



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 2, 2025

Day 19

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. 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 ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my privilege to have met with Mr. Raphaël Dang, the consul general of France in Vancouver, earlier this morning. I am delighted to welcome him to the Chamber this afternoon. Mr. Dang is joined by his press attaché, Mr. Jérémie Pericou Habaillou, and the consul general of France in Edmonton, Mr. Jordan Willi. Bienvenue and thank you for being with us today. I ask that you please rise to receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Okay. We've got a school group today. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you another group of 34 grade 6 students from A. Blair McPherson with their teachers and school staff. I ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Chamber one of my constituents, Kevin Boettger, who is a fourth-generation farmer and a very proud father of four beautiful children. Welcome. Please stand and let us give you the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

The Speaker: Again the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, again. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Shiv Dutt and his better half, Sanjolly Dutt. Mr. and Mrs. Dutt are well-recognized and established entrepreneurs and serve with many community organizations. I would request that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

Members' Statements

Recovery Community Contracts

Member Eremenko: The timeline is clear as day, Mr. Speaker. The Premier names Marshall Smith her chief of staff in 2022, at which point he really leans in on the recovery-oriented system of care that he and his colleagues in private treatment centres have

been pining for for years, and he can do so with a seemingly endless stream of resources.

Months later private service providers are flocking to Alberta – that's a direct quote from the deputy minister, by the way – each of them eager to leverage their relationship with Mr. Smith. The chief of staff, with the blessing of multiple ministers of Mental Health and Addiction, becomes the much-published and celebrated architect of the Alberta recovery model, and in his wake are for-profit companies eager to get their piece of the recovery pie.

One such individual, a long-standing friend and colleague of Marshall Smith, gets the memo that Alberta is the Wild West of addiction treatment and there is potential to make a great deal of money. He creates a company. The company bids on a package of contracts worth \$70 million. They win all four in a supposedly competitive process even though the company didn't exist anywhere in Canada three months prior.

There is reason to believe that the company is tied to Sam Mraiche and corrupt care, a scandal that has multiple ministers and Marshall Smith at its rotten core. Meanwhile organizations that have been in this province for decades, making do with little attention and even less funding, have been cast aside, Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving organizations supplanted by for-profit operators who would build the system in Marshall Smith's image.

Government is failing terribly at this whole procurement undertaking. It happened with Alberta Surgical Group and Turkish Tylenol. It happened with DynaLife. It happened with RSG. They just can't stop themselves from making their friends rich with taxpayer money, and it will keep happening as they privatize health care even further because that is the whole point.

Federal Firearms Buyback Program

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in strong support of Alberta's law-abiding firearms owners. For years responsible firearms owners in this province have been unfairly targeted by federal policy that does nothing to address violent crime. These Albertans are hunters, sport shooters, farmers, ranchers, and outdoor enthusiasts. They follow the rules. They complete the training. They're not the problem, yet Ottawa continues to advance their ineffective, costly confiscation scheme, that will spend more than \$750 million without addressing the root cause of firearms crimes.

That pilot project launched in Nova Scotia: well, they've collected a grand total of 22 firearms. Mr. Speaker, this gun grab was doomed to fail. Even the federal Public Safety minister said that he didn't think that it would work or actually help public safety. The federal government's approach is not only misguided; it undermines public confidence in our justice system and diverts resources away from real public safety priorities.

Alberta's government is taking a principled and measured stance. Our Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services has directed law enforcement not to enforce or implement the federal gun grab. Albertans expect law enforcement to focus on violent criminals, gangs, and those who threaten community safety, not licensed, responsible gun owners acting within the law.

Alberta's government is also reaffirming something fundamental. Albertans have the right to use reasonable force to defend themselves, their families, and their homes. This principle is reflected in the Attorney General's updated guidance which directs prosecutors not to pursue charges involving home defence. Alberta will not stand by while responsible gun owners are treated like common criminals. We'll always stand up for common sense, for responsible firearms owners, and for a safer Alberta for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

UCP and NDP Government Records

Member Ellingson: Albertans have historically expected fiscal discipline and a prosperous economy from a Conservative government, but that isn't what they're getting. Let's recall the track record of this government. Just this year alone they're on track to dig Alberta another \$6.4 billion into deficit and pile on more debt. The budget wildly projected oil to be \$71 next year while it currently sits at \$58. This UCP government shows they're all too okay with big deficits and growing debt.

What do Albertans get for this debt? A commitment to not build another stand-alone hospital and to pay out of pocket for health care services. Despite all the hoopla no new schools. Unemployment is the highest outside of Atlantic Canada. Youth unemployment is the highest in generations. People struggle to afford a place to live and to pay for groceries. And while they increase pay for themselves, they vote against increasing minimum wage.

Alberta's New Democrats steered this province through oil prices two-thirds of what we see today and 10 per cent of the royalty revenue seen today. In that environment Alberta's New Democrats managed to build the largest cancer centre in Canada and build and modernize over 200 schools. Investments in tech and innovation tripled. Alberta was leading the country in investment in renewables. Construction began on the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. Alberta's New Democrats raised minimum wage and cut child poverty in half.

It is time for a government focused on Albertans, a government with a track record of building the infrastructure needed to deliver on education and health care, a government that respects the Charter rights of individuals and delivers for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, it is time for an Alberta New Democratic government.

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

1:40

Nuclear Energy

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know that reliable power isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. It forms the foundation of our economic strength and quality of life. Across Canada and around the world jurisdictions are grappling with challenges to maintain a reliable energy supply. These challenges are amplified by an unprecedented surge in demand, driven by economic growth and emerging technologies like AI data centres.

To meet this reality, we must think bigger and plan smarter. This means embracing innovation and pursuing an all-of-the above approach to energy. That is why our government has launched the Nuclear Energy Engagement and Advisory Panel. Nuclear energy has powered Canada safely and reliably for more than 60 years. We have world-class expertise, including our own homegrown CANDU reactor technology. Alberta has even hosted a research reactor at the University of Alberta.

Nuclear energy not only has the potential to power our homes; it can create opportunities to strengthen Alberta's industrial base, especially in rural and remote communities. It could attract investment, drive high-tech careers in science and engineering, and can support health innovation. In fact, Mr. Speaker, nuclear technology can save lives. Canada is a global leader in producing medical isotopes critical for cancer treatments, diagnostics, and surgeries.

For years our government has recognized this potential, and now it's time to move from conversation to action. Everyone across our province is invited to take part in the public webinars on December 8 and 10. These sessions will provide important insights and details, which will be shared later this week. This is about building energy security, advancing innovation and life-saving treatments, and

bolstering the industrial development that has made Alberta tick for the last seven decades. Mr. Speaker, if we want to keep Alberta strong, growing, and competitive, we must seriously consider the opportunity that nuclear energy presents to us today.

Thank you.

Public Health Care

Mr. Deol: Let me give you a simple statistic, one you can put on a piece of paper and carry in your head. Our friends in the United States spend 9 per cent of their gross national product on health care, yet 34 million of their people have no health care coverage at all. In Canada we spend 7 per cent of our gross national product, and every man, woman, and child is covered under medicare.

This was Tommy Douglas's vision more than 40 years ago. When the concept of universal care was introduced in 1947 in Saskatchewan under Tommy Douglas and his NDP government, things changed for Canadians. Bringing in a groundbreaking health system, his government also delivered 17 balanced budgets. He even eliminated Saskatchewan's debt, proving that universal health care is not only morally right but financially responsible.

The Canada Health Act of 1984 later ensured the core principles of universality and accessibility and prohibited extra billing and user fees. This framework has ensured that Canadians receive care when they need it and where they need it. It passed Parliament with unanimous all-party support.

Mr. Speaker, how things change. The UCP government's attack on universal, accessible public health care is unprecedented and so concerning. Alberta now has fewer per capita doctors, and a million Albertans are searching for family physicians. They also face overcrowded ERs and yearslong waits for critical surgeries and cancer care. I hear from constituents whose conditions have worsened or become irreversible due to delays. Some have even left the country for treatment after losing hope.

Albertans are tired, frustrated, and increasingly threatened by out-of-pocket treatment costs during an affordability and unemployment crisis. Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve better, and better is possible.

UCP Government Record

Member Boparai: Let's look at this government's report card. Spoiler alert: it's full of cuts, chaos, corruption, and cruelty. Health care: F. They are breaking public health care to force families into for-profit, U.S.-style health care, another privatization failure in the making after \$125 million on privatizing lab services with DynaLife, \$80 million on Turkish Tylenol, and millions more on private surgical contracts for friends. Albertans are left paying for their mess.

Education: F. Teachers stripped of their right to strike. Classrooms are still overcrowded, and we are still the lowest funding in Canada for our kids. This government doesn't fund their futures; it funds failures.

Affordability: F. Insurance rates are through the roof, 15 per cent for auto insurance, with home rates quadrupling, not to mention skyrocketing utility bills. The UCP's idea of affordability: forcing families to choose between heating and eating. They are increasing salaries for UCP government politicians while doing nothing to increase people's wages, and they even voted against raising the minimum wage.

Accountability: F. Elections Alberta and the Auditor General, the very offices investigating corruption and citizen-led recalls, are gutted. The Auditor General: fired. If only secrecy wasn't their full-time job, imagine what they could do for Albertans.

Meanwhile their successes are clear. Corruption: A-plus. Undermining oversight, restricting investigations, and funnelling taxpayer dollars to friends and insiders: they really make it look easy.

Distractions: again, A-plus. Alberta separatism and selfies with Trump and with new licence plates: they don't have a clue what hard-working Albertans need.

Consequences: A-plus. Youth unemployment, chasing away investment, and wasting taxpayer dollars: they don't know how to run an economy or this province.

Mr. Speaker, good governance isn't extra credit; it's a core subject, and this government is failing. It's time we gave them one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of a letter from October by the Chiefs Steering Committee on Water and Related Infrastructure to reject proposed amendments to Alberta's Water Act, where they're requesting a response from the Premier and the minister.

The Speaker: The Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of petitions signed by 61 of my constituents on behalf of the Canada branch of End Transplant Abuse in China.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. My letter is from somebody named Caroline and was sent to the education minister and others highlighting the disrespect of Bill 2 and that there were other options the government could have chosen instead.

The Speaker: The Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of an article from the *Globe and Mail* entitled Canadians are Protecting the Mirage of Single-tier Health Care. It Doesn't Exist. [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, this isn't debate. We're just doing tablings. Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three e-mails from folks who work in education, who are urging the UCP to start respecting teachers and education workers and again reminding them about the egregious use of Bill 2 and the notwithstanding clause.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling three letters I received concerning Bill 9, the antitrans legislation, and I have the requisite copies.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from a Calgary-Foothills constituent and teacher talking about the impact of underfunding for public education.

The Speaker: Any more tablings?

Seeing none, I have a tabling. Members, I rise in accordance with section 15(1) of the Citizen Initiative Act to table the requisite copies of a policy proposal that was provided to me by the Chief Electoral Officer yesterday, December 1, at 1:02 p.m.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The first question goes to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Services Procurement Process

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Premier continually claims to barely know Sam Mraiche. She didn't even know he was related to her Justice minister. Now we know she's had dinner at his house, she's had multiple meetings with him, she's had many social outings with him, and he was with her and her closest advisers on election night. Now, I've had a lot of successful election nights, and I know that you spend time with your closest advisers; your inner, inner circle. How did someone with a billion dollars in for-profit taxpayer contracts end up in the Premier's inner circle?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier of Alberta.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd invite the member opposite to read that story a second time because it says I spent the evening with my husband and then, when the results came in, which were quite late, I went around to multiple different hospitality suites. I spent that evening talking to hundreds if not thousands of really excited Albertans happy that the UCP government had won their second majority government.

1:50

Mr. Nenshi: Well, we do know the Premier enjoys the hospitality suite.

But this gentleman was with her chief of staff, her new chief of staff, and yesterday in the House the Justice minister told us: don't worry because the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, Dale McFee, is going to ensure that all of Justice Wyant's recommendations are implemented, and there will be no more corruption. There's only one problem. Mr. McFee has attended multiple social outings with Mr. Mraiche and the Justice minister. Does the Premier see a conflict of interest here, and has she asked her deputy minister to recuse himself?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I meet with hundreds if not thousands of Albertans and people who want to do business with our government, much like the former mayor of Calgary did when he went to a soccer game at the invitation of a prominent business leader in Calgary. That's just, I guess, in his view, part of the job. I meet with lots of business leaders. In no instance did Mr. Mraiche ever talk to me about business, about contracts. What he was concerned about was racism against his Muslim community. What he was also concerned about was encampments in Edmonton and what we could do to improve the business environment. [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, members, members. Just the person recognized we should hear from.

Mr. Nenshi: She suddenly does remember all those meetings with Mr. Mraiche. I wonder how many of those hundreds and thousands

of businesspeople she meets with get billions of dollars in government contracts.

Interestingly, her advisers also include five members of the Mraiche family; six if you include the Justice minister. She hired Sam Mraiche's son and three of his nephews to work for the government, and a fourth nephew was hired to work in – wait for it – AHS procurement. Does the Premier think having all these family members of someone they're giving a billion dollars to passes the smell test, and why did none of these people talk to . . .

The Speaker: Member, member, member. When I stand, you need to stop talking.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned before, yes, I have met the individual a handful of times, and I have met many, many business leaders a handful of times. That's what you're supposed to do in this job. You're supposed to meet with people, identify any issues that they have, and then work with your caucus members to identify policy issues that might address them. The issues that are of concern to the Edmonton business community are of concern to me. The concerns of the Muslim community are of interest to me, and I will continue to meet with Edmonton business leaders and members of the Muslim community to address their issues.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Will the Premier continue to hire family members of all those businesspeople she purportedly meets with?

Recall and Citizen Initiative Legislation

Mr. Nenshi: Now, listen, we know that last week the UCP cabinet voted to recall the recall legislation, and yesterday the Premier suggested in a press conference that changes are coming, but also yesterday the Justice minister's spokesperson told us that cabinet and caucus had decided against recalling the recall legislation. Now there are 14, 15, 16 petitions out, more than a third of the people opposite, more to come. Can the Premier simply clarify: is she recalling the recall of the . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're not that new. I'm insisting now. If you want to keep asking questions, because I will stop you, you need to stop when I stand up.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this is going to become a my record is better than your record kind of debate, I can tell you that we'll put our government's record up against their record any day of the week; \$80 billion worth of debt racked up. We're spending \$3.5 billion a year on interest payments on the debt they racked up. We have paid down \$15 billion in debt. We have added \$15 billion to the heritage savings trust fund. They spent \$3 billion on health care and got zero progress. In fact, things deteriorated. Two billion dollars on classroom sizes; they got larger. They have no reason to lecture us.

Mr. Nenshi: We know the Premier doesn't have an answer when she resorts to a lecture. We'll try again.

Every time this government messes with elections legislation, the result is less democracy. The Justice minister confirmed on the weekend that changes to campaign finance were made solely to benefit Conservatives. And now we're hearing that the government

is intending to make referenda and citizen petitions more difficult unless they are for causes the government agrees with. Can the Premier simply confirm: does she believe that democracy should apply equally to everyone, or is the playing field slanted only to her supporters?

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be additional changes coming on Thursday. I would invite the members to wait for that legislation rather than mention it here, but I can tell you that we on this side of the Chamber are quite happy to campaign on our record, and that is what we're going to do. We know what it was like under the NDP with the early phase-out of coal, that caused prices on power to spike to 17 cents a kilowatt hour; \$4 billion of taxpayer money spent bailing out those coal companies they shut down early as well as having to subsidize. Nobody wants to return to those bad old days.

Mr. Nenshi: If the Premier is happy to campaign on her record, call an election now.

Now, leaked documents suggest that the government wishes to politicize the citizen initiative work even more. They'll put the Minister of Justice in charge of determining whether anything is constitutional. Of course, the Premier may recall that that's the court's job, to determine what's constitutional. Does the Premier believe the courts have any role to play in determining what's constitutional, or does she make that determination alone?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is talking out of both sides of his mouth on this one because, on the one hand, he says that you want to make sure that citizens' initiatives go forward and there's no interference, and then on the other hand he's saying that it's all right for the Chief Electoral Officer to interfere in those decisions by sending them to the court in order to prevent them from going forward. Which is it? We believe that the referendums that should go forward are ones that have the majority support of the citizens. There's a process that has been laid out. If they can get 177,000 signatures, it will be put to the people. If the people pass it, then it will go ahead.

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

Mr. Nenshi: What a fascinating answer. She accused the Chief Electoral Officer of wrongdoing and interference for following the legislation that she herself put before the House.

Alberta Separatism

Mr. Nenshi: The UCP, Mr. Speaker, is clearly now a separatist party, and we have a separatist government. Jeff Rath rallied the convention and he got a standing ovation calling for a free and independent Alberta while the Premier got booed every time she used her classic phrase and said that Canada works. Will the Premier confirm that she will be putting forth, as she just said, a referendum on separation this spring?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was delighted to be able to sign and reveal with the Prime Minister of Canada an historic memorandum of understanding that will allow for us to expand the development of our resources, to make sure that we're reaching emissions reduction targets at a level that will continue to support our industry, and to ensure that we have Indigenous

ownership of those future projects. We're very proud of that, and that's what I'm prepared to go to the public with. I believe that Canada works. I know that the majority of our members believe that Canada works, the majority of Albertans believe that Canada works, and we're very pleased to be working with the government on that. [some applause]

Mr. Nenshi: At least she got a few claps and not boos for saying it this time.

The Premier has been flirting with separatism nearly as long as she's been having secret meetings with Sam Mraiche and Jitendra Prasad. Her entire political career has been focused on grievance politics with Canada, and now the chickens have come home to roost. As much as she'd like to blame the federal government for this, it is she who has been pandering to separatists. Meanwhile 13.9 per cent of all Alberta electors in the largest petition in Alberta's history signed to stay part of Canada. We just had it tabled. So what is the Premier's plan here? Will she take us to a referendum?

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 1:58.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We congratulate the group on gathering so many signatures, which asks for a referendum on whether to remain in Canada. Of course, we've got a couple of options now that the petition has been verified and that it has been tabled here in the Legislature, and caucus and cabinet are going to be meeting to discuss how we're going to proceed on that.

Mr. Nenshi: The Forever Canadian petitioners have clearly indicated that they don't want a referendum. All they want is a vote in the Legislature saying that Albertans are proud Canadians. Listen, we will certainly vote yes on that vote, so if at least four people on the other side are willing to stand up and say that they're proud Canadians, this goes away real quick. But it doesn't solve the Premier's political problem. She's pandered to them, and now her base is crying for independence. Once again, does she want a job-destroying referendum on separation, or will she work to avoid one?

2:00

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate that that's not the way the referendum petition was worded. The referendum petition was worded to call for a referendum, and that's part of the reason why we need to, now that it's been tabled, meet as a caucus and a cabinet and decide what the next steps are. There's a very clear process that's detailed in the legislation, and we'll be taking that away, and we'll be assessing it. But I can tell you that I feel stronger than ever that Canada works because of the MOU that I signed with the Prime Minister last week. We're going to continue to work on developing a pipeline to the B.C. coast, and I'd invite the members opposite to support us in that.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Pancholi: The Premier confirmed yesterday she met with Jitendra Prasad, a public servant, and Sam Mraiche multiple times while she was running for leader of the UCP and that just weeks after she became Premier, on behalf of her government Prasad negotiated the inflated and disastrous contracts for Turkish Tylenol and surgical facilities with Sam Mraiche's companies, the same Prasad who was found to be in a conflict of interest. The Premier has spent the last month blaming AHS procurement staff for the bad

contracts her government signed and wanted. But if those staff were so incompetent, why was she meeting with them before she even became Premier?

