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The 31st Legislature
First Session

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Day 104

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 30, 2025

[Mr. Rowswell in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rowswell in the chair]

The Acting Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 41 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and a pleasure to see you in the chair there smiling proudly. This evening we look forward to having very few points of order that you'll have to deal with and an intelligent debate about wildlife and harvesting thereof in the province that enables us to let Albertans know that we care about our wildlife and we care about those who either make a living or get their food from our wildlands.

I can't say that I've had a lengthy experience in hunting or fishing or otherwise harvesting wildlife in the province, but I'm not without some background. I certainly remember the day I was able to shoot a rabbit with a .22, and I took it to my uncle Bill, who was 81 years old at the time, and he was delighted that he got a chance to dress out and skin another rabbit. I was determined not to waste that meat. That old jackrabbit made a really tough but tasty stew, and we didn't waste the meat. But I tell you what, it did take me three shots to get that rabbit sighted in the gun while it sat there waiting for me.

On a more serious note, Mr. Chair, what we find with Bill 41 here is troubling in many ways. Recognizing that the legislation hasn't been updated in quite some time and there always is a need to make sure things are current no matter what topic we're talking about, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025, introduces a lot of so-called updates which are, in my view, in conflict with the principles of sort of fair hunting and the background and underlying foundational reasons as to why we harvest and what the regulations are around harvesting of wildlife in the province.

I'm concerned, first and foremost, about one of the large items that it really doesn't speak to a lot. Given that country food forms the diet of a large percentage of the Indigenous population in Alberta, it concerns me that this legislation barely mentions the Indigenous population with respect to their hunting rights on Alberta wildlands and within parks and so forth. It's largely silent in that area. Certainly, I'm concerned about that, and I'd love to hear some explanation from the government members as to why indeed that area of the hunting regulations and the conservation measures and the updating that this bill is supposed to be doing were left undealt with. I'm sure that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-West Henday will probably have something to say on Bill 41 as it lacks any real reference to the hunting privileges of First Nations people in the province, so I'll leave that part to that member to express his thoughts in detail on.

What I wanted to talk about, Mr. Chair, with respect to Bill 41 were a number of items that I think Albertans are rightfully

confused about and unhappy with; for example, the designation of conflict grizzly bears, quote, unquote, which undermines decades of conservation work for this threatened species which defines our Alberta wildlands. We think of grizzly bears, and we know that we think of ourselves as the Canadian stewards of the wilderness areas that we have, and grizzly bears are a symbol, emblematic of that wild territory that we are responsible for, yet here we are in 2025 with a minister who's supposedly responsible for Forestry and Parks, meaning being a proper steward of them, yet it appears with respect to grizzly bears he's putting a target on their backs – no pun intended – which is unnecessarily risky for them. It's undeserved.

There's no real definition of what, in fact, this conflict bear might be. I mean, it basically authorizes an open season on grizzly bears. How indeed is one going to determine if somebody was hunting for sport or actually they were destroying a, quote, unquote, conflict grizzly bear? There are already measures in place, Mr. Chair, to take steps to provide for the safety of people who are in contact with grizzly bears which might provide a danger or risk to their family and/or domesticated animals on their properties.

There's a problem seeking a solution here or a solution seeking a problem, I should say – the other way around – that the minister has yet to explain. Certainly, when a bear, a grizzly bear, in fact, gets into a property, kills animals, or perhaps scares the daylights out of human beings, that is cause for concern, but wildlife management has been able to go in and manage these bears, either trapping, live trapping, or in some cases destroying an animal that is causing potential human conflict, without decimating the population of these bears and also by way of actually determining there has been a conflict, making sure the right bear was exterminated or removed to a place far away from human contact.

That's one of the distressing parts of this piece of legislation, Mr. Chair, that I think Albertans are very live to and are concerned about. I mean, I've actually been chased by a bear once in my life – it wasn't a grizzly; it was a black bear – at Skeleton Lake Scout Camp not too far away from here, just up at Skeleton Lake. A bunch of Cubs and Scouts were jumping up on the canoe house. We actually beat the tractor and a trailer to that place, and the mother, a sow, was protecting its cub, and it really was just chasing us away. If it wanted us, it could have had any one of us, but we got on the canoe house, and the bear made sure we were staying there and took off with its cub, and that was the end of that. I can't imagine being chased by a grizzly with real intent.

