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The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 3, 2025

Day 20

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, hon. members. You may be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 12

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate December 2: Ms Wright]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join debate on second reading of Bill 12? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein. [some applause]

Member Tejada: I've got to say that I'm just continually impressed by the hype club here. All right.

Member Irwin: And from over there.

Member Tejada: And from over there, too. Thanks, everybody.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Tejada: All right. Oh, the pressure.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and respond to Bill 12, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I'll start out saying, of course, that any bill that has impacts on the framework of how our budget is allocated is critically important in an affordability crisis and in increasingly polarized times. The financial decisions that we make in this place are not only important to the success of our province and those we serve but also communicate where the values of our government lie.

We've all heard the phrase: put your money where your mouth is. I would say that in this bill not only do sections of this bill not do that, but they take it a step further and really pull money and the rug out from some of our most vulnerable neighbours while the rugs in the Premier's office offer rich comfort to the government's well-positioned friends. I'm sure those rugs have witnessed questionable deals and have kept the government MLAs comfortable and seen them well compensated for their willingness to carry out self-serving agendas and wildly undemocratic measures.

We're now almost three years into this term, and one part of the day that never gets old for me is the recitation of the prayer. As a person of faith it's one that I take much to heart. "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." That's a great prayer. I think about it even when I'm not in this place.

When I think of the types of bills that have been put forward by this government and, you know, sometimes deceptively plain titles, I know that the devil is in the details: red tape reduction, or as I call it red flag proliferation; bills supposedly aimed at protecting free speech, which this government has shown us very clearly is not actually one of the government goals or agendas; any bills purporting to protect vulnerable people. I've been around this government long enough to know that it's what's in the bill that's important, that it's often the opposite of what it claims to do. This

bill is plainly titled, but the details belie where this government's values are, who it serves, who it does not, and who it stands to harm.

While I've heard the side opposite, you know, wring their hands and talk about supposed fearmongering, single out members of our caucus for rightly calling them out – we've also seen some award-winning pearl clutching when that happens – boasting about breaking records while they underperform, and attempt repeatedly to deflect and distract us from repeated failures, as I've said before in this House, history will not look kindly on the UCP's time in government. I see this as another part of the story of this government and decisions that are made in this term which amount to an institutional betrayal of all Albertans.

Among the biggest concerns that I have with this bill are the cruel changes to AISH and, as contrast, the unencumbered many happy returns to the trough as this government continues to find new ways to pay its MLAs more, inflate government, centralize control, and, at the same time, leaving behind the people we serve and leaving them in the cold.

Madam Speaker, let's start with AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, and the proposed changes there as they relate to the creation of ADAP, the Alberta disability assistance program. Now, I've received hundreds of e-mails on this proposed move to ADAP. I have spoken to families, to grief-stricken and fear-stricken parents with adult children who are on AISH. I've had folks plead with us to do the right thing, and by "us" I mean all of us in this House as legislators. I know that the government is copied on this. You know, we can continue to hope against hope that they are capable of doing the right thing in voting against this bill and actually do work that benefits this community instead of making them worry for their survival. That's the overarching theme, is that a lot of folks that I've been talking to are worried about their survival.

Now, Madam Speaker, I have been part of a government that did meaningful consultation with Albertans around Henson trusts. I know what it feels like to work for a New Democrat government that believes that inclusion is just how we live. It's not an ideology. We passed Henson trust legislation and created security for adults on AISH and their families. As a staffer at the time it was quite an accomplishment and quite a feeling of pride to work on legislation that was community led and necessary. This legislation does quite the opposite.

On the details we know that in July of '26 Albertans on AISH will be automatically transferred to ADAP unless they apply and qualify for an exemption. Current recipients will have to be reassessed and reapply for AISH. We don't have any certainty around what the benefit levels will be. Some of those details could be in the regulations – we know that regulations can cover all manner of sins – and this could mean that benefits are less guaranteed than in the current set-up. We know that the decisions around people's eligibility lie with a director, and this could potentially reduce their benefits. We don't see yet in this legislation a stringent appeal mechanism that's within this process. One of the concerns around that is that if someone has been rejected, they may not have a process to appeal those decisions. I don't have a lot of hopes, quite frankly, for this government in that regard.

We know that we've seen this government basically force folks who are on AISH to go through, you know, the gauntlet of processes. We're talking about people who are vulnerable, who are living in extreme poverty. When they've had to apply for the federal disability benefit, they've had to pay out of pocket for medical documentation, and all in the name of this government pocketing the \$200 that was given to them by the feds, that would provide some very small measure of relief.

I've heard the members opposite say that this is empowering legislation, and I would say that the community has told us loudly and clearly that that's not the case. There's been significant push-back on ADAP. We still don't have safeguards in place in terms of accessibility legislation. So when they're talking about empowering folks to work, we don't have the legislation to back that up. My colleague from St. Albert has proposed that legislation. It's a shame that this government and the minister of that ministry haven't made any appreciable efforts to collaborate with her. In essence, the UCP is trying to save money off the backs of Albertans with disabilities. It's part of a pattern. This party of small government and red tape reduction has actually put a lot of public monies and Herculean efforts in to nickel and dime disabled folks in Alberta.

I keep hearing from the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services that we pay the most benefits ever and, you know, unfortunately, leaves out the critical parts of the equation where we also have the highest cost of living. This government have had six years to materially improve the lives of disabled Albertans and instead have created more red tape, have pocketed the money that could have provided relief from the feds, have created confusion and stress for many of my constituents. We know as Alberta New Democrats that governments should actually make people's lives better. Instead, this government is focused on making lives better for themselves and their friends.

7:40

Now, to go a little bit on the topic of giving themselves a raise. Albertans have some of the highest rental rates in the country, highest inflation rates, highest auto insurance rates, some of the highest unemployment rates. We've introduced legislation to increase minimum wage, to protect workers' paycheques, to make utilities and auto insurance more affordable. The UCP voted against all of those and instead gave themselves a raise. I mentioned earlier the concept of institutional betrayal, and I think it's very useful when we're talking about a lot of the bills that we see put forward by this government. It's a concept described by Jennifer Freyd referring to wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings committed within the context of said institution.

Now, I have a lot of hope and increasingly what I'm hearing from constituents and from people all over Alberta is that they have hope that as New Democrats we will do better, that the New Democrats, when elected, will do a better job of governing and that better is possible and it's on the horizon.

I urge all members of this House to vote against this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 12, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I actually had to run over here because between 6 and 7:30 tonight what the NDP caucus did was host a virtual town hall for people with disabilities. I think we had about 179 people on, and most of them stayed on for close to the whole time. I had to leave a bit early to get here, but most of them were online to talk about Bill 12. I suspect there are many of them tuning in now after the town hall.

They had a lot to say. Number one is that there's a lot of fear about what's happening, and this fear is well founded. Now, the government will say that that's fearmongering. It's not fearmongering; it's fact. Actually, if the government or if any member here doesn't believe that, go right to the page. It's all listed

there, what's going to happen starting in July. I suspect a lot of it's going on right now. It's very clear. Nobody is fearmongering. This is factual.

In fact, I listened to almost an hour and a half of people talking about very real concerns about how they're going to manage their budget with \$200 less once they get moved to the new program in July, not to mention the \$200 they lost because this government clawed back the federal benefit, which is the Canada disability benefit, that was meant to help cushion disability poverty. This government stole it.

But what I would like to focus your attention on tonight is a letter. I tabled this letter already, so I will not – actually, I have not tabled it. I will table it tomorrow. This is an open letter to the government of Alberta, and it's just called cancel ADAP to protect dignity and livelihood of Albertans with disabilities. What makes this unique, Madam Speaker, is that this letter is not from just people in the community sort of talking about the legislation. It's not from New Democrats. It's not from our caucus. This is from a number of people. It's 19 people who were appointed to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. They were appointed by various cabinets. Most of these folks were actually appointed by Conservative governments.

This open letter – anyone can go ahead and read it; I will table it as well – talks specifically about the danger. They say, "We write with urgent concern." As former leaders in Alberta's disability community they have a lot of credibility and a lot of experience, and what they're saying is that this is dangerous. This will deepen the poverty of people with disabilities. This will encourage people to – you know, earlier today this government accused me of doing something that is so repulsive that I don't even want to talk about it, but I am going to say it because I hear it almost every day.

I don't know the exact words they used, but they accused me of wanting people with disabilities to kill themselves and encouraging that online. That's what I was accused of earlier today. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every workday my office receives calls and e-mails with people telling me that they want to unalive themselves or they want to access MAID. I thank God that we don't have another track for MAID that people can access right now. I thank God that that isn't around for people to access because people are that frightened.

This many previously appointed by mostly Conservative government leaders in the disability community, with no ties to benefits, no ties to the New Democrats, no ties to this government, are sticking their necks out and saying: this is really, really bad and really dangerous and you need to stop this. I'm going to read their names into the record because I think it's really important that we all know that this isn't coming from just us. This is coming from leaders all over the province.

Chloe Atkins, PhD, former Premier's council member, associate professor at the University of Calgary signed onto this letter saying: stop ADAP; it will harm people; it's dangerous.

Eric Boyd, founding executive director of the Premier's Council on the Status of People with Disabilities, former executive director of the Canadian Paraplegic Association, and the founding member and CEO of the Rick Hansen institute.

Hart Chappelle, former CEO of the Edmonton region community board for persons with developmental disabilities.

Tara Chisolm, former Premier's council member.

Tony Flores, Alberta's first Advocate for People with Disabilities.

Mike Hambly, former Premier's council member.

Austin Mardon, PhD, former Premier's council member, assistant adjunct professor at the University of Alberta.

Margaret McCabe Conquest, former Premier's council member.

Norm McLeod, former CEO of PDD provincial board.

Janalee Morris, former Premier's council member.

Ann Nicol, former Premier's council member, former CEO of Alberta Council of Disability Services, former co-chair of the provincial PDD review, former member of the Citizen's Appeal Panel and the PDD safety standards consultation team.

Neil Pierce, former member of the Premier's council, leader of the Neurologic Health Charities for 30 years.

Alison Plain-Cutknife, former Premier's council member.

Diane Ridley, former Premier's council member.

Inara Samoylove, former Premier's council member.

Lori Shortreed, former Premier's council member.

Cam Tait, former Premier's council member and journalist.

John te Linde, psychologist, former member of the Premier's council and the Citizen's Appeal Panel, former chair of the PDD safety standards consultation team.

And Pamela Wagner, former Premier's council member.

Madam Speaker, for two years I was actually a member of the Premier's Council on the Status of People with Disabilities as well. I saw first-hand – and this is under a New Democrat government, no less. So am I going to say things, you know, that are maybe a little bit less than positive about the New Democrat government? Sure. Let's be honest here. It was not working as it should have even then.

What this group was assembled for, again, in the late '80s, was to actually provide direct advice to the Premier and her cabinet on disability issues. Now, as I'm sure you can imagine, Madam Speaker, disability sort of travels through all of the ministries. Right? It affects every aspect of our life. Just like the government members say, all of us know somebody with a disability. Likely that is very true. One in 5 people live with a disability; 27 per cent of Albertans have a disability. It's a lot of people. We all know somebody.

And this bill – you know, I've been alarmed by a lot of pieces of legislation in this place. The fact that this government chose to shove this in a financial statutes bill is really a slap in the face. It really is a slap in the face that they don't have the guts, if you are going to blow up AISH like you're doing – this government is blowing up AISH as we know it. They're blowing up AISH. At least have the decency to have a piece . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

Mr. Schow: I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). It's one thing to say that the government is blowing up AISH – I think we've already talked about these graphic visual images – but it's another thing to celebrate it and use it multiple times in the same sentence and say it three or four times consecutively. I think the member is looking for reasons for me to stand up and call a point of order so that the member can show it to all the people watching online that she told, prior to coming to this session tonight, that she's going to come up here and blow up this bill or something to that effect.

Madam Speaker, I'm not really sure if this is the language that we want to be using tonight. We're only 20 minutes into session and we're already talking about blowing stuff up. Maybe we should crawl before we walk here. I would ask the member to refrain from using that kind of language for the rest of the evening, particularly

when talking about AISH and a program that so many Albertans depend upon.

I'll leave it at that: 23(h), (i), and (j).

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

7:50

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. While the Government House Leader is discussing 23(h), (i), and (j), he might want to avoid imputing false or unwarranted motives to any member as he sat and opined about why he thinks the Member for St. Albert might be saying the things she's saying. If anyone's grandstanding here today, I'd say it's the Government House Leader.