The Speaker: The minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Concerns were raised about the procurement practices and procedures and handling of conflicts of interest in AHS procurement, and I'm pleased to share that the procurements for the central and south zone surgical facilities have been cancelled. Going forward, procurement and contracting are being transferred to the Health Shared Services organization. We've hired a consultant, RSM, to align our procurement and contracting procedures with the best jurisdictions in the world. That's going to result in more transparent, accountable, and public processes for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That begs the question of why this government didn't cancel those contracts back in January, back when there were serious allegations that there was political interference made in every step of the way with those contract negotiations. In fact, Judge Wyant said that he couldn't actually confirm that political interference because nobody, not one single UCP MLA, minister, or political staff, was interviewed by him. Why didn't they participate in that investigation? And can this government confirm that Judge Wyant was given the records the *Globe and Mail* found proving that the Premier met with Jitendra Prasad and Sam Mraiche multiple times before she became Premier? It's a straightforward question: were those records given to Judge Wyant?

The Speaker: The minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The procurements were paused when there were issues and concerns raised about procurement practices and the handling of conflicts of interest, and they were paused out of respect for the Wyant review. Judge Wyant made several recommendations, which are now in the process of being implemented across government and across our health delivery organizations. Again, there have been significant changes at all levels of AHS. Procurement is being moved out of AHS into the Health Shared Services organization, and we have hired a consultant to help us align our procurement practices with the best jurisdictions in the world. We're committed to that.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, what that doesn't address and take responsibility for is that there was clearly political interference into those contracts in the first place. We know that the Premier's chief of staff, Marshall Smith, lived in a house owned by Sam Mraiche's sister. Mr. Smith personally signed off on hiring Mr. Mraiche's son and four nephews for cushy jobs in government, AHS. This is the same Marshall Smith who is alleged to have put significant pressure on AHS to renew and sign more government contracts. If those contracts are being cancelled or paused, it's because this government has acknowledged that it mishandled those contracts and that it politically interfered. So can we get an apology right now to all Alberta taxpayers for their . . .

The Speaker: Member, I know it's inconvenient that you have to stop talking when I stand, but that's what we go by here.

The minister of preventative health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Judge Wyant had access to all the documents he wanted. There were 2.25 million

documents that he looked at. In fact, neither the Premier nor I were around when those contracts were signed. In fact, the judge did not actually ask us to be interviewed because we weren't there when those contracts were signed.

Mr. Nenshi: We'd like to forget when you were in government, too.

Member LaGrange: I would have been happy to be interviewed by the judge, but he didn't interview me or anyone else.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted at 2:05 p.m.

School Class Size and Complexity

Ms Chapman: Last night's education town hall could have been an opportunity for the UCP to repair relations with teachers. Instead, teachers were offered nothing but excuses and confusion. Class sizes are too large, but the Premier blames Ottawa on immigration. Classrooms are complex; well, the education minister said he's, quote, just beginning to realize how complexity is affecting the classroom. Why did the Premier and education minister host a town hall when they're not prepared to do the work to fix what's broken in education, starting with their disrespect for teachers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a great privilege and honour to join the Premier for a telephone town hall with teachers last night. I want to thank the over 1,600 teachers and other individuals who dialed in and participated. It was a great opportunity to listen directly to teachers, hear some of their concerns. We agree with the majority of their concerns and their pressures. We're on the same page in terms of wanting to improve conditions in the classroom, address violence and aggression, build more schools, and provide funding where it's needed the most.

The Speaker: As we start the part with no preambles on supplementaries, the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Given that yesterday the minister conceded that his own government asks too much of teachers, requiring them to work in unsafe conditions with poor funding, with overflowing classrooms and given that this government used the nuclear notwithstanding option to rob teachers of their constitutional rights and force them back to work under those very same conditions, to the minister: how could Alberta teachers believe that this government holds anything but contempt for them?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, as I've said in the past, indeed, our classroom conditions have changed dramatically over the course of the past two years. Just in the course of the past two years we've seen a 38 per cent increase in the number of students who speak English as an additional language. We've seen a 41 per cent increase in refugee students. All of that being said, today teachers have to wear more hats than ever before. They're expected to be interpreters, mental health professionals, behavioural experts, and other individuals in addition to their teaching responsibilities. That's not practical, and we aim to assist them.

Ms Chapman: Given that this government could have respected teachers enough to have returned to the bargaining table but didn't, given that this government could have pursued any number of options to end the teachers' strike, including arbitration, but didn't

and given that at least one cabinet minister told a constituent that they used the notwithstanding clause because they knew arbitration might lead to a better deal for teachers, to any minister across the aisle: how can Albertans trust that this government has any respect for upholding Charter rights?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to talk more about our record and contrast that in comparison to the NDP. When the NDP was in office, they approved only 46 school projects. Under our UCP government over 150 school projects have been approved. In addition, our spending on education just over the course of the past couple of years has increased by 11.7 per cent. That far exceeds any spending that the NDP ever provided to education.

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

Federal Firearms Policies

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been clear that the federal firearms confiscation scheme unfairly targets the wrong people. Law-abiding gun owners are responsible, trained, and licensed. These folks are not the problem and shouldn't be treated like criminals. Can the Minister of Justice tell this House why Alberta thinks the federal government should focus their efforts on real public safety priorities rather than an ineffective gun grab and what they're doing about it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

2:10

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has made it absolutely clear that we'll not enforce the federal gun confiscation scheme, and that's because the program is misguided. It's expensive, and it doesn't do a single thing for public safety. That's why we'll be tabling a motion under the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act that makes it clear that we'll not enforce or assist the federal government in the gun seizure program here in Alberta. Law-abiding owners in this province deserve respect, and that's exactly what they're going to get with this government.

The Speaker: Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that Albertans expect that when their safety is at risk, the law will protect them, not penalize them and given that this Assembly should make it clear that Albertans have the right to use reasonable force to defend themselves, their families, and their homes from intruders, can the Minister of Justice tell this House why Albertans facing this worst case scenario can be assured this right will be protected?

The Speaker: Only the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the Alberta sovereignty act motion will affirm that Albertans do have the right to use reasonable force to defend themselves and their loved ones within their homes. Our homes are our castles. They are sacred to us, and that's why I've recently issued guidelines to the Alberta Crown prosecution service to ensure that we take a proper approach to make sure that legitimate home defence is not pursued when individual Albertans are simply protecting their families. Albertans can feel confident that they will not be criminalized for protecting their loved ones.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Ottawa's gun confiscation scheme is expected to exceed \$750 million yet there is no evidence it will reduce the criminal use of firearms and given that hundreds of thousands of Albertans are licensed firearms owners and our province expects law enforcement to prioritize their efforts towards dealing with violent criminals, not hunters and sport shooters, can the minister of public safety outline how Motion 17 ensures that police allocate their time and resources toward genuine provincial policing priorities?

The Speaker: The minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. This government sets priorities for law enforcement in this province. You know, even Al Murphy, the president of the AACP, is not interested in using limited police resources that they have on the gun buyback program. He further said that the gun buyback program is an inefficient program which will not produce results. On this side of the House we support lawful gun owners. I can tell you that what we will focus on is the 4,000 organized crime groups that the members of the NDP let into this country, because on this side of the House we're going to support lawful gun owners.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:13 p.m.

Electric Power Prices and Transmission Costs

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government has dropped the ball on making utilities affordable or reliable. Under this government's watch Albertans have paid some of the highest utility costs in North America. It is Alberta's dirty secret. Just a few deregulated generators set prices at sometimes 20 times more than their production cost. Why is the Premier allowing the highest profits in these companies' histories to be recovered from hard-working Albertan families and small businesses?

The Speaker: The Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's ironic that those questions come from the NDP, who broke the electricity system in Alberta. Let's just go through some history, shall we? They're the ones who got off coal when coal was at 2.3 cents a kilowatt hour, costing Alberta taxpayers \$2 billion. We still pay \$100 million a year. That's roughly five schools a year that we can't build because the NDP broke that. On top of that, they offered contracts to renewables for such high rates that now that we have low prices, we still pay \$80 million a year for their bad work. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the Premier brags about coal phase-out in her speeches, given that this cabal of companies was raking in record profits through economic withholding, given that they couldn't even be bothered to keep the grid reliable – we all recall the UCP's frantic alerts telling families to turn off their lights – to the Premier: when will this government stop carrying water for the generator oligopoly and stop blaming renewables that have actually lowered Albertans' utility rates all while Albertans are treading water and the Premier and her UCP MLAs continue to give themselves raises?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this just illustrates how little the NDP actually know about the system that they broke. They continue to add costs to Albertans, and you know what we have to thank for a very stable system now? Natural gas generators, that are there no matter what time of year, what the weather. Natural gas comes through. Every time that we have an emergency, where are renewables? Not generating because they can't. It's too cold. It's dark. It doesn't have the ability come when we need it. Thanks to the work that we've done, we've mitigated all that power monopoly within the system.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that industry consumers located in northern Alberta pay proportionally less for power than working families in the same region, given that cross-subsidies cover up mistakes and there is only one taxpayer, what approach will the UCP take to helping rural and northern families who are paying some of the highest transmission and distribution costs in the country? Will the Premier guarantee that Calgary and Edmonton families will never be forced to subsidize the transmission and distribution fees in northern service territory?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the best thing that we can do to help Albertans with their power costs is make sure the NDP never get elected again. In fact, under their government they didn't have a plan at all, and when renewables built, they added \$5 billion of transmission costs that Albertans will be paying for the next 50 to 60 years. We are making sure that we take care of Albertans. We are making ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, it wasn't hard to hear the question. Maybe some people in here didn't like the question, but they heard it. Maybe some don't like the answer, and we need to hear that also.

The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess some don't like hearing the truth of their failed ways.

We are here to work for Albertans. We are here making the system more reliable, we are here driving down the costs, and we are here making life better for Albertans.

Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

Dr. Elmeligi: In September the AER issued approvals for mine 14, a coal mine north of Grande Cache, after the AER CEO unexpectedly cancelled a public hearing. FOIP documents show that Summit Coal lobbied the AER CEO and the Minister of Energy and Minerals to deny this public hearing. Albertans took it to the courts and have been granted permission to appeal that decision. Has the Minister of Energy and Minerals yet again interfered in the independence of the AER and created more costs to taxpayers for coal-related legal action?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I mean, the NDP screwed up this file very badly for Albertans. They cost us billions of dollars, not just in prematurely shutting down coal, as we just heard from the Minister of Affordability and Utilities, but also in inviting coal companies from all over the world to come in and to dig, to dig not just in land that's appropriate to take for coal but places that are totally inappropriate. We've listened to Albertans. We've heard clearly from them that some things are appropriate and some things are not. We're going to take care of Albertans and make sure that they're always at the forefront of every decision.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that this gong show with coal started in 2020, when this government was in power, given that Albertans have paid \$238 million to date in settlements to two different companies, given that coal companies make money from investors as soon as they start exploration even if a mine doesn't proceed, given that it seems odd that Albertans should be on the hook to pay coal companies again for the same work and there's more to come, to the minister of energy: how many lawsuits are yet to be settled, and how much more will Albertans have to pay for their will-they-won't-they relationship with coal companies?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that member is just clearly wrong. She's, like normal with the NDP – they come late to the table. It was 2016 when the letter went out from the minister from the NDP government. That letter said: "Come on into Alberta. Don't worry about the rules. We'll take care of them. We'll avoid them for you." Dig, baby, dig: that was their motto. We don't believe that Albertans want that. We've heard clearly from them. They want responsible development. They want us to protect the water, the air, the land, and all the animals and especially humans. That's exactly what we're going to do.

2:20

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that this government has more flip-flops than a beach in Mexico, given that Albertans have been repeatedly and abundantly clear that they don't want coal mining on the eastern slopes in multiple surveys and consultations, given that only yesterday I tabled a petition with over 1,000 signatures requesting this government cancel any and all new coal mining and protect the eastern slopes, given that Corb Lund recently filed an application with Elections Alberta for a citizens' initiative petition to put an end to new coal mines on the eastern slopes, will the minister commit today to actually listening to Albertans this time and honour the results of these petitions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I find it ironic to hear this from that member, the Member for Banff-Kananaskis. I quote her: my riding is dependent on the jobs created and maintained by these industrial partners; they're a big part of who we are in Banff-Kananaskis. End quote. The industry she was talking about was the mines and operation of three major companies. It's interesting that she argues only for a carve-out for the mines within her constituency. What about the rest of Albertans? They want jobs, they want wealth, and they want to protect their environment. That's what we're doing. That's what we're going to continue to do for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: At this point we should only hear the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Government Accountability

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, a disturbing pattern has emerged. The UCP used notwithstanding on four pieces of legislation in just a month, before the courts have even ruled. With Bill 12 they are stripping Albertans of the right to sue for losses tied to AIMCo mismanagement. At the same time the UCP launches lawsuits against political opponents, races to stop recall, and aims to ban the word "progressive." To the Premier: why is the Wildrose so obsessed with blocking courts, limiting legal rights, and crushing accountability unless, of course, it has something to hide? [interjections]

The Speaker: Now we should hear only from the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, question period wouldn't be a real party without a personal attack coming from the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. Now, speaking of not being a real party, the independent members should really consider using their subscription for ChatGPT on doing proper research rather than selecting personal insults to direct at the Premier. It is ridiculous . . .

Mr. Guthrie: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: . . . the way the members opposite come at the government, suggesting malpractice or something like that. Mr. Speaker, it's ridiculous; it doesn't belong in this Chamber.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:22.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that the Auditor General didn't just find mistakes in the DynaLife fiasco – he found obstruction – and given that the AG reported thousands of documents redacted, records locked, missing, or destroyed, key officials refusing to co-operate and given that, worse yet, AHS staff testified they were afraid to speak for fear of retaliation, to the Premier: how can Albertans trust a government that must hide evidence just to survive its own scandals?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of preventative health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite's counting is inaccurate.

Ms Hoffman: Accurate.

Member LaGrange: Inaccurate. As much as the members opposite continue to yell at me, it is actually inaccurate.

The ministry did provide the Auditor General all of the documents they wanted, as we typically do to the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, members, members. Let's hear the answer. We don't have to like it, but we're actually kind of obligated to hear it.

Go ahead, Minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We provided in compliance with the way we usually provide documents. The Auditor General then went on to write his report. We are actually looking at that report, making sure we use those recommendations to improve the system.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given the hypocrisy of the UCP fighting doctors, teachers, municipalities, and its own watchdogs but given that they show their soft underbelly when it comes to foreign coal companies when they come knocking and given that tight relations with lobbyists pay dividends for those foreign coal companies and given that the UCP is using the courts to sue political opponents, block the Election Commissioner, and intimidate critics into silence, to the Premier: why do you only respect the courts when they serve your power and ignore them when they serve the public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of energy and . . .

Mr. Guthrie: Crying Brian.

Mr. Jean: Now, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Members.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: It's just harder to get stuff done if we can't hear ourselves or anybody else.

A point of order is noted at 2:25.

Start over again, please, Minister.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member for tomahawk steaks and specialty drinks . . .

Mr. Guthrie: Point of order.

Mr. Jean: . . . but when he was the minister of energy and had the opportunity to fix this file, he put a pair of blinders on and focused on T-bone steaks, medium rare. Mr. Speaker, that's not what this government is about. We are taking care of Albertans' best interests. We are going to protect them every step of the way even though the member opposite will continue to cause issues that aren't issues and aren't really there.

The Speaker: Well, that was a second point of order, at 2:25 p.m.

Daycare Investigation Process

Mr. Schmidt: On June 18 a parent reported their child was sexually abused at Willowbrae Academy Mill Creek daycare. This government's legislation requires that the daycare operator notify parents. Willowbrae waited two months to notify parents of the incident and even then refused to say that sexual abuse had occurred. A private, for-profit operator has every incentive to hide incidents that threaten profits rather than protect children. Will the Minister of Education and Childcare admit that his legislation is broken and commit to ensuring that his department, not operators, notify parents of serious incidents at daycares?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, if there's more that we can do to provide information to parents, we're happy to do so. In this specific case an allegation was brought before an individual, and a criminal investigation was immediately launched, and the individual was immediately removed from the school. Of course, you have to be mindful of communication and opportunity in situations where there is an active police investigation under way, but of course I think it's important for members just to see how the member opposite thinks of private entities. We believe that they're an important provider of child care spaces, but I know the member opposite has disdain for them, as he's just expressed, and does not want to see them in operation.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister says that he'll do anything except amend the legislation, which is what's needed to fix the problem, and given that parents deserve to know immediately if their children have been physically or sexually abused in daycare but given that this government has been far more aggressive about forcing schools to report when a child wants to change their pronouns rather than when a child is assaulted, will the minister amend his legislation so that parents are told quickly and clearly when abuse occurs, or does he truly believe that pronouns pose a greater threat to children than sexual predators?

Mr. Nicolaides: What a ridiculous comment, Mr. Speaker. As I've mentioned, in this particular circumstance an investigation began against an employee of this specific child care operator. Police began investigating the matter immediately, and the individual, of course, was removed as a worker at that child care centre immediately. As I mentioned a moment ago as well, if there are opportunities for us to strengthen enforcement and strengthen

notice to parents, we'll be happy to do that to make sure that parents are fully informed. We'll always be willing to look at those opportunities.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Given that the minister says that the employee responsible was removed when what he meant to say was that he skipped the country and is now out of reach of prosecution here in this country and given that as the regulator the government's first duty is to protect children and ensure parents are warned when their kids are harmed or at risk of harm, will the minister commit today to amending the Early Learning and Child Care Act so that his department and not operators must notify parents when their children are at risk of serious harm, or is he going to let more sexual predators off the hook, like he did earlier this year?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order or two were noted at 2:29 p.m.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As soon as the matter was raised and a complaint was filed, a police investigation began immediately by the appropriate police authorities. Of course, as a criminal matter it needs to be investigated by police. As I've mentioned twice already in this line of questioning, if there are opportunities for us to strengthen enforcement and strengthen communication opportunities, I'll be happy to explore that to help ensure that parents have . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, let's hear the answer.
Minister, please continue.

2:30

Mr. Nicolaides: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, we're happy to look at ways to strengthen enforcement and notification opportunities for parents. Again, we have to look at that within the context of a criminal investigation that's under way, so we'll be talking more with police authorities in this process.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Health Care Wait Times

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's growing population and increased demand for front-line medical care continue to put pressure on our emergency departments. Emergency rooms across the province, particularly in major centres, are experiencing longer wait times, which affects patient outcomes and places additional strain on health care staff. To the Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services: what is our government doing to address rising emergency room wait times and ensure Albertans can receive timely critical care when and where they need it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government knows that emergency department wait times are too long, which is why we're hiring additional health care professionals and physicians and why the acute-care action plan includes the addition of over 1,000 net new acute-care beds in the Edmonton and Calgary area. Two of these towers will be at the Grey Nuns and Misericordia, and one of the bed towers will be at the South Health Campus in Calgary. This builds on the \$15 million we've invested to develop eight new urgent care centres across the province in places like

Edmonton, WestView, east Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Cold Lake, and Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that extended surgical wait times can lead to worsening health outcomes for patients who urgently need procedures and further given that delays in scheduled surgeries place additional stress on hospitals, surgical teams, and families across Alberta, to the same minister: can you please tell this Assembly what steps our government is taking to reduce surgical wait times and improve access to essential procedures for Albertans? [interjections]

The Speaker: Members, there are other places to have private conversations; that's not here.