If indeed that type of conflict happens, Mr. Chair, certainly fish and wildlife are involved in exterminating the bear or trapping it and getting it to safer places, but what's happening right now is really prone to abuse by individuals who might use the term "conflict bears" to describe a sport hunting situation which gives them access to a pelt and perhaps winter food.

The Wildlife Amendment Act changes multiple things and definitions of tagging requirements, hunting regulations, enforcement mechanisms. It includes the need for an Alberta resident to be here for six months in residence before obtaining permits to hunt. Interestingly enough, it allows minors with federal firearms licences to hunt without adult supervision. It doesn't go into detail although you need an FAC to go ahead and hunt under this new proposed regulation under Bill 41 amendments. You know, you can have somebody as young as 12 years old going out without adult supervision.

7:40

I'm not saying that this is inherently unsafe. I mean, I was 11 or 12 years old when I was going out on Sunday afternoon to shoot gophers myself with a .22, and we were safe. We knew, because we

had been trained by older adults before, that you didn't shoot towards town. You shot into the hill, and you made darn sure what you're shooting at before you pull the trigger.

But, indeed, when you start having a different generation of people who didn't grow up with the culture of having, you know, their dad or grandfather having a .303 Enfield in the back window of the truck and there's unfamiliarity with weaponry and you didn't have every boy or girl in the family taking a gun course at a local range as a Boy Scout or a Girl Guide, that lack of sort of growing up with knowledge of guns and their safety requirements therewith is something that we should take into account right now when we're suggesting that people as young as 12 should be able to go hunting without adult supervision.

Even though they've had the federal firearms licence, there seems to me to be a lack of oversight there that I have concerns with. I think that perhaps there should be another measure allowing for some actual testing of the skills and safety knowledge of the individuals at a young age like that going out to hunt on their own. I'd really like that to be considered. I don't think it's too much to ask that an individual who claims to have a 12-year-old in their family who is a hundred per cent safe with weapons to go hunting on his or her own pass a rudimentary test.

It might even be a field test, more than just a multiple-guess questionnaire online but an actual test with somebody who's perhaps been a hunter all their life and understands, maybe one of the trainers under the federal firearms licensing certification process. I think that measure, that extra step needs to be put in place not to satisfy the urban population who never goes hunting, Mr. Chair, but to actually make sure things are safe. Not every 12-year-old who perhaps has been raised in the country on an acreage or a farm or even a reservation or a Métis settlement – not everyone has had the same level of experience with going out with weapons.

If you've only been out once or twice or maybe this is your first time you've got your certificate, you don't necessarily have the understanding as to what you need to do before you actually pull the trigger when something is in your sights. That's, I think, a clear message that I'd like to have everybody consider when they're looking at this piece of legislation because it's a critical mistake that we don't want 12-year-olds to make in the field, and it could be avoided in large measure by having an actual field test with somebody who can perhaps pick up and understand that certain 12-year-olds, this individual that is under their supervision going through this test, might really not have the capacity to make those decisions, those snap decisions that you have to make when you are in the field actually hunting.

There are a number of other things, Mr. Chair, that I wanted to bring up regarding sort of the exemptions and some of the changes that are of concern to more than the Alberta population who has never hunted before, never intends to hunt but also should be of concern to the hunting community, the rural community, those who depend upon country food or like to have country food as part of their diet on a regular basis, whether you live in a city or in rural areas.

They talk about proposing in this bill to allow hunters to take either the meat or the hide from bears and cougars, and I don't understand why this option is being granted, Mr. Chair. If you are harvesting an animal, you should be making sure you use every part of it. It's something that – you know, in times past, before Europeans got here, First Nations people, Indigenous people, believe me, didn't waste anything. It wasn't, like, the hide or the meat that they were using. They were using everything from that animal to make sure it provided for their needs, and they were

rightly thankful for every part of it and actually thanked Creator for the blessing of that animal's life to provide for them.

I'm concerned that, first of all, I don't know what you've got to hunt a cougar for, for sport, I guess, but once you do, if we're allowing that – and I know we allowed it in the past, trapping and so forth – that privilege goes along with obligations and part of the obligation is to make sure every part of that animal is used in a meaningful way. If you don't want the meat, then there should be a way to find somebody else who does. That is something I would like to see changed. I'm not comfortable with that either/or concept.

