



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 7, 2025

Day 108

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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Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Calahoo Stonehouse
Dyck
Eggen
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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you students, staff, and volunteers from école St. Mary school located in Whitecourt and, as we all know, the best riding in the province, West Yellowhead. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you the students and staff of J.C. Charyk school, making the trip all the way from Hanna, Alberta, today to learn more about the Legislative Assembly. A little note for the Chamber. We have an alumni in the Chamber, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I don't know if that's useful. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you the students from Spring Glen junior high school and the staff accompanying them, led by Jamie Barfuss. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the amazing team of FascinAsian, a film festival that showcases the talents of Asian-Canadian filmmakers. Please rise, Su Chau, Laura Li, Joselito De Los Angeles, Suzuanne Burwash, Edmon Rotea, and Shawn Tse, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce my friend Councillor Chad Krahn. He was my former constituency office manager and now has moved on to bigger and better things. He's a member of a most excellent city council of Red Deer. Please rise and receive a great warm welcome from the Assembly.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you the grand chief of Treaty 8 along with the chief from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation along

with their legal counsel. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a couple of amazing leaders, Chief Allan Adam from Athabasca First Nation and, from my home traditional territory of Treaty 8, Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi. An honour to be here, and I stand with them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, the chief government whip.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 5 marks the beginning of Emergency Preparedness Week this year. The week serves as a crucial reminder for all Albertans to take proactive steps to protect themselves and their families during emergencies. Whether it's a flood, tornado, wildfire, being prepared can make the difference in ensuring the safety and well-being of you and your loved ones.

A special thanks to all the emergency services teams out in Sturgeon county and Parkland currently and all those that are being affected. Our thoughts are with you.

In times like these, where we need to be prepared, important apps such as the Alberta Emergency Alert app as well as having a 72-hour bug-out bag containing cash, medication, water, first aid kits, all the things that are needed, are invaluable. Understanding the risks specific to your region and knowing how to respond to the different types of emergencies such as evacuation procedures or shelter in place: that's vital. By taking these simple yet important steps, we allow ourselves and our communities to be more resilient during these challenging times. Emergency preparedness isn't just about reacting when the crisis happens; it's about building a culture and a mindset of readiness that helps us to navigate these challenges in a timely manner with confidence and security.

When individual families and communities understand potential risks, the knowledge and resources to respond effectively can make all the difference in the world. This involves ongoing education, practising response plans, and fostering strong communication networks. Fire drills aren't just for the school kids. By integrating preparedness into our daily lives, we build resilience, reduce anxiety in the face of uncertainty, and allow ourselves to navigate the crisis with greater confidence, ultimately minimizing the harms, facilitating a faster recovery.

This week is a perfect opportunity for Albertans to take concrete actions to better prepare and protect themselves and their families during emergencies. For more details on being prepared, I encourage all Albertans to visit alberta.ca/beprepared.

With that, Mr. Speaker, keep 'er safe out there.

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, treaty rights are not optional. They are legally binding constitutional agreements recognized by international law, protected under section 35 of the Constitution, and enshrined in the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples and are the very foundation of Alberta's existence.

How can anyone trust this Premier when she can't be trusted to uphold the basic standards of integrity? This government is

currently under an RCMP and Auditor General investigation in what might be the biggest scandal in Alberta's history. While they hand bloated surgical contracts to their families and friends and insiders, they're pushing a separatist agenda to appease their radical base. That is harmful. It's destructive, and it's unconstitutional.

First Nations are taking a stand. Chief Allan Adam said yesterday, and I quote: if Alberta wants to separate and doesn't want to be a part of Canada, then you're not allowed on our traditional territories anymore for exploration because we don't know who you're exploring for. End quote. This speaks volumes, not just about jurisdiction and authority but about trust. First Nations leaders do not trust or believe what this Premier says about Indigenous rights, and frankly why should they? This government is embroiled in a corruption scandal, wasting public dollars to families and friends that could have been used to lift Indigenous communities out of poverty: hundreds of millions of thousands to Sam Mraiche, \$70 million wasted on Turkish Tylenol, \$300,000 on a red carpet, thousands of dollars on china, on and on and on. First Nations leaders are tired, and they took a stand shoulder to shoulder yesterday against this Premier, who has attempted to erase our treaty rights and exploit treaty lands.

Mr. Speaker, we must not forget that all of Alberta is on treaty land, and all Albertans are treaty people.

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

Alberta in Canada

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a once thriving village each family had control over their own land. Some worked diligently; others let their fields go to waste. To create fairness, the village elders decided all harvests should be shared equally. At first the hard workers agreed, hoping to help their neighbours. Over time effort no longer led to reward. Motivation waned. Eventually the crops failed, not due to a lack of land but a lack of incentive.

The word "sovereignty" means freedom from external control, autonomy over one's own affairs. Coincidentally, Sovereignty caught up with Journalism and made the final pass to win last weekend's Kentucky Derby by one and a half lengths. Imagine that.

Premier Peter Lougheed, a strong advocate for provincial autonomy and the namesake for my constituency, once said: the Constitution is clear; resources belong to the provinces. Mr. Speaker, Canada's equalization was designed to share the harvest. In October of 2021 a referendum was held asking if equalization payments should be eliminated from the Constitution of Canada. Nearly 62 per cent of Albertans voted yes.

Bill 1, the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act is the beginning of a broader conversation, setting the foundation for a road map towards a more autonomous Alberta, one with lower taxes, where Albertans reap the full rewards of their labour and where we no longer subsidize federal vote-buying schemes. Our Premier has outlined nine clear conditions the federal government must meet within its first six months in office. As Peter Lougheed said, the best way to deal with Ottawa is from a position of strength.

Bandwagon slogans like Elbows Up are meaningless unless you're prepared to go into the corner and fight for the puck. On this side we're not cherry pickers, Mr. Speaker. The time is now. Join me on June 25 at our town hall titled The Courage to Listen: Building a Framework for a Sovereign Alberta within . . . Canada.

Thank you.

1:40

Asian Heritage Month

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, May recognizes and celebrates Asian Heritage Month, an opportunity not only to celebrate the culture, language,

food, and community of Asian Albertans but also to recognize and acknowledge the contributions and the resilience of generations of Asian Albertans and Canadians who have helped build Alberta, often in the face of adversity, exclusion, and injustice. From early Chinese railway workers and South Asian lumber mill labourers to Japanese-Canadian farmers and Filipino front-line health care workers, Alberta's history is deeply intertwined with the courage, perseverance, and ingenuity of Asian communities.

Today we see the legacy of leadership evolve and continue through entrepreneurs who revitalize our downtowns, teachers who inspire our students, innovators who advance our tech and medical fields, and, of course, artists and storytellers who enrich our cultural fabric. Storytelling ensures that heritage is not only remembered but lived and shared with future generations.

That's why I'm so pleased today to welcome the phenomenal team from FascinAsian, a festival based in the prairies that showcases the contributions and talents of Asian-Canadian artists in film. FascinAsian is making its debut in Edmonton for the first time from May 9 to May 11.

Mr. Speaker, it is also critical that we speak with clarity and conviction about the ongoing challenges faced by Asian Albertans. During the COVID-19 pandemic we witnessed a rise in anti-Asian hate and xenophobia. Racism, whether overt or systemic, has no place in Alberta.

Let this month be a recommitment to justice, equity, and inclusion. Let us amplify the voices of Asian Albertans not only during Asian Heritage Month but all year long. Happy Asian Heritage Month.

Support for Agriculture

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, as we begin the month of May, Alberta farmers and ranchers are at the start of a new growing season. While agriculture is a year-round effort, spring marks a time of renewal, when the fields come alive and the hard work of feeding our province and the world begins anew. Alberta is home to one of the country's most diverse and productive agricultural sectors. From beef, pork, and poultry to canola, wheat, barley, pulse crops, and honey, our producers deliver high-quality, sustainably grown products recognized world-wide.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a national leader in agrifood exports, contributing more than \$18 billion annually to the economy through high-value products shipped around the world. Our government understands that supporting agriculture isn't just about crops and livestock; it's about helping families, communities, and food security while building long-term sustainability, market growth, and resilience across Alberta's agriculture sector.

Through Budget 2025 we are modernizing irrigation infrastructure, expanding veterinary diagnostics, investing in crop research and diversification, and supporting meat and food processors with enhanced business development tools. We're supporting producers with risk management programs through AFSC, including AgriStability improvements, crop insurance, and drought protection. We've also launched a Buy Local campaign to promote Alberta-made food and products, encouraging consumers to support the producers in their own communities.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's farmers are resilient, innovative, and deeply committed to their work. We are proud to stand with them every step of the way. On behalf of this Assembly I want to thank all Alberta producers for their dedication to feeding our province, our country, and the world. May your fields be fertile and abundant with harvests and your family safe and well this farming season.

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

Government Priorities

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is missing the point. Every week in my office I get messages from constituents who are struggling. They're struggling with their grocery bills, their electricity bills, their insurance, their tuition. The list goes on and on. Constituents in Edmonton-North West want a government that is going to ensure that life is affordable and that they and their families can afford a secure and stable life. What I'm not hearing at my office is that constituents want the government to spend \$300,000 on a new carpet for the Premier, to be spending millions on Turkish Tylenol and even more money to store it when it cannot be used.

Albertans are hard working, pragmatic, and logical thinkers. They want a stable and well-funded health care system, teachers and education assistants for their kids. They do not want MLAs to be voting for themselves increases to their own rent subsidies and getting rid of rules about financial limits for gifts that they can accept.

Mr. Speaker, this government seems to be bound and determined to enrich themselves and their friends while the average Alberta family is doing their best just to keep the lights on, food on the table, gas in the car so that they can get to work. I would urge the members across the aisle to spend some time reflecting on why they put their names forward in the last election: to make lives better for their constituents, or to enrich themselves and their friends? If the answer is the former, I would recommend that they give their heads a shake in the Chamber, refocus, or find another line of work.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a record dated November 22, 2018, in which the minister of community and social services spoke in favour and voted in support of Bill 26, the Alberta NDP bill which indexed AISH for the first time in Alberta history, which took effect January 1, 2019, until it was deindexed by the UCP one year later.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five requisite copies of the preliminary analysis of Bill 50 from Alberta Municipalities, where they acknowledge there are several challenges to Bill 50 and several elements which they were not consulted on.

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

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's from my March 17 submission to the Auditor General, including my personal handwritten notes to the Premier from our May 28, 2024, meeting where I introduced the concept of the financial oversight committee and highlighted my concerns about poor decision-making in government procurement.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I rise to put a tabling of the appropriate copies of a briefing note on how the Alberta NDP failed to spend a penny on indexing when it comes to AISH.

Dr. Elmeligi: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling an open letter to the Minister of Forestry and Parks asking that he rescind the hunting and trapping quota changes, including additional information as

well as 35 pages of current scientific data showing those quotas are inappropriate.

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table copies of an article entitled [The Premier] Seems as Confused about Alberta Separation as the Rest of Us by Graham Thomson. It asks very good questions around if separation is even possible given the constitutional barriers, including strong opposition from First Nations folks. Please read it, Premier.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the five requisite copies of a ChatGPT analysis, referenced in my speech yesterday, on how Alberta could have a super-duper, huge tax cut, a personal tax rate of zero if Ottawa gave us back the \$20 billion-plus of excess payments they take from Albertans every year.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you look at that clock, it appears to be 1:50, and that makes it Oral Question Period. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

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

Order. Order. [interjections] Hon. members, we will have order. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Alberta in Canada

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is now 1:50.

The Premier's openness to run a separatist referendum has caused Alberta international embarrassment and is already putting investment in our province at risk. Just as the Prime Minister was trying to get a deal with President Trump and end tariffs, questions arose about the UCP's separatist agenda. Right when Canada needs to have a united front against the American trade war, the UCP's latest antics harm our province and our country. Why is the Premier indulging separatist extremists when doing so is costing Albertans?

1:50

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I have made it very clear that I support a sovereign Alberta within a united Canada, and I'm very pleased to have had a lengthy conversation with the Prime Minister where we were able to talk about the nine issues that I've put on the table. We also had a very constructive meeting today with first ministers, and I'm so pleased to report that across the country, it doesn't matter what Premier they are, what stripe they wear, where they're located, they all want to see large economic projects get built, and that includes pipeline infrastructure. We've got a sea change happening, and I'm looking forward to taking part in that.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans are seeing is that it's an international embarrassment to be so divided when we should be united in support of Canada. That's what we are seeing. Premiers of other provinces are calling this Premier out because of her government's support for separatism. But this Premier does have one ally, the separatist leader of the Parti Québécois. He says that the UCP Premier is doing a great job dividing the country. And this is the guy blocking our pipelines. Does the Premier understand how out of touch she must be if the PQ are celebrating her efforts to tear down Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been delighted to see that Premier Doug Ford has been a consistent friend and ally on the issue of changing Bill C-69 specifically so that we can get oil and gas

pipelines built. He said it in the meeting today, he has said it publicly, and I've expressed my gratitude towards him for that because, quite frankly, the bills that are causing problems here are causing problems for Doug Ford in Ontario, too. They have mining projects they want to get built. There's investor uncertainty. The biggest uncertainty has been the last 10 years of Liberal-NDP coalition government, which is why they were reduced to 6.5 per cent in the Legislature.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, separatists are delighted by what this Premier is doing. You'll note that she won't even answer questions about it in this House.

She has never gotten a good deal for our province. Picking endless fights with Ottawa, but she can't turn them into a win for Alberta. No pharmacare, no dental care, no child care, no better health care. The only thing that is being achieved is controversy as the Premier is courting the American far right's approval. When Alberta needs good jobs and investments, does the Premier not realize how her enabling of the separatist agenda hurts Alberta's economy?

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the member opposite said is just not true. We actually do have a child care deal, that is being managed by my minister of jobs and economy. Jobs and economy has also worked collaboratively with the federal government; it's the reason why we've had De Havilland and WestJet and Dow Chemical and Air Products invest here, all of which required collaboration with our federal counterparts. This is the point I've been making all along. If we can find a way to eliminate the irritation from the nine bad bills that have depressed the investment in our economy, I think we're going to have a very constructive relationship.

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

Bill 54 and First Nation Treaty Rights

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, yesterday First Nation chiefs from treaties 6, 7, and 8 came together in an emergency meeting to denounce this Premier's separatist rhetoric. They told her in no uncertain terms that this government must scrap Bill 54. This UCP government has failed to uphold their responsibilities under the treaties that are foundational to our country. Why is this Premier and her UCP team needlessly causing a unity crisis in our province?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to spend a lot of today correcting the record, it seems. Alberta's government is entirely committed to protecting, upholding, and honouring the inherent rights of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. Any citizen-initiated referendum question must not violate the constitutional rights of First Nations. It must honour treaties 6, 7, and 8. It also must honour section 35 of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, this Indigenous Relations minister provincially is leading the country in the policies that he is putting forward and establishing a constructive relationship with every Indigenous community, and we're going to continue doing that.

Ms Gray: If that was true and they were respecting treaty rights, there could be no referendum on separation.

This UCP government does not respect the treaties and does not respect the First Nations leaders. Chief Billy-Joe Tuccaro of the Mikisew Cree First Nation called Bill 54 garbage. Chief Troy "Bossman" Knowlton of Piikani First Nation said that the talk of separation is insanity. Chief Allan Adam from ACFN said that this

will cause economic projects to be ground to a halt. Why has the Premier caused such needless division with her government's separatist agenda in Bill 54?

Ms Smith: I would remind, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 54 is over a hundred pages long and includes extensive changes to elections law, which we have been consulting on for well over a year. The issues around the thresholds for citizen initiative and recall were because we've heard feedback that the bars were set so high that none of them would ever be able to get enough petitions to be able to go forward. I'm not going to prejudge what questions might come forward; I would look forward to having a constructive conversation. When I looked at California, most of the propositions that come forward are left-wing propositions, so this is not an ideological issue.

Ms Gray: How shameful. Did the Premier just admit she consulted for a year and didn't talk to First Nations leaders about this election legislation?

Chief Kelsey Jacko of Cold Lake First Nation said that the Premier should be lifting Indigenous people out of poverty instead of fixating on separation. The Premier and her UCP team have caused this division. She can pick fights, blame others, but Indigenous leaders have been clear. They are completely opposed to Bill 54. If the Premier believes in reconciliation, then she must denounce separatism immediately and get rid of this bill. Will the Premier do the right thing?

Ms Smith: Again the member opposite misunderstands the purpose of Bill 54, which is to do a comprehensive reform of the provincial election laws that govern our provincial elections.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that on the issue of reconciliation we have made progress. We have made progress on 24 out of the 29 Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action. We have the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, which has underwritten \$720 million in loan guarantees and which every other province and the federal government is copying. We have the Aboriginal business investment fund, which has created more than a thousand permanent jobs on nations. We have the community support fund. We have Indigenous-led recovery communities. We're going to continue partnering with First Nations.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the UCP government ignores conflicts of interest possibly perceived, likely real. The Premier allowed her Justice minister to be part of the decisions around the corrupt care scandal despite his friendships and familial relations with Sam Mraiche, the owner of the company at the heart of the scandals. And how did she respond when asked about this? She said: what should he do, divorce his wife? Ridiculous response. How about behave ethically as a government? Why didn't the Premier do her job, require the Justice minister to recuse himself from the multiple matters related to Sam Mraiche, the minister's friend and relative?