The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that more must be done to ensure Albertans receive their surgeries within clinically recommended time frames. That's why our government announced the acute-care action plan, which delivers an additional 50,000 surgeries by expanding partnerships with chartered surgical facilities to perform lower complexity surgeries so we can free up our hospitals to perform more complex surgeries. This builds on the Alberta surgical initiative's \$265 million in capital for new operating rooms, renovated spaces, and improved equipment to do even higher volumes than the record 318,000 we did last year. We're going to continue to invest in our surgical programming.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that improving emergency and surgical wait times requires long-term system planning, strategic investment, and efficient co-ordination across our health care system and further given that Albertans expect practical solutions that will strengthen hospital capacity and support front-line workers, can the minister please provide an update on how our government is implementing long-term solutions to enhance hospital efficiency and ensure Albertans receive timely emergency and surgical care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As part of the acute-care action plan our government is advancing two long-term strategies to ensure the health system meets Alberta's needs now and for the decades to come. First, through capital readiness we are developing a 50-year provincial capital plan to better balance community and hospital investments to ensure infrastructure keeps pace with growth. Second, through workforce resilience we are creating a long-term workforce plan to strengthen flexibility and to recruit and retain a world-class health workforce. We're going to continue to invest in our world-class public health care system.

Whistle-blower Protection for Health Care Workers

Member Tejada: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 doesn't just introduce for-profit, American-style health care; it also makes sweeping changes to how Albertans' health information is handled without the right safeguards in place to do so. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has warned that without whistle-blower protections, people who report issues will be left exposed to retaliation. To the

minister: given the commissioner's clear recommendation for robust whistle-blower protections, why is this government ignoring this advice while they privatize our public health care system?

The Speaker: The minister of preventative health services.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're doing nothing of the sort. We are working with the Privacy Commissioner to make sure that we do have the most robust privacy legislation in place, particularly as we bring in new Bill 11 areas that we're going to be working in, just because we're covering so many different things. The average Albertan would agree with us that if you have an accident by the side of the road and you have an ambulance come and pick you up, you want that paramedic to have access to your personal health care information. We're going to make it possible.

Member Tejada: Given that the question was about whistle-blower protections and given the Auditor General's report that the DynaLife scandal showed that Alberta Health Services staff were discouraged from voicing concerns due to fear of retaliation and given that the Auditor General has repeatedly highlighted gaps in accountability, including failures to protect those who report wrongdoing, how does the government justify not addressing whistle-blower protections in Bill 11, especially when the Auditor General's findings clearly show that fear of retaliation is a barrier to transparency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anyone who sees something that is going on that is wrong actually has a duty to report, regardless of where they are within the system. We continue to work on the recommendations by the Auditor General. The Auditor General made some recommendations in terms of how we can improve our work within Alberta Precision Labs and the work that we're doing in so many areas within health care. We're going to continue to work with the Auditor General along with the Privacy Commissioner and make sure that we have a system that actually looks after people's personal health care information.

Member Tejada: Given that the privacy concerns left in Bill 11 show this government's incompetence through and through and given that it's clear they rush their own priority legislation that makes regular people pay for the health care they need while infringing on their privacy rights and given that Bill 204 aims to address these concerns with enhanced whistle-blower protections, will the government put Bill 11 on the back burner, address the privacy concerns, and help pass Bill 204 to protect whistle-blowers in our health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are going to continue to work with the Privacy Commissioner. The Privacy Commissioner actually commended Bill 11 for some of the great things that are in there that safeguard the health care information of individuals, particularly abandoned health records. We're going to make sure that that's strengthened even further. We're going to continue to do that work with the Privacy Commissioner. We're going to make sure when we bring in the new health cards, et cetera, that all of that privacy information is safeguarded because we want the best safeguards in the country.

Support for Alberta Festivals

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, more than 500 events and festivals take place across our province each year, and more than 100 of these are considered major festivals, attracting large audiences and international visitors. They're a huge economic driver for our province. Sadly, GlobalFest, which has been an annual event in Calgary for 23 years, was forced this week to suspend its operations because of its financial pressures. Does the minister know how many other events and festivals are impacted by the affordability crisis this government refuses to address and may result... [Member Ceci's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I thank the member for his question. I've had the chance to attend GlobalFest many times and just as recently as a week or so ago met with Ken Goosen and his amazing team at the GlobalFest office to discuss their situation. We're proud that this government has awarded GlobalFest this year alone \$80,000 through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which brings our total support for GlobalFest, including AFA supports, CIP, or community initiatives program, and community facility enhancement program since 2019...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Given that many festivals are in a precarious financial position because of the ongoing affordability crisis and given that insurance costs, especially as a result of the industry's response to climate change, are driving up overhead costs to outdoor festivals and given that there's no recent data or research from the government on the issues festivals are facing, will the minister commit to immediately begin collecting research and data on the current health of Alberta's festivals and explore how the government can ensure that the music ecosystem can mitigate the risk of severe...

2:40

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, just to finish my comment, since 2019 through combined Alberta Foundation for the Arts grants and community grants our government is proud to have given GlobalFest nearly \$780,000. And you know what? Through our community programs there's a reason why they've been so successful. Through our continued support Alberta remains a mecca for festivals. Alberta's capital city continues holding its title as Canada's festival city. Explore Edmonton's CFO and president said that this year's festival broke attendance records, created a positive...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Given that we all know Alberta's arts sector is a vital contributor to our economy and given that Alberta's \$1.7 billion music ecosystem relies on outdoor festivals to promote local musicians, attract audiences, and create jobs, what specific steps will the minister take to address the growing risk posed by climate change such as extreme weather, wildfire smoke, and rising insurance costs to ensure the sustainability of festivals in Alberta?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, I'll say again that through our grant programs and through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts we continue to

support all sorts of amazing community and nonprofit organizations, music festivals. Just to name a few more examples: \$45,000 for the Calgary Ukrainian Festival, \$20,000 for the Airdrie Windwood Music Festival, \$15,000 for the Okotoks Film Festival. We will continue to provide tremendous supports to these incredible organizations.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with the daily Routine.

Okay. Hon. members, we are at points of order. The first one was at 1:58 p.m. The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h) and (i). At the time the Leader of His Majesty's Opposition was saying, quote: it's been she who's been pandering to separatists. Now, we believe this is a point of order. It's imputing false motives to the Premier and also allegations against another colleague, member in the House.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, on April 30, 2025, on page 3,085-86, you said that "referring directly to the Premier as a separatist is a point of order." As you well know, you cannot do indirectly what cannot be done directly. We think that questioning the patriotic loyalty of a colleague of the House is a point of order, particularly explicitly referring to her as a separatist or implying false motives that she is pandering to them. We ask that the hon. member or someone on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition apologize and withdraw and we continue the substantive debate of the House.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a matter of debate. I disagree with the Deputy Government House Leader. I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but to my recollection the Leader of the Official Opposition said that she, by pandering to the separatists, has empowered them, talking about items that are fully on the record of this government changing election legislation to allow for citizen initiatives specifically so that separatists could then start to organize on a referendum to separate from Canada.

We've seen the UCP AGM and the news coverage. I won't engage in continuing debate here, but this government and its actions and how they have treated the issue of separatism are a matter of debate here in this Chamber, in the news and in the media, with Albertans when they're at the Tim Hortons. This is a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker, and I do not believe it was worded in a way to imply the Premier's own stance on separatism, something we have tried to clarify in this House. By my read, this is not a point of order. I think it is clearly a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Okay. This is what the Blues say. "The Premier has been flirting with separatism nearly as long as she's been having secret meetings... it is she who is pandering to separatists." It's not a helpful comment. It's sure walking the line. I would call it debate, but should the opposition continue to go down this path, it could well become a point of order, but we're going to call it a matter of debate today with a caution to the line that your members are walking right on top of. You need to be aware of that, please.

Number 2 at 2:05 p.m. by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted the Leader of the Opposition was making remarks to the minister of health and talked about specifically when that minister was or was not in cabinet, saying that the documents that were in question weren't

dealt with when she was in cabinet. Now, the Leader of the Opposition said, with my unofficial records, quote, we would like to forget when you were in cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I rise on 23 (h), (i), and (j). This language is clearly inflammatory and, I think, also builds on a pattern of the Leader of the Opposition making a point of singling out and specifically, personally criticizing strong conservative women on the government House side. [interjections] This has been noted a number of times, and I hear that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake has something to say, and if he wants to add to this submission . . .

The Speaker: Folks, you know what? We don't heckle during points of order. Points of order are meant to clean up the mess that was made earlier, and by making another mess right now, it doesn't help anything. Start over, please.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, if it pleases the chair, I'd rather continue my argument as I've forgotten most of the things, some of the things, I've already said.

Like I said, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake has all the opportunity to give his own submissions on this issue rather than heckle from the independents' benches.

What I would say is that this is a continual pattern from the Leader of the Opposition coming after strong, conservative women on the government side, saying they're incompetent, saying they don't know anything they're talking about. This is a pattern that also goes back to the time when the Leader of the Opposition was in the mayor's chair in Calgary, criticizing a number of women. There is also video online of this. This kind of behaviour is unacceptable. It certainly does not rise to the level of debate for this House, specifically for a leader of a major political party, albeit in opposition. So on 23 (h), (i), and (j) I rise to call this a point of order.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it disappointing that the Government House Leader continues to use drive-by smears during points of order arguments, bringing up completely unrelated, again, smears and false accusations from the time when the Leader of the Official Opposition was mayor of Calgary and trying to characterize the legitimate critique of this government as personal attacks against women. This is not a pattern, and I think that the Government House Leader is working very hard to try to make it one. I think it's a very deliberate strategy on his point, and I think it shows weakness on the part of the government.

I did speak to the Leader of the Official Opposition about the heckle that was said at that time, and as I understand it, things were heated. The Leader of the Official Opposition was responding to something that the minister had said about time in cabinet, and the phrase came out wrong. It was unparliamentary. On behalf of the leader I will apologize and withdraw.

2:50

The Speaker: Thank you. That matter is dealt with.

That takes us to point of order 3 at 2:13 p.m., called by the hon. Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rose at this time to call a point of order specifically under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," as well as

23(l), "introduces any matter into debate that offends the practices and precedents of this Assembly."

Mr. Speaker, to the best of my recollection at the time, the minister of public safety stood and said – apologies; let me find the quotation as I took it – "On this side of the House we support lawful gun owners, and I can tell you that what we will focus on is the 4,000 organized crime groups that the members of the NDP let into this country." Four thousand organized crime groups – characterizing immigration into our country as if all immigrants are criminals, is how I read that – is absolutely language that offends the practices and precedents of this Assembly.

I will also note that the UCP has been the government for six years. The NDP has had no input into the immigration that has been allowed. I find that the government members are starting to veer further and further away from reality in making these incredibly broad, sweeping generalizations and accusations that will create disorder. That is why I raised this point of order under 23(j) and (l), because the practices and precedents of this Assembly are that we are hon. members and there should be some form of reasonable debate.

I understand that we often use different facts. We have different positions, but this type of comment creates disorder. My members were immediately louder in this Chamber. If we want to have good conversation and debate in this place, these types of remarks are not helpful, and I hope that you find it a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll give the Opposition House Leader credit for an inventive use of 23(l), though it has absolutely no relationship to practices or precedents of this House. As we well know, these are procedural questions and norms that we have in the operations of the House, not what the member wishes were cultural norms or debating norms and that we didn't have the position that we have.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite made the point for us when she said very clearly that she believes that we're further and further away from reality. That is a matter of debate, how close one is to reality or not. It is a question of whether or not the NDP did or did not let criminals in. There was no personalization of it. It was plural members, and the criminals are not the members opposite; they are legitimate, actual criminals. How many entered or did not enter is clearly a matter of substantive debate. If the minister of public safety cannot enter into this point, I don't know which member they expect on this side of the government can enter into this point as to where criminals come from, when they are here, when they came in, how many of them are here, all substantive questions that are matters of debate.

So, Mr. Speaker, credit to proposing 23(l): absolutely no relationship. Of course, the standard 23(j): when it wasn't personalized they attempt to try and bar us from having the substantive debate that we need to hold in this House.

The Speaker: Well, we're having fun.

Listen, here's what I have on the Blues. It says, "I can tell you that what we will focus on is the 4,000 organized crime groups that the members of the NDP let into this country, because on this side of the House we're going to support lawful gun owners." It does talk about the group, the political party, and not an individual member. I suppose whether the comment is accurate or not: there's your matter of debate. I can certainly say that it's not helpful commentary, and I would caution the Government House Leader to pass that on to the minister that made the comments.

It's a matter of debate, but it's not a helpful matter of debate. I guess if we had to undo everything that was inaccurate around here, I'm not sure which side would be worse off, but the public, to a certain degree, gets to judge what they believe that's said in here and what isn't. I'm sure many of the public would have different opinions on the answer to that question, too. That matter is dealt with.

That takes us to 2:22 p.m., called by the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot to unpack here from the Member for Cardston-Siksika. First, he said that I was using insulting language. The question that I asked was factual. I mean, you have the Blues; you can read that.

The next one was saying that I use ChatGPT for my content. I can assure you that there's not one single person in this room that thinks that the information and insights that I have about the UCP come from ChatGPT.

The next one was about us not having a party. Now, you know, we have a UCP that has interfered with Elections Alberta. They are suing us. They're pursuing a court injunction. Now there's the rumour of new legislation to stop us from using the Progressive Conservative name. I think what's going on here is that this member is unable to defend his position and has to resort to these low-level attacks. This is clearly a violation of 23(h), (i), and (j).

This has become the MO of the House leader. I'm going to say – and I'll give him a little bit of an out here – that I think it's stress induced, quite frankly. But I do feel that he should apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you for the psychological opinion. I appreciate that. Is there anything other than a psychological opinion you'd like to offer?

Mr. Guthrie: I just think that he should apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The deputy House leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the reference of the quotes particularly and also the standing order. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) whether or not one is or is not using ChatGPT is not only interesting but also clearly a matter of debate. This is also the case for whether or not someone has a party registered with Elections Alberta or not. These are matters of debate. They are factual matters. Whether someone used language that our side believes to be insulting is a matter of debate. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to leave this in your capable hands, but we believe these are matters of debate, and we're happy to follow your direction.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, here's what I...

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, pardon me. No, I just didn't see you. Go ahead.

Ms Gray: No worries, Mr. Speaker.

A very quick interjection on this only to say that I know there is precedent that referring to reading speeches that have been written by staff has absolutely been ruled out. Reading speeches written by ChatGPT strikes me as very much the same thing. Accusing another member of not doing their own work is a pretty grievous insult and

something that can be weaponized when it comes to election time. I certainly do not want to see any of my members accused of using ChatGPT, just like I wouldn't want to do that to the government. It seems very similar to previous rulings about staff-written questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Well, while I have at least some sympathy for the last argument I heard, ChatGPT is not staff. I know you didn't say that they were. What I have here is, "The independent members should really consider... their subscription for ChatGPT on doing proper research rather than selecting personal insults to direct at the Premier." Well, this is successful in all the wrong ways. One member insulted the other, the other member insulted the first member. It's a matter of debate, but none of it is helpful. None of it is helpful. [interjection]

You know what? We don't debate during points of order, Member for Lesser Slave Lake. Thank you.

I guess you could call this two points of order or no points of order at all. There was enough bad behaviour to go around. None of it is advisable. I think the folks that elect us and, by extension, pay us to be here would like us rising somewhere above a string of personal insults and accusations. This is not helpful.

The next point of order was called at 2:25 p.m. by the Government House Leader, and maybe...

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, if I may address the previous – I'm rising to apologize.

The Speaker: You're rising to apologize?

Mr. Schow: I am.

The Speaker: We have time for that.

Mr. Schow: Certainly. The member raised some concerns about the nature of the insults that I used. You know what? In my position as Government House Leader I do need to rise above that, so I'd like to apologize for the nature of the comments that I made.

The Speaker: Thank you. That was the right way to do it, too.

Deputy Government House Leader, this is for 2:25 p.m., I'm assuming?

3:00

Mr. Williams: Correct. Yes. If you're calling on the government.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was wonderful to see that tone in the Chamber. I hope we can continue with this point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language Referring to a Member by Name

Mr. Williams: At 2:25 the minister of energy was answering questions, and at that time, from a sedentary position, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane shouted audibly, very loudly: cryin' Brian. Now, though it may rhyme, it is undeniably a personal attack on an individual.

I must point out that on top of that, there was a personal name used in the Chamber. If this was a reference to the minister of energy who has – and I will say that it's a matter of public record – cried in this House as he addressed the House in the past to talk

about the passing of his son under care, which is an incredibly traumatic experience, and I would hope that every member of this Chamber independent of partisan affiliations or political back-and-forth can appreciate that that is deeply personal, or if instead it was about the time the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, the Minister of Energy and Minerals, cried because his house burnt down with all of his personal effects within it in the same year that his son had passed away, I would hope as well that that was not the case.

If this is the case, it was in terribly poor taste, but independent of those circumstantial points that only accentuate the absolute inappropriateness of it, it stands as a point of order under 23(h) and (i) both because of the language being used of a personal attack, cryin' Brian, in some sort of attempt to diminish the Minister of Energy and Minerals and also the use of a personal name.

We ask simply that the member stand up, apologize, and withdraw, and we can return to decorum on these matters. I'm happy to hear any arguments from the Opposition House Leader if she has any to add on this one.

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

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I was just going to simply apologize and withdraw, but obviously the member is forcing me to explain that the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche is well known as crying at multiple speeches in industry . . .

The Speaker: You're done. Sit down. You're done now. Good. That'll be enough of that. Thank you for the apology. If you had ended it there, it would have been great. Extending insults into this part of the day or making fun of other people is not acceptable. Not now, not ever.

I've got 2:25, another one. Airdrie-Cochrane.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order where the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche made references to comments from an online source. The fact that this individual is referencing a podcaster who has doxed people, who has threatened not only the livelihoods but lives of innocent people, including myself, is extremely disturbing. What is more troubling is that the Premier of Alberta has repeated these talking points, so I think that the member feels that it's okay to continue doing it.

Furthermore, what is doubly disturbing is the fact that over the course of the UCP AGM, the UCP invited this same person from Ontario to attend their AGM free of charge, giving them press access.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the point of order is on what happens in here. You just can't drag every other complaint from the rest of the world in here for the point of order.

Mr. Guthrie: I think it's very important for people to understand the nature of the . . .

The Speaker: It might be important for them to understand, but you don't get to drag it into the point of order.

Mr. Guthrie: Well, the fact that an outlet that traffics in harassment and intimidation is allowed in this House is what's beyond comprehension to me. Mr. Speaker, this conduct falls squarely under 23(h), (i), and (j), and it degrades this Assembly. It's been

ruled on previously, so I think that the member should apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the member I'll apologize and withdraw unreservedly for those statements, and I believe for the following point of order, both of which are the same substance, both made by the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

The Speaker: We'll consider that dealt with. I'll say for people on all sides, that the last example wasn't the only one today; there were several examples. Dragging general complaints into points of order and extending debate into points of order is not helpful and not what we're here to do. It's bad enough that we have to go back over the day's proceedings because of the points of order.