I mean, my uncle Mike was a taxidermist. He was a very good one. He was a carpenter as well, but on a shelf in his workshop he had a lynx. He had wolverine. He had porcupine. He was a taxidermist who was sought after for miles around the little community of Thorhild. We would walk into his workshop in awe as kids and see real gems of taxidermy work. I was used to seeing this in my childhood and my young life and my family, and my uncle Mike would have been really ticked to know that somebody just decided they wanted to shoot a cougar or a bear and left the meat or the hide in the bush. It's not something that he would have been happy with in any way, shape, or form.

I am happy with the permission to allow those in wheelchairs to participate in the sport of hunting. I think there needs to be a little bit more care given to defining the regulations around making sort of wheelchairs permissible vehicles to use as a platform for hunting from because there are obviously numerous styles and types of wheelchairs, some of which now are pretty capable of going over rough terrain.

I think indeed that we want to make sure that if we're going to grant the right and privilege to people who are using wheelchairs to hunt from that wheelchair, we're going to make sure we include everybody and don't by default or mistake exclude somebody who has a pretty significant wheelchair with rubber wheels and so forth that might be roadworthy from actually using that chair in the hunt. I want to make sure that detailed regulation is actually clear.

I've got a lot of other things to say about this act, Mr. Chair, and I'll save it for next time. I think I may have another opportunity. I'll sit down now and listen to some other arguments.

The Acting Chair: Are there others that would like to speak to the bill? The Member for Sherwood Park, go ahead.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Happy to get up and talk about Bill 41. It's kind of full of UCP logic, you know, that kind of logic that says that I'm going to give \$50 million to someone to hold on to for two and a half years even though we probably could have made 2 and a half million dollars in a money market account with that and probably provided it to people with disabilities, but UCP logic.

UCP logic, I think, probably comes with the idea: why would you consult? You know, on my own farm we don't wear high-vis equipment when we go out with our .22s to shoot gophers. That's a dumb law, so let's just get rid of that. That's UCP logic. It's applied all throughout this bill.

It gets applied by this ministry. When they looked at the number of fishers in the province – the lynx, the river otters, the wolverines – they said: we don't know how many there are, so we should probably just take the limit off trapping because then we'll find out how many there are. Yeah; we'll count how many we catch each year, then we'll know how many there were. That's great UCP logic. Each year we'll find out. Maybe there will be some trends: 2025; how many wolverines did we catch? Sixty-seven. Last year it was 85. Looks like it's going down. Interesting. There's a trend here. We better keep up with this research. That's good UCP

approach to policy-making. How do you count a population? You kill it.

7:50

When they were opening up the book of Genesis, Mr. Speaker, it said, “Human beings will have power over fish, the birds, and all animals,” and they said, “That sounds great.” I don’t think they read the rest of it, but that was really good, and they said, “Let’s stop right there,” because it gives them the opportunity when you’re managing wildlife to make laws and decisions that feel good. Maybe when you’re talking to your friends, it goes: that sounds right. Then we get bills like Bill 41.

Now, I do appreciate some of the debate that has been brought forward, Mr. Speaker. I think, when we are talking about how we’re going to build a better Alberta, knowing that there’s hunter education in schools is a big part of that. Knowing that there are youth growing up with knowledge of how to use guns is a big part of it. It’s not brought into this bill. This is opening up opportunities to sort of just acknowledge that there’s a way of life in the rural part of Alberta that has been going on for a while, and let’s just make sure that it’s in line with our laws. Happy to see that we’re bringing forward some modernization of hunting regulations in our province.

It is interesting when I heard the member talking about his experience. You know, my experience with guns, Mr. Speaker, was different. I do know where my dad kept his gun, and it was, you know, something out of reach, and it was kept safe, and the ammunition was kept apart from the gun for good reason. It’s a dangerous piece of equipment that we’ve created in our world, and so knowing that we have safety precautions around it: very important.

It’s actually funny, Mr. Speaker. When, as kids, we were playing war, that game everybody would play, and you’d shoot, I wasn’t allowed to point my pretend gun at people. Yeah, and if my mom caught me doing that, I caught heck, and so it would be: bang, bang, and then we get into a lot of arguments about whether I got you or not.

Mr. Schmidt: Like a storm trooper.

Mr. Kasawski: Like a storm trooper in *Star Wars*. They must have been raised by the same mom.

Having that safety around gun use is very important, Mr. Speaker, and so knowing that we have those kinds of regulations in place I think is also important. Hunting, shooting a gun is something we’ve done. It’s a common experience in Alberta. We’ve all been able to tell our stories about shooting .22s. It’s still something that happens in Strathcona county, and it’s entertainment. It’s a good time; it’s also practice, I’m sure, for people that are more serious about it.