Ms Smith: Because the Minister of Justice has no involvement. Not only does he have no role in approving RFPs; he has no role in health care. He has no role in the investigation. That is being led by the deputy minister of jobs and economy. He has no role in determining that Judge Wyant was the person receiving it. He has no role in directing anything to the Auditor General. The Minister of Justice is not in a conflict of interest position. You are in a conflict if you say that you are making

decisions related to something that is going to benefit a private interest. He is not in conflict, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has repeatedly stood and defended the UCP government's corruption scandal. He is the government's top lawyer. He cannot – cannot – be in a real or perceived conflict of interest while multiple investigations look into the corrupt care scandal, but he is. He absolutely must recuse himself, or the cloud of doubt will hang over this government forever. Your top legal man simply can't be a friend and relative of the person at the centre of the allegations. Will the Premier do the overdue thing, have the Minister of Justice step aside and call a public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a judge-led inquiry from a judge who is outside of the province, from Manitoba, and, in fact, held in such high esteem that he was the Chief Justice in Manitoba before taking this on. He has terms of reference which he can modify any time. He has chosen not to because it is very broad. He can ask questions of whoever he wishes to. He can get whatever documents that he needs. He can take whatever time he needs. If he needs more money, he can ask for more money. None of that has happened, and as a result, we are going to see a result of this report by the end of June.

2:00

Ms Gray: To be very clear, Sam Mraiche's company has got over \$600 million in contracts from this government and, it seems, more still to come. From that, Alberta got unusable Turkish Tylenol, \$50 million stranded halfway around the world, unusable PPE, a questionable land deal, severely bloated private surgical contracts. And through all of this it seems the Minister of Justice never bothered mentioning to the Premier that he's a friend and relative of Sam Mraiche. This is serious. This is wrong, and it shows how unethical this UCP government is. How is the Premier blind to what every Albertan can see?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Up until April 1 of this year Alberta Health Services made independent decisions on procurement. They wrote the RFP; they oversaw the RFP. They chose the RFP; they awarded the RFP. They wrote the contracts for the RFP with 200 different people in the procurement department. That only changed as of April 1, and the details of any of those contracts only became available because of reporting that appeared in the newspaper. That is how procurement works. These decisions are made independently of the oversight of politicians, and that's the way it should stay.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the story broke that the Minister of Justice is close friends and relatives with Sam Mraiche, the man at the heart of the corrupt care scandal. The UCP seem confused as to why this may be a conflict of interest, so let's spell it out for them. The Minister of Justice is responsible for directing the defence of the Minister of Health in the lawsuit filed by the former AHS CEO, the same lawsuit where the Minister of Justice's very close friend is alleged to have received overly generous government contracts. How hard the Minister of Justice defends this lawsuit, including how much in taxpayer dollars he's willing to spend on it, could absolutely be influenced by his relationship with Mr. Mraiche. So does that help the Premier understand why the minister may have a serious conflict of interest?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was quite the web that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud just spun. If anyone at home was following that, you're better than I am because – I'll tell you what – the Minister of Justice has nothing to do with these investigations. These are being led by Chris McPherson, who is the deputy minister of the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade. Also, there are three concurrent investigations going on between the Auditor General, the RCMP, and Judge Wyant from Manitoba. I wish the members opposite would wait, just like we are, for the results of those investigations.

Ms Pancholi: Well, ignorance may be bliss, but in this case it may also be corruption. So how about this? The Minister of Justice is responsible for retaining all outside legal counsel on behalf of the government of Alberta, that includes the law firm Rose LLP, who the minister retained to handle all inquiries from the Auditor General for the AG's investigation into bloated government contracts with, yes, the minister's good friend and relative Sam Mraiche. The AG said that the decision by the Minister of Justice to use an external law firm was highly unusual and has never happened before. To Albertans it looks like a cover-up. Does the Minister of Justice, a lawyer subject to the Law Society code of conduct, agree that this sounds an awful lot like a conflict of interest?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, it's not uncommon to see the members opposite be a little fast and loose with the details of the truth. Rose LLP was retained by the Department of Health, the civil service, so the member is incorrect in that assertion, and I would hope that she would correct the record on that. What I would also say is that the Minister of Justice is not involved with the investigation. We are elected members of the Assembly. We do not investigate. The investigations are happening by the Auditor General, the RCMP, and Judge Wyant, a judge who is well respected by his peers in Manitoba.

Ms Pancholi: Well, there's more, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Justice is responsible for the Crown prosecutors in Alberta, the same prosecutors who will handle any criminal prosecution that may result from the ongoing RCMP investigation, charges that could implicate the minister's very close friend and relative Sam Mraiche. Or how about the fact that the minister has been put up every day in this House as the UCP's lawyer to evade questions about corrupt care, but all the while he never discloses to the House, to his colleagues, or apparently even to the Premier that he's besties with the man at the heart of the allegations of kickbacks and corruption against the UCP? Will the Minister of Justice admit that he doesn't support a full public inquiry? Because by not recusing himself, he is directly implicated.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, we believe in prosecutorial independence. That's why we're abiding by that. I would also say that this is being investigated by three different independent bodies: the Auditor General, the RCMP, and Judge Wyant. The hon. Justice minister has nothing to do with these investigations. I didn't know that a prerequisite for putting your name on a ballot was tabling your family tree. I think it's really quite despicable that the members opposite would stand in this Chamber and use question period to malign the personal character of the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted at 2:05.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Municipal Voting Rights of Indigenous Persons

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later this afternoon we will move an amendment to grant many First Nation Albertans the right to vote in local elections, elections that shape the bylaws, services, and infrastructure in the very community that impacts their reserve lands. For far too long these Indigenous Albertans have been denied a voice in local decision-making. This needs to end. To the minister: will he do the right thing and commit to supporting this long overdue amendment today? Yes or no?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I will do the right thing that's in Bill 50 and maintain the really important long-standing tradition that people that live in a municipality get to vote in the municipality. If they live in a reserve next to or even in the middle of the municipality, they don't get to vote in the municipality. The land that we're talking about is either in the municipality or it's in the reserve. I think we can all agree that the land at issue is in the reserve. Consequently, people that live there don't get to vote in the municipality. It's the same across Alberta. It's fair. It's consistent. It's not biased. It's the way it should be, and it's the way, I think, all reasonable Albertans would want it to be.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this Minister of Municipal Affairs stood in this Chamber and promised to fix this voting rights issue before the next municipal election and given that he repeated that promise directly to the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation in a private meeting over a year ago and given that since then the minister has done absolutely nothing and broke another promise to Alberta's First Nations, to the minister: will he fix this broken promise to Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I promised to consider this carefully and I have, and the fact is that what is consistent, what is true: if you live in a municipality in Alberta and you're Canadian and 18 years old, you get to vote there. If one of those three things is not true, you don't get to vote there. If you're not 18, if you're not Canadian, or if you don't live in the municipality, you don't get to vote in the municipality. It's fair. It's even. It's the same for everybody. It's just. It's what we've always done. It's always been the right thing to do. It's the right thing in 2025, it was the right thing in 1925, and I'll be surprised if it's not the right thing in 2225.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this Premier is bending over backwards to appease separatists, changing Alberta's election laws to lower the bar for referendums, and making it easier for big money to influence our democracy and given that she caters to those who want to tear Canada apart while Indigenous Albertans living on-reserve still don't have the basic right to vote in local elections, why is this government rewarding radical separatists while continuing to deny First Nations a voice in elections that impact them in every way?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has chosen not to understand the answer, but the answer is quite obvious. If you live in the municipality, you can vote in the municipality. If you don't live in the municipality, you don't get to vote in the municipality. The folks in Airdrie, Alberta, are completely dependent upon Calgary for fresh water, but they don't get to vote in Calgary. Why? Wait for it. They don't live in the municipality. The rules are applied the same to everybody across Alberta regardless of race, creed, colour, religion, tall, short, rich, poor. The rules are the same for everybody. That's democracy.

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

Child and Youth Mental Health Supports

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week marks Mental Health Week, a topic we can all be familiar with. Our government is leading the charge, making record investments to ensure those in need get the support for recovery. Unfortunately, too many youth in our communities struggle with mental health challenges, whether it stems from social media, anxiety, bullying, or anything else. I witnessed this first-hand as a summer camp counsellor in the early 2000s. To the Minister of Children and Family Services: what is your ministry doing to ensure that we're supporting vulnerable youth across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Family Services.
2:10

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to that member for being such a tireless advocate for children and families in his riding. The member is correct. Today we announced that we increased funding for the youth suicide prevention grant by an additional million dollars for a total of \$4 million. This is going to support 17 organizations throughout the entire province and will also help support an additional 2,100 young Albertans in mentorship programs and other services throughout the province. We know that this program is making a tangible difference in the lives of young Albertans, and I'm proud of our government's work in this regard.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that youth suicide prevention grants have supported thousands of children since their creation and given that youth are eager for connection and respond well to mentorship and coaching and further given that I have had my own personal experiences in seeing first-hand the impact that camps can have on the social and mental well-being of youth, again to the minister: how is the additional funding for youth suicide prevention grants going to help organizations significantly improve their abilities to make these connections with young Albertans?

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

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to that member for that question. I just want to commend all the coaches and adults running these programs who provide mentorship for these young children, which is such an incredible support for these young Albertans. These programs provide the opportunity for children to be active, to increase their cultural connections as well as increasing their family connections. We know that these are all making incredible differences and small steps towards improving the lives of these young children, helping them become more resilient so that, as they transition into adulthood, they're better prepared for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that responding to mental health challenges in our community should not be just reactionary but rather proactive and given that this program on its own isn't enough to support every child and youth in Alberta and further given that every child has a different set of cultural needs to support their healing, to the same minister: what other preventative and proactive programs is our government offering to young Albertans struggling with mental health challenges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to that member for that question. The youth suicide prevention grant is just one way that the Alberta government is helping support some of these vulnerable and complex children. Another key way that we're supporting children here in the province with preventative services is through our family resource networks, which are located in every corner of the province. These family resource networks help provide food security, mentorship programs as well as many mom-and-baby programs throughout the entire province. We know that all these actions are making positive effects, helping kids become more resilient and helping them transition into adulthood.

Government Spending

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, core conservative values are transparency, good governance, and fiscal responsibility. True accountability means balanced budgets, limited government, and lower taxes. While I supported the tax cut for Albertans, I am deeply concerned about the \$5.4 billion deficit. Even at \$70 oil this UCP government wouldn't balance its budget. Operational spending is up 24 per cent in just three years. This is not a revenue problem; it's a spending problem. To the Minister of Finance: can a 24 per cent increase in spending honestly be called fiscally responsible?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I'll take any question any day on fiscal responsibility in this House. It's kind of refreshing. I would point out that one of the great challenges that Alberta has had – the member referenced the last three years. Alberta's population has grown about 15 per cent since 2019. I think that's a great story. A dramatic part of that story is that since 2022 it's grown by 11 per cent, coupled with heightened periods of sustained inflation coming out of COVID and the supply chain crisis. I am very grateful for our fiscal rules, and we've stayed below population plus inflation spending in every year.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, when I was elected in 2019 until this Premier took office, the size of the GOA shrank 7.5 per cent. Given that over three budgets since then that reduction was reversed, climbing 14 per cent and given this trend is further driven by an expanding number of Crown corporations significantly increasing staffing demands and given this bloating of the public sector is a reckless expansion of power to establish control, to the minister: isn't a ballooning bureaucracy at odds with the pledge of fiscal restraint?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I went through this with the opposition in estimates as well, looking at the size of our public service. Alberta sits at about 5.9 Albertans per 1,000 that work for the public service, the second-lowest in the country, with the highest productivity. Ontario is the only one below us, and they have economies of scale we can't match. But I think it's important to know that these aren't managers and administrators; these are nurses and teachers that we're being asked to supply to serve this fast-growing population.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given a lack of fiscal discipline and oil trending below \$60 and given that the budget underestimates expenses in health, education, and child care and given a more realistic forecast places the deficit at \$10 billion to \$12 billion and given it is hard to justify plush Trudeau-style red carpets, spending \$460 million on recovery jails, and entertaining multibillion-dollar boondoggles . . .

Ms Lovely: You were a terrible minister.

Mr. Guthrie: . . . like the Premier's rail plans, to the minister: if the UCP can't balance the budget at \$70 oil, does a path to balance really exist?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I know that that member was in Treasury Board at the time when the fiscal rules were created and debated and developed.

Mr. Sinclair: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Horner: We have three years to get to balance. It's important that, you know, we're not irrational about how we get there. It's like that for a reason. We're going to develop this plan. We're going to do it with Albertans. It will be debated in this Chamber as we try to determine what the priorities for Albertans are in this time of great growth, and I look forward to it. It will be tough conversations with Albertans and in this Chamber. It's going to be about our priorities.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Government Procurement Process

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, in May 2024 I brought concerns about flawed purchasing practices direct to the Premier. My first objective was to commend the work being done at the Department of Infrastructure while defending internal criticism directed at this dedicated group of individuals and, second, to propose the establishment of a financial oversight committee intended to offer oversight on major purchasing contracts, particularly from less financially experienced departments. Premier, given your awareness of procurement problems, why was this idea scuttled?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think that the development of that idea is under way. You know, I think in light of any allegations that are made, I think it's important to look at your processes. We're definitely doing that as a government. I think that's the appropriate thing to do. I think back to the heart of this line of questioning. I think we really do need to all understand the situation we're in right now for Alberta. Fiscal responsibility is going to be very important. It's going to touch every conversation we have in this House, whether it's education or health care or housing. We need to make sure it's sustainable for the future.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that I not only emphasized Infrastructure's strengths but also identified areas of improvement and given that I raised concerns citing examples such as the Grande Prairie, Edmonton, and Beaverlodge hospitals as well as the federal child care deal and given that I stated clearly that we are making errors doing deals in silos with little oversight and given that the GOA has suffered the consequences of poor decision-making in complex agreements, to the Premier: don't Albertans deserve a government that works to ensure maximum value for every tax dollar spent?

Mr. Horner: Yes, Albertans do deserve that, and that's what they have. We're constantly going to work to get even better. You know, it's important when you look at a complicated deal. I know the child care deal was mentioned from the federal government. It's important that we have our best financial analysts look at that from across ministries and that we look at the plan not only now but for the future. It's a challenge sometimes because generally the feds only offer a certain time period of funds. Then the question comes

back to: where do we go from here? We're doing that work. It's important work, and we'll continue.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that Treasury Board's mandate is to assess fiscal capacity, not to negotiate purchasing contracts and given that lack of scrutiny creates a major gap in the procurement process and given that departments such as Finance, Infrastructure, transportation, energy, and JET have the expertise to fill that gap and given that this skill set could be leveraged to maximize returns for our stakeholders, the public, to the Premier: with serious issues now exposed, what has prevented you from taking action to improve oversight and transparency?

2:20

Mr. Horner: Nothing has prevented us. We're doing it. That work is happening across ministries at the deputy minister level to make sure that we have our best financial analysts looking at these complicated deals. I know the member also knows that when Treasury Board is looking at a proposal, it's important that we bring in our best people, like the member that was the Minister of Infrastructure, to come and give us their insight while we work through those decisions. We also do that at times with ministers from some of the other economic files, like the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade, because they have that analysis. We use it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Road Construction in Chestermere-Strathmore

Ms de Jonge: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Robert Frost recommended taking the road less travelled, but when it comes to my questions for the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors, I'm sticking to a well-trodden path, one I've visited numerous times in this Chamber. Budgets 2024 and '25 included vital engineering funding for several key interchanges in my constituency, investments which are critical to ease congestion and enhance safety. These are long-standing community priorities, and we are eager to see progress. Can the minister update the House on the current status of these projects? What's been completed so far, and what are the next steps to move them from planning to construction?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your commitment and dedication serving this House and each and every MLA. It's been an honour and a privilege to have served with you for the last seven years.

To the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore: you've been a relentless advocate for your constituents, and they're lucky to have you. I'm happy to say that over the next three years there'll be \$50 million invested in Chestermere-Strathmore for key projects like the Rainbow Road and for the Conrich interchange. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that Strathmore also received a \$2.3 million grant for their water reservoir upgrades. These are just a few examples of really important infrastructure projects that we've invested in all across Alberta in Budget '25.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that, like the minister mentioned, Glenmore Trail and Rainbow Road is a key intersection that serves not only local residents but also significant regional traffic and given that the ongoing safety concerns and increasing traffic volumes have made upgrades to this area a top priority for my neighbours, can the minister provide an

update on the planned improvements for that particular corridor and outline what steps the department is taking to move forward with implementing these much-needed safety upgrades?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that \$16 million is invested in highway 560, or Glenmore Trail, at range road 283 and 284. Again, it's a growing area of the province, and that's why we want to make sure that we have these key investments and that we can keep up to the road infrastructure, that needs to make sure that people can get to where they're going safely and get home safely. Again, the work is under way in this area for those very important projects. I know that so many in Chestermere-Strathmore are excited to see this project completed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for addressing my many questions about roads in this Chamber. Given that the intersection of highway 9 and highway 564 has been a long-standing concern for local drivers due to visibility issues and traffic volume challenges, both of these corridors accommodate an increasing volume of semis, farm equipment, and other large vehicles, to the minister: can you please update my neighbours on how your department plans to address these concerns and whether any improvements are being considered to enhance the safety at this intersection?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that we've initiated design work that will start this year; an RFP for this project will be going out very soon. Again, Budget '25 has huge investments in road projects all across this province. There's also a 5 per cent increase in the highway maintenance to make sure that our roads are that much safer. Overall, \$3.4 billion in Transportation and Economic Corridors for roads, bridges, and water projects in Budget '25. I'm happy to say that the member obviously voted for Budget '25 and that these projects are well under way.

