record of cuts, chaos, and corruption, Mr. Speaker.

The minister's record also includes clamping down on freedom of speech. It's abysmal, especially with the corrupt care scandal. The minister fired the AHS board and put a gag order on them, Health employees have been instructed not to respond to the Auditor General without talking to the UCP's lawyer first, and now the chief medical officer of health has left after we hear the minister had a gag order on him, too. How can the Premier stand by the worst Health minister in Alberta's history while she fails to do her job?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you a little bit more about the record of success of our Health minister. When I say that we have a record number of doctors, it's 12,123. And why is that? Because our Health minister successfully negotiated a new doctor funding model. Eight hundred and forty-six have already signed up even though it just came into effect April 1.

When the member opposite from Edmonton-Glenora tried to come up with a new doctor model, she got one clinic and seven doctors signing up. That is a record of failure, Mr. Speaker. This minister has a record of success.

Ms Gray: Record amount of corruption, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier has chosen to keep the Health minister in place even as the corrupt care scandal grows day by day. Alleged by people with direct knowledge, she and her office put political pressure on the former CEO of AHS to wrap up an internal investigation into corruption. A member of this Premier's cabinet, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, told her that this minister needed to go, particularly while corruption was investigated. He got a gag order and then fired, just like everyone else willing to do the right thing. Why won't the Premier do the right thing and fire the minister?

Ms Smith: Because the minister is doing an amazing job.

We have a record number of nurses in this province. We have 52,325 registered nurses. That's 12,915 that have been additionally added since 2020. Why have we had such success, Mr. Speaker? It's because this minister negotiated a new funding model for nurse practitioners. Nurse practitioners now have more opportunity in this province than anywhere else in the country. Fifty-nine have signed up for the new model; 48 are already in operation.

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

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, presiding over a record number of ER closures is not a record to be proud of, and the minister has also presided over a record number of disastrous decisions. On her watch as the Minister of Education, a UCP donor earned millions for substandard masks. The Ethics Commissioner said, "There is no doubt that the Minister's office had some involvement with [the] process." But wouldn't you know it, the minister and their staff couldn't remember a thing. That should have been the end of her, but this Premier promoted her to Health. Why has the minister's repeated incompetence not resulted in her pink slip?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, because we have an excellent Health minister. We have a record amount of money that is being spent on health care because of the advocacy of the Health minister, and it has allowed us to give fair wage increases. The nurses' union just signed off with a 97 per cent approval across 100 per cent of locals for 3 per cent, 3 per cent, 3 per cent, and 3 per cent increases going all the way up to 2028. What happened when that Member for Edmonton-Glenora was Health minister? How much did nurses get? Zero, zero, zero, and zero. That is a record of failure. This is a record of success on this side. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, a record amount of money wasted on bloated contracts for UCP friends and insiders under this minister.

When concerns were raised, instead of asking why, she fired the person who flagged it. She continues to defend the waste of taxpayer dollars on Turkish Tylenol that her officials ordered and that put young kids at risk. Mr. Speaker, 500 skids are still sitting in a warehouse today collecting dust, wasting even more money. What would it take for this Premier to see all the incompetence as a reason to fire the Health minister today?

Ms Smith: Well, I'm glad the member opposite is giving me so much opportunity to brag about our excellent Health minister. We also have a record number of surgeries. At the end of this year – we're just waiting to get the final numbers – we believe we're going to have 310,000 surgeries that have been completed in this province, which is more than any other year in history. Part of that is that we've finally, with the investment of money in the surgical initiative, increased the numbers in our acute-care public hospitals. We're almost at the level that we were prior to COVID. But the big success has been chartered surgical facilities, which are up from 40,000 to 63,000.

Ms Gray: Albertans are not celebrating. Their doctors are fleeing the province, and it's not because the grass is greener somewhere else; it's because the minister is salting the earth right here.

On her watch wait-lists for surgeries are ballooning, emergency rooms are overcrowded if they're even open, patients are waiting in agony for the care that they need, and that's if they can even get the care they need because a record number of Albertans don't have family doctors. Instead of fixing the problems, she sits back while insiders get rich off bloated contracts. How does the Premier justify keeping the worst Health minister in Alberta's history in her cabinet?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, because we've got one of the best Health ministers in the history of this province. I can tell you that as of this week the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta reported the highest ever quarterly net gain of 491 physicians, bringing the total number of registered physicians in Alberta to 12,123, the most ever in our province's history. And another thing that this Health minister has presided over is the advancement of

new training in Grande Prairie and Lethbridge so that we can train even more doctors who will be able to serve rural Alberta. This is a record of success.

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

Chief Medical Officer of Health

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this worst Health minister in Alberta's history has now presided over the fact that we have no chief medical officer of health. Measles is spreading, one of the most contagious infections that we know of, a preventable disease that is making kids sick. The minister could at least appoint an interim chief medical officer of health, but she hasn't and in their absence continues to fail to promote effective vaccination. To the Premier: how can an outbreak of measles and a loss of the chief medical officer of health not be enough to justify firing the Health minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Health minister was hoping that Dr. Mark Joffe would accept an extension of his contract right up until it expired. It expired on April 14, and he chose to go on to other opportunities. He's done a great job for us through a number of different crises, whether it was E coli or giving us advice on the most recent measles outbreak. We're in the process of interviewing candidates. We hope to be able to have an interim announcement for a chief medical officer of health very soon. Just to give you the updated numbers, we have had a total of 83 measles infections in the province; 75 are now noncontagious.

Ms Gray: The chief medical officer of health didn't want to work for this Health minister, and can you blame him? She has a history of giving voice to antivax rhetoric. She justified a \$2 million antivax junk report and even said that she'd use it to inform decision-making. It's no wonder we do not have a chief medical officer of health now in the midst of a measles outbreak, and now we're hearing that more than 200 public health officials have turned down the job. They don't want to work for this government. Albertans need to be able to recruit the best and the brightest. We need good public health info. Fire the Health minister.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have no idea where they're getting their information from. The chief medical officer of health's contract just expired a couple of days ago on April 14. We have made a couple of inquiries, and we hope to be able to have an interim chief medical officer of health lined up very soon, but the good news is that there are medical officers of health in every zone in the province, and they are taking the lead wherever it is that we have an outbreak of measles. I am pleased to see that we only, at the moment, have eight active cases of measles that have been identified, and we're going to continue to make sure everyone knows where they can get their vaccination.

Ms Gray: Families desperately need family doctors. The Health minister keeps chasing them away. Children need to get into ERs, and the doors are closed. Kids need surgery. They're left waiting because public ORs are understaffed. We desperately need to get children vaccinated, and this minister makes room for antivaccine science, and when parents look for trusted public health information from a chief medical officer of health, there isn't one because the

minister hasn't filled the job. When will this Premier do the right thing, the honourable thing, and the only proper thing and fire the Health minister?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of the changes that the Health minister has made and the focus on primary care, we have had success in getting more medical practitioners into the front-line delivery of family practice. We have 348 additional family doctors and rural generalists. As I mentioned, we now have 59 nurse practitioners who have said that they want to set up shop. Forty-eight already have. Nineteen of those are in rural Alberta. Anyone can call 811 to be able to get the information that they need if they are looking for a vaccination, and we're looking forward to making sure that everyone is able to get that information.

Measles Outbreak in Alberta

Ms Hoffman: I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but at 44 I'm catching myself saying things like: when I was a kid. When I was a kid, you respected doctors as professionals. When I was a kid, if you didn't believe in science, you failed. When I was a kid, if a politician screwed up, they'd own it and take responsibility. The UCP government has spread junk science, disrespected doctors, and they're now embroiled in a corrupt care cover-up. Why doesn't the minister just get out of the way so somebody over there, anyone, can actually focus on public health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is clear to me that the members opposite have a real problem with strong conservative women. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said that Margaret Thatcher didn't die soon enough, and progressive men like Naheed Nenshi want the Premier and the Minister of Health to just sit down and shut up. But, Mr. Speaker, don't take it from me. Let me ask, through you to the government benches: should our Premier and Minister of Health sit down and shut up?

Ms Hoffman: When I was a kid, we stood up and took action. We were actually as a province taking the lead on eradicating measles. Now we have the second-highest number of measles cases anywhere in the country. We don't have a chief medical officer of health at the helm either. There's an outbreak in every region of the province, at least 39 cases in the central zone alone. Does the Health minister really think she's capable of convincing people to get vaccinated and protect public health when she has undermined vaccines and public health and now doesn't even have a chief medical officer, a top doc for Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, I want to thank Dr. Joffe for the great work that he has done as the interim chief medical officer of health. He was in the position since 2022. In fact, his contract was ending at the end of March. We extended it. We had conversations. He has decided to move on to new and exciting things, and we wish him all the very best. We are actively looking and making sure that we have someone in that position, and we will look to hire a new chief medical officer of health very, very soon.

Ms Hoffman: When I was a kid in the 1980s, one measles vaccine was seen as good enough to have immunity. The science has

definitely evolved, and everyone needs two now. There are probably people in this Chamber who aren't fully vaccinated. So I'm calling on all of you to stand up, call 811, call your family doctor if you're lucky enough to have one, and get your booster. Alberta has low vaccination rates for the measles vaccine. For example, only 10 per cent of two-year-olds in the High Level area are fully vaccinated. That's dangerous. The minister wouldn't let the chief medical officer of health speak publicly about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. Time is up. We need a new Health minister.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, the members opposite continue to put out misinformation. The actual immunization rate for someone who is 13 years of age in Alberta is 89.6 per cent. This is for measles. That is two doses of measles vaccine. When you get to 17 years of age, that's actually closer to 93 per cent. We do know that we are needing to increase our numbers, and we're continuing to make progress in that area. I'm very proud of the progress of our public health officials.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Mr. Ip: Quote: we should have core values, and being against corruption should be one of those. End quote. That's from a now former UCP MLA and the government's former Minister of Infrastructure. He apparently couldn't stomach standing beside a cabinet so hell bent on hiding the truth from Albertans and in protecting bloated contracts for the close allies. The Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism voted no on a public inquiry into corrupt care. What is the minister so afraid of that he won't do the right thing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the question. The members opposite still have no clue. The Premier and this government commit unconditionally to supporting, to working with the independent investigations that are already taking place, an independent Auditor General investigation, an independent judicially led investigation. We're supporting a number of third-party investigations by furnishing the materials, furnishing witnesses. This government is fully committed to making sure that we co-operate fully with those investigations.

Mr. Ip: Given that the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women stated, quote, that we welcome the investigation by the Auditor General, end quote, but given that we already know this to be false as we learned that AHS employees were instructed to refer the Auditor General to outside attorneys and given, I would assume, that the minister doesn't want to be remembered as someone that Albertans can't trust, why would the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women vote no to a public inquiry?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, like everybody on this side of the House, we have committed to full co-operation with the work of the Auditor General, an independent legislative office of this Assembly that is conducting a comprehensive review of the allegations made. We're looking forward to seeing what the Auditor General comes up with. We're also looking forward to hearing from the former Chief Justice of the provincial court of Manitoba. With that independent investigation that is happening, we know that we're going to get to the bottom of this. This government is committed to

taking action, and we'll await those results, which are coming shortly.

Mr. Ip: Given that at least one UCP member has called for the removal of the Health minister from her position while the corrupt care scandal is investigated, given that the Minister of Advanced Education stood by the Health minister despite glaring allegations of political interference, kickbacks, and more and given we've learned that this government wants to put a gag order on public servants and muzzle their own MLAs, is the Advanced Education minister still okay with all this blatant obstructionism, or is she ready to face the truth that the Health minister cannot be trusted and must be fired?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, it seems that the members opposite have a problem with women. It was the members opposite who decided to punt Robyn Luff out of their caucus. It was the members opposite who also punted out Deborah Drever from their caucus. But you know who they didn't punt out of their caucus? Thomas Dang, someone who broke the law. The member opposite from Edmonton-Glenora talked about wondering who on this side is vaccinated. Why don't you ask Thomas Dang? What I can tell you: on this side of the House we stand behind our cabinet ministers and our caucus. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has the call.

2:10 Anti-Semitism Prevention Initiatives

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Holocaust is one of the darkest chapters in human history. Six million Jews were systematically murdered by the Nazis, an atrocity that was ultimately a consequence of anti-Jewish hate. Recognizing this as one of history's most heinous crimes ever committed, it is critical to ensure the collective postwar vow of Never Again remains as resolute today as it was 80 years ago. To the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: how is Alberta's government fulfilling its vow to Never Again?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this House has formally endorsed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition on anti-Semitism. We made Holocaust education a mandatory component of the school study curriculum. We continue to fund the hate crimes co-ordination unit. We have to do this because, sadly, in Canada we're now seeing upwards of 17 anti-Semitic incidents taking place a day across this country. In this the year of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of death camps across Europe we all must come together to say that this is not acceptable in our country or our province and to say clearly together: Never Again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it is currently Passover, the Jewish holiday to remember the Exodus from Egypt and how God liberated the Israelites from oppression and adversity and given that many people chose to come here to be able to practise their faith in peace and leave behind the violence experienced abroad, to the same minister: how is Alberta's government strengthening the resiliency within the Jewish community and ensuring that they can gather and worship in peace?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we have the Alberta security infrastructure program, which helps cover costs associated with security

improvements and risk mitigation for schools and synagogues, as an example, who have seen violent activity taking place in their communities. We just invested and announced \$200,000 to go to the Jewish Federation in both Edmonton and Calgary. Both play a critical role in educating Albertans about Jewish culture and building a resilient Jewish community. We also continue to provide financial supports to Jewish Family Services through FCSS. We will continue to do that because, again, staggeringly, anti-Semitic activity is up online by an incredible 161 per cent, and we must fight against that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that to fulfill the vow of Never Again and actively combat anti-Semitism, we must ensure that our children are educated about the dangers of hate and given that our government has made Holocaust education a mandatory component of the social studies curriculum, to the same minister: how will this latest investment help better educate Albertans about Jewish culture and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Funding goes towards efforts to combat anti-Semitism through education and the promotion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, including scholarships, educational and training material for teachers and students, engagement sessions with government and law enforcement, and a conference specifically focused on anti-Semitism, again continuing to stand up for Jewish people that call Alberta and Canada home, to make very, very clear that we want the Jewish community as part of our community and that anti-Semitism and racism of any kind is not accepted in this province. It's good to see this House continue to send a strong message on this important issue.

Measles Outbreak in Alberta (continued)

Member Hoyle: With every passing day we hear reports of new measles cases arising in every area of the province. The government of Alberta's latest numbers list 77 confirmed cases, and more have been reported in the media since then. Exposures are occurring in places in which we might normally feel safe, like schools, bowling alleys, grocery stores, and movie theatres. This is a public emergency. It could even end up being the worst outbreak of measles in a century. When will this government stop sitting on its hands and start doing something to protect the health of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to correct the numbers, there are 83 cases – these are confirmed cases – of which 75 are no longer contagious. We have no active cases in Edmonton zone, no active cases in Calgary zone, no active cases in north zone; we do have some in south and some in central zone. I want to give a shout-out to all our public health officials, including our MOHs, which are medical officers of health, in our local communities that are continuing to address this issue on a day-to-day basis.

Member Hoyle: The minister speaks as if these numbers are an award or something.

Given that the former chief medical officer was under a gag order for most of his tenure but is now no longer in the position to manage this crisis to date, given that the UCP are the only ones to blame for the fact that the CMOH position is vacant, a testament to this government's lack of preparation and constant chaos, and given that the UCP government could have done something weeks ago, knowing that the risk to Albertans was rising every single day, to the Minister of Health: is anyone in charge of this crisis today, and if not, will there be?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From day one we have been on top of this case. In fact, measles has been on the rise right across Canada. We know that they entered into Alberta through international travel and a case from Ontario as well. We are continuing to work with our officials to monitor the situation. We are making sure that we have increased access to immunizations in communities that are underimmunized or nonimmunized, and we've got an additional website to inform . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Hoyle: Well, given that the one staffer that she's not working with is the CMOH and given that the Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association has been calling for the UCP government to do more to stop the spread of this illness, citing low vaccination rates and a lack of public updates, and given that we are now without a CMOH and with no replacement and given that this crisis is clearly not, as the Premier said, quote, under control, when will this Premier realize that the house is on fire and that we know where the buck stops? When will she fire this Minister of Health?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, we continue to see this attack on a strong, conservative female member of our caucus. The members opposite are taking their direction from Naheed Nenshi, and it's clear that progressive men have a problem with strong conservative women, particularly women who are taking on the difficult task of refocusing health care to make sure that Albertans get the care that they pay for and that they deserve. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Member Tejada: A mother in Elk Point was forced to speed 50 kilometres to Bonnyville with her unconscious 18-month-old in the back seat because the emergency room in her town was closed. She is not alone. Last year ERs in at least 25 communities were closed for a combined 34,400 hours due to staff shortages. That's the equivalent of shutting down four emergency rooms completely. To the Minister of Health: how many more Alberta families need to risk their lives on back roads before this government admits the rural health care system is collapsing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural health care is of prime importance to our government. It's why we've developed a rural health care strategy. It's why we're increasing the number of doctors in rural communities. It's why we're working with nurse practitioners to look at opportunities to enhance rural health care, why we are continuing to make sure that we are training doctors and nurses and health care aides and EMR in our rural communities.