We’re dealing with a group of Albertans – it’s not a large number – I think that have a way of life that’s important to make sure we acknowledge and we help preserve.

You know, I called some hunters when I was making sure that this was good. My friends Mike and Jason always go with their dad, Roger, and they set up the goose blind, and sometimes they just sit, sit, and sit, and sit, but it’s a good experience for family to get together. Now young Seth is coming along, and he is sharing that experience with them. I asked if Avey and Sophie were interested, and Jason explained that they’re not as interested in it. They’ve all learned to shoot, which is important, but not at all interested in sitting with their uncle and grandpa and brother in the blind waiting for a goose to come by.

There is an interesting thing that’s come up in this province that did not make its way into the Legislature this sitting. I guess we’re

just avoiding it, but I know in our past we had an experience with some parts of agriculture wanting to bring hunting onto farms with these shooting farms or these hunting farms. I’m glad we don’t have it here. I know that when we had it with pigs, we now have a big problem with feral pigs, and there’s a risk of disease. If you were to have this idea that we’re going to raise and fatten elk and then put them out in pastures so that somebody can come by and shoot the animal, I’m not sure it’s something that we would support, and it’s something that could have been brought up for debate. It’s probably worthwhile exploring.

Otherwise, we’re going to have continually, probably every year, someone coming to the government saying: can we use our farmland for this purpose? It’s something that we probably need to be looking at in this House, whether it comes through this ministry or the ministry of agriculture. It’s an important thing. I think that what we’ve heard in debate here is that there’s not a lot of support for this idea of disconnecting from the hunt, with this idea that you just go out and shoot animals like it’s a video game. There should be a processing afterwards. There should be an acknowledgement that you’ve taken a life, and you should have good practice and good care in doing that.

Mr. Speaker, I know that we’re going to be getting further into debate on this, and I just want to make sure that I’ve covered all the pieces here. Yeah. I do know that we have this situation with guns, which we need to just make sure we have further acknowledgement of. There is a fear in society, and there is a need to maybe look at how we can make sure that we have better education, better safety.

There’s also a lot of misunderstanding out in that group of Albertans. There are certain people that think that we’re trying to take their way of life away, their cultural practice, and that’s not what we’re trying to do in this Legislature. It’s important, I think, to be bringing this up in legislation, to know that people have the ability, the responsibility, that they can have their hunting, their guns, and that it is done in a safe way.

I’m not sure if I have much more to say about this, although I’ve been probably meandering on for probably minutes. [interjections] Mr. Chair, I will try to make sure that *Hansard* caught all of my laughs with a ha, ha, ha. We will move on to another member that might want to address this bill.

The Acting Chair: Are there other speakers that want to address the bill?

Member Ceci: Thank you to the member who spoke before me in speaking to Bill 41, the Wildlife ...

The Acting Chair: Excuse me. Sorry. I didn’t recognize you.

Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Perfect. The Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025. I’m here to address it briefly before the members of the Legislature as well. You know, the questions that I want to come up with, want to ask – some of my colleagues have already talked about these things if you haven’t heard it before, the feeling that there’s got to be scientific evidence behind the amendments that are being made to the Wildlife Amendment Act. What’s the wildlife population data? Did that inform Bill 41, particularly regarding vulnerable species? I say “vulnerable species” because though there’s an update to regulations here, I think what the bill fails to do is to address some of the most damaging UCP wildlife management decisions of late that have been brought in. Some of those are quite familiar to me because of the controversy that they created, things like the 18-year moratorium on grizzly bear hunting that was reversed by this minister. It was controversial. I believe wrongheaded. My colleague from Banff-Kananaskis, who I just caught out of the corner of my

eye, has spoken clearly, eloquently, and critically of the decision by this minister to allow that hunt to go on. And my colleague previously had talked about that tonight as well. I think that I'm concerned about pieces like that in this bill. Of course, we all have our concerns we want to talk about.

Another one that I'm not sure is informed with – I'd like to know what the science behind it is. As we heard, if you're going to kill or harvest an animal, it should be done ethically and in a humane way. The decision to change the bow draw weight from 40 to 35 pounds. I don't know where the science behind that is. I know why it's been done or I suspect why it's been done: to allow a greater range of people to be able to go out into the bush and use their bows. But is it humane? Will it dispatch the animal with a kill shot, or will it harm that animal and allow it to suffer? That would be useful to hear the minister address that in particular because if there is science behind it, we should know that instead of just seeing it as a change to the regulation that allows more people to hunt.