Measles Outbreak in Alberta

Member Batten: Mr. Speaker, there are almost 300 Albertans sick with measles. These are children, and some are even requiring intensive care that they will hopefully recover from. Measles is 100 per cent preventable, and it was once almost eradicated here in Alberta. Leave it to this science-denying, conspiracy-spreading, corrupt, and cruel UCP government to bring it back, risking the lives of every single Albertan under the age of 18 months. Does the minister regret ignoring the incredibly predictable measles outbreak and doing nothing about it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, nothing can be further from the truth. I can share with the members opposite that on March 18 the very front page of the *Edmonton Journal* said: the Health minister promotes measles shots; Health minister speaks out after AHS issues exposure alert. That was on March 18, just days after the first measles outbreak. We are continuing to ramp up our efforts, making sure that those that are unimmunized or underimmunized are in fact provided information.

Member Batten: Given that the minister can deflect blame and claim that there's nothing further from the truth, given that facts do not lie – measles are 100 per cent preventable; vaccines are safe, effective, and life saving – and given that they are not, however, a

silver bullet and they are best used preventatively, something that any competent Health minister would understand, and given that the Health ministry sat on their hands while 10 cases became 30, 30 became over 200, now over 300 cases of this deadly, preventable disease . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member Batten: . . . why should any Albertan have confidence in this minister to take the action that's necessary?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:26.
The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again, nothing can be further from the truth. Once again misinformation coming from the other side. We are continuing to make sure that we get information out not only in one language but in 14 languages. We have a dedicated measles online website. We have increased the number of clinics that we have, particularly in hotspot areas. We have a hotline. We're continuing to make sure that we ramp up. It's the reason why we've seen a 67 per cent increase in immunization since last year.

Member Batten: Given that measles are airborne, highly contagious, and at times deadly and given that in this very House we the opposition urgently called for action, providing evidence and solutions – spoiler alert: routine vaccines save Albertans – and given that there are UCP members who actively spread vaccine misinformation and are continuing to do so today and given that the Health ministry failed to act, has now caused harm, and are responsible for this outbreak, when will the minister take ministerial actions and responsibility to help Albertans?

Member LaGrange: Once again I'm going to say: nothing is further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. I know you want to hear it. The members opposite are wrong once again. We are continuing to up all of our procedures and policies, et cetera, and making sure that we reach Albertans where they need it. As I said earlier: a 67 per cent increase in the number of immunizations from the same time last year. When I look at the number of children by the age of 13 that have double doses, that's 90 per cent. By 17 that's 93 per cent. We want to see 100 per cent as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a question to ask.

Interprovincial and International Trade

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent tensions in Canada-U.S. relations highlight the importance of Alberta securing new economic opportunities and reducing reliance on a single trade partner. Alberta has immense potential to expand its economic base, particularly in energy, technology, and advanced manufacturing. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: how is Alberta leveraging this moment to diversify our economy and attract new investment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has consistently advocated for additional trade-enabling and trade-diversifying infrastructure. This, of course, includes pipelines, rail, ports, even highways. We've also advocated for the federal government to take the steps necessary to ensure this critical infrastructure remains operational at all times. Alberta is a leader in interprovincial trade and a driver of economic corridors. As an example, we've worked

recently with the government of B.C. and the federal government on the export of hydrogen and ammonia, and we'll keep advocating for faster, more reliable one-window reviews for major projects, with the province of Alberta leading those reviews.

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

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the response. Given that Alberta's energy sector remains a pillar of our economy and a major contributor to government revenues required to finance our cherished government programs and given that expanding access to global markets is critical to ensuring long-term prosperity and energy security and further given Alberta's ongoing efforts to develop LNG infrastructure and critical mineral resources, can the minister outline what specific strategies our government is pursuing to expand Alberta's energy exports to new international markets?

2:30

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the reasons that we have such an intentional focus on international trade, why we're visiting jurisdictions like Japan and South Korea, why we've made recent trips to the Indo-Pacific, Philippines, and Indonesia. We know that the world is looking for Alberta's food and Alberta's energy, and with a collaborative partner, hopefully, in this new federal government and with our partners in Confederation, the provinces and territories, we hope to be able to develop the infrastructure necessary to get our product to them. That's what the world is looking for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that Alberta's ability to expand its energy trade is directly tied to pipeline access and given that interprovincial and federal regulatory challenges continue to limit Alberta's ability to move its resources to tidewater and further given that our province must negotiate with both the federal government and other provinces to develop critical infrastructure, can the minister explain the collaborative efforts our government is making to secure pipeline expansion agreements and ensure our energy reaches new markets?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is leading this work with the Council of the Federation, and I'm pleased to report that even at my table with the Committee on Internal Trade we're seeing progress. Provinces and territories and the federal government are unified on expanding energy corridors across this country and, ideally in our case, getting Alberta's energy to the many customers around the world who want it. We're working with our provincial and territorial counterparts on the mutual recognition of consumer goods, on trucking to make that more seamless across Canada. We've just launched a website at alberta.ca/freetrade where you can tell us what trade barriers you want removed.

Teachers' Contract Negotiations

Ms Chapman: With record high voter turnout Alberta teachers have rejected the UCP's collective agreement offer. Teachers have done more than their fair share of belt tightening, seeing only a 5.3 per cent wage increase over the last decade. After six years of UCP mismanagement of our classrooms complexity and class sizes are out of control. Teachers have been asked to do more with less for far too long. When will this government start listening to our teaching professionals and put an offer on the table that respects the incredible work they do?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we are listening very carefully to the needs of our teachers. This isn't our proposal; this is one that was supported and recommended by the Alberta Teachers' Association. They recommended this deal to their members. We worked together to ensure that we could put a reasonable deal before their members. Now, I understand, of course, that members have rejected the deal. I'm happy to continue to listen to our teachers to see how we can work together to find an alternative path forward, and I wait to hear some more from our teachers as to what we can do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Chapman: Given that I'm talking about teachers, not the ATA, given that 1 in 3 Alberta teachers report that they plan to leave the profession, either through a complete career change, early retirement, or fleeing this province for one who values their contributions, given that the ATA has reported that only 22 per cent of teachers feel happy at work, given the significant fatigue, moral distress, and burnout facing teachers, what exactly is this minister doing to ensure we're attracting and retaining the professionals we need?

Mr. Nicolaides: There are a number of things that we're doing, Mr. Speaker. We've increased operating funding into our education system by \$1.1 billion over the next three years. That'll help us recruit and retain over 4,000 additional educational support staff. We're prepared to invest additional funds to help improve classroom conditions. We've increased the classroom complexity grant by 20 per cent, increased many of our base operating rates, and are now projecting to be spending close to \$10 billion in our education system. We're listening very closely to our teachers, and I'm happy to continue to work with them to make sure we get a deal.

Ms Chapman: Given that 86 per cent of teachers report that the complexity and diversity of students have increased yet classroom supports have decreased, given that this government's increase to the classroom complexity grant amounts to a pathetic \$13 per student and given that teachers have been begging this government to provide the supports they need to manage modern complex classrooms, will the UCP step up and provide the resources our classrooms need, or is a strike the only way they can get this government's attention?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we're already doing that. We heard concerns regarding the three-year weighted moving average, and we made changes. We heard concerns regarding classroom complexity and increased funding in that area. We've heard concerns about other challenges and increased funding generally to student supports to the tune of \$1.6 billion. We're working very carefully with our teachers and school boards to ensure that we can sustain a strong, world-class education system. I know that that's not something the NDP ever had to worry about because when they were in power – yup – they told Albertans to leave Alberta. They told them to find work in B.C. We're happy to see Alberta booming again.

Women's Health Care

Ms Hayter: It's Women's Health Week here in Alberta. Women make 50.1 per cent of the population, yet research funding for women's health represents a shocking, inadequate 3.4 per cent of overall health research dollars. This government continues to dismiss women's experience in the health system by chronically underfunding targeted research, clear data, insufficient reporting, and policies disconnected from women's lived health realities here in Alberta. To the minister of status of women: how can this government justify allocating such a minimal

amount of research funding on issues that are impacting half of Albertans in women's health?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to that question on women's health issues. In terms of the research, in fact, the members opposite, when they were in government, provided zero for women's research. We, on the other hand, doubled our initial commitment of \$10 million to \$20 million over two years. That is a commitment to make sure that women's issues are being addressed, that they're being looked at. They are unique, and we deserve that.

Ms Hayter: Given that the majority of Alberta's front-line workers, educators, and caregivers are women and given that their economic security depends on our championing better health outcomes for women and given that health delays are sidelining women from the workforce and given that women's full participation in the economy is critical for Alberta's economic future with preventable health barriers forcing women out of their jobs, when will the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade take action to ensure women's health is treated as an essential component of building and sustaining Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's incredible what our government does to support women in the workplace, whether it's the scholarships we have, from the Persons Case scholarship to the STEM scholarship to our recently announced women in applied arts scholarship, that help women in underrepresented fields to the amazing work that multiple ministries do to support organizations like Elevate Aviation, Women Building Futures, and other organizations that get women into underrepresented jobs and support their economic security. This government continues to support women and will continue to do so in the future.

Ms Hayter: Given that that was a terrible spin when I was asking about health and not STEM and given that Albertans continue to pay out of pocket for birth control that's provided free in other provinces and given that universal access to prescription contraception is a basic health care right – we know that access saves health care dollars, reduces unplanned pregnancies, and helps people plan for their futures – and given that the federal government has stepped up and introduced a national pharmacare plan that includes contraceptive coverage, again to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: why is the government fighting the federal government about the economy but refuses to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Albertans, particularly women who are Albertans, can rest assured that we are continuing to provide access to reproductive care products in the province. We continue to work with the federal government on the pharmacare, but I have to tell you that it's very disappointing to see that the federal government – of the \$1.5 billion that they promised to pharmacare, they've already allocated roughly about a billion of that to just three provinces. How are we going to adequately get that funding when they haven't promised enough?

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue to points of order.

2:40

Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 2:05 the hon. Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate we're back to points of order, but I think it's an easy one to deal with. At 2:05 or just before the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was speaking, addressing a question surrounding what the opposition has called corrupt care, quote, unquote, and then continued in the question, while asking the Minister of Justice, to say, "besties with the man at the heart of the allegations of kickbacks and corruption against the UCP" and continuing on: "Will the Minister . . . admit that he doesn't support a full public inquiry? Because [he's] not recusing himself, he is directly implicated." Implicated in what? In kickbacks and corruption.

Mr. Speaker, this is indirectly doing what you should not do directly, accusing another member of this House personally of kickbacks and corruption. I understand that there can be allegations against a government. I understand this is an important place of debate. I understand we need to address these in an open forum. None of that requires any member of this House to make personal allegations against members of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I disagree. I believe what we are talking about is a matter of debate. There are absolutely no personal allegations made here. In this case the word "implicated" is referring to being connected or involved, and in this case we are talking about a conflict of interest, a perceived one perhaps. Certainly, I don't claim to have all the information to know if there is an actual conflict of interest, but it is a matter of debate in this House whether or not the Minister of Justice should be in the role he is given the relationships that have been under debate. No intention of an insult or personal accusation intended, but we are quite concerned about this.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule unless there are other submissions. Hon. members, it is, of course, the Speaker's utmost responsibility to allow members a wide latitude in making the very important cases that they will make here inside the Chamber. I will add that on this issue there's been lots of very passionate language. I think it is a little bit unclear as to exactly what the hon. member was referring to the minister being directly implicated in. I think that it is strong language, but I think that members have the right to use such strong language. They don't have the right to accuse a member of committing a crime. I'm not convinced that that's what took place here today.

So it's not a point of order, but I do just provide a caution or a reminder that we're not able to make the allegations that another member has committed a crime. I consider this not a point of order, and I consider it dealt with and concluded.

At 2:16 the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to call a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). I'm not as detail driven as the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, so I don't know the exact time, but I know it was Wednesday, May 7. The hon. Member for Camrose

shouted some abusive and rageful language. A lot of it I didn't catch, but I definitely heard "terrible minister" to the esteemed Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. This hurtful and disrespectful language is sure to cause disorder, and I believe it's clearly a point of order and that she should apologize and withdraw.

Thank you.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear the comment. I wouldn't be able to comment on what the member may or may not have said, so I would leave it in your very capable hands. But I certainly would argue that, regardless of what was said – and I don't know if I heard this properly, but if the Member for Lesser Slave Lake said that it was a racial comment . . .

Mr. Sinclair: No. Rageful.

Mr. Schow: Oh, a rage comment. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. Again, sometimes I've got to get my ears checked, it sounds like.

All that to say that I didn't hear the comment, but I'll leave it in your very capable hands.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I can confirm that the hon. member did say the following words. "You were a terrible minister." This puts the Speaker in an awkward position because on occasion people share very passionate views about a minister's performance. I might, just for levity's sake, highlight that on occasion some people like to suggest that certain members are the worst type of minister in Alberta's history, which could be considered to be as aggressive as saying someone was a terrible minister. Now, I would strongly urge against it. However, I'm not convinced that on this occasion it rises to the level of a point of order, and I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Our final point of order for the day was at 2:26, when the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, I did rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j) when the Member for Calgary-Acadia was asking a question of the hon. Minister of Health. The member prefaced it with all kinds of things I believe that are not happening and then, finally, said: this is something any competent Health minister would understand. Now, I understand if you believe . . .

Mr. Sabir: Matter of debate.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has something to say on this point of order, he is well within his rights to stand in this Chamber and argue said point of order, but at the moment I do have the floor. I would ask for that respect as I've always given him when he rises in this Chamber, at least on points of order.

Mr. Speaker, what I would say is that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. To call the Minister of Health incompetent I think is inflammatory language. Members on this side of the House certainly take that as a personal attack. Now, I understand that the members opposite may not see it the same way, but this is becoming a routine, where the NDP is deciding to use language that could be considered indirectly but really more directly a personal attack, whether it's the hon. Premier, the Minister of Justice, or now today the hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, I'll leave it in your capable hands, but I believe it is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Isn't this the most fun thing that we could ever be doing? I think so.

I would like to suggest that the Government House Leader is mistaken in this being a point of order. I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but I believe that the Member for Calgary-Acadia talked about the fact that measles are 100 per cent preventable, vaccines are safe, effective, and life saving, as well that vaccines work best when used preventatively, which any competent Minister of Health would understand. This is a declarative statement which I enthusiastically agree with. It was not making an accusation of any individual. I believe the member speaking at the time was making a series of statements and then accused the Health ministry of sitting on their hands when 10 cases became 30 and 30 cases became more than 200.

I do not see a point of order here, and I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule unless there are additional submissions.

With the benefit of the Blues you both have very robustly described what they are. The crux of the matter is this, when the hon. member said, "something that any competent Health minister would understand." Of course, the implication is that the hon. the Health minister, not the ministry, is the incompetent one.

Let me say this. In the strongest possible of caution, both to the hon. Member for Camrose for her remarks and now to the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia, these personalized remarks always, always, always lead to disorder and an unruly House. I know any Speaker would prefer that not to be the case, and I will leave it at that with respect to other Speakers to make decisions on such matters.

In this case this is not a point of order, and I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Statement by the Speaker

Resignation of Hon. Nathan Cooper, Speaker of the Assembly

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a statement which I would like to make. As you know, I'm a traditionalist, and I wanted the first address to be to the House – unfortunately, CBC had other ideas – not in a social media post or a Friday afternoon press release but to the members whom I serve. You deserve to be the first to hear from me.

Serving this Assembly has been one of the greatest honours of my lifetime. Standing alongside each of you and serving you has been a dream that I've lived out each day, but today that dream comes to an end as my time in the chair will only last a few more minutes.

2:50

I believe that we are at a critical time in our province and in our country with respect to how we interact with the world and with the United States of America. How we do that interaction, I believe, is just as important as what we do to interact. Recently the Premier asked if I would serve as the senior representative to the United States of America based in Washington, DC. I have accepted that offer and consider it a great honour to serve Albertans and Alberta in a new way. Serving as the 14th Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta over the past almost six years has prepared me for such a time as this. Working as the Assembly's chief diplomat has equipped me to be ready for my next role, serving Albertans in a new and meaningful way.

In just a few moments my time in the chair will come to a close. While I will not officially resign as Speaker until Monday evening at midnight to allow the House and its members to prepare for a Speaker election, I have spoken with both the House leaders and recommended that a new Speaker election take place on Tuesday, May 13, at 10 a.m. The Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chair of Committees have accepted the additional responsibilities over the next couple of days and will assist the Assembly while members prepare themselves for an election.

Did you know that I am the eighth longest serving Speaker of Alberta? For 2,177 days I've sat through 345 question periods totalling 287 hours, or 12 full days of question periods. I've presided over 2,195 hours of debate, or 91 full 24-hour periods, and a whopping 17.9 million words have been spilled on the floor of the Assembly.

Who has been there with me? My colleague the Deputy Speaker. For all of that time we have been on this rocket ride together. Elected in 2015, you have become a true, lifetime friend, and I'm proud to have served this chair with you.

My appointment will take place in early June, and I will serve as a private member of this Assembly until that time. I will speak directly to the constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills in the coming days, but suffice to say in the remaining days of session as a private member I've got a few things to get off my chest.

Thank you to the constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills who have supported me, thank you to the moms and dads who make our province what it is, thank you to the truck drivers and the farmers who make the world spin, and thank you to the volunteers and activists. Without you our collective success is impossible.

They say that you're only as good as the people that you surround yourself with, and I have had some of the greatest in my office. Thank you to Katja for being so incredible, to Andrew for working with me and for not just being a great colleague but an incredible friend.

Thank you to my long-serving chief of staff, who I owe much of my success to. Some days you were the gas pedal and some days you were the brakes, but you always knew which pedal to push on which days. I appreciate you. I'm sure that you will continue to do great things in the future, whatever comes next for you, but your service to our province has made a huge impact, not just on me but members of the Assembly, and I am deeply grateful.