We are seeing progress. The reason that emergency rooms closed 95 per cent of the time was because of the doctor numbers.

Member Tejada: Given that in 2024 rural ER closures nearly matched 2023 levels – it is clear that this minister's strategy is not decreasing closures; they're just shifting from one town to the next – given that families in Elk Point, Consort, Ponoka, and others are being forced to drive hours for emergencies and some are moving just to be closer to hospitals, does the minister really believe her plan is working when parents are leaving their communities just to have access to an open emergency room?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's why we settled an agreement with the primary care physicians, so that we have more primary care physicians dealing with situations so that they don't have to escalate to an emergency. In fact, we have an additional 394, I believe the number was, additional family care practitioners. It's why we continue to work with nurse practitioners. I was just in Consort last week, where they've now been able to have a nurse practitioner program, where they're having an independent clinic, and they're absolutely able to deal with situations in the local community.

2:20

Member Tejada: Given that the Minister of Health has had years to address this rural ER crisis and she's failed, given that ERs are closed for 30,000 hours year after year, families are relocating just to access basic care, rural doctors are burning out under a broken system this government has refused to fix, this isn't just neglect; it's a pattern of failure. To the Premier: after years of crisis, collapse, and communities left behind, will she finally take responsibility and fire her Health minister?

Mr. Schow: No. No, Mr. Speaker, and we will take no lessons from the members opposite about how to operate as a government. The members opposite had four years in government, and they failed miserably, and Albertans fired them. They are no strangers to firsts and worsts: the worst Finance minister in the history of Alberta, the worst Health minister in the history of Alberta, and the first and only one-term government in the history of Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

High School Construction Project in Camrose

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents, families, and students in the Camrose area have been eagerly awaiting a new high school for years. In 2022 Elk Island Catholic school division received construction funding for a new high school, which is now complete eight months ahead of scheduled opening. This is fantastic news, but the school still lacks the road access and site servicing needed to open. Parents in Camrose want to know who is responsible for finishing this final step. To the Minister of Infrastructure: who is responsible for the final servicing in the project and the road access if this is not the provincial government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the great question. The member is correct. This school was completed eight months ahead of its scheduled opening and is awaiting road access and activation of site utilities to be able to open this fall. The development of roads and utilities projects like the

school site are generally a joint responsibility of developers and municipalities. Once roads and utilities are built, they are owned by the municipality. The province has been working closely with the city of Camrose and the school division to ensure the road access is built and the site servicing commissioned in order to ensure that the school opens in September as scheduled.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the province cannot hand the school over to the school division without proper site servicing and road access and given that the provincial government has worked with the builder in getting this school built ahead of schedule and given that the minister has said he is working with everyone involved to come up with a solution, to the same minister: can you please update my constituents on any progress made with the city on this important project?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout the construction process to present day my department has been in constant contact with Camrose to help resolve the site issues. Well, I'm thrilled to be able to tell the member that, after some great work from my department officials, the province, the city, and the school division have reached an agreement in principle that resolves the road access and site servicing issues as originally planned. This is great news for the community, bringing students and families one step closer to walking the well-built halls of their new school.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given the great news that an agreement has been reached between Infrastructure and the city – thank you to the minister and his department for that work – and given how vital the school is for families in the Camrose and surrounding areas, to the same minister. The most important question on parents' and students' minds: what is the timeline for getting this work done? Will students be able to use their new classrooms for the upcoming school year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for her advocacy on this project. At the end of the day, parents and students do not care about who should do what and when. They care about having a state-of-the-art learning space that fosters positive learning. On that note, we anticipate site servicing and roadway paving will take a combined three months, with a bit of wiggle room for the weather. Given that timeline and where we are currently at, I am proud to say that we anticipate students and teachers will fill the Blessed Carlo Acutis classrooms for the 2025-26 school year this fall.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement (continued)

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health employees could be forgiven for not trusting this government, particularly since chaos is the name of the game, what with the firing of multiple AHS boards, CEOs, and a near constant shifting of deck chairs. These workers are expected to inform an ADM and Alberta Health's legal counsel the minute they hear from the Auditor General. This is interference and certainly doesn't protect the interests of staff who

may have important things to tell the Auditor General. Alberta's protection for whistle-blowers has been around since 2013. Why has this UCP government forgotten that it exists?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, again absolute nonsense. We have been absolutely clear time and again. The government supports a full and transparent investigation by the Auditor General. We'll continue to support that process with every possible thing that we can do. We are working with the Auditor General to facilitate the production of materials. We're working with the Auditor General to facilitate the interviews. The civil service has hired an outside agency to help manage those records and those interviews, and that's the right way to go.

Ms Wright: Given that under the whistle-blower protection act wrongdoing includes mismanagement of public funds or a public asset and given that asking workers to only speak via people who are not part of the Auditor General's office could lead to breaches of confidentiality and given that according to a 2024 Public Interest Commissioner survey concerns about protection from retaliation and confidentiality are the largest barriers to public servants doing the right thing and reporting wrongdoing, how will the Health minister protect workers from reprisal, retaliation, and possible job loss if they are interviewed by the Auditor General?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, time and again we've said that every single government department, every single government ministry would fully co-operate with the investigation of the Auditor General. Speculating about what might happen doesn't make any sense. No interviews have been turned down. No records have been denied. We're continuing to work with the Auditor General to furnish all of the materials and provide all of the support that this government can possibly provide. We can speculate all we want, the members can do what they think, but it's not true. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Wright: Given that this is the government responsible for DynaLife, Turkish Tylenol, and bloated private surgical contracts, given that researcher Cam Hutchison noted, "Albertans are straight shooters. They don't like bad actors who break the law, mismanage public money or undermine the public interest for their own private gain," given that gaps in whistle-blower protection leave workers feeling anxious and unsafe, particularly in the face of multiple investigations and government gag orders, when will this Premier retract her government's gag order memo and fire this Health minister for her inability to do her job?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, Albertans would be better served by an opposition that states facts, not fiction. Nobody is being fired for being interviewed by the Auditor General. Nobody has been denied an interview with the Auditor General. No records have been denied or withheld from the Auditor General. Again, fearmongering is not going to get us anywhere. Co-operation with the investigations, working with the independent offices and the independent investigations will get everything cleared up. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Official Opposition and Government Policies

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, the NDP seem more interested in echoing eco terrorist talking points rather than standing up for Alberta workers. Every time responsible resource development is

mentioned, they jump straight to fearmongering, ignoring the statistics, ignoring the science, and ignoring the livelihoods at stake. Albertans deserve better than fear and fiction. They deserve facts. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: can you tell this House how Alberta's world-leading standards in energy and mineral development prove that we don't need to bow to extremist ideologies to protect both our environment and our economy? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Jean: I thank the hard-working member for a great question, Mr. Speaker. It's the truth. We have a world-class regulator in the AER, probably the best in the world, led by experts, not environmental evangelists. We have the highest standards in the world for oil and gas production and the cleanest barrel of oil in the entire world. We are now doing the same for coal, bringing protections for water and the environment to the highest standard on the planet. We have banned mountaintop removal and new open-pit mining in the Rockies, creating economic opportunities and jobs to fill the global demand for steel. The NDP opened the floodgates. They started all this mess because of their brothers and sisters in the NDP. We're going to fix it.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans are tired of this fearmongering while the NDP seem to thrive on it and given that the NDP have even invited individuals into this very Legislature who have helped amplify lies and hate directed at me and my family and given that their hypocrisy knows no bounds, preaching unity while sowing division, can the same minister explain why the NDP would rather stoke fear amongst Albertans rather than acknowledge the positive results and real progress delivered by this UCP government?

2:30

Mr. Jean: It's true, Mr. Speaker; Chicken Little gets more headlines than "steady as she goes." Acknowledging Alberta's success would mean admitting that the NDP screwed up, and they did on the coal file. The opposition has never accepted responsibility for their poor record while in government. That's probably why they make up fake health scandals, why they can't find anything to do, because they're such a bad opposition. Speaking of firing, I think the people of Alberta already fired them from government. I just don't know how they're going to fire them from opposition, but they will.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP seem to celebrate extremist ideologies and given that the former member Rod Loyola is also known for his sympathies towards Hamas and given that even the federal Liberals have found rhetoric such as this too extreme for their party and further given this shows the NDP's willingness to promote fear and division rather than unity and safety, to the minister of public safety: how is this kind of behaviour acceptable, and what policies are in place to ensure Albertans are protected from having to live in fear of extremist sympathies being normalized in our institutions?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all acts of terror and terrorist organizations must be denounced. Full stop. Any type of rhetoric that supports or recognizes a terrorist group can often have Albertans living in fear, and that is unacceptable. Everyone deserves to feel safe and respected in their community, regardless of their background. The former NDP

member's actions are hateful; they're embarrassing. They are so embarrassing that even the Liberal mother ship in Ottawa kicked him out. On this side of the House we are going to do whatever it takes to keep Albertans safe. We'll do whatever it takes to make sure hatred and fear are not in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement (continued)

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As of tablings today we now know that on February 25 the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane sent a very clear letter to this government, stating:

Over the past few weeks, I have raised concerns regarding GOA procurement practices particularly in the Department of Health. As Minister of Infrastructure, I have line of sight into these processes and have suggested steps . . . At Cabinet on Wednesday, it became clear that the Minister of Health, and possibly even you Premier, had knowledge of identified procurement issues involving . . . AHS.

Is this true, and what does the Premier have to say for herself?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've answered this question many times. Yes. We knew that the former AHS CEO had identified that there were different prices being paid to different service providers for the same service. That is the very heart of why it is we've asked Judge Wyant and the Auditor General to take a look at why that is. Why does Clearpoint have a contract for \$3,700 per knee but Alberta Surgical Group has a contract for \$8,300, both of which actually are less than what AHS charges? Absolutely. That's why we're getting to the bottom of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, without the use of a preamble.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, we have asked repeatedly in this House what the Premier knew when. She has told media at various availabilities that she had no knowledge, yet we see from this letter that

At cabinet on Wednesday, it became clear that the Minister of Health, and possibly even you Premier, had knowledge of identified procurement issues involving [Alberta Health] & AHS, yet you deliberately misled our reduced quorum Health Cabinet Committee . . . on January 30th.

Is deliberate deception part of the policy of this government? Is that what's been happening on the corrupt care scandal, and will the Premier call a public inquiry?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we've gone over this ground again and again and again. The minister had it flagged for her about mid-year last year that the former AHS CEO saw that there were different prices being paid to different service providers for the same service, so the minister encouraged her to try to get to the bottom of why that was. The former AHS CEO was never able to identify that there had been anything wrong, no wrongdoing had been done, and that's why we're now launching an investigation into it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hon. members, the hon. the Leader of the Opposition has a second supplemental. I appreciate that you may be writing these questions as you deliver them. Having said that, the use of a preamble after question 4, even if it's delivered by the Leader of the Opposition, is still wildly inappropriate.

Ms Gray: Given that what is wildly inappropriate, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that this Premier, we now learn from this letter of February 25, may have had knowledge and given that the MLA for Airdrie-Cochrane said, "If we can normalize deception in government business practices, what other indiscretions may emerge?" and given this shows a pattern of this government attempting to cover up the corrupt care scandal to protect their own and to refuse to do the right thing, will the Premier and this government finally call a public inquiry? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's nothing new here. That's in fact exactly why we have asked for Judge Wyant to look at the allegations that were made by the former AHS CEO. It's why we are giving documents to the Auditor General. This is exactly why we are trying to get to the bottom of the allegations the AHS CEO made, because the minister knew . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I had no problem hearing the question; I hope to have no problem hearing the answer.

Ms Smith: The minister was told mid-year last year that there were different services that were being charged different rates at different facilities, and we need to understand why that is. I'm hoping we can get to the bottom of that, Mr. Speaker. We need to repair the procurement practices.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of public record that the RCMP is investigating the UCP government over the allegations of corruption, kickbacks, and political interference in health service procurement. This is a serious matter. There are other inquiries into this matter as well. Yet the UCP refuses to come clean on it. My question is for the government members. Albertans deserve to know. Please stand up if you have been reached out to or interviewed by the RCMP in this matter.

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that question period is the time to ask about government business, not to ask members of the Assembly to stand or not stand.

If the minister would like to answer the question, he's welcome to do so. If not, we'll proceed to the next.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Auditor General is also looking into this matter and given that the government has passed a gag order directing the public service to contact the government-appointed lawyers if they are reached out to by the Auditor General and given that the taxpayers shouldn't have to shoulder the government's effort to hide its corruption, what will it take for the government to take responsibility, remove all those involved in corrupt care from their positions of power so that Albertans have some faith in the integrity of these investigations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the member has not been listening because we have said from the very beginning that there would be one hundred per cent full co-operation with the Auditor General's investigation. The civil service retained an outside agency to help facilitate records to the Auditor General; 13,000 records have already been furnished to the Auditor General. Interviews are being facilitated by the civil service and the agency with the Auditor General. My department officials

have been in touch with the Auditor General's office. There is nothing to see here.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the government and the people in positions of power are subjects of criminal, judicial, and quasi-judicial proceedings and the Minister of Health is implicated in all of these proceedings and given that the Minister of Health has lost the trust and confidence of so many Albertans, a simple question: will the minister do the right thing and resign, and if not, will the Premier step up, remove the Minister of Health from her position, and call an actual public inquiry now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again we see another progressive man in the opposition coming after a strong, conservative woman.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: First the opposition came after the Premier, making wild accusations at the Premier, asking the Premier to step down, but the Premier didn't flinch and nor will she. And now they're coming after the hon. Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker. This is not becoming of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

2:40

Supervised Consumption Sites

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April is a good month for Red Deer; the bad drug consumption site got kicked out of Red Deer. Drug sites are not safe injection sites. They are not safe. Drug sites are not overdose prevention sites. That is a lie, too. Overdoses often occur there, but they are drug sites, epicentres of lawlessness and destruction. To the minister: are there any Alberta communities that want drug sites?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the member, I'm not aware of any community that's asked for another drug consumption site. The truth is that what we've seen in Red Deer is an example of an alternative, an alternative to what is the typical NDP Vancouver model playbook, one borrowed from our neighbours next door in British Columbia that the NDP did whilst in power. Instead of that, the Alberta recovery model shows that there's another path forward with dynamic overdose response teams, with rapid addiction medicine, with detox beds, with treatment beds, all coming together so that in Red Deer we see an alternative to what is not harm reduction but increasingly harm production from the activists on the other side.

Mr. Stephan: Given addictions disconnect human will and nullify moral agency, robbing one of the power to decide, and given it is right to love and support our neighbours suffering in addiction to become free from addiction and given it is wrong to in any manner whatsoever support and keep them in the filthy waters of addiction, including drug sites, to the minister: why is recovery the better way?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, those who suffer from the disease of addiction have inherent dignity. I believe every Albertan does, and they are no different. I believe that recovery is not only possible but probable for those who suffer from addiction, and this government wants to make every single care pathway available to those who

suffer from addiction. I believe that addiction should not be criminalized. I believe it should be a health care process to help those who suffer. Anybody that wants to be a part of that coalition across this province: I consider them a part of our Alberta recovery model and our team to get addiction care to those who suffer.

Mr. Stephan: Given drug sites normalize and embolden law-breaking, given drug sites destroy surrounding businesses, given we must say no to law-breaking, vandalism, stealing, and all other crime, given that if Alberta got rid of all of these drug sites, there would be less crime in Alberta, to the minister: when will Alberta get rid of each and every drug site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member well knows, the city of Red Deer made a motion in collaboration with this government in a desire to see the drug consumption and overdose site removed from Red Deer and, instead, have positive recovery alternatives so that we can build a recovery culture and a recovery community around the entire community of Red Deer. Any other community in the province that wants this same process, I'm open to. But if instead of this process you want to have more drug consumption sites, one on every street corner, I am not open to that. I do not believe the path forward is going down the B.C., Vancouver addiction model. Instead, it's the Alberta recovery model, one that is open to recovery.

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

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. The point of order initially called by the Leader of the Official Opposition has been withdrawn, so I believe that is one day without a point of order. Gold star.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 50

Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How long do I have, if you don't mind me asking?

The Speaker: Twenty minutes, but you don't have to use all of it.

Mr. McIver: Oh, good, because I've got a lot to say.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 50, the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

The Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act amends three critical pieces of legislation: the Local Authorities Election Act, or the LAEA; the Municipal Government Act, or the MGA; and the New Home Buyer Protection Act, or the NHBPA. Boy, that's conveniently named, isn't it? NHBPA rolls right off the tongue. Nonetheless, it's an important piece of legislation. The bill also includes amendments to the Safety Codes Act.