8:00

The other thing that I have heard some criticism about is the ability to hunt from a stationary motorboat or a boat. The concern that has been raised is: will people use that boat to flush out birds, ducks, and then turn off their motor? How do you regulate that? How do you police that? You know, it's a way of quickly finding out where ducks are on lakes. Is it a fair fight, essentially, between the hunter and the ducks when the ducks are being not corralled but scared and showing their position?

The Alberta Wilderness Association has some critiques of what we're seeing here. I just want to see if I can quickly identify what a couple of those are. They have many, many people who have both experience as hunters but also as conservationists, as people who enjoy the outdoors on a regular basis and tend to see a lot.

Their view, as I understand, is that the changes in Bill 41 are problematic despite appearing minor on the surface. They argue that these changes would increase hunting efficiency – good for hunters, I guess – in a province without sustainable harvest limits, potentially accelerating wildlife population declines. Nobody wants to see wildlife population declines because that's a zero-sum game for hunters and people who enjoy wildlife and want to see wildlife continue not only for our generation but for generations to come.

If the Alberta Wilderness Association is having concerns with this bill, how do they get answers to those questions before this bill is passed? They also warn that the bill's focus is on expanding hunter access and technology and it could place additional pressure on vulnerable species and lead to further ecosystem impacts through increased demand for motorized access to wilderness areas.

Those are a couple of the concerns that have been raised, as I said, by people who have a clear understanding of some of the challenges to wildlife in our province. Wildlife in this province is under threat all across Alberta. As we know, there are very few undisturbed places. We heard earlier about, I think, the wood buffalo, the concerns raised by one of my colleagues in question period today. We're not raising these questions without, you know, knowing that stakeholders, knowing that Albertans, are raising them, too.

I just want to focus on critical conservation concerns. Alberta is a beautiful place, but it is changing rapidly. We know 200,000 people, I think, emigrated to this province last year. I'm not sure if that's just Calgary; it couldn't be just Calgary. It's got to be the whole province. That puts pressure on the rest of our beautiful province. We need to make sure that we're not doing things that negatively affect this province.

There's a concern that Bill 41, while it streamlines regulations and makes things more efficient, also makes things more problematic for the remaining wildlife that's in this province. I, like my colleagues, have a story of in my younger years hunting, of course, with my father and uncles. Left that a long time ago. They stayed with it, and they did their best to utilize all of the game that we hunted together.

We did it with high vis all the time, and I see where that's changing. It says that people haven't been doing that for a long time, but I can tell you there's probably good sense in maintaining high visibility in the woods when you're out hunting and it's hunting season. I've known of several people who were mistaken, and you hear about that all the time in our news reports around hunting seasons. It's unfortunate. It's tragic, but there's good rationale to, I think, keeping that in this regulation. Unfortunately it's been identified as something that's going to be taken out.

There are a great number of people who are engaged in this, and I'm glad that they do it after training, particularly if they're younger. Anything that can increase the abilities of young hunters to learn and to get guidance like I had and other people had when they first got firearms licenses years ago is a positive step. Anything that would reduce the ability to ensure that people are properly regulated is not a good step.

Thankfully the minister is not proposing that, though he has proposed lots of other things in the past which I disagree with, particularly around the grizzly bear hunt, which did not seem to be based on science, did not seem to be based on the evidence that people who are grizzly bear biologists have told us are important. That animal in particular is seen as a huge totem not only to, you know, culture but Indigenous culture.

Mr. Chair, with those concerns put on the table, I will sit down and take my place and allow others to address this. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there other speakers? The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. Go ahead.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've been listening to the debate with great intent. I really appreciate a lot of the comments that were made and folks in the opposition reaching out to people they know that hunt, even one member was talking about her husband. Hopefully he has better luck next year and keeps continuing up the sport to bring home and get a few more moose in the freezer.

There are a few misconceptions that I wouldn't mind just clearing up. When we're talking about "those Albertans," well, "those Albertans" are amongst you in this Chamber when we're referring in third person or having to call somebody up. A lot of us here, Mr. Chair, grew up with firearms. Not only did we have them for sustenance in the fall, a lot of us had a lot of Indigenous friends and relatives that we learned about their culture through this as well. A lot of us grew up similar to the Member for Sherwood Park of not being allowed to point anything that looked like a gun at somebody else because we had that ingrained into us from a very young age.

