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The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, April 28, 2025

Day 102

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, April 28, 2025

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 51 Education Amendment Act, 2025

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to move second reading of Bill 51, the Education Amendment Act, 2025.

An incredible piece of legislation – an incredible bill, I should say. Not a piece of legislation just yet, but a bill that is making a series of amendments to the Education Act. These amendments that we're making are largely being pursued to help facilitate and implement stakeholder feedback that we've received in a number of different areas and to help improve processes in some functions of the ministry.

For example, in one area we'll be making a series of changes to the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission. As members of this Legislative Assembly will know and remember, back in 2023 it was our government that brought in the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission and made sure that there was independent oversight over teacher professional conduct and compliance with their code of conduct. Previously that function existed within the Alberta Teachers' Association. Of course, we had concerns with the disciplinary process being held by the same organization that is responsible for representing its interests and promoting its interests, so we took that function out. I want to thank the previous Minister of Education for doing that important work.

As we're working towards establishing the Teaching Profession Commission, we've recognized that there are a couple of areas where we can make some improvements, and those are being reflected in the bill today. As an example, we've recognized that there are some areas where reporting requirements can be delegated to other individuals, and we're giving the principals of schools that are responsible the ability to delegate that authority and that responsibility to other individuals in their schools as they see fit.

We're also implementing a fee for appeals for decisions of the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission. The fee that we're introducing is similar if not identical to that fee that was previously in place when the function was held by the Alberta Teachers' Association. The idea behind instituting a fee for appeals here is just to ensure that any individual who is not satisfied with a decision of the Teaching Profession Commission takes some time to contemplate and consider the implication and consequences of filing an appeal. We hope that the fee will give them that time to pause and think about the implications of filing their appeal, and then if they believe that it's something they still want to proceed with, they can submit their fee and then proceed.

In addition, outside of the changes that we're making to the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission we're also making a change to the school trustee code of conduct. Now, we're not making any changes specifically to the codes of conduct themselves, and we're not making a change to the requirement to have a code of conduct. That still exists in legislation. School boards will still be required to have and maintain a code of conduct

for trustees. However, we are removing the ability for a school board to remove a trustee because of an alleged violation or a proven violation to that school board's code of conduct.

The reason that we're doing that, Mr. Speaker, is very simple. Only voters should have the final say when it comes to the position of a duly elected individual. Only voters should have the right to remove a duly elected trustee or any other duly elected individual. I know the NDP disagrees, and they're shaking their head at that assumption. Again, this is something that clearly distinguishes us. We clearly believe in the importance of the democratic principle, and we clearly and strongly believe in the importance of democratic accountability. The NDP are shaking their head. Of course, one can ascertain for themselves what their position is on democratic accountability.

Mr. Sabir: So rich.

Mr. Nicolaides: One can also ascertain from their heckling what their view is of democratic accountability.

Ms Chapman: Come on. It's the first night sitting. A little latitude for sass.

Mr. Nicolaides: Happy to always have some latitude and sass.

Now, you know, all those watching at home, which I know that there are many because there's nothing else really important happening this evening, and I know so many Albertans are really tuned in to the debate this evening: I pause there just so that individuals tuning in have the opportunity to hear some of the heckling and commentary directly from the members of the opposition. I think as the members opposite and even on this side of the House know, I'm all for levity. You know, I'm one for levity as much as possible. I appreciate the comments from the member opposite that we're just starting night sittings, so we don't really want to go right over the deep end as we're just starting our evening sitting this evening, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to oblige.

But not to digress. We do fundamentally believe in the importance of democratic accountability, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I have a real problem with a board removing an individual that has been duly elected by members of the public to serve in a particular role. There's only one group of people, only one determining factor that should be at place when removing a duly elected individual. The only person or only group of people that should have that right and authority should be voters, not a board, not some other entity.

Bill 51, which of course we have before the Assembly, will remove a school board's ability to remove a duly elected trustee. If members of the public or any other individuals are dissatisfied with the performance of an elected school trustee, they have the opportunity at the next possible election to remove that individual or subsequently they also have the opportunity through recall to remove that individual if they are dissatisfied with that individual's performance. Just as is the case with all of us in this Assembly, if citizens are unhappy with our performance, we can be removed at the next election or through recall, just the same as with municipal councillors, mayors, and other individuals in an elected position. We want to ensure that degree of consistency.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we're making some amendments to the Education Act to change some terminology. More specifically, we will change terminology in the Education Act to remove references to the term "private" when referring to private schools, to independent schools. Now, this is being done for a number of reasons. Firstly, the association of independent schools in Alberta, that represents our independent schools, has requested that we make these changes to better reflect the diversity of their membership and

the diversity of their institutions, and I think it helps to clarify what role these institutions serve in our education system.

There can be a negative connotation associated with the term “private school.” Unfortunately, many of our exemplary independent operators are unnecessarily viewed in a negative way as a result of some of this terminology. We have fantastic independent schools who serve in an incredible way students who need customized learning and specialized learning in many different circumstances. I think of Janus Academy, that specifically works to service students with autism. I think of Renfrew Educational Services, that specifically exists to provide education to students with severe disabilities. These organizations work tirelessly to ensure that every student, irrespective of physical disabilities, intellectual challenges, or physical impairments, has the opportunity to receive a world-class education.

These are not elite institutions charging thousands and thousands of dollars in tuition fees. These are institutions that work to provide the very best education to individuals that require customized and tailored programming. I believe it’s important that we ensure our Education Act, our governing legislation here, is updated in accordance with these provisions and terminology to better reflect the very nature of schools operating and the work that they do.

7:40

These are examples of some of the changes. I don’t believe I’ll need to use all of my time this evening. There are other changes being made as well in the bill. I’m happy to chat more this evening about some of those changes, but I wanted to capture some of the major changes in my commentary. I think I’ve been able to do that, so I’m happy to provide opportunity for other members to contribute.

Again, just for the record, Mr. Speaker, I do rise to move second reading of Bill 51. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Calgary-Beddington has risen to speak.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] Thank you, Government House Leader. I appreciate the support. I’m happy to rise and offer comments on Bill 51, Education Amendment Act, 2025. As the minister just laid out, this makes a number of amendments to the Education Act. Some of these changes, obviously, we would support wholeheartedly. The legislative changes to allow displaced Jasper residents to vote and run as candidates in school board elections is a very welcome amendment, but it’s not really my job to pat the minister on the back for doing one good thing. [interjections] Guys, I literally just mentioned the one good thing. Take the win.

Let’s talk about some of the issues that we see in this bill, the change to school board properties. Last fall we discussed Bill 13, the Real Property Governance Act, and this Bill 51 kind of enshrines that piece of legislation into the Education Act. I remember from that Bill 13 debate that the changes were made on a recommendation from the MacKinnon panel report. That recommendation was that the government of Alberta should

redefine [its] inventory of land assets to include the broader public sector and create a definitive policy to clearly define surplus assets and a process for disposal of surplus assets. Providing an increased ability to core government and the broader public sector to dispose of surplus assets can act as an offset to the capital cost of new investments or provide revenue for the province.

Now, one thing that came up during that bill debate was that when announcing the Real Property Governance Act the minister did reference that MacKinnon report but without any kind of

elaboration on the last piece of that recommendation. The comments at the time were crafted very carefully to imply that what might happen with, say, surplus school board land is that it could be turned over to, say, the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services to be used for housing projects.

Sure, it is possible with this legislation that the government could take aging, underutilized land parcels designated for schools when schools aren’t needed in that community anymore, so they’ll turn them into some affordable housing projects. But, of course, it’s equally possible that what could happen is the government will take surplus school lands – now, to be clear, there are no surplus school lands right now. What there is is a desperate need for more schools. But this legislation will last for many years, should it pass, so it’s good to think ahead. They could take those surplus school lands and then they could just sell them to provide revenue for the province.

When I was talking to some school boards, I learned something I didn’t know before, which is that when the government builds a school, they provide the money to build the school, the shell – right? – but none of the fit up of the school, so no stuff to go inside, no desks, no gym equipment, no musical instruments in the music room. There is no money attached to a new school build to do that fit-up work. Talking to some school boards, what I had learned was that – that is, previously when school boards were allowed to manage their own land assets and they did have a piece of property that they were selling because it was underutilized – they would use those funds to do the fit up on the school. My question to the minister – I’ve got a number of questions for him in here, so I hope he’s able to come back to us with some answers – is he making a change to how school boards are going to be able to access funds to get all the stuff that we need in a school to make it a school, given that we’re taking away one of the only revenue streams that school boards had to fund those pieces of work?

Okay. Then the minister mentioned the changes on the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission. This bill is making changes in an attempt to improve the teacher complaint process, which has, to be fair, been floundering a bit under this government’s control. For 80 years the process of investigating, prosecuting professional conduct complaints against teachers in Alberta was managed by the ATA. In 2023 the UCP decided that the government was the better choice to manage teacher complaints. The claim at the time was that the newly created Alberta Teaching Profession Commission would result in a quicker resolution of complaints and would streamline the process. That wasn’t this Education minister; it was the previous Education minister. Still the promise was there from this government that they would speed things up, streamline the whole thing, but, as that minister likes to say, of course, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth.