The amendments proposed in this bill are about modernizing municipal processes. Our government has been listening to feedback from our municipal, business, and community partners, and this legislation reflects that. In turn, we are proposing that the legislation take the next steps in making local elections more

accessible, in making municipal councils more functional, and in enhancing protections for Albertans and Alberta families who are interested in buying new homes.

The amendments we are proposing to the Local Authorities Election Act build on some changes that we made last year, Mr. Speaker. For example, as everyone is aware, our government is requiring hand counts of all votes cast in local elections in Alberta. The confidence of Albertans is worth the time and resources it costs for the residents to have faith in municipal election results, but we do need to make one modification. We need to update the LAEA so that it allows for the use of elector assistance terminals for Albertans who live with disabilities.

All Albertans deserve the opportunity to cast their ballots independently and privately. The elector assistance terminal is designed to allow them to do that. The device does not replace a paper ballot, Mr. Speaker; it merely enables a disabled person to mark a paper ballot without any assistance with the same privacy or dignity that any Alberta citizen should desire to have. The device does not connect to the Internet or any other kind of network, so the concerns that some Albertans may have about automated vote-counting machines are not relevant in this case.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Last year we amended the LAEA to allow the formal registration of local political parties in Calgary and Edmonton for elections this fall, and there's a lot of enthusiasm for this option in both of Alberta's big cities, Mr. Speaker. It's so good to see so much interest from local election candidates in making local politics more transparent for voters.

Last fall, through the local political parties and slates regulation, we set some clear campaign finance rules for political parties and for all candidates who put their names forward in the local elections for this October. We are now proposing to update the LAEA to allow funds to flow between endorsed candidates of a local political party. This is very much the way party campaigns are financed at the provincial level, Mr. Speaker, very much the same or at least, if not identical, quite similar to how political parties operate on the provincial level, including parties represented on both sides of the House here today. Provincially, political parties make decisions about how donations and funds are distributed amongst endorsed candidates within established limits for donations and expenses. This helps level the playing field within a party's team and lets candidates pool their support.

We also intend to require local political parties to disclose their financial information in September 2025, before the October election. This means that if voters want to have a better understanding of the donors who support different candidates and parties, they can look into it well in advance of the election. Annual disclosure requirements for candidates, third-party advertisers, and, indeed, political parties already exist thanks to Bill 20 in March, but we recognize that with the lack of history for local political parties, having a disclosure in September will enhance transparency for local political parties in particular. All existing donation limits and transparency rules will still apply. Plus, additional regulatory amendments are in the works to establish the financial reporting rules for local political parties and fines for exceeding campaign expense limits.

2:50

We also have a very meaningful amendment for the municipality of Jasper. Mr. Speaker, as I explained in a formal statement in early February, due to last year's tragic wildfires, many displaced residents who call Jasper home are at risk of losing their eligibility

to vote in Jasper's municipal election or even to run for council, should they decide to do so, because they won't be physically residing in the municipality on election day, particularly those who may have had their house burn to the ground. Albertans should not lose their democratic right due to such an extraordinary circumstance. I think we can all agree on that. Bill 50 addresses this. People who were eligible to vote or run for office in Jasper immediately before the wildfire and intend to return to the community once they are able will fully remain eligible to vote and/or run in this fall's Jasper municipal election. This is a commitment our government made to the people of Jasper, and we are following through on it.

I will now shift to the Municipal Government Act. We have heard loud and clear that certain rules in the MGA have led to some unintended consequences and dysfunction in a few communities. As it stands currently, the MGA requires every municipality to pass a code of conduct bylaw for council members, with the idea of setting standards for respectful behaviour and remedies when those rules are violated. Unfortunately, we've seen some cases, Mr. Speaker, where some of these codes of conduct have become weaponized, sometimes one councillor against another. Sometimes these codes of conduct have been used by council members to harass or sideline their colleagues over political disagreement. Council codes of conduct when misused or abused can create a chilling effect on legitimate debate and discussion of important issues, and they can be used to silence dissent on council. That was never the intention, it's the wrong thing to do, and our intention is to improve on that.

There have also been multiple instances where courts have overturned council sanctions, finding them to be unreasonable or disproportionate or based on a lack of procedural fairness. More importantly, this kind of dysfunction can result in council members losing track of the job they've been elected to do, which is serving Albertans.

If passed, Bill 50 will remove the MGA requirements for every municipal council to have a code of conduct bylaw. Councils will no longer be permitted to have a bylaw for codes of conduct between council members for now. Mr. Speaker, do you know what this does not mean? This does not mean that those councillors who have misbehaved and have been called to account by a behaviour bylaw – this doesn't excuse that behaviour. Absolutely not. It means that we need a better, more impartial system to deal with conduct issues, one that can't be easily misused for political gain or for personal rivalry. That's why going forward, we will be working with municipalities to develop a new approach to councillor conduct and accountability.

First, we want to ensure that every council follows consistent procedures for meetings in key areas, essentially a standard set of rules of order and conduct that applies province-wide. The primary focus of these standard procedures will be how to handle conflicts that arise within council meetings and ensure the effective and smooth flow of council business.

Second, we will explore creating an independent ethics commissioner for municipalities. This would be an impartial official or body that could handle serious complaints about councillor behaviour when they arise. The idea is that if a council member is truly acting egregiously, or badly, for those of us who like smaller words, the situation can be investigated by a neutral party outside of local politics and dealt with through sanctions or recommendations that are consistent across Alberta, because when a local council falls into chaos, it's the residents who suffer as projects stall and trust erodes. We need council chambers to focus on the real issues: the budget, the infrastructure projects, the community programs, and the services their residents deserve.

Another change we are making to the Municipal Government Act tackles the process for intermunicipal collaboration frameworks, or ICFs. Alberta has hundreds of municipalities, and where they border each other, they often need to co-operate on services for their residents. ICFs, or intermunicipal collaboration frameworks, are meant to formalize co-operation and cost sharing between neighbouring municipalities. In many cases these agreements have worked very well and to everyone's benefit, but we've also heard feedback that the rules could be made more clear and more fair, so we are proposing some changes.

First, we're making it a requirement that each ICF agreement must address a mandatory list of core intermunicipal services. In the past municipalities could in theory gloss over some services or argue about what to include in their agreements. The changes we are proposing will create a checklist of key services that must be discussed and planned for in every ICF. This list includes emergency response, water and waste water, solid waste, recreation facilities, transportation. These are basic services that very often cross municipal boundaries.

Second, we are limiting new capital cost obligations to only those projects where both parties, that is, both municipalities, have had some say in the decision to build the facility and the decisions around the facility's design. If one facility unilaterally builds, say, for example, a new rec centre without consulting its neighbour, they should not later be able to stick that neighbour with half the bill unless that neighbour has agreed to sharing the cost upfront. Just seems fair, Mr. Speaker. Municipal partners will need to communicate and coplan if they intend to cost share, which is exactly the spirit of what ICFs are supposed to be. While there are many, many examples across Alberta where exactly that has happened, there are other examples, sadly, where one municipality has tried to force another one to pay for a large part of a facility that they had no hand or part in agreeing to build. It just doesn't seem fair.

Third, we will allow adjacent counties and municipal districts to opt out of ICFs by mutual agreement. Not every pair of neighbours needs a detailed framework that lasts in perpetuity, especially in many remote and rural areas of Alberta. Sometimes two rural counties might find that they don't really share any services, and making them develop an ICF in such cases creates unnecessary cost for a council with limited resources and unnecessary work for a community with not a lot of staff based on the number of taxpayers they have and the low amount of revenue that they may work with. Under the new rules, if both municipalities agree, they can withdraw from an ICF or decide they don't need one between them. This approach provides flexibility, cuts red tape when an official framework is not necessary, and will not help.

We're also making some tweaks to strengthen the role of arbitrators to resolve disputes about ICFs more effectively when they do come up. Stronger collaboration frameworks mean municipalities can share the costs of infrastructure and services in a way that's fair and planned, which in turn helps speed up development and smooths a path for projects to go forward.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities asked for updates to ICFs, and we are delivering. The president of Rural Municipalities of Alberta even said, and I quote: we're extremely happy, dancing from the rooftop with the changes that are coming to that process. Ultimately, it's about making sure local governments spend less time in disagreement and more time serving Albertans building the roads, the fire halls, and the homes that our growing population needs, which brings me to the last major piece of Bill 50, protecting homebuyers and ensuring homes are built properly.

After all, it's not enough to get more homes built faster, which is a big priority, mind you. But speed can't come at the expense of

quality, and homebuyers deserve to have confidence that their investment is being protected. We are making key updates to the New Home Buyer Protection Act to strengthen consumer protections while cutting red tape where it makes sense because rules should protect homeowners, not create unnecessary hurdles.

Take owner-builders, for example. Many Albertans, especially in rural areas or on acreages, choose to build their own homes, and we are proposing to make this process simpler. No more notarized statutory declarations that bog down approvals; just a digital confirmation. And for those who find themselves needing to sell – you see, Mr. Speaker, when a home builder builds for somebody else, they're required to buy the home builder insurance which lasts 10 years, but if somebody builds the home for themselves where they don't have to buy the insurance, sometimes they can find themselves in a position where they need to sell their home before the 10-year warranty period would be up.

3:00

We're making it easier now for those to qualify for an exemption and be more responsive to real-life situations even as we make sure future home builders are protected. Mr. Speaker, we want to encourage those that want to build their own homes, especially in rural Alberta where large city builders: it may be hard to attract them and any home builder. So we want to make it easier and not more difficult for that to happen.

If a home is sold without a warranty under an exemption, a caveat will be placed on the title, just like any caveat that would be placed on the title of all new homes built without a warranty going forward. This way buyers know exactly what they're getting. If they think it's important, they can order a new and separate inspection of the home before they make the purchase.

When it comes to challenging decisions related to exemptions, definitions, or rental use designations, the changes we are making will reinstate Albertans' ability to make their appeals to the Land and Property Rights Tribunal. Mr. Speaker, we're planning on further discussion with Alberta's housing sector to inform key regulatory changes to strengthen builder licensing and enhance available dispute resolution, likely in the fall.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I hope all members of this House will support the amendments we are making with the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act. The proposed changes to the Municipal Government Act will streamline processes for municipalities, bring an end to the weaponization of council codes of conduct, and make intermunicipal collaboration frameworks more effective among neighbouring municipalities.

The proposed amendments to the New Home Buyer Protection Act will protect consumers in Alberta's housing market, raise the overall quality of home construction, and improve access to appeals while, we hope, keeping it possible for those that decide to build their own homes to do exactly that.

I'm sure my fellow members in the House will have some questions about the improvements we are proposing for these key pieces of legislation as will municipalities, and I will say before I close, Mr. Speaker, that our intention is to work with municipalities on what a new behaviour bylaw may look like or behaviour rules may look like for Alberta municipalities. Our intention is to work with municipalities on the changes and help them understand what the changes are that they're required to do, so that this becomes easier for them rather than more difficult.

I look forward to a healthy debate and to improving the quality of life for our fellow Albertans through our work together, Mr. Speaker. I would ask all members at the end of debate to vote for Bill 50

because there's a lot in here, I think, that will make a positive difference for Alberta and Alberta municipalities.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 50? The Member for Sherwood Park has risen.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for the introduction of the bill. I'm going to take some time to lay out our initial thoughts on this bill maybe just in quick response to the minister because he had a chance to speak.

There are some rich ironies. About a year ago Bill 20 was brought in. It seemed at the time like a surprise. No stakeholders, no municipalities were prepared for the legislation that came in, and it seemed a little reckless and half baked. Bill 50 largely seems like a cleanup job for that initial terrible legislation, Bill 20, which has transformed our municipal government and our municipal elections in Alberta. It is with some sense of irony I see that, because of pandering to extreme interests and people that watch too much Fox News, in Bill 20 the government banned the use of vote tabulators, machines that count votes in municipal elections. So to catch up, they realized: "Oops. What about people that are blind? What about other disabled people?" How are they going to vote when there was some enabling technology that has now been kicked out by Bill 20? We see that now we have electoral assistance terminals being brought back, so machines are being brought back into municipal elections. That's an interesting thing.

Parties, we know, largely, writ large, are unpopular in this province. Now we have just some bolstering, some clarification brought around about it because they were quickly brought in, municipal parties, and then a few questions were raised about financing, so Bill 20 is coming back trying to make things work a little bit better. But what we still have as a problem is that dark money, numbered corporations, can buy elections. Voting in municipal elections: we see there's an opportunity for abuse with municipal parties and allowing corporations to buy municipal councils.

The minister often gets up and talks about third-party advertising being in municipal elections already. Neither in Bill 20 nor in Bill 50 has the minister taken an opportunity to strengthen and codify rules around third-party advertising. We now know that there are going to be some clarifications and disclosures made about political party financing, but third-party advertisers have still been left alone, which we see as a gap in this legislation.

The codes of conduct for councils that are being repealed: we view that as an authoritarian measure. We view that as the provincial government going down into duly elected municipal councils and telling them how to do their work. And the minister is very good to defend municipal decisions by saying that duly elected councillors have made those decisions, but in this case he's deciding that it is against government policy or the public interest to have codes of conduct for municipal councils. I'm sure many members will bring forward from their own communities examples of when the code of conduct has worked very well.

The minister seems to be governing by examples, by anecdotes, I call them. He hears a story. Maybe he heads to the UCP convention, and the cousin of a minister was reprimanded because they violated a code of conduct, so he internalizes that. Maybe a friend of his on some UCP board that also sits on a council has had their wrists slapped or reprimanded because of their misbehavior as a councillor, so now he's internalized that, and he said: "You know what? Let's just get rid of this to help our UCP friends because we don't want them to be held accountable." This government is allergic to accountability.

In response to Bill 50, though, recognizing the situation that was created by Bill 20, recognizing the situation that was created by a government that defunded regional planning boards, the Alberta New Democrats are actively engaging with municipal leaders and everyday Albertans to assess the full impact of Bill 50, and once the review is complete, we will be bringing forward ideas to this Assembly for consideration. I have sent an e-mail to the minister to say much the same, asking for a meeting so that we can have a discussion about potential amendments before I bring them forward into this Assembly. We're not changing our view on Bill 20. We will repeal Bill 20 when we form government.

An Hon. Member: Yahoo.

Mr. Kasawski: Yeah.

It is still an authoritarian piece of legislation that undercuts the autonomy of duly elected municipal councils, and we need to step back, sit down, and try and build some robust legislation with consultation and not with stories from friends at UCP conventions but with consultation with municipal stakeholders, municipal leaders, and experts in the field so that we can understand the unintended consequences.

We've seen with this government, with the local government fiscal framework, that robust policy development is possible, but in the last year since Bill 20 came in and Bill 18, we have seen nothing like that. We have seen a government that continually just brings forward legislation, throws it into this Assembly, and then afterwards goes to stakeholders to say, "What do you think of this?" and often they have thoughts. So we hope to bring those thoughts forward and have a healthy debate on Bill 50 in this House.

3:10

We want you to know that better is possible. Better legislation is possible. Better municipal governance is possible, and municipalities are bringing forward ideas on ways we can improve municipal statutes, so there are some ideas we might be bringing forward that the minister has not brought forward in Bill 50 that will still be related to the legislation that is a part of the municipal statutes.

Let's get into it a little bit. Ethics, integrity, and accountability: we know these are things that the UCP are allergic to. There are things that do not align with what the UCP views as good government, so then they will go into municipalities and say: we're going to get rid of those. Codes of conduct: apparently, something that does not align with good conduct, with good ethics, with integrity. Eliminating professional accountability for the behaviour of elected municipal councillors is an offside move by this government.

With Bill 20, they clarified that if the cabinet wants to go in and change a bylaw, they can do that, and they only do it by the determination of what they as cabinet decide is in the public interest or government policy. Something that Bill 20 brought forward and something Bill 50 clarifies is that it's all still left up to cabinet, so the cabinet of the day still gets to decide what is okay for municipal councillors and councils to do.

Today, I tabled the code of conduct for Strathcona county, my community. Now, with Bill 50 the government of Alberta is going to be repealing a bylaw that the independently elected council of Strathcona county passed; because of Bill 20 the UCP have decided that the Strathcona county's code of conduct is not in the public interest and counter to provincial policy.

The mayor of Calgary has raised some grave concern about this immediately. Maybe I'll read parts of a statement that the mayor made. She wants to address one of the recent changes that was

introduced by Alberta Municipal Affairs and the Municipal Government Act. The amendments in Bill 50 propose to repeal the code of conduct requirements, and they are concerning. This change removes a critical framework that holds our elected officials accountable for their actions, fostering transparency and integrity in our municipal government, and it's crucial to understand for all members of the Assembly that without a code of conduct there is a significant gap in how we manage and challenge inappropriate behaviors in council members.

What's also alarming with this legislation, that feels like it's half baked and brought forward, is that the minister is suggesting what a solution can be. The minister does not have that solution yet. I do not know why this rapid change is needed in municipal government that we could not have seen the minister going to municipalities, discussing a potential solution, and having that solution ready before he brought Bill 50 in to get rid of the codes of conduct.