There were some concerns brought up about the age being 12 years old. If you're old enough to have a firearms license, then there's a couple of mandatory things you have to do. It's no longer called an FAC. That's been gone for about 20 years. It is a possession and acquisition license, and there's two categories for that. Well, actually, there's three. There's the regular one; you've got prohibited and restricted. So depending on those classifications of rifles, and despite some of the folks out there that have misconceptions, it's not just on what the firearm looks like. There's a lot of conjecture and a lot of politics that have been put into that,

and I can see why there's been some concerns over that over the years because a lot of folks that don't understand firearms are making up the rules and the policies here, and that's part of the issue.

8:10

To clear up some of these misconceptions about semiautomatic rifles, to clear up some of the misconceptions about draw weights on bows, to clear up some of the misconceptions on modernization, myself, the firearms that I like to use are recently just considered prohibited or restricted because they're a semiautomatic firearm that has a .308 or .223 or 5.56 or 7.62 by 54. It doesn't matter if it's the firearm round itself that people are concerned about. Typically, it's talking about the function.

I heard the Member for Calgary-Buffalo there talking about visibility. Well, it's no longer Elmer Fudd and it's no longer Bugs Bunny walking out in the bush. There's a lot of really good protocols that we have in place. Wearing a high-vis vest isn't going to make a difference, quite frankly, anymore. We've seen that it hasn't had a ton of changes for it in that place.

What does make the difference is understanding your firearms, so again, that training on the front end. Everyone is mandatory to have a firearms license. It's a one-day or a two-day course. It's fully intensive depending on the type of firearms you want to possess. Again, when we're talking the .223 calibre, that's one of the items that's being modernized. That one can take down a deer in a number of places and locations. In the States, it's widely used. That round that was developed for predatory control, basically it was a wildcat round back in the '60s that was modernized and brought forward, and, coincidentally, the 5.56, NATO, that's what our soldiers use. The .308, that's a great rifle. Somebody's mentioned .303. These are all calibres that we're talking about.

The firearm mechanism itself, again, coming back to that point, doesn't matter if it's semi auto, bolt action, or single shot, the modernization here, looking at the draw weights as an example, a lot of it comes down to efficiencies. A 35-pound draw weight versus a 40-pound draw weight comes back to the efficiencies and the technologies in the bows that they're having. So again, I thank the minister for doing a bunch of this.

Yeah. I'm trying to catch things, so maybe I'll just quickly go through this, some of the speaking notes here for those at home that are following along, so they don't hear me rambling.

Bill 41 is taking the necessary steps to modernize the laws while respecting the traditions that shaped our province. Hunting and trapping are vital parts of the heritage, absolutely, supporting families' livelihoods and community traditions. It updates outdated laws. Safety is always going to be top of there. The bill represents practical sense, a common approach to hunting.

What else are we doing? Basically we're modernizing, bringing hunting and wildlife management laws up to speed with the rest of the country. It does thorough consultation with Albertans and wildlife experts, reflecting their valuable input and changes to improve our systems.

We're talking about the grizzlies. We're talking about the grizzlies and some of those items, too. Well, there are a lot of things down in the eastern slopes. We've had a lot of problem bears down there, too. Folks that are closer to the cities may not appreciate what can be faced there. That was put in place to make sure we take care of those as well.

I apologize if I put my glasses back on. It takes me a bit here. So these proposed changes will simplify the process for hunters, trappers, landowners, and wildlife officers assuring the continuity ...

[interjection]. The member opposite keeps heckling here. I'm not sure why. I'm just trying to answer some of the items they had, but it's great to hear him talk about it because before he was talking about something else there.

Mr. Schmidt: You haven't even read the bill. This is the first time reading the bill, and then you're trying to explain it to us.

Mr. Getson: I'd be looking forward to an intervention if you want to there, Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, because you're an absolute expert in everything. We found that out in this House.

Wheelchair accessibility. That acknowledges the importance of making hunting accessible to everyone and those with disabilities. We've had a number of constituents come out, too, talking about air bows as well. For them, the seniors that are getting out there, they're very active. This is almost like an air rifle, except it uses the same components as a crossbow would, so the bolt on the end of it, and the gentleman out in my area has lobbied for a long time. It's used extensively in Europe, so it's nice to see that coming out here for the folks in that. So that's really good.

Youth hunting. We talked about that. High visibility. Meat. Yeah, we definitely want to make sure you use the meat from this. Again, in these times, too, we're seeing a lot more folks that are getting an interest that traditionally weren't involved or didn't use it for sustenance, but it's from that 100-mile radius type thing. People want to know where their food comes from, so we've seen a resurgence over the years in that, and it's one heck of a way to see our wildlife.