What’s actually happening is that cases are now dragging on for years. In October of 2024 the CBC reported that under the new Alberta Teaching Profession Commission no disciplinary hearings had been held and decertifications had completely stalled. Five former employees at the time spoke out about a chaotic, unfair, inconsistent, and ineffective system. We learned that there were 57 teachers whose cases had been stagnant for over 300 days in the new system. The worst to me, because I’m not a teacher, you know, who had sort of a threat hanging over me for hundreds of days, is that what folks were reporting is that there was no prioritization of cases where a teacher’s behaviour could put students or colleagues at risk. I want to be clear, and I know that all members of this House know that it’s a very small number of teachers who have had serious complaints against them. But those serious complaints are serious, right? It is not something that we want to leave lingering. That’s where we want to see that quicker resolution and that streamlining so that we can address those issues.

In February of this year the ATA reported that, to their knowledge, only two hearings had been held since the commission took over the work. They took over that work in January of 2023. So we're 18 months past, and only two hearings have been held. If you want to compare that record – it's useful to compare – when the ATA was managing the process, they would hold between 25 and 30 hearings per year. The government took over this process, and they've gotten nowhere close to being able to manage it as quickly or efficiently as it used to be managed. I know I've heard from a number of teachers that two years later still nothing is happening with the investigations against them other than having a new investigator assigned every six months.

7:50

We know there has been a lot of staff turnover in that department. We know, through budget estimates, that that work of investigation had been contracted out to an Ontario firm. There is a concern, of course, that these third-party contracted investigators don't have the right background or understanding of the educational setting. Obviously, the revolving door of staff and contractors has led to chaos, inconsistency, poor communication, and really, frankly, inexcusably long delays for teachers who are under investigation.

Again, I want to be clear that the vast majority of complaints require no action from the teaching commission. These would be complaints that are frivolous, vexatious, without merit. According to the latest annual report from the teaching commission, 16 per cent of cases are just dismissed outright; another 52 per cent are dismissed following investigation. I think it's important for us to remember the stress that teachers are living through during the years that these investigations drag out. I think teachers have a lot on their plate under the best circumstances, and they're really not working in the best circumstances right now. They're working in really overcrowded classrooms. They don't have the resources they need to manage the complex learners in their classrooms.

To be clear, there is no crisis happening with regard to teachers violating their professional code of conduct. The real issue with the dragging timelines on investigating and hearing cases is the very small number of cases, as I mentioned, that do have merit because it's our kids' health and safety that are on the line here. When the UCP made this change to the complaint process, it was with that promise that resolution on cases would come more quickly and that simply has not happened.

I think the question that I had for the minister on this one is just: how is this bill going to address the backlog of complaints that we know still need to be dealt with? What does it do to set some timelines? Clearly we need some sort of boundaries on how long someone can just be waiting for an investigation to take place. I mean, 300 days is ridiculous. I would just love it if the minister could provide some commentary on how this process will be sped up and how we will get to that point that we were promised where we would get a quicker resolution on these complaints.

Oh, another issue I'd like to raise on this portion of the bill is the section that allows administrators to be informed about ongoing complaints. This is when a teacher becomes employed by a different school authority, which kind of sounds to me like sharing a personnel file with another school division. It would be like sharing a personnel file with another employer. I think of personnel files as something that live with your employer, and they kind of live and die there, right? They aren't something that are transferred on to your next employer. I don't think this is a standard practice. Happy to be corrected by the minister if he has more information about this. I have wonders about privacy issues around this piece. I'm just hoping the minister will be able to provide some clarification in regard to protection of privacy for these employees.

While I appreciate that the minister is making some changes to better align the teacher complaint process with how the ATA managed it such as adding that \$250 fee that he mentioned to appeal a decision – that was the standard when the process was managed by the ATA – I'm just not convinced that what we see in this legislation is going to address the concerns that have been flagged around this teaching commission. Nothing in this legislation that I can see addresses the issue of case prioritization.

I mentioned that 52 per cent of cases referred to investigation were dismissed with no further action required. That kind of feels like the obvious low-hanging fruit here. You know, to see that half of all investigated cases were dismissed suggests to me a lack of understanding of what kind of cases may actually merit an investigation. You know, resources are limited. We're told that by the government regularly, so I think that they would understand this need to be prioritizing those cases where student health and safety is at risk.

In this bill part of this teaching commission, too, is this ability to delegate some reporting requirements, introduces the fee for appeals, but there's no direction for the Teaching Profession Commission to improve other processes. Anyways, when the minister speaks again on this, I hope that he can provide us with a lot more clarity on how these changes are actually going to improve processes because at this point I think it's not clear to me that the changes will result in a more efficient system or deliver more timely results.

Oh. How much time? I forgot to set my timer. Five minutes? Okay. Good.

The last piece, I think, to offer comments about is the democratic accountability that the minister was referencing. The change that's happened here is that school boards are no longer able to remove a trustee. The only case that was, you know, sort of pointed to as an example was the case of a Red Deer trustee, Trustee LaGrange. No relation. Or maybe relation? I don't know, actually. Like, is it a very common name? I'm not sure. Of course, this was a trustee who was removed after she equated the pride flag to the Nazi flag. Certainly, you can see how that would, you know, ring a lot of alarm bells for parents. That's probably not appropriate subject matter for kids, not appropriate commentary to be coming from a trustee.

There aren't a lot of cases where this has happened – right? – where a trustee has been removed. There's that one. There was, of course, when the Premier was a school board trustee, that whole board was dismissed, but that was the Education minister removing the entire dysfunctional board at that time. When the minister was introducing this bill to the press, there were definitely some like questions asked around consultation and in our technical briefing, too. We did confirm that no consultation was held on this piece, no open consultation with parents, no consultation with trustees.

I think that what the minister had offered up was that he had received some e-mails. In my opinion I'm not really convinced that meets the kind of threshold of: we should change the legislation because I got some e-mails. I mean, if that's the threshold that this government is setting for how we make legislative changes, I'm really excited because I have a lot of e-mails from people, e-mails that I get from parents. I've actually never heard a parent or a trustee or any education stakeholder raise this issue of removing trustees as a top concern they had about education, right?

What I hear about is the fact that we've got the lowest funding per student in the country, the fact that our schools in our metro areas are grossly overcrowded, the lack of supports complex learners have in the classroom. Those are the things that I hear about. I don't hear a lot of concerns around trustees being able to be removed.

I do have a couple of questions, again, for the minister about this, just to help me understand, I think, because the recall petition that he mentioned is the mechanism for which a trustee can be removed.

8:00

The threshold on that is quite high, right? Some might say that it's impossibly high. Maybe it was designed to be impossibly high, but 40 per cent, which is the threshold on the recall petition, is well above the voter turnout for the vast majority of—I just remembered that I wrote down in my notebook here because I went looking for what was the voter turnout, right? This would have been in the previous municipal. Airdrie: 22.5 per cent turnout. Grande Prairie: 21.7. Leduc: 29.6. Red Deer: 26 per cent turnout. There are worse ones than that. Right? County of Newell: 16.5 per cent. Foothills County: 11.6 per cent.

So the threshold for removal here—oh, I wrote down Westlock, too, because, you know, I thought that the Speaker might be interested: 28.6 per cent turnout. A little better than some areas, but what all of these numbers have in common is that they are all well below 40 per cent. Now the mechanism that we have to remove a trustee requires engaging more voters than came out in the first place to elect them. I find that to be a little bit concerning. Unlike other levels of elected...

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I see Calgary-North East has risen.

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, I rise today not just as the MLA for Calgary-North East, but as someone who believes that the child of a taxi driver deserves the same chance in life as the child of a CEO. That belief rests on one simple truth: education is the great equalizer. It's the one tool governments have to level the playing field, but instead of sharpening that tool, this government, since 2019, has been breaking it apart bit by bit and bill by bill. With Bill 51, it's another chapter in their book.

Let's talk about what this bill actually does and, more importantly, what it refuses to do. This bill changes the name of private schools to independent schools. A branding exercise, Mr. Speaker, not a policy solution. The problem isn't just the name; it's the inequitable funding and lack of oversight. Meanwhile, families in my constituency of Calgary-North East are struggling to get their kids into a public school close to their homes. Our community is one of the youngest, fastest growing, and most diverse in Alberta, yet year after year it gets ignored when it comes to building new schools in our communities. Classrooms are overcrowded, modular units are bursting, and parents are told to just wait. How can the UCP say that they care about equity when they let our kids sit on wait-lists year after year?

Now, let's get to one of the most important parts of this bill. It takes away the school board's ability to remove a trustee who violates a code of conduct. Let's be honest. This is the LaGrange clause in this bill. The entire change is rooted in a single case where a trustee was removed after posting wild homophobic content comparing pride flags to Nazi symbols. A court upheld her removal. But instead of respecting that process, the minister is rewriting the rules so that people like her can never be removed again. That is dangerous, Mr. Speaker. No consultation, no broad evidence, just political payback disguised as policy.