Thank you to Brenda in my Olds office for your thousands and thousands of hours of worries, your relentless support and to all others who've supported me, including Ethan, Nathan, Alana, and many others.

Lastly, to my friends and family. You all know who you are; too many to note today. You've served alongside of me on this team that we've had together. In many ways my service has been your service. Your support has meant the world to me, and this would have been impossible without you. On rare occasions when politicians receive praise and limelight, you deserve all of the credit.

Hon. members, our democracy is worth fighting for. It's worth standing up for. In my only words of caution this afternoon let me say this. Sometimes when we don't like the results of an election here in Alberta, in our country, or around the world, we are inclined to say things like: our democracy is broken. I worry that it has a chilling impact on our democracy and our people.

Hon. members, our democracy isn't broken. It's alive and well. It's more accessible and open to an overwhelming majority of Albertans today than it has been at any point in time in our history. If a new Canadian or a young Albertan shows up in Alberta today, it's possible that they can be here in these seats in virtually no time at all. There are tons of examples in this Chamber, that I can see today, that are proof positive that hard work and dedication breeds

new hope and new opportunity, and those opportunities lead to a strong, robust, open, and transparent democracy. Our democracy is truly unique. It isn't about how much money you have or who you know, but it's about building teams of people to work together to accomplish a common goal. That has gotten all of us to this point today.

Lastly, let me remind you of this. I have told thousands of young students across our province over the past decade that I have served that there is more in common between all of us than divides us. Every single morning my colleagues in the government wake up and come to this place to hope to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family, and my colleagues in the opposition come to this place every morning with the exact same goal. They wake up with a desire to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family. The only thing that sets us apart is that one team of people has deeply held, passionate views on how to make that happen and the other team holds an entirely different set of values and views on how to make that happen. But together we share a common unity, a common sense of purpose to defend our democracy, to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you each for your support and trust and respect that you've placed in me as the Speaker, not just your Speaker but the people's Speaker. May God bless you. May God bless Alberta.

Now, for the very last time, hon. members, we are at Orders of the Day.

Hon. Members: Ordres du jour. [Standing ovation]

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there may be a request for unanimous consent.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the Assembly to revert to Ministerial Statements.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:00

Ministerial Statements

Resignation of Hon. Nathan Cooper, Speaker of the Assembly

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to rise and I want to thank you both personally and on behalf of the government caucus for all your years of service. For 10 years you faithfully represented the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and for the past six years you've acted as a referee of this House, working to maintain order when things have got heated and to maintain decorum and debate.

The harsh reality of this job is that at some point in time we will all leave, and even at some point in time the Speaker of the day will read our name as we have passed on from this light to the next. All we can hope for is to leave a legacy, and Mr. Speaker, you have done that. We all know that we will miss the Chamber time with you with a well-timed joke to break the tension, with your careful and steady hand in managing this Chamber, your distinct Alberta tricorn that you've been sporting recently, and, of course, your signature: Orders of the Day, Ordres du jour.

Again on behalf of the government caucus, Speaker, I will break protocol and I'll say: Speaker Nathan Cooper, thank you for your years of service. Thank you for your diligent work. Thank you for your time serving Alberta.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Alberta's New Democrats and our Official Opposition caucus I genuinely want to thank you for

your 10 years of service to Albertans and for your stewardship of this Assembly since 2019. You're only a few weeks away from six years. You didn't want to hang on just a little bit longer?

The job that you have, which is to maintain orderly debate in this place, is not for the faint of heart, but your fairness, humanity, knowledge, and deep respect for parliamentary tradition has absolutely made this Legislature more thoughtful and more respectful. Thank you for bringing us such legislative classics as zing; yay; order, order, order; Ordres du jour but also retro OQP and Legoslatures among the many other outreach programs and classroom visits and things you've done to engage community and the many operational changes at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

I will just say that I and my caucus have always appreciated your approachability, your willingness to talk about anything and to provide your advice and perspective. While you were our Speaker – and that is so much work – I also want to say that we have heard and have seen that you are also a very incredible MLA who is loved, appreciated, and known for always listening to your constituents, meeting with them, and working to represent them.

Finally, to paraphrase a great quote, there is nothing wrong with this country that can't be fixed by what is right with this country, and, Mr. Speaker, your remarks today were poignant and important at this moment. We share your views, and we thank you for what you said today.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I hope you get to keep the hat.

Thank you. [applause]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 41

Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the words that were just expressed here today.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

It's my honour to rise and move third reading of Bill 41, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025.

I want to start by thanking all members who have contributed to the discussion on this bill during second reading and in Committee of the Whole. I also want to recognize the incredible work of the team in Forestry and Parks, especially our colleagues in the lands division and the hunting and fishing branch who helped shape this thoughtful, forward-looking legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I truly hope that the conversation today focuses on what this bill is about – wildlife stewardship, ethical hunting, and ensuring our laws reflect today's realities – and that the members opposite can focus on what is included in the bill and not the asides and misdirects they have become so accustomed to. As I expect to hear them doubling down on false claims about grizzly bear hunts or manufacturing outrage over cougar quotas, I would like to first take a minute to address those claims we've heard so often in this Chamber.

Let me be clear. There is no grizzly bear hunt in Alberta. The only time a grizzly may be removed is when it poses a serious threat to public safety or property, and even then it's as a last resort, using the same criteria to guide decisions that fish and wildlife officers use when they euthanize a bear. Since the policy was introduced nearly a year ago, not a single grizzly has been removed under it.

On cougars: once again I would like to point out that this year's quota is 132, lower than last year's at 137 despite including twice

the area, well below the 167 allowed annually under the previous NDP government's disastrous policies. If the members opposite would like to talk about a reckless and unsustainable approach, I suggest they take a long, hard look at their own records.

Our government has moved in the opposite direction, taking a responsible, science-based path to managing wildlife populations, using input from biologists, Indigenous communities, and local stakeholders. We follow Alberta's existing wildlife management plans, regularly reviewing population data, habitat conditions, and harvest rates. We've reduced tags for species like moose and deer where needed and increased tags where necessary to manage the predator impacts and to sustain biodiversity. That's what real stewardship looks like, and that is what is at the core of Bill 41.

At its heart, Mr. Speaker, Bill 41 is about balance; balancing the needs of wildlife and conservation, supporting ethical hunting and trapping practices, aligning our rules with federal law, Indigenous rights, and the real-world needs of Albertans. This legislation modernizes outdated rules, streamlines enforcement, and empowers Albertans to be responsibly engaged in hunting and wildlife management. These changes reflect the values that Albertans hold dear: responsibility, respect for nature, and the right to continue the traditions that define life for many living in rural Alberta. Yes, there is a big wide world outside the cities where hunting, trapping, and fishing aren't just weekend hobbies; they're ways of life. We know that the people who live in the city enjoy the same thing. They put food on the table, support local economies, and build deep intergenerational knowledge of the land. That's something we should all respect.

I was disappointed to hear some of the members opposite suggest that this bill only impacts a small number of people. That's a telling comment. It speaks volumes about the urban privilege we too often see from the NDP. These changes matter to rural Albertans, and they matter to First Nations communities who live close to the land. They matter to many in our cities, too, Albertans who grew up around firearms, hunting traditions, and the outdoors.

One of the pieces of this bill most spoken of relates to youth hunting, so let me address some of the concerns. Right now Alberta law requires minors to be directly supervised while hunting even if they've passed the Canadian firearms safety course and hold a valid minor's permit from the RCMP. That creates confusion. It contradicts federal law, and oftentimes it cannot even be enforced. Under the Firearms Act youth aged 12 to 17 can already possess and use firearms for hunting independently if approved by the Chief Firearms Officer and if they meet all the training and safety conditions, and even then a firearms officer and parents are entitled to place conditions on that licence and its use. All this amendment does is bring Alberta's law in line with the federal law, ensuring that we're not layering unnecessary provincial red tape overtop of a system that already works. No shortcuts, no relaxing of safety standards; just consistency and respect for responsible youth who've earned that trust.

This matters especially in our rural communities and especially for many in Indigenous families where hunting is both cultural and practical. It's a rite of passage, it's a way to learn self-reliance and responsibility, and it's often how families ensure there's food on the table through the winter. Respecting treaty rights means ensuring those traditions aren't buried under confusing or contradictory laws.

Let me also clarify. The Wildlife Act has never touched on treaty rights, and it does not seek to. That's federal jurisdiction. But I welcome that discussion because many parts of this bill do support treaty rights by making sustainable hunting more accessible and respectful of community practices.

Bill 41, if passed, will deliver real results. It would clarify residency rules, introducing a six-month requirement so only Alberta residents can access resident tags. It would modernize regulations, including

digital licences, mobile harvest logs, and future e-tagging for big game. It would remove outdated requirements like mandatory orange clothing, which is not effective and hasn't been enforced in decades. It would improve hunting ethics, allowing dogs on leash to track wounded game, and remove red tape around meat harvest and boat anchoring for waterfowl.

3:10

It would bring us in line with the rest of the world on using laser aiming devices, modern .22 centre-fire cartridges, and accessible draw weights for archery. It would streamline enforcement, letting officers act quickly without unnecessary judicial orders, and make it easier to transport injured animals to care. All of these are common-sense, balanced changes that make Alberta's system more efficient, more humane, and more in line with modern realities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 41 is about looking forward, not backwards to outdated approaches or political smears. It's about getting the rules right so Albertans can continue to hunt, trap, fish, and manage wildlife ethically, safely, and sustainably. Let's not lose sight of what this bill really is. It's smart policy. It's built on evidence and engagement. It respects tradition while preparing us for the future.

I hope all members can rise above partisanship today and vote for the people this bill actually serves: our hunters, our rural families, our Indigenous communities, our youth, and everyone who believes in responsible wildlife management. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Banff-Kananaskis has risen.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, for one last time, to speak to Bill 41 in third reading. The minister and I don't agree on a lot of things, but we can agree on the majority of the contents of this bill. I will be supporting Bill 41 in third reading. The reason for that is that I agree with the minister. The bill does modernize some aspects of hunting regulations that have needed to be modernized, I guess you could say, for quite some time, and this bill definitely has a role to play in that.

The minister has repeatedly said that he has consulted on this bill, and while I believe that to be true, I do think that there are some groups that were not consulted, and I would like to take a moment to share their views now. In particular, I have an e-mail here from the North American Packgoat Association, who is concerned about the change of domestic sheep not being allowed to accompany hunters in wild sheep habitat. This presents one of the challenges with hunting regulations, Mr. Speaker. There is abundant science to show that there is considerable risk to wild sheep populations from domestic goats transmitting diseases, in particular a kind of pneumonia. That being said, this bill does impact people who use goats for backcountry packing, for hunting.

Mr. Eggen: Goats?

Dr. Elmeligi: Goats. Yeah. Goat packing: it's a thing.

This group was actually wondering if there was a way that they could provide evidence that their domestic goats had been tested for disease and if they could still be permitted to go into the backcountry with their disease-free goats. I understand that this adds another layer of bureaucracy, and I don't know if that would necessarily work, because, as I said, I do support this provision in the bill, but what is clear to me, Mr. Speaker, is that the North American Packgoat Association was not consulted on the bill. They tried to reach out to the minister, and the minister and his team did not get back to them.

The other people who were not consulted on the bill, as far as I can tell, Mr. Speaker, were First Nations. The minister has stood up in this House and accused me of not consulting with First Nations, not knowing what First Nations want. He stands here and he speaks to

how important hunting and trapping is to First Nations culture, customs, and subsistence, yet, as far as I know, First Nations were not consulted on the contents of this bill.

When I speak with First Nations, Mr. Speaker, the biggest concern that they have when it comes to hunting is related to access, not related to the modernization of techniques or tags, not related to whether or not domestic goats can go into wild goat habitat; it's related to the fact that there are gates at the bottom of roads on public lands, and those gates can be operated by a number of industry or government entities. That access is what stops First Nations hunters from being able to get to their traditional lands and territories to hunt and trap. That access is not addressed in this bill. And it's actually very telling to me that the minister doesn't even talk about that in the House when it is the number one thing that I hear from First Nations leaders and citizens all the time. I would also say that the minister is correct. We have gone back and forth quite a bit about the science and what is lacking in this bill in that regard.

I have thousands of e-mails from Albertans in my inbox, Mr. Speaker, who have expressed concerns about the way this minister is making decisions on hunting and trapping. I've shared a lot of those concerns in this House, but there is one string of thought that ties all of these together, and that is that the minister never got back to them. The minister did not ask many people how they felt about updated hunting and trapping regulations, and he has most certainly not consulted with Albertans on changing hunting tag numbers and trapping quotas. So when the minister says that he has consulted, I have to ask: with whom? When? Where? Can the minister table his calendar to show who he has met with? Can he table meeting minutes so that we can see who he met with and who he consulted on this bill and what the results of those conversations were?

At the heart of it, this bill is not addressing the problem that Albertans have with hunting and trapping right now, which is really about tag limits and trapping quotas. I have said it in this House before, and I'll say it again, Mr. Speaker, just to be very clear. I am not against hunting. I believe in subsistence hunting. I like having a moose or an elk in my freezer to last me through the winter. Moose pepperoni has got to be my favourite meat ever. That being said, sustainable hunting management is critical, and the way that we achieve sustainability when it comes to hunting limits is through science.

Thousands of e-mails asking the minister for justification on his hunting and trapping limits have gone unanswered by the minister. There are currently three active petitions on change.org: one, stop Alberta's grizzly bear and elk trophy hunting program, 14,376 signatures; two, stop the grizzly bear hunting amendment, protect Alberta's wildlife, 5,999 signatures; three, halt wolverine trapping practices in Alberta, 13,270 signatures. Now, this is not the wording that I would choose. I have not crafted these petitions. There is a lot about them that I think are questionable ways of presenting the issue and its reality, but it is how Albertans are perceiving these decisions.

These Albertans have a right for their voices to be heard and for the minister to respond to their concerns, and he has not. Every single one of these petitions question the science and the wildlife management principles behind these decisions, and they're right to do that, Mr. Speaker, because science and sound wildlife management are not at the heart of the decisions that the minister is making.

The minister talks about the rights of all Albertans to appreciate wildlife, and I agree with that, too. I think every single Albertan should be able to go outside and appreciate the diversity and the incredibility of Alberta's wildlife, but the minister favours hunters and trappers in his management decisions. That cannot be denied, Mr.

Speaker. There is a clear bias here. The minister is directly connected to this community, and his decisions favour that community.

If the minister is not favouring hunters and trappers and really just wants to provide all Albertans an opportunity to appreciate and enjoy Alberta wildlife, I have some questions. Will the minister be introducing a wildlife viewing bill or policy to the Legislature? Will we be promoting wildlife viewing as a way to attract people to come to Alberta to view grizzly bears at the meadow behind the Peter Lougheed visitor centre, for example, Mr. Speaker? Will we be creating policy and legislation to encourage nonconsumptive use of wildlife? Will the minister travel to foreign countries and sell Alberta birdwatching experiences or wildlife viewing experiences? He's spending tens of thousands of dollars travelling all over the world selling hunting experiences for wildlife. Will he put that same effort into promoting nonconsumptive use of wildlife? I don't think so. That is a great example of how this minister is incredibly biased, not only in his decision-making but even in the way that he thinks about wildlife on the landscape.

3:20

Everything this minister does is about promoting hunting and trapping. In its definition there is nothing wrong with that. However, Mr. Speaker, when we consider the cumulative effects of promoting hunting and trapping, increasing tag limits, removing trapping quotas, we start to see a pattern of just increasing the number of wildlife that will be killed under this minister's watch. And I will emphasize that not all of those members or individuals of wildlife communities are killed for subsistence and for food. That is a very different thing also.

At the heart of it, the minister and I are philosophically opposed. The minister believes in wildlife, that it is only useful if it is consumed. He believes in nature and dominion over nature. It is a philosophical value set. I, on the other hand, hold more of a mutualistic value set, Mr. Speaker, and believe that all living beings have a right to exist free from harm. I believe that we can live with nature and coexist with wildlife even if the occasional individual does end up becoming pepperoni in my freezer.

Yes, I hear the inherent contradiction in that, but that is why science is so critical in this conversation, Mr. Speaker, because our individual perceptions and emotions and wants and needs should not inform how we manage wildlife populations during a biodiversity crisis, during times of rampant habitat loss across the province for a variety of reasons. We need science to inform this discussion, and unfortunately it is not.

I will support this bill because it does modernize aspects of our hunting regulations that do need to be modernized, but I also want to recognize that the motivation to update these hunting regulations is coming from a minister who is actually holding Alberta wildlife management practices back by focusing on antiquated consumptive views of what wildlife is good for. I've seen a lot of grizzly bears in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. As a grizzly bear biologist I have seen hundreds of them over the years, not all different ones, by the way. Hundreds of times I have seen grizzly bears, and every single time I have, my heart has skipped a beat; I have lost my voice in admiration. Seeing a grizzly bear walk across an Alberta meadow is unlike anything I have ever seen in my whole entire life, and I look forward to spending more time in the wilderness this summer in the hopes that I can just catch a glimpse of another bear. Never have I wanted to shoot one.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? Seeing none.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a third time]

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

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 50
Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move an amendment to the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

The Deputy Chair: This will be referred to as A1. The member can proceed at this time.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Would you like me to read it in? Yeah? Okay. I move that Bill 50, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 1 as follows: (a) in subsection (9) by adding the following after the proposed section 48.1:

Residency and voting for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation 48.2(1) This section applies to every election that is held after September 1, 2025, in a local jurisdiction in the same area as the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

(2) Notwithstanding anything in this Act, an individual is deemed to be a resident of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo for the purposes of sections 21, 27 and 47 to 49 if the individual makes a statement in accordance with subsection (3).