There was a concern about overhunting. Most folks that I've seen, they don't do that. They respect the animals. They're out in the wildlife, and they are some of the best managers of that as well, stewards of the land. But where the issues are and lie is usually on vehicle accidents, when we talk about how many vehicles run into animals. That's why you have the protections down in that Banff-Kananaskis country to make sure those wildlife overpasses are there.

Mr. Schmidt: Not enough of them.

Mr. Getson: Again, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar still continues to heckle. I'm not sure why. I'd love to take him out hunting sometime. Yeah. So basically when it comes down to the cartridges ...

Mr. Schmidt: You make it sound like you know what you're talking about, but this is a steady stream of nonsense.

Mr. Getson: This is amazing, Mr. Chair. We were doing so good here, but he just can't resist it. He really doesn't want any truth. He wants to keep going off interjecting. He really wants to keep heckling here, and I'm not sure why. To those folks at home, this is the same gentleman that kept going against your firearms rights, and these are the folks that all voted against that a number of times when we brought up firearms rights. I'm glad we could get some consensus and go longer.

In conclusion ... [interjections]. Were you all waiting for it? There we go.

In conclusion, the opposition has to call out for help on this file. The opposition is against your firearms rights in many cases. I'm so glad today that we have a consensus, that we can actually support some of these. It's really good to have some of these modernization things. I think we can do something really good in this House by supporting this bill, from all that consultation that took place to come forward and modernize this so that not only the current generations will be able to enjoy our wildlife, to be able to enjoy

our outdoors and to see that, but hopefully they can bring more people here to see what we have.

As a person who travels and gets out of, you know, their constituency more often than not, when you see the wild outdoors and you're not afraid of mosquitoes up in Zama Lakes, you're not scared of anything like that, when you actually get other people out, they tend to have a better appreciation for the land, how wildlife interface with us. We need to do more to get our kids up to date on this and to respect firearms and use them for the tools that they are but not be scared of them by the colour they are or what they look like on television or on the memes that people may stumble across but to make sure that we use these tools for generations to come.

With that, I hope all the members of the Chamber will support this, even those that heckle from Gold Bar.

Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: We're all now stupider for having listened to you.

The Acting Chair: The next member is Banff-Kananaskis. Go ahead.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an amendment . . .

Mr. Getson: Point of order.

The Acting Chair: Point of order. Go ahead.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Getson: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar – and I would love to hear this. Again, what he said was: we're all stupider for hearing your conversation. So 23(h), (i), (j), and (k) and sometimes P.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I don't know what the other provision was. I was listening to the member. I had the earpiece, so I didn't hear all the heckles. But the member described what the member said, I think. I didn't hear it, but at best it will be a matter of debate.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Well, you know, it's going pretty good. I'd like to keep order and reduce the heckling as much as we can and allow people to speak. So we'll carry on and hopefully have a better process going forward.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Just a minute.

I'll recognize the Member for Banff-Kananaskis. Go ahead.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do have an amendment to propose for Bill 41.

Debate Continued

The Acting Chair: Okay. This will be known as amendment A1. Go ahead and read it out.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am proposing an amendment. It's quite a long one, so I'm not going to read the whole thing. I'll just give you a little bit of Coles Notes so I can jump into the arguments of why I'm proposing this. Basically, you've heard a few of my colleagues tonight talk about the need for science to inform wildlife management and hunting quotas and trapping quotas. This amendment kind of has a couple of different sections. The first section is that the classes of animals listed will have a tag issued to them. That's trophy sheep and goat; moose, elk, white-

tailed deer, mule deer, antelope, bison, and non-trophy sheep; black bear and grizzly bear; cougar; and wild turkey. Each of those classes of wildlife will have a number of tags associated to them, so that's kind of the take, I guess you could say.

8:20

Then the next section of the amendment is that the total number of tags issued by the minister will be based on certain criteria. The first one is that the total number of tags will be based on "the best available scientific data and analysis regarding population dynamics, habitat capacity and conservation status of the class of wildlife animal," and (b) will "consult with independent wildlife biologists and other stakeholders as the Minister considers appropriate."

Then the next section of that is that the minister must also "publish the following information on the publicly available website of the department administered by the Minister" and that is "(a) the scientific data and analysis used to determine the maximum number of tags" and the number of tags issued in respect to each class of wildlife animal.