How will a trustee be removed now through a recall petition that requires 40 per cent of eligible electors? In a system where electors are divided between public, separate, and francophone boards, there is no reliable data on electoral numbers. It's like asking someone to find their socks in three different houses during a blackout. Calgary couldn't even determine who was eligible to vote in a Catholic by-

election. In Red Deer the turnout in a municipal election was 30 per cent. Who exactly will organize these petitions? Will the tooth fairy do that?

Now, let's move to the next important part, which is school ownership. Under Bill 51 new school properties will no longer be owned by the local boards but by Alberta Infrastructure. [interjection] While the member opposite is celebrating this, let me remind the House who we are giving this power to. Mr. Speaker, Alberta Infrastructure is the same body that is under investigation in the UCP's corrupt care scandal. It's the same ministry that built a brand new high school in Camrose but forgot two small details. The first one is the access road; small one. The second one, utilities; just another small one.

Ms Chapman: Who needs lights?

Member Brar: Nobody.

The school is complete, but students can't safely get to it because the ministry didn't verify land ownership and agreements. Now they want to take over all new schools in Alberta. That's not just reckless, Mr. Speaker; that is dangerous.

Many other provinces in Canada, including B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, let school boards own their own schools. That allows local control, faster decision-making, and better accountability. Instead, this UCP government wants to centralize control under a department that can't even manage basic due diligence. Does the minister think that leasing schools back to boards is more efficient, or is it just easier to manipulate decisions from the top down?

8:10

Then there are changes to the teacher complaint process. Let's not forget that it was the UCP who bungled this in the first place back in 2022 with Bill 15. They ripped the complaint process away from Alberta's Teachers' Association without a plan, and the result was the teachers waiting more than a year for disciplinary hearings, good teachers leaving the profession because there were no timelines. Now three years later they are back with fixes that are about as effective as duct tape on a sinking ship. Mr. Speaker, let me ask: how will this bill reduce that backlog? How will it prioritize high-severity cases? How will it restore trust among teachers who feel they have been left in limbo for more than a year? This is not reform; it's reputation management.

Speaking of reputation, this government has a track record when it comes to education, and it is not something that any government would want on their resumé. They have cut per-student funding despite record enrolment growth. They froze classroom supports while inflation soared. They wrote a curriculum that historians and educators called regressive and out of touch, and they have continually ignored the needs of working-class, racialized, and immigrant communities, especially in Calgary-North East.

Where are the new schools that we were promised? Where are the culturally relevant supports our diverse classrooms desperately need? Where is the investment in early childhood education and mental health support in inclusive curriculum? Mr. Speaker, this government talks a big game about parental choice, but what choice do parents have in Calgary-North East when their local public school boards are overcrowded and underfunded, and the only alternative is a school 45 minutes away from their homes?

Let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. Education is not just another line item. It is the foundation of economic opportunity, the driver of social mobility, and the most powerful antidote to inequality we have ever known. If this government truly believes in building a stronger Alberta, they would invest in education and not just for the

few, for all Albertans. They would empower local boards and not centralize power. They would listen to teachers. They would build schools based on community needs, and most of all they would understand that every child from Jasper to Edmonton to Calgary-North East deserves a school system that sees their potential, supports their dreams, and gives them a real shot at success. This bill does none of that. No amount of rebranding or regulation can hide the fact that the UCP is failing our kids.

Mr. Speaker, before I close today, let's take a step back from the legal jargon and technicalities of Bill 51. Let me highlight why public education matters to my constituents, to me personally, and to all Albertans. History is clear. Education is the most powerful tool we have to break cycles of poverty, dismantle inequality, and unlock human potential. According to UNESCO, every additional year of schooling can raise a person's income by up to 10 per cent. The World Bank estimates that universal access to quality education could cut global poverty in half. And right here in Canada, Statistics Canada shows that university graduates earn on average 38 per cent more than those with just a high school diploma.

But it's not just about incomes, Mr. Speaker. It's about dignity, opportunity, and dreams.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 51, the Education Amendment Act, 2025. When it comes to education and the record of this government, it's not very good. We currently have the least funding per student in the country. I was hoping that when we heard that there was an amendment act coming forward from Education, that we would see things that would actually improve the education system. You know, things like making sure that Alberta has a world-class education system, making sure that students are funded appropriately, making sure that when schools are built, they have access to a road, making sure that education is public and funded and accessible. None of that has occurred, unfortunately, in this piece of legislation. We know that there are significant challenges that are facing the Alberta education system, which ultimately impacts our students, our future leaders, that have been caused by this government, that aren't being addressed in this legislation. I think that that's really, really concerning.

When we think about what Albertans expect from government, they expect a government that prioritizes children and educators and our education system. Unfortunately, we've seen, through the years of this government being in power, that they have taken what was an incredible world-class education system and have picked away at it. We've seen other jurisdictions stop accessing the Alberta education system because of this government and the decisions that they made. We have seen countless stories of educators that are stressed. We watched for months while education assistants were out fighting with this government for fair wages. Yet listening to Albertans does not reflect anything in this bill.

8:20

I will say that I'm very happy to see that this government is giving Jasper residents the ability to vote in school board elections for the area that they lived in. I think this government has completely dropped the ball when it came to supporting Jasper and the residents, so it's nice to see that this piece of legislation does something that actually supports people in Jasper.

Now, what this legislation does is it changes a private school as the name to independent schools, it stops school boards from removing a trustee due to a code of conduct violation, it transfers

new school ownership to the Crown. Schools are then leased to boards by Alberta Infrastructure. Just a reminder that this government, specifically this area, is under investigation for their corrupt deals related to infrastructure. We saw the minister resign, and they're saying: we want that authority with us. That's very, very concerning, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to Alberta's trust for this government, I don't hear that from the communication that I have with people all across this province.

One of the other things that I don't hear from people in Alberta is anything that's in this piece of legislation, aside from the Jasper piece, asking for this to happen in the education system, so I'm curious why this government continues to put forward legislation without consultation. We saw them put forward legislation regarding the removal of the authority of the ATA to discipline teachers. They did that in 2022, and it's back. Why? Because it's failed, Mr. Speaker, and instead of talking to those that are, you know, doing the work, talking to teachers, talking to administrators, they've put forward different legislation to try and fix the things that they had made a mistake in changing something that wasn't broken. Instead of repealing that decision to take away the ATA disciplinary process, they're adding new pieces of legislation that they hope are going to actually make some positive changes.

When it comes to teacher complaints, I think that it's very important to note that this is something that Albertans have a very high expectation of a thorough investigation. I think part of that is that there should be a timely investigation when it comes to these types of complaints. I also think that there should be some sort of triage system to have the most urgent complaints and the high risk dealt with first. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that isn't the case.

This legislation is trying to fix a system that this government put in place just in 2022 without consulting with anyone. Again, it's a make-work project that means that teachers are perhaps waiting two years to have a complaint heard. Now, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, from personal experience, that when I was a student, I went through a complaint process through the ATA regarding a teacher, and I felt very supported the entire time. It was something that the ATA took very seriously. It was something that I felt very supported through the entire time. I felt that there was ongoing communication and support for me as the complainant, and I felt that it was resolved in a timely manner. From the time that it was reported to the time that the determination had come to me was under six months. With this system that the UCP has put into place, there are teachers that are waiting for their complaint to be heard for two years.

Now, we know based on statistics that the majority of complaints are dismissed. This is absolutely unacceptable. When it comes to looking at a process that they implemented, that no one asked for, that they're now fixing perhaps without consultation is really, really concerning. I think that when parents are looking to understand what's happening with their kids in school, if there is a complaint laid, that's two years of being in limbo for that family as well. Mr. Speaker, I think that it's completely unacceptable.

I think that this piece of legislation does nothing to address all of the concerns that have been caused by this government within the education system. I would really strongly encourage that members vote no. With that, I will cede my comments.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, like my colleague, lit up with a very short-lived glimmer of hope when I saw that there was an amendment to the Education Act. As a parent this is of particular concern to me. As an elected representative this is one of

the issues that I hear about the most in our communities in terms of this government's failures, quite frankly, on our education system. We have been known in Alberta to have a world-class education system. I think the teachers that are there, the people who are making the system work despite this government's move: I have all the respect in the world for them and admiration.

But under the UCP government, their focus has not been to improve our education system. The focus has been around power grabs, jurisdictional interference, ideological curriculum changes, and, you know, as we've seen recently, rollbacks on human rights, which would impact both students and teachers.

As a reminder, when we're talking about the education system in terms of funding, as many of my colleagues have already mentioned, we are last when it comes to per-student funding. That's of particular concern when we're thinking about this with the backdrop of one of the worst affordability crises we've had in a long time.

Last week, of course, being constituency week, I had the opportunity to have conversations with lots of stakeholders, with lots of constituents. Conversations about crucial shortages and pressures that our local schools are under, especially public schools, at least for now, the public system being the system that the majority of Albertans rely on.

When I think about the pressures that were mentioned to me this week, we were hearing about a lack of operational funding, a lack of resources, EAs running from classroom to classroom, no one getting the help they need, lots of complexity in the classroom especially when it comes to language needs. Of course, this being of particular interest to me because of the role that I have in Immigration and Multiculturalism, seeing that this government is failing to meet the needs of the adult community members.