This one was called at 2:29 p.m. I think by somebody on the government side.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Williams: Wonderful. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well on the point of order, particularly 23(h) and (i). At the time the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was speaking and said something to the effect of, "the Minister of Education personally," referencing not a group, but personally, "let sex predators off the hook," or words to that effect. It's obviously personalizing debate. We believe that to be without question a point of order. We understand that things can get hot in the House. We ask simply that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar rise, apologize, and withdraw, and we can continue to the substantive debate. I leave this in your hands.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At that time the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar was engaged in, I mean, a very heated debate, specifically because of a child sexually abused at Willowbrae Academy Mill Creek daycare and how that was handled. Now, throughout the three parts of this question, it is absolutely clear that the Minister of Education and Childcare was being questioned because of his ministerial responsibility for his department and their actions.

The first question asked was: will the Minister of Education and Childcare admit the legislation is broken, commit to ensuring the department and not operators ensure notification? The second question was: will the minister amend the legislation and make sure that people are notified when child abuse occurs? The third is: will the minister commit today to amending the child care act?

The concern, if that does not happen, was that sexual predators of children could escape justice in the future, as has happened in this instance already, but the accusation was not that the human who sits in that chair and plays the role of minister had a direct hand in aiding and abetting a sexual predator. Not at all. From the principle of ministerial responsibility, the entire question is about: will a minister take action, amend legislation, and ensure that children are protected into the future? I know that it was not intended as a personal attack. The entire question was about something very serious and respective to ministerial responsibility. I don't believe it's a point of order, and I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, hon. Opposition House Leader, I know you're an hon. member and you would never knowingly say anything that you knew not to be true in this House, but if you saw what I saw, you wouldn't have made that argument right now. In fairness to you, you don't have the benefit of what I see in front of me. You probably read the question as it was written, but that's not all that came out of the hon. member's mouth. Let me read it to you.

He said, "...when abuse occurs, or does he truly believe that pronouns pose a greater threat to children than sexual predators?" We don't get to speculate on what other people think, that's very clear in 23(h), (i), and (j), and we certainly don't get to accuse people of being willing to offer up children to sexual predators. But wait, there's more.

At the end of another response the hon. member said, "is he going to let more sexual predators off the hook like he did earlier this year?" That's two very serious points of order in a row, and I'll expect an apology and a withdrawal.

Mr. Schmidt: I withdraw the comments, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: And?

Mr. Schmidt: And I withdraw the comments, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: And apologize?

Mr. Schmidt: I withdraw the comments, Mr. Speaker. [Interjections]

The Speaker: I'm going to give you a third chance here. I want an apology and a withdrawal for this.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, as has been long-standing practice, it's not the Speaker's place to judge whether or not the apology and the withdrawal meet the Speaker's standards. I've complied with your request, I've withdrawn the statement, and I believe that I've shown the respect for the chair's decision by doing so.

The Speaker: Well, that was most short of what we would hope to expect here. The matter is closed.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 7

Water Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate November 26: Member Miyashiro]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Member Arcand-Paul: Madam Speaker, I rise in opposition to Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025, for many of the reasons already outlined by my colleagues and I on this side of the aisle. A major thank you to the Member for Banff-Kananaskis for taking a lead on this given her expertise and traditional knowledge gleaned not only from working with First Nations people but being a mom to future water keepers if they so choose to take up that charge.

Madam Speaker, I briefly want to touch on something that came out in debate from the minister about the lack of co-ordination with the opposition. This act truly brought together our shadow ministers in a way that demonstrated the strength of our government-in-waiting. We listen to not only the stewards of this land, treaty First Nations, but we talk to our stakeholders and each other because this is so much bigger than just this government. It's our future that we're talking about.

I've been reminded over the past weekend – and the news that flowed around the UCP finally attempting diplomacy rather than foot stomping and arguing and the flow of opinions on what this might mean for our great province. While I'm cognizant of the multitude of Albertans that shared different perspectives, our job is to synthesize those perspectives and represent not for "love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals," as we are reminded

every single day in this place. From what I have gleaned over the past several months discussing this bill and what I've gleaned over this last weekend over the federal MOU is that people are increasingly split.

While the minister spoke about the alleged consultation that was undertaken for Bill 7's introduction in this House, one thing was abundantly clear. First Nations were sadly not included. This goes for the MOU as well. Our job is to represent all Albertans, not private interests, not billionaires with pet projects. Albertans. The decision to pass Bill 7, if the UCP does not change course, is reckless without meaningful consultation and consent to changes to the Water Act. With increases for industrial use that this government is quite open about in agriculture, oil and gas, and AI data centres, to name a few, it rings alarm bells.

Madam Speaker, one of my first jobs during law school was as a legal researcher for an advocacy organization here in Alberta, and my first task was to research water and associated legislation here in our beautiful province. That was around 2013. In that time I've witnessed the exclusion of First Nations at an alarming rate when it comes to water in Alberta. My deadly colleague and relative from Edmonton-Rutherford spoke eloquently about the research from the late Dr. Schindler, who warned against these small steps that we take for granted that have catastrophic impact over time, like these lower-risk transfers between river basins. There is no lower-risk transfer; they are all risky. We are playing a risky game and Mother Earth will have the last word.

In other parts of the world water and our river systems are treated as the relatives they are. In areas like Aotearoa, Ecuador, and Bolivia, and, yes, even here in Canada, where the Magpie River has been granted legal personhood by the Innu in Quebec. Water is our ancestor and it deserves our respect, not management and irresponsible bills like this one to manage it like every other resource that this province likes to claim dominion over. This government's view of the environment needs to radically shift. We are not masters over the environment. We live in coexistence with it. We live because of it. Madam Speaker, this is the heart of the calls for consultation and shared stewardship that was supposed to occur through treaty when we all agreed to share this territory together.

My earliest memory of water and ceremony and practising my inherent harvesting rights was with my kokum Ella and my late mushum Dan. I was no older than seven or eight years old. My late mushum Dan is a revered elder for many nations in and around these territories. He was a pipe carrier, sundance lodge holder, a medicine man, and a traditional knowledge keeper. To me, he was just mushum, but to many First Nations people here and across Turtle Island, he was a well-respected elder; still is. A lot of my understandings of this place we call home comes from him and my kokum Ella. When I think about that memory, I was entrusted with the most important job: looking out for fish and wildlife officers. Back then it was against the law to practise our ceremonial right given to us by the Creator because of bad provincial law.

I remember the day as if it were yesterday. The sun was shining in the trees, the babbling brook was trickling with the most calming melody, and the weather was moderate. Not quite cold enough for a jacket, but my kokum told me I had to, and you don't say no to kokum. The medicines that we were picking could only be found near a river, and many of the medicines that I've gone to pick and learn about from my late mushum Dan were always near water. Rat root grows in the depths of the muskeg. Moss grows near watersheds. Even love medicine is right beside a lake. Our medicines, Madam Speaker, are so connected to our waters that it goes beyond just protecting water for our consumption. All life requires clean water.

I'm here again today to do what I did back when I was just a little baby, to fight back against a bad law that affects our traditional harvesting rights. Those are treaty rights, Madam Speaker. My grandparents were there not for their own selfish needs but for all of our relatives' benefit, to use these medicines like we have since time immemorial. Those medicines needed a source of clean water. I also remember another time more recently that we went out to pick more medicines. I was much older and had a law degree. This time we did everything compliant with the law, but the sad thing was that we had to drive around for several hours to find a suitable site.

I remember hearing the strain in my late mushum's voice when we could not find it. We drove past abandoned wells, forestry cutblocks, and agricultural fields. Finally, when we found it, naturally the medicine was at a dry former riverbed. I've not been back, and I am worried if I did, it will all be gone. This was a sign to me and certainly should be one for all of us in here. Again, all life requires water, Madam Speaker. Mother Earth is telling us that we are in deep trouble. Drought is symptomatic of a system that cannot cope with our expectations and needs for it. Those First Nations in the north that cannot access their groundwater and those who are seeing their relations, the rivers, trickle from once-mighty flows should be a warning to all of us.

One of the things that really stuck out for me was that this exclusion was intentional when you start deconstructing the acts of government, the words of leaders in this province, like the Premier's a few days ago. To truly unpack what White settlement has done on these territories, you start to understand where you need to do better. It is without hesitation that I continue to advocate, despite this government's protestations, about the effects of colonization and White settlement in this province. None of this could have been done without our sacred treaties. The legal foundations of the province rely on it. To deny that, to deny colonialism, to deny White settlement, leaves you with nothing. In this country we like to talk about water and First Nations but only insofar as we have clean access to drinking water, which is a very good thing.

But Madam Speaker, our connections to water run much deeper than just drinking water. I've said it in the debates prior on this bill about our connection to water with our women, girls, two-spirit, and gender-diverse folks and their connection to being our water protectors. Water belongs to all of us. Not one government over another, not one industry over the rights of Albertans.

Madam Speaker, what is left to say on this bill debate which hasn't been said already by my colleagues and even in admissions by the minister? Well, we know that consultation has been inadequate, insufficient, and, quite frankly, disappointing. From the letter that I was able to table a few days ago in this Chamber from Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, authored by Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi, I want to remind this government of the following quote.

The legislation expands provincial regulatory control over water, particularly in areas overlapping Treaty No. 8 Traditional Territory, without any recognition of First Nations jurisdiction or authority. This approach conflicts with the Honour of the Crown, which requires early, meaningful, and good-faith consultation whenever legislation may affect Treaty rights.

To date, there is no evidence of substantive engagement between Alberta and Treaty 8 governments. This continues a pattern of provincial legislation being enacted without proper consultation, despite Alberta's own Duty-to-Consult policies and long-standing commitments to work with First Nations."

3:20

Madam Speaker, the New Democrats put forward two really impactful amendments that were struck down by the UCP and spoken against by the minister. These amendments would have

gone to the core issues that we have been hearing from leadership across this province and experts who work in this field. Well, we had the opportunity to support this bill. It's really too bad that the UCP did not accept those amendments because with those changes and the required consultation I would have been confident in this bill, that First Nations and Métis settlements would be fully aware of what any government of Alberta tried to do with water. But under this current iteration, without amendment, the minister has far too much control, too much overreach, and far too much authority with our most sacred relation.

But don't take it from me; take it from the chiefs themselves. In the letter that I tabled today, that was hand-delivered and sent to the minister and the Premier, the Chiefs Steering Committee on Technical Services and the water committee issued the following quote.

The amendments have been advanced without free, prior, and informed consent of Treaty First Nations, as required by Treaty, the Constitution Act, 1982, the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples, and the United Nations Declaration Act in Canada. The provincial government's failure to engage in substantive good-faith consultation is not only unacceptable – it is unlawful.

This has been the first time in 25 years that the minister has opened up the Water Act. We as a province had an opportunity to engage and include First Nation and Métis voices, but an e-mail or registered letter was deemed sufficient by this government. For shame.

To quote Grand Chief Mercredi:

Bill 7 is not a technical amendment. It is a fundamental shift in how water is controlled, allocated, and transferred in Alberta. By advancing Bill 7 without our involvement, Alberta has failed to uphold its legal and moral obligations under Treaty 8 and the Constitution.

Treaty 8 Nations stand united in defending our waters, our rights, and our future generations. We call upon the Government of Alberta to honor the Treaty relationship through meaningful engagement, recognition of our sovereignty, and a commitment to shared stewardship.

I'd like to end my comments today with a quote from the letter that was tabled from the chiefs steering committee earlier today, who kindly request a response, an acknowledgement, anything from the minister or the Premier to their very important points that they bring forward and their concerns about water rights in this province. They are the experts in this field. They have been working on this their entire lives. We have been working on this since time immemorial, and we have an obligation in this House to ensure they are engaged, to ensure they are shared in these decisions moving forward.

We could have had an opportunity here with these amendments that we put forward and a new way of moving forward, but the UCP have shown time and again that they're not interested in that. They're not interested in working with First Nations. We had the opportunity.

Madam Speaker, I urge this Chamber that we can do so much better when it comes to consultation, when it comes to comanagement of our lands that we share. When treaty was entered into, the expectation was that we would be able to practise our way of being for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow. But when the rivers stop flowing, the grass stops growing, what are we left with? We are left with a world where we are unable to even function as humans. We need to do better.

I want to quote the chiefs steering committee on water, who said:

Failure to uphold treaty obligations and constitutional protections will result in the pursuit of all available legal, political, and international remedies by our Nations. We will not stand by as

our rights, lands, or waters are disregarded or diminished by unilateral provincial legislation. We expect your urgent response and the immediate cessation of all legislative processes related to these amendments until full and proper engagement with Treaty First Nations has occurred.

To me, this shows that a government has not done its job. Bill 7 misses the mark, and it is for these reasons I cannot support Bill 7. To this government: notice is served. [Remarks in Cree] Water is life.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 7 in third reading?

Seeing none, I'll ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 8 Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to move second reading of Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

If passed, this bill will build on our government's ongoing work to strengthen every aspect of our province's utility system and create a strong foundation for our energy future. This includes accelerating the advancement of AI data centres that provide their own power, which protects the reliability and affordability of the power that Albertans, businesses, and communities depend on.

Madam Speaker, as our population and economy continue to grow, so does the demand for electricity. Reliable power is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It's required to keep our families warm in our harsh winters and the lights on in our businesses and communities. It's playing a greater role in our daily lives, from powering our cell phones and computers to life-saving medical technologies.

The rapid advances in artificial intelligence are also playing a significant role in the increased power demand, and the use of AI apps like ChatGPT and Google Gemini becomes even more commonplace. A recent report from Amazon Web Services says that almost half of Albertan companies are already using AI consistently. In fact, three-quarters of Alberta businesses using AI say they've seen productivity gains, and 9 in 10 Alberta companies believe AI will transform their sector by 2030.

Madam Speaker, we are on the cusp of a technological revolution. Through this legislation we're proposing changes that will help prepare and power Alberta to lead that revolution. Our province has seen incredible interest from data centre developers who want to build within Alberta. Data centres want to come here because we have the right resources, expertise, and business-friendly environment for them to be successful. We also have the lower year-round cooling costs for these facilities because of our cooler northern climate. At present, there are 37 data centre projects with over 19,000 megawatts worth of power requests. That is significantly more than our entire province's provincial peak electricity load, which is just over 12,000 megawatts. It's exactly why our government has been clear from the start that our priority has been the well-being of Albertans and the power they rely on.

This legislation, if passed, will pave the way for data centres to bring their own generation by encouraging developers to sign agreements directly with generators to add power to our grid. Those who bring their own generation will be prioritized, accelerating the approval process and supporting their connection to the grid. This would help data centres meet their energy needs while preventing new projects from straining the grid's available supply, and thanks to the amazing work of our government, which has done so much to get rid of the clean electricity regulations suspended through the MOU that was signed last week, it will be even more straightforward for data centres to invest in building generation right here in Alberta.

The amendments we've proposed will also align with previous changes that we've made to ensure ratepayers are not burdened with the cost of any power infrastructure upgrades needed for a data centre project while also protecting taxpayers. Other proposed amendments, if passed, will build on the critical updates introduced earlier this year to support the implementation of the restructured electricity market, or the REM, as well as updates for Alberta's electricity transmission policy. This follows the completion of the final market design in response to hundreds of hours' worth of engagement and valuable feedback from industry and stakeholders from across our province.

The final design is a smart, forward-thinking solution meant to address the rising electricity demand while supporting competition and protecting consumers. We've done a lot of work on the REM to modernize our system for the future, and this is one of the legislative steps needed to help complete that work.

To put into perspective how important this is, the work we've done so far has helped lower the default rate of electricity by 63 per cent from its peak. We have protected Albertans who are not on competitive contracts from unpredictable price spikes and volatility, giving them certainty that they will be paying 12 cents a kilowatt hour for a two-year term. We have prioritized reliability, reducing the likelihood of future grid alerts, and improved transparency for Albertans on their bills, ensuring they know if they are on the rate of last resort and that they could save hundreds of dollars per year by switching to a more competitive contract.

3:30

We've also addressed local access fees, creating clarity and consistency across Alberta which this year alone has saved Calgarians more than \$27 million. Contrary to the opposition's comments yesterday, by implementing a cost-causation model, our government is ensuring that ratepayers will no longer be burdened with the full transmission costs of some of these bills.

Madam Speaker, the changes we're making today will build on all of this good work in laying a strong foundation for Alberta's energy future. There are a lot of exciting opportunities on the horizon for Alberta, particularly when it comes to electricity. The advancement of innovative technologies like AI has the potential to bring new industries, new jobs, and economic growth through our province. A successful future depends on a utility system that can adapt to these changes, a system that is modern, efficient, and able to support industry, emerging technologies, and the daily needs of Albertans and their lives.

If passed, the changes we're proposing will move us closer to achieving these goals and keep Alberta's utilities reliable, affordable, and sustainable. If passed, this legislation will build on the important work that we've done in our utility space and create long-lasting benefits for industry, ratepayers, and Alberta as a whole.

With that, Madam Speaker, I hereby move second reading of Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, and ask all in this House to support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister for bringing forward Bill 8 for debate. I think the minister's comments on the electrification of society and the net-zero economy goals for 2050 that now the government, the federal government, and all members on this side of the House are in support of – it's good to identify that direction and set that direction.

The debate might be worth getting into a little bit of the details of the bill. From my own perspective, Madam Speaker, no government really gains anything by making electricity political. It's a utility, so my debate will focus on the problems that have been created by the UCP that have turned electricity and utilities into a political football.

That largely started, Madam Speaker, initially with this renewable energy moratorium. We have been reeling and trying to figure out where the firm ground in this province is for electricity generation and for the electricity system. You know, all credit to the minister. He's been left with a challenging task created by a Premier who likes to govern by headlines where, with utilities, ultimately you need a lot of certainty, a lot of reliability. It needs stodgy, boring people in rooms full of engineers and economists that try and create market design with very thoughtful values of fairness and equity and openness and competitiveness in mind.

When we sit back and we ask ourselves, "Why is your electricity bill so high in Alberta?" there is one straightforward answer. The answer is the UCP, Madam Speaker. Alberta has become a difficult place to do business under the UCP. The climate of uncertainty has increased the risk of doing business here. It has increased the cost of capital, reduced the appetite for new investment, and led to delayed and cancelled projects. Running an electricity system is complex and not done well by politicians, especially ideological politicians like the UCP that govern by headlines and do not care how much Albertans pay for anything. The UCP government always makes Albertans pay.

Alberta's New Democrats will bring stability to the Alberta electricity system. After six years of this UCP messing around with the Alberta electricity system, we will bring policy stability to the system. With an Alberta New Democrat government Alberta will once again be a good place to invest and do business. As I like to say, we'll be the handlebars of stability; we'll be the brakes on system overhauls and the accelerator of new investment in Alberta's electricity market as we enable a reliable and affordable and sustainable electricity system for all Albertans.

It's important as the opposition to highlight the challenges and risks involved in the UCP's plan to restructure the energy market. The UCP are desperately trying to fix what they have broken. To try and do this expediently, they are giving excessive discretion and unchecked power for the minister, Bill 52 earlier and now Bill 8. The government is adding a lot of authority and discretion for regulation by ministerial order.

That might sound exciting to some members on the government side of the House. I believe it was the minister that manages AGLC, the minister of red tape reduction, that gave himself similar powers earlier in the spring and said that he could turn on a dime. Maybe that sounds exciting when you're managing online gambling, but I can tell you from a utility perspective that the idea that a minister can change things and turn on a dime does not create a lot of certainty, does not create a lot of confidence. It creates a lot of risk,

which leads to investors holding their money and holding back from Alberta as a place to invest. Investors prefer slow, methodical, predictable markets, regulated by fair, transparent electricity system operators.

Madam Speaker, it probably helps, just for debate, to bring it up for the other members before we get into it. There are a lot of acronyms that we need to deal with here. You might think here of the OTP. That's the optimal transition planning, which has been undertaken as a way to make sure that we don't have overbuilds in the market like we've had in the past by Progressive Conservative governance.