Basically, this amendment is saying that these animals are in these wildlife classes. There will be a maximum number of tags issued for all of the wildlife in these classes, and that maximum number of tags will be based on science and data and conversations with biologists and stakeholders and all of that will be publicly available.

Then the third section of the amendment is really to incorporate the total mortality of these species. As the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland mentioned, there are species that are really prone to vehicle mortality. When we think about hunting, we should be considering the other causes of mortality as well.

Then the last piece is really that if there is a conflict between the number of tags in this act, this process to determine the maximum number of tags and existing regulations, that the regulations will come in line with the act. It's quite a lengthy amendment. I hope that everybody is okay with that summary.

You're probably wondering why I'm doing this. Well, I believe in science. As a wildlife biologist it's pretty foundational to who I am. But I also believe in consultation with experts in the field as well as hunter-guide outfitters, for example, or other stakeholder organizations.

I would say that over the last year we have seen the Minister of Forestry and Parks increase hunting and trapping quotas for many species. In each one of those instances the science has not been consulted, and independent biologists have not been consulted either. I'll get into that in a little bit more detail.

I also think that it's important to publicly share this data because that's one of the reasons why the public is so concerned about these hunting and trapping quotas and e-mailing me about it all the time. There are questions about the data and where it's coming from, and the ministry has not been forthcoming with that information.

I know that independent biologists were not consulted on the changes in hunting and trapping quotas. They are my colleagues, and I speak with them regularly, and I know everybody was surprised by some of the decisions that have been made recently.

I also know that the public is concerned because I get e-mails from them. A lot of the e-mails right now that I'm receiving from constituents, Mr. Chair, use words like "unethical trophy hunting" and "trapping quotas," that this is unnecessary. They're objecting to the hunting tags, the trapping tags, and they have all of these questions.

I will say that it is very clear to me through my e-mail inbox that this is a very emotionally charged issue, on both sides of the coin. The hunter-guide outfitters are definitely emotionally charged about these limits, but I also have a lot of people who don't think

that trapping is an ethical practice in Alberta anymore, and they are also emotionally charged.

It is because of that, Mr. Chair, that we need to have science inform the decision-making because science takes the emotion out of it. It's not about how you personally feel about hunting and trapping. It's not about how I personally feel about hunting and trapping. It's about: what does the data suggest needs to happen?

When we have issues where emotions run high, we can use science to make decisions. What if, Mr. Chair, I was the Minister of Forestry and Parks? It'd be so great, so great. But what if I was the Minister of Forestry and Parks ...

Mr. Schow: Cross the floor.

Dr. Elmeligi: Never.

... and I was making decisions on hunting and trapping quotas based on my emotions. How would the other side feel about that? We cannot have governance decisions about wildlife based on emotions because it really then is too subjective, and it depends on who is the person making the decisions.

It is the reason why science is a cornerstone for establishing wildlife policies and making management decisions. Science informs decision process, and the impacts of decisions can be better understood, acknowledged, and considered when they are informed by data. When we use science, we can promote and adhere to the highest standards. It allows us to have confidence in our decisions and the potential impacts of those decisions. Science also helps us promote educational efforts and encourages people to understand the wildlife and the ecosystems that they are recreating in.

Science provides sound advice, and I know that the members opposite will love this: it creates jobs. There's a lot of scientists out there.

Mr. Schow: You should love that, too.

Dr. Elmeligi: I do love it. Of course I love it. Why wouldn't I love that? Scientists are working all over this province, and we have many experts working on wildlife science throughout the province in both the private and the public sector.

Science also encourages collaboration because sometimes it raises other questions that become important for other processes to answer. And hunting, when properly regulated following biological principles, is an appropriate means of managing wildlife populations, but it is not the only tool to manage wildlife populations, Mr. Speaker. Hunting and decision-maker education should invite people to increase their knowledge of wildlife ecology and management. It should emphasize ethics and responsibilities. There are things to learn throughout this process.

So I want to provide some concrete examples of how the recent decisions that the Minister of Forestry and Parks has made in the last year have not used science as a foundation. When it comes to cougars, the minister increased quotas for hunting female cougars, more than doubled, and he created or the ministry created six new management areas for cougars, including Cypress Hills, and then created a directive to open up hunting of cougars with off-leash dogs in these six new management areas. Hunting quotas were set for all of these new management areas, and this increased the total number of female cougars that could be legally hunted in the province.

Fine. Those are all management decisions. What does