(3) For the purposes of this section, a statement must be in writing and signed by the individual and state that the individual is a resident of land set apart as an Indian reserve, within the meaning of the Indian Act (Canada), for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation that is entirely within the boundaries of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

(4) A statement referred to in subsection (2) must be submitted with a nomination if

- (a) an individual who is being nominated under section 27 is relying on the statement to establish the individual's qualifications in accordance with section 21, and
- (b) an individual who signs a nomination in accordance with section 27(1)(b) is relying on the statement to establish the individual's residency of an Indian reserve referred to in subsection (3).

(5) Before opening a voting station in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, the presiding deputy at the voting station must post a notice respecting the entitlement of electors to make a statement referred to in subsection (2) within each voting compartment and at a conspicuous location within the voting station, and the presiding deputy must ensure that the notice remains posted there until the voting station closes.

(6) Before issuing a ballot to an elector, a deputy must offer the elector an opportunity to make a statement referred to in subsection (2).

(7) Notwithstanding anything in this Act, if an elected authority has made a resolution under section 77.1(2) and an application is made for a special ballot, the returning officer or deputy who receives the application must provide the applicant with the following:

- (a) the forms referred to in section 77.1(3)(b);
- (b) a form containing the statements referred to in subsection (3)(a), (b) and (c) for the elector to complete;

(c) sufficient instructional information on how to complete the form.

(b) in subsection (13) by adding the following after the proposed section 53.03:

Proof of elector eligibility in Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

53.04(1) This section applies to an election held after September 1, 2025, in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

(2) Notwithstanding section 53, a person who attends at a voting station in the Region Municipality of Wood Buffalo for the purpose of voting or submits an application for a special ballot under section 77.1(1.1) is permitted to vote if the person

- (a) makes a statement in accordance with section 48.2, and
- (b) produces one piece of identification issued by a Canadian government, whether federal, provincial or local, or an agency of that government, that contains a photograph of the individual.

and, finally, (c) by striking out subsection (14) and substituting the following:

(14) Section 69(5) is amended by striking out "section 53(1)(b) or (2) or 78" and substituting "section 48.1, 48.2, 53(1)(b) or (2), 53.03(2)(a), 53.04(2)(1) or 78".

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Okay. Mr. Chair, I move this amendment because it is time that this Chamber starts righting historic wrongs. The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation is not asking for a complete rescission of the legislative framework that exists in this province; they're asking to further enhance and be added to this beautiful province's unique framework. This amendment goes to the heart of a unique situation that finds itself in northern Alberta. We see the residents in a small municipality of Fort Chipewyan within the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo prevented from exercising their democratic rights to vote, run, or generally participate in local elections despite participating in civic life in all other matters.

Mr. Chair, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, due to a myriad of historical injustices, acquired treaty land within the municipality of Fort Chipewyan. Such injustices included being forcibly removed from the area by the governments of the day and all of their lands being reconfigured to remove the First Nations from these areas which provided natural abundance and beauty for folks that came to this province.

3:30

In 2022 the ACFN received an addition to reserve, or a treaty land entitlement. This TLE is rooted in the unique history and development of Fort Chipewyan. I'd like to quote an article from *Alberta Native News*, which I'll table in this House at a later date.

Before 1970, ACFN members lived on a reserve along the Athabasca Delta. After the construction of the Bennett Dam, wildlife populations in the Delta collapsed and ACFN's reserve became largely uninhabitable. Further, the federal and provincial governments began to centralize housing, health, education and municipal services in Fort Chipewyan and most ACFN members had little choice but to relocate to Fort [Chip].

This is the historical background as to why ACFN is asking for this amendment. It's been three years, and this government has done zilch to get this addressed. Now is that time with the Local Authorities Election Act being open in this bill.

Mr. Chair, this amendment does not seek to remove the rights of any Albertan in this province. It does not seek to prevent any Albertan from participating in their democratic rights. Instead, this amendment intends to add democratic rights for a group of people in Alberta that have been forgotten and ignored for far too long.

We have guests here today that have a deeply vested interest in this amendment and who have travelled a great distance to be here in the hopes that the UCP will strongly consider this amendment and pass it accordingly. These folks have seen the direct impact that not having a say in decisions has affected them and has had on their people, on their lands, and on their future. Mr. Chair, this amendment seeks to ameliorate that.

The heart of this amendment seeks to specifically add the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation into the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. Both Athabasca Chipewyan and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo include the hamlet of Fort Chipewyan in ward 2. Since it was settled in 1788 by non-Indigenous peoples, the coexistence with First Nations throughout the lands, that this province now finds itself situated on, was a thing of beauty and art. But now ACFN residents living within Fort Chipewyan are currently not eligible to vote in the RMWB's municipal elections due to limitations in the Local Authorities Election Act.

This exclusion means that residents who rely on, contribute to, and are affected by municipal decisions have no voice in the democratic processes that shape their daily lives. To deny voting rights on the basis of reserve residency ignores this practical integration and undermines principles of equal representation. Mr. Chair, it is also discriminatory based on residency. Recognizing their eligibility would not only align with democratic fairness but also reinforce the collaborative spirit already embedded in local governance.

Furthermore, there is a belief that ACFN members living on-reserve should not be permitted to vote as they do not pay municipal taxes. However, these same members on-reserve also do not pay provincial or federal tax, yet they are still eligible to vote. So that same argument does not hold weight. As Alberta continues to advance meaningful reconciliation efforts on several policy files, we believe that this is another critical opportunity to address this gap and align municipal electoral rights with the realities of intergovernmental co-operation.

Examples of how this can be successfully accomplished exist in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, our neighbours to the east and west. In British Columbia some of the First Nations that participate in regional districts in British Columbia elections include Tsawwassen in Metro Vancouver; Huu-ay-aht, Uchucklesaht, Ucluelet, Toquaht in Alberni-Clayoquot; Sliammon in qathet; Kyuquot Checlesseht in Strathcona; and Sechelt in the Sunshine Coast. In Saskatchewan First Nations with urban reserves have residents in the municipality who also happen to be registered under the Indian Act with their respective First Nation. They are all able to vote in the municipal elections.

There is precedent for this. I assure you that we can do that here in Alberta. We can be forward thinking, and we can move this needle forward. Why is Alberta any different? I urge the minister to elaborate in his response to this amendment as to why the situation in Alberta is any different than either of our neighbouring jurisdictions. ACFN is not asking us to recreate the wheel. We have the distinct opportunity to address this grievance in a real, tangible way today.

I urge the members opposite to consider this amendment seriously and thoroughly because it will enfranchise people who do in fact live within a municipality – we can't escape that fact – but who do not right now have a voice in the very important decisions that need to be made in ward 2 of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. This includes making decisions related to their water treatment facilities, waste management, public works, safety and emergency preparedness, and environmental protection, to name a few. We know how fraught things are in the area with respect to emergency preparedness and environmental protection. We saw this just last year, and we will likely see it again.

It is absolutely critical that the ACFN members living within the municipality have a voice. Both the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation wholly support this, wholly support moving this amendment forward, and wholly support enfranchising status Indians living within the municipality of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. Amending the Local Authorities Election Act to empower ACFN residents within the RMWB to vote in local elections would reflect a fair and inclusive approach to local governance and strengthen relationships across our communities.

I heard the minister upstairs today say that he understands that if Indigenous people live on-reserve, even if it's encompassed by a municipality, they can't vote in the municipality. This is the issue – I know the minister gets it – and this is why this amendment meets it. It's clear that the minister has no concerns or urgency on this and, what we have said in this House and to the media just this afternoon, it shows. Mr. Chair, this is why this amendment presents us with this opportunity to make substantive changes to the legislation that prevents ACFN members from being able to participate in their municipal elections.

Mr. Chair, I urge this House to seriously consider this amendment and right historic wrongs, to truly be committed to Indigenous peoples, to First Nations, and the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. I heard the Premier say that the rights of Indigenous peoples in this province need to be upheld, and this is a chance for us to uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples, stop discriminating based on residency, and allow the members of ACFN to vote in the municipal elections of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, as it has been agreed to by both the municipality and the First Nation.

Let's do the right thing here and support this amendment. Again I ask the question to the minister, in case it needs to be repeated: please explain why this might be a complicated thing here in Alberta and why we cannot do that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other comments? The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. First of all, I want to thank the hon. member for the amendment and for the courtesy that the hon. member extended by letting me know a few days ago that this amendment was coming. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Now, Mr. Chair, the hon. member that moved the amendment did ask me to explain why I feel the way I do, and I will do my best to do that. I think the hon. member called it discrimination based on residency. If I didn't get that exactly right, I think everybody knows that that was the intent of what he said. Eligibility based on residency is what it is. I don't think it's discrimination; it's eligibility. It's a principle that is applied equally across Alberta. Right in the amendment under section 2 it says, "An individual is" – and here's the important word – "deemed to be a resident of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo." The hon. member, in fairness, is honest about it when he writes this. He acknowledges that folks living on the sections of reserve land within the municipality are not living in the municipality. He wants them deemed to be in the municipality. Clearly, the hon. member accepts that they don't live in the municipality.

Mr. Chair, that's really how we do this across Alberta. It's very consistent. It's not biased. It's not based on race, creed, colour, religion, tall, short, rich, or poor. It's just how we decide who gets to vote in municipalities. The principle is pretty clear. If you live anywhere in a municipality, you can vote in the municipality. In fact, even with our provincial elections, if you live anywhere in Alberta, you can vote in Alberta. You don't get

to vote everywhere in Alberta, just in the jurisdiction where you live, but you do get to vote.

3:40

So it's very consistent, very fair. I know the hon. member made arguments about how these residences that are on reserve land are completely, I think they used – and again, I don't mean to misquote the hon. member, but he said something like that it's dependent upon the surrounding municipality for services. I think he named water, waste management, and other services that they're dependent upon, and I agree with them. They are, but that's a fairly normal circumstance, Mr. Chair. The example I gave in the House today in question period is that Airdrie, for example, is at this point completely dependent upon the city of Calgary for their drinking water, but they don't get to vote in Calgary, and they send their money for their water to Calgary, and they don't get to vote in Calgary. Pretty consistent, I would say.

The argument that the land is completely surrounded by a municipality: well, that's true, but it's not an argument that makes voting necessary. The municipality of Didsbury, for example, is completely surrounded by Mountain View county. Without going through it all, I wouldn't be surprised if there might be 100 municipalities, but there are certainly dozens in Alberta that are surrounded by other municipalities, and they don't get to vote in the municipality that they're surrounded by, despite the fact that they can't go to their municipality without going through the other municipality, they can't leave their municipality without going through the other municipality. Basically, in most cases, all the electricity and water and other services come through the municipality or they wouldn't get there; completely dependent by that definition, yet they still don't get to vote there.

I'm only saying this because I'm doing my best to answer the question in the context in which I felt the hon. member was asking the question. My point is that we're trying to be fair, consistent here, and I think we are doing exactly that.

Listen. We love our Indigenous brothers and sisters. I think I can legitimately say that I don't know of any province in Canada that has made a greater effort at support and reconciliation than this government has and particularly our Premier and our Indigenous Relations minister. We care very much. What's also true is that if a First Nations or other Indigenous person lives in a municipality, they can vote there. Equal rights. Exactly equal rights. Not more. Not less. Exactly equal. We're very consistent that way.

You know, the reliance on the dependency on the surrounding area is consistent, doesn't change the ability to vote. The hon. member talked about paying taxes there. The fact is, Mr. Chair, that across Alberta, many, many people pay taxes in a jurisdiction where they can't vote. I really hate to hold myself up as any kind of good example, but just as an example – I won't call it a good example – I own a condo here in Edmonton. I don't get to vote here because my permanent residence is in Calgary. I get to vote there. I pay taxes here, but I don't get to vote here. So many people, so many businesses are in a similar situation where they pay taxes in one jurisdiction but they don't get to vote there, because that's not where their permanent residence is.

Our intention is to be scrupulously fair, scrupulously unbiased, which is – I'm sorry to say to the hon. member – why I'm going to recommend to my colleagues in this House that we don't support this amendment because if we do, then we lose that scrupulous fairness to everyone.

I feel like the hon. member is legitimately trying to represent the wishes, perhaps even hopes, dreams, and ambitions of people that he represents and that he cares about, and I respect that. I hope, in turn, the hon. member will respect the fact that I'm trying to be fair, unbiased,

equal, consistent in a way that is fair to all Albertans, whether they are First Nations, other Indigenous, or otherwise. That's the way it has been, and I believe genuinely that's the right thing to do. So with no offence intended to the hon. member, I am recommending that we don't support this particular amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to comment on amendment A1? I recognize the Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments that were brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-West Heday and from the minister himself, recognizing that we are all treaty people and we have a duty to treaty. It is what has made our province so great and our country so great, that it was founded in treaty, and also just an acknowledgement that it was through the north that we get so much wealth and also that we have settled this province.

I think some key points I just want to re-emphasize to all the members of the Assembly are that through the federal government transfers to the municipality, you know, the members of ACFN are paying to the municipality. They're not trying to get a free ride. If you were to travel through this municipality, you would say that these are just other people living in the municipality. It's not going to be obvious to you that here is reserve and here is where the municipality starts and ends.

Other municipalities do have service agreements between them, and that's not the same as comparing Didsbury and some county. This is a completely different and a very unique situation, and the government has made exceptions. We are making a residency exception for Jasper, and it's well deserved. We also have a complicated system in this province with summer villages, where people are able to have an opportunity, by my understanding – correct me if I'm wrong, Minister – to vote in two municipalities. So I feel like what is being asked, that is being supported by the municipality and is so unique to this particular municipality and this nation, deserves the full support of this Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to provide comment on amendment A1?

I'll call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:48 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Goehring	Kasawski
Calahoo Stonehouse	Gray	Miyashiro
Dach	Haji	Renaud
Eggen	Hoffman	Sabir
Ellingson	Ip	Schmidt
Elmeligi		

Against the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Pitt
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Rowswell
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Sawhney
Bouchard	Loewen	Schow
Cyr	Long	Schulz
de Jonge	Lovely	Sigurdson, R.J.
Dreeshen	Lunty	Singh
Dyck	McDougall	Stephan
Ellis	McIver	Turton

Fir	Nally	Wiebe
Getson	Neudorf	Williams
Glubish	Nicolaides	Wright, J.
Horner	Nixon	Yao
Hunter Jean	Petrovic	Yaseen
Totals:	For – 16	Against – 43

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to provide comment on Bill 50, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025? I will recognize the Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wish to offer an amendment to Bill 50, the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act.

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

The member may proceed to read the amendment into the record.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For those following along, this is on page 21 of the bill.

I move that Bill 50, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 2(11) in the proposed section 208.1(3) by striking out “within 72 hours of the information being provided to the councillor” and substituting “within 5 business days of the information being provided to the councillor, or any other shorter period established by bylaw.”

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With Bill 50 there is a section in here that is related to the chief administrative officers that report to the municipal councils. I believe the intention brought forward in this bill is fair. It’s saying that when a councillor goes to administration and asks for information that they be provided it within a reasonable time and also that that information be shared amongst all council members and the mayor so that everyone has the same amount of information so that they can make good decisions for their municipalities.

The concern is the red tape burden that is being placed upon the chief administrative officers and administration. You can imagine a situation in which on Friday afternoon a councillor requests information and that on a long weekend by Monday they have to have all this information. Some examples might be an area structure plan or something requiring 800 pages of copies being made for all of council.

I think municipalities can be trusted to come up with a timeline that is appropriate. We’ve suggested that five business days is enough time for any information requests, but if they could come up with a shorter timeline, let that happen within their own boundaries and within their own municipality so that they can make good decisions and provide that information to council.

That’s the amendment. It’s straightforward. We’ve brought it forward to the minister, and I look forward to other comments on it from the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to provide comments? The Minister for Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the hon. member for the amendment. I’d also like to acknowledge and thank the hon. member for letting me know this amendment was coming. I appreciate that.

Mr. Chair, we have to set a timeline on this, and in fairness to the hon. member, we chose 72 hours. It’s three days. We thought it was reasonable. The hon. member would like five business days, which typically would amount to five to eight days based on that it could be a two- or three-day weekend in between. All we’re really talking about here is a different period of time.

Mr. Chair, I don’t think this would be as onerous as what the hon. member seems to think it would, but I respect his opinion. What really this is for – and this shouldn’t have to happen that often, because the section is about if the CAO has to do things that were not explicitly directed by council through it being part of the budget or something like that.

4:10

To be clear, I don’t think it’s that onerous because typically this shouldn’t happen all that often. Now, it won’t be rare when it happens, but I don’t think it’ll be every day either. The types of things that I think fall into this category: well, the first thing would be emergent things that aren’t expected. Let’s face it. With all the best planning in the world sometimes we get surprised. You know, an important boiler could fail, a tree could fall through the roof of a municipal building and it’s some place where valuable records are stored and it has to be fixed and the CAO maybe needs to get a contractor in to fix it right away. All this says is that within three days of that, like, let members of council know that an expense is coming to you that’s not included in the budget and explain why. If a tree fell through the roof or something, that’s completely understandable, and I don’t imagine CAOs would get a bad time about that.

The bigger issue, actually, which I’m hoping through this piece of the legislation to make a smaller issue, is that sometimes, Mr. Chair, in the same way that some days this room that we’re in is a competitive environment, some municipal councils are a competitive environment. Not all; some of them hold hands, sing *Kumbaya*, and get along with everything, right? I see a former municipal councillor across the way that’s laughing because I think he’s seen probably both sides of it during his time on a municipal council. Sometimes they get along like best friends, and sometimes they get along like sworn enemies, and part of that, unfortunately – and it is the minority. Nonetheless, it needs to be managed, which is why that part is in the legislation.