There's the REM, which is not that amazing band. It's also not your rapid eye movement. Madam Speaker, REM is restructured energy market. The UCP are trying to find a way to change the rules in the market, and if that sounds normal to you and good to you, you are not in the utilities business. That is alarming and creates fear for lenders, investors, developers, and project proponents in a utility market.

There's a new concept of locational marginal pricing, LMP. Locational marginal pricing, Madam Speaker, is going to be creating a system where where the electricity is generated is going to matter, and that's fundamental in our discussion of Bill 8 because previously in Alberta the location of generation has not impacted the rate of return and the reward for generating that generators get. They could locate in deep south Alberta; they could locate in northern Alberta. It all goes into the same grid. There is one system price for generators. That is how the system has worked, and billions of dollars have been invested in our market with this system, which is considered a congestion-free system.

The UCP with their REM, restructured energy market, want to change it and with locational marginal pricing want to change the market that generators have been operating in for decades now. It is alarming. It is creating uncertainty, and independent assessments, Madam Speaker, are not coming out with, you know, excitement for this change. They're coming out with a lot of hesitation, a lot of questions, and a lot of uncertainty, because that is what's created by this government. We see uncertainty in all sorts of this government's operation, and it's snuck its way into the utility market, where people want stability.

Just to go down another story and a trail for you, Madam Speaker, part of our history of our electricity market was in a period of deregulation. It was very exciting for this province. I guess at the time we would have had Premier Ralph Klein, had some ministers that were real big proponents of the privatization of everything, and they first took a stab at the Alberta Liquor Control Board. The way we bought liquor, for all the young people listening: in the past there were very few liquor stores. They were all government owned. There were very few SKUs, or items on the shelf, and it was all controlled by the government. The government said: "That's not how it should be. Private enterprise should be operating this, so we're going to deregulate the liquor market." What they did was that they said anyone can produce liquor. That was the case, anyway. You can sell it into Alberta. We have one wholesaler. They warehouse all of their liquor in St. Albert. Then we have: anyone can be a retailer. As anyone going through Alberta knows now, there are retailers of liquor on just about every strip mall, sometimes two. We have a lot of retailers. Then it goes to the consumers.

3:40

Now, the interesting thing about this model, which seems like it's actually worked pretty great – and it has been a great success in Alberta, Madam Speaker. You may have heard me tell this story before in this House. Where in the past we probably had 100 retailers and maybe they had 1,500 SKUs, or 1,500 products, to sell,

we now have probably 2,000 retailers, and they have an offering of 50,000 different liquor items that you can buy in Alberta. So a lot of choice, a lot of competition. We still have that one warehouse in St. Albert where all the alcohol brought into the province gets wholesaled through there and distributed out to the province. Then if you're buying a bottle of wine in Fort McMurray, you're probably going to add the transportation cost to that, and if you're buying your bottle of wine down in Crowsnest Pass, you're going to add the transportation cost to that. If you're buying in Edmonton or Calgary, maybe a little less for the transportation cost.

The point here, Madam Speaker, is that we have a wholesaler and seller. Everything goes in there. We treated the electricity grid the same way. We have one grid. All the electricity that goes in, doesn't matter where the location is, goes into the grid, and it goes into the same wholesaler. We just treat it like there are no transportation costs. In electricity those are transmission costs. There are real transmission costs in the system, and our system doesn't capture it. The idea for the restructured energy market is that they're going to find a way to capture that.

Then the challenge, Madam Speaker, is that existing generators – we call those incumbents – that have been participating in this market, are heavily invested in this market, want to build additional generating assets in this market, have rules changing in front of them. The old rules, which everyone was working inside: you connect to the grid if you get permission from the independent system operator, and you get paid the market price for your energy. The government is wanting to change that, and that is creating a great deal of uncertainty in our market. We have to return and make sure we maintain those values of a fair, efficient, open, and competitive market in Alberta.

There are some additional thoughts I have, Madam Speaker. The UCP is desperately trying to fix what they've broken. This bill desperately tries to start patching up the massive leaks that their brand new, actually still under construction, restructured energy market has already sprung. The new bill patches in Bill 8 are probably, you know, something that have to be done, but maybe the way it's being done is removing some of the independence in the market, and it's creating anxiety because of the uncertainty. Their changes reveal just how messy, how chaotic, how fragile and ill considered their electrical system overhaul is. Honestly, I come back to: probably the Premier led on this and now the minister is trying to do the work. I honestly think they were totally unaware of how complicated and hard it would be. They are slowly learning, so they are bringing in patches and repairs with Bill 8 to try and see if they can't fix things because of the way they've already broken it.

The restructured energy market rules pause – they give the minister and the ISO the authority to suspend the rules. That's in the legislation. It's actually in the legislation that the minister, in order to deal with the very real risk that these restructured energy market rules won't work or, as the bill says, the "market cannot operate normally" – the only check on ISO's ability to do this is the minister himself.

The ISO can stop the market on a dime with the minister's permission and revert back to the noncongestion rules, the rules of the past. They know that they're going ahead with something that is fragile, nerve racking, and has a lot of uncertainty for investors in the market, and the only check on the ISO's ability to do this is the minister himself. It doesn't actually even need to go to cabinet. It's not an independent reviewer. An element of all electricity systems and markets is an independent system operator, and the independence of the system operator in Alberta is being compromised by Bill 8.

The two of them, the ISO and the minister, can flip a switch back and forth at will to cover the frailty of the restructured energy market and hopefully keep the lights on in Alberta. So when there is any risk in the market, it's going to land at the feet of the UCP. I think this fosters investor uncertainty, and investor certainty is needed for the restructured energy market to attract sufficient new supply, to keep the lights on, and to have the competitive market, to have the sustainable market, to have the reliable market that Albertans want. Bill 8 doesn't really give that to them. It has a massive piece in there that says that things are really up to the minister, so the minister must be under a great deal of stress right now, but I can tell you that the investors are under equal amounts of stress.

There's a concept here of incumbents. Incumbency treatment is in the bill. With regard to the optimal transmission planning and the restructured energy market, they could be severely undermining the economics and the reasonable investment expectations of existing generators, and that's creating a great deal of fear. We've already had from this government's flirting with separation one of the largest players in this market say that they won't invest in Alberta until things get sorted out. This government today, even when we challenged them in the House about the possibility of a referendum, wouldn't just come out and say that there will be no referendum on separation in Alberta, because this government likes to deal in chaos. It likes to deal in uncertainty. It likes to keep people on their back foot. That's not actually how you run a good utility system.

Now, the province has promised generators market access. They've given them the rules in the past, and now they're going to change the rules of market access, plus adding a bunch of new regulatory charges to boot. The fact is that now, very blatantly, the UCP is realizing that they'll need to pay those incumbents to avoid having their project go bankrupt because they invested in this market and they invested in this province based on a certainty and a set of rules that had existed for decades, and now those rules are changing. There's a massive restructuring being undertaken, so I guess to avoid being sued, as they're being sued on so many other fronts, they're going to send the signal that we will take care of you; we will make you whole. That money is not going to come from anywhere, Madam Speaker. As we all know, in Alberta the UCP make Albertans pay, and that's what they can expect.

Including our electricity supply, they desperately might need more generation. They might need these incumbents. The minister is giving himself the power to pay those incumbents compensation and to try to Band-Aid the bleeding from the thousands of cuts that they're inflicting on generators, because all the players in this market are sitting pat and holding still, unwilling to invest until this restructured energy market looks like it might be a good place to participate.

What's kind of bizarre is that they didn't start the conversation with this. They didn't go to the generators and the players in this market and say: "We think we could do some things differently. There are a lot of transmission lines that are built not close to where the energy is being used, and it's being loaded up with generation. Maybe we can find a more efficient way to use that transmission and make sure that in any future system new transmission will be done efficiently, not some large boondoggle that was led by the Progressive Conservatives of the past."

There is excessive discretion and unchecked power for the minister. Through Bill 52 and now Bill 8 the government is adding a lot of authority and discretion for regulations by ministerial order as well as discretion to the ISO, too. To be clear, in this province, in this current situation with the minister hand in hand with the independent system operator, the ISO is not operating traditionally

as it should be, as an independent systems operator. We saw with the renewable energy ban that when politicians get involved in electricity, businesses change, industry changes, investment freezes.

3:50

There are provisions in here for special treatment of data centres. Again, this comes back to the lack of fairness, equity, competitiveness, and openness in a market where transparency is gone. We know from this government that when there's no transparency in backrooms, in their ministers' offices, they make deals that are bad for Albertans. We saw it with the Alberta surgical facilities that Sam Mraiche's company has brought in, where they guaranteed, I think, 3,000 surgeries a year to them so that they can make sure they could pay for their fancy new building. Contracts that this government makes are not good for Albertans. They are ideological, and they are made in backrooms with their friends with the idea that somehow if you have a private company operating, it might be better.

When it comes to utilities, we have many private operators in it. They do a good job. They are efficient with their capital. They look and seek a good rate of return. We just need to provide certainty for them. We need to provide an element of reliability. We need stable government. We need reasonable people in charge. We need people to approach this.

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

Member Kayande: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for Sherwood Park for his exceptionally clear description of what Bill 8 actually does. There are a lot of provisions in Bill 8, and the ones that I want to really focus on are, first of all, that it's a patch. It looks like a patch, smells like a patch, walks like a patch. It's a patch on an electricity market design that kind of didn't get all the way there.

Before I get into the details, I want to talk a little bit to the people of Alberta about their electricity prices because, boy, do I hear about electricity prices. One of the misunderstood elements of the electricity price is the transmission charge, which is exceptionally high in Alberta. Transmission distribution charges are very high here, highest in the country, I believe. The reason for that is because of the zero-congestion strategy that the Alberta grid was designed on for many, many years, since the Klein days, actually, and operationalized in its current form by the Stelmach government.

Folks on the other side of the House should know this well because the genesis of the Wildrose Party was from the acquisitions and takings of property that had to be made in order to build a large DC transmission line from northern Alberta into the Calgary area, a line that didn't need to be built unless we were guaranteeing zero congestion for generators.

Who were these generators that we were – sorry. Let me back up a little bit more. What does zero congestion mean? Well, a transmission line can only carry so much power, and the more power the transmission line carries, the hotter it gets, the more the lines sag. Bad things can happen when you try and overload a transmission line. It's what starts some of the forest fires in California.

In many, many jurisdictions what they do is price the congestion on the transmission line. That's the locational marginal pricing that my colleague from the riding of Sherwood Park was talking about. Where there is a transmission line that is congested, then a generator that is trying to put power on the grid that is causing that congestion

has to pay the cost of that congestion. That's what locational marginal pricing does.

See, electricity pricing at the wholesale level is required – its purpose for generators is to motivate investment decisions, right? It is to make sure that the right amount of generation with the right amount of technology is built in the right place. When you have a zero-congestion grid, what you're effectively saying to generators is: build whatever you want and we'll make sure you have the transmission that you need, paid for at public expense, to get to the load centres.

Who were these generators that wanted access to an endless amount of load without actually paying for the cost? Well, those were oil sands producers. You remember now that oil sands are responsible for about 4 million barrels a day of production. Back in 2007 it was thought: "You know what? We'd be at 4 million barrels a day by 2015. Maybe by 2020 we'd be at 8 million." All of the cogeneration facilities that the oil sands generators were building needed access to the grid for their electricity, so the Stelmach government gave it to them. That's why your transmission charge on your bill is so darn high. It is because of that bargain that was made. Well, it turns out when you are guaranteeing zero-congestion access to load centres, what that results in is overbuilt transmission. It results in high utility rates, becomes more and more unaffordable for consumers.

Let's remember why deregulation was done in the first place. Deregulation was done because the large power monopolies had every incentive to overbuild their assets and ram the ratepayers with all those extra costs, and boy, ratepayers got really frustrated with that. That's why power systems around the world deregulated in the '90s and the 2000s: to get away from the regulated utilities, as they were called, or government-owned utilities doing all of the gold plating that they did in order to build more projects because that's what kept the bonuses coming for them. Really bad for ratepayers. That's why we changed, and then we got this other element of gold plating and overbuilt transmission on the transmission grid. Locational marginal pricing is intended to solve that.

Now, I've got bad news for the Alberta ratepayer. This isn't going to solve anyone's problem today. That's really a shame, and that's what I want to talk about in this bill right now. There is actually nothing in this bill that reduces the costs to the average Albertan. In fact, there are a lot of provisions in this bill that are going to increase your costs.

Let's talk about those. One is – again, the Member for Sherwood Park very ably discussed this – that there are two bailouts. Not one but two bailouts in this bill. One is a bailout on hydrogen. I don't know how that made it into a bill on electricity, but clearly the proponent of a hydrogen project that is under water really needed to have that project included in rates.

Now, let's talk about what actually happened here. This is a private business that looks at the market, decides, "You know what? I'm going to build a hydrogen filling station," puts together their supply chain, puts together all their different pieces, the elements of that, invests millions of dollars, and finds out: whoops, there's no market. Most businesses when they find out that they invested millions of dollars in a project for which there is no market take the L. This is a learning opportunity; we misread the market. Whoops. Maybe if you're a good company, you fire a few people. Not in this case. In this case what happened is that the company comes to the government and says, "Yeah. Can you do us a real solid and have the Alberta electricity utility ratepayer" – that is, you and me, the people of Alberta – "pay for our business mistake?" And this government never met a bailout it didn't like, so: "Sure. No problem." That's in Bill 8. For that reason alone I've got a real problem voting for this.

There's a second bailout in here for generators who are hurt by the implementation of locational marginal pricing. It's more of a matter of debate. We can go back and forth on that. My own belief is that when government changes the rules, it is very difficult for private businesses to say: "Look, you promised us a zero-congestion market. We don't have that, so therefore we need to be made whole by the government." Well, I mean, come on. Nobody believed that it would remain a zero-congestion market forever and ever and ever with ratepayers consistently in every year swallowing higher and higher and higher electricity bills. That just doesn't happen in the real world. That doesn't happen, so that bailout as well is a real problem.

4:00

Now, both of these bailouts are uncapped. The liability of the taxpayer is completely unknown. The liability to the electricity ratepayer is completely unknown. That's a real problem. The people of Alberta should really be asking questions about this because they're the ones who are ultimately going to have to pay for it.

Now, I heard a member's statement earlier today about nuclear power. This is why we have generators building their own power plants and selling the power that comes from them for cash, right? These are business decisions. We have decided to have a utility system in which businesses making business decisions provide the electricity that we all need, that's necessary for our lives. Generally speaking, it's a good system as long as the market rules are consistent.

Why do I mention nuclear power? Here's the issue. The Vogtle nuclear power plant in Georgia just finally came online. It cost \$35 billion. It's a \$17 billion cost overrun for 2,228 megawatts. I want to repeat that: \$17 billion of cost overruns. I love nuclear. I worked for a company that owned 10 nuclear power generating stations, including the phenomenal Indian Point generating stations. Just incredibly good assets, not from the perspective that they made electricity, although they did; they also made a lot of money.

There is no nuclear project – there is one now. Sorry. There is one nuclear project anywhere in the world that is backstopped entirely by private investment, and that private investor is Microsoft. Very unique set of circumstances. There is no other nuclear plant in the world that is being built entirely with private capital, and the reason for it is because it is probably some of the most expensive power that you can build. So if somebody wants to site a nuclear plant in Alberta under these market rules, I'm like: "Yeah. Let's talk about it. Let's talk about permitting. Let's figure out how it goes." But the next question is always: "Oh, and we need public subsidy. Oh, oh, we need public subsidy. We need the taxpayer to step up. We need ratepayers to step up. We need something that is unfair in the realm of how a competitive electricity market should work." That's where I draw the line.

I find it interesting that the only proponents of nuclear I hear about are: yes, it's got a great climate change profile; yes, absolutely, it is completely baseload capacity. It's often what a lot of markets need. They never talk about the economics. They never talk about the fact that Georgia Power ratepayers are going to have to pay an average – let's do the math here – \$170 to \$180 per megawatt hour for power from that nuclear plant that cost twice what they expected it to.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Let's talk a little bit about market design and why it's so important. The market design is meant to create a price signal that allows investment to happen. From that perspective, the kill switch that's embedded in Bill 8 is exceedingly problematic. There's no

limitation on the minister's ability to use that kill switch whenever the minister chooses. There's no sunset in which, you know, maybe in the first month, maybe in the first year of the electricity market you need to have a kill switch to make sure that everything is running properly. There's no sunset on the provision either. It is good for life. It is good forever. It's good for when the NDP form government, and I don't think that's what the members opposite want. It's certainly not what investors want, because investors want certainty. They want the ability to know that when they put money to work, the rules are clear.

Electric power, electric market design rules are the most complicated rules of any market that I've ever seen. I worked a little bit in various different deregulated electricity markets. I've worked on the New York market. It's abbreviated NYISO. I've worked in the Pennsylvania-New Jersey-Maryland Interconnection. That's PJM. I've done projects in ERCOT. I've done projects in the Midwest ISO, MISO.

I have a user's understanding of how various different market designs work. I can spend a lot of time with you over a couple of beers in your most boring conversation ever about why the PJM capacity market is not great, but what I can't do is adjudicate whether market design rules are good or not. That is something that is, I think, beyond the capability of any minister. Ministers are first politicians. Politicians kiss babies, shake hands. That's what we do. We're not PhDs in market design, and every electric market design restructuring creates a whole host of problems that need to be solved. Every electric market design has somebody or many somebodies whose oxen are getting gored.

Mr. Speaker, it's really, really challenging to figure out how outside of an AUC process this electricity market redesign is actually going to function. I'm begging the minister once again to really be a little bit more collaborative around this and not centralize all this power because when the lights go off, it's going to be his fault.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 8. I really, really appreciate the contributions from the Member for Calgary-Elbow as well as the Member for Sherwood Park. Those were really, really insightful inputs to the bill, and I hope the minister takes note of those great contributions. These are areas that the minister needs to pay attention to in regard to Bill 8 as well as electricity and the historical failures that a series of Conservative governments have led to, making Alberta number one in terms of the biggest increase when it comes to power bills.

Albertans already pay some of the highest electricity prices in Canada. Families across this province are struggling to keep the lights on, yet this government continues to ignore the electricity affordability aspect. There's one thing that I will agree on in the minister's statement, which is that electricity nowadays is a necessity; where I will strongly disagree with the minister, though, is that this bill protects affordability. No, it doesn't. It does nothing when it comes to affordability.

Let's consider one thing. A recent Bloomberg study found that wholesale electricity costs in parts of the United States near major data centres have surged over 250 per cent in just five years. The *New York Times* recently noted that the rising anxiety over electricity costs and data centres has become a major political issue south of the border. It's a warning that we need to take seriously.

The growth of electrification, the change of human behaviour, the growth of population all signal that demand is just going to go up. With such demand the capacity to generate and the capacity for transmission will always go up. We have to be smart enough to

come up with solutions to the demand for electricity. Yes, investment in data centres can bring benefits. We have no objection to that. But what we want, and what we want to caution, is that residential consumers must not be forced to subsidize these facilities through higher power bills.

4:10

The demand for electricity for data centres is estimated to be the current demand of Edmonton and Calgary combined. Again, as I said, with the change of human behaviour, with the demand of electrification, all of those things will only increase the demand, but the current demand that the data centres will need is almost equal to Calgary and Edmonton combined. In such a situation the prices will likely go up, and when the prices go up because of higher demand, who is going to protect Albertans? Bill 8 does nothing to guarantee that won't happen. It does not create the additional generation or transmission capacity that data centres require. Without that capacity Albertans could face the same soaring electricity costs seen in other jurisdictions where electricity demand for data centres has been experienced.