You know, I know they really love a good talking point from the federal Conservatives. They love to point fingers at immigrants for causing shortages in housing, for causing the overcrowding in classrooms. We have actually been subject to a lot of changes at the federal level where the cuts to our incoming populations have been made.

8:30

I think what that puts into relief is the fact that this government is continuing to fail the people that we have in these communities right now, and where I'm seeing that the most is in our education system. No one is getting the help that they need. Teachers aren't getting the help they need, EAs are run ragged, and students suffer at the end of the day. I don't think it's too much for any of us to understand here what happens when we are underfunding our education system and leaving students to flail in the wind. You know, those costs come back to our communities.

I want to talk a little bit about school construction projects. On this side of the aisle we would like to see that school construction projects are approved and that the needs of the actual communities are taken into account. Again, when we're talking about population growth, we know that comes from immigration. We know that comes from international immigration but also interprovincial. This government loves to talk about how Alberta is the greatest place to live, and it is. I was born here. I've grown up here. I've gone to public schools here, but I went to public school at a time when it was more properly funded. What I worry about now is, again, when there are good talking points about how it's the greatest place to live but then also using the talking points of, you know, open borders and a little bit of that fearmongering around immigration. I want to make sure that they're actually meeting the needs of our community and that we finish with the deflections and actually start serving the communities that we've been elected to represent.

In terms of being responsive, I know we need to see a lot more co-operation with other orders of government. That includes school boards. That includes municipalities. We are hearing a lot, especially in the city of Calgary, around densification. The decisions they're making around school construction, around modernizations: how are all of those changes being taken into account?

In terms of funding students appropriately, again, I come back to the talking points, about how they're spending generously. I love that. I love to hear about how we're doing the most ever, and we're spending the most ever, and we're the most generous ever while actively ignoring that we have now the largest population and that it is here. We can blame other orders of government all we like but if we're not meeting those needs, we're just failing people. We're failing the people who come here as newcomers. We're failing the communities. We're failing all of our students because those pressures extend to all students.

Now, it would be really interesting for me to know how many of the members opposite have benefited from a well-funded public education. You know, I always wonder at how it feels to benefit from that public education and to be here now in 2025 and to actively pull the ladder up after themselves and actively fail our students.

We need smaller classrooms. We need more attention paid to the complexity that exists in classrooms. With Bill 13 we heard a lot about collecting data on the properties that exist. My concerns around Bill 13, you know – actually, again, another glimmer of hope, where I was thinking about: Okay; well, finally, this government would like to collect some data. It was data for a fire sale of our public schools, which also serve as community spaces, by the way.

When I think about Bill 51 and the changes that it makes and the changes that it wilfully ignores, that it needs to be making, I have a lot of concerns there. I have a lot of concerns about this decision around the complaints process with school board trustees. It comes down, also, to an issue of safety in our schools.

Given all of those concerns, all of the needs that aren't being met, all of the failures that still aren't being addressed here, and just this looming, I would say, constructed pressure and failure of this government to the public education system, I would say that they need to go back to the drawing board and actually take data and address the needs that we actually have in our public school system.

With that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 52

Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move the second reading of Bill 52, the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

If passed, this bill will clear the way for energy innovation, strengthen Alberta's utility system, and ultimately power prosperity in our province for generations to come.

Alberta's population and economy continue to grow. Whether it's Canadians from other provinces or newcomers to our great country, more people are recognizing what we already know: Alberta is the best place to live, raise a family, start a business, and have a life. Our government is committed to making sure it stays

that way by making sure every Albertan has affordable access to the utilities they need and depend on, now and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, the world is changing. We need a utility system that can weather these changes while meeting the growing demands of our province. That's exactly what Bill 52, the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act is designed to do. If passed, this bill will allow for the safe use of hydrogen within our natural gas system. This includes enabling hydrogen to be blended with natural gas so that it can be safely used to heat homes and businesses within our province. I think everyone in this House can agree that with our harsh winters heating homes and businesses is not a choice; it's a necessity. Through this bill, we're proposing forward-thinking changes that will help ensure Albertans have access to that reliable heat in the decades to come.

Mr. Speaker, hydrogen presents an even greater opportunity for our province. In fact, the world is looking to hydrogen as a solution for heat to decarbonize industries. As the largest hydrogen producer in Canada, producing over 2.4 million tons of hydrogen per year, Alberta is well-positioned to not only strengthen utilities but help the world responsibly and safely make this transition.

Mr. Speaker, the world needs more Alberta and our government is working hard to make that happen. Alberta has the right resources, expertise, and business-friendly environment to be a global leader in this industry, and through our proposed changes we're looking to unlock hydrogen's potential to help fuel more innovation and investment in the sector.

Of course, we are committed to making sure we put safety and options of Albertans first and foremost to ensure we're introducing hydrogen in a safe and responsible manner. Our government is working closely with the Canadian Standards Association to determine the best blending percentage. Through this bill, we are looking at low volume blending of 5 per cent with the potential to increase that percentage in the future as the CSA approves those safety levels.

At the same time we'll make sure Albertans are protected by requiring hydrogen projects to obtain significant community support before they can move forward as well as ensure that only those receiving hydrogen blended natural gas will be required to pay for that hydrogen blend and any additional system costs required for it.

Mr. Speaker, we will not be making the same mistakes that the NDP made when they hastily phased out coal and drove up transmission costs for ratepayers, who had no choice or say in projects for their communities. That is why Bill 52, if passed, will also support critical updates to power market rules and transmission policies. These will restore the balance between affordability and reliability within our electricity system. Collectively, these changes are referred to as the restructured electricity market, or REM.

Mr. Speaker, our province has seen a significant amount of change since the market was first designed. Albertans, their families, and businesses increasingly rely on electricity, and we have a responsibility to make sure that when Albertans reach for a light switch or to go turn on their computer, there is zero doubt that the power that they need will be there when and where they need it.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, that's why this bill is so important. It will help modernize our electrical grid to ensure that the system can meet the future needs and demands without sacrificing reliability or affordability. If passed, this legislation will support the move to a day-ahead reliability market, which will allow us to more accurately predict the amount of electricity that will be needed and ensure that we have the right amount of generation online to meet that demand a day in advance.

If passed, it will also address the issues the NDP created and ignored with transmission by encouraging more efficient use of transmission infrastructure. By maximizing the use of transmission lines already in service and only building new power plants where they make sense, we can be more strategic about how we move that electricity to homes and businesses all across our province. These changes will protect Albertans from rising fees on their utility bills and make cost certainty for investors while prioritizing the reliability Albertans have come to expect and avoiding unnecessary costs in the future.

Mr. Speaker, through this bill our government is looking to create a bright future. Alberta's utility system will take the next steps in powering prosperity across our province, and we will create the right environment for our world-class energy industry to advance innovative hydrogen technologies, and we will ensure power in Alberta is both reliable and affordable while keeping an eye on efficiency and preserving Alberta's free market system and values.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move second reading of Bill 52, the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any others wanting to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 52, Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. This bill amends five pieces of legislation: Electric Utilities Act, the Gas Distribution Act, the Gas Utilities Act, the Hydro and Electric Energy Act, and the Petroleum Marketing Act.

Albertans are clear about what they want, in fact, what they need, especially during this cost-of-living crisis. Albertans want affordability, Mr. Speaker. They want stability. They want an energy system that works for them, not for government backrooms and not for corporations. This bill does not deliver all those. Instead, Bill 52 hands even more unchecked power to the minister's office, leaves Alberta families exposed to higher bills, more uncertainty, and more hidden charges. At its heart, this bill is about power, not the kind of legislation that keeps the lights on for every Albertan. It is about consolidating control in the minister's office while families are struggling to keep up with the rising living costs.

The bill does not deliver affordability, and let's just highlight what Bill 52 does and what it doesn't. It amends five major laws governing Alberta's electricity and gas sectors, it creates a legal framework for massive change of our electricity market under the name of restructuring the energy market, it formalizes hidden surcharges on people's electricity bills, and it hands sweeping power to the minister's office. What it doesn't do: it does not lower the cost of power.

Albertans are facing some of the highest electricity rates in the country. In 2024 Albertans paid the highest utility bills in Canada. You expect a bill that will address that rising cost. Right now families under the rate of last resort, a legislation and a policy that was introduced in this House not that long ago, are paying about almost 30 per cent more than if they had a competitive contract. Instead of tackling the real issue of affordability, we have legislation that introduces new surcharges that drive the bills higher for those who are already on the rate of last resort. Mr. Speaker, Albertans need a plan to lower costs, and instead this government gave them a plan to rewrite the rules without an oversight.

I'll speak to that part. One of the most alarming elements of Bill 52 is the consolidation of power in the minister's office when it comes to the restructuring of the electricity market. Right now Alberta's electricity system is regulated by independent bodies like

the Alberta Utilities Commission, whose job is to act in the public interest, to provide expert oversight, and to ensure decisions are made based on evidence, not politics. This bill changes those principles. Bill 52 gives the minister unprecedented ability to set the critical rules for the energy market without the independent review of the commission. No hearing, no consultations, no independent oversight: that's not how you build a trustworthy energy system. That's not how you attract investment and create market stability, and that is not how you ensure the public confidence within the system.