The fact is that the Member for St. Albert is simply, I think, noting what the government is doing. They are in fact taking apart the AISH program. Is she using colourful language, "blowing it up"? Sure. But that is nothing that is beyond the pale. The only thing I heard there that might be concerning is that the member in the heat of debate mistakenly used the word "you," which I thought was what the government member was going to rise on. We'd be happy to, I think, simply apologize and withdraw, but the rest of the balderdash we just heard from the Government House Leader is not a point of order. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: I don't know if that's necessary.

I think probably this is an interesting can of worms very early into this evening's debate. We're just going to reset here. Okay? There's some crosstalk and these sorts of things. That's not helpful. Using language like "blowing up" repeatedly is probably not helpful. Let's restart, take a breath.

The hon. Member for St. Albert has the floor.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will not say they're blowing up AISH. I will say they're aggressively dismantling AISH. How about that? Better? So they're aggressively dismantling AISH. That is a reality. I guess they're a little sensitive to me saying that they're blowing it up. All right. That is just fine.

Let's go on. Now, you don't have to listen to what the NDP is saying. Let's go on to another organization . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. That didn't last long. [interjection] Hey, no. There's a whole lot of you not innocent right now. St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What we have tried to do here is less about what we think about this bill, that will make massive changes, not good changes at all for people with disabilities. We have tried to amplify and elevate the voices of Albertans with disabilities, organizations that support people with disabilities in the community. I think that we are continuing to do that. This government has repeatedly told us, "We will not listen to anything the NDP has to say," which really kind of tells you a lot more about them than about us.

I would like to share more information from other advocacy groups. One is Inclusion Alberta. Inclusion Alberta is a provincial chapter of a federal group, I think, that is very active, has a lot of credibility. They have been around for a very long time. What they clearly tell us, what Bill 12 does – again, I encourage everybody to go online and check out their page. It's inclusionalberta.org. They have all of their press releases right there, and they tell you specifically what Bill 12 does, nonpartisan. Let's hear it.

It moves everybody from AISH to ADAP. That's a fact, Madam Speaker. In July of 2026 everybody on AISH is going to move to ADAP, then they're going to decide – we don't know who because they haven't shared that information. We don't know who the adjudicators will be. We don't know who the assessors will be. We don't know if this will go out to tender to a private company to do this. We don't know because they're not telling us. Hopefully they'll tell us soon. It's not a government that likes to share information. But everybody's going to move, and everybody that moves will have their benefits reduced by \$200. That's a fact. Go on the government's page and check it out if you don't believe me.

Then they're going to decide who goes back to new AISH. I don't know what they're going to call it after that, but whoever goes back. And that's why I made the joke: who's going to do it, a magic Harry Potter sorting hat? We don't know, Madam Speaker, because they won't share that information with us. We don't know. Is it based on disability? Is it based on IQ? Is it based on employment history? Is it based on income? Is it based on age? We don't know. We don't know because they're not telling us.

But the fact is that everyone's going to move, everyone's going to lose \$200, then they're going to decide who goes back, but they're going to have a special \$200 grant for the ones who are going to move back to AISH. That tells you right there. They are reducing people's income, but they're saying that it'll be okay because they can work. They're saying that the NDP didn't want people to work. Well, that's baloney. AISH already had that ability. All they're doing is creating a two-tier disability system. That's it. They're just afraid to be honest about it.

People before had the ability to work up to a certain amount before their AISH income was reduced dollar for dollar. That's a fact. It's just a fact. I'm not making it up; it's a fact. We already had the ability to do what they're saying ADAP will do. The only difference is they're going to reduce the core benefit by 200 bucks and give themselves the ability to decide who goes where, not the experts who know about disability, who understand the reality of employment in Alberta when it comes to people with disability. No. It's going to be this government that decides who gets what, and they are going to decide who makes those decisions. That doesn't seem very fair. That is what's adding to the absolute fear in this province. It's not fearmongering; it is based fear. It is based on fact that this government has shared.

It cuts benefits. It cuts income exemptions. It actually uncouples it from their own 2 per cent increase per year. They got rid of the schedule that said – first they uncoupled it from inflation. We knew that. Then we said: why are you uncoupling it from inflation? They said: "Oh, we're not. We're not, but it capped it at 2 per cent. It's pretty much the same thing." It's not, but they've even gotten rid of that. They got rid of the appendix that said that they would do that every year. Now it's at the discretion of who? The minister. The minister gets to make all of these decisions now. So when they stand up here and say, "Look at us; look at all the great things we're doing for people with disabilities," look at the fine print. Go to their page. Just read it for yourself. You don't have to listen to me. Just read it for yourself.

Is this creating some uncertainty for people? Absolutely, yes, it is. Even more so now because they're in the midst of being clawed back from a federal benefit, they know there's another provincial loss coming, and they're just freaking out. What happened earlier is that also in July we saw the federal government say: hey, we put this money aside. Do I think \$200 a month is enough? No, I don't, but that's a debate for another day.

They put this \$200 aside for every person with a disability in Canada that met their criteria. Part of that criteria was financial eligibility. If you earned under \$23,000 a year, you were eligible.

Naturally, if you're on AISH, you are eligible. Twenty-three thousand dollars a year to live on: that's pretty rough. I would suggest that some people's gas mileage, just the reimbursement alone per year, is more than that in this place.

This government, Madam Speaker, is saying that \$1,901 is enough for you to live on; you don't need this extra money from the feds, so we are taking it back. And that's exactly what's happening. In fact, because they're so late processing all of this because it's been a bit of a disaster, some people are now getting back pay all the way to July, so this government is going to claw back every cent that they got in back pay for this Canada disability benefit, and AISH will be reduced.

Now, here's another thing I wanted to mention before my time runs out. A lot of people – I don't know the exact percentage, but if you go in open data and look, it shows you the caseloads of all AISH recipients, all approximately 80,000. There is a huge chunk, maybe 30, 40 per cent – I'm not entirely sure; I don't recall – that receive \$1,901 but not all of it comes from the provincial government or from AISH. What it is: a combination of AISH and CPP, which is a pension plan, but it's CPPD. It's for people with disabilities that qualify for CPP and are on early pension because of a disability. There are lots of people, thousands and thousands of people that have blended benefits up to \$1,901.

Here's the trick. People that get CPPD sign an agreement and guarantee that they will not work. Otherwise, if they work, their CPPD will be clawed back as well. I haven't heard this government say one word about that. What about blended benefits? What about the thousands of AISH recipients that are also on blended benefits? Not a word. I would suggest they haven't even addressed that because this plan was pretty much scratched out on the back of a napkin. It is not well thought out, it is most definitely not consulted, and I will tell you that the almost 200 people I spoke with tonight were not consulted.

Now, Madam Speaker, you might say: you had 200 people; that's nothing. There's almost 5 million people in Alberta. This is about the sixth one I've had, and every time we get new people. It's not the same people joining. It is new people. I will tell you that they're organizing, and they will push back. I think that governments for far too long have taken people with disabilities for granted, and that's going to end.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 12, the financial statutes omnibus act. Oh, I just lost it. Give me one second. That's a good way to kill my time. Uh-oh. Can you give me one second? What happened to it? I just lost it.

Member Irwin: Can I intervene on it? I'll just intervene on the hon. member.

Member Miyashiro: It just disappeared. Give me a second. Unless you want to go.

Member Irwin: It's actually an honour because then I can speak briefly to Bill 12.

I just want to echo the comments of the Member for St. Albert, who did an admirable job this evening, hosting hundreds of disability advocates. I'm grateful for her, and I'm also grateful for the Member for Lethbridge-West, who has vast experience working in nonprofits and with folks with disabilities as well. I can't wait to hear from him.

8:00

Member Miyashiro: Sorry about that. Sorry, Madam Speaker. A little technical difficulty.

As I rise today to speak to Bill 12, the financial statutes omnibus act, I'm going to focus on the piece that deals with ADAP.

But first, I want to address the disrespect shown this afternoon by members opposite towards the Member for St. Albert, the unmitigated gall of members of this House to disparage the reputation of the Member for St. Albert, who was a disability services professional and led a disability services organization for years and continues to be a fearless advocate for people with disabilities and for the disability sector. I guess it was purely ignorance of that fact that led to the display of disrespect we witnessed in the Assembly early today because if that behaviour was made with full knowledge of my colleague's background, then we should just call it spiteful . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but we are now delving into maybe more of a matter that has been decided on previously. I can appreciate a brief comment, which has been made. But let's move on.

Member Miyashiro: I will move on. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, no one asked for the ADAP program. I have friends and family that work in the disability sector, and some have done so for decades. They never asked for this. I know people that receive services in the disability sector, and they never asked for this. I worked for over seven years in the disability sector, developing and implementing services, working to meet the needs of people with disabilities, and working with staff to create opportunities for community engagement for the people we served.

We developed an employment support service that touched over 1,000 people a year in Lethbridge; employment supports, that's ADAP back in the day. People with medical disabilities, people with developmental disabilities, people experiencing mental illness, we provided pre-employment training, job-readiness groups, job search, job placement, job coaching, all within the existing funding frameworks: AISH, PDD, mental health, federal disability funding. Every person that wanted to engage in that broad range of services was given the opportunity to do so. We didn't have to disrupt their lives by changing their personal funding support. We didn't have to disrupt their lives by making them apply for a new funding stream.

You know, there's an organization in Lethbridge that created a new way to do employment supports, and they did it at least a year before ADAP was a gleam in this government's eye. This agency found that just calling agencies and asking what they needed: do they need staff, and what will help you fill your staff? – no, they actually went the next mile. They actually found out what needs were in different businesses, and then they found someone to fill that need.

Let me give you a good example. Madam Speaker, this relates directly to the fact that ADAP was not necessary to do, to disrupt people's lives. This organization went to a place in Lethbridge – it was a large manufacturing organization – and they found that they just spent some time speaking with the management and being shown some things that were going on in this business and asking simple questions like: what do you think needs to be done now that you're not doing enough of, that maybe some of your more expensive staff were doing that maybe they didn't need to?

One of the things for this organization was to do wiring harnesses. Because they were using parts people to do it and, as some of you know, parts people are paid a pretty good wage, it was probably a job that the parts people didn't have to do. So what this agency did was said: we have someone that's autistic, and they're

perfect for this job because you give them a list of things to do and a guideline, and they will do it. So at first they started this person out a couple of hours a week, and then this person was so good at it that they did a few more hours a week. Eventually this person was full-time. Zero mistakes; this person with autism was given this list of parts that had to go into this bag of parts to do this wiring harness, and they made sure they got it done perfect every time.

There's an example, Madam Speaker, of the ingenuity that the people in the disability sector do every day to try to get people working. They didn't have to blow up the system. They didn't have to try to do something new because they thought it was a good idea. They just did it because it was in the best interests of the people they were serving.

I fail to see and I fail to hear who this government has talked to about this program to get this under way. Who thinks this is a good idea? Certainly, nobody in the sector that I've talked to thinks this is a good idea. ADAP could have been implemented by a regulatory change in AISH, and I think my colleague said that earlier. They could have changed the regs, could have increased the amount they earned from \$800 to whatever they wanted to, could have just changed a couple of words, didn't have to put people with disabilities through this mess that they put them through and the anxiety and the stress. I know this because people in my family tell me about this.

You know, the sad part about all of this, too, is it's actually pitting some of the agencies against the people they're serving because the people that are providing disability services are afraid to speak out. Let's think about that for a second. They're afraid to speak out because they're afraid that this government is going to be spiteful and vindictive towards them and cut their funding, and these are agencies that have been around for 40 or 50 years in my community. These are agencies that employ up to 300 people. These are agencies that serve hundreds of people with disabilities, and they're afraid to speak out against ADAP because they're afraid of the vindictiveness of the government across the aisle.

You know, Madam Speaker, I don't want to say this because I know that the Government House Leader will get angry about it. So I'm not going to say it the way I wanted to.

Mr. Schow: That's a point of order right there, Madam Speaker, because he's presupposing what I may or may not do, under 23(h), (i), and (j).

Member Miyashiro: I was trying to be nice.

Mr. Schow: I will remind that . . .

Member Miyashiro: I was trying to be nice.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, order, order. Hon. Government House Leader, you will direct your comments through the chair. You are rising on a point of order. I will now recognize you. You can make your case.

Point of Order **Allegations against Members**

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through the chair, there's nothing nice about the remarks that the member is saying. I'll remind the member that he's not in the Chambers in Lethbridge city council; he's here in the Alberta Legislature. He can't just go and throw shots at the member.