In reality, Alberta's electricity sector needs a large-scale investment to attract energy facilities, but government decisions have made the sector, in the words of many investors, uninvestable. In 2023 they imposed the ban on renewables. They abandoned the zero-congestion policy for transmission and infrastructure. Those are the two key areas, generation and transmission. The government has this pattern of saying, "Let the market determine," but when the market kicks in in a way that doesn't align with how the government wants, then the market is the problem. Renewables are a very, very good example. The electricity market was allowing renewables investments, but this government came and said: "No, no, no. This is not the investment that we want. It has to stop."

Bill 8 fails to protect Albertans who are simply trying to pay their monthly bills. While we support investments in the sector, we cannot support investments that come at such a high cost to the hard-working families because at the end of the day it will be the ratepayers who will be paying the price. Investments should enrich lives, not bankrupt them. What we know is that 50 per cent of Albertans are \$200 or less away from financial bankruptcy or from not being able to pay their bills, so any slight increase on their electricity bills will risk many Albertans in terms of whether they can pay their bills or not.

The ministry that has supported the bill is the ministry that is responsible on affordability as well. Electricity is not just a line item on our bills nowadays. It's not a line item that we can skip. It's not a line item that we can say we will not include this month, that we will pay next month. No. It is actually a necessity, something that I will agree with the minister about. It determines whether families can heat their homes and live with dignity, and right now Albertans are paying some of the highest prices in Canada because the UCP has failed to act and reduce the cost of electricity.

Well, I can see the minister of transportation shaking his head, but here is the fact: eight years ago electricity in Alberta hit a historic low of 2.88 cents per kilowatt hour. Today the floating retail price has skyrocketed. In late 2022 it peaked at 37 cents per kilowatt hour, 12 times higher than 2017, when the NDP was in government. A typical household uses about 800 kilowatt hours per month. That means monthly costs jumped from \$29, about \$80 in 2017, to over \$337 in 2022. This is before delivery costs, before admin costs, before many costs that are not quite self-explanatory.

Even now the rate of last resort averages 12 cents per kilowatt hour while contracts are between 6 to 9. But many Albertans, especially seniors and rural residents, don't qualify for those

contracts because there are not many retailers there. You have a monopoly and you have to pay exactly what they ask, so they're stuck with paying the highest rates.

We have debated in this House the rate of last resort, which actually makes – those who have difficulty at times of paying their bills are the ones who are paying the highest, almost double than the rest of Albertans. Think about this. This is where the government needs to come in with equity lenses and address those who can't afford the – and I will use the minister's word – necessity of electricity and support them, but that's not the case. It is the ones who cannot – either they have credit problems or they are in the U or they are seniors or they live in rural Alberta and there are not many retailers where they can shop. They are stuck with one price that is quite higher than others, so it's not something that is that helpful.

Well, in fact, the government realized that it was expensive, and they had to invest a lot of money to tell people: "This is the rate that we set, so please don't use it. It's expensive." It's quite clever, isn't it? Like: "This is the price that we set. It's expensive, so we will launch a campaign to discourage Albertans from the same policies that we put in place because it's expensive."

Our deregulated market has left Albertans exposed to wild price swings and higher costs than almost anywhere else in Canada, and it wouldn't have if they also would have let the market decide. They didn't. The renewable ban is not allowing the market to determine; it is interfering with the market and playing with the market.

This crisis didn't happen by accident; it is by design. Twenty-four years ago, as my colleague from Calgary-Elbow mentioned, Alberta became the only province that fully deregulated its electricity market. The promise was simple – competition will lower prices – but the reality is that the Conservative policies failed. Instead of cheaper power, we got volatility and concentrated market powers in the hands of very few companies that are either similar or closer to the Mraiche companies, numbered or whatever.

4:20

As I said, they introduced the rate of last resort. They didn't help. They realized that, "Oh, it's bad" and launched a campaign. These are Band-Aid solutions. These are not strategically thought solutions that address the foundations of the problem. Albertans deserve more than slogans and short-term fixes that consolidate power in the minister's office, that keep the ability of the commission to do its work out of the way, that keep the administrator's ability to do its work out of the way. It's not a system that they deserve, a government that treats electricity as an essential service, not one that you can gamble with.

What needs to happen is the reality that what we needed to do is to reintroduce consumer protections. In fact, we are one of the few provinces, I will say, that doesn't have an electricity rate for those who are struggling. So increasing transport . . . [Mr. Haji's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to rise to Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. We've heard a lot from the minister and from other members of my caucus in regard to sort of what the intention behind this bill is and looking at the different structural changes that the government is trying to achieve, which I do actually believe is trying to achieve some way of trying to lower costs for Albertans. I will say that it's probably not going to work the way that the government intends it to, but the devil will be in the details.

Now, the thing that I do find really interesting, though, is that over the last few days when the minister has been asked any types of questions around this piece of legislation, his immediate response is: it's the NDP's fault. The interesting thing about that is that it's the NDP's fault; it's not the feds' fault, which is usually the government's default. Usually it's because, you know, the federal government did it. The reason – and we know why the government isn't focusing on the feds, and I'm going to get there in a minute. But I think, actually, I want to start going back and doing some memory lane stuff with the government around how we actually got here.

As many of us remember, the Wildrose Party didn't actually exist for a while. It was the PCs. Then there were some other opposition parties, the Liberals and the New Democrats. Then there was this thing that happened, and it actually relates to transmission lines. The PCs decided to introduce a bill. Well, they'd done some work up to Bill 50. They were looking at doing some work on transmission lines along the eastern part of the province. The concern that came up around that was that there was a split in the PC Party at that point around whether or not that was a good idea. There were concerns that there was going to be overbuilding and that those transmission lines were just going to be built in some random places and it was going to disrupt agriculture land and it was going to create chaos in the grid and all of these things.

So what happened? There was a split. The Wildrose was created, and the Wildrose Party decided they were going to stand up for agriculture producers and they were going to stand up against Bill 50 and they were going to fight the expansion of the utility lines.

In 2009 Bill 50 was introduced, and it was really interesting during that time, the amount of debate that came up around this and the conversations that were happening by the current Premier in relation to our electricity markets. I'd like to just remind the government about some of the things that were said. The government claimed that Bill 50 at that time was to protect consumers by requiring developers to pay for grid upgrades, but Bill 50 didn't actually achieve that, and the Premier warned about that. I quote: if the companies are going to profit from new lines, it is only fair that they help pay for them. Fair principle; makes sense; isn't in Bill 8. Actually, we're going to be paying for lots of the things within this new bill.

Then, you know, she continued on with this. The Premier said: "You know, right now we don't have a level playing field with Bill 50. The power producers pay nothing for transmission. It is paid 100 per cent by the ratepayers." I believe that's still relatively happening. Then she continued on and warned that under the current system with Bill 50 Albertans are subject to wild and unpredictable price spikes that take a big chunk out of their monthly budgets. Bill 50: not fixing that problem either. Then it continued on with the Premier plainly saying, "Those are two areas that are being completely mismanaged by this government," which are openness and transparency. Interesting because Bill 8 actually brings everything in under the minister and removes it from the regulator.

That's what was going on under Bill 50: lots of conversations, lots of opinions by the current Premier that were going to get fixed if she ever became the Premier of the province. Well, we're here. Bill 8 is not fixing any of those things. So, I mean, you might want to go back and think about those things.

Now, the other thing that the minister continuously keeps bringing up is the coal phase-out and, heaven forbid, coal phase-out. This is where I go with: isn't it funny that the government says it's the New Democrats' fault but it's not the feds'? Do we all remember why it's not the feds'? Because in 2012 Stephen Harper put in the ban on coal production; 2012 wasn't allowed to build any

new coal plants. In fact, he implemented the phase-out. Stephen Harper did in 2012. Also, fun fact: if you look at the Wildrose platform for the election in 2012, the current Premier promised to also put a coal ban in when it comes to coal production and electricity generation. [interjections] Shocking, I know. History lessons. History lessons. Oh, the minister doesn't like the history lesson. It's really hard when facts matter.

So here we go. That's 2012. Where are we now? Well, I can tell you that in 2015 the ban was put in place to ensure that any coal generation plants that were built between 1975 would be ensured to be closed by 2020. In fact, again, the government is saying that it's our fault coal was shut down; the last coal production in Alberta actually just closed down in 2024, less than a year ago. Again, how is the volatility market around coal production actually the NDP's fault when in the last six years they've still been running coal and the prices have gone through the roof?

Another fun fact of history lessons: in 2017 who was in government then in Alberta? Hmm. The NDP. Lowest electricity rates in the country, and our electricity rates in 2017 were at 2.8 cents a kilojoule. Two point eight cents. Oh, my goodness. The RRO, which was created under the NDP, was at 6.8 cents. Today it is at 12 to 13.8 cents, double – double – what it was under the NDP. So who is better at electricity? This side of the House. It is not that side of the House.

The government can stand up and say that we did all the things wrong. Actually, we did all the things right. We brought down the price for Albertans. We made sure that the market was making sense. We created changes within the structure, and then the government decided, when they became government, to get rid of all of it.

Six years later the bill has now been introduced to try to fix the problem – six years later – after the government got rid of what we did. And what has happened in those six years? A hundred per cent volatility in the market. [interjection] The minister doesn't like it. The minister is heckling me because he doesn't agree. He knows the facts matter, and in fact everything I have said is true. [interjections] Everybody is getting involved. I know that when I'm saying good things, everybody talks back. It's great.

4:30

Let's continue on through where we are going now. If we look at the fact that the lowest price of utilities was in 2017, and now we have the highest in the country. That is where we are today: highest in the country. I also want to remind members – I forgot one thing about memory lane; I really like memory lane – that not even a year and a half ago, two years ago, 2023, we were in an absolutely astronomically high level of electricity. It was, like, 37.8 cents or something like that for a kilowatt hour. If you even think that right now 9 cents feels expensive, imagine when it was at 30 cents. People who were in the lowest income were paying the highest at 37.8 cents.

We all agreed in this Chamber in 2023 that that was a ridiculous number, so we needed to figure out how to bring that price down. What we didn't agree on was what the government chose to do. The government put a cap on the RRO. They capped it, and then they hid in this funny little fact, which was that the cap was going to be deferred. In January to March of 2023 the Alberta government capped the RRO at 13.5, still super high, which is where we're relatively at right now. The idea behind that was that they were going to try to bring down the cost from 37 cents and make it more reasonable. Okay. But what they didn't tell anybody was that that deferral was going to be put in place. When the deferral came in, it basically bumped the money further down the line for the same people that were going to pay the 37 cents.

Basically, utility companies were unable to charge consumers above the rate cap of 13.5, and then the government loaned those same companies \$200 million to say: we're off-setting. Instead of figuring out a way to bring down the utilities even further and not put a cap in, they just loaned the money to the industry and then said: don't worry; we'll make sure you get paid back. The loan had to be paid back between April of 2023, when the cap ended, and December of 2024, so only a year ago. It made sure that consumers had to pay at least 2 to 4 cents more per kilowatt hour, and it cost roughly \$10 to \$20 more a month on anybody who was on the RRO in the last year. So it didn't actually bring down the cost. All it did is that it deferred it for a year later. Those same people who were struggling to pay their power bills when it was super cold were then required to pay those same bills a year later, in December, when it was super cold. Worst solution ever. It didn't help Albertans, continued to make life more expensive, and still hasn't done this.

I was really excited when I heard that there was a bill coming on electricity. I was, like: great; the government has learned their ways. They've come all the way from 2011 when they made all of these commitments. They said that they were going to do all of these things, and they realized that our market is not working, and it's super expensive, most expensive in the country. The government is going to come with an idea that is going to bring down the cost. They are going to address the affordability. They are going to make it less expensive for Albertans when it comes to paying to heat their homes and to feed their kids and to do all of those things. Okay. But the bill doesn't do it. [interjection] Thanks, Minister. It doesn't do it, Minister. It actually does not do anything to address any of the factors that I just talked about. It does none of those things. It doesn't address the RRO.

I had a great conversation with someone the other day talking about, you know, the fact that some people are on this fixed rate. Why are people on this fixed rate? They're on this fixed rate because they either don't have the credit rating to qualify to be able to be on a nonfixed rate. Who do those people tend to be? Students that have probably moved out of their homes and are now just building credit, new Canadians who don't have Canadian credit yet and don't have an ability to prove, or, let's say, a single mom who has left a situation where she doesn't have credit because her husband or her partner was the one that had all the credit cards in their name. Those are the people that are on these fixed rates.

I said: why wouldn't the government just decide that there's a different way to do this and it's not based on credit? Why does it have to be based on credit? Why are you punishing the people that are in the lowest income bracket the most when it comes to a basic essential need? That's the only thing that we do it for. Why couldn't that have been done in Bill 8? Why couldn't we have addressed that huge barrier of how people access their electricity and their service delivery? That would actually have been a great solution to this.

The interesting thing is that I do want to go back to some of the utility lines and how much money Albertans are actually paying on this transmission. When the transmission lines were built, an agreement was made with two major retailers that they would get a 9 per cent return on that investment; 9 per cent. On top of the 9 per cent that we're paying just to have those built, there are still distribution and transmission costs. That is significant.

Now we're also going to, under Bill 8, not only have the 9 per cent that is being paid back for this build, not only are Albertans still going to be paying a transmission and distribution cost, but now the government is saying: well, because we built them in the wrong spot on the east part of the province, we're going to adjust the rate and make sure that whoever these companies are are all going to get paid the same because we know they're losing money because of

where we built the line. Guess who's going to pay that? Albertans, making it more expensive.

In fact, Bill 8 could have been introduced with some solutions to the problem to bring down the costs, but instead the solution to the problem is to increase the cost and to help the businesses be able to do it. What I will say is that I can't support Bill 8 because it's actually a failure on supporting Albertans with their affordability crisis.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 8? Seeing none, I'll give the minister an opportunity to close debate. The minister waives that opportunity.

The hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities has moved second reading of Bill 8, Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 10

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate November 26: Mr. Deol]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to make comments on Bill 10, second reading? I will recognize the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 10 today, red tape statutes amendment, or reductions, or whatever. These omnibus bills: you know, the names are always so creative.

I want to sort of speak to the changes that allow the creation of cervid harvest preserves, first. These are areas where the shooting of trophy elk and deer in high-fenced enclosures will be permitted. There could be other species involved as well. This is a highly controversial idea, Mr. Speaker, with a high level of disagreement among stakeholders. Robust public consultation is the bare minimum of what the agriculture minister should have done on this topic, but there has been no public or stakeholder consultation on this recently, and there is no evidence of a review of the wildlife science literature and analysis either, and I find that disappointing.

The other thing that's disappointing is that these changes are hidden in a red tape reduction act, so it's not even coming to the Legislature floor in its own act warranting the fulsome debate that it deserves. Statutes to protect the public interest and wildlife are definitely in the public interest, Mr. Speaker, and are not red tape. The amendments to the Livestock Industry Diversification Act are ill-advised and, frankly, reckless.

For weeks I have been fielding many e-mails from fish and game associations and other hunting groups stating their opposition to the idea of cervid harvest preserves. These are people, Mr. Speaker, who traditionally vote UCP or conservative, but their votes are now at risk – their words, not mine – because of this decision.

4:40

In one e-mail to the Premier a constituent commented that hunters will be watching how MLAs vote on this issue. This proposal to allow CHPs, or cervid harvest preserves, has been rejected multiple times in Alberta's recent history. In 2001 Premier Klein called it abhorrent, before rejecting the proposal. Current cabinet ministers that still sit in this room every day have also spoken out against this idea when they were agriculture ministers. So it's kind of interesting to me that it should come up now.

The Alliance for Public Wildlife calls this move preposterous and absurd. Attempts to expand or propose larger, more natural areas on marginal land to simulate real hunting, even though this still isn't real hunting, will only further fragment and destroy prime wildlife

habitat and facilitate transfer of diseases, parasites, and invasive species.

The Alberta Wildlife Federation has spoken out about these changes, Mr. Speaker. They represent more than 14,000 Albertans and oppose this bill because it conflicts with the North American model of wildlife management. An independent survey of Albertans found that 72 per cent expressed opposition to CHPs, concerned that decisions regarding this issue should be made with open, transparent public education and consultation, which, as I said, has not happened. Their members who are game ranchers are terrified of the risks associated with buying cheap feed from the Wainwright area due to CWD contamination, especially so on grain crops that sat out for the winter and were fed on by infected mule deer. I'll get a little bit more into CWD shortly here.

In partnership with hunting and fishing organizations, the Minister of Forestry and Parks and the Minister of Infrastructure have been invited to participate in community discussions about this, where both the pros and the cons could be discussed in multistakeholder conversations. Both of those ministers did not get back to their constituents consistently or in time for such an event to be organized. As one member told me, real hunters don't pretend to hunt domesticated animals, and responsible governments listen to their constituents.

The Wildlife Society, an international organization of scientists and managers advancing wildlife management, says that the list of impacts associated with hunt farms includes behavioural impacts on farm species, diseases associated with confinement and transport, genetic effects of confinement, shipment across natural ranges, habitat impacts, impacts on nontarget species, and exclusion of wild animals from critical or migratory habitats. As a public resource wildlife has a presumed right to pass freely through private lands with protection from ill-advised barriers or threats. This is necessary for migration, forage, habitat, and escape. All of this is lost when second fences are erected or when game farms are erected in the first place.

There are two main reasons for opposition to cervid harvest preserves. First is the argument of fair chase, and second is the reality of chronic wasting disease. Fair chase is defined by the Boone and Crockett Club as the ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful pursuit and taking of any free-ranging wild animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper or unfair advantage over game animals. The Minister of Forestry and Parks spoke repeatedly to this idea of fair chase last spring when we were debating the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025. It's one of the few things the Minister of Forestry and Parks and I can agree on.

Hunting in a cervid harvest preserve is not hunting or harvest. This is shooting a captive animal enclosed in an escape-proof fence without any of the classic rules of fair chase. Ethical hunting is rooted in stewardship, respect for wildlife, and a connection to the land. This action actually debases hunting, Mr. Speaker. I have received e-mails from hunters who are concerned about what cervid harvest preserves do for the reputation of hunters in society, because ethical hunting uses a combination of skill, observation, time, and maybe a little bit of luck to be successful. Respecting nature and building a relationship with it is an essential part of a successful hunt. Stepping into a fenced enclosure involves little of these essential components and degrades hunting in the public eye. This has very real potential to tarnish ethical, responsible hunters who are proud to be responsible stewards of Alberta's wild places and its wildlife.

The second concern, Mr. Speaker, is chronic wasting disease. CWD is an incurable, always-fatal degeneration of the brain. It is a prion disease in the same family as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE, mad cow disease. As a

biologist there are two things in this world that truly scare the pants off me, climate change and CWD.

CWD is pervasive. It spreads rampantly, it kills all deer and elk in its wake, and it is a disease introduced to this world through human activities. CWD is the worst of the prion diseases because it can be transmitted by body fluids or infected animals and can spread to and through wild ungulate herds. The prions that source the infection are virtually indestructible – I have yet to find a paper that has described actual successful destruction of CWD – and it can persist in the environment for years. There is no going back from CWD spreading on the landscape. In addition to animal-to-animal transmission, research suggests that prions shed from infected animals can remain in the soil and in the water for long periods of time. This provides opportunity for the disease to repeatedly cycle through new animals and new generations.