We can imagine, without the codes of conduct over the next few months, some serious problems. A member of council could be accused of bullying. Without the formal code of conduct and a clear disciplinary procedure, addressing these accusations becomes problematic and may not be handled with the seriousness it deserves. Similarly, you need strict guidelines to ensure that there is no conflict of interest or perception of being duly influenced in situations where a council member might accept gifts from third parties. We have seen with this government that when you receive gifts from third parties, it often leads to exceptionally bloated contracts, which is what's led to the corrupt care scandal. Now we're just encouraging municipal councils to follow the lead of this provincial government. We do not want misuse of public funds.

Another challenge that's been created by getting rid of the code of conduct is starting to see a blurring of the lines between public service with administration and government. We've seen this blurring of the line so much as we've seen ministers and key staff in the political arm of the government going into the bureaucracy and influencing decisions for where funds should be directed for government funds. Now, with removing the code of conduct with municipalities, they will not have those guardrails that have been in place for years for them.

Municipal councils are there to govern. We are here to govern. Administration and bureaucracy are there to carry out the roles and duties of government. You are exposing administration. Now you are removing the code of conduct, and you are risking a situation where council is going to be in a situation where they might get called out for bullying or abusing municipal staff and you are risking, exposing council to litigation for breach of employment law. Up to this point the chief administrative officer of councils is that barrier. The relationship between council and a chief administrative officer has been codified, but we are removing the barrier for council then to take direct action with employees, and we could see problems from it.

Campaign financing. It seems to be that this government is encouraging ways for corporations to get involved in municipal elections in a very large way. Rather than leaving it to citizens to be contributing to their candidates for municipal elections, they've opened it up for corporations to contribute. That happened in Bill 20, and with Bill 50 we have just seen the clarity made so that it means that a municipal council candidate that is running with a party gets to raise twice as much money and spend twice as much money on their campaign as an independent candidate.

The government is encouraging dark money to come into municipal elections and tip the scales, giving them the opportunity for the highest bidder to buy municipal elections and buy a council. It's a harm to our local democracy. We should be finding ways to bring robust guardrails and protection of our local democracy

because I know, as the minister has said in many speeches, locally, duly elected officials are the ones that need to make decisions for their council, but we need to create protection around how we get them elected and the rules that they will be using during the elections. Bill 50 will diminish our voices as citizens in municipal elections because money by corporations can outweigh the influence we would have on our own candidates.

We see with Bill 20 this clarification that the cabinet can fire councillors, and they can change local bylaws. They're changing local bylaws immediately by removing all bylaws and repealing all bylaws for codes of conduct for municipal councils. What we see in Bill 50 is that there was a request after the creation of Bill 20 to get some clarity on what public interest means or what the policy of government means, and that is still left up to cabinet. As ridiculous as it sounds, cabinet decides what's in the public interest and what municipal bylaws they will be repealing.

I raised it at the beginning, but I'll just raise it again, Mr. Speaker. It is deeply ironic that in pandering to the extreme interests of people that do not trust computers and machines, the UCP have gotten rid of vote counting machines in municipal elections, but now they're bringing machines back into the voting booth for enabling disabled people to have an opportunity to vote and exercise their right.

3:20

Bill 20 disenfranchised many people. I know some members will want to talk about that, especially when it comes to vouching, something that could have been addressed – we raised that concern in this House – and how people can prove that they are eligible to vote, but the minister did not take any of that feedback from the last debate we had a year ago. We might want to raise that up with him again. There should be opportunities to make sure people are enfranchised and have their opportunity to vote in this province.

Mr. Speaker, how am I doing for time?

The Acting Speaker: Three minutes.

Mr. Kasawski: I have more to say, Mr. Speaker.

Where do we go from this? I'll just raise a couple of things that are really interesting. Mr. Speaker, this minister defunded the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board. He defunded the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board. When he did that, we lost an important regional municipal planning tool, and as a result we are seeing Bill 50 brought forward to try and clarify how intermunicipal collaboration frameworks can be built and negotiated. Government decisions blew up a good working system in this province, and now they're trying to create legislation that's going to allow us to try and fix it.

The arbitration process has been brought forward, and key services need to be negotiated such as emergency services, water and waste water, solid waste, recreation, transportation. I'll ask anyone who's paying attention to municipal affairs: Minister, has anybody left anything important out? I think that stormwater is maybe something that needs to be a part of this agreement because it's an important part of intermunicipal collaboration.

Mr. Speaker, I think maybe the last thing that's pretty important: within municipalities we have chief administrative officers. I mentioned them, and they are the employee to the council. There's an established relationship there. Codes of ethics, in part, were there to help govern that relationship between chief administrative officers and the council that they serve. Now there is very prescriptive top-down management coming from this government that doesn't know how to govern, and they think that their job is to manage every little affair. If you can believe it, they have required

that when a council member asks for information from the chief administrative officer or anyone in the administration, all of council needs to get a response within 72 hours. All administration wants to respond to council's requests, and they do so diligently, but prescribing 72 hours seems very strange. I don't know why it wasn't business days. It seems like you're setting up a trap for chief administrative officers.

The last thing that is really strange, Mr. Speaker, is that any time a chief administrative officer uses natural person powers, they have to report that to council within 72 hours again. Any time someone that works for a city uses a credit card, they are going to have to report that within 72 hours. Every time they hire or fire a staff member, they're going to have to report that within 72 hours. Every time they sign a contract, they're going to have to report that within 72 hours. Every time they spend money, they'll have to report that within 72 hours. Red tape has been created by the UCP.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have just heard some really good arguments from the shadow minister of Municipal Affairs about how this government seems to be, like, just kind of wandering through the forest, making up rules as they go, and then realizing some of the mistakes that they thought that they made, and then coming up with new legislation to try and fix those repairs.

I mean, in standing to speak to Bill 50, the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to talk a little bit about, as I have before in this Chamber, how we seem to be seeing legislation after legislation from this government that shows their desire is to consolidate control into their government, into their ministers' offices, and take control away from others. They're particularly happy to do this with municipalities, particularly a couple of municipalities out there that maybe they feel like they didn't win enough jurisdictions in in the last election. This government maybe took a step back and looked at Bill 20 and thought: "You know, what are more areas, other areas where we could step in and take a little bit more control? Like, maybe we missed some opportunities in Bill 20."

In Bill 20 they already allowed for political parties; interestingly, an action which 70 per cent of Albertans were opposed to. So I guess they're not really listening to Albertans.

Also interesting, Mr. Speaker, you know, as a member of Public Accounts, is hearing in Public Accounts that the ministry informed us that, in fact, actually, political parties were already allowed in municipal elections in Alberta. Curious that nobody else seemed to have that understanding, that they were already allowed, and nobody previously had ever taken the opportunity to create a municipal party in a municipal election. Not only that, but they gave us some clarification that, in fact, Bill 20 actually, like, clarified some things and restricted to only allow political parties in Calgary and Edmonton, that they were allowed everywhere; now they're only allowed in Calgary and Edmonton, when everybody else's perception and understanding was that they were previously allowed nowhere and now they're allowed in Calgary and Edmonton.

Bill 20 also removed the ability to use voter machines and voter tabulators in elections, which we also heard in Public Accounts that a survey that was conducted by this government found that 36 per cent of Albertans had expressed concerns with voter tabulators. Thirty-six per cent, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly to me, that would mean that 64 per cent did not express concerns with voter tabulators. I would wonder why the government would side with 36

versus 64. Maybe they're confused by the word "majority." But that survey in and of itself could be spurious. I think this government also has a history of releasing surveys that the questions are closely crafted to give them the outcomes that they're looking for.

Now here we are. Bill 20 has passed. Bill 50 is the conversation of the day, and we see additional rules being put in place for those political parties. Mr. Speaker, it almost seems like the government's plan to take a little bit more control of the two charter cities with political parties wasn't really working, so they needed to step in and stack the deck for their preferred candidates and parties. The minister says that the funding changes and allowing to share funding between political party members and from the party to the members is no big deal because this already happens at the provincial and federal level. True. It does already happen at the provincial and federal level. But I think we all know, we've seen in the history of democracy in this country, that at the provincial and federal level independent candidates aren't typically very successful when they're stacked up against parties, and one of those reasons that they're not as successful perhaps is funding and the ability to secure funding and share funding with others. But I expect that the government already understands the struggles that independent candidates face, which is why they have stepped in to, you know, give parties a bit of a boost, so that those independent candidates may not be successful.

As I said, this government has a history of stepping in to assert their control over the two charter cities. We've seen that pretty recently with the green line. We saw it with Bill 20, that facilitated the province's ability to step in and remove members of council even though the government already had the ability to step in and remove members of council; they just needed to make it easier and not actually need any justification to do it. The previous legislation required justification; now we no longer need justification.

3:30

We saw it with Bill 18 blocking charter cities' ability to access funding from the federal government. In a provincial we-know-best move, the province will now make those decisions on what grants can be applied to, how those grants will be allocated, and how those grants will be utilized in Alberta. Again and again, this government steps in to assert their control, and Bill 50, Mr. Speaker, is just another example of that. This government isn't particularly interested in transparency or accountability; they're most interested in consolidating power.

Bill 50 also removes municipal codes of conduct and blocks any municipality that doesn't already have a code of conduct from creating one. Interestingly again, Bill 20 already gave the government the ability to nullify any municipal bylaw of their choosing whenever they wanted, so they already had the power to nullify a bylaw, a code of conduct bylaw, in a city or a municipality. But for some reason we needed to create Bill 50 with amendments that now will blanket in one sweeping move and nullify all code of conduct bylaws, regardless of whether or not some of those code of conduct bylaws were working and supported by the councillors that were working with those code of conduct bylaws.

In a unilateral move we've removed all the codes of conduct everywhere rather than, what they could have done with power already granted to them through Bill 20, surgically look at which areas were having some challenges, which municipalities were having some challenges. They already had the ability within the MGA and granted to them through Bill 20 to step in and work with those municipalities and do whatever they wanted, but Bill 50 will just facilitate it and make it easier.

Places like Edmonton and Calgary already have ethics advisers and integrity commissioners in place. Calgary council's code of

conduct bylaw establishes rules that the council must follow in the discharge of their office, requires council members to disclose real estate and financial holdings. These rules have been in place since 2018. Council has an integrity commissioner and an ethics adviser. At least four councillors have been found to be in violation of the council's code of conduct since 2016. At no time during those four times was it considered that council was out of bounds or that the Ethics Commissioner was out of bounds.

Edmonton has a code of conduct that's been in place since 2018. They have an ethics adviser in place to guide councillors in their decision-making. They have an integrity commissioner to investigate complaints that are made against any councillor. Again, this has been in place for several years, and we haven't heard of any real reasons why this isn't working and why it would have needed to be swept aside, but this government thinks that they can do better, that they can centralize codes of conduct, that they control it from the government of Alberta and all will be better everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, that's interesting coming from a government that has gutted the Conflicts of Interest Act and changed the ethics rules for themselves. Interesting from a government that amended FOIP legislation to make it harder for Albertans to get access to information. Interesting from a government led by a Premier that was found in conflict of the Conflicts of Interest Act. Interesting from a government that accepts gifts to box suites at playoff hockey games, and they don't even bother to disclose those gifts on their ethics disclosure. Interesting from a government that, today, is embroiled in the worst corruption scandal in Alberta's history.

Corrupt care allegedly funnelled funds to their friends running private surgical facilities. Corrupt care led to the spending of tens of millions on useless medical equipment and Turkish Tylenol to the same person that owns those private surgical facilities. Corrupt care saw that same person sell land to the Ministry of Infrastructure, profiting hundreds of thousands of dollars. We heard from Public Accounts that never before, previously, has the Ministry of Infrastructure purchased a parking lot.

The Ministry of Infrastructure told us that pre-emptively looking and investigating or looking at conflict of interest was inconvenient and simply not possible and that they wouldn't be doing that. This government thinks they know best despite their record, and they will wipe the codes of conduct and put them in charge. Mr. Speaker, Bill 50 would be laughable and part of a comedy routine if it were not so serious.

On top of all of that, and, of course, with almost every piece of legislation we've seen from this government, there was no consultation with municipalities on Bill 50. One might wonder why they wouldn't consult with municipalities on a bill that directly impacts municipalities. No consultation seems to be the standard way of operating with this government. You know, as we have just recently heard, this government even built a school on land that had no road access and no power. Mr. Speaker, this government didn't even know who owned the land before they built the school on it; hardly a government that we should be looking to for advice on ethics and codes of conduct.

I'd also like to take a moment, as my friend the Member for Sherwood Park talked about those intermunicipal agreements that interestingly this government just defunded and disbanded, the two metro regional boards. Those boards were working on intermunicipal agreements. So having wiped out those boards and all of the work on intermunicipal agreements, they then thought that they needed to introduce legislation to strengthen and encourage intermunicipal agreements. That seems a bit ironic to me, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 50 just seems again like an example of this UCP government charging through a china shop like a bull, and then after having

realized all of the things that they had broken, they're trying to create new legislation to fix problems that they themselves created. Kind of like realizing after the fact that removing voter tabulator machines would make it more difficult for persons with disabilities to vote, so now we need to reintroduce the use of machines for some voters.

Mr. Speaker, we should not have gone through with Bill 20. We should not be going through with Bill 50, just another example of legislation that does not advance Alberta, does not serve Albertans. I beg everybody in this Chamber to please vote no when the time comes for Bill 50.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-West is recognized.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really don't know where to start. Bill 20 in itself wasn't a very positive bill for municipalities. They weren't consulted again. Bill 50 is a continuation of that. There are very few people in this House that have actually served on municipal council. The minister is actually one of them. Myself and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo are two more. That experience of being on council and understanding how a municipal council works and seeing something like we're seeing in Bill 50 just rubs us the wrong way. For example, there's no really good reason for this bill to eliminate a code of conduct for municipal council. Not only that, but it bars municipalities from making bylaws or resolutions that address councillor behaviour. We're talking the Wild West out here.

This bill also terminates any current code violations or code of conduct complaints and any other sanctions against sitting councillors. They can't face code of conduct sanctions if there's actually no code of conduct. Plus the municipalities aren't required to report these to the ministry, so the ministry can claim they have no specific examples of anything that's going on.

3:40

You know, Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of things that would not be dealt with if there's no code of conduct. I'm going to tell you what they are. There was a mayor in southeastern Alberta that was stripped of some of the powers by people in that municipality, I believe, misreading the code of conduct, not applying it correctly, and this was borne out by the fact that all these sanctions were reversed by a judge who pretty much said: yeah, those sanctions weren't in proportion to the code of conduct breaches. As a matter of fact, that person is now getting back pay for all the money they lost.

There was another councillor that was in another municipality that was accused of bullying and harassing staff members. That came to light because of a code of conduct in that municipality. Another councillor has been accused of sharing a constituent e-mail list with their current campaign, which totally violates a code of conduct within that municipality, which is, again, breaching public trust. It's using information incorrectly. It's violating private information.

There was another complaint against a sitting member of a council for taking a picture of a mayor's licence plate and circulating it online, because that councillor had a vendetta against the mayor and wanted everyone to know. That kind of doxing is obviously not acceptable behaviour for an elected official. That councillor is also guilty of a number of offences that happened when that city councillor was a police officer, and questionable behaviour bordering on criminal.

Member Ceci: Still sitting.

Mr. Kasawski: Still a sitting councillor.

Member Miyashiro: Still sitting as a councillor.

I'm not sure what it is exactly that this bill is trying to do and what they're trying to allow councils to cover up. But you know what it is? It sounds like something in a psychological film. You talk about projection, and you're talking about – they're going to try to project the things that they're doing already onto city councils, and saying: oh, well, we can't have rules for this because we're doing it, and we wouldn't want to be caught doing it, right?

Let's talk about some things, and I'm going to talk about some things that I was proud of creating when I was a member of city council in Lethbridge. In 2018 we actually redid our code of conduct. It's pretty robust, and it addresses everything that we're talking about that Bill 50 takes away. That's why it doesn't make sense to me, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things that we talked about in our code of conduct is that

As leaders in the community, [city council] Members are held to a higher standard of behaviour and conduct and must be mindful that as public figures the lines between public and private behaviour are not readily apparent, nor easily distinguishable by the public at large.

Very important to remember, Mr. Speaker.

In representing the municipality, Members shall: act honestly and in good faith, serve the welfare and interests of the City as a whole; perform their functions and duties in a conscientious and diligent manner with integrity, accountability and transparency; conduct themselves in a professional manner with dignity and make every effort to participate diligently in the meetings of Council, committees of Council and other bodies to which they are appointed by Council.

Actually, the fact that our code of conduct mentions committees of council reminds me that Bill 50 talks about how the provincial government wants to direct how councils do committees, which is ridiculous because every single municipality has different kinds of committees and every municipality has committees that do not just different things, but they need to function differently based upon the purpose of that committee.

Also in the city of Lethbridge code of conduct:

No Member shall speak in a manner which is discriminatory to any individual referencing characterizations such as race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical or mental ability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation.