So that they’re at an advantage in the council meeting, sometimes a mayor, reeve, or other member of council that may disagree with some members of council will try to get information from the administration, from the CAO and not share it with their council colleagues. Well, they’re all duly elected; they all deserve the information. The 72 hours is what I think is reasonable. There are times when perhaps at least for two or three days or even one day that maybe the mayor or the reeve, when something special has happened, needs to know a day ahead of time. Nonetheless, it’s intended not to be a power move but, rather, out of reasonable expediency – and it would mostly probably be the mayor or the reeve – to perhaps generally do that, Mr. Chair.

Of course, the other thing that’s unfortunately happened once or twice is where a CAO has hired an outside legal counsel without a council motion or council even knowing about it. I think that we can all agree that we should probably limit the amount of time that can go on before council knows. It’s not every day, but it has happened. That’s how these things end up in legislation, preventing things from getting out of hand.

Mr. Chair, I’m going to recommend we don’t support this, but I get it. If the hon. member across was to say, “It’s somewhat arbitrary,” yeah, we had to pick a time. You know, the hon. member with his amendment seems to agree that unlimited time is not a reasonable thing because he even with his amendment puts a time limit on it. We set one. I think what we set is okay. So with no particular malice for

the member that made the amendment, I'm recommending that we don't support it.

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

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We move back on to the main bill, Bill 50, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. The Member for Sherwood Park has risen.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have another amendment to propose, and I hope all members of the Assembly agree with this amendment when they're called upon by the chair.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. The amendment will be referred to as amendment A3, and the member may proceed to read it into the record.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 50, Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 be amended in section 2(21)(b) by striking out the proposed section 708.29(1.1)(b) and substituting the following: "(b) water, wastewater, and stormwater." If you're following along in the bill, this would be on page 25 of the bill, and it's related to intermunicipal collaboration frameworks.

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll come in a little bit hot, but I like the collaborative environment that we've created today. The UCP blew up regional boards, that were providing very good collaboration between municipalities, but as a result now we need to bring forward Bill 50 with some more emphasis on what's required for intermunicipal collaboration frameworks. There are requirements for the frameworks to account for transportation between municipalities, water and waste water, solid waste, emergency services, recreation. We've heard from municipalities. They appreciate this and also want to include stormwater in that: "(b) water, wastewater, and stormwater."

The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore will probably have familiarity with this as Chestermere was limited in its ability to build a new subdivision without a stormwater agreement with Wheatland county. So requiring stormwater as a part of ICFs is a good thing for municipalities in this province.

I look forward to more debate on this.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to provide comment on amendment A3? The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that, and let me say, again, credit where it's due. The hon. member let me know this was coming. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Let me be clear. It's not an unreasonable amendment, but there is a reason that we didn't have it in there in the first place, which I tried to explain to the member, but I think the House deserves to hear the explanation even if they don't agree with it. We'd actually considered this when we were drafting the bill, but what it comes down to is water and waste water are typically delivered by the municipality. Stormwater is kind of already regulated through the environment ministry. Consequently, we thought that having something required to be in the ICF that they're not always strictly responsible for might lead to problems.

Obviously, in fairness to the hon. member across, many municipalities really like that stormwater is not in there, but I also agree with the hon. member that some wish it were. So

there's no perfect place to land, but it's based on the principle that we considered, that we would have what is strictly required by municipalities in the ICFs as a required thing.

Now, here's what's also true, and I think the hon. member knows this. They can actually include stormwater in the ICF. It just won't be subject to automatic arbitration. They can also make agreements on stormwater, an agreement outside of the ICF, and the legislation doesn't stop that either.

So with all those things considered, I'm going to recommend we don't support this. I certainly understand why the opposition put it forward, but I tried to respectfully describe why we won't be supporting it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to comment on amendment A3? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill.

Any members wishing to provide comment? The Member for Lethbridge-West.

4:20

Member Miyashiro: I'm going to have to hurry about this, Mr. Chair. I'm going to have to hurry because the minister took some of my time.

Once again this government is introducing legislation to solve problems that really don't exist, and although this government can be given a lot of credit, I think, for engaging with Alberta Municipalities regarding this bill, I think that their implementation of what they were told falls a bit short. AB Munis is supportive of some of the proposed changes in Bill 50, but they talk about how it falls short in many ways from what was recommended, things like – oh – stormwater, that was excluded in the mandatory services and intermunicipal collaborative frameworks. Libraries also are excluded from cost sharing through ICFs, which is interesting, because in southern Alberta we actually have a very robust sharing agreement between a number of different libraries in our Chinook regional library system.

Councillor code of conduct bylaws will be repealed. Instead, the problem is going to create an independent integrity body.

I want to talk about a few things. I don't have a ton of time, and some of these have already been talked about. You know, one of the things is the whole thing about a chief administrative officer having to notify council in writing within 72 hours of not just big things like requests for information; they're talking about things like e-mails and sharing of information.

The other thing, that municipal governments have the rights, powers, and privileges of natural persons. What that means is that municipalities can address daily operational issues like entering into contracts; using a credit card; acquiring property; hiring, disciplining, terminating staff; legal matters; exercising management rights like any other employer. Adding a provision that requires every use of natural person powers to be reported to council will add a significant burden to municipal administrations. This provision also blurs the lines of a council's role as a governing body versus administration's role in the management of operations, and that comes from AB Munis, Mr. Chair.

The importance of this point cannot be overstated. One of the first things new municipal councillors are taught is to respect the line between governance and operations. Other than legal matters, for which every CAO ensures council is informed, the mundanities of day-to-day operations are strictly the purview of administration. Council has no business micromanaging municipalities, but I would hazard to guess that this is also included due to this government's deeply rooted belief that their job is to meddle in day-to-day operations. In fact, this government

has proven this point by melding the bulk of operations of AHS, formerly the health operations arm of the government, into Alberta Health, formerly the health policy arm of the government.

There are also a number of sections to this legislation for which AB Munis has concerns. I think some of these I'll just skip by, although things like capital costs for new facilities in an ICF are not addressed in this. What it means is that if there are any disagreements on capital projects, they don't get arbitration because those things aren't mandatory.

I want to spend a few minutes of my time talking about the elimination of the code of conduct bylaws and resolutions related to those behaviours. This removal of codes of conduct totally undercuts the ability of a municipality to manage internal challenges with damaging behaviour by elected officials. As the minister said, there are times when council chambers are not a fun place and people are in opposition and people act up. I know that for a fact, Mr. Chair, because I've been there, and I have to say my behaviour was a bit unruly at times.

This legislation also looks at terminating current complaints or sanctions, so if there are any actions in place once this comes into force, those go away. That means people don't get their day in court, people don't get that discussion, people aren't allowed to have resolution to any issues that they've experienced.

The other thing that's super important is that this takes away the protection and well-being of CAOs and municipal staff. As an employer the municipality has a duty under occupational health and safety regs to protect the physical and mental well-being of all employees, including the CAO. If council harasses an employee, AB Munis is concerned that the municipality won't have the tools required to deal with this.

Also, the minister is going to set standard meeting protocols and procedures for council meetings and council committee meetings. This is a little bit problematic because every council operates differently. You can't say that an 18-person council such as is in Calgary or a nine-person council like is in Lethbridge will operate the same as a five-person council in a smaller municipality.

There are a number of other issues, Mr. Chair, but you know what? Based on the number of issues and concerns and the need for more information that experts like Alberta Municipalities have, this legislation must be defeated. Further, it would be great if this government, in the few instances when it consults with experts, actually listens to those experts.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 46

Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to provide comment on Bill 46? The Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to introduce an amendment to the bill if I may, and I have the requisite copies here.

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

The Member for Edmonton-South West can proceed.

Mr. Ip: Thank you. I move that Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended by striking out section 1(3).

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll take a few moments to talk about this amendment. I introduced really the identical amendment last week when we debated this bill but pertaining to a different part of the

legislation. But the point is the same. Let me make my point maybe by talking about King Henry VIII. I think the hon. Member for Sherwood Park made a similar reference when talking about Bill 46. You know, there is a quote by Winston Churchill. I think it's almost a cliché, and it goes something like this. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. It's most attributed to Winston Churchill. I think that in some ways we're kind of at that moment. We're witnessing an attempt by this government to behave in a way that I think should be of concern to every single member of this Assembly.

On the thread of talking about King Henry VIII, of course everybody knows that he was the infamous 16th-century monarch who broke from the Catholic church, dissolved monasteries, and yes, went through six wives. But beyond the royal drama Henry VIII is remembered for something more enduring and dangerous, and it was his obsession with absolute power. In 1539 Parliament granted him the authority to make or amend laws by royal proclamation without having to go back to the legislative body, and this allowed him to sidestep scrutiny, dodge opposition, concentrate power in the Crown. That's why the clauses that we see in Bill 48 and certainly other pieces of legislation that bypass the Legislature are perhaps affectionately or infamously known as Henry VIII clauses, describing the ability for an executive authority to change or override laws without legislative oversight.

4:30

Mr. Chair, that is dangerous. That is dangerous even if on its surface it seems relatively pedestrian and routine. Sections 2(9) and 1(3) of this bill masquerade as sort of modern policy changes, but they are what I've just described, Henry VIII clauses. They allow cabinet to unilaterally amend or repeal privacy and information laws without ever bringing those changes back to this Legislature, without any kind of scrutiny, and that fundamentally undermines this democratic process.

I have to mention, as I did a few days ago in this House, that this is not a one-off. It's not an isolated situation. It really is a pattern from this UCP government that stems back a number of years. I'll take us back to April 2020. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic the UCP brought forward Bill 10, the Public Health (Emergency Powers) Amendment Act, 2020. That law gave a single minister the ability to unilaterally make or amend legislation without ever bringing it before this Assembly. Didn't require a vote or debate or any sort of oversight. The *Edmonton Journal* reported on it at the time. As some members of this House will remember, the backlash was swift both from the public and, ironically, from members of the other side. Even the conservative Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms announced a legal challenge, calling it unconstitutional. Premier Kenney, in a rare moment of contrition, admitted on a live stream that the bill had gone too far, and he said, I quote: given the public concerns, which I think are reasonable, I've asked our lawyers to go back to the drawing board. End quote.

At that time this side of the House tried to add a sunset clause to Bill 10 so that these powers would expire automatically, but the UCP rejected it. We tried to add transparency requirements so that Albertans would know when ministers were changing the law, and again the UCP said no. Now, five years later, they're at it again.

Mr. Chair, we've seen this movie before, and it doesn't end well. There are high stakes with Bill 46. It includes two critical sections, section 1(3), which would insert section 97.1 into the Access to Information Act, and section 2(9), that would insert section 62.1 into the Protection of Privacy Act. Both provisions give cabinet sweeping authority to make – the language is “any necessary changes as a result of this Act.”

That's why, Mr. Chair, I'm introducing an amendment which proposes to strike that section entirely. What we do in this House as legislators is important, as sometimes inconvenient as it seems – right? – for the minister. The kind of scrutiny and transparency and accountability that this process brings is important. You either support democracy and the principles of democracy, or you don't. There is no middle ground. We were elected to debate laws in this Chamber, to represent our constituents, to hold government to account. For cabinet to be able to unilaterally rewrite legislation not only bypasses the role that the Assembly plays, but I think it is an affront to the principles of democracy. This is actually not about slowing the work of the government down. It's about ensuring that the work that we do in this House is to actually make government processes stronger. It's about making the work that we do in this House more accountable to the people that we serve.

If the government believes a change is necessary, it should come back to this House, make its case, defend it publicly. That's part of the legislative process, and frankly if the government wrote a bad piece of legislation and they're now trying to go back and fix it through Bill 46, well, that's no excuse, Mr. Chair, to undermine, really, the sanctity of democracy, the importance of democracy, and the long-held traditions of democracy.

I have lots to say, Mr. Chair, but we are, again, I think, at a crossroads. I think it's incredibly important that we don't allow this moment, when we're setting a dangerous precedent, to bypass us without robust debate and reconsideration. That's why I am introducing an amendment, to give members of this Chamber, particularly members opposite, an opportunity to actually vote in favour of this amendment. Let's strengthen this piece of legislation and ensure that our democratic principles are not undermined.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

For the House's benefit the Chamber will refer to the amendment as amendment A2 on Bill 46.

The Minister of Technology and Innovation has risen.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to speak to the proposed amendment to explain to this House why I will not be supporting the amendment. The members opposite continue to try and make these allegations that this Henry VIII clause is being used to give blanket, sweeping powers to change legislation without coming back to this House. That's not what's really happening here if you were to look at the actual words used in the section that is at issue here. Those words: the member read them correctly, but I need to highlight exactly what they mean in law, in legislation. This is about making the necessary changes as a result of this act.

The changes necessary as a result of this act: what do we mean by that, Mr. Chair? Well, you know, the member opposite was talking about how we need to come to this Chamber if we want to make changes to legislation. That's exactly what we did with bills 33 and 34 in the fall session. We brought forward legislation to create the privacy act of Alberta and to create the Access to Information Act of Alberta. Those were formerly known collectively as the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Well, Mr. Chair, we got the approval of this Chamber to bring those pieces of legislation forward, and they have been passed. Now we have the challenge that there are hundreds and hundreds of references across literally – maybe not literally. Practically every piece of legislation in Alberta in one way, shape, or form refers to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of Alberta, which no longer exists. For expediency's sake, to make it simple and straightforward for all of the Leg. Counsel to go through

and update all of those different references, literally hundreds of those references, this was the most straightforward way for us to ensure that that could happen. Let me be perfectly clear. This does not give the government blanket powers to change legislation about anything that they wish; this simply says that those changes that are necessary "as a result of this Act."

4:40

A very easy way to think about it, Mr. Chair, is that we're all familiar with the find-and-replace function in Microsoft Word when you've got a long document with hundreds and hundreds of references and you need to go and find one word and replace it with another and you want to do that multiple times. This allows us to go through that process in legislation. This is the fastest way to make sure that bills 33 and 34, which did come to this Chamber and we did debate in a robust manner and we did pass – we can ensure that those pieces of legislation are properly reflected across every other piece of legislation in Alberta. That is all that this is about.

For those reasons, I am recommending to all members of this Chamber that we reject the member's proposed amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other comments on amendment A2?

If not, I'm prepared to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:41 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Goehring	Miyashiro
Dach	Haji	Renaud
Eggen	Hoffman	Sabir
Ellingson	Ip	Schmidt
Elmeligi	Kasawski	

Against the motion:

Amery	Jean	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Sawhney
Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schow
Bouchard	Loewen	Schulz
Cyr	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
de Jonge	Lovely	Singh
Dreeshen	Lunty	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	McIver	Wiebe
Fir	Nally	Williams
Getson	Nicolaides	Wilson
Glubish	Nixon	Wright, J.
Horner	Petrovic	Yao
Hunter	Pitt	Yaseen

Totals:	For – 14	Against – 42
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 46. Are there any members wishing to provide comments? The Member for Edmonton-South West has risen.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I appreciate the comments from the minister. I certainly appreciate his good intentions, but I wish it were as simple as replacing a word. While I understand the minister's intentions do not go beyond the intent to harmonize the two bills, 33 and 34, and he really sees this for housekeeping purposes, the fact remains that the Henry VIII clauses – and let's call it for exactly what it is – grant powers beyond those intentions.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

I think that's the danger here, Madam Chair. It grants cabinet broad, sweeping powers. I am a little bit dubious or skeptical as to whether the very narrow reading we've heard from the ministers would be interpreted by all. The fundamental issue here is really that this bill is poorly designed. If this government is looking to harmonize specific sort of housekeeping issues, I'm not sure this is the best way to do it. In fact, I think there are more deliberate ways to do it.

Madam Chair, my apologies. I'm going into debate a little bit, but I would like to actually introduce an additional amendment that I think hopefully addresses some of the concerns that the minister has raised.

When you're ready, Madam Chair, I'd like to read the amendment into the record and perhaps offer some . . .

The Chair: Just let me get a copy.

You want to read that all into the record? There's no need to.

Mr. Ip: There's no need to? Okay.

The Chair: Hon. members, just note that it's two pages.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Oh, sorry. This will be amendment A3.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ip moved that Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended as follows: (a) in section 1(3) by striking out the proposed section 97.1 and substituting the following:

Consequential amendments

97.1(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by regulation, amend any Act or any regulation filed under the Regulations Act for the following purposes:

- (a) to resolve any inconsistency or conflict with one or more provisions of any other enactment and this Act;
- (b) to strike out a reference to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and substitute a reference to the Access to Information Act.

(2) The regulations authorized by this section may be made in respect of a regulation that was made by a member of the Executive Council or some other person or body, but only for the purposes described in subsection (1)(a) or (b).

- (b) in section 2(9) by striking out the proposed section 62.1 and substituting the following:

Consequential amendments

62.1(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by regulation, amend any Act or any regulation filed under the Regulations Act for the following purposes:

- (a) to resolve any inconsistency or conflict with one or more provisions of any other enactment and this Act;
- (b) to strike out a reference to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and substitute a reference to the Protection of Privacy Act.

- (2) The regulations authorized by this section may be made in respect of a regulation that was made by a member of the Executive Council of some other person or body, but only for the purposes described in subsection(1)(a) or (b).

Regarding amendment A3, what we're proposing here on this side of the House is that this is a much more narrow amendment that will ensure that the issues that we've raised on this side of the House are addressed but it will also allow the work that the minister has referred to around harmonizing the two bills to happen. I think this more adequately addresses any of the concerns about overarching and broad, sweeping powers granted to cabinet.