While the origins of CWD are not entirely known, research suggests that it moved from sheep to deer in farm settings in the U.S. It then came to Saskatchewan through farmed ungulate imports, was transmitted to wild deer, and came to Alberta. To date 16 elk farms in Alberta are contaminated with CWD. Every year I look at the Alberta government website and map of CWD spread, and every year CWD has spread farther and more rapidly than biologists estimated.

To be clear, CWD started on wild game farms. Having wild ungulates feeding at stations in high density and in pens is what led to the evolution of the disease. CWD is now the largest ever mass of infectious prions in global history. It cannot be mitigated or cured. Its potential impacts to wild deer and elk populations are severe, risking population viability and so the future of wild deer and elk hunting as well as everything else.

CWD and cervid harvest preserves are deeply intertwined. CHPs involve transporting and confining farm deer and elk into fenced enclosures for hunting, which significantly increases the risk of spreading CWD. Recommendations are to contain the spread of CWD by enacting and enforcing an immediate ban on the movement of all live cervids. The highest level of CWD infections, persistence, and geographical transfer have been found on commercial game farms. Legalizing CHPs would amplify this risk by concentrating animals in confined areas, increasing animal-to-animal contact, and accelerating environmental contamination.

CWD seems to be unstoppable, a slow-moving pathological train wreck. It fits the definition of a wicked problem, which is defined as something that is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and shifting factors that are often difficult to recognize. Research shows devastating impacts on wildlife, with severe population declines to the point of extirpation or extinction of deer, elk, caribou, and potentially moose, with massive ecosystem, economic, food security, treaty, and trade consequences.

We have allowed hunting for some species on other game farms, namely wild boar, and that has been a total disaster. Wild boars are now successfully infiltrating much of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and some have classified wild boar as the most dangerous invasive species in the country. This government talks about invasive mussels and all their success there. Wild boar is way worse and will cost way more money, and it all starts with inappropriate game hunting on farms.

Efforts to date around CWD have mostly been to monitor the spread, provide awareness, and learn as much as possible by supporting CWD research. Hunters are required to submit heads for testing from selective wildlife management units. There are recommendations on how to consume and how to process elk and deer in these areas. We recognize that CWD is dangerous. We recognize that it's spreading quickly. We recognize measures have

to be taken to contain it, and yet here we are talking about doing the very thing that will propagate the spread of, honestly, what is the most dangerous disease to ungulate populations in the province.

4:50

Environmental contamination on infected hunt farms cannot be eliminated, so prions build up in the soils and remain infectious. These issues in part explain why the Canadian Food Inspection Agency backed away from their national approach to eliminating CWD in game farms. We now have to live with the cost and persistence of CWD, but we definitely should not be doing things that exacerbate it.

The minister will say that the elk farming industry needs to remain economically viable and they need to allow harvest preserves in order to do that. I want us to have a very serious conversation about how we ensure that people who run elk farms do not go out of business. Obviously I don't want that to happen to anybody, but I do not think this is the solution.

There is no legitimate purpose to promote exploiting captive wildlife as industry, and records show that these kinds of schemes have turned out to be exactly as predicted: a biological nightmare and an economic deficit machine. Allowing cervid hunting on game farms will not save the elk farming industry, Mr. Speaker. It could make their lives more difficult.

With my remaining minute and a half I want to talk a little bit about the licence citizenship markers because I don't like that either. Adding these markers to licences is unnecessary and, to be honest, a little offensive. I was thinking a little about when I've pulled my driver's licence out as proof of my identification lately, Mr. Speaker. I've used it at the bank, at the hospital or doctor's office, not at the bar, like the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who clearly is so much younger than I am, but I've also used it when registering my vehicle.

None of those purposes needed to know that I'm a citizen. I can't think of why it would even matter. Anyone can have a bank account, see a doctor, or drive a car. It's an invasion of my privacy for anyone, including a bouncer at a bar, to see my citizenship. It's none of their business. Other than voting there are no programs exclusive to citizens, and there are other ways to prove voter eligibility.

I echo the question that many of my colleagues have asked, which is: what programs are going to be restricted to people who are not citizens that we need to have this marker on our licences? Where does that matter? To me on this side of the House what it looks like is opening the door to discrimination. It's a way of creating the other, and it's a way of allowing people to discriminate against you before you even have a conversation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak and oppose Bill 10, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). This is an omnibus bill that amends six different pieces of legislation across multiple ministries. The government claims that this is about reducing red tape, but the reality is that this bill hides harmful provisions behind a few overdue fixes. Albertans deserve clarity on what this legislation truly does.

Let me begin by acknowledging the positive change in this bill. One of the most significant amendments is to the Fair Registration Practices Act, which will prohibit regulatory bodies from requiring Canadian work experience for internationally trained professionals. This is a change Alberta's New Democrats have long advocated for.

In fact, in spring 2024 we introduced Motion 511, calling on the government to remove these barriers. Mr. Speaker, this change will help newcomers build better lives, reduce underemployment, and address labour shortages in critical sectors.

Mr. Speaker, lots of people come here with high qualifications, highly qualified people, and we are not able to use their talent. Now we will be able to use their talent, and they can get better jobs. It brings Alberta in line with other provinces like Ontario and British Columbia, which have already taken similar steps. This is a long-awaited move that the Alberta NDP have advocated for, and we will commit.

But there are other amendments that on their own may seem reasonable. The Traffic Safety Act will allow Albertans to include their personal health number on their driver's licence only if they choose. This could streamline identification in some situations, though it is hardly a priority when our health care system is in crisis. The Land Agents Licensing Act will allow the registrar to dismiss complaints that are frivolous, trivial, or made in bad faith, a sensible clarification. The All-season Resorts Act consolidates regulatory oversight for resort developments, which the government argues will reduce administrative burden, though critics have raised concerns about environmental protections and ministerial overreach. Finally, the livestock diversification act legalizes hunting of domestic deer and elk on harvest preserves. While this may benefit certain industries, wildlife experts warn that it could spread chronic wasting disease and undermine ethical hunting standards.

Mr. Speaker, these changes, questionably, are not the real story of Bill 10. The real story is the amendment to the Government Organization Act that introduces mandatory citizenship markers on drivers' licences. This is unnecessary, costly, and dangerous, more dangerous than anyone can think about. Alberta will be the only province in Canada to require this. It divides the citizens into the tiered system again as well. Other provinces like Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, and British Columbia scrapped similar programs because they were ineffective and expensive. The track record is that all the systems which were being used by other provinces were then scrapped. We are just following them. We are way behind them.

The Privacy Commissioner was not consulted and has raised serious concerns about privacy and discrimination. There are no social programs in Alberta that require proof of citizenship, so what is the real purpose here? What is the hidden agenda of this UCP government behind this?

The government claims that this will protect election integrity, but voter fraud by noncitizens is extremely rare. Only three cases were identified in the last provincial election. Meanwhile, this policy will cost Albertans over \$1 million over a year, a 75 per cent increase, in ID security spending to implement changes that Albertans did not ask for and do not need. That is money that could be used to hire more teachers, for mental health supports, or to reduce surgical wait times. Mr. Speaker, it will air the flames that are going against the immigrants here. It will encourage far more discrimination and racism.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, instead of investing in what Albertans truly need – affordability, health care, education, and public safety – this government is spending millions on a policy, again, that opens the door to discrimination.

Stakeholders across Alberta have raised alarms. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has warned that this change could lead to profiling and denial of services. The Institute for Canadian Citizenship has questioned what problem this policy is even trying

to solve given that voter fraud by noncitizens is statistically negligible. Privacy experts have said that this could face constitutional challenges. Mr. Speaker, these are not fringe concerns; they are serious warnings from respected voices.

Mr. Speaker, as I said when discussing Bill 13 yesterday in this Chamber, these are not abstract concerns. They are real consequences for real people, and those people include families in my riding of Calgary-Falconridge and across northeast Calgary, where many of my constituents have been on the receiving end of an increase in anti South Asian sentiment. This will only fuel that fire.

This corner of Alberta is a mosaic of cultures and communities where diversity is woven into everyday life. People here speak countless languages and bring traditions from every part of the world. They work tirelessly, make sacrifices, and invest their hopes in creating a brighter future for their children. At the heart of that effort is a belief that the systems they rely on, whether it's health care, education, or justice, will treat them with fairness and dignity. But, Mr. Speaker, what message does this government send when it pushes policies like citizenship markers on IDs? It tells these families that their inclusion is conditional. It tells them that their privacy is optional. It tells them that their contributions matter less than political optics, and this is unacceptable.

Imagine a newcomer family in Calgary-Falconridge trying to navigate life in Alberta, already facing rising utility bills, skyrocketing insurance premiums, unaffordable rents, and stagnant wages. They are struggling with overcrowded classrooms and long waits for health care. And now instead of addressing these urgent needs, this government is spending millions on a policy that will make them feel singled out every time they show ID at a store, at a clinic, at a job interview. This is not about security. It is about creating barriers and division and systematic racism. And let me be clear. My constituents have already been at the receiving end of an increase in anti South Asian sentiment, and this will embolden those who want to discriminate. It will make everyday life harder for families who already feel targeted. Mr. Speaker, this is not hypothetical. This is the reality my community faces.

As I said yesterday in the Chamber, this is a part of a pattern. Whether it's stripping away cultural competency requirements under Bill 13 or introducing citizenship markers under Bill 10, the message is the same: fairness does not matter, inclusion does not matter, and communities like ours do not matter.

Mr. Speaker, that is not the Alberta we believe in. We believe in an Alberta where diversity is celebrated, where newcomers are supported, and where government invests in what people truly need – affordable housing, world-class public education, accessible health care, and strong public safety – not policies that divide and discriminate.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are looking for leadership that tackles these real challenges they face every day, not more bureaucracy that costs taxpayers millions, yet that is exactly what this government is delivering with Bill 10. This bill is a mixed bag. Yes, it includes one positive change, the removal of Canadian work experience requirements for internationally trained professionals, a step that we the Alberta NDP have long championed.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But that progress is overshadowed by harmful provisions that do nothing to make life better for Albertans. At the heart of this legislation is a citizenship marker policy, a measure that is unnecessary, discriminatory, and expensive. Time and again this government chooses optics over substance, ideology over inclusion, and politics over people.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want solutions that strengthen our province, not policies that weaken trust and create barriers. Bill 10 fails that test. It is not what Albertans asked for, and it is not what they need. For these reasons, my Alberta NDP colleagues and I cannot support Bill 10.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, there are many components to Bill 10 that need to be addressed, but given the time constraints we have tonight, I'm going to focus on citizenship markers and health care identifiers on drivers' licences. First of all, Albertans deserve respect and support for their contributions to our province. Next, other than voting, there are no programs in Alberta that are exclusively for Canadian citizens. The UCP have suggested through their Alberta Next Panel that Alberta could withhold social services from noncitizens. They've used this anti-immigrant rhetoric to blame newer noncitizens for their policy failures. Is the UCP planning to illegally and unconstitutionally restrict programs for legal residents? This government is sending the wrong messages, opening the door to discrimination.

Alberta will be the only jurisdiction in Canada that would require citizenship markers on drivers' licences. Four other provinces discontinued these markers due to additional costs for, essentially, no return. Citizenship is not protected under Alberta's Human Rights Act, meaning this policy could lead to private-sector misuse, things like screening for citizens versus noncitizens for employment or housing.

Legal changes to include citizenship markers and personal health numbers will include additional security measures that will cost a million dollars a year, which is approximately a 75 per cent increase. This is spending by this government for changes Albertans did not ask for nor do we need, especially at a time when there are other issues to be prioritizing.

How can the minister guarantee that discrimination will not increase with citizenship markers easily identifying noncitizens when the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric is prominent? How does the optional inclusion of personal health numbers on drivers' licences reduce the number of active health cards versus residents of Alberta? That was one of the biggest reasons why this government wanted to do this, because there were too many health cards issued.

You know, there's been lots of expert opinion on this. I'll just say a couple. One civil liberties society expressed serious concern over the disclosure of citizenship leading to maltreatment, whether it's outright denial of service or changes in treatment based on profiling. The Institute for Canadian Citizenship said that it's unclear what issues they're trying to resolve with citizenship markers because voter fraud by noncitizens is statistically low, and I'll address that in a minute. A U of C law professor said that citizenship markers could lead to a constitutional challenge. The Supreme Court has previously declared that noncitizenship has the potential grounds to argue a case of discrimination.

Amendments to the Traffic Safety Act will enable Albertans to have the option for personal health numbers to be included on licences, which in itself is neither here nor there, but what about personal health numbers and cards for those who don't drive? Children, some seniors, people that don't have drivers' licences: it appears that those people will have to pay for the government ID card because they will have to renew their personal health card periodically or they're going to be denied services, which the minister of health said quite clearly in this House. This will cause

extra costs, again, affecting affordability for families, for persons with disabilities, and for the aforementioned groups.

5:10

The other thing that we should be concerned about is that the Privacy Commissioner noted that she was not consulted when this policy was first announced and had serious concerns about privacy. The violation of privacy could very much outweigh the benefits of displaying citizenship markers. We present our IDs, Mr. Speaker, in many social situations in which citizenship status is not relevant or prudent: bars, liquor stores, cannabis stores, online mail order pickups, the post office, health clinics, and the list goes on and on.

The argument that these markers will support election integrity by ensuring noncitizens don't cast votes is really a nonstarter. Let's be clear about this. Voter fraud by noncitizens is quite rare. Following the 2023 provincial election Elections Alberta issued three letters of reprimand for cases of illegitimate voters casting ballots. Three out of millions of voters. This is a rare occurrence that the UCP are sensationalizing to further drive anti-immigrant rhetoric under the guise of ensuring election integrity.

Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying that if you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail, and in the context of what I've been talking about this afternoon, every immigrant to this province who is the wrong kind, in quotes, must be doing something illegal or underhanded or is cheating or is making life more difficult for, quote, real Albertans. This mindset was clearly illustrated earlier today in this Assembly when the minister of public safety, a minister of the Crown, said, "What we [the UCP] will focus on is the 4,000 organized crime groups that the members of the NDP let into this country." Pretty extraordinary when the NDP hasn't been in power for six years. In response, I think in the point of order, the Opposition House Leader said, "Four thousand organized crime groups – characterizing immigration into our country as if all immigrants are criminals is how I read that." Hammer, meet nail.

Alberta's New Democrat shadow minister of immigration and multiculturalism, the Member for Calgary-Klein, said the following about adding citizenship markers to drivers' licences.

This UCP government has not been able to provide clarity on why this citizenship marker is necessary. Other than voting, we cannot identify any programs that are exclusively offered to Canadian citizens.

Is the UCP government now planning on illegally and unconstitutionally restricting programs from legal residents of Canada?

Instead of reducing red tape this will be a headache for Canadian-born citizens who will now have to present either a passport, that over 1/3 of Albertans don't have, or find their old birth certificate just to renew their driver's licence.

Once again, this government engages in virtue signaling while creating bureaucracy and red tape for everyone.

While the UCP is creating distractions for the crisis it has created in health care and corrupt care allegations, the disrespect it has shown Alberta's teachers, students, and public school boards, picking fights with municipalities, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, Alberta's New Democrats are focused on Alberta's priorities: affordability, health care, education. Mr. Speaker, Bill 10 is a flawed piece of legislation, and no one asked for it. I encourage this Assembly to vote no to Bill 10.

On that, I will give my time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 10. Now, Bill 10 is supposed to be about reducing red tape. Sure feels like it's actually creating a lot. The fact is that, you

know, when – I want to talk about a couple of pieces here. First of all, I want to acknowledge the work my colleague from Edmonton-Decore did through his Motion 511, where he called for what is being done in Bill 10, removing the requirement for Canadian work experience for folks to be able to access employment for internationally trained immigrants. That's a big step forward, and I appreciate the government taking notice and taking that recommendation from the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

I also just wanted to speak about, in particular, some of the changes this government is making about ID and drivers' licences. The fact is that there are no practical reasons for the changes this government is bringing forward. None. There are a number of political reasons, which generally, in my view, Mr. Speaker, are poor reasons for government to bring in any kind of a legislative change but particularly so when we are talking about Albertans' personal information and the protection of their privacy. A number of people have opined on this and sort of raised concerns about some of the particular pieces, in particular the citizenship marker.

Dr. Jared Wesley had an article in *The Tyee*: Seven Concerns about [the Premier's] New Citizenship Markers. [interjection] I recognize the minister of transportation probably prefers the Rebel or perhaps Fox News, but certainly Dr. Jared Wesley is a noted expert in political science, far more knowledgeable, I think, than probably any member in this Chamber about politics in western Canada.

The Speaker: I'll politely request the minister and the speaker to address all comments through the chair.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely. Through you, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Dr. Wesley talks about a few particular elements of this, sort of breaking down again why this is not practical. He talks about the fact that the government claims that this is about elections integrity, but the fact is that renewing a driver's licence only has to happen once every – what? – five to 10 years, so we're talking five to 10 years for it to actually turn over. If the government considers it a pressing problem of elections integrity, they're taking an awfully long time to address it. That really doesn't leave much there in terms of that argument.

He points out that if the government is in fact trying to do this because of access to services, like they claim, the fact is that the vast majority of services that people access have nothing to do with citizenship. Outside of civic rights – that being voting in elections, signing petitions, serving on juries – all other things are based on residency and immigration status, not citizenship. Putting a citizenship marker on a driver's licence adds nothing in terms of improving access or changing access to services in Alberta unless, of course, they are planning to follow through on what they talked about at the Alberta Next Panel, which is that they want to start denying all kinds of new services on a basis of citizenship. If so, the government should just come out and say so.

Dr. Wesley points out that we're talking about rights and freedoms. Citizenship, Mr. Speaker, is not a protected ground in the Alberta Human Rights Act. Forcing people to put their citizenship status on their ID, which they have to present in a number of circumstances – hey, I have to get my ID scanned when I go to the bar. Putting a citizenship marker on there when it is not a protected ground, as my colleagues have noted, opens up all kinds of new opportunity for discrimination.

Dr. Wesley also points out that, hey, it's pretty easy to lose your ID. It happens all the time to folks. But the thing is that to obtain – you know, to go through this whole thing, basically, if you want to get your birth certificate in Alberta, that requires photo ID like a driver's licence or a passport. But under this new law obtaining a

driver's licence will require a passport or driver's licence. They're opening this circular loop that is going to make it far more difficult, Mr. Speaker, for people to be able to replace their ID.

The government also talks about other jurisdictions having done this. The fact is that the other jurisdictions that did this walked it back. They discontinued it because they found it was not helpful. In fact, it was problematic, and none of them made it mandatory, Mr. Speaker. Not one. Alberta would be the first.

But the most important thing that Dr. Wesley brings up, not just him but the Information and Privacy Commissioner: the issue of privacy. The fact is that we know this government has had a lot of issues with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Certainly, they have been known for being one of the most secretive governments in Canada. What we're talking about here is the fact that they have not given any thought to what the privacy impacts for Albertans are of putting this information on the front of their drivers' licences.

5:20

Frankly, before you take this kind of step, Mr. Speaker, you're supposed to do what's called a privacy impact assessment. The government has not done so. They have not even spoken with the Information and Privacy Commissioner about this plan. In the words of Dr. Wesley, when we look at it this way, "this plan looks a lot less like streamlining and [a lot] more like risk stacking: [putting] more data on more cards [that are] shown to more people, with unclear guardrails and unfunded administrative burdens." That's what this government wants to impose on Albertans, not for any useful purpose but simply for the purpose of political posturing or potentially for targeting folks who aren't yet citizens of Alberta, which, again, is part of a political agenda.