And, importantly,

Members must not: use, or attempt to use, their authority to interfere or attempt to interfere in the employees' duties.

Pretty simply, Mr. Speaker, the city council members are not allowed to use what their position of authority is in order to influence what the city staff do in their roles as employees.

The other thing that council members are not allowed to do is "maliciously or falsely injure the reputation of City employees." That's a pretty slippery slope that some council members are on quite often when they criticize publicly the function of some of the city employees.

Mr. Speaker, there are also some clauses about conflict of interest within the city of Lethbridge council code of conduct, which I believe would be really good if the current government could probably look at as well. Two things especially:

Members are to be free from undue influence and not act in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, family, friends or associates, business or otherwise.

The whole corrupt care scandal that we've been talking about for the last few months deliberately relates to that.

Also:

Members will not, in the exercise of an official power, duty or function, give preferential treatment to any individual or organization if a reasonably well-informed person would conclude that the preferential treatment was advancing a private interest.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is the basis for all of our accusations of corrupt care with this current government. Is influence being peddled? What is going on with the missing money? What is going on with the private surgical suites that we're listening to?

Totally related to this is the improper use of influence, that no Member shall use the influence of [their] office for any purpose other than for the exercise of the Member's official duties.

No Member shall act as a paid agent to advocate on behalf of any individual, organization or corporate entity before Council or [on] a committee of Council or any other body [that's] established.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that was very clear in the code of conduct for the city of Lethbridge is that there are several clauses about gifts and hospitality. This would be something, a cautionary tale, I think, for the current government in terms of the gifts that they've accepted.

Members shall not accept gifts, hospitality or other benefits that would, to a reasonable member of the public, appear to be in gratitude for influence, to induce influence, or otherwise to go beyond the necessary and appropriate public functions involved.

When members of the government are receiving gifts, like – I don't know – trips or tickets to sporting events in luxury boxes, things of that nature, I think a reasonable person in the public could understand that there might be something wrong with that, and there might be something that should not occur.

Mr. Speaker, there's a multitude of things going on with this legislation. I could go on and on. In fact, I will, right to the end of your time.

Mr. Kasawski: Yeah, you will.

Member Miyashiro: Yeah, I know. Sorry.

Why were municipalities not consulted in this? It seems rather odd that a minister that's actually been involved in a municipality for a long time wouldn't understand the fact that – just talk to us. Talk to the municipalities. Get their perspective on what is being presented. I know when the minister was a sitting council member, he probably didn't like the overreach by provincial bodies into the business of the municipality for which he was a councillor.

My colleague from Sherwood Park mentioned this, too. Why is the government getting rid of any code of conduct legislation without having something in place? Why would you do that? Why would you just dump it and say: okay; now what? Now, as I said earlier, it's like the Wild West out there. People are just going to do whatever they want, and there's nothing in place to stop that, right? I don't understand that.

3:50

The other thing is some municipalities have things like ethics advisers or ethics commissioners or integrity commissioners, and there's nothing in this legislation to say whether that will be allowed after this legislation passes. I think that's something really important in some municipalities, especially larger ones. It's important that they have that other office that can look at any complaints or that can look at what's going on with the council and say: "Hey, maybe you're crossing the line. Hey, maybe this isn't something that you should be pursuing."

I guess we need to really think of and ask ourselves: who is this bill for? Like, seriously, look at this and go: who is this for? It's

definitely not for the municipalities. It's definitely not for the good of the municipal councils, definitely not for better government. The MGA says for municipalities to provide – I think it is clause 3 – good government. I don't see how getting rid of a bunch of the things that are in Bill 50 is going to say that we're providing better government because of this. We need to understand that. Who is this for?

Isn't it easier to fix these smaller problems that are in individual municipalities? Maybe "smaller problems" isn't the right terminology. Maybe problems that are being experienced by certain municipalities are ones that can be fixed in those municipalities. Maybe they are just core to what's going on in those municipalities. Maybe they are because of the personalities on those municipal councils in those municipalities. Maybe it's because of the way the CAO interacts with council that has created issues. Maybe it's because of the way the bureaucracy in those municipalities is interacting or not interacting with council that's creating those issues. I think, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister needs to go back and look at who this is for. What's it going to fix? Are we just creating a whole new set of problems because of this?

The other thing that was touched on briefly – and I'll just touch on this really quickly. Is the UCP intentionally giving municipal political parties advantage over independent candidates? My colleagues both touched on this. It's like: how is it that candidates part of municipal political parties have the ability to raise more funds and to spend more money than individual people that are running for office? That doesn't make sense to anyone, I think, that you talk to about this, and I think that's something that definitely really needs to be looked at again by this minister before implementing these things.

I know that the colleagues of mine from the city of Lethbridge – I know pretty much everybody, am good friends with several. None of them have been jumping up and down and saying: "Wow. This is great. We're just so happy to have this legislation."

Mr. Speaker, they need to talk to the municipalities, and if you're going to do this, do it right.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 50? I will recognize the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 50, especially since I didn't actually get to speak to Bill 20 because, well, we were kind of rushed in December, and sadly my genius was not shared with the House in December around Bill 20, so I really appreciate the opportunity to share it now. I see the Minister of Education is very happy to hear the amazing ideas I have to share. You know, Bill 20 was a pretty controversial bill at the time because it wasn't really something that municipalities were asking for. While there are pieces of Bill 20 I wish I could speak more directly to today, I will limit my comments as per standard to the contents of Bill 50.

I want to take a minute to talk about this codes of conduct piece. As we know, this bill does remove municipal codes of conduct, but we still need a mechanism to talk about councillors who are not great or not doing their jobs or posing a threat to public safety or their colleagues or whatever. This bill terminates all current codes of conduct, current complaints against councillors. I'm a little concerned about it also eliminating current complaints. Those complaints exist for a reason. They have been filed within, arguably, what can be a challenging system, but they do exist for a reason. I wonder what happens, Mr. Speaker, to those existing codes of conduct complaints now because we don't have a replacement for these municipal codes of conduct.

And while on this occasion – and, I mean, it is rare – I do agree with the minister that codes of conduct have been weaponized by some, it is clear to me that there were problems with the municipal codes of conduct process, but I don't think that that is a reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Sure. It's a good reason.

Dr. Elmeligi: The Minister of Education agrees.

Mr. Nicolaidis: No, it's a good reason.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you for that.

We need to be able to hold all elected officials in this province, whether they be education, like school board members, or municipal councillors and mayors and reeves or even provincial elected officials – dare I say that as provincial elected officials we should also be held to account. The members opposite seem to be allergic to accountability sometimes, Mr. Speaker. I actually believe in accountability on this side of the House. I do think it's important for us to think very carefully about this whole idea of municipal codes of conduct being completely eliminated with Bill 50 here.

It is difficult for councillors to sanction each other, and it is very awkward for town managers to administer a complaint against their employers. I would argue that that is even more challenging, Mr. Speaker, in rural communities, where everybody knows everybody else. I mean, I don't even go grocery shopping anymore because I can't go into Save-On and leave in 10 minutes. It's always a 40-minute trip even if I only want milk. Living in a small town means that everybody knows each other. It does create this need for the ability to file complaints with anonymity or with independence so that people can feel safe in investigating complaints and they can feel like they're not going to be called out when they go to get a litre of milk at Save-On or Safeway, wherever you shop.

I feel that there are valid reasons to file complaints. Some people in small towns are worried about retaliatory complaints being filed or, you know, kind of being faced with negative reactions in the community, so we need to be able to have a way to file complaints against councillors that is independent and anonymous and robust. I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that the codes of conduct for municipalities process needs to be improved, not thrown out altogether. I appreciate the minister saying that he will work with municipalities to find an alternate plan and an alternate path here, but I guess my question to the minister is: why has that not been done before cancelling the codes of conduct in Bill 50? If we're aiming for an alternate plan for codes of conduct for municipalities, I kind of feel like those conversations should have happened already.

I know that my municipalities in Banff-Kananaskis have ideas on how to improve this system, but they haven't been consulted, and they haven't been asked. They are the ones who are the most challenged. As I said, small rural communities are challenged with these codes of conduct because rural communities are different than urban communities, Mr. Speaker. I think sometimes the members opposite like to talk about rural Alberta, but I don't often see the needs of rural Albertans reflected in legislation, and I would argue that Bill 50 is yet another example of that.

I also want to take a minute to speak to the intermunicipal collaboration framework changes. These agreements are very essential, especially in a rural landscape, where you may have a small town surrounded by an MD. You may have a hamlet that responds with an MD, reeve, and council and a town that has councillors and mayors. It creates this interjurisdictional complexity, Mr. Speaker, when you have these towns that serve as centres for the broader region.

4:00

I think one of the things I've learned being the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis is that a lot of the challenge with intermunicipal collaboration frameworks really stems from MDs and municipalities having very different population numbers. I mean, you can have an MD that has literally a few hundred people living in the whole MD and a town that has several thousands or even tens of thousands of people living in it, and then they enter into these intermunicipal collaboration frameworks, but they come from very different places with different population sizes and, therefore, very different tax base structures. Really, for me, ICFs, Mr. Speaker, become a conversation around fairness, not necessarily about saying that, like, the process is confusing and so we need to fix the process around ICFs. That may be true, but I think what we really need to remedy around ICFs is fairness and making sure that all municipalities involved feel that those agreements are fair and serve the populations that they represent.

I question, Mr. Speaker, how the changes to ICFs will ensure that fairness as well as ensuring that the municipalities are set up to build successful and positive relationships with each other, because I also see a lot of instances, especially being the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis – I can think of plenty of examples of how the city of Calgary really feels like this humongous force pushing onto the rural municipalities in Banff-Kananaskis. I think ICFs are an opportunity to make sure that one municipality with a much larger population and a much larger tax base is not forcing ideas or priorities on smaller rural municipalities, who really every day are struggling to just hang on to their ruralness and their identity as a rural municipality. I don't see how these changes will ensure fairness in ICFs. I'd really like us to talk about that a lot more.

I also have questions about why some services are exempt and why those specific services are exempt. Specifically, why are libraries exempt from ICFs when they do serve a broader region? In Canmore we are part of the Marigold library system, which is awesome. It's a regional library system. It means that if I go to my library and they don't have the book that I need, I can order that book from any library in the Marigold system. Some of those libraries are in Okotoks or Chestermere. So it's this really broad regional service that these rural libraries provide. I'm curious why they are exempt from ICFs. The other thing is that, like, the library in the town of Canmore serves Canmore and the MD of Bighorn, but because Canmore is also a tourist destination, it could also serve anybody else whose town is part of that Marigold library system. So why are libraries exempt from this legislation?

Mr. Speaker, can I ask how much time I have left?

The Acting Speaker: Five minutes.

Dr. Elmeligi: Five minutes? Okay. That's perfect.

We have this saying in science. I know that's a foreign concept for some in the room. We have this saying in scientific modelling: garbage in, garbage out, Mr. Speaker. It basically means that if you put bad data into a model, you will get questionable results out of that model. I think about that when I read Bill 50 because Bill 20 is a garbage piece of legislation and Bill 50 is a garbage piece of legislation trying to fix a garbage piece of legislation. At the end of the day it's all garbage. I am happy that we will repeal Bill 20 when we form government in 2027.

This bill contains pieces that are fixing issues in Bill 20. We just debated Bill 20, Mr. Speaker. Surely the definitions of things and the clarity should have been provided in that bill that we debated months ago, yet they are not. Albertans need a government that is thoughtful, strategic, and forward thinking, and Bill 20 and Bill 50 are not.

Bill 20 was sloppy, and now we have Bill 50 to fix some of those mistakes. Bill 20 now allows for electoral assistance terminals for disabled Albertans to vote independently. Surely that was raised before. Surely, when we were debating Bill 20, somebody in this room, I'm pretty sure on this side of the House, would have commented that a lack of electoral assistance terminals was going to impact the ability of disabled Albertans to vote. Surely, Mr. Speaker, if we actually had effective debate in this House, some of those ideas raised in December when we were debating Bill 20 would have been reflected in the final bill rather than us having to debate a whole new bill that addresses some of the mistakes that have already been brought forward.

Obviously, we need to have measures in place for disabled Albertans to vote, Mr. Speaker. This is not news. This is not some new kind of fandangled idea that just got introduced last week. No. We knew that in December, when we were debating this bill, and if the government had listened to any of the productive ideas raised on this side of the House, we wouldn't be here debating this garbage bill.

Now, we will still require hand counting ballots. I just want to share, Mr. Speaker, a little bit about how hand counting ballots directly affects municipal budgets in my riding. The town of Banff is budgeting \$20,000 more dollars for hand counting ballots. The town of Canmore is budgeting 3.2 times more money, over \$70,000, for the 2025 election; \$62,000 of that will be directly associated with changes to vote counting. It will take longer to count these ballots, and there's more potential for human error. People will have to wait for longer to get the results. Property tax owners will be paying more.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This is in addition to other downloaded costs that have been passed on to municipalities, which, I will argue, my hometown of Canmore faces quite significantly. The town of Canmore is receiving \$646,000 less than in 2023, yet the total downloading of costs to the municipality from the province is almost \$8.5 million. Part of that downloading of costs is hand counting ballots in a municipal election, which is something that nobody wanted and is a waste of time and introduces human error. Eventually, Madam Speaker, those costs get passed on to me as a taxpayer in my town, and they get passed on to every single other taxpayer in my town. Combine that with the increased education provincial tax, and all of our property taxes are increasing. But they're not increasing because of decisions that the municipality has made; they're increasing because of the decisions this government has made downloading costs to municipalities.

I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but I actually don't like paying taxes for no reason, and I kind of feel like that a lot with Bill 20 and Bill 50. This bill is garbage. Garbage in, garbage out. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. I, too, will oppose this bill when it comes for votes. I can tell you that I do believe that people want effective municipal elections with really good guardrails, and they ask for those things. They ask for those things at all orders of government, of course.

When I look at Bill 50 and what it tries to clean up in Bill 20, I can say, like my colleague before me, that I won't be supporting this. She used some pretty colourful language. I don't blame the administration, the ministry, for this bill. I think this is written – it's got the stamp of the UCP cabinet. It's got the stamp of the UCP

private members all over it. I don't think it is good legislation nor one that we should be supporting.

I think, Madam Speaker, that there are many issues that I want to address in my brief time with this bill, and I'll start that right now. You know, there are parts in this bill – like, it identifies that it will create regulation powers for cabinet to define things like public interest in the policy of government, which were referenced and not clear in Bill 20, and it endeavours to try and clear that up.

4:10

I think about what's going on in the United States right now, how there is overreach from the federal government, in particular the White House, where decrees, declarations are being signed about all sorts of things. They're telling in one case private institutions like universities, Yale and Harvard, what they should be doing that's in the interest of the public or what they should be doing that's in the interest of the government. It just sounds so arbitrary and scary and overreaching, what's going on in the United States, and the same sort of language is here, which is equally terrifying, I think, and we should be concerned about it.

Another area of concern of mine, and my colleagues have talked about it several times already, is the whole area of codes of conduct that have been put in place years ago, initiated by the NDP government and finalized across all municipalities by 2018, and how Bill 20 indicated that there was a problem with those. I didn't agree with Bill 20 either. I voted against that. Bill 50 now removes all codes of conduct, and I think about that overreach.

You know, councils across this province are unique and different by virtue of the fact that many people run for local councils. They want to try and make a difference, Madam Speaker. Sometimes the people who get elected do things against their council colleagues or against administrations or not in the public interest, and they are sanctioned by the codes of conduct that are in place for those councils. This removes all of that ability and says that the only sanction will be at the next election and whether they get re-elected or not will be the way that those people are dealt with. Think about the amount of time that perhaps an individual can be offside in their municipality with council and the direction council is going. They can be offside and be working daily to undermine the work that's going on by administration and council, and this Bill 50 means there's no way to deal with that at all.

You know, there are flagrant – flagrant – violations that have been brought forward to this minister in the past, and the only ways that the council could deal with those things is by local sanctions. This minister refused to do anything about people who were on council that were seen to be of huge concern to the citizens in that municipality.

The other thing my colleague formerly from Lethbridge council mentioned is that councils – when I was elected, I was in an area of the city that has two current ridings of the provincial government. What I'm trying to say is that there are 14 wards in Calgary, and when I was a city councillor I was elected by more people and I served more people than currently MLAs in this city of Calgary, and probably it goes for the city of Edmonton as well.

Mr. Eggen: Did you get paid more then?

Member Ceci: Pardon?

Mr. Eggen: Did you get paid more?

Member Ceci: I don't think so. No.

We had more responsibility for more people, is what I'm trying to indicate, and we took our roles very professionally and worked hard at them. But this government, this provincial government

under the UCP, doesn't seem to recognize or care that the people who are in those positions at the local level are doing their utmost, and the overreach of bills 50 and 20 and the lack of consultation, the lack of agreement at the local level with the things that are in these bills is astounding, Madam Speaker. It should not be done, it should not go forward, and I will not be supporting these things.