We have learned hard lessons from other jurisdictions in the world where such restructuring without proper consultation and without oversight led to a very long period of time that created blackouts and public outrage. Alberta cannot afford to make the same mistakes. Energy policy needs stability, energy policy needs independent oversight, and energy policies need public accountability.

Bill 52 lays the groundwork for major restructuring of the electricity market, a restructuring that experts say will be complicated. It will be costly and will be filled with uncertainty. The government says they are replacing the power pool with a dual-market system, a day-ahead market and a real-time market, but the details are still fuzzy. It's unclear. Even the Alberta Electric System Operator admits that the plan is delayed, unfinished, and full of unresolved questions that the industry is asking. In the meantime the government is rushing ahead through Bill 52 without clear evidence that this will deliver lower prices, without economic analysis on the cost to the families, and without proper consultations and without ensuring that consumers are protected and public oversight is ensured.

Even Alberta's Market Surveillance Administrator criticized this government's approach, and industry pointed out that this is a rushed market design and it's needlessly complex. It could determine investors' confidence and may not even fix the very reliability issue it claims to address. What does that mean in plain language? It means that bills will not go down, the market volatility is still out there, and fewer protections for regular Albertans at risk.

8:50

On top of this, Bill 52 includes a new surcharge, the so-called consumer awareness charge. At a time when families are struggling with food prices, mortgage payments, and rising utility bills, this government thinks it's appropriate to add another charge onto the monthly power bills, all to fund the government advertising campaigns. Many of us on this side of the House wonder: how much will the surcharge cost to lower socioeconomic Albertans who may be the ones who are on the rate of last resort? How much cost of that will be annually? Why is the surcharge necessary when the Utilities Consumer Advocate is already funded through existing mechanisms?

Let's be honest about what this really is, Mr. Speaker. It's not about reducing costs. Of course, it's about shifting the costs of the policies that were created already in this House onto the backs of Albertans who are already unable to get contracts in the competitive market; in other words, those who are already paying higher electricity bills compared to the rest of Albertans. If the government wants to inform consumers, they should pay for it because it's the government that created that policy, not add another line of surcharge on the same Albertans who are already paying higher, 30 per cent higher, than the competitive market price.

Let's talk about the changes that come with the hydrogen development. It's important, but it must be transparent, again, something that is very, very difficult for this government. I don't understand why. Mr. Speaker, Bill 52 makes changes to allow for

hydrogen blending into the existing gas distribution system. Now, we believe in the promise of hydrogen. This is a good move in the right direction, and we support efforts to innovate and build a clean energy economy, but the bill doesn't answer key questions on this.

Why has it taken the government so long to establish a hydrogen blending market framework when it has been part of a hydrogen strategy since 2021? That's four years ago. Will the government commit to requiring proof that hydrogen blending delivers genuine emissions reductions before allowing companies to recover costs from consumers? Will the government ensure that this is not cost-prohibitive? In other words, that it is not an expensive utility that Albertans cannot afford to use at all, which, in other words, will be counterproductive to the same emissions reduction that the government is claiming to be trying to be achieving through this model?

Mr. Speaker, hydrogen could be a massive opportunity for Alberta but only when and if it is done right. Innovation must not come at the cost of transparency, and we need to know how this is done. It must not become an excuse for handouts to political insiders, especially when we already know the scandals that are going on within the circles of this government. It must not become another driver of unaffordable energy costs for ordinary people. Clean energy must serve the public interest, not a narrow interest group.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the bigger pattern, the chaos that we have learned through the legislation that has been tabled in this House by this government. What Bill 52 reflects is part of a much bigger pattern from this government. They slap Band-Aids on problems they caused, like creating the rate of last resort, and invest in campaigns to chase people away from the same program that they have created. They're quietly introducing new fees like the new surcharge buried in this bill. They concentrate power in the minister's office while gutting the independent checks and balances meant to protect Albertans. They manufacture uncertainty in critical sectors, scaring investment away. We have seen this in renewables, and we are seeing this happening in other sectors as well. The result is very clear. It is chaos for the economy, it's cuts to consumer protections, and it's higher costs for ordinary people.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve an energy system built on transparency, stability, and affordability. They deserve lower bills, not higher ones. They deserve independent oversight and strong checks and balances. They deserve a government that stands up for working families, not one that stands up for interest groups.

Bill 52 fails those tests. It fails to prioritize affordability. It concentrates power in ways that put regular Albertans at risk. It gambles with the future of the electricity system. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are tired of the chaos. They are tired of these hidden fees. They are tired of a government that says one thing and delivers another. Affordability is at breaking point for many Albertans. We expect government bills to centre affordability in its policies. Bill 52 fails to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 52? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 52, the Energy and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. You know, there are a couple of overarching comments I guess I'll make about the bill before I dive into some of the details. First of all, I want to actually thank the minister for working so hard in energy and utilities over the last year. This is not the first bill that we've debated about electricity and energy, and I appreciate the minister's efforts. While we may

not agree on everything or very few things, that doesn't mean that I don't appreciate the work. If there's anything I've come to truly appreciate about our electricity and our energy, it's that it's a very complex system and there are many different levers that can be pulled.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I will say that one of the things that makes me uncomfortable in this bill is the same thing that's made me uncomfortable in other bills that we've debated in the House, and that is the centralizing of power in the minister's office. I don't love it when we do that because the minister changes over time, and it's not always going to be the same person. It might not always be the same well-intentioned minister in the minister's office, so I think we need to be very careful when we centralize decision-making power in the minister's office and in this case taking that power away from the AESO. I'll just throw that out there, that, you know, this bill does allow the minister more power to make changes without going through the Alberta Utilities Commission, and that is a flag for me.

I wanted to spend a bit more time talking about the hydrogen piece. We know that Albertans deserve stable, reliable electricity and a cleaner energy future with innovative solutions like hydrogen. While I support hydrogen innovation, I do think that we need, like all innovations, to make sure that these new technologies meet stringent environmental regulations and that processes are enforced. The minister in his remarks said several times the word "safe" when it comes to hydrogen. We know that there are risks associated with hydrogen blending, so making sure that we ensure that safety, making sure that Albertans are safe but also that the systems are safe. Hydrogen blended fuel explodes differently than natural gas on its own, so it's something we need to consider as we explore this technology.

9:00

This bill allows creating a regulatory framework for blending hydrogen gas into natural gas distribution. It requires getting consent from the commission and from the affected consumers before implementing hydrogen blended natural gas services. I appreciate the need to get people's permission before changing the kind of energy that is servicing their home or their business; however, this bill also allows for that service to come with an increased cost. I also can understand the need for that; however – there are so many "buts" here – if the purpose of blending hydrogen is to clean our energy distribution, then we're basically asking people to pay more to have a greener energy source. So to reduce your emissions for your home or your business, like, that's great, but it's going to cost you more.

Mr. Dach: Carbon tax.

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. And the carbon tax was not supported for that exact same reason. Thank you.

I think we just need to be careful about how we structure these things because, ultimately, if we are asking Albertans to reduce emissions, we want to make sure they're not paying for it.

Would you like to answer my question, Minister?

Mr. Neudorf: I would.

Dr. Elmeligi: Oh, okay.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities for an intervention.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for allowing the intervention. I do just want to touch on this. You're absolutely right on these points. For safety, that is why the legislation is tying the level of blending to the CSA and what they determine is safe within the Canadian context. Right now the CSA is set at 5 per cent, but as they explore safety steps, it could go higher, not likely to exceed 20 per cent, which is the highest we know of globally at this point.

For the cost and how that works on it, you're right. The consumer is – we are writing it so they have the choice on whether they would like to choose it. It cannot be forced upon them. If they don't want it, they do not have to pay for it, and they do not have to accept it. If they do want it by moving into an area that has that enablement for that blending, they are doing so knowing that it's blended and knowing that there may be a cost for that capital infrastructure to do that.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. Through the Speaker to the minister, thank you very much for that explanation. It still means that if somebody is choosing to reduce their emissions, they will pay more.

Climate change is real. We know it's caused by increased greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere. I think we need to be finding systems that incentivize people to reduce their individual and their business emissions, not penalize them for wanting to try to do that. It is a concern of mine that when it comes to greener energy, we are putting that cost on consumers, so why would they choose it? If affordability is such an issue and affordability is in crisis, why would anybody choose to have hydrogen blended energy even if it reduces their emissions?

I want to get a little into the percentage that is blended. We know that ATCO launched its first project in 2022, blending 5 per cent hydrogen into natural gas distribution. ATCO has had international success with this approach. They've done this in Australia. They've got plants in Europe as well. There are multiple countries around the world looking at hydrogen blending and ways that we can do this. I think that that's great. There are lots of international learnings that we can, you know, gain from there.

Hydrogen is created by splitting water with electricity from renewables. That's called green hydrogen. That requires more renewables to create the hydrogen. But at the same time this government had this renewable energies moratorium, which put a chill over the development of renewable energy in the province. I find this to be rather disappointing now, right? These things are a year apart, but this moratorium on renewable energy development did change...

Ms Schulz: Pause.

Dr. Elmeligi: Sorry. Renewable energy policy?

Ms Schulz: Pause. Moratorium. It was lifted.