The commissioner points out that citizenship is sensitive information, that we need to keep in mind that drivers' licences are indeed often used as proof of age in many locations. Mr. Speaker, does the gentleman at the liquor store need to know whether someone is a citizen of Canada? This government wants to ensure that they do. The government should have to, and these are the words of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, demonstrate how any benefit of having that information included on the driver's licence outweighs the privacy risks. They have not done so. They haven't even attempted to do so. Instead, they hide it within a bill that's supposedly about ending red tape.

She said that it's not clear in any way that the provincial government as a public body is even allowed to collect that kind of personal information. Now, of course, this government is pretty bold about taking on new powers for itself. They've repeatedly tried to do so in legislation, through their sovereignty act and through a number of other things. This government is pretty high on its own supply when it comes to adopting power, but the Information and Privacy Commissioner says that requires authorization by the Protection of Privacy Act, and her office has not yet received a privacy impact assessment. Again, the arrogance and entitlement of this government.

She also raises concerns about another piece in Bill 10 here, which is about including health numbers on licences. Currently the government intends to make that optional, but again she raises significant concerns. She says she, in fact, warned the government that they should abandon this plan because of an increased risk of fraud. Now, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker. They want to put the citizenship marker on there because they're saying they are trying to prevent voter fraud, which is basically next to nonexistent in the province, less than 1 per cent of votes cast, but in something where that is far more likely to actually cause fraud and a warning from

the Information and Privacy Commissioner: oh, they just want to race ahead with that.

She notes that the Alberta government body that's responsible for drivers' licences, that being the registrar of motor vehicles, isn't, in fact, subject to privacy laws, so they're going to be handling Albertans' health information with no actual privacy laws overseeing how that's done. Now, of course, the government says they will bring in regulations; they will catch up on that after the fact. Mr. Speaker, when you are dealing with Albertans' personal information, their privacy, this kind of serious thing, the risk of fraud, you should do your homework first. They should figure that stuff out before they rush a bill in that's all about political posturing based on their Alberta Next town halls, where they went on and on about the hundreds of thousands of personal health numbers that they just can't figure out who they belong to.

This government has the ability to do its due diligence, but once again, they aren't bringing these things up because they're actually interested in making things better for Albertans. They bring it up because they think it makes it better for themselves. More divisive rhetoric, more political posturing, and they want to put Albertans at risk of fraud in the process of doing so. In the words of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the registrar of motor vehicles will hold highly sensitive health information of all Albertans with no corresponding duty to protect that information and no consequences if there is a breach. Mr. Speaker, we take it pretty seriously when someone breaches someone's health information. We've got an entire piece of legislation about it, but this government is preparing to potentially hand over thousands of Albertans' personal health numbers to a department which has no duty to protect it and no consequences if they breach it.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this is a government that is acting recklessly. This is a government that is acting out of no purpose other than, again, political games, and it's shameful. There are any number of actual serious issues this government could be working to address. We've talked about electricity prices. We've talked about the fact that affordability is crashing in our province. We've talked about the fact that this government has so badly undermined and damaged our health care system yet is rushing ahead with a reckless plan to create further two-tiered, American-style health care in the province. In the meantime they want to play around with people's personal health information for a little bit of posturing at their AGM. The fact is that this is a government that has, apparently, no interest in helping Albertans, no interest in doing the actual work of governing, just in playing around with more stuff out of their populist playbook.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner is being very clear that there is no oversight by her office, so Albertans will literally have no protection. Now, the minister's office responded and said: well, you know, we've put something in that says that nobody is allowed to use a personal health number for any other purpose. They wrote a sternly worded letter, Mr. Speaker. That's the only protection they are offering Albertans. They could have actually, in this legislation, prescribed a penalty. They could have actually just connected it to the Health Information Act and put that department under that and given the same penalty for a breach in any other department. They did not do so, either out of incompetence or because they honestly don't seem to consider that to be important. Either way it really seems like they are rushing this legislation ahead and forward. [interjections] The minister of transportation might think that's a joke, Mr. Speaker, through you to him, but an awful lot of Albertans don't.

The fact is that Albertans deserve to have their health information, their citizenship information, their status considered protected in this province, respected by this government. This

government should not be placing them at risk of fraud. It should not be placing them at risk of discrimination because it wants to please a few radical members of their base and their political party.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting Bill 10.

The Speaker: On the second reading of Bill 10, the red tape reduction act, does the mover like to close on second reading? I don't see anybody on their feet to speak. That's why I'm asking.

An Hon. Member: We'll waive it.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

Bill 9

Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Debate adjourned November 26: Dr. Metz speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. You have the floor for – how much longer? – 13 minutes.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I previously stated, this bill removes the right of parents to access medically recommended care for their children. This bill removes the right of health care providers to provide recommended care to patients when they've discussed it and planned it with the patients and their families.

This authoritarian government has decided that they will make the medical decisions for children in Alberta. They've decided that this government knows what is best for Alberta's children, but in fact it really doesn't know Alberta's children and is not in there. They're not literally in the examination room with the patient and their family. Instead, they're just making a ruling so that everyone needs to comply. They're flexing their muscles so that their authority over your medical decisions is known to everyone, so beware. Furthermore, this bill says that it will not take away the rights of parents to choose medical care, but that is absolutely the opposite of what is happening.

5:30

They will not even let the courts decide if their ruling is legal, so they've brought in the notwithstanding clause. They must know that this isn't a legal ruling because there's no urgency to this bill. By using the notwithstanding clause they are trampling on the rights of all of us. This bill is absolutely egregious. Albertans need to know what this government is and what they are standing for. They are standing for giving you their rules no matter what the facts and the evidence may say. They are coming into your examining rooms.

This government is misinformed, or perhaps they're just selling a story. This legislation is either sold as buying into and spouting completely wrong information, or perhaps they're unaware of the actual facts and they're just choosing to twist the story. Children are not actually having the surgeries they are banning. It's just in the bill to attract public attention to something that is very emotional and that will make the public feel, "Ooh, that sounds very bad," but these things aren't even happening.

Then they are banning the use of puberty blockers. These delay puberty and allow the child to mature so they can choose later, as adults typically, whether they wish to stop them and go through puberty under the hormonal influences of their choice. Yet this government is taking away the right to delay puberty and is pretending that this is protecting the children. I ask why they feel they need to spread this misinformation. If they did not know these effects, now they do, and I ask that they use their due diligence to confirm them, as they undoubtedly will, and to correct their previous comments.

Medical care is always evolving, and, when possible, medical care that's modern will be based on practice guidelines that are developed based on review of evidence from several studies, very careful evaluation of that evidence, and thoughtful discussion from people that are informed about the problem. That is not politicians. This is the most likely way that we can deliver good medical care. Practice guidelines change as new evidence comes up, and we find better ways to do things. This government is putting ideology and politics ahead of science and removing this right of Albertans to follow good, science-based medical advice.

Governments already have powerful ways of influencing best practices in health care. They implement systems of data collection and data management. This data can then be used. They fund universities for research and education. They can also ensure that the questions they feel are important to running the health care system are addressed by the people that know how to address those questions. There is lots that can be done to get the evidence to improve health care and to improve delivery of care to individuals when there's an issue such as this that they don't understand. Close collaboration, even cross appointments between people that work within ministries, between people employed at universities, between health care agencies, can assure that there is attention to all of these critical issues so that these things are appropriately and scientifically addressed.

Provincial governments can also do this in collaboration with each other. Every province does not need to do the same research. What happened to crossprovincial collaboration? With true collaboration the federal government, who often fund and might be encouraged to fund more if they're part of the discussion and process, should also be involved.

Government should not be making medical decisions for individuals. Governments need to have policies around what they can fund. There are systems long in place such as the funding of pharmaceuticals, biologics, and new technologies. This is called health technology assessment. They are supposed to evaluate the value of proposed new therapies. They need to be able to act quickly because new things come up suddenly that could be a better way of managing any problem. Certainly we need to not put things into legislation that then cannot be changed according to new evidence.

It is not for ministers to be intervening with individual health decisions. There need to be processes in place such that a decision about what gets funded follows a standard process. Government, specifically politicians, should ensure these systems are in place, funded, and operating for the safety, appropriateness, and value of all Albertans.

I completely oppose Bill 9, which brings in the notwithstanding clause to prevent court challenges of three previous bills which remove the rights of Albertans. I would just like to remind the members opposite of some of the comments that have come from other experts around this issue. When these bills first came in, in February 2024, the Canadian Medical Association put out a statement that strongly opposed the government's efforts to restrict access to care. The Canadian Medical Association said that they were

deeply concerned about any government proposal that restricts access to evidence-based medical care, including . . . and in this case very specifically

. . . the Alberta government's proposed restrictions on gender-affirming treatments for pediatric transgender patients.

Canadians have a right to make personal choices [with] their health with the support of their families, the guidance of licensed, regulated health professionals [that is] free from political interference.

Exploring and determining one's sexual orientation and gender identity is part of normal childhood and adolescent development. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to treating patients [that are] experiencing gender dysphoria. An approach that restricts the most appropriate care options for some patients has the potential to cause [them] permanent harm.

Ensuring children have universal access to a full range of medical care is essential for their well-being. We know that transgender youth have higher rates of mental health issues, including suicidal tendencies . . .

and indeed suicide,

. . . due to the stigma that they face. By providing comprehensive health care options, we affirm the dignity and humanity of transgender individuals, reinforcing the notion that everyone deserves access to the medical support [that is] necessary for authentic self-expression.

The Canadian Medical Association strongly urges the government to consult with health care professionals, experts in their field, when considering these policy changes.

Now, in May 2025 the Canadian Medical Association went so far as to file a legal challenge to protect the rights of patients and families to make medical decisions. Along with three Alberta doctors they filed a constitutional challenge to Bill 26 to protect the relationship between patients, their families, and doctors when it comes to these treatment decisions. This Bill 26 directed physicians on how to deliver gender-affirming care to people under the age of 18, right down to which medications they can use, when, and how.

5:40

This is historic and unprecedented, for the government to be intruding into the physician-patient relationship and to require doctors to follow the law rather than the clinical guidelines and consider the needs of the patients and their own consequence. This new bill takes away the right of the court to rule on whether that previous Bill 26 can come in. It removes the ability. It's the get-out-of-jail-free card so that this government does not need to respect the rights of people that are present under the Charter, and it is not respecting the autonomy of patients to follow the medical advice of their physicians.

Medicine is a calling. Doctors pursue it because they are compelled to care for and promote the well-being of patients. When a government bans specific treatments, it interferes with a doctor's ability to empower patients to choose the best care possible. Doctors are already governed by the highest standards of ethics and professionalism, and under Bill 26 they are now powerless to provide independent expertise. Clinical guidelines and treatment options won't be followed when it comes to gender-affirming care in Alberta. This legislation . . .

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

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for her comments. One thing that I respect about the Member for Calgary-Varsity is that while we may disagree on this, we don't need to be disagreeable. I respect her for doing so, and I appreciate her feelings on this matter.

I'm going to be referring to an op-ed that I'm currently drafting for one of the most favourite NDP media outlets, the *Western Standard*. This is titled the notwithstanding clause is good for Alberta, and I'm going to, of course, refer to it, but not completely because we're talking about Bill 9. I've also discussed Bill 2 in this particular draft op-ed, but I want to talk about Bill 9. Just for Albertans, there are actually four acts that are being amended in Bill 9: the Education Act, the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act, the Health Professions Act. Or is it three? It's three.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity, I think, was focusing on the Health Professions Act, so maybe I'll talk about that one last, but there are other good amendments that are also being made. I'll start off with the Education Act. When we think about the Charter, section 2 deals with fundamental freedoms. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on section 2 because section 2, in the op-ed, deals with the judge-invented right to strike. That isn't the subject that we're going to be talking about.

Section 7, the right to life, liberty, and security of the person, is actually an engaged Charter right here. The court in interpreting section 7 of the Charter recognizes that families are the foundation of society and that the right to liberty includes parental rights to raise one's children and enjoy vital family relationships without government interference. In terms of the Education Act, we don't want to see the state interposing themselves between children and their parents. Parents have a legal duty to provide the necessities of life to their children.

To have the most excellent education system possible, the most open flow of information between schools and classrooms and parents is vital. We want to make sure that if children are changing their pronouns in classes, we don't want to see classrooms keeping secrets from parents. We don't want parents to go to teacher-parent interviews and have teachers know of things that maybe the parents would like to know about, probably should know about, and have that kept secret from them. We don't want to create this barrier between teachers and students.

In 2019 one of the reasons why the NDP lost that election is that, unfortunately, the NDP had policies that had an underlying presumption that parents cannot be trusted and that schools should keep secrets from parents. The reason why parents really didn't like that is, yes, there are some exceptions, unfortunately, but the vast majority of parents love their children, know them best, and will seek their best interests. The vast majority. We had an NDP government, though, that had policies that had as their underlying premise that, across the board, parents cannot be trusted, and unfortunately we see sometimes in schools some of these attitudes still prevailing. That's very unfortunate, so the Education Act was amended so that parents were to be notified of these developments relating to their children.

Now, I want to talk about the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act. The Member for Calgary-Varsity didn't address this, but I presume that – I mean, I would hope that members opposite would recognize that when we have Charter rights, there's kind of an underlying presumption that Charter rights: when you exercise a right, it will necessarily, in many cases, interfere with someone else's right. So in the case, for example, for transgender athletes for them competing in female sports, if they're biological males, there's an inherent advantage that many have. You know, many articles, many studies have shown where there's an unfair playing field, so to have that individual participate in female sports creates an unfair disadvantage and interferes with the right of female athletes as they're seeking to compete and excel in female sports. I think that most Albertans recognize that we want to have an even playing field. We don't want to create contention, division, and actually it's best that transgender athletes are not impeding on females' rights as they look to compete in female sports. Again, Bill 9 seeks to isolate that from judicial interference.

You may think: well, why do we need to do this? With every right that we have in the Charter, one thing that is important to recognize is that rights need to be exercised responsibly, and a functioning free and democratic society actually requires it. As I said, if an individual's rights and freedoms are exercised irresponsibly, they will often limit or interfere with others' rights and freedoms.

I'll just use a very simple example. Take the fundamental freedom of expression. I think we all recognize and the Charter identifies that as a fundamental freedom. But should that Charter right permit an individual with an open-ended right to yell and swear or use obscene language in public spaces?

Even within this Legislature there's not an open right of freedom of expression. It has to be used responsibly. Of course, the reason why individuals don't have open-ended rights to yell and swear or use obscene language in public spaces is that this would interfere with and limit the rights of other individuals and families to access, use, and enjoy public spaces.

5:50

In this example governments have laws that limit one's ability to yell and swear in public spaces, and that's because that Charter right of freedom of expression isn't absolute. Section 1 inherently recognizes that rights are not absolute. These rights are not exercised in a vacuum; they impact other rights. Section 1 of the Charter limits Charter rights "to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society."

It's true that government actions properly addressing the irresponsible exercise of rights and freedoms actually allows others more freedom to responsibly exercise rights and freedoms. I'll just use this example. The judge-invented Charter right of an ATA union to strike was interfering and limiting the rights of 740,000 children to get an education. The Alberta government decided that with time it was required and compelled that the right of 740,000 Alberta children limited the judge-invented Charter right to strike.

The Alberta government has also concluded that the rights of biological females to compete in sports on a level playing field will not permit transgender individuals who are biological males to compete in female sports. In the case of parental rights the vast majority of parents love their children and should be trusted. Therefore, the Alberta government has moved to protect parental rights and protect schools keeping secrets from children if minor children are changing pronouns.

Now, I want to also talk, though, about altering one's gender. The Member for Calgary-Varsity expressed opinions on that. I think we would all agree that altering one's gender is a very serious matter – it's a very serious matter – and in experience all of us would agree that better decisions on serious matters are made when an individual has all relevant information available to her. Thus, it is not wise to alter one's gender as a minor as the very matter being altered is itself changing or evolving through natural processes and can result in very serious regrets.

The Alberta government has decided that protecting minors from making an adult decision on changing his or her gender while a minor was a reasonable limit under section 1 even if it limits a parental right. Under the Charter, section 7, the right to liberty is actually internally balanced. It says that this right will not be denied except through – I don't have it with me. It modifies the right by stating that deprivation of these rights can only occur "in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice." While parental rights should be almost absolute, they cannot be completely absolute and are subordinate to protect children from serious objective harm. We had this law protecting minors from serious harm. Unfortunately, a judge decided to put an injunction against this protection.

Now, courts have the stewardship to interpret the scope of the Charter and apply it to actions taken by governments and not private individuals or businesses. I know that I'm running out of time, but this is the issue. We have seen too often that judges have applied the Charter when they shouldn't – for example, in saying that

removing bike lanes breaches the Charter – and not applying the Charter when they should, actually. I think we saw that often in the case during COVID, where we saw across the board government actions – shutting down schools; closing and bankrupting businesses; vaccine passports; restrictions on family gatherings, funerals, weddings – some of which were obvious overreach, not minimal. Section 1 says that when you limit a Charter right, it should be minimal, proportionate, and rational. Courts, unfortunately, have failed to exercise the Charter when they should, again, with bike lanes and often in criminal cases. It's very shocking that in criminal cases they would often apply the Charter with such vigour.

In order to protect children, the Alberta government, unfortunately, was in a position where they felt compelled to apply the notwithstanding clause, and it's an important clause. The notwithstanding clause is part of the Charter, and it's to prevent activist governments or activist courts from moving outside their lane. There's an important difference between courts... [Mr. Stephan's speaking time expired] And I ran out of time.

The Speaker: You did run out of time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. You've got about two and a half minutes.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join my voice to the debate on Bill 9. Really, the name of the bill is incorrect. It's really an antitrans bill attacking the protected rights of Albertans. It goes against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Alberta's Bill of Rights and the Alberta Human Rights Act.

The notwithstanding clause was first used by the UCP against teachers to force them back to work and no negotiated contract and no legal option to appeal. Now the UCP is using the notwithstanding clause to enforce illegal bills that take away the protected rights of vulnerable children. Certainly, we on this side of the House condemn this new legislation. This is not democratic governance; this is authoritarian governing. We stand with teachers, workers, trans children, girls, and women and with all Albertans who deserve to know their fundamental rights must be respected and upheld. Alberta's human rights record is on the line, and it's being decimated by this Premier and this UCP government.

What's fascinating, Mr. Speaker, is that the UCP proclaims to be champions for freedom and individual rights. For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic was under way, the Premier was deeply concerned that their rights were being denied to those who were unvaccinated. She declared that the unvaccinated are the most discriminated group in history. Bizarre. That certainly is not true as discrimination has included the murdering of certain groups just because of a particular characteristic. Yet here we are. When we are talking about trans youth, all of a sudden the Premier and the UCP are taking away their fundamental rights.

Mr. Speaker, this is called hypocrisy.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

Point of Order Imputing False Motives

Mr. Williams: I hesitate to raise the point of order. However, the member opposite is an experienced member of this Chamber and knows that we shouldn't be accusing individual members of taking away rights. That's been ruled a point of order many times with precedent. The member clearly said that this government and the Premier are taking away rights. I ask only to stay to the substantive matter of debate, refer to the government broadly. I'm happy to hear the debate continue. I know it is important. If the member were only

to stand, withdraw, and apologize, we'd be happy to continue this debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would disagree with the Deputy Government House Leader. The fact is . . .

The Speaker: You're going to have to do that at 7:30, with all my apologies.

It's not a choice I have, hon. members. The House is now adjourned until 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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