I don't understand, for instance, one of the things that is in Bill 50, and it has to do with a councillor asking the CAO, the chief administrative officer, for information and why their chief administrative officer can give information to one councillor but doesn't have to follow up and give that same information to all the rest of council at the same time but within 72 hours. Why say "within 72 hours"? When one person is requesting it, it should be available to all people at the same time. I mean, it's kind of a weird thing to be putting in place. But then again, I don't think it's administration of the ministry that's doing these things.

Mr. Kasawski: Imagine if government FOIP requests were responded to in 72 hours.

Member Ceci: Thank you.

The other kind of changes that are in this Bill 50 that are problematic, again, are – just going back to the codes of conduct: that wasn't broken, from my perspective. There were councils both in Calgary and Edmonton that had done yeoman's work to put in place a structure so that ethics, integrity, and behaviour were something that all councillors signed off on in terms of understanding how they should behave with one another. Obviously, Bill 50 is removing all those things and talking about that, in the briefing I got, potentially there will be a kind of comprehensive codes-of-conduct person or ethics person for the entire number of municipal governments, of which there are hundreds, put in place sometime in the future.

The party system is another aspect of Bill 20 that I certainly didn't support. I don't think, for Calgary and Edmonton, that they were clamouring for party systems. When you ask people in the community for survey information, you know, "Do you support parties at the local level?" that was not something that was on the top of anybody's radar. They didn't necessarily believe that it was in the interests of making better councillors. It wouldn't make better councillors. It would create a system that kind of mirrors the provincial government system that many people see a problem with in terms of the partisanship that goes back and forth. Citizens believe that collective, consensual decision-making is not taking place because of the ultrapartisanship that is expressed by people in this place.

The municipal council systems in both Edmonton and Calgary now have party systems in place. We've yet to see if that will improve governance at the local level for Edmonton and Calgary. Calgary, for one, prided itself on not having a party system, that people were voted independently by the constituents in their wards, and that worked really well for, you know, a hundred years, and there was no necessary urging to change it from the local participants, local citizens. There was, of course, from the previous government, the Kenney government of '19-23, and we're stuck with that today, again, in Bill 50. Not a positive change for anybody.

4:20

I just want to touch on a few other questions. The whole thing around disclosure of gifts is, of course, really important. We don't want anybody getting into positions of power and using that power to improve their own selves, but this Bill 50, we're not seeing how all of that is going to be handled. We did see how it was handled in Calgary when there was a need to have directories – not directories;

inventories is not the right word either – disclosures of all of those things. Calgary put that in place, Madam Speaker, and this removal of it in a blanket sort of way with all municipalities is not going to raise that bar until we see a subsequent provision, perhaps that will come forward in regulation or other ways, to put that back in place.

The fact that, again, municipalities are focused on delivering for their constituents, making sure that, as some councillors used to say, the toilets flush and the roads are plowed. There was a lot more that municipalities did, but some councillors kind of reduced it to that level in an ironic sort of way, but they were in place and working for, you know, sometimes dozens of years, and they knew what they were doing. The fact that bills 50 and 20 arbitrarily make decisions on behalf of councils that weren't worked in co-operation with councils is less than the standard that we try to achieve in this place, Madam Speaker.

I think the government should concentrate on fixing many specific issues that they've created, but removing every single municipal code of conduct in this province is not one that was a problem except for those councillors that were offside with their councils, and leaving them in place until elections come around again every four years is an unfortunate action that's coming forward by this government.

I just want to again say that leaving things to regulation is a problem. We're seeing things in this bill that are a problem, but leaving things to regulation power with this cabinet and government when we know that they have, as we've heard many, many times . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West might know that it might be inappropriate to stand between the member speaking and the chair.

I am currently seeking members to speak to the bill. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the American poet, I title my address: How Do I Loathe Thee? Let Me Count the Ways. It may take a little while to enumerate the difficulties I have with this piece of legislation, but it's already been begun by many of my colleagues on this side of the House.

Of course, first of all, questioning the absolute unnecessary of this piece of legislation, many have already started to comment on why this bill was actually brought forward and what in the world the government is attempting to accomplish. Is it making the statutes it's attempting to amend better? In many ways it has been pointed out time and again that is not the case. The whole issue of codes of conduct being swept away from all municipalities in the province to be replaced by Lord knows what, that the province will dictate by regulation to the municipalities sometime later, leaves one scratching one's head.

I always look to the motivation of the government whenever a piece of legislation is brought forward, Madam Speaker. Sometimes it's clear and evident, and other times you have to do a little digging. Truly, when it comes to the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, Bill 50, that we're discussing this afternoon, the motivation seems to be following a similar pattern that has happened in the past with the UCP government, and that is one of control.

It looks to embed itself inside municipal governments even more so than they have in the past. What actually is behind it? One can speculate. As it had been postulated before by the Member for Lethbridge-West, it's suggested that perhaps a cabinet member heard something related to the activity of his cousin somewhere and then adopted that into the understanding of the legislation and decided that they were going to fix it. But I think what's actually

happening is that the government felt that there needed to be a certain component of our ideological tapestry in this province unleashed municipally. After this bill, if it is passed, it becomes law. A common theme and question might be: who let the dogs out? It's going to be an unleashing in a very difficult way, the ideological leanings of individuals who wanted to get away with attacking their fellow colleagues on councils throughout the province.

There are instances where councils have admonished and brought down censure upon councillors who have spoken ill and accused their fellow councillors of nefarious things and were not doing so in good faith. It seems as though this government wishes to protect that type of behaviour and let it become a free-for-all in councils across the province whereby anyone can say anything about a councillor and not be held to account for it. That's what I mean by unleashing unnecessary free-for-all in terms of accusations by councillors upon each other in chambers right across the province. Every council across the province has had, as a result of the legislation we passed as an NDP government, the requirement to pass code of conduct bylaws that they had to abide by. Of course, with much of the good legislation that we passed, this government is sweeping it away without mercy and replacing it with nothing at the moment, Madam Speaker.

It's unknown as to what will occur in terms of replacing the codes of conduct that are in place right now across the province, and it behooves me as to why this would be done in this way. I mean, we have heard from the two former city councillors that we have in our caucus, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the Member for Lethbridge-West, who spoke eloquently, reflecting their experiences on city council and how they had taken great pains and much time and care and attention in producing their own respective codes of conduct, which were aligned with the needs of their particular municipalities.

4:30

I think Albertans are along with me, scratching their heads as to why indeed this legislation was necessary at all. It's just another example of the type of overreach this government has demonstrated time and time again to exert, in many ways, ideological control over institutions in this province. Here this time it's municipal governance. Prior to this, Madam Speaker, it was our universities and postsecondary institutions, where they are being required to report their applications or the receipts of money from other levels of government and make sure that their policies and their guidelines and their funding applications reflect the ideological bent of the current UCP government, or they face perhaps not being able to receive that funding at all.

That type of overreach and the type of consent or acquiescence that this government is expecting from either universities, postsecondary institutions, and now, in this case of Bill 50, from municipal governments is at some point, I hope, going to reach the point where municipal governments stand up, much like Harvard University stood up, and say: no more; I've had all I can stand; I can't stand no more. Harvard University recently stood up to the President of the United States and said: we're not going to conform to the demands that you're making because you threaten our institutional integrity and independence.

I can imagine, Madam Speaker, the type of conversations that are going on right now at the municipal level right across the province and the indignation that municipal governments feel at this intrusion into their sphere and intrusion into an area which they have diligently formed policy on, and now they see the provincial government coming in and just in one fell swoop erasing it all. On top of that, of course, any cases right now where bylaws have been breached or there are accusations made where there – or allegations

of breaches of code of conduct under way currently, all of those are swept under the rug. None of them will be heard. There could be some serious violations of conduct that have been taking place over the past number of months and maybe even a couple of years – some of these take time to process – that will never come to see the light of day, and individuals who have perhaps committed somewhat egregious breaches of the code of conduct in these various municipalities will now never be held accountable for them.

That is something, Madam Speaker, that I loathe about this piece of legislation. That's just one element of the legislation. The removal of all the municipal codes of conduct is something that I think all Albertans will be sorry to see happen. I, for one, certainly am as well.

Now, there are election finance changes that are also very concerning and changes to the local elections and regulations. The fact that the mechanical tabulators, vote counting machines, will be disallowed is something, once again, which we scratch our heads about and wonder what motivated that. Now, I've heard the minister stand in this House, in this Assembly, and in a one- or two-sentence explanation try to suggest that there was a certain percentage – there are a number of Albertans. That's about as far as the minister went in trying to quantify the amount of discontent with electronic voting machines. All that the minister has been able to say that I've seen in *Hansard* that I've been able to find is that he's heard that some people didn't like them, that some people didn't have faith in them, so to ensure public faith and confidence in the outcome of a vote, he was going to eliminate the voting machines and go back to a hand count.

Yet there's no real evidence that backs up what the minister claimed so feebly is the case in the province. It's not the case. There's no evidence of any widespread miscalculation made by vote tabulation machines. In fact, on top of that, there's an economic case to be made by the municipalities, and they're making it very clearly, that the reversion to a hand count is going to be extremely costly. In some cases it's thousands, and in other cases in the bigger municipalities it's hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions of dollars.

There's no justification whatsoever that the minister has been able to supply to this Assembly and to Albertans that there's a problem with the mechanical tabulation, machine tabulation, of votes in the province. In fact, to make the policy decision to eliminate them without justification is an aberration of the actual facts on the ground. I think that it shows a disdain for the Alberta voter who knows indeed that there have been no mistakes of any significance made in vote tabulation.

We've had, I think, a high level of integrity in our elections. We've had many, many people from this province who have worked with the Elections Alberta office over time being volunteers internationally to oversee other elections because of the integrity of the elections that we have in this province. It's unfortunate that it's the minister, Madam Speaker – it's the minister himself – who is besmirching the integrity of our elections in Alberta by suggesting that there's a problem, by suggesting that he's heard a small number of Albertans claim that they feared that there was a problem with the count of a machine-counted ballot, and there was a need because of anecdotal evidence that he'd heard; nothing scientific at all, no proper study to determine actual fact.

Going ahead with this is pretty problematic. It's wrong. He shouldn't be doing it, and indeed it's the minister who's creating a sense of lack of faith in the electoral count in this province. It's very unfortunate and unnecessary that he's doing it. I'm deeply dissatisfied that the minister sees fit to carry through with this.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park will know that it's inappropriate to pass between the member speaking and the chair.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 50. While I would continue to hope against hope that any governing party in Canada – just a reminder of where we are right now – would draft legislation impacting elections in any jurisdiction with the express goal of improving the integrity, the efficiency, the transparency and access to democracy of our elections, sadly what I am seeing with Bill 50 is a repeat and a sequel to what was done with Bill 20. So that's simply not happening here. There is no improvement to the integrity or transparency or efficiency of elections. Really, this is an echo of Bill 20 because it's an attempt to do a little bit of cleanup, you know, to echo the words of my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis, to clean up some of the mess or the garbage left behind by Bill 20.

4:40

Again, this is an echo of Bill 20. To refresh everyone, the issues that came up with Bill 20, which I also was not able to speak to at the time because debate was limited in that case, were overreach, control, authoritarianism, access to democracy – i.e., voter suppression – and issues with financing. No one asked for Bill 20, which we're now trying to clean up with Bill 50. No one asked for political parties in municipal elections, which this bill does not correct, of course.

When I'm seeing that we have municipal elections on the horizon, I see that this government has decided to come back and do a little more massaging perhaps in its own self-interest or in the interest of friends that they would like to grease the wheels for. To be clear, there was a loud and fervent opposition to this government's intrusion into municipal jurisdiction, and that was completely justified when you think about the fact that this, like I said, intrudes on municipal jurisdiction and is a massive overreach. I would say that it is also evidence of massive disrespect to municipalities and the work that they're trying to do, the work that they're trying to focus on. Of course, we've heard municipal leaders coming out now against this bill as well.

Then there are other bills that I see echoed in Bill 50 that were perhaps not necessarily to do with municipalities but that have shown that this government has the capacity to wear away at the trust of Albertans in quite a shameless manner, I would say. One of those was Bill 8, where they removed limits from the number of gifts that MLAs could receive for themselves. You know, that was another attack on accountability and really just brazen. What I see are echoes of that here as well in that we're seeing them modelling municipal elections in the image of some of the decisions they've made at a provincial level by forcibly removing codes of conduct. What we're seeing is that Albertans have told us loud and clear after seeing the results of Bill 8, after seeing the results of Bill 20 that they're speaking out against bills like this one. They want to make sure that there is transparency. They want to make sure that they can trust their elections. In order for that to happen, we need rules in place that ensure consistency and provide some guardrails at all levels of government.

What I'm seeing here is also an attempt to clean up in terms of access and assistance to voters. While that is welcome, it would have been nice if some of the damage hadn't been done in the previous bill. They're trying to clean up a little bit of the sloppiness of Bill 20, which would have prevented folks with disabilities from being able to exercise their democratic right. Now, where I don't see and where they had actually an opportunity to do a lot better,

we did provide an opportunity for this government to accept our amendments when it came to vouching, which will end up disenfranchising local Albertans, I think somewhere to the tune of 10,000 to 50,000 folks when I think about an article that was written by Dr. Jared Wesley. They didn't provide any sort of ability to being added to a permanent voters list. If you just moved to the city, let's say, then you might be left out of the ability to vote and to participate in elections, which is a pretty bad look, I would say.

With that, I would just implore my colleagues to vote against Bill 50, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 48 iGaming Alberta Act

[Adjourned debate April 9: Mr. Dyck]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members that wish to join debate on second reading of Bill 48?

Seeing none, I will ask the question on Bill 48.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a second time]

Bill 47 Automobile Insurance Act

[Adjourned debate April 15: Ms Hayter]

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

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise in the Assembly not just as the MLA for Calgary-North East but as an unapologetic voice for the hard-working people of Calgary-North East, all Albertans, parents juggling multiple jobs, seniors working hard, and the young drivers trying to afford their first set of wheels. These are not just abstract policy points to me. These are my neighbours, my constituents, my friends, the people I know.

I along with my other colleagues met with various cab drivers a couple of weeks ago, where they shared their frustrations with us. They are frustrated with the unfair insurance practices in the province. They told us that they paid the city of Calgary hundreds and thousands of dollars to get the taxi plates, and then on top of that they pay weekly fees and other costs on top of that. What they expect from this government: they expect the government to work for them and not just for the profitable, wealthy insurance companies. They expect this government to lower insurance costs so that they can see some relief, but unfortunately this UCP government continues to make life more difficult for them.

They have gone through a lot in the past few years, Madam Speaker. Due to hailstorms of 2020 and 2024 their cars, their homes have been severely damaged, and their livelihoods have been impacted. This UCP government did nothing to help those people in 2020 and 2024. In fact, their insurance continued to go up.

Madam Speaker, you know who these people really are? They are the front-line workers who kept this province moving during the pandemic. Instead of helping them during the pandemic, this UCP government blamed them for spreading COVID-19.

Now here is Bill 47, the so-called Automobile Insurance Act. Sounds helpful, like a free air freshener in the car, but Madam Speaker, let me assure you there is nothing fresh in this bill. This is the same old UCP playbook: privatize everything, subsidize profits, and use the buzzwords like choice, efficiency, and relief. Let me make something crystal clear. This bill does not prioritize drivers. This bill prioritizes insurance companies. It is a one-way express lane to higher profits for corporations and fewer rights for everyday

Albertans, and it does so while pretending to be a solution to rising insurance costs.

4:50

Let's rewind the tape a little bit, Madam Speaker. Let me take you to the time when the Alberta NDP was in government. We capped auto insurance to protect Albertans, and that cap was helpful to all Albertans. It helped to keep the insurance rates lower, keeping more money in the pockets of hard-working Albertans. Then the UCP came to office, and one of the first acts was to remove the cap from the insurance premiums. As a result, rates skyrocketed by up to 50 per cent, especially in Calgary-North East. That's not a coincidence. This is a consequence. Now the UCP comes back and says, "Don't worry; we'll fix everything that we created with a brand new system," a system they claim is modelled after Manitoba, except in Manitoba it's a publicly delivered system. Here in Alberta they are coming up with a privatized, no-fault insurance system.

Let's dig into the mythical \$400 savings that this UCP government is promising to Albertans in the next few years. According to the government's own commissioned report the average driver might save \$400 per year, but let's not forget that they are also removing the cap of 3.7 per cent and moving it up to 7.5 per cent for the next two years, which means that Albertans will pay 15 per cent more insurance costs in the next two years. It is just like handing a 10 per cent off coupon to somebody and then increasing the price by 25 per cent. Madam Speaker, that's not savings; that is a scam.

Let's be clear. Who will be hit the hardest with this bill? It's not just Alberta drivers, broadly speaking. It's racialized communities. It's immigrants. It's low-income earners. It's seniors. It's a mom in Skyview who drives her kids to daycare before her 10-hour shift. It's the dad in Cityscape who drives Uber to cover rising grocery costs. It's every young driver in Coventry Hills in my riding who is already being penalized for insurance by insurance companies just for being new to the road. These are the people who will be mostly impacted by Bill 47.