Dr. Elmeligi: Pause. Whatever. It was a pause, but we know that it affected the level and the scope and the intensity of renewable energy development in the province, and now we're promoting hydrogen, which has the least amount of emissions when it is coupled with renewable energy, so I feel like there's some contradicting objectives here in what the government is trying to accomplish.

I'm saying this because I believe in solar and wind and hydrogen and alternative forms of energy, and I think that we have the most success as a society when we truly explore and develop each of them to their potential. I think one of the challenges that we had,

Mr. Speaker, in the renewable energy pause or moratorium or whatever you'd like to call it was that we were positioning it as if it was this choice between agricultural land and solar panels, for example. I think that there are an awful lot of surfaces in Alberta that are not prime agricultural land, where solar panels could be very effective. For example, the new Calgary arena that's about to be built: I haven't heard talk about solar panels on that roof, but that will be a massive surface that could have solar panels on it. I think we have a lot of surfaces on warehouses and arenas and community buildings, and there is a lot of already built infrastructure that could sustain solar development, and I feel like we're not exploring that potential. It doesn't have to be over prime agricultural land, because I also believe in growing food, so I don't really want to do that either.

Are you going to intervene again? This is like one-on-one time.

Mr. Neudorf: I'm going to try.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. I'll let you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the member, and I think these are very good points. I appreciate that. The intent is to eventually allow for innovation to continue the incentivization of hydrogen. As more products are brought online, more innovations, we continue to see that price drop, and we think there are still many Albertans who have the wherewithal to choose that because they do want to be less emitting.

In terms of renewables, we agree, which is why the hon. Minister of Environment and Protected Areas said that it was a pause to gain balance in our system. Alberta is very fortunate. Over 40 per cent of our generating capacity is renewables, and we saw a huge influx, so now we are trying to do exactly what you suggest, find the right locations for them to continue to flourish where it's not impacting something else negatively, like prime agricultural land or views, which I know we have a difference of opinion on. But as we do that, incorporate that through legislation that we've already brought forward, which is more self-supply and export, we've allowed for that.

Dr. Elmeligi: How much time do I have left, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You now have eight minutes and 50 seconds. You just received a number of minutes of bonus because of taking two interventions.

Dr. Elmeligi: Oh. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I didn't realize there were bonus minutes at stake. I'll keep that in mind for next time.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister, thank you for that explanation. I do think, though, that it is an example of how a lot of our decisions are connected to each other and the importance of being forward thinking in this House, that a decision that we can make a year ago can be coming up in conversation today about a different piece of legislation. It really does underscore the need of thinking holistically and strategically, especially when it comes to energy development in the province and renewable energy development in the province.

There are concerns about hydrogen blending, that it is expensive and potentially inefficient. There is concern that anything above a 20 per cent blend starts to create corrosion in pipes and requires upgrades to infrastructure, which, of course, is costly and dramatically increases the overall cost of hydrogen blending and development. But anything less than 20 per cent might not actually

generate the greenhouse gas emission gains that we're hoping for. So, again, I feel like we need to make sure that we're operating with the best information in a way that is going to reduce emissions, not cost us extra investment in upgrading infrastructure, but is still going to reduce emissions, which is ultimately the goal here. To me, I feel like a lot of this will be fleshed out in the regulations. I look forward to that, but I do think this is a topic, Mr. Speaker, that requires quite a lot of critical thinking and thought to make sure that we are doing right by Albertans and actually reducing emissions. For me, that's the number one goal in all of this, reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

9:10

We are aiming for net zero by 2050, and I still think that that's a very lofty goal. We've been in this House as a group of MLAs now for two years, and I still have yet to really understand what the government's plan is with targets and objectives to get us to net zero by 2050. There is no doubt that hydrogen and hydrogen blending could be a part of that plan, but I don't see targets or timelines associated with legislation like this to make sure that we get there.

Costs of green hydrogen can be six to 14 times more expensive than natural gas, so we need to make sure that the cost borne by the user by hydrogen blending is not that much more because then nobody will do it. Then all of this is kind of moot, right? There is potential for hydrogen to provide 24 per cent of global energy demand, and it is worth exploring and supporting, but I really think we need to be thoughtful here. I think that the best way to do it is by expanding our renewable energy development sector, and that means putting solar panels on existing infrastructure and thinking carefully about where we put windmills. I mean, we never even got to talk about bats during that whole thing, but I think about bats and windmills all the time also. I really think we also need to think truly about incentivizing green energy and not penalizing people who want to make that choice.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my comments, and we can move on. But thank you for the bonus minutes.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 52, and it's always indeed a gift to listen to the Member for Banff-Kananaskis talk about matters with respect to the environment and green energy and greenhouse gas emission reductions because we learn something new from that member every day that she speaks in this Legislature. I wanted to expound upon some of the comments that member made, particularly with respect to the blending of hydrogen with natural gas.

If you look at the literature, Mr. Speaker, we know that there are ongoing discussions and debates about exactly what the longer term effects of the blending of hydrogen and burning of hydrogen with natural gas are, not necessarily with respect to the residential application or its use in heating but its effects on the infrastructure that carries it. There are numerous studies, as have been mentioned by the minister and by the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, that brought to light the various different technical challenges with respect to transmitting blended hydrogen, I think it's called, natural gas blended with hydrogen.

Some of them are reflected in the information that you find in a document that is produced by the Department of Energy in the United States. The executive summary of it talks about various difficulties beyond certain pressures and densities of the polyethylene pipes that carry the blended natural gas and hydrogen fuel, and the analysis is

still very much an ongoing process. So in order, Mr. Speaker, for our Alberta public to have confidence in the whole process, we need to really take a look at the studies that are ongoing. They're incomplete. The evidence, the literature shows that it's very much a work in progress, and I think that the population needs to be reminded that this is not a fait accompli.

The situation that was taking place by ATCO, the 2,100 homes in Fort Saskatchewan which were part of the study to show how the natural gas was consumed and what its effects were on appliances and so forth, showed that it's not a great deal of effect, according to them now, so far. But the jury is still out, Mr. Speaker, on what the long-term effects of transmitting this new fuel in polyethylene pipelines will be.

Now, you may remember, Mr. Speaker, that in about 1978 there was a wonderful new development in water lines in residential and commercial construction, some of which is maybe evident in the QE II Building, which springs leaks all the time. But now what we happen to have seen, since 1978 to I think it was 1999, is that poly B, or polybutylene, was used quite excitedly in the plumbing systems of residential homes in this province. I as a realtor saw that and recognized that it was a problem pretty early because they were springing leaks. The polybutylene was of course susceptible to chlorine contamination. It became brittle, especially at the joints. What was then heralded as a very much cheaper way of putting plumbing into a home soon became a very, very detrimental thing to have in your home, and it was costing \$15,000 to \$50,000 to retrofit it to get it out.

What I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that I don't want to see the same thing happen here with our existing transmission lines. The competitive advantage to using hydrogen blended with natural gas that many people see is that we can use our existing transmission line capacity to transmit it. There is still an unknown risk to that that has not been correctly and empirically tabulated over time. There is solid evidence that there are concerns about the percentage of gas that has to be transmitted and how much hydrogen, what percentage of hydrogen you can blend with the natural gas. Up to 20 per cent seems to be the maximum percentage volume that people are wanting to recommend.

Indeed, there are no longer term studies, Mr. Speaker, that are showing how a natural gas pipeline made with polyethylene is going to stand up over time. What I fear is that we could have a second phase of the abandoned well moment in Alberta if indeed we proceed en masse, in whole adoption with the transmission of hydrogen blended with natural gas throughout Alberta's transmission system and that we could end up perhaps damaging our pipeline infrastructure in the headlong race to adopt this new blended fuel in an effort to reduce our carbon emissions, our greenhouse gas emissions. Trying to solve one problem and creating something else that is an even potentially larger difficulty and more expensive difficulty to fix isn't necessarily the way we want to go.

I really, really hope that the minister and the government are taking full advantage of all the literature that's out there to make sure that we do have forward thinking in advance and are looking at our pipeline infrastructure with the care and concern that it deserves so that the province of Alberta and the population in it who are being asked to take up this new fuel can have confidence in it in the long term, not just because it burns clean in their appliances but also because it's not damaging our infrastructure, which is billions and billions of dollars' worth of infrastructure. The science is still not complete. We need to do that before we go ahead and try to downplay the risk of adopting this new blended fuel of hydrogen with natural gas.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hope that we hear something more from the minister on this topic. I will ask my colleague from Lethbridge-West to continue with his remarks.

The Speaker: I think I get to determine who speaks next, not you. But in light of no other person rising, I guess we'll go to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise now to speak to Bill 52. I'm going to quote a little bit from a letter from a resident of Lethbridge I tabled this afternoon in the House from a column that the minister put in the *Lethbridge Herald* on April 15.

9:20

In that column:

[The minister] tries to blame a decade-old NDP government for rising transmission costs on [our power bills]. If this sounds [a little] absurd, let me assure you: it is.

[The minister] claims that the need for new transmission lines was caused by the NDP's "coal phase-out and renewable projects." In truth, the coal plants were mostly (other than the oldest units that were slated for retirement anyway) converted to more efficient natural gas power plants, using the same existing lines. And the NDP's renewable energy program required all successful power projects to connect to existing transmission capacity on the grid, so none of those caused a single new line to be built.