I should mention that the amendment does a number of different things. First, it will allow cabinet to retain regulation-making powers but only for the following functions: to resolve inconsistencies or conflicts between provisions of other enactments and this act, and to update references from the former Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to the newly separated Access to Information Act or Protection of Privacy Act as appropriate. That is fundamentally what the minister has just articulated is at the core of Bill 46, and this amendment will allow that to happen, but it will also put some parameters around cabinet powers.

4:50

Frankly, Madam Chair, it's a very reasonable amendment. It is one that I think demonstrates the spirit of collaboration and our desire to strengthen this piece of legislation, and I certainly encourage all members of this House to support it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any members wishing to join the debate on amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Any other members on Bill 46? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: It was a very loud aye, though.

An Hon. Member: Aye.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah.

Thank you very much. I'll take a few minutes to go through a few points that I think could use more consideration here as it relates to Bill 46, the Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Just for historical awareness, Alberta has been voted the most secretive government in Canada on multiple occasions by I forget the exact name of the organization, but it's the one that independent journalists are all a part of. On those occasions part of it was because of how slow and how restricted the FOIP laws were in this province and the government's execution of release of documents that flowed from that. I do have to say that saying that the only changes that will be made are the ones that need to be made because of this legislation but not saying what the criteria will be that pens that in is asking the members of this Chamber and all Albertans to put trust in this government that I think the current government hasn't earned to date.

When I was in budget estimates and preparing for the Health budget, I was reviewing public statements made by the Premier around procurement, particularly procurement of American materials, goods, and means. I want to say that I am well aware that the provincial government has run a campaign telling other people to buy local, buy Canadian, buy Alberta-made products, but the

government continues themselves to use the purchasing power of the collective, the money that we as individual Albertans pay and the money that corporations pay and the money that we have from royalties, to buy American. While they tell Albertans that we should all be buying local, the government continues to buy a number of American products. Specifically in Health there are a number of sole-source contracts related to information management software that are owned by American companies. I think that's something that most Albertans would be uncomfortable with, knowing that American companies had ownership of their personal health information, knowing that their privacy was in the hands of an American company and that the government wasn't following through on what they're asking all of us to do and which most Albertans very proudly are doing.

In fact, I'll mention that my uncle Larry downloaded the app so that you can scan every product that you're thinking about buying, the QR code, and it tells you how much of it was produced in Canada or made in Canada. It's a great app. I think it was an Albertan who came up with that concept. So many Albertans have really rolled up their sleeves and put buying Canadian as a priority for them when it comes to their own money. If the government wanted to actually show that they were doing what they're telling everyone else to do – it reminds me of when the government told everyone to stay home and then the UCP government hopped on jets and travelled to places all around the world and attended large gatherings while they were telling everyone else to stay at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It relates back, of course, to Bill 46 in that this is about how we take care of and how we safeguard Albertans' individual information. One of the opportunities that I think we could have taken in consideration of this bill is actually around giving Albertans more information about when breaches of their personal data happen. I think everyone should be able to trust the government, and if there is something that happens to compromise people's personal private information, there should be a requirement that that be shared with that individual immediately.

I don't think I need to reinforce the comments made by my colleague about the Henry VIII clauses. I think they're a real problem. I think that they don't speak well of how the UCP views democracy and the citizens that we all represent in this place.

I will once again call on the government to get away from sole-source contracts. Get away from sole-source contracts to American companies, period, especially where it concerns our personal private information. That health information should not be in the hands of companies that we don't have a more direct line of sight into what they're doing.

With that, I think I've put enough on the record to let you know one of the reasons why I'll be voting against Bill 46 and how I feel about these measures. I think the government could show a lot more respect to citizens if they actually made the effort to follow what they're telling everyone else to do and what they said they themselves would be doing around buying Canadian first and if they did indeed actually safeguard everyone's information and, if there was a breach, requiring that information to be shared with the people who were individually compromised.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to join on Bill 46? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to introduce an additional amendment if I may. This is relatively short, so I will read it into the record.

The Chair: Always preferred.

This will be known as amendment A4.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 1(3) by adding the following after the proposed section 97.1(2):

(3) No later than 30 days after the Lieutenant Governor in Council makes a regulation authorized by this section the Minister must publish the following information on the publicly accessible website of the department administered by the Minister:

- (a) a copy of the regulation;
- (b) a description of the changes made by the regulation;
- (c) the reasons for making the regulation.

Thank you.

Madam Chair, I'll share a personal story with you and why I think it's so important that we always safeguard our democratic processes and that we're not flippant and nonchalant with how we go about legislating and that we are not undermining, even if that's not the intention, the democratic process that's before us. My grandfather was a religious minority. He was from a Muslim tribe in northeastern China. He was born in the Qing dynasty, actually. He was a general with the Kuomintang in China, had fought in the Chinese civil war. While I have never met him – he died before I was born – I did hear stories of his sacrifice and what he fought for. Later on he would retreat to Taiwan, where my mother was born and where my family is from. It is often a tradition of my family to share stories of heroism, of his sacrifice. He's become a bit of a legend in our family in some ways. One of the things that I did learn about him and through his stories is that he fought very much on the principle of freedom and for democracy.

For those of you who may not be familiar with the history of modern China, there was a civil war between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, that ended in 1949 with a defeat to the communists. Folks who fought on the other side were fighting for universal suffrage. They were fighting for ensuring that their country had a democratic system. They were fighting for the ideals of freedom, and that was the side that my grandfather was on. I think folks in this House might be looking at this piece of legislation and thinking: how can you possibly compare something like this to this? But I think the principles of democracy are always important no matter how significant or perhaps pedestrian a piece of legislation is.

5:00

I'm not trying to suggest that Bill 46 is pedestrian. It isn't. It is in fact making broad, sweeping changes and consequential changes, I must say, to bills 33 and 34. But I think as members of this Chamber, as legislators who play a very important role in our democratic system, where there are checks and balances, where we are here to not only debate legislation but hold the executive branch of this government accountable, it's incredibly important that we don't shirk that responsibility, that we don't take that responsibility lightly. It's disappointing, Madam Chair, that a very reasonable amendment to ensure that there are some parameters around the powers that are granted under Bill 46, amendment A2, was defeated. That was a very reasonable amendment.

I think at the very least, if the government is to exercise broad, sweeping executive powers in terms of changing legislation, we must ensure that the public is informed about it. Under the current legislation cabinet can make changes to any parts of the legislation, and it would be done in secret. The public would never be informed about it. There would be no way of knowing what those changes are, and I think that fundamentally erodes our system of accountability.

So this amendment, again, is a reasonable amendment that demonstrates the willingness of myself and my colleagues on this side of the House to work with this government to actually improve legislation. I think sometimes there is so much focus on who wins and who loses, who's right and who's wrong, and there have been very, very few moments in this Chamber of true collaboration, of working together to be able to improve a piece of legislation. I think this is an opportunity. I think this is an opportunity for members of the government side to work with us and ensure that we can address some of the real dangers of this bill.

Now I have introduced, Madam Chair, three different amendments, all of which have been defeated, and that's certainly disappointing. But here is another one. Here is another opportunity for members of this Chamber to vote and support an amendment that will ultimately ensure that the rights of Albertans are protected, that our democracy and the principles of accountability and transparency are very much upheld and valued.

What this amendment does – it's actually a very simple amendment – is it asks cabinet to ensure that there is a copy of the regulation and a description of the changes made to be put on the minister's website or the department website within 30 days of those changes being made. This is a very small gesture but an important mechanism to ensure that Albertans are informed about changes that might pertain to their privacy, might pertain to how they access information. Bills 33 and 34 are broad, sweeping pieces of legislation that will govern how information, private information of Albertans is treated, how it is stored. It has very important implications potentially for the daily lives of everyday Albertans, and it is a piece of legislation that will actually impact the most number of Albertans.

It isn't a particularly sexy bill, I have to say. Yes, I did say that word in the Chamber. Not a lot of Albertans will pay a lot of attention to their privacy, but I have to say that if you measure a bill's importance in terms of how many people it will impact, I think Bill 33, Bill 34, and certainly Bill 46 will rank up there . . .

Ms Hoffman: Everybody.

Mr. Ip: . . . because, as my colleague has mentioned, it will impact everybody, every single Albertan in this province.

I ask again, Madam Chair, to all members of this House to adopt a very reasonable measure to safeguard the accountability and transparency of our process and to ensure that no change – no change – will be done in secrecy or, frankly, even the optics of making a change that's seen as somehow away from the public eye, I think, will ultimately harm the reputation of government. In many ways this is for the protection of any government in the future, so I ask all members to support this amendment.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair. The reason why I will not be supporting this amendment is that all of the regulations will be disclosed at the same time as the act is proclaimed. There is no need for this amendment. This is exactly what is going to happen. It will

all be published, it will all be public, it will all be available as soon as the act is proclaimed, so I will not support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, this provides an interesting thought experiment, of course, because what the minister just said is that they will provide this information through some version of freedom of information about the regulations that will determine the parameters of freedom of information. I think that the last three amendments that my colleague has brought forward are a very reasonable precaution against this very thing that we are all very concerned about, which is the government being forthcoming with information that is to do with the governance of our province and the information that is to do with protecting the people of our province as well.

We know that more than ever in industry and in government and in all things human, data is driving decision-making, and, in many ways, so it should. I mean, as my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis talks about the importance of data-driven decisions around wildlife and so forth and, you know, everything from arranging transportation or food systems or economic systems, it is to make an informed decision, to use as much data as possible. But the integrity of that data and the integrity of especially human-related data is all that much more important, too.

The perfect example, of course, Madam Chair, is health care – right? – because, yes, we do use digital systems to monitor and track health care systems, and so we should. I mean, it's the most expensive expenditure we have in our provincial budget, and it's probably the most vital aspect of our personal information to do with our bodies and our physical and mental health, right? But it's also potentially the most dangerous information to fall into the wrong hands.

5:10

As we see a concerning increase in private health care here in the province of Alberta, you know, that's one separate issue that we have to deal with. Of course, it's more expensive. It's driven by profits. It's made through corporate decisions, not decisions around health, amongst many other things.

But the other part of it, Madam Chair, is that there's a whole lot of data there on people's health, the state of their health, the trends around their health, the choices, the conditions, and the treatments that they might receive that has to be protected in the most stringent possible way.

You can imagine, Madam Chair, if personal health information gets into the wrong hands or even gets into the hands of other industries, what damage that can incur to a person's life. For example, you know, around insurance, right? People have insurance. You buy insurance policies and so forth. Then if that somehow is being entangled with the treatment of health conditions and so forth from another section, if that data somehow gets entangled together, then a person literally is in jeopardy if we don't protect that information. We know that any amendment around FOIP and around information generally always has to be looked at through that lens.

Then the other issue, of course, is that when we are functioning as a democratic entity, at the provincial level in this case, we need to make sure that the information around governance is always forthcoming. We've seen a lot of problems around people trying to use the freedom of information act and being blocked from certain sensitive information that otherwise should be and would be in the

public domain simply because the government puts fences or guardrails around those things.

We see a direct correlation between an absence of information or a vacuum of information of what a government is up to and the health or the lack of health of a democracy. And we don't have to look just here in the province. It's happening all around the world.

Any time there's an Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, Bill 46, as this one is called, we need to make sure that we're all hands on deck looking to protect the democratic implications of secrecy, or not, and around personal information, too.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora brought up a very good point as well around this very unstable time that we're living in in regard to our biggest trading partner, you know, the nation that we have evolved very closely together with, the United States, and as we see the tensions rising between trade and other aspects of our relationship with the United States, that we are maintaining the integrity of our information, personal information especially, and making sure that it doesn't fall into the wrong hands, right?

I mean, one of the biggest, I guess, cautionary tales around what bad things can happen around, as I say, health care and private health care and private insurance that covers health care: we don't have to look any further than the United States, where people are literally being denied coverage all the time or having to pay exorbitant insurance rates because their personal health information is not protected, right? These two things work together in very close proximity.

We now have a more fraught relationship with the United States. We have the UCP government who seems to have this love affair with private health care, American-style, two-tiered private health care. At the very least we have to protect the integrity of our personal information to make sure it's not falling into the wrong hands or being used in anything less than a reasonable sort of way.

Those are my concerns around Bill 46 specifically and freedom of information generally here in the province of Alberta.

I will cede my time to someone else to maybe give us some enlightenment. There's the minister. That's great.

The Chair: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-North West for his comments. I think there are a few things we need to clarify here.

First of all, access to information is very different from privacy. Access to information is about private citizens saying: I want to know something about what the government is doing. That is what the Access to Information Act now covers. Privacy is about dealing with the privacy protections for private citizens' personal information. Now, the member was combining access to information and privacy. He was complaining about: oh, we're not doing enough on privacy, but we want to make sure more information is available to the public.

Well, first of all, let me be perfectly clear. We're never going to publish the private personal information of Albertans for others to see. That would be ridiculous. It would be absurd. Secondly, most of his complaints were about health information. Bill 46, which ties into Bill 33, which is the privacy act of Alberta, focuses only on public bodies. It does not focus on health information. That is covered by the Health Information Act, so all of the things that he raised about the importance of protecting privacy when it comes to health information are completely irrelevant in the scope of Bill 46 or Bill 33. Those are all tied to the Health Information Act.

Now, we can all agree, I think, in this Chamber that, yes, the health information of Albertans should be kept sacred, and that is a responsibility that I and the Minister of Health and the Premier and everyone on this side of this House takes very seriously. That is why we published the data ethics framework and the privacy management framework in January of last year. I would invite the member to read them because I think most of the concerns that he's raised, that are all hypothetical in nature, are addressed in those frameworks. Those frameworks are our commitment as a government to Albertans on how we will ensure that there is ethics used in any use of data and to ensure that their privacy will be held to the highest standards in the country.

That is why we brought forward Bill 33 last year, to strengthen privacy legislation and protections for Albertans in the context of public bodies. That's why we've committed to updating the private-sector privacy legislation of PIPA, and I'm sure that in due course we will also have time to ensure that the Health Information Act is updated and modernized so that Albertans can rely on the strongest protections in the country.

Furthermore, Madam Chair, that is why we also are the first government in Canada and one of the only ones in North America to introduce a privacy portal which allows Albertans to log in and see all of the information that the government has on them through the ordinary course of those Albertans interacting with the government for a service, whether that be health care, whether that be some other government department that they've interacted with. We believe that Albertans should be able to see that and they should be able to see who has accessed it and for what reason and they should be able to file a complaint if they believe that anything untoward has happened. Nobody else in Canada has done this. We have, and this is something that I'm extremely proud of. This is all part of a suite of ensuring that Albertans have the strongest privacy protections in the country.

This is also why we have made significant investments into purchasing and installing our own sovereign compute cluster. Madam Chair, why is this important? Well, the member talked about data residency and about the fear of data falling into the hands of maybe other countries or private companies. Well, that is why we want to make sure we have more sovereign compute. What I mean by sovereign is that we own and control the compute as a government on behalf of Albertans. That means that this is the most secure compute environment or data storage repository that you could possibly imagine, and it is not in the hands of a private company; it is in the hands of the Alberta government on behalf of Albertans.

We also ensure that in any agreements that we have with partners like Epic, which was one of the major health care system providers not just while we were in government but also while the members opposite were in government, we make sure that those agreements have the strictest encryption and security protocols, and we ensure that data is resident in Canada, not in the U.S.

So the member opposite was essentially fearmongering with hypothetical scenarios that don't actually exist. We are absolutely on guard to protect Albertans' privacy and their personal information, whether it be health or otherwise, and we will absolutely ensure that we make the right investments and ensure the right policies are in place to ensure that Albertans' private information is safe and secure. You can count on that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to speak about some of the things the minister just said but also talk about a couple of other issues with respect to my concerns with Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, which is heralded as a housekeeping bill by the government, including the minister.

In many respects, Madam Chair, it tries to downplay the content and the intent and the actual effect of this legislation in the same way that the Justice minister tries to speak and calm Albertans' fears about what's actually going on with the investigation into the government corrupt care scandal, saying: "Don't worry. Everything is all right. Trust us." In fact, that's what Albertans now know not to do with this government. This government has destroyed trust.

5:20

Everybody in this province, when they look at proposed legislation, whether it be this Bill 46 or any piece of legislation that's brought forward to this House, has in mind the ultimate question not of "How does this serve Alberta's interest?" but of "How does legislation, any piece of legislation, put forward by this government serve the interests of the UCP, serve the interests of the government?" That is the hallmark of legislation that's brought forward by this government in that they are very self-serving, and this bill is no different, Madam Chair.

This bill serves the interests of the government, and it reserves unto themselves a very distinct provision of the separation of responsibilities in our parliamentary system. Of course, we have a legislative branch and we have an executive branch, and the division of those is very clear in our Westminster parliamentary democracy. This bill clouds that differentiation. It actually gives, through the Lieutenant Governor in Council by orders, the ability to amend any legislation that references the former Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The minister has stood on his feet here and said to this House and to Albertans: "Don't worry. This is just normal procedure. This is what has to happen in order for us to implement these changes, wherever this act is mentioned in other pieces of legislation." It's not a housekeeping measure, Madam Chair; it's a wide open door. We've seen this government use these doorways before to justify other acts which serve their interests. This is not a surprising doorway to see embedded in this legislation, and we are not fooled by it.

This piece of the legislation, the Lieutenant Governor in Council powers, which the minister tries to downplay as simply a housekeeping administrative process, is actually an administrative hand grenade. It blows up long-standing democratic and parliamentary principles of the primacy of the Legislature to be making laws. In fact, what it does is hand over yet again the authority to make laws to the cabinet. Indeed, I mean, every time this has happened in the past, we've had the same explanation from the minister responsible for the legislation to say: "Well, don't worry. This is a housekeeping matter. It's a small item. Trust us." That trust has been gone.