Let's talk about Bill 47. Let's talk what it actually does. It shifts Alberta to a no-fault insurance system. In simple words, if you get hurt in a car accident, you can no longer sue the at-fault driver unless a criminal conviction is involved. That's a huge change. It effectively eliminates the legal recourse for thousands of Albertans every year. Think about this. If a driver hits you while driving distracted and they don't get criminally convicted, you are stuck with a fixed benefit and you can't sue for pain and suffering. So much for justice. So much for accountability. The UCP is calling this a care-first model. Madam Speaker, it should be called the profit-first model.

Then there's the infamous, very bureaucratic Alberta automobile care-first tribunal. Under this tribunal every member is appointed by the minister. There is no requirement for transparency, no public oversight, and decisions become final after just 30 days. Imagine being injured, recovering, navigating insurance paperwork, and realizing your benefits have been denied. Thirty days, Madam Speaker. Who will sit on this tribunal? Will it reflect Alberta? Will it include people from diverse communities, from the northeast, from rural Alberta, or will it just be a few wealthy insiders from the insurance industry, the very folks Albertans are supposed to appeal against?

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I cannot ignore the fact that this bill is built almost entirely on vague language. The bulk of the decision-making power, the definitions, the actual entitlements, the scope of benefits

are left to regulation. That means future decisions can be made behind closed doors without consultation with Albertans, without any debate, no scrutiny, and no voice from the people at all. That's not democratic governance.

Let's take a closer look at section 10 of this bill. Benefits can be cut off if an insurer decides a treatment "is not likely to contribute to the further . . . improvement." Who defines "likely"? These vague definitions allow insurance companies to pull the plug on treatments with no accountability at all.

And then there's section 33. It says that if you are 65 or older and unemployed – not seasonally or casually or temporarily employed; just unemployed – you may not qualify for income replacement. So a 66-year-old who drove part-time to make ends meet: is this government telling that 66-year-old to try GoFundMe?

Section 49 sets a hard cap of five years on income replacement for noncatastrophic injuries. That might sound like enough time until you talk to a physiotherapist or a trauma counsellor or, you know, a human being who has been through a serious accident and needs more time to rebuild their life, Mr. Speaker.

But here's where it hurts, where it really hurts. This government has a choice. They could have chosen a public delivery model like in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or British Columbia. Their own commissioned report shows that public models provide better savings, more stability, and job creation. The Manitoba public model, for instance, would save drivers \$732 per year and create up to 5,000 new public-sector jobs.

Why didn't they go that route? Why choose the model that saves less and costs more? Let me tell you why. The UCP weren't building a better system for Albertans. They were building a system that benefited private insurance companies. And if those insurance companies happened to make campaign donations or host government ministers at luxury boxes during hockey games, well, that's just a coincidence, right?

Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta are smart. They see what's happening. They see their rates going up, they see their rights being taken away, and they see a government interested more in spin than substance. Calgary-North East is a place where families work hard, stretch every dollar, and expect their government to make life more affordable, not more complicated, not more unjust, and certainly not more expensive. This government has been focused on not building schools in those communities, forcing parents to drive their kids an hour each day, every day, increasing their fuel costs, increasing their insurance costs. Bill 47 is being sold to Albertans as a pathway to lower insurance costs, but when we look at our neighbours, it becomes more evident that this no-fault, no-care system has failed.

Let's talk about Michigan, the poster child of no-fault insurance. For years they had the most expensive car insurance in the entire U.S. Why? Because medical providers inflated bills, insurers passed the cost to drivers, and a system meant to reduce the costs became a breeding ground for red tape and fraud. In 2020 they reformed the system to allow the public to opt out of the very no-fault model that Bill 47 is now trying to introduce here in Alberta.

5:00

Let's go to Florida. They followed a similar path except their no-fault model turned into a full-blown scam industry. Organized crime rings orchestrated fake crashes, and clinics billed for treatments that never happened. What did all of this achieve? Did the people of Florida save money? No. Did lawsuits disappear? Not really. They just changed lanes from suing the at-fault drivers and started suing their own insurance companies. Instead of accountability, they got bureaucracy; they got red tape. Instead of fairness, they got frustration.

Mr. Speaker, these are not accidents. They are patterns, and Alberta is about to repeat them with this Bill 47. Bill 47 proposes a privately delivered no-fault system, not a public model like Manitoba's which at least gives drivers some consistency in savings. This one is unique in all the worst ways. No public control, minimal transparency, and vague definitions that give insurance companies a blank cheque to decide what is reasonable and necessary. Let's not forget this isn't a fantasy scenario. We have already seen how private no-fault works; it just doesn't work.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to, first of all, before I start my comments on Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act, thank my friend from Calgary-North East for not only his powerful advocacy on behalf of his constituents but his incredibly persuasive comments, speaking out against this bill. You know, I too share my friend's concerns about the private no-fault automobile insurance system that is going to be created under this act for a number of reasons, that my friend from Calgary-North East has really done an excellent job of outlining.

I want to preface my comments by giving at least a bit of my own recollections as to all of the things that we've seen this government do to change automobile insurance in the lead-up to the introduction of this act. It seems that the issue of automobile insurance has been one that does not go away as much as any government tries to reform the system to make it more affordable for Albertans.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, when I graduated from university and moved back to Alberta to start a job and owned my first car, that the automobile insurance rate that I was paying at that time – and this was probably 23, 24 years ago – was more than I was paying for rent when I first moved out on my own and got my own car for the first time. At that time there were young drivers like me who were being punished for being young and not having any driving experience, who were also paying these outrageously high automobile insurance rates. At the time the government of the day introduced some changes to the automobile insurance system here in Alberta whereby young drivers had their premiums reduced, but those costs were shifted on to the backs of older drivers. Now, as a young driver I appreciated those changes, but now that I'm an old driver, I don't appreciate those changes so much. It continues to be, I guess in my recollection, anyway, of this long, drawn-out saga of automobile insurance here in Alberta, one of the first attempts to make the system more affordable for people.

And then, if I recall correctly, maybe at around the same time, there was a soft tissue injury regulation that was created, that essentially capped the amount of money that people who suffered soft tissue injuries in automobile accidents were allowed to claim. That was also introduced as a result of the government's desire to maintain a private automobile insurance system while trying to make it more affordable for people who were purchasing insurance through the system. But even after that system was in place, you know, we capped soft tissue injuries, so people who suffered soft tissue injuries were no longer eligible for receiving fair compensation and could only receive the amount that was stipulated by the regulations. We were told at the time that that was going to keep the costs of insurance in Alberta affordable or bring it down for people, but that didn't happen.

You know, the only time that we had any control over automobile insurance premiums in this province was when we were in government from 2015 to 2019 and we capped the amount that they could increase. At least it provided certainty to automobile insurance

consumers as to how much their insurance would cost over that four-year period.

Now, in 2019, when the government of Jason Kenney was elected, they scrapped that. They said: oh, automobile insurance companies are not making enough profit, and if we remove this rate cap that the NDP had introduced, well, we're going to increase the number of car insurance companies that are offering services in the province of Alberta, and that increase in competition will bring auto insurance rates down. Well, we didn't see that happen either, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it's my recollection that even after the Finance minister of the day removed the automobile insurance rate caps, the number of automobile insurance providers in Alberta actually went down. And a couple of years later we're back here in the Legislature discussing a whole bunch of other restrictions on automobile insurance claims, again designed to limit the rate of increase to automobile insurance rates.

If I recall correctly, we had some limitations on the number of experts that automobile injury victims could call in a case, and they would limit the doctors that the injury victims could go to see in an attempt to reduce the amount of money that insurance companies would pay out. We were told then that that was going to reduce automobile insurance rates, and again that didn't happen, and again it didn't prevent automobile insurance companies from picking up and leaving the province.

So we have a long history of governments in this province making changes to an automobile insurance system, every time telling us that this is the change that's finally going to do it. This is the change that is finally going to see automobile insurance rates come down to a level where we're competitive with other provinces in Canada, and every time that the government stands up and promises us that automobile insurance rates will come down, the very opposite happens. Automobile insurance rates continued to skyrocket.

My constituents certainly don't believe the government when they say that, oh, in 2027, after this new automobile insurance system is implemented and we've allowed rates to increase by 15 per cent, all of a sudden we're going to see this magical \$400 reduction in the average car insurance premium because we've never seen a change to Alberta's automobile insurance rate system that has actually reduced rates for Albertans, and it's very unlikely that we're going to see this again. But what we are seeing is, again, limiting the access to justice for people who are victims of automobile accidents.

5:10

You know, to go back to my previous comments, long ago we capped soft tissue injury compensation and then ... [interjection] Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to focus on the automobile insurance rate system. I think the Government House Leader is disappointed with my comments.

Mr. Schow: Spice it up a little bit.

Mr. Schmidt: All right. All right. Hold on a second. Points of order.

The Speaker: I don't advise that.

Mr. Schmidt: Now, if you'll grant me latitude, Mr. Speaker, I understand that I do have a small place in your heart according to *Hansard* but also according to *Hansard* that it's shrinking every day.

The Speaker: My heart is full.

Mr. Schmidt: Now, Mr. Speaker, I would commend to you a morality tale called the grinch who stole Christmas. [interjection] That's a story about somebody whose heart was shrinking and saw the error of his ways and reversed that trend. Hopefully, there would be something in there for you.

Regardless, we've seen this trend of governments of Alberta reducing the rights of injury victims to seek fair compensation. That started with the soft tissue injury regulation, which capped the amount that people were eligible to receive for soft tissue injuries as a result of automobile accidents. Then in 2021 or 2022 the government of the day introduced further restrictions on abilities of injury victims to seek compensation, limiting, like I said, the doctors that they could access, the number of experts that they could call forward in a trial. And now we're seeing them lose their right to sue at-fault drivers entirely. When we push the government on this point, when we say, "You're taking away people's right to sue for fair compensation," they say: "No, no, no, we're not. You'll still be able to sue if somebody is criminally convicted under the Criminal Code or receives a conviction under the Traffic Safety Act."

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the level of evidence that somebody needs to present in a court case in a civil suit doesn't have the same threshold that is required of somebody who is charged under the Criminal Code or under the Traffic Safety Act, so it could very well be that even though somebody is not successfully charged under the Traffic Safety Act or the Criminal Code, somebody who was injured by that person would still have enough evidence to receive a financial compensation from that person's insurer. But now we're putting this arbitrary restriction that you can only sue if somebody is found guilty under the Criminal Code or the Traffic Safety Act. That seems to me to be an unfair barrier to receiving compensation.

One of the other concerns that my friend from Calgary-North East raised was the creation of the tribunal that would oversee the compensation claims that will be handled by the new system. You know, he rightfully raised concerns with the appointees that the minister will put on this tribunal and worries that injury victims will not receive a fair hearing because the tribunal could be stacked with industry insiders and friends of the government. So who will be the voice for victims?

Like, I don't recommend that anybody go to court to seek compensation or justice. It is a system that is incredibly frustrating, runs very slowly, but at least you can count on a fair hearing from an impartial judge. That's being taken away from people by the creation of this tribunal that will be stacked by the minister. So why would Alberta's auto injury victims take any comfort from knowing that what is currently at least a fair and unbiased process could now be biased by the people who are representing the insurance industry, the very people who are financially incentivized to not give people a fair hearing? It doesn't seem very fair.

Now, one of the other concerns that people have raised with the issue of the tribunal is the possibility that the tribunal's decisions may not be appealable. Thankfully, the government has clarified that these decisions will be appealable, but you have to appeal within 30 days. Mr. Speaker, I think that that's an incredibly unfair timeline because it's so short. Thirty days is probably not going to be enough for many injury victims to be able to file an appeal, and I think it will result in people giving up and not receiving fair compensation.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 47, the Automobile Insurance Act. If I had to pick one biggest problem with this bill, I would say that it's the worst of both worlds. Simultaneously it takes away the right to sue and also does nothing to drive down the cost of insurance.

Typically, just to situate folks, there are two models of insurance. One is a no-fault government model of insurance. The advantages, one would say, of such a model are comparatively low costs. The disadvantages are that you don't have the right to sue. So if you feel that the decision has been made wrongly, you're not able to sue, and one of the biggest disadvantages tends to be that there's a cap on the benefits. Usually it caps out, depending on the model, around \$300,000. What I would say is that that's nowhere near enough. If you're someone who has been catastrophically disabled, who may be the sole breadwinner for your family with multiple children, \$300,000 isn't going to do it. It's not going to come even close to remodel your house, to deal with the physical rehabilitation you might need or mental rehabilitation, to deal with replacing the income that your family otherwise would have had, to deal with caring for your children. It's nowhere near enough. So it is a big disadvantage of that system. The big advantage is lower costs.

The system that we had up until now in Alberta, a private insurance system, the advantage is that a court determines – and maybe not perfectly but it is the system we have, much like the system of democracy is the system we have. It might be imperfect, but it's the best we've come up with. In that case, you can sue. So you have the ability to pursue, and there have been awards that have fully compensated people for what they've lost. Well, you can't fully compensate someone for what they've lost but have, like, remunerated them financially as far as is possible, whether that's, you know, backfilling costs, whether that's remodelling their house to allow for the entry by a wheelchair, whether that's retraining for work or other assistance that you might need. The disadvantage of that system is, because it's private and you can sue, litigation can be a significant cost, and, because profit is being generated, it's expensive.

5:20

They are two systems that both have advantages and disadvantages, and, yeah, I mean, it can be challenging to choose between them. As my friend the previous Member for Lethbridge-West was so fond of saying, hard things are hard. This is a decision that has some factors, and it's a hard decision.

One thing I would not have done, definitely, were I in the shoes of the government, is to make this particular choice because this choice is the worst of both worlds. People don't have the right to sue. Their insurance is still going to go up probably 7.5 per cent this year and another 7.5 per cent next year – that's a significant amount – and they are losing their right to sue. Yeah. What I don't like about this decision, I guess, is that they've managed to make a decision that is bad in both ways simultaneously. It is both expensive and it takes away people's rights. That's not great.

I have to say, like, this is a stunningly bad decision. I want to say I'm surprised by it, but the truth, Mr. Speaker, is that the history of the UCP on this file is really not very good. They like to claim that insurance rates, which have been skyrocketing – Albertans already pay the highest. I mean, that's one of the things to note here, that Albertans are already paying the highest rates. This idea that, like, rates must go up, I don't think that that is accurate.

I would also note that this is a government who, while acknowledging that the reason that rates are going up endlessly is because there's a lot more damage, seems to be reluctant to acknowledge the cause of the fires and the floods and the hailstorms

that are occurring and to discuss what the relative merits of action versus nonaction are in that respect. I think a lot of it is problematic.

I would say as well on this issue, you know, the history is that when the NDP were in government, there was a cap on insurance. Now, the UCP will jump up and scream and cry and say, you know, it was impossible for them to operate within this 5 per cent cap, but I might hasten to add that, at that time, inflation was well below 5 per cent, so it actually wasn't unreasonable at all to say, like, stay within 5 per cent. In fact, we had given them an out. That's the thing that has always sort of baffled me about the UCP's handling of this particular file. We gave industry an out. All we asked was that they prove it. Generate a report, show us, prove to us that your costs are going up at higher than 5 per cent, and we are happy to have a conversation with you.

Now, of course, the UCP came in and immediately said: "No need to prove it. We don't care why you're jacking up Albertans' rates. You just go ahead and jack them up as high as you want." Which, you know, in the midst of an affordability crisis, when affordability is kind of the top issue for most people, seems like a choice that really just disregards the needs and desires of the people you represent. I just don't think that that's very nice. I just really don't.

Families are struggling, and they were at the time struggling. Like, costs were and are still rising at incredibly high rates. Now, one can argue, certainly, that costs are only part of the problem, right? The other problem is the stagnation of wages. That also can be tied fairly directly to right-wing policies that privilege the rich, that privilege, you know, those who have their capital to bring to the market rather than their labour to bring to the market; i.e., those who were born rich as opposed to those who work hard.

I suppose that's one of the – I was asked recently in an interview by some student journalists about, you know, what sort of drove me to politics, and one of the big things that drove me to politics is that, exactly. It is the erosion of average wages relative to costs, which, like, I mean, doesn't sound like a very exciting issue. You know, politics. We're very fiery in this place. It doesn't sound like an exciting issue to talk about the fact that people can't afford their lives anymore, but actually it is a huge issue. It's a huge issue. It touches the lives of every Albertan, and it makes their lives harder and harder. It creates this sort of low-level stress that makes it difficult.

In my opinion, it impacts democracy. It impacts democracy because it is those at the bottom who are no longer able to participate in the process. They don't have the time because they are so busy just trying to scrape by, just trying to work extra shifts and extra hours to make ends meet, that they don't have time to engage in the process.