The truth about the UCP's record on electricity diverges wildly from [the minister's] talking points.

[The minister] and the UCP have been in power for six years now, during which they have allowed dozens of new power plants to build anywhere in Alberta on the promise that the power lines will be built for them on the ratepayers' dime. Now they're pulling the rug out from those investors by refusing to build those promised lines – with the result that power consumers [will] be on the hook to pay for the lost market access that those good-faith investors will endure.

If you think this government can just ignore the claims of those investors who have put billions of dollars into new energy operations in Alberta, I've got news for you. [The minister's] main excuse for allowing Northback to build the Grassy Mountain mine (threatening our drinking water and farms) is that the UCP had told them to come build their mine. So, according to [the minister], Northback could now sue the government if they refused to give Northback the right to take down one of our mountains.

No, the UCP is clearly not acting in our interest, neither on coal ... nor electricity ... Case in point: if you're stuck on the UCP's new "rate of last resort" power option, you're now paying more than double what you would be if the UCP had left the previous [regulated rate option] alone.

Let's explore that just a little bit. For years the regulated rate option, or the RRO, was actually cheaper than rate plans. When I was on city council, for the longest time the regulated rate option that the city of Lethbridge was charging was actually lower than many of the rate plans. But when the market started getting more volatile, especially in the early '20s – not a coincidence with the change of government – these fluctuations caused massive changes in the rates that people were paying and made it way more affordable.

What's troubling to me about Bill 52 is it leaves out details like rate calculations in any condition to be determined by regulation, and currently the ROLR is almost 30 per cent higher than fixed-rate plans in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, what's problematic about this for me and should be for the minister, whose portfolio also includes affordability, is that the people most affected by the ROLR are new

Albertans and first-time ratepayers, those who do not qualify for rate plans, and those that have lower incomes.

Mr. Speaker, in a further burden on lower income Albertans, they will pay a surcharge on the ROLR to pay for the Utilities Consumer Advocate. The UCA is proposed to provide the following things such as consumer advocacy, information and education, dispute resolution, participation in regulatory processes, research, and policy development. You know what? I think these are great things. I think these are things that consumers – if they can get the assistance from a government department to help them navigate through these different systems, I think that's a great thing. What I don't like about it is that the people that can least afford to pay for it are the ones that are paying for it through a surcharge.

The UCA is intended to help those people that are footing the bill for the service. This makes things less affordable for many Albertans when affordability is a major concern. Mr. Speaker, in the last couple of years affordability for people across Canada, as we all know, is a major problem for many Canadians, not just Alberta. When the government has the ability to make things more affordable through something like electricity regulation, which everybody in Alberta has to pay for one way or another, I think it's continued upon this government to make those things more affordable in any way they can, right? I think part of it can be through changes to this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make a couple of comments about hydrogen and things I've read. You know, there is something on the horizon with green hydrogen. If we can find a way to bring it out of the rocks and to store it, we have the ability to have hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of hydrogen produced in Alberta without having to use our natural gas to do it.

Oh. Go ahead, yeah.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for allowing me to get up and just correct a few items of misinformation that were presented in the quote about the lines. The reason why transmission costs went up with renewables is a thing called congestion, too many electrons on the line, and we had a rule in transmission policy that there is zero congestion. Every time it was congested, you had to replace that line. That is why it's fact that over the last decade and a half transmission costs have gone up over 500 per cent, predominantly because of renewables growth from multiple new sites.

That's why we had to do that, and the volatility caused by renewables intermittency is why we had to go to a stabilized rate of last resort, which is now fixed for two years. It was a floating rate before that, which is why we saw prices spike from month to month. The trade-off was that it was never meant to be the lowest price. There are plenty of other programs that government funds to help those on low income to find better, more affordable rates for themselves.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you for that, Minister. I appreciate that.

Mr. Getson: Thanks for taking the intervention, too. That was awesome. That's how it's supposed to work. Gold stars all around for everybody.

Member Miyashiro: Thanks for that. Very good.

Let's get back to hydrogen for a second. The fact that we want to look at using hydrogen I think is a great idea, and I'm not going to discount that. I'm just worried that the hybrid model that this

government is choosing to pilot is one that – a Canadian company I think is piloting it also in Australia. I believe that's the same company that we're using to pilot in Alberta. Again, this is one of the things that I think this government is really good at, doing sole source with their friends. Not to say that this isn't a good technology. I think that there needs to be a little bit more transparency in how the technology is going to be developed with the most broad array of players.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left?

The Speaker: You have eight minutes remaining unless you take another intervention, in which you will get time added.

Member Miyashiro: In which it'll get reset.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think I have eight minutes left. I have a few minutes more left because of the fact that my colleagues have clearly articulated, I think, what our position is on this bill and the things that I think are a problem. I do appreciate the fact that the minister is making an effort to make things a little bit more efficient and work a little bit better for the province. However, I think there are different ways that we can go about it in order to make it work better for Albertans.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I just want to reiterate the fact that there are ways that this minister and this government can make things more affordable for Albertans. That's my major concern and I think our party's as well with this bill without the other regulatory issues that we've seen.

On that, Mr. Speaker, I don't have six more minutes to speak, so I think I'm going to have to move to adjourn debate for now.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has moved to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

9:30

Bill 40 Professional Governance Act

[Debate adjourned March 26: Mr. Dyck speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate on second reading of Bill 40?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a second time]

Bill 45 Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate April 8: Mr. Williams]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is second reading of Bill 45. Are there others wishing to join in the debate?

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a few brief comments about Bill 45, Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025. It's here. It's very brief, obviously. It amends a previous bill and things that were supposed to be in regulations that are now talked about in this bill.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that I would . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hon. members, if you'd like to have private conversations, I encourage you to do so in your respective lounges, the peace lounge. There are a number of places enabled to do. . . [interjections] Order. You're being unhelpful.

Mr. Nicolaides: I'm sorry. I'll try better.

The Speaker: The Speaker is displeased.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is the only one with the call.

Member Ceci: Thank you.

Just looking back at this bill and speaking to it briefly, it seems like – and I don't think this is a thought that hasn't been conveyed in this House previously about this bill – it is performative. It seems like a performative political bill without delivering any meaningful solutions to the challenges the energy sector is facing at this time, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder, too, when you read words in it – and I highlighted them, just have to find my glasses because the highlighter was quite dark. "This act binds the government of Canada." You know, I don't think that's accurate. I don't think the government of Canada can be bound by a bill that's here and won't be bound by a bill that's in this Legislature because they supersede the Legislature in regard to issues that are in their purview.

I also wonder, when you read words like that, what investors across the world think about a jurisdiction that acts counter to the rule of law, Mr. Speaker. I think the legislation ignores the rule of law and creates uncertainty from investors who would otherwise look at us and want to potentially see the opportunities here, but when they see things like this in this Legislature, which I don't agree with and oppose wholeheartedly, I wonder if that in fact repels investment, drives it away.

Just going down, Mr. Speaker, and looking again in the bill. What are the real priorities Albertans have? Is it this bill? Is it the fact that it does nothing to secure our economic future? Or are Albertans really concerned about what this government is up to and whether it is acting in the best interests of all of its citizens, particularly when you look at our health care, which has been blown up by this government and is barely recognizable, when you look at our lack of affordable and appropriate housing for the legions of Albertans who need appropriate and affordable housing and don't have it and are feeling like their opportunity to get it is evaporating as days go on in this province under this government. If you look at the elementary school teaching of our children and look at and listen to the people who are talking before me about the huge challenges of the lack of funding per student, of the crowded classrooms, of the lack of assistance in the classrooms for children who need that support, again, I wonder what the purpose is that this government is undertaking with this bill.

If we go on, it talks about designating all lands within two kilometres of the Alberta-U.S. border for essential infrastructure. You know, I think I can get there in terms of appreciating why that's important. I do know that there was an act in place – let me just see if I can find it here – the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, in 2020, which initially was established under the previous UCP government and previous Premier, who was on TV tonight, I guess, feeling quite sad that his team wasn't winning. That 2020 act that was brought in was brought in to target environmental protesters.

You know, we had so-called freedom convoy protesters in the Coutts town that were there, if I recall – was it 19 days? – for 19 days, and this government did nothing about those protesters. There was a Critical Infrastructure Defence Act in place at that time. So it gives more credence to my initial statement, our statement that this bill is performative. I don't see the government using this bill to address people like the freedom convoy people that were in Coutts and made a laughingstock of this province, similar to Ottawa, where the convoy cousins were in that city.

Just going on to other parts of this bill that I want to address for a few minutes before I sit down. Thinking about, you know, how much wasted government money will be spent defending this bill potentially against the federal government. This legislation I think is not going to be used to address people that perhaps the UCP government supports, that are breaking the law, like we saw in Coutts for 19 days. I just wonder if this government is more interested in a performative kind of politics that doesn't address the needs of this province than they are wanting to address the failures in the health care system, the education system, the affordability challenges that Albertans are experiencing every day.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of my thoughts and considerations about Bill 45, which I believe should be opposed by people in this Legislature, and I won't support it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise tonight and speak to Bill 45, the critical infrastructure defence amendment bill. I'm opposed to this bill, and I'm a little more fired up about it than I was about the previous bill. Hopefully I can take us to the end of the night with a little bit of energy and vigour and maybe even generate some groans of consternation from the other side of the aisle. [interjections] Oh, there it is. Start there.