By the way, if he's going to go and disparage the government members and things we've said, that were said by member's opposite on the record, he might want to look inward with his own

caucus and look at what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said last night. If we're going to go tit-for-tat tonight as to who said what, I'm happy to play that game all night. It's a target-rich environment across the aisle, Madam Speaker.

But in this instance I believe this is a point of order because the member is presupposing what I may or may not do. Trying to veil this as a charitable remark? No. It's a shot across the bow, Madam Speaker. This is ridiculous.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Look, if we want to have a professional environment in here tonight, we can start with the Government House Leader, who every time he gets up to argue a point of order goes on an extended rant disparaging members, bringing in all kinds of things from outside this House. If the Government House Leader wants more decorum tonight, he could start by showing some.

We all have the ability to regulate ourselves here, and I'll ask the Government House Leader to prove it himself if he wants to see it. Now, the Government House Leader had demonstrated. Earlier he did get up and get angry when a particular phrase was used. The member was simply referencing what occurred on the floor here tonight. If the Government House Leader is saying now that he is no longer going to be offended if someone uses the phrase, "blows up the system," then he can say so. In my view, it's not a point of order, and I would love to simply get on with debate.

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the point of order was a complaint that the member was presupposing the behaviour of the Government House Leader. The argument against the point of order was that the Government House Leader did what he said he was going to do, which doesn't argue against the point of order, but the point of order also isn't necessarily valid as you all troll each other in this House all of the time, in all of the ways, and you all know it. So if we all stop doing that, it will stop happening. Tonight is a perfect example of how no one is innocent in this House. We all argue points of order the same way, and they're all quite wrong most of the time.

I'm going to reset the House again. It took about half an hour to get there from the last time we reset the House. The hon. member who is speaking will do very well to not continue to troll other members in this House, and other members in this House will not troll each other either. I hope this is not a troll meme that ends up on the Internet later by the Speaker, which is where I think it's going. I blame all of you.

We're resetting. It's going to be a great evening.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Debate Continued

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, what I want to say is really that I'm hoping that this government isn't doing this new system so they have to pay less people ADAP. That's what it seems to me. That's what it seems to people in the system. The ability for most people that are unsupported with disabilities, especially developmental disabilities, to navigate the system will leave them out in the cold, literally. They won't be able to do the paperwork. They won't be able to get their application in on time. They will get cut back. What that'll do is reduce the rules on AISH. That'll reduce the rules on ADAP, whatever it's called. I'm really hoping that that's not the intent of this government, but I don't think my hope is really going to be borne out in that case.

There are lots of people that are pushing back against us, as we know, right? I mean, we don't even have to talk about the clawback for the \$200 for the federal government benefit that this government is trying to say is not a clawback. However, it absolutely is. When the federal government has given the people with disabilities \$200 to make up for that, the government has said: well, then we're going to give you \$200 less. That's totally a clawback.

You know, we just need to hope for – and I can say this, Madam Speaker, because I've worked with people with disabilities and, as I said, I have family and friends that work in that sector. If you work in that sector, as some of us have, you get protective, and you just want to see something happen that's good for the people.

If you go into a disability organization, it is probably the place of the most joy that you can walk into. I can walk into the place that I worked at 20 years ago, and I will get greeted by the people that are still there that I worked with 20 years ago. They'll run up to me, and some of them will be like: hey, have you been on holidays? I mean, obviously, developmental disabilities, right? Some of them on their Friday outing will stop by my house and honk the horn and yell at me to come out; of course, if I'm home, right? You don't get that in a lot of other jobs and sectors. What that creates in you, Madam Speaker, is a desire to make sure that these people get the best that they deserve and that they can. That's why I'm speaking out against this. It's not right, and it's not what people ask for, and it's not helping people.

I just described to you a system that was in place a few years ago by an agency in Lethbridge. I described to you a system for employment that was in place 20 years ago in Lethbridge. It's doing everything that the ADAP program said that it wants to do, without blowing up people's lives. In that case, Madam Speaker, I really can't vote for this, and I really don't think anybody that has a conscience about people with disabilities and people that want the best for people with disabilities can vote for this as well.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I started working with people and for people that have multiple sclerosis 40 years ago. Throughout all of that time, there have been massive changes in the science and management of people with the disease of multiple sclerosis, but there are still far too many people that have severe and significant disabilities.

The AISH program is really a lifeline to people with that disease. Not everyone has the privilege of being able to stop work and have the assets or the family to look after them and continue their future. Not everyone has been employed in a field where they can go on a disability plan and have private disability. In a province where a very large proportion of people are self-employed – think of someone who is a realtor or whatever their business is – they're going to be devastated when now they can't work.

In order to get AISH benefits, it is a very, very hard road. First, you're suffering from a medical condition that takes and takes and takes and takes away from you. You cannot be someone who has a bunch of assets or an income that's going to provide you with that safety net. AISH is really that safety net that you can at least pay rent and put food on the table.

To get these benefits it takes months and years because there are so many levels of proof and so many forms that need to be filled out, and they're horrendous forms. As a physician it would take me about an hour to complete the form for a patient that I've known for perhaps 20 years because I have to go back in their history. I need their chart. I have to know all the details about where they are now and what they've been through and all the varying attempts they've

made to try and keep working, find jobs that will keep them earning an income.

This is a really distressing and very fearful time for every patient that I've had. People miss opportunities for advancement. They're afraid to change jobs. Employers maybe have to make accommodations, or they may not. Absenteeism often grows. As people are accumulating more disability the person's reliability becomes less because some days they're good and some days they just can't work. It's also a much greater amount of work to just get dressed and get to work at any point in time.

The stress grows. The reliance on family grows. The impact on a workplace changes over time. For people that have cognitive deficits as part of their changes, they don't even realize that they're really not so capable of doing their job anymore sometimes.

There's also this problem of partial disability where a person could do some of the tasks, but they're really not fully employable. It took a long time, many years, to get AISH even to the point where they would accept that you didn't have to lose all your capacity in one sphere such as all your vision or all your walking but that it was the accumulation of multiple different disabilities that added up that made a person so that they were not able to be employed.

It took a long time to understand that employability isn't based on what a person can do on one day; it's whether you could hire that person and they're going to reliably come for their shifts or come in and do the tasks that they need to do. AISH provided that for people with nothing else, no other way that they could hold on and survive.

8:20

The psychological impact on patients when they need to renew their disability and reprove again and again that they're still disabled is enormous. The impact on a person that has, let's say, a private disability plan but they still need to have that form filled out every year or every two years to say they're still disabled, when they live in a continuing care institution with a wheelchair that has head controls, but they still have to prove that they're not going to get better – they're anxious because everything depends on what some unknown committee is going to do. Now we're putting this on nearly 80,000 Albertans on AISH and saying: you're all moving to this new program, and now you all need to start at ground zero again and start proving your disability.

This is creating enormous anxiety just having to go through this process all over again, and it's going to create so many problems because of all of the requirements and the forms and even the medical forms that have to be done. These are onerous forms, and they require a physician that understands what they're really asking because the question doesn't really transmit what you really want to know. You want to know what the person can do and can't do, but how does that transfer into whether they're employable or not? That's really what it comes down to, and if you don't have a physician completing this form that actually understands that – you get a tiny little space on the form to fill out something which could be 30 years of history – we're going to have problems, and it's going to create anxiety.

We've got so many people that do not have their same physician, that do not have any physician, and if it's like the other requirement to now apply for the federal form, it's all done in a short period of time. Many of these people are relatively stable with their disability. They're not necessarily seeing the physicians that look after them on a very regular basis, and now they're going to need to all get in quickly, which is going to make every other waiting list long, or these people aren't going to get their assessments and that extra time to do these forms. This is a totally insane way of bringing in a program.

These people already had to have evidence that their disability was permanent. I completely support having a program where we don't really know yet. "This person's very disabled. They may get better over the next couple of years." This would be particularly relevant in someone who's had a trauma, maybe in a motor vehicle accident where we don't know really how much better they're going to get. We need something where we're not confirming that they're never going to work. The AISH program kind of boxed things in a bit, but for the majority of people and the people that actually get AISH – that's why it often takes a long time to get it, because we have to follow for a long time to be sure that they're not getting better – it is going to put absolutely tremendous stresses on people.

The other thing about the program is that it requires the physician and the patient to say that they've done all the medically potential possible things to improve them and make them employable, but these things aren't things they can afford. They can't afford rehab. They can't afford the copays on some of the symptom medications that might be helpful to them, and many can't even afford the copays on the drugs that might prevent them from acquiring disability or getting worse.

We're asking things of people that are out of their control, and we've got a system that is not supporting people and allowing them to get those supports and perhaps be able to be supported in the workplace. In my experience the people with significant disability that have been able to continue to earn income have tended to be the highly educated people in jobs where their brain wasn't affected where a lot of accommodations could be made. I had a patient that was a judge that was able to continue despite tremendous disabilities but with a lot of accommodations made for him. I've had patients that can work in family businesses.

There are so many things that we need to think about with this, and this bill is absolutely not going to help people. It's going to hurt. It's going to hurt so many people, and I absolutely cannot support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? Seeing none.

The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved second reading of Bill 12, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). Does the Assembly agree to the motion for second reading?

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 8 Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Chair: I'm looking for members wishing to join the debate. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park. [some applause]

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks. Oh, thank you. We're taking a new tone. We're resetting, Madam Chair, as you've asked, and to your wisdom, we reset.

Bill 8 is before us, and I just got to go through the process. I just want to say I have an amendment to offer to the Assembly.

The Chair: This will be known, hon. members, as amendment A1. Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: Okay, Madam Chair. Thank you very much. Do you want me to read into the record the amendment?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Kasawski: I'm moving that Bill 8, Utility Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 2(5)(a) in proposed section 20.21(2.2) as follows: (a) in clause (a) by striking out "and"; (b) in clause (b) by adding ", and" after "under section 20.9;" and (c) by adding the following after clause (b):

- (c) there is no reasonable expectation that the implementation of the ISO rule will result in increased costs to a customer other than a customer who owns or operates a data centre.

Madam Chair, there is an expectation of a buildout of AI data centres coming to Alberta. There are warnings from other jurisdictions and other utilities that, due to the rapid growth of data centres, the grids that are being strained, customers are being faced with increased utility rates. As we know, in Alberta we already have the highest electricity rates in the country. We just think it's important, for the families that already pay high electricity rates, that we look to the other jurisdictions where AI data centres are already being built out, that we put some guardrails in this legislation.

8:30

Prior to approving an ISO rule around data centres, the commission must be satisfied that certain criteria are met. Our amendment will add an additional criterion to the list, and that criterion is that there is no reasonable expectation that the implementation of the ISO rules – that's the independent system operator rule – will result in increased costs to a customer other than a customer who owns or operates a data centre. Essentially, we want to protect residential customers, Alberta families from electricity bills increasing due to data centres connecting to the grid. If the commission could reasonably expect cost to increase, then they should be allowed to approve a project.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to debate on amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Appreciate the time. I'd first like to start also by helping reset the tone. Really appreciate the effort and intent by the Member for Sherwood Park. I think he's done a lot of work here, and I appreciate that he's trying to bring forward an amendment to make sure that ratepayers are not burdened by additional electricity costs, including when it comes to when data centres come in to join our grid. However, there is a small challenge with this amendment that hopefully I can clarify.

When one talks about a customer within our electricity grid and our system, that typically means that our Alberta Electric System Operator is dealing with the customer that brings the electricity to the grid, which, in this case, is not actually the data centres themselves. Because of the rules that we're bringing forward, many data centres are going to have a private contract with a generator, and it is typically the generator that is connected to the grid; therefore, the generator would hold that contract, not the customer or the data centre in this way.

Again, I just want to make sure that the member opposite hears that this is exactly the intent that we share, is to make sure that we're protecting all of the ratepayers on the grid so that when this connection comes, they don't bear any additional costs. We don't want to limit them to the way the definition is set forward here: per customer. We actually want to empower our data centres and our

developers to create long-lasting benefits that will help alleviate costs and reduce other bills for all ratepayers in Alberta.

We think that the growth of this data centre industry can be a win-win for Albertans because, one, data centres will bring their own generation; two, they will take on a substantial share of the province's transmission costs. Again, this is a supply and demand question. When a data centre comes on and they use an amount of generated power similar to one of our large cities, Calgary or Edmonton, and if you consider all the customers that would reside in one of those cities and all of their transmission fees added up and give that same equivalent kind of bill to one entity, you can see how much a payment that would be, thereby reducing – because we're not building substantially more transmission because of the location, they will lower every Albertans' bill on the transmission. And, three, they will further advance Alberta's position as a primary destination of choice for investors and innovators around the world.

A lot of our work on the restructured energy market is underpinned by a new principle called cost causation, whereby those that are adding that cost to the system pay for that. That means that if we have population growth, it would be appropriate for that new population to pay their share of the system. If it's industrial growth, as it could be with a sense of data centres, they would pay their share of the system. But all others who are there don't have to pay for it if they're not getting a direct benefit from that. This is going to help all of our other ratepayers, whether they are farm or commercial or doing other work within the province. I want to assure this House and all Albertans that we will remain committed to this principle as the data centre industry continues to grow within Alberta.

Therefore, this amendment, while good in intent, has a flaw that I would just ask others to consider. It is being addressed within the bill, and it will be further addressed through regulations that will be forthcoming. In this case, while it pains me to do so, I would ask others to not support this amendment. So in this case, while it pains me to do so, I'd ask others to not support this amendment.

The Chair: Any others to the amendment? Seeing none . . .

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Chair: I will decide when the question gets called, which is right now.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Any other members to the main bill, Bill 8, in Committee of the Whole?

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. The tone of debate, thanks to your leadership and guidance of this House, is going exceedingly well. I expect it will maintain for moments more.

On Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, I have another amendment that I'd like to offer.

The Chair: Hon. member, I should point out that flattery will get you everywhere . . .

An Hon. Member: Just approve the amendment.

The Chair: . . . and I will approve the amendment to be debated, and we'll call it A2. The hon. member may proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: A2. Great. I might have to use my glasses for this. Madam Chair, just to read in, I don't know if I have to read all of it

again, but it's key that there are some sections in this, again, I think some guardrails and some concerns that we have with regard to infrastructure costs and grid strain and that potential of unfair cost allocation that could be passed on to Albertans. We want to make sure there are some protections in there, and also just acknowledging that there is a lot of decision-making that has moved into the minister's office in Bill 8. Traditionally decisions made for utilities are made by utilities commissions by independent systems operators. It can be a methodical and maybe long process, but it's done so for stability and for certainty into the market, and so we just want to make sure that we are talking about that.

I guess I've already started debate and I forgot to read it in, Madam Chair. We're going to be adding the following to proposed section 41.1(1):

The minister may not make regulations establishing criteria for the allocation of costs associated with data centres that result in the allocation of costs to a recovery cost from a customer other than the customer who owns or operates a data centre.

The minister spoke of the developers and the proponents and all the players that are going to be a part of data centres – the generators, the brokers – but we want to make sure that we're really enforcing that no cost be passed on. Our amendment adds additional regulation-making powers respecting the criteria for the allocation of costs associated with data centres to customers, and then also adds a clause clarifying that the allocation or recovery of costs cannot come from someone other than the data centre operator.

Once again the intent is to protect Albertan families from facing increased costs due to data centres connecting to the grid. If the UCP wants to pursue this data centre strategy, which they've really brought forward a lot, they must at least ensure Albertans that already have high electricity rates, that they won't be going up even further as a result of the addition of data centres to our grid.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you again, Madam Chair, and I agree, you are doing exceedingly well tonight, thank you, and continue to try to strive to get the decorum to the level where it's meant to be.

I again want to thank the member for his efforts and this proposed amendment. Again, we share a similar intent. This is trying to bring a protection for ratepayers in different areas of the bill. Again, a similar intent, different place, and I appreciate that very much and the time that he's taken to put forward these amendments.

While I appreciate his endeavour, due to the complex nature of the system, this may actually have an unintended consequence. I shared under the previous amendment how customers may actually be a group of businesses working together. There may be a developer, a generator, several investors that might be named within that corporation, and then, of course, the data centres themselves. Labelling them as one customer can be somewhat problematic as the Alberta Electric System Operator will typically do a contract, or a DTS contract, a demand transmission service, only with the generating company that connects to the grid. So we don't want to encumber their work on how they can make sure that connection is there, and we don't want to interfere with their allocation of costs. Now the Alberta Electric System Operator will allocate costs to make sure that there's grid reliability.

8:40

In the nature of the intent of the member opposite to protect ratepayers, the very reason we are asking large-scale data centres to bring their own power is so that generation costs, that higher demand, do not inadvertently raise costs for everyone else and why we've put in other places transmission regulations to make sure that location really does matter so that we're not excessively building

out our transmission grid and all ratepayers pay for that transmission cost, but only those who are adding that cost and receiving that benefit. That way we're protecting them on both the generation cost and on the transmission cost.

Furthermore, it is already built into the system that our regulator, the Alberta Utilities Commission, will have to review all of the changes on a restructured electricity market when they're all done to make sure that all the rates set therein are under the rules of just and reasonable.

Again, while I truly appreciate the additional endeavours of the member opposite and absolutely support his intent to make sure that ratepayers do not bear any unfair burden for the development of a new industry of data centres within our grid, I would kindly ask all members to not approve this amendment.

The Chair: Any others? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair. I too have a friendly amendment to the act that I have the copies here to submit.

The Chair: I'm reminded there's no such thing as a friendly amendment, but there is if you call it one, so this is that. This will be known as amendment A3.

You may proceed.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 3 as follows: (a) in subsection 9 by striking out clause (a); (b) in subsection 11 by striking out clauses (a), (d), and (e), 1(b) and (2).

Making this amendment would allow us to accelerate and expand the work that we began in the spring by the passing of Bill 52, the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, the EUSAA.

Madam Chair, this amendment provides clarity, protects ratepayers, and aligns Bill 8 with the government's established plan for the hydrogen blending policy through the EUSAA. For these reasons I urge all members to support this amendment, and I leave it with you.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the minister probably put a lot of work into putting this bill together and then bringing the amendment forward. I think I'll only point out and I've communicated this in the House already that the market requires certainty and stability, and we're putting a lot of power and responsibility in the minister's office. Kudos for the minister for taking on that responsibility, but changes that come late at night, late in the day to change quickly, sometimes that gives people that worry when we're looking at Alberta as a place to invest.

I'm going to say that it's a very good amendment that's been probably thought through very well. I'm going to support it. I did kind of want to prove the point that I was making in previous debate.

The Chair: Any others to join the debate? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Chair: Any members on the bill as amended? Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, in Committee of the Whole. I just want to reset a little bit.

I don't have an amendment, but Albertans do pay the highest electricity prices in Canada by a lot, and it's very unfortunate that our deregulated electricity market that was created for the purpose of reducing electricity prices actually has increased them. There are a lot of things that happened in order for us to get here, a lot of which are under the control of this government, the most important being that the renewable energy sector was eviscerated by this government banning investment in renewable energy.

Now, I just want to point out that when oil sands investment was first contemplated in the 1970s, the oil sands were seen as unconventional resources and the incumbent oil companies hated it. They thought it was a complete waste of money for starters, and secondly, they thought it was a threat to their own competitive position in Alberta. Peter Lougheed ignored them and put together multiple structures in place to make sure that one of the world's largest accessible oil accumulations would be recoverable through technology.

I find the same thing analogous with renewable energy in Alberta. Alberta had for many years been the place for electricity investment, especially in renewables, where Alberta accounted for 96 per cent, I believe, market share of renewable energy investment in Canada. It's not just an Alberta thing. Deregulated markets generally had massive investment in renewables because they were actually cheaper, and I urge all members to look at the investor presentations from Florida Power & Light's parent company, who says repeatedly that the cheapest form of new electricity is a combination of solar, wind, and batteries. In the rules of the market that's why those technologies were taking over. It wasn't that it was woke. It wasn't that it was a bunch of socialists operating power companies that decided that this is what they wanted to do. It's because this was their path to make money.

Now, look, you can't have renewables powering 100 per cent of a grid, right? Nobody believes that. Of course the sun doesn't shine at nighttime. Of course the sun is very weak here in wintertime. Of course the wind doesn't always blow. So we need market rules that set out exactly to what extent does increasing renewable power need to in some cases have some elements of higher reserve capacity in order to make that power possible, and much of that reserve capacity can be provided by batteries. Some of it can't. I don't think anybody reasonably has an objection to the fact that natural gas generation will form part of the supply stack for, you know, quite some time to come.

It's up to the technocrats to make those assessments, because speaking as a politician and speaking as a politician who was at one point in the energy business, I have learned some of the skills of politics over the last two or three years and become stale at some of the skills of energy over the last two or three years. I'm now much better at shaking hands and kissing babies than I used to be. That comes at a cost, because shaking hands and kissing babies means that I can't be embedded in massive, massive spreadsheets and huge technology platforms and keeping up to date on all of the information in this vastly fast-moving space. So if at some point in the future, you know, I am in a position to make decisions for the Alberta energy grid, I will be doing that as a politician and incapable of having the same sort of insight that I would have, having been an energy consultant, back in the day. This is just a warning, right? I don't think politicians should be making decisions that are best done by technical experts. That's why we have the system that we have.

8:50

There are elements of this bill that really concern me from that perspective. The one is that there's a kill switch on the market rules. I understand that, you know, things can go wrong, but I'm also not entirely sure why there needs to be a kill switch that operates forever without a sunset clause.

With that, I will cede my time. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Now, we know that families in Alberta are paying the highest electricity prices of families in any Canadian province, and we've seen this occurring for some time. This government has been a disaster when it comes to utility rates for the folks in Alberta. Under this government Albertans have paid some of the highest utility rates they have seen in a very long time, and this government has done very little, taken next to no action to relieve those costs for Albertans at a time when we've seen significant inflation on a number of fronts. Indeed, this is one of the things that the government has some direct control over, could certainly be making efforts to make life better for Albertans and more affordable. But what we do know: instead, this is a government that's fond of downloading costs. Indeed, those are some of the concerns that we have with Bill 8 and the utilities act.

Now, of course, the record of the UCP when it comes to downloading costs is a long and storied one, Madam Chair. Just think about everything that they've done with municipalities; for example, passing legislation that downloaded all kinds of extensive costs to run an election on the municipalities by banning the use of voting machines, forcing them to count votes by hand, millions of dollars of extra costs, which then, of course – the cities have to incur those costs – those are paid by local taxpayers.

As Conservatives are often fond of saying, Madam Chair, there is only one taxpayer. This government sure loves to exploit them. Doesn't like to do so directly. It likes to do so by putting the costs on the municipalities and forcing them to charge Albertans. That is what happened with many of the changes that the government downloaded those costs, similar with their restrictions on photoradar, which, of course, they put forward as an incredibly great populist thing – what a wonderful thing they were doing for people – but not accounting for the dollars that were lost in the system then, \$28 million from the budget of the Calgary Police Service, effectively defunding police. Again, the government has the right to put forward any policy it wants, much like the policies it's putting forward in Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, but the fact is that they should own up to the cost, then, that those cause for Albertans.

Indeed, you know, back in 2019, when this government was being big on how fiscally responsible they were by cutting their budgets, they did so by forcing more costs on the municipal budgets. We saw that happen in the city of Calgary, where this government caused \$16 million worth of cuts, the majority of which, about \$12 million, were cuts to the Calgary Police Service, again, Madam Chair, an example of this government effectively defunding the police. They took a greater share of revenues from traffic tickets at a cost of \$10 million a year and elected to charge police in Calgary \$2 million more a year for forensic testing. Again, when we talk about Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, and the concerns folks have about what some of these changes may do in terms of downloading more costs onto ratepayers in Alberta,

this is part of the record that we see from this government, a repeated action over and over.

Similarly, what we saw in 2019 and budgets after is this government deciding it didn't want to pay its full share of property taxes. Now, of course, members opposite will say that, well, they don't pay property taxes; they pay grants in lieu of taxes; they reduced that amount. It was only recently that the Premier finally stepped up and corrected that about five years later. All those costs, Madam Chair? Downloaded onto municipal ratepayers because, again, this government loves to make changes in policy and make decisions that benefit themselves and download the cost onto Albertans, as we are concerned some of the elements in Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, might do.

Similarly, education property taxes, Madam Chair. In 2025 this government is taking more than \$575 million from Edmontonians in property taxes and the education property tax. That's an increase of about \$50 million over the previous year. Again, the government pats themselves on the back for giving a small credit decrease in income taxes in the province while they use another mechanism by which they download the responsibility to collect \$50 million more in taxes from Edmonton property owners by forcing the city of Edmonton to do it for them because this government so often lacks the courage of its convictions. The fact is that this is a government that loves to download costs, and we are concerned that elements in Bill 8 could lead to this government choosing to download more costs onto Albertans through their electricity bill.

Even on electricity itself, Madam Chair. We recall this government when it went forward and said that it was going to make electricity more affordable for Albertans just ahead of an election. They bragged about this wonderful new affordability plan they were bringing in. For three months they were going to cap electricity, the regulated rate option, at 13 and a half cents. Incredibly generous, isn't it? Not really, because in capping it, all they did was take anything above 13 and a half cents and put that forward, and after those three months everybody on the RRO got to pay that back anyway.

So, again, Madam Chair, when we express concerns that elements in Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, could potentially raise costs for Albertans in a way in which the government is not being up front about, in a way that the government is not choosing to make clear, it is based on a rich history of seeing this government repeatedly do that time and time and time again.

We know that electricity prices are higher. As I said, Alberta families are paying the highest electricity prices of families in any Canadian province. Indeed, a recent Bloomberg study found that wholesale electricity costs are 267 per cent higher now than five years ago in areas of the U.S. located near significant data centre activity. That's what brings us to the crunch here, Madam Chair, as the government is proposing to make these changes to enable more of these data centres in Alberta. My colleague from Sherwood Park just introduced amendments to try to protect Albertans against that. The minister spoke against them. The members opposite voted against them. Why? They said: "Well, don't worry. Trust us."

Madam Chair, I just went through a history of why there can be no trust for this government on these sorts of things. Albertans deserve to see it in writing, in black and white, in the legislation because so many times we have seen this government use subterfuge, use backhanded tactics to download costs onto Albertans, onto the only taxpayer that exists – there's only one taxpayer – not doing so by the front door, not coming out and doing it directly but hiding it in the background through the municipal education property tax, by cutting money from the municipal police force, by refusing to pay their share of property taxes. And, again,

potentially what we could have here, as we have seen in multiple U.S. jurisdictions, is that when we have these new data centres, it is local, residential, and business electrical bills that go up to cover additional costs.

The fact is, Madam Chair, that the government says that these data centres are going to be an economic boom. They're going to be good for Alberta. They're supposed to help support jobs, help bring in investment. They're supposed to be a profitable business. Albertans should not be expected to subsidize that in any way. We have attempted tonight to make that clear in the legislation. The minister says: no; trust me. Well, again, I do not have grounds to trust this government, so I would find it difficult. In fact, I don't believe I can support Bill 8.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

9:00

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in opposition to Bill 8 because of the significant provisions around data centres and the lack of work that this government has undertaken to assure Albertans that they will not be affected by this growing industry. I say that keeping in mind the fact that we are in an affordability crisis. Despite the minister's commentary that they have brought down our utility bills, Albertans still pay some of the highest prices for electricity costs in this country. Where is the responsibility of this government? Why are they not focusing on the interests of Albertans?

The reason I bring this up and for many of the other reasons that my colleagues in this House on this side of the aisle have spoken about is the load that this will add to our current electricity grid. This bill does not bring up any additional generation or transmission capacity that data centres rely on, and we know the heavy requirement that this will put on our system. Perhaps that's why the minister has given himself such broad power to do what he will when it comes to data centres although this seems like a common theme with this cabinet: wide, sweeping powers in all areas of Albertans' lives. Let's be forthright with Albertans. What's so wrong with that? Let's put it in the bill if that's what the minister wants to do. Madam Chair, without this additional capacity, we have seen other jurisdictions around the world not only deal with extreme costs but also a major strain on the electricity needs of these data centres.

The Climate Institute says the following:

Adding data centres can either help lower electricity prices for other consumers, or push them up for everyone. It all depends on how well the grid can handle their large, steady power demands, as well as how costs for any additional infrastructure are shared between customers.

Let's look at California. In California the Pacific Gas and Electric Company has already begun to work on 5.5 gigawatts of new data centre energy demand over the next decade, with 1.4 gigawatts currently in final design and projected to come online between 2026 and 2030. That would help that load and the increase of data centres in that jurisdiction and, in fact, bring down the bills for Californians because of this forthright thinking for the ministry to be considering.

Stephen Harper, then Prime Minister, not in his role as IDU chairman, mandated a phase-out of coal in 2012. This put us in the position and put in place the steady increase of costs for electricity in this province except for that brief, brief window when the NDP were in government. Who is to blame for that? Well, Madam Chair, let's all remind ourselves of who was in power in January 2024 when the emergency alert came in because our electricity grid was at its max.

Dr. Elmeligi: Who was that?

Member Arcand-Paul: Who was that, Madam Chair? It was this government. It was the UCP government. This bill does not deal with this. We're going to see this again despite the wonderful amendments put forward by my colleague from Sherwood Park.

Let's look at why that is. From the *Alberta Views* article by Doug Firby titled, Take Back the Power, dated December 1 of this year: "They aren't incentivized to create surplus power. The market governs when private firms decide to build more capacity, leaving the risk of supply at times running dangerously low – and of prices shooting through the roof." Mr. Firby talks about these private companies that do not have the incentive to create the surplus power. This government has nothing set in this legislation nor have they figured this out before putting forward this – I want to say "ambitious," but I don't think that's quite the right word. I think it's more "irresponsible" legislation. In fact, in the same article the sponsoring minister is quoted as stating that Alberta "is the only province free from debt on power generation." Of course, Alberta is in debt with these costs, and who is the one that pays, Madam Chair? It's Albertans because, of course, they must. While they go into debt with a government that is not focusing on the pocketbooks of Albertans, they are the ones that suffer.

This cabinet is setting up VIP concierge to companies who will set up these data centres using the power in this Chamber that Albertans entrust us with. Madam Chair, might I remind us that they also entrust us with their power at home, which is why we need to have good legislation that actually works for Albertans. This is why I stand opposed to this Bill 8, for not thinking about Albertans in the draft of this bill.

Madam Chair, I'd also be remiss to not bring in the concerns that we just brought on water usage and AI data centres. I know this bill relates to utilities, but we need to be having these conversations about AI data centres and the strain it puts on all of our communities. Earlier today, the Minister of Tech and Innovation spoke about an advanced project that this government will announce soon. The minister spoke about, if I heard correctly, a 1,200 megawatt data centre, which is about 10 per cent of Alberta's current peak electricity use. For that project mentioned by the minister, that's almost the entire current load capacity for the city of Edmonton, 1,400 megawatts. How is this prudent? Well, it isn't. It just isn't.

What else is concerning is that on average a 100 megawatt data centre will use 800,000 litres of water, enough for 2,500 homes. This project hinted by the Minister of Tech and Innovation will use 9.6 million litres of water. With the changes this government has made to the Water Act without adequately consulting First Nations – Madam Chair, I digress. Albertans can look at *Hansard* about what we said about water there. For this bill at hand, let's be real. Is this forecasted increased strain on our current system the reason why the minister is giving himself such broad powers under this bill?

This ongoing overreach by all of the ministers on that side of the House is incredibly alarming. If they truly value the voices of Albertans, they would allow the ability to debate these bills and these amendments and these really bad decisions by the UCP government, but instead they shield themselves from scrutiny by putting in place clauses like clause 41.01(d), (g), and (h) in Bill 8, which grant the minister overwhelming power when it comes to data centres in this province.

So the bending over backward for these private businesses does what for Albertans, Madam Chair? Let's expect more transparency, not less. If this government wants to stand on its merits, leave it

open for debate in this House for Albertans to hear, not by the use of cloak-and-dagger regulation-making like the government is doing in bill after bill after bill after bill.

Madam Chair, it is for these reasons that I cannot support this bill, and I urge this Chamber not to support it either. We had the opportunity to make good amendments, and the New Democrats keep putting forward good amendments but keep getting voted down by the UCP. For the sake of transparency and clarity for Albertans: there's nothing wrong with being transparent. Your government should be transparent to Albertans. We work for them. This is their House and they deserve that accountability every single day we come to this place to do good work. Let's make life more affordable, not less convoluted by creating bills that will cater to private industry and not Albertans.

Madam Chair, I urge everyone in this Chamber to not support this bill, and let's go back to the drawing board and figure out actual solutions for Albertans instead of catering to private business.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to speak on the bill as amended? The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak in strong opposition to Bill 8, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. The government claims this legislation will modernize Alberta's electricity framework and pave the way for investment in data centres, but let us be absolutely clear: this bill does not protect Albertans. Instead, it exposes them to higher costs, greater uncertainty, and a system tied to corporate interests at the expense of families.

This is yet another example of a government that prioritizes ideology and optics over affordability and sound planning. It is another chapter in a pattern of incompetence that has left Alberta's electricity sector unstable, unattractive to investors, and increasingly unaffordable for ordinary people. Madam Chair, Albertans already pay the highest electricity prices in Canada. Families in Calgary-Falconridge and across this province are struggling with skyrocketing utility bills, rising insurance premiums, unaffordable rents, and stagnant wages. They are facing overcrowded classrooms, long waits for health care, and mounting costs at every turn, and now, instead of delivering relief, this government is pushing a bill that could make those bills even worse.

9:10

Bill 8 does nothing to guarantee affordability. It does nothing to ensure that families can keep the lights on without sacrificing other essentials. Instead it opens the door to higher costs and greater risk all while leaving taxpayers to foot the bill for the government's poor planning.

This legislation amends three major statutes, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, the Electric Utilities Act, and the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. It grants sweeping regulation-making powers to the minister regarding data centres and so-called incumbents, including authority to make payments to unnamed parties. It restricts the ability of market participants and the Market Surveillance Administrator to challenge AESO rules related to data centres.

It facilitates implementation of the new restructured energy market while allowing emergency rollback if it fails, and it enables utilities to recover costs from hydrogen-blending pilot projects. On paper these changes may sound technical, but their implications are enormous. They will shape Alberta's electricity market for decades, and they will determine whether families can afford to heat their homes and power their lives.

Madam Chair, the government is selling this bill as a way to attract AI data centres and innovation, but the reality is that it does nothing to guarantee the additional generation and transmission capacity those facilities require. Without that capacity Alberta families could face the same soaring electricity costs seen in other jurisdictions with heavy data centre activity, costs that have risen by as much as 267 per cent in some U.S. states.

The government says that data centres will bring their own generation, yet the bill contains no clear language to ensure that happens. Instead, it gives the minister sweeping powers to make regulations behind closed doors. It even allows payments to incumbents, a vague term that raises serious questions about who benefits and why. Who are these incumbents? Why should they receive taxpayer money? Albertans deserve answers, but this bill offers none.

Madam Chair, this is not just about one piece of legislation. It is part of a broader pattern of mismanagement and incompetence. This government imposed a renewable moratorium that sent shockwaves through the investment community. It abandoned zero-congestion transmission planning, creating uncertainty and driving up costs. Investors have called Alberta's electricity sector uninvestible, citing a trend toward regulatory instability and a climate of uncertainty. These actions have increased the cost of capital, reduced appetite for new investments, and led to delayed or cancel projects.

Now Bill 8 doubles down on that instability. It tells investors that Alberta is not a safe or predictable place to do business. It tells families that affordability is not a priority, and it tells everyone that this government is more interested in chasing headlines than delivering real solutions.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Chair, meanwhile Alberta faces 20,000 megawatts of data centre load request, nearly double our current peak demand of 12,000 megawatts. These facilities consume massive amounts of power and water. A single 100-megawatt data centre can use 800,000 litres of water per day, the equivalent of 2,500 homes. If all proposed projects proceed, their water use could match every home in Edmonton, yet this bill offers no plan to manage these impacts. It offers no strategy to ensure that growth in demand does not translate into skyrocketing costs for consumers. It offers no vision for a sustainable, affordable electricity system. Instead it offers vague promises and unchecked ministerial powers.

Mr. Chair, who pays the price for this government's incompetence? Not the corporations building data centres nor the politicians chasing headlines. It is Alberta families, families like those in Calgary-North East and across the province who will bear the burden when electricity prices spike. Families already struck by rising costs will be asked to subsidize projects that bring few permanent jobs and enormous strain on our grid. They are already facing rising utility bills, skyrocketing insurance premiums, unaffordable rents, and stagnant wages. Now, instead of addressing these urgent needs, this government is spending its energy on legislation that could make their monthly bills even higher, all to prioritize corporate projects that offer little long-term benefit to ordinary Albertans.

Mr. Chair, this bill is not about affordability. It is not about sustainability. It is about ideology and optics. It is about prioritizing vanity projects over the public good. Time and again this government chooses politics over people, secrecy over transparency, and short-term headlines over long-term solutions. Albertans want leadership that tackles the real challenges they face every day, not more bureaucracy that costs taxpayers millions. Bill

8 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 8. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have a few comments on this electricity Bill 8. First and foremost, my responsibility to my constituents is to ensure that we have a safe and secure electricity supply for each of the members of Edmonton-North West and indeed across this province and to ensure that it is affordable. I don't see either of those things reflected in this bill, and for that I have some serious problems with it.

We have experienced quite significant growth over the last number of years here in the province of Alberta in our population and industrial capacity, which is quite optimistic really, but you need to make sure your utilities are keeping pace with that need. Far too often in this province, not just in the last couple of years but even in the last 10 or more years, we have experienced rolling blackouts and brownouts and some of the highest electricity prices in Canada, the highest right now in Canada here in the province of Alberta.

What does that mean for people in Edmonton-North West? Well, we've had a number of these rolling blackouts come through, and you know, we rely on the — electricity is not a luxury; it's an essential service. It has to be there when you need it for yourselves and your family, and it has to be affordable. Clearly, we're not meeting those two levels of expectation here in the province of Alberta, and there are a number of things that we could do to make it better.

Number one, make sure that our sources of electricity are sufficiently diverse so that if we lose one of those things, we have something else there to help to compensate. Having a mixed source of generation is a responsibility for all of us. That's why, quite frankly, when this UCP government chose to attack renewables, we lost a number of other sources of generation in that basket that could help to stabilize our electricity generation. Solar panels, wind, geothermal: they're part of the basket that includes natural gas and all other forms of electricity, cogeneration as well from other industrial sources and so forth. Until we make the grid more secure, we make sure that we're not putting additional risks onto that grid as well.

I mean, I'm as interested in data centres as anybody. I think it's an emerging market that we can see growing all around the world, but you have to make sure that you're guaranteed to produce the electricity, not just for that data centre but for the people to turn on the lights. You know, when I see this UCP government hitching their wagon to some of these carpet baggers like Kevin O'Leary and so forth that roll through and say, "Oh, we've got a deal for you; 50 per cent off and just go for it," then our government enthusiastically jumping on, I just really hope for the sake of all of us that we do the research to make sure we have the generating capacity to embark on something like a large data centre. Some of these ones that they're talking about this morning require the same amount of electricity as the city of Edmonton, right?

These are the concerns that regular Albertans have. I have lots of people that have trouble even paying their electricity bills from month to month, right? They call my office. They have their electricity shut off. They put those governors on there so you can't even run your stove. People aren't doing that because they're irresponsible; they're doing it because they can't afford that electricity.

Mr. Chair, obviously, there was an opportunity here, as we have with many electricity bills – we’re going to be doing more of this along the way. Let’s just take a step back and always run it through the filter of, number one: does it meet the safety and security needs of electricity as an essential service here in the province of Alberta for all consumers, individuals and industrial consumers as well? If you don’t do it for the industry and they can see it demonstrably that you are prone to brownouts and rolling blackouts, then that’s a deterrent for an industry to set up here in the province, because the lights don’t go on all the time or they go off when it turns to 40 below.

9:20

In 2024 the record – you know, really cold. I remember. I was here. It was very cold. But, I mean, that’s not an excuse to have your system at the verge of catastrophic failure, which could have resulted not just in the lights going out but people freezing to death as a result of their furnaces not working, and the electric fans.

There’s lots to think about with this. I mean, it’s good to be optimistic and inventive and looking for different ways by which we can approach these things, but you have to do it through a responsible lens for all the people in Alberta to ensure the safety and security of our grid and the affordability of electricity for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 8 as amended, the Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

Bill 10

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

The Deputy Chair: Any questions, comments, or amendments on Bill 10? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I did spend quite a bit of time debating this bill yesterday and getting into some of my concerns around the cervid harvest preserve, so I won’t spend too much time on that part of the bill tonight, but I will just point out that, you know, after question period today I did go for coffee with my guests from the Edson Fish and Game Association. They just kind of reminded me – one of them was dramatically impacted by the BSE, the mad cow disease epidemic that really impacted livestock exports several years ago, and his whole business model had to change because of BSE. BSE is also a prion disease, just like chronic wasting disease, so this decision around cervid harvest preserves does run the risk of creating exactly the humongous challenge that we had with BSE a few years ago.

You know, it’s disturbing to me that we’re even debating it because chronic wasting disease isn’t funny. It’s not something to be taken lightly. It’s a deadly, incurable, super contagious disease that will affect wild elk and deer. Spending time with the folks from Edson fish and game made me reflect again on the consequences of this decision but also how it’s not wholly supported by the community that it impacts. We’re now in Committee of the Whole

for Bill 10. The minister has an opportunity. This is his one last chance to remove this part from the bill and engage in meaningful consultation with all stakeholders who are affected by cervid harvest preserves.

When I met with the hunting community in west-central Alberta, I saw so much disappointment in their eyes: disappointment that they weren’t consulted, disappointment that this decision was done without transparency, disappointment that their MLAs were untruthful and not transparent with them when they asked about cervid harvest preserves, and, truly, disappointment that this government is not who they thought they were and that the MLAs that they voted for are not adequately representing them in the House. I’m just here to say, Mr. Chair, that that’s okay with me. I’m happy to represent them.

I can’t support a bill that allows unethical hunting and threatens our public wildlife with an incurable, super contagious disease, but I also can’t support a bill that violates people’s privacy and identity with citizenship markers and Alberta health care numbers on drivers’ licences. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has said that adding Alberta health numbers to IDs increases the risk of fraud. The Canadian public health system is highly sought after, Mr. Chair, because it’s so great in its public nature, or at least it is right now until we end up debating Bill 11. That’s a whole other thing. Basically, the Canada public health system is so sought after that people want to do bad things with Alberta health numbers. If they’re on drivers’ licences, basically your Alberta health number becomes accessible to people who don’t need it and who might use it for nefarious reasons. That was why the Information and Privacy Commissioner raised concerns about adding the health number to drivers’ licences.

I really encourage the minister of health to consider what the implications are of adding the Alberta health number to drivers’ licences. Last night I spoke a little bit to how citizenship is nobody’s business really, except for maybe the airport security and Revenue Canada. Other than that, I really feel like we need to be very careful with these numbers and what they mean and what they tell other people about us as individuals and how some of that is private information.

In the spring of 2024 the NDP introduced a motion to remove Canadian work experience requirements. Of course, this government never met an NDP idea they liked, so they had to amend it to be like: well, we don’t want to introduce a bill around this; what if we just replace it with “continue to proactively take . . . steps . . . to”? Now here we are, debating a bill that removes Canadian work experience requirements. So I guess, yeah, the NDP do have some good ideas, Mr. Chair. It just takes the government about a year and a half to catch up. That’s okay. We’re here for four years, maybe a little bit less. Well, we can wait. We can wait for you all to catch up to our good ideas.

I’m very curious to see what we’ll be debating in the spring, what new and exciting pieces of referendums and legislations and amendments we’ll see to bills we’ve already debated, just to make sure that we can incorporate NDP ideas, not really as NDP ideas. It’s totally fine. It’s not about credit; it’s just about serving the people of Alberta, but you’re welcome. It’s just kind of funny to me. That’s all. It is still a really good idea to, you know, remove Canadian work experience requirements and get more people to work, serving the people of Alberta and reducing unemployment. It’s a great way to do that, but it was our idea first, just FYI.

The other piece of this omnibus bill that I just wanted to speak to briefly is changes to the All-season Resorts Act to include private land in the assessment process. This basically makes it so that both public and private land components can be managed by a single regulator. While that does reduce red tape – this might actually be

one of the only parts of the bill that actually belongs in a red tape statutes amendment bill – I still have the same questions around accountability and how all-season resort developments will be approved and how this bill, by including private land, still gives the minister too much power to approve and/or fast-track proposals without discussion.

That was my concern when we debated the All-season Resorts Act last year. I still feel very concerned about that. The All-season Resorts Act does not require robust consideration of these kinds of developments, and I know that in my riding of Banff-Kananaskis and all up and down the eastern slopes people are coming to me with many questions about it. I look forward to talking with the minister more about that to make sure that we can address the concerns that people have as these resorts are going to be developed on the landscape.

I think that there is generally a need to consider that the tourism ministry is not a land manager, not historically, so there does need to be some very intentional thought and planning about these resorts, and this bill kind of takes us there. I also don't really understand why private land needs to be included in the all-season resorts, so I look forward to the minister explaining that to me at a future date also.

With that, I will cede my time. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

9:30

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to just get on the record very briefly here at Committee of the Whole for Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I just want to get on the record about one piece. I know many of my colleagues have spoken far more eloquently than me, but I wanted to get on the record specifically around the amending of the Government Organization Act to include mandatory citizenship markers on drivers' licences in Alberta. The reason why I thought it was important for me to just weigh in on this – you know, I'm very fortunate. I have a lot of privilege. I'm not a newcomer to Canada, but I have the fortune of having so many incredible folks from various backgrounds in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Just so much diversity.

Very regularly I get to meet with some of the dozens if not hundreds of community organizations that are really focused on immigration and multiculturalism. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Decore and myself recently went to the grand opening of an organization called PASS, Prairie Alliance for Settlement and Support. They're brand new on Norwood Boulevard in my area for folks who know the area. You know, in talking with those folks and hearing about some of their needs, it echoes the needs of so many other individuals and organizations. What are newcomers, immigrants, folks coming to our country wanting for supports from this government? They talk about things like housing. They talk about things like making sure that we have a strong public health care system, right? They talk a lot about job opportunities and a strong economy.

I've never in the countless, countless meetings heard any of them speak to the need for discriminatory policies like having a citizenship marker on our driver's licence. Like, "Who is asking for this?" is the point of me telling that story. You know, when Alberta is the only jurisdiction that's having this in all of Canada and when the Privacy Commissioner is also weighing in with her concerns, I think it's fair that we raise a lot of questions on this point.

You know, to some of the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday previously, I think this, again, really

points to the fact that we've got a UCP government that's not willing to accept our amendments, not willing to listen to the advice of folks like the organization I mentioned and other folks on the ground. They're not asking for this. They're making clear asks to this government, and they're not listening. It's disappointing to hear that we put forward amendments earlier today that would address this very issue and, again, the government was unwilling. It's incredibly frustrating. Like I said, I wanted to get on record there just to raise that flag again for this UCP government.

You know, at a time when this government should be doing all they can to make Alberta a more welcoming, more inclusive, more economically and socially supportive province, it seems like they're dead set on adding barriers and adding more red tape, adding more red tape when they say they're trying . . .

An Hon. Member: In the reduction bill.

Member Irwin: In the red tape reduction act. Tell me how this doesn't add more red tape.

With that, Mr. Chair, I said I would be brief. Thank you very much for the time.

The Deputy Chair: Any others wishing to make comments?

Ready for the question on Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)? We will be voting on two separate blocks.

[Sections 1, 2, and 4 of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Sections 3, 5, and 6 of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

Bill 12

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Any members wishing to provide comment? I will recognize the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening through you to all of the Legislature. I'm looking forward to having a conversation this evening through Committee of the Whole on Bill 12. As we start debate on this piece of legislation, I did want to rise on one section of what is a rather large bill that does refer, particularly, to the new Alberta disability assistance program, or ADAP, to correct some of the things that I heard that were factually incorrect throughout the second reading on this legislation.

I want to, first, start out with one area that I think is very concerning that we continue to hear from some members of the Legislature in the context of AISH itself. AISH, the Alberta income for the severely handicapped program, has existed in this province since 1979, Mr. Chair. We have some members in the Legislature who weren't even around in 1979. It's been here for a very long time, a very important program in our province.

Unfortunately, we continue to hear some rhetoric in conversations from the Official Opposition and others that AISH will be disappearing. Some of the language that was used earlier in the House is not parliamentary and has already been dealt with by the chair, so I won't repeat it, Mr. Chair, but it's inaccurate to say that AISH will be gone. I think that's the most important thing that we can make clear right now.

Unfortunately, when individuals go out and tell people that a program like that is going to disappear and that legislation that is in this House tonight is making it disappear and that it won't be here for people, that creates a lot of fear for individuals who depend on that program; 77,000 Albertans depend on AISH, Mr. Chair. It is the law of the land. It is legislated by this Assembly – it has been for decades – that it must be available for Albertans that need it. It will remain available for Albertans that need it, and there is not one thing in this piece of legislation that we're debating today that in any way removes AISH. In fact, it refers specifically to the AISH Act to make sure that it is clear that AISH will remain in our province. So we have to start with that.

Now, there are some changes that are coming in, which I'll discuss in a moment, but it is really, really important and sad to see certain members of this Assembly implying to people that it will disappear. It's creating great stress for those individuals, Mr. Chair. It's something that certainly members should not be trying to do for political purposes.

At length as well earlier during second reading, Mr. Chair, I heard some members repeatedly get up and say that people would have to be reassessed to go on AISH. First, they actually said that you are reassessed every year already underneath the current disability board. Now, this is a challenge, when you're debating a piece of legislation like that, when you clearly say statements like that that are just factually one hundred per cent wrong. It takes away your credibility as an Official Opposition.

First of all, you don't have to do that already underneath our disability programs in our province, Mr. Chair, and there's nothing in this legislation that would require you to have to be reassessed if you're already on AISH in this province. Let me be very clear about that. There will not be new medical assessments for Albertans who have already been assessed with a disability. It will not happen. That is a clear part of where we will be moving forward with ADAP, which I'll discuss a little bit more in a minute, but what's most important is the bill that is being debated in this Legislature says no such thing. I really want to emphasize that to Alberta's disability community, who, sadly, keeps being told the opposite.

What the members are right about is that that's creating fear for them. What the members are wrong about is that that's happening and it's this side of the House creating this fear. It's that side of the House that is creating this fear by making things up, Mr. Chair, and that's a concerning aspect of it. If you are on AISH, you will remain on Alberta disability programs. You will not have to reseek medical assessments, and you will remain in that process going forward.

Now, I did hear some comments about concerns about getting access for those who are not on AISH who are working their way into our disability programs in Alberta, sometimes struggling to get access to family doctors and other aspects of that. That is for sure correct, Mr. Chair. That's one of the challenges that this bill actually works to fix, which I hope the members across the way will actually support, by bringing in the ability of the department to be able to hire and work with medical professionals to be able to help those individuals who are trying to get access, to be able to help them fill out forms, access true medical supports and medical advice to be able to make decisions.

9:40

Sadly, right now inside the department that doesn't take place. These decisions are being made by our bureaucrats, who are very good but aren't medical professionals. This legislation will actually increase access to medical professionals for, again, Mr. Chair, not people that are currently in the program because they've already been assessed and they are inside our disability programs; for new people who are entering the programs.

The other big issue that we continue to hear is that there was actually a lot of conversation around medical benefits. The biggest thing that this legislation does by creating the ability to bring it in under the ADAP program is make sure that every Albertan, whether they qualify for AISH, meaning that they are at the severest level of disabilities in our province and need that support, or they are on other disability programs in Alberta, will keep their health benefits. They will receive health benefits from the Alberta government for all of their life until they turn 65, at which time you turn over to the pension programs with the federal government, and they will take over that role. This actually increases access to health benefits, the exact opposite of what the hon. members across the way are referring to. I think that's really important because that's the most important piece of this legislation.

We've heard from Albertans who have disabilities who do not need to be on AISH. They're not even applying to be on AISH, but they're trying to go forward with some supports associated with their disability and go back to the workforce, and the biggest challenge is that they can't get health benefits from their employers. So something has happened – maybe they've had a stroke; maybe they were diagnosed with MS – that has created a situation where the employer cannot get that individual on their health benefits. That's a terrifying thing for anybody if you're going through those circumstances. This will secure everybody who's involved in this situation health benefits all the way until they turn 65, when the federal government would take over those health benefits, no matter what they're making, so that they can do that. That helps employers employ people with disabilities or people that have had circumstances take place if it's one of the barriers to employment, and it also helps individuals who are working in the workforce.

The last issue – actually, maybe two more issues that I want to cover for the House that are being misrepresented by the Official Opposition. First is around payments, that somehow there's a massive clawback taking place with AISH. Here's the reality, Mr. Chair. The Official Opposition, the NDP, when they were on this side of the House, paid people with AISH \$1,588 a year. Just six years ago that's what they were paying. They never raised that price once the entire time they were in government. They paid them \$1,588 each and every year. They didn't index it. The only government that indexed it is this side of the House. Not one budget. You can go back and check every NDP budget; they never put any money in for indexation. Not one person on AISH received a dollar more than \$1,588 the entire time the NDP was in government.

Now, this government, this Conservative government, right now is paying \$1,940. That is the latest AISH rate a month, not counting health benefits. That's an increase of 22 per cent, double the inflation rate over those six years. This government didn't just talk about indexation; it passed indexation, put it in a budget, and actually paid people. The opposition did not do that. They set individuals at \$1,588. So when the Official Opposition stands up in the Legislature and says they want to go back to their program, that would mean us cutting people on AISH almost \$400 a month, Mr. Chair. The Conservative government is not going to do what the NDP did, which is not care for people that are on AISH going forward, pay them as low as the NDP did, not index their rates and make sure that they're kept care of.

Now, lastly, on ADAP. ADAP will be a supplementary program that will support AISH. It is because we have received lots of requests from Albertans with disabilities who are not eligible to be on AISH but who are having a disability that they need help with but still want to work in the workforce. In fact, I had a letter that caused a lot of this to start from a lady in Alberta who had a bachelor of commerce degree. She was a CPA accountant, got MS and

cancer at the same time, had to go through a very tough situation, ended up on AISH, and then, when things stabilized, could not maintain disability benefits and return to work. That's what the NDP program does. It says that if you have a disability, your only choice is to go on AISH, be locked up inside your house and not allowed to participate in the workforce. That's what AISH does. That's the rule because it's supposed to be – that's what it was designed for in 1979 – for the severely handicapped who could not participate in the workforce.

So now you have this individual I referred to. She wants to return back to the workforce. She's still going to need some medical supports during that period of time because of her circumstance. She's certainly going to need her health benefits going forward because her employer cannot restore her health benefits because of the way that situation works. Now with ADAP, Mr. Chair, when done, that individual will keep their health benefits and not have to worry about it no more. They'll be able to return to the workforce, they will receive supplementary benefits through ADAP to help with their disability, and they'll be allowed to keep the income that they earn while they work.

The reality is that there are thousands of Albertans that are in that circumstance right now that will not be eligible for AISH, that probably maybe never will be eligible for AISH – though if they are eventually, they will transition to that program – but do need our help with disabilities. That do need our help, not to make sure that they're punished like the NDP program, when they want to participate in the workforce. We have individuals right now, Mr. Chair, in our PDD program, persons with developmental disabilities program, who work for government departments, cleaning campgrounds, doing maintenance, working in different organizations with supports from the department. Underneath the NDP program, that we're fixing right now, those individuals couldn't keep their paycheques and in some cases they could not even be paid.

Some Hon. Members: Wrong.

Mr. Nixon: The members want to say: wrong. Sadly, you should go check your own legislation. Remember, Mr. Chair, these are the members who got up and told you that you had to be reassessed for AISH every year. There's no credibility. They don't even know what's inside their legislation.

Again, to be clear, AISH will remain. ADAP will be there to support individuals who are not in a spot where they need to be on a program where you cannot be supported during employment. You will not be forced to reassess yourself medically for your disability that has already been assessed. That's false, made up, completely inaccurate, and totally inappropriate for the Official Opposition to continue to say. Alberta will continue to have the highest benefits anywhere in the country for both AISH and ADAP.

If we go with what the NDP want – again, they want us to go back to 22 per cent less for people on AISH, pay the ridiculous rates that the NDP did, not index the program to care for people on disabilities, and follow their NDP partners in places like Manitoba and B.C. that pay \$500 a month less for people on disabilities. That's what the Official Opposition wants to take place? Do they want to actually look individuals in the eye who are contacting the department saying, "We want to help with our medical supports," and vote against that? Is the NDP going to get up here today and vote against disabled people in our province receiving medical supports inside this bill?

It fits in with some of the stuff we're seeing, with certain comments about putting investments and resources into people with

disabilities being a waste of time, a waste of resources; shocking things that you're hearing during that period from members across the way. That's the question. Are they going to support Albertans who are asking for disability payments, that are asking for health benefits, that are asking to participate in the workforce?

You know, unfortunately, Mr. Chair, the entire time the NDP was in power, they didn't spend \$1 helping individuals with disabilities get work. One dollar. Not one. That's because they were too busy paying everybody \$1,588, well below the poverty line; not indexing AISH; and not caring for individuals. This government, this caucus on this side of the aisle, Mr. Chair, is spending \$185 million a year right now on employment supports for the disability community; something like 72 per cent employment rate after those programs.

My caucus members, you tell me what your constituents want. Do they want the NDP version: paying people so low, not indexing it, not giving them health benefits, not allowing people with disabilities who aren't on AISH to receive support, and telling people with disabilities that they can't participate in the workforce? That's certainly not what I think my constituents want.

Mr. Chair, I'll close with this. I encourage all our caucus members to frankly ignore what the NDP have to say on this because they continue to rise in the House and just get it factually wrong. Instead, side with the people that are calling Alberta to say that they want to participate in the workforce, that people with disabilities – one in five Albertans have disabilities – have value, that they can participate in the workforce, that they deserve to have health benefits, that they deserve to be paid fair rates, and they deserve to see us change the ridiculous programs that the NDP forced upon those individuals, leaving them in perpetual poverty and not able to participate in the workforce, not able to get health benefits, and most importantly, that we never, ever go back to what the NDP has asked for, which is to follow their NDP colleagues in Manitoba and B.C. and cut back benefits by \$500, \$600 a month and attack, essentially, people with disabilities.

There you go, Mr. Chair. Those are the facts of what's before us. You will hear a lot more fake facts over the next couple of hours, I'm sure, and then I'm very much looking forward to seeing this become law before Christmas and making sure that we can help good Albertans.

9:50

The Deputy Chair: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That was something. So what I would suggest for all members, you know, there's a lot of . . . [interjections] Are you all done?

Mr. Chair, what I would suggest is, you know, instead of listening to the rhetoric, you know what? Is there rhetoric on both sides? Sure, sometimes there is. What I will say to everybody watching tonight, to anybody in this Chamber that actually wants to do right by your constituents who have disabilities, I encourage you to go to this minister's website. All the information is right there.

Mr. Chair, it's very clear it talks about the Alberta disability assistance program. It talks about what that'll look like. In July 2026 everybody on AISH will be moved to a program called ADAP. Now, the minister said that the opposition, the rhetoric that we were using, that we disappeared AISH, that AISH will be gone. No. Actually, I used an unparliamentary term. I said that they're "blowing up AISH," but I changed that to aggressively dismantling AISH. They're creating a two-tiered disability program. That's what they're doing. It's not going to be gone. We never said it was going to be gone. Let's clear that up.

What we really are encouraging people to do is to look at the website. It's all right here. It talks about everybody getting moved.

Starting in July the new program will be in place, it will be operational, and all applicants will be assessed by both for both programs. The department will assess them. It goes on further. All existing AISH clients will be assured a place in either ADAP or AISH. "Those currently on AISH will continue to receive their existing benefits until they are able to be placed in the program [that is] best suited to their unique situation."

Who will decide what their individual unique situation will be? It will be the people that this government chooses to adjudicate and assess. That's called a reassessment because these folks have already been through assessment. It's right on the website. It's not me making it up. It's right here. What this program is doing is moving everybody over to ADAP. The legislation changes that. Everybody goes to ADAP. Some people go back to AISH.

I don't know how they're going to decide that. Their language is that some people are profoundly disabled; some people are severely disabled; some people's employment is inhibited; others is prohibited. It's all words, Mr. Chair, but it's this government that is going to determine who goes where. They don't like that they got called out by the community, not by us, by the disability community that can read a website and know what's coming, and they know exactly what this government is doing. So all of their baloney rhetoric means absolutely nothing. It means nothing.

Now, they went on to talk about AISH. We had to do this for the benefit of people with disabilities. Yes, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: I will ask that you discontinue using the prop in your discussion. You may proceed.

Ms Renaud: The minister went on to say that they're only really doing this, Mr. Chair, to make life better for people that are on AISH that really wanted to work or wanted to work and keep medical benefits. Again, I encourage the minister to go to his own website and read the rules for AISH because until this AISH program, as it exists right now, gets changed by this legislation – let me tell you how it works.

You can be on AISH, which is a very difficult program to get on, mind you. You can get on AISH and you can work. Some people's disability is sporadic. It allows them to work sometimes. They could work enough, up to \$1,100 a month, that they could bring in an employment income before the AISH was reduced dollar for dollar, but they could keep working to transition off AISH. They could earn as much until AISH got reduced to \$1, and they still kept their health benefits, Mr. Chair. That's how AISH works. It always has worked that way and, in fact, the New Democrat government raised the income earning when we indexed to inflation and when we increased it by \$100.

All of the stuff that you heard previously is incorrect. Don't believe me. Look at the minister's own website. It's all right there, and there's a reason that they stopped updating it, because they put the information out, they got called out by the disability community, and now they're just – I don't know what they're spewing now. It's just false. What this program does is create a two-tiered disability system, and one pays less, and they're wrapping it up in: but it'll be great because you could work and you'll have health benefits. They already had that ability, Mr. Chair.

Now if this bill was about, "Yeah, we are serious about investing in pathways to employment," I'd be all over that. Certainly, the government has signalled that it was in their last budget. It's already done. This isn't a new spending thing. It was already done. That money already went into the labour and employment programs; federal money, I think. Maybe the government could correct me on that. They diverted more federal funds to this. These are programs in their own ministry's annual report. I encourage the minister to

check it out. Their target for success for these programs was 65 per cent, Mr. Chair.

Even if you go through these programs – you're off AISH; you're on this new program; you're looking for work because you can't live on \$1,700 a month; you go to this program – what are you going to do? How are you going to buy a bus pass with 200 bucks less? How are you going to buy new clothes to go to an interview for that job you're supposed to get? How is that going to work? Didn't really think about that, did they?

These programs are not that successful already, and they don't meet the needs of all people with disabilities. You have all kinds of people on AISH. You have people with developmental disabilities, who will perhaps always need staff with them to work or to teach them a bus route or to help them problem solve at work. You have other folks that can't get in the darn building because it's not accessible and we don't have accessibility legislation in this place, or we don't have employers that understand because we have not helped them with legislation and with assistance to understand that when you make these employment accommodations, you get some really great employees back.

I think I have heard from the members about the skills of people with disabilities. I wholeheartedly agree, and I think the minister said yesterday or, I don't know, one of the days, something like that people with disabilities contributed \$10 million to the Alberta economy. I would suggest it's in the billions, Mr. Chair. I think \$10 million is an underestimation. I think people with disabilities – and there are over a million of them in this province – contribute a great deal. I'm talking about pathways to employment for the 80,000 people that are currently on AISH. Maybe half of them are going to get moved to ADAP and not go back to AISH. I don't know what the government's plans are because they're not sharing it.

All of the information that Albertans really need to understand is available on the minister's website. If you want information about AISH and ADAP, it's all right there, black and white. Don't have to listen to us. If you want the facts, go there. All that being said, this bill – you know, we talked about: what can we do to amend this piece of legislation to make it any better as it relates to people with disabilities? There's nothing, Mr. Chair. There is nothing, in my opinion, that makes this better from the lack of the ability of Albertans to appeal government decisions, to the reduction of benefits, to the ridiculous spin that's going on that AISH didn't allow people to work. It's all baloney. For that reason, I would like to move an amendment to Bill 12.

Would you like me to read it?

The Deputy Chair: We'll wait for the copy to arrive to the desk here, and then we'll ask you to proceed at that time.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1. Member for St. Albert, you can proceed to read it into the record.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 12, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) be amended by striking out section 6.

The reason that I am moving this amendment, Mr. Chair, is that I don't believe, in this particular portion, there's anything to salvage. I think this is going to do harm that we're going to see for a very long time. I think we've heard that from experts in the community, from people with lived experience, from people that have been advising governments for many decades. They're all saying the same thing. They're saying, "Please stop. You're going to cause a lot of harm," and this government is not listening, but I would say – you know, I'd like to add one more thing before I take my seat. [interjections] Well, maybe I'll wait until they're all done crunching the amendment.

What I will say is that just before we heard about Bill 12 and what it was going to do to the AISH program as we know it, what we heard were deliberate cuts to funding.

10:00

Who did this government choose to cut just before this happened? They cut self-advocates. That's what people with developmental disabilities call themselves when they advocate for themselves, self-advocates. They cut self-advocacy organizations in Edmonton, in Calgary, and in Lethbridge. They silenced them. They also cut – which is really bizarre to me that the minister stood up and was, like, talking about how employment was so important, especially for people on PDD. Well, they cut programs that actually supported people that receive PDD funding to find employment here in Edmonton, in Calgary, also in Lethbridge. It's like they do one thing, they say one thing, and they do another.

You know, I would suggest to anybody watching this debate tonight or even looking at it later is to get the facts. Go right to the website. Get the facts there, understand what's being debated right now. What you're hearing from the government about the purpose of Bill 12 is wrong, and it's wrong just based on the information that's on their website. Go check it out.

I will say, Mr. Chair, don't listen to us. We already know that this government does not listen to anything that we have to say. Listen to your own experts. Ask your own disability advocate, ask the Premier's council, listen to the 19 previous Premier's council members who stuck their neck out to say: "Please stop this. Listen to the advocacy groups. Listen to the people with lived experience. They're telling you that this is dangerous."

Removing \$200 from someone with a \$1,900 budget is devastating. It is devastating. People will lose their homes. They will be evicted. People will have to go to the food bank more. Do you know they limit trips to the food bank? People aren't going to be able to get maybe that new outfit to go for the job interview or get a bus pass to get to the job interview, making life difficult for people.

I encourage every member of this Chamber to think about what this bill does. Don't listen to the rhetoric. Look at the facts. This is going to harm people for many, many years. Listen to your own disabled constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Amendment A1. Any members wishing to provide comment or question?

Seeing none, I will ask the question on amendment A1.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:02 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Haji	Miyashiro
Boparai	Irwin	Renaud
Eggen	Kasawski	Shepherd
Elmeligi	Kayande	Sweet
Eremenko	Metz	Tejada
Ganley		

Against the motion:

Amery	Jones	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Sawyer
Boitchenko	Loewen	Schow

Bouchard	Long	Schulz
Cyr	Lovely	Sigurdson, R.J.
de Jonge	Lunty	Singh
Dreeshen	McDougall	Stephan
Dyck	Nally	Turton
Ellis	Neudorf	Wiebe
Fir	Nicolaides	Williams
Glubish	Nixon	Wilson
Horner	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Pitt	Yao
Jean	Rowswell	Yaseen
Johnson		

Totals:	For – 16	Against – 43
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back on the main bill, Bill 12, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). Any members wishing to provide comment?

The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, what a real shame, frankly, that my colleague's comments concerning the amendment to Bill 12 were not ultimately successful despite, I think, having pointed out a great deal of gaps in the ways that government has both designed ADAP and in which Bill 12 still fails to answer so many critical questions that folks in Alberta have. It's not just the 80,000 individuals who themselves are receiving AISH, it's their family members. There are so many people who are deeply, deeply concerned. Frankly, it's the ineptitude of this government that has created the environment in which we now have to have this conversation. Bill 12 kind of stokes the flames on a lot of that anxiety and a lot of that fear.

10:20

Mr. Chair, just a few weeks ago, actually, we held our own little town hall in Calgary-Currie for folks and constituents, not to do as the members opposite have claimed, which is to fearmonger and spread doubt; in fact, it was to try and fill the vacuum that their incompetence has created. It has been as a result of just an incredible number of e-mails and constituents reaching out to say, "I'm hearing about this thing," whether it be on social media or Facebook; "I'm getting official letters from the government of Alberta concerning changes that are coming," to, for many people, their only source of income. We're doing our very best as representatives to give them a little bit of assurance that they're not going to be left high and dry by the government.

That is their job, Mr. Chair, with the full coffer of resources behind them, with all of the staff and all of the resources and all of the money that they have at their disposal. It's the NDP, it's the members on this side of the aisle that are taking those incredibly concerning phone calls from family members and from people who are on AISH saying: Please make this make sense to me. If they had done their job, if they hadn't ruled out what was ultimately a real reckless implementation and a careless introduction of this change, perhaps there wouldn't be quite the same temperature on the debate this evening about Bill 12 and about the changes to ADAP.

I'd like to just highlight a couple of the conversations that we had at our own town hall in regard to some of the questions that remain unanswered and, frankly, that remain so top of mind for families and for individuals who are receiving AISH directly as a result of the minister. He is speaking in direct contradiction to what is on the government of Alberta website, and it is exactly that kind of

uncertainty, it's exactly that kind of doublespeak that has put us in this position this evening.

Just a couple of things that I'd like to highlight that came up in our own town hall in Calgary-Currie. One of the big questions: who's going to do all of these assessments? Mr. Chair, I have someone very close to me and my family who has been looking to have AISH forms filled out for going on two years, but in order for that to happen, he has to find a family doctor. There are family doctors who don't fill out the forms. They make it clear right there on the website that AISH forms are not something that they complete. That's a degree of complexity that they are not willing to undertake. They certainly require a great deal of time and resources, and they just say: I'm sorry, this is not something that my clinic can do. So not only are almost a million Albertans missing a family doctor; now you've really refined and really had to find that needle in a haystack in many ways, that family doctor who is both happy to receive a patient with very likely higher complexity of needs and then who also has the time to fill out the forms.

Who will provide the employment? Government claims to have thought really thoroughly and have really done a deep analysis on this legislation and on the implementation and the creation and the design of the ADAP program. They've gotten that far, but they have not in fact provided anything of substance when it comes to where the actual employment opportunities are supposed to come from. We reference the resources and the organizations that can help to support a person be employment ready, but what about the actual jobs?

Just last week we were debating Bill 13, the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act. Thou shalt not say DEI. Now it's actually forbidden for regulatory bodies to talk about inclusive practice, to talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Here we are saying that some portion – we don't know how many, but some portion – of the 80,000 individuals currently on AISH are going to be moved over to this new program where there will be an abundance of employment opportunities available for them, but do not by any means be an employer who talks about diversity, equity, or inclusion; that is now officially against the law. So where do the employment opportunities come from?

Mr. Chair, let me be very, very clear. I have worked most of my life since I was 14. I am a very, very firm supporter in the dignity and the purpose of a good day's work, and everybody has something to contribute. Fundamentally, every single person has something to contribute. But ADAP has not considered that second part of the equation. This government has failed to consider what the barriers are to employment, the reasons why people may not in fact have that opportunity. Just because you create the law, it does not create the conditions in which a person can ultimately be successful at the other side of this.

That was one of the biggest questions. I can think of a wonderful friend of mine in Calgary-Currie who has been on AISH for many, many years. For several of those years he was a bike mechanic, and he loved working on bikes. He loved it. But productivity was tough. You know, it didn't have quite the same kind of business case, so he had to be let go. And he said: oh, maybe I'm going to have this opportunity to work on bikes again. Maybe the minister opposite can take that away and they can say, "Hey, you know, we're actually going to take a far more meaningful approach to actually identifying what those employment opportunities can be, eight hours a week, 12 hours a week, whatever it's going to be," but they are going to have to do a lot better than they have currently done when it comes to actually talking about the employment opportunities that meet people where they're at because right now I'm not seeing any of it.

They have not done anything to address the level of anxiety, the fear, and the uncertainty that I'm hearing from individuals like Michael, who said: "What does this letter mean about losing \$200 as a result of the Canada disability benefit? Can the government actually do this? Can they take \$200 that are meant for me from the federal government? We wrote our letters, and sure enough, the government said, "Yes; yes, we can," and clearly they will. And now they're going to take an additional \$200 away from those individuals who are moved over to ADAP but unable to come back onto AISH. That is, in fact, what's going to be happening.

It is right here on the government of Alberta's website. If you search "Alberta disability assistance program," there's a fact sheet. [interjection] Well, I just want to make sure that I'm giving people the right information, that maybe we can actually point them to the place where the government is saying, words on paper, fact; here's what it is. Rather than listening to the spin from some of the members opposite, they can actually go and find that.

Much to my colleague's comments from St. Albert, look to those trusted sources. Look to those organizations who, unfortunately, are having to do more with a little bit less as a result of the government's cuts in that area as well. Look to those sources. Look to those trusted resources that you have in your community. Try to break through the noise from this government that this program is one thing or another. Look to those trusted resources who are in fact trying to provide you the certainty in a great deal of fear and anxiety that those of us on our side understand and hear. You deserve better. You deserve so much better than what is happening here at no fault of your own, and you do not deserve the kind of anxiety that this has installed in you and your family's lives. Families are doing everything they can – they always have – but the burden is immense and government is asking for families and asking for those individuals living with disabilities to bear an even greater load. They are already living in deep poverty, and there is immense demand on the system. I hope we can see better from this government.

On that note, Mr. Chair, I will move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

10:30

Mr. Schow: Mr. Chair, I move that Committee of the Whole report bills 8 and 10 and report progress on Bill 12.

The Deputy Chair: Government House Leader, Bill 8 with amendments?

Mr. Schow: Yes. That would be Bill 8 with amendments, Bill 10, and progress on Bill 12.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, the committee reports the following bills: Bill 10. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 8. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 12. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a night it has been. Appreciate everyone's diligent contributions and work, but now I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:33 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 12 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)..... 731

Committee of the Whole

Bill 8 Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 737

Bill 10 Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)..... 744

Bill 12 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)..... 745

Division 749

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