I think that's sad and it's unfair and it suggests that – I mean, ultimately, the result is that people who are wealthy get to participate in democracy and people who are not wealthy don't, and that is highly, highly problematic. I have seen this government take exactly zero steps to – well, I mean, that's not true. They haven't taken zero steps, have they? They have taken steps that have affected the relative growth of wages, just in the wrong direction, privileging, again, those who are born wealthy over those who work hard. I don't think that's fair. I don't think it's just, and I don't like it. So there you go.

This bill in specific, Bill 47, is having impacts on a cost that is a huge driver. Like, Albertans – it's the highest in the country, and it's been going up. If you look over the last several years, people's insurance rates have gone up hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and they can't afford it. Many of these people have to drive to work. They have to drive to school. They have to drive for their work. Many people have to drive for their work. This is a bill that will

punish those people; 15 per cent over two years is a huge amount. It's a crazy amount. For the government to claim that this is something we're doing to reduce costs: how is an increase of 15 per cent reducing costs? It doesn't make any sense while at the same time they're revoking folks' access to the court.

The only folks who are going to profit off this are large, profitable corporations and their shareholders. Again, as I think I have said multiple times in this House, if you look at wealth distribution at this time, we are seeing more and more the very rich being incredibly rich and everyone else struggling. But here is the UCP bringing in another bill to do exactly that, to give more to the incredibly rich. I think that that is very, very problematic.

I think that Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government who understands their lived experience, who understands what it's like to live in this time, who understands what it's like for a young person to try to buy a house these days. You know, when I talk to young people, and I do in this job a lot of the time, most people under 30 don't think they'll ever afford a house. That seems like we're going in the wrong direction. You know, for years and years and years in this fine country people have wanted better for their children than they had. That's what most people want. If you ask most people, that's what they want. They want their children to have it a little bit better, a little bit easier than what they had. That's not what's happening right now.

It is policies exactly like this that are leading us in that direction. It's policies that privilege the very wealthy, that privilege friends of the government over the majority of the population. Slowly each tiny cut, you know, asking you to pay for a family doctor, asking you to pay more for insurance, doing nothing about price gouging in the electricity system, slowly these cuts add up and they erode people's participation in civil society, which is really just a nerdy way of saying their ability to engage with the community around them, which I think is one of the things that makes this country, this province so incredibly great.

It's that ability to choose what you worship and who you love and, you know, what you're going to participate in and what your political party is and what your views and your values are and being able to talk to those around you about those things, being able to engage in intelligent debate about those things. Those are the things that make this country great, that make life here so wonderful, and as people have their ability to afford the basics of life – their food, their insurance, their housing – slowly wheedled away, it gets harder and harder for them to participate.

5:30

I, for one, don't want my daughter's life to be harder than my life was. I want the opposite. I want her to have it better than I had it, and policies like this are doing the opposite. I know it's only one tiny cut, but it is one amongst thousands. For the people who have had their right to sue revoked, it isn't a tiny cut; it's potentially a massive cut. It's potentially a life of trying to barely scrape by. For their children it could be a life of extreme poverty, and it wasn't their fault.

Because of the fault of someone else they are now in that situation, and they won't be able to sue. I know that these are tough choices because on the other hand, it is balanced against costs. But this is exactly why this bill is so ridiculous. It didn't make that balance; it didn't do that balance. It chose no right to sue and higher costs, and that is the worst of all worlds, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 47, Automobile Insurance Act. I'm very grateful for the debate that we're having in the House this afternoon regarding this piece of legislation.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View so eloquently explained how when we were government, we put a cap on insurance and on the premiums and explained how there was an opportunity to adjust that 5 per cent increase by essentially showing your work, providing data that would allow them to show why they needed to increase it more, which makes sense. That was something that we did as government. We did things that made sense. We listened to Albertans. We listened to experts. We believed in sharing your work and showing how you get to the data.

Unfortunately, when this government was elected in 2019, they promptly removed that cap. I'm sure you know. I know that so many of my constituents, myself included, saw insurance premiums skyrocket. It's been a consistent conversation that comes to me, representing Edmonton-Castle Downs, from so many that affordability is a major, major concern right now.

When the UCP removed that cap, it was an impact that caused people incredible financial stress on something that they needed. They needed their car. They needed to be able to get to work. It wasn't something that they could just determine whether or not they could use it or not. It wasn't like saying that they could no longer go out and play their favourite sport because it became too expensive or go to certain activities that were too expensive. This is something that they relied on for their day-to-day life, and it became incredibly expensive.

What we watched in our last Legislature when it came to the UCP with insurance was that so many pieces of the legislation that they brought forward that Albertans were hopeful would provide some sort of relief in the insurance world didn't actually do that. Some of the legislation prevented multiple physicians from weighing in on an accident. That actually limited the scope of what an Albertan could bring forward in terms of expertise and witnesses for a claim when involved in an accident. I heard from many Albertans that had multiple physicians and experts speak out on their behalf because of multiple implications from an accident. But government at the time got rid of that.

Then we saw more legislation come in where they changed the rules again when it came to what was allowed to be represented in terms of a claim from an accident. They got rid of concussions being a serious injury. Now, science, Mr. Speaker, shows that impact on the brain is a significant injury that has long-term effects, sometimes permanent. The sports world acknowledges it. In order to be a coach in football, I had to go through concussion understanding and training because of the impact. But this government removed that as a serious injury. Again, not looking at science and recommendations, they again reduced rights of Albertans to access fair compensation for injury.

In January of 2023 this government enacted a rate pause. It was a sign of hope, if you will, that perhaps they had seen that when they removed the cap in 2019 and insurance premiums skyrocketed, they didn't require any sort of data or anything from insurance companies to prove that increase. There was some sort of hope. Instead, Mr. Speaker, we now have the highest insurance rates in the country. For many drivers Calgary and Edmonton are noted to be the two most expensive cities in the country, and now they're not doing anything to help with the rates. They have said that this is going to save for Albertans. Well, when Albertans are looking at their insurance premiums going up, they know that is simply not true. We saw that between 2019 and 2024 the rates went up 35 per cent. Thirty-five per cent. That is the cost of perhaps not being able to drive and being able to drive.

We have so many in this province right now that are struggling. It's not just the insurance rates. It's rent. We brought forward pieces of legislation, from this side of the House, to look at possible solutions to help Albertans with rent control. No surprise; that was voted down. We have in the province one of the fastest growing unemployment rates. Again, the government isn't listening to what's actually happening to Albertans and the data that shows that people are struggling.

It is getting more and more expensive to live, work, raise a family in Alberta. I think when we look at Alberta being a destination for people to come and live and raise their families, this government needs to take some serious consideration into the type of Alberta that they've created. Do you have a family doctor when you move here? Depends where you live, but probably not. Are your children going to be able to have the best education experience possible? Probably not. We're one of the most underfunded per student in the country.

5:40

When you're looking at enticing people to come and invest in our province, the reality is that there are so many things that this government could do to limit cost that they're just not doing, and one of them is this insurance act. It's increasing their insurance and decreasing protections. That's the other piece of this piece of legislation that is quite frightening, Mr. Speaker. When people have potentially a life-changing accident, there should be certain things that are guaranteed. They should have the right to a fair compensation. They should have the right to sue. Those things are being taken away.

Now, I've spoken to so many people that work in injury law, and they put me in touch with the people that they represent. Those that work in this industry are terrified for the people that they represent and what it means to them. They're already up against massive insurance companies who have incredible amounts of money to fight any sort of claim. So when you have someone who's injured, doesn't know the rules, doesn't know all of the things that they're able to advocate for and receive as compensation, you're now making it more difficult, putting more pressure on the victim of an accident in favour of the insurance company.

When people are injured, nobody says: "You know what? I hope that this accident causes so much stress and trauma that I'm not going to be able to drive again. I'm not going to be able to work again." But those are the realities. There's impact on families when someone is in a car accident. [interjections] I hear a lot of chirping on the other side, and it would be wonderful to hear them enter the debate, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lundy: I'm not an injury lawyer, so I don't know.

Ms Goehring: They're saying they're not injury lawyers. I mean, you don't have to be an injury lawyer to know that if someone is injured in a car accident, that victim deserves fair compensation.

I just don't understand the logic of how this government came up with this piece of legislation and how it's being supported, allowing insurance companies to come out ahead and not Albertans. Ultimately, as an Albertan you should expect that your insurance company is going to protect you. That's why you pay for insurance, to make sure that you're covered, to make sure that if – God forbid – anything happens to you, you're compensated.

When we have a government that prioritizes profits over people, it becomes really clear in the legislation that they put forward. They want to make sure that their friends are being taken care of, and they're not listening to the everyday, average Albertan that this actually impacts. We hear stories about people that have had to

completely change their life in terms of not just driving but how they have to re-create their space at their home when it comes to now possibly having to be wheelchair accessible and having ramps and all of those things. It feels like so many people in the province are being just swept away so that insurance companies, friends of this government can have – I'm not even sure. Profits, some sort of relationship? We've watched this government make unprecedented decisions in terms of how they've handled procurements. The list goes on and on about some of the questionable things that this government has done for favours.

I can tell you that when people are talking to me about concerns with this government, insurance is one that comes up over and over and over. People are worried about how it's going to impact their finances. People are worried about what could happen if they require medical care, equipment, medication, income replacement, all of those things. There's nothing that this government is doing that creates some sort of safety for the insurance that they pay for. It's making it more expensive, and they're getting fewer services and security in the insurance that they need to drive.

I think when it comes to supporting this piece of legislation, I'm hearing loud and clear from my constituents that this is not something that makes sense for Albertans. This is not something that they want me to support. There are so many questions and people that are going to be damaged by this piece of legislation coming forward that I would really, really urge the government to perhaps listen to Albertans and talk to them about what this legislation means to them rather than, again, force through a piece of legislation that benefits insurance companies, not Albertans.

I know that on that side of the House they're hearing this because I'm CCed in the e-mails when they reach out to the Finance minister, when they reach out to the Premier asking this to not go through. So I know they're hearing it. I'm just confused as to why they're not listening. I would really implore that this piece of legislation not be supported. It's not in the best interests of Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you.

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just listening to everyone's contributions to this debate, I was actually really struck by something the Member for Lethbridge-West said, which is: who is this for? I think when we're talking about legislation, when we're talking about anything that has the potential to impact the lives of thousands, that's a question that I'm going to have top of mind, which is: who is this for? Who does this benefit?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I just want to say that I know that, echoing the words of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, one of the things that I hear most about, you know, when people are talking about affordability is insurance. People are struggling to pay their bills, and this bill and many of the moves around insurance from this government have actually proven to make life more expensive.

In the words of one of my constituents when they were talking about no-fault, private insurance, it sounds to me like you're sacrificing your average Albertan to the insurance industry. I think, sadly, that constituent is correct. It fails to provide protections and compensation that Albertans need to rely on when it comes to collision so that they can move on with their lives and be properly cared for. I know that the combination of private delivery with no fault is relatively uncharted territory, so that leaves me with the

questions of, you know, why we're doing this and if this is something that we should really leave to chance.

In terms of affordability we know that insurance rates have fluctuated between being the highest and the second-highest in the country, with Calgary and Edmonton being the two most expensive cities.

I hear a lot about telling the Alberta story. Quote and unquote. In this case this is a cautionary tale, where the UCP again enrich corporate friends while hard-working Albertans struggle just to make ends meet. It's also a fictitious story whereby this government would pretend to care about affordability pressures of the average Albertan. I would say that they likely – or at least, in my opinion, I don't get that impression. We know that it's getting more expensive to live here. People are suffering from the highest rents, high insurance, high utility rates. They're feeling squeezed in every direction, and everyone understands this struggle, I would say, except for the UCP in very distinct circumstances. We know that they made sure to increase their living allowances by 14 per cent in addition to other blatantly self-serving decisions while denying supports to Albertans and making life more expensive. This is a pattern of profits over people.

5:50

Now, I want to talk a little bit, in addition to affordability, just thinking about the fact that they're allowing insurance rates to go up by 15 per cent over the next two years, and juxtapose that with that 14 per cent living allowance increase. This also presents a great deal of risk to Albertans in terms of what they're able to do and how they can be compensated for injuries.

Another issue that I've seen come up in my constituency through conversations with an incredibly intelligent constituent is the impact that this will have on jobs. We know that we're having some of the highest unemployment rates here in Alberta, and StatsCan just released some numbers for March, where we now have the Alberta jobless rate sitting at 7.1 per cent compared to 6.7 per cent. In relation to this fact, I had a conversation with a gentleman who works for a company that actually serves the insurance industry and works with insurers but also around, like, defending auto insurance claims. I know that I was copied on this e-mail that went to the hon. ministers of Finance and Affordability and Utilities. I'm just going to read a little bit from his e-mail, something that really I think impacted us.

Our firm, Collision Analysis, is headquartered in Calgary, and they have expertise in accident reconstruction, human factors, injury biomechanics, vehicle fire investigation, and failure analysis of motor vehicles and their safety systems. Our clients include lawyers, insurers, and the government of Canada, Transport Canada. For our litigation-related work our firm is hired approximately equally by lawyers representing people injured in car crashes and insurers defending auto insurance claims. Our firm employs four highly specialized and qualified engineers, two engineering technologists, and three support staff, and the announced changes are going to be devastating to our business. We have invested substantially in very specific technical qualifications and training.

I think one of the things that he brought to my attention was that he was very disappointed in the Minister of Finance's answers around how this would impact jobs. He feels that would make him and all of the folks that work for him collateral damage in these decisions. I just wanted to share those thoughts from my constituent. I'll table this letter although I know that the ministers opposite have all received a copy of that.

I would urge my fellow members to vote against this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A pleasure to rise and give my brief remarks this afternoon on Bill 47, Automobile Insurance Act. While I don't profess to have any intimate inside knowledge of the debating ongoings of the UCP caucus or cabinet, I can only surmise that this bill probably received a rancorous debate because, given the recent exodus of two members from that cabinet and caucus, one can expect that there were significant disagreements on this piece of legislation, as there have been with others. This, I'm sure, was no different.

However, I can surmise and read between the lines when I try to imagine the debate in the cabinet and the caucus about this piece of legislation, where, you know, they were trying to determine where they would land on this piece of legislation and if indeed the debate went something like this: "Let's try to anger everybody, let's increase the cost to consumers, and let's decrease the legal rights of injured Albertans. Checkbox, checkbox, checkbox. Yup. Let's go with that." That sounds like what they ended up with and ended the debate because they managed to be successful on all counts, Madam Speaker. Three strikes and you're in: that's what happened with this piece of legislation. Indeed, that's what the results have been. They seem to be angering everybody on every side of the equation with respect to automobile insurance. They've raised costs to consumers, and you no longer will have the right to sue for injuries received except in some minor circumstances.

On top of that, Madam Speaker – on top of that – I'm sure the debate had some element to it where they said: "Heaven forbid, don't mention the word 'public.' Let's do something different. Let's invent something new that's never been tried before and slap our label on it. We'll call it private no-fault insurance and just see how that works out."

Madam Speaker, it's not working out well in the minds of many people who have been involved in the insurance industry for a long, long time, including my constituent Mark McCourt, who is a very outspoken auto accident injury lawyer and has been historically speaking to save the right of Albertans to have full opportunity to sue for complete compensation and is very, very clear in his opposition to this piece of legislation. I've had a number of conversations over the years with Mr. McCourt, and he's well known in the literature and in the province for his advocacy for the right to sue for personal injuries.

In this piece of legislation he suggests that Bill 47 – I'm quoting him now:

With Bill 47, set to be rammed through the Legislative Assembly this spring unless the government exercises sober second thought and wisely presses the pause button, the UCP is raising our rates and ripping away our rights. This is a lose-lose proposition for Albertans, but the multibillion-dollar insurance industry will be laughing all the way to the bank if this becomes law.

That is representative of the arguments that Mr. McCourt has been making for a number of years in defence of the right of Albertans to sue for complete and full compensation as a result of injuries received in an accident. Regardless of what you may think of the strength of his advocacy, he certainly is right in terms of what this legislation will do. Bill 47 will limit those rights of compensation for Albertans, and that is something that really shouldn't be taken away very lightly at all, Madam Speaker. It's something that, once gone, perhaps will never be resurrected.

Whether it's a public no-fault or a private no-fault, which is an experimental piece of legislation to begin with, which nobody knows whether it's going to work or not, the consequence is that Albertans will be losing the right to sue for full compensation, and that's a risk of this piece of legislation. Mr. McCourt very, very

eloquently talks about it in his representations about the legislation. He further states that the UCP has given insurance companies the green light to jack up our rates for the next two years and then rip away our long-standing consumer protections in 2027.

His advocacy is something that I listen to because he's been a very learned practitioner for decades in this province. He's one of the most respected injury accident lawyers in the province. His voice carries weight with me, and I wish it had carried more weight with the UCP when they were making this decision to move ahead with an experimental type of private no-fault insurance that has not

been tried yet. I think that it's something that could go very badly wrong, Madam Speaker, if indeed they pass this piece of legislation.

Indeed, in the interim I hope to have other conversations with Mr. McCourt and determine what else he might have to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I am pleased to interrupt. The House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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