This bill is split into two parts. The first part is labelling all land within two kilometres of the Alberta-U.S. border as critical infrastructure and essential infrastructure, and then also classifying oil and gas facilities as essential infrastructure. I do agree with my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo that overall this bill is another expensive, performative political stunt. I'm really actually concerned about fundamentally unconstitutional overreach that does nothing to help the people of Alberta but does create legal uncertainty and wastes taxpayer resources.

9:40

I'll talk first about this bit about land within two kilometres of the border. This matches the two-kilometre border zone that the government designated in January, and I agree that we need to protect our border, Mr. Speaker. I feel like we can all agree that protecting our border is important. However, I would argue that this bill appears to be designed to appease the President of the United States, Trump, rather than address the needs of Albertans. I'm curious as to why now. Like, why now are we proposing that anything two kilometres within the border is critical infrastructure?

Part of this bill also includes the interdiction patrol team, which falls under the Alberta sheriffs, and they have power to make arrests without warrants in the red zone, which is that two-kilometre buffer. Any time we start talking about making arrests without warrants, I get a little bit concerned, Mr. Speaker, about the potential impacts to freedom. I know everybody in this room is concerned about freedom and maintaining it and maintaining democracy, and an essential part of that is due process, and warrants are an essential part of due process.

There are currently 20 members of the Alberta sheriffs that have been assigned to this interdiction patrol team. There will be a total of 51 officers assigned to that. In March there were three arrests at the border, four northbound unauthorized border crossings. Seems like an awful lot of capacity for three arrests and four unauthorized border crossings. It's a really expensive effort with minimal results, and that is concerning to me at a time when Albertans are rightly asking questions about government spending and we have a \$5 billion deficit and we have hundreds of millions of dollars in health care that are unaccounted for, bloated surgical contracts, rah-rah-

rah. I really don't feel like this government can be trusted to spend our money, Mr. Speaker, and now we're talking about a significant capacity of sheriffs. We have rural crime issues, we're arguing and debating a provincial police force in this House right now, and yet, somehow, there are going to be 51 officers to patrol two kilometres of the border for three arrests and four northbound unauthorized crossings. Are you serious? I feel like it's just a colossal waste of money, and it's a colossal waste of money that we don't seem to have.

The Havre border patrol, which covers most of the Canada-Montana border, sees just over 1.4 kilograms of fentanyl in 2024; 99.87 per cent of the fentanyl recovered in the U.S. was from Mexico, and only 0.13 per cent is attributed to Canada. I think we need to ask ourselves why this increased border effort is happening right now because if it's to appease Trump, it's a waste of money. It's never been about fentanyl for him. It's always been about power and bullying.

The Critical Infrastructure Defence Act is also near and dear to my heart of opposition because it was originally targeting environmental protesters by making it illegal to protest on or near essential infrastructure like pipelines, railways, and highways. Then this bill would make it illegal to protest within two kilometres of the border, would it not? So, like, the Coutts blockade, which was definitely within two kilometres of the border, would be illegal and should have been deemed illegal and this bill could have prevented that blockade from happening for so long. Apparently when it's a bunch of First Nations people standing in front of a pipeline on their traditional lands that's unacceptable, but when it's a bunch of truckers at Coutts blocking the international border, we can um and ah and think about it and consider for way too long. That is also critical infrastructure. We need to be fair, Mr. Speaker. There needs to be consistency. You can't tell some people that they can protest and other people that they can't. That is totally inappropriate.

Justice Paul Rouleau ruled that the federal government had met the threshold to invoke the Emergencies Act with the Coutts blockade. It was a highly disruptive protest with some actors who allegedly intended to affect serious violence for a political purpose. Conversely, many of the people who are protesting pipelines, et cetera, are not actually ensuing violence. They're just defending their traditional territories. I think we need to be very careful, Mr. Speaker, about how we consider protesters and protesting in this House. It is a democratic right. It is part of living in a democracy that you are allowed to stand up and oppose what the government is doing. We can't say it's okay for some people to do that and not okay for other people to do that.

A couple of weeks ago in this House a member opposite accused people opposing coal development of being eco terrorists. That kind of language is deeply offensive, wholly inappropriate, and is just another example of how the members opposite cherry-pick what it means to protest and who is allowed to protest and who isn't. Holding a weekly protest outside of an MLA's office is inconvenient. It is not an act of eco terrorism. Labelling people with that word is disgusting. I will not stand for it in this House, Mr. Speaker.

Stating that oil and gas infrastructure is essential: I agree. Oil and gas infrastructure is essential. There is no doubt that it drives the Albertan economy. That being said, it is not perfect. That being said, there are many reasons and many times, Mr. Speaker, where oil and gas infrastructure has threatened communities and has had grave environmental impacts on communities. We as the people have a right to point out and oppose those developments and ask that rigorous environmental standards be upheld and enforced.

Imperial Oil leaking pollutants with the Kearl sands spill for months and months and months on end before any action is taken is not acceptable behaviour. Higher rare cancer rates downstream from Athabasca tailings ponds oil and gas developments: that is unacceptable. It is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, that we sit by while our water is being polluted and people are dying of rare forms of cancer, and we're not allowing those communities to protest because it's critical infrastructure. Come on. Come on.

There are basic principles around public safety that need to apply, obviously, but limiting protest can start to feel like limiting free speech, rights to assembly, and the fundamentals of democracy that allow us to disagree with the government and to show that. I am standing in this House today, Mr. Speaker, in large part because of the protester that I have been in my past. I have always stood up to this government and asked for better. I've never damaged property, I've never vandalized anything, and I've never hurt anybody. But I can guarantee you that I have always appreciated my ability and my freedom to oppose government decisions. It's not okay that we are trying to say that it's acceptable for one group of people to do that and not another.

The Critical Infrastructure Defence Act has been controversial since it was introduced. It's been interpreted by some as an affront to democratic rights, authoritarian overreach, and a threat to Indigenous people's way of life. It stops people from entering, blocking, or damaging without reason essential infrastructure. Bill 45 expands that definition of essential infrastructure.

I want to take a minute to recognize the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs who opposed the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline through northern B.C., whose continued efforts really are the impetus of all of this work. There's an incredible documentary streaming on Netflix called *Yintah*, if you're not familiar with the story of the Wet'suwet'en people, Mr. Speaker. This effort triggered national solidarity.

Conversely, the members opposite call protesters eco terrorists and spoiled kids. It's awful, Mr. Speaker. There's nothing wrong with protesting the government.

Mr. Getson: Really?

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah, really. You think that people don't have a democratic right to oppose government decision-making? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Dr. Elmeligi: Moving on beyond the protest stuff, Mr. Speaker. I want to just zoom in a little bit on the emissions data component of this bill. This bill classifies places where production and specified gas emissions records for the facility are retained. These are also considered essential infrastructure, but I'm curious as to why a building that holds records is considered essential infrastructure. Well, dig a little deeper and it seems like it's actually to prevent the federal government from enforcing their proposed emissions cap by making it illegal for federal officials to access emissions data from Alberta oil and gas producers.

9:50

We're not only not wanting to share the information. Apparently we have nothing to hide, but we don't want to share the information. Actually, we're going to make it illegal for the feds to come on and get the reports. Seriously, if it's so great, we shouldn't have a problem with sharing that information.

The Premier has said that Alberta is aiming for net zero by 2050, but we have no plan for a climate action plan. There's no policy to achieve this, and to do it we're not even willing to share the

emissions data that isn't even owned by the Alberta government, Mr. Speaker. It's owned by the oil and gas companies, and they should be able to share it with whoever they want.

We have to reduce emissions. I cannot overstate this. Climate change is real. Oh, my gosh. One more time: climate change is real. We need to reduce emissions. [interjection] This isn't a joke. I'm glad you think it's so funny.

This government would rather throw a tantrum and play opposition to the federal government than put forward any kind of action plan or policies to actually achieve net zero. While we're dancing around, talking about it, we're not actually doing anything, and emissions are just increasing globally. It's disgusting to me, Mr. Speaker. Seriously, why are we stopping ourselves from reducing emissions? Why would we actually put into legislation that the federal government can't access the data and the records to see how we're reducing emissions? If we're reducing emissions, we should be free to share that information.

For decades we as the global community have blown off emissions targets. We can and we should do better. The new legislation is less stringent than the 42 per cent proposed reduction in 2022. While I don't necessarily love the emissions cap proposed by the federal government, Mr. Speaker, I definitely think there are

better ways to go about this than making it illegal for the federal government to look at the data and the records of how we reduce emissions.

I will not support this bill. This bill is nonsense. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Getson: Unless we're voting.

The Speaker: That all depends on if there are others.

Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the hon. members for their pivotal vote on Bill 45.

Mr. Speaker, I now make a motion to move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 29, 2025.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:53 p.m.]

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