We know that this piece of legislation has replaced the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the FOIP Act. If you look at the history of FOIP in this province, Madam Chair, one would be correct in assuming that the government is forever on a hunt for the best price it can find globally to procure black ink. The history of FOIP in this province is filled with buckets, maybe truckloads, of black ink. That's what ended up being the result of a FOIP request in this province. You ended up with page after page of black ink in response to a FOIP request. That's part and parcel of what I refer to as elements of the type of reply that you get, which has destroyed the trust in this government on the part of Albertan citizens. When you look at other things that they're doing right now,

you look at separatist support, you look at electoral reform to favour themselves, it adds to that lack of trust.

I'm not in favour of many elements, and I don't have a lot of trust in this legislation. Hopefully, we query it more and end up not passing it.

I'll adjourn debate. [interjections]

The Chair: I didn't hear that.

Mr. Dach: I didn't adjourn debate.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A4?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Any other members on Bill 46? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 51

Education Amendment Act, 2025

The Chair: Any members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 51 and, frankly, to oppose it, the Education Amendment Act, 2025. I think I can speak for thousands of Albertans, and recently I've met with many education support workers and parents who believe in public education as a public good, who believe that our schools are more than just buildings; they're places where children become citizens. Education workers, teachers, those in our school system take pride in their work. They really believe that this is where curiosity is nurtured, where equity is something that we must ensure is in practice, that's more than an ideal.

Unfortunately, this bill is incredibly deflating. In its construction, in its priorities, in its omissions it betrays any vision of hopefulness, any vision that public education is a public good. What Alberta students, parents, and educators need right now is a government committed to real investment, smaller class sizes, more mental health supports. What I'm hearing is that classrooms are more complex than ever before. We need more schools in the growing neighbourhoods of many of our ridings, and many teachers are saying that they want a fair, functional teacher regulation system. Instead, with Bill 51 this government has delivered a package of legal tweaks that again – it's a pattern with this government – centralizes power, shields misconduct, and distracts from the real crisis in our classrooms.

I'll begin with what seems like a fairly innocuous change, but I think it really sends a very clear message. This government, through this bill, is renaming private schools to independent schools. Seems like an administrative update, doesn't it? But language matters, and changing the label doesn't change the nature of the institution. A private school remains a private school regardless of what we call it. This is very much a calculated shift. It's a softening of terminology so that this government can conceal what's really happening. They're going to ensure that there's a flowing of public dollars away from our public institutions and ensure that our public classrooms remain underfunded and overcrowded, and that's unfortunate. It's absolutely unnecessary.

5:30

As a former school board trustee I was always very proud, being a trustee on the Edmonton public school board, that as a division we were

known as a division of choice or a district of choice. At the time I think Edmonton public had over 46 programs of choice, different, alternative programs that families can choose, and children, regardless of their interests or their needs, would be able to find a place where they can thrive. That was within the framework of a public system. Whether you wanted your child to be within a faith-based program or learn a foreign language or perhaps even your own native language or be in a science alternative program, a science-focused program, or an arts-focused program or an academic challenge program, there was the opportunity for you as a parent to find that fit for your child.

Edmonton public schools along with many of the publicly funded schools – and I include Catholic and francophone within that as well – within school divisions within Alberta have really demonstrated and delivered a high-quality level of education and provided choice for parents and students. Alberta is truly renowned for that. Edmonton public, for example, has the largest Mandarin bilingual program in North America and, some would argue, the very best. This was all done and delivered within a publicly funded system.

Alberta had one of the best public education systems in the world before the UCP took over six years ago. It was the envy of so many jurisdictions. I remember as a trustee at one point – and I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora will remember this – I think there were even folks from, like, Finland who had come, had sent a delegation to see what folks were doing in Alberta. Unfortunately, that's in the distant past, it seems, because rather than investing in the things that matter – smaller class sizes, ensuring that students who require specialized supports receive those supports in the classroom – rather than hiring more teachers and paying them fairly, rather than hiring more educational support workers and paying them fairly, this government continues to fragment and divide.

Instead of addressing underfunding in our public education system, what they've done is they've allowed more charter schools to open. They have diverted resources into private schools. Don't get me wrong. Private schools and charter schools and other types of schooling within the province of Alberta certainly have their place. The folks that work in those schools do great work. They support their community. But there is a balance here. There is an ecosystem, if you will, of a strong education system, and unfortunately the UCP is saying that under the guise of choice we're going to actually slowly dismantle our public education system.

We have to realize – and I think many of the members of this House do – that publicly funded education is the great equalizer. It's really the system that will ensure that every single child has the opportunity to succeed. When you have more charter schools and more private schools, unfortunately, not all students have access. It really depends on that specific organization or that specific charter school, and it is not accessible to all. Choice is important, but it already exists within a public framework.

I'm not suggesting in any way that we diminish the work of private schools or of charter schools. Again, as I say, I think they make a very important contribution to the landscape of education in Alberta, but we must ensure that publicly funded education – Catholic, public, francophone schools – remain well funded, well supported, and in particular that there continues to be the kind of investment that we need as a province to ensure we not only have citizens who thrive but the future leaders, the future innovators who will contribute to the economy and the prosperity of this province.

I want to turn to some of the more troubling pieces of this bill, and that's the changes to how school trustees can be held accountable. I was a former public school board trustee, as I mentioned, and it's surprising to me that this government has decided, through this bill, to actually remove the ability for boards

to be able to govern themselves, to be able to govern and potentially discipline one of their own.

I'll give you an example, Madam Chair. In November of 2023 a trustee from Red Deer Catholic school division posted a deeply offensive image comparing pride flags to Nazi propaganda. It was absolutely inappropriate. It was hateful, grotesque, and that, rightfully, caused outrage. When this particular then trustee, who also has the last name of LaGrange . . .

Ms Hoffman: You can say the name of the person. You just can't say the name of a . . .

Mr. Ip: Monique LaGrange, Trustee LaGrange at the time, refused to accept sanctions from her fellow board members. They voted to remove her. Madam Chair, that was accountability in action. That was a board standing up for students, particularly for 2SLGBTQ-plus students. They sent a very strong message saying that hate has no home here.

But how did the Minister of Education respond? Not by defending students, not by standing with the board but by drafting legislation to ensure that in the future no board could ever do that again. It's taking away school board autonomy, which we've seen through various other bills, from management of infrastructure to land. We're seeing a real erosion of school board autonomy.

Bill 51, to be clear, removes the ability of school boards to remove a trustee for violating their code of conduct. Ironically, as you'll recall, a code of conduct provision was actually introduced by this very UCP government. These tools to be able to discipline and govern a specific member on the board were introduced by this very government. It is ironic that it now is removing those tools that actually serve a very real purpose. Instead, it requires communities to navigate a recall process that is, frankly, impossible to achieve in practice. That's not accountability. That's not actually helping school boards be not only more accountable but be able to support their self-governance.

I also want to talk about transferring school ownership to Alberta Infrastructure, which is buried in Bill 51, the transfer of ownership of all new school properties to the Crown, specifically Alberta Infrastructure. This is a staggering centralization of power.

5:40

I've seen the erosion of school board autonomy over the years, beginning with the removal of the ability for school board trustees to set the mill rate and for individual municipal school boards to set the mill rate. This was back during the tenure of former Premier Ralph Klein in 1993, and since 1993 we've seen a very deliberate but precipitous erosion of the autonomy of duly elected school board representatives.

I have to remind members of this House that school board members are not volunteers that happen to just, you know, be doing this for fun. They are duly elected. They are directly accountable to their communities. Again, this is another example of all the ways this government is undermining democracy. It's undermining the will of local communities and the various opportunities that exist in this province to exercise democratic will.

What does Bill 51 do? School boards no longer will own the buildings they operate. Instead, they will lease them from a government department that has shown time and again that it cannot be trusted. This is not a good policy, Madam Chair. For large school divisions like Edmonton public schools, Edmonton Catholic schools, and all the metro boards what this will do is it will remove that ability for local infrastructure and planning departments, that have the local knowledge, that have the relationships, that actually would be a benefit to the planning process, to actually be able to steward their schools, to be able

to make local decisions around programming or around how they might choose to use schools that might be aging or require replacement. It will impact planning in the long term.

What this will also mean potentially is that any infrastructure planning is done centrally through either Alberta Infrastructure or Alberta Education. Well, I guess we'll figure that out in terms of what that looks like, but it will be done centrally, without local input, without the community's input, and that is going to result in a more impoverished result ultimately in terms of outcome for the community.

Consider the Camrose high school project, a new school built with no road access, no utilities, no agreement in place with the municipality. In fact, this is a perfect example. Why did that happen? Because Alberta Infrastructure didn't know who owned the land. They didn't do their due diligence. They didn't have those local relationships that often are so important in the local building of a school. Now, imagine. You might say: well, that's an anomaly. But if Alberta Infrastructure couldn't handle just one project – and Camrose is but one example – imagine the same ministry managing dozens and dozens if not hundreds of projects. Imagine the various change orders that might come through Alberta Infrastructure, the kind of bottleneck that it will create.

It will be a disaster. I can already see it as a former school board trustee. I already know the bottlenecks that will exist. This is not good design. It's not good policy. It will only cost Albertans more money, more delays at a time when students all over the province are needing supports, needing investments in new schools. This bill will actually prevent this very government from delivering the promise that they made to Albertans, which is deliver schools. It is a mistake, so I encourage all members of this House to vote down this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Madam Chair. Apologies for interrupting the order here, but I just wanted to take a couple of moments just to respond to some of the things that I heard. I did have a couple of questions for the member, so I'll only take two minutes, maybe one minute. I'll be very quick.

Unfortunately, I didn't hear a lot of productive commentary there, just a lot of talking points and things that might be great for capturing social media images and little clips, you know. Maybe that's the purpose and the intent of the member, but I didn't hear really anything productive or beneficial in terms of improving the bill or aspects of the bill.

You know, the member though did touch on public education, the importance of public education, did talk about choice, did talk about private schools, charter schools. I did just have a couple of very quick questions, again, just take a minute or two, but I did have a couple of quick questions for the member. I was just curious if the member does, indeed, support private schools or not, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I will not respond to that minister's question.

Mr. Chair, or Madam Chair – my apologies. Long day. The UCP are not saying out loud what they are doing covertly in this clumsy piece of legislation, Bill 51, Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Between section 20, which will add section 187.1 to the Education Act, and the amendments to clarify private schools versus independent schools, the picture is quite telling.

Why are we making these amendments in tandem, Madam Chair? Curiouser and curiouser this government becomes with each

passing day, but maybe it's not all that curious. Trustees have been letting me know that this is exactly the direction this government is wanting to go: privatize education, just like their boondoggle of an attempt to privatize health care. Oh, how I worry about what scandal the UCP might cook up under privatized education, and we need to look no further than Bill 51, which will severely undermine the public school and Catholic school boards when it comes to the school stock in their rosters.

Madam Chair, what the UCP giveth, it taketh away. That's what Bill 51 is planning to do, and you don't need to take my word for it. You can read it in black and white in the bill itself. While the UCP are praising themselves for giving a few schools to some of the corners of Alberta that desperately need them, they are setting themselves up to not expropriate under the Expropriation Act but to actually expropriate schools to give them up to private school operators under this amendment act.

Let's call it what it actually is, Madam Chair. Even with this government's attempt to cover it up under section 187.1(3)(c), under the 12th edition of the *Black's Law Dictionary* – and I swear I did not think I would ever reference the *Black's Law Dictionary* outside of law school, but here I am – *Black's Law* offers the following definition of an expropriation: “a governmental taking or modification of an individual's property rights, esp. by eminent domain,” and “a voluntary surrender of rights or claims; the act of renouncing of divesting oneself of something previously claimed as one's own.”

With the changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act that this government has proposed, oh boy, we are going to gear up for whatever these expropriations will likely cause. I say likely because, although I'd hoped the UCP might have learned their lesson from the corrupt care scandal, a leopard might not change its spots, Madam Chair.

Let's not forget that, in light of this scandal and with reference to this bill, we should all be concerned about school ownership existing solely under Alberta Infrastructure. This is a ministry which relies on self-reporting conflicts of interest. The Auditor General also flagged some concerns, which cast enough doubt into whether Alberta Infrastructure is capable of owning and managing new school sites.

We only need to look at what happened in Camrose, that my good friend from Edmonton-South West mentioned, which was a gong show that happened there with a school which had no access roads or no utilities. We look back at some of the committees that spoke about this, and the answer that we got was just: “Well, we didn't know what happened. We weren't sure what went back and forth. There were some major concerns that we didn't know. We just assumed.” What's going to happen when these transfers are being made under this act?

5:50

I worry about the quality of education that our kiddos are going to be receiving with all of this hullabaloo that's going to be going back and forth between these private operators and the public operators and taking away from our public operators to give to the private operators. You can't rob Peter to pay Paul in this circumstance. The only people that are deprived from this are our kids and our education system.

Now, while I say this, I can already hear the members opposite rise in this Chamber crying: fearmongering, fearmongering. That's the signature line when it comes to the truth, and there is a shred of reality to it. To that I say: Alberta, pick up your reading glasses and see what it is exactly that this government is doing. They're planning to gut our public education system and hand it over to private operators. If underfunding our public education system was not enough, they're going in and surgically removing much-needed school spaces in our province to satisfy the never-ending goal of privatization that this government is so keen on advancing.

Instead of focusing on our schools bursting at the seams, this government is focused on robbing the real estates of school boards to give them to private entities in the name of what? Of what? Well, Madam Chair, if the UCP have ever visited one of their schools, especially in urban centres, there's a high enrolment and sometimes even lottery systems in my own backyard. One of the schools has a lottery system for people that live across the street. They can't even access those schools. This hits way too close to home for me. In that same neighbourhood that I live in, some families are prevented from even accessing that school across the street because our classrooms are already so full.

This is not to say that the schools that come online in the next couple of years might not alleviate this pressure, but that is a few years too late that the UCP could have committed funding before this issue became as pressing as it is today. You see, not only are our elementary and junior high classrooms filled with eager and curious young minds, but in Edmonton we are at a boiling point. Our high schools will not be able to handle the crushing weight of enrolment that is yet to come. Taking more stock out of the public system is only going to exacerbate this problem.

In Edmonton-West Henday this concern is quite pressing for many parents, who are already thinking about this gap in our community. Despite having young children who have just started their educational journey, they are already preparing for the worst because all of our high schools are over capacity. Schools like Athlone, LaPerle, David Thomas King, and Winterburn are between 90 and 115 per cent utilization. Every single one of the Edmonton Catholic schools in my riding are above 90 per cent utilization, with my niece and nephew's school being the worst: Bishop David Motiuk being at 131 per cent utilization.

Madam Chair, I visit these schools, and I see how they are bursting at the seams. Before teachers even have to bring up how full their classes are, I see it first-hand. I see it in the desks pushed together, using up every available piece of the classroom. I see them having to rely on the portables, which are good additions to the schools. But those classrooms are already full, and those portables just arrived.

The high schools, that the parents of Edmonton-West Henday are concerned aren't there but have no choice but to access, include Jasper Place, which is at 98 per cent utilization right now. We bring up all those kiddos from these other schools; it's just going to be a lot worse. They are already over 100 per cent utilization rate: Ross Shep, which is at 114 per cent utilization, or Queen Elizabeth in the northeast of Edmonton-West Henday, which is at 96 per cent utilization. All of these numbers are current as of March 4, 2025, per the Edmonton public school's 10-year facilities plan.

While we're musing about making historic investments, we are missing the point. If we put in place this piece of legislation, we're going to lose more stock. I talked with my trustees. I've done the type of consultation that this government should have done. We need to make sure that the public system remains robust and accessible for all Albertans. Not everyone has the means to pay for private education. Not everyone has the means to send their kids to that type of education system. We need to be realistic about the

folks that do access this type of education system, specifically our public schools or our Catholic schools. I'm a product of public Catholic school. I wouldn't be here if I did not get the education or the teachers that supported me along this journey. I would not be here if we did not have those investments.

We need to continue making sure that we are working at this. We need to make sure that we are facilitating access to schools and high schools at a decent rate. Unfortunately, I cannot support this bill in good faith because I also have to look at the Edmonton Catholic numbers. I'm afraid they're not much better than the public system that I just referenced, Madam Chair. St. Francis Xavier is at 107 per cent utilization, and St. Oscar Romero is at a staggering 117 per cent utilization. While a Catholic school in one of my communities of Rosenthal has been approved for planning, there are still kids in Edmonton-West Henday that continue to get older and need those spaces in high schools.

Finally, Madam Chair, I would be remiss if I did not raise my concerns around the removal of a trustee as a sanction for violating the code of conduct. Many of us in this Chamber may remember the only trustee who has been removed. I don't need to restate what my good friend from Edmonton-South West shared moments ago because it is quite shocking that a trustee in this province would even say this about the students which they are supposed to be responsible for.

That trustee, or I should say ex-trustee, was quite justly and understandably, might I add, removed for her homophobic and transphobic remarks made while in an elected position. [interjection] Madam Chair, this is unacceptable. With section 33 being amended to change the parameters – and I just heard the minister laugh at that. I don't know what's funny about transphobic or homophobic comments.

Section 33 being amended to change the parameters of code of conduct sanctions for a school board is unconscionable, especially after that same trustee I mentioned obtained a judgment that found that this removal was fair. A court of law found this judgment to be fair. Madam Chair, I must urge that we take note of the important work that our trustees do, but they also have a standard to follow.

I'd like to thank the chair for listening to me. This government is wading into territory it should not be moving into whatsoever. Madam Chair, for these reasons, I cannot in good faith support this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members on Bill 51?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 51.

[The clauses of Bill 51 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The House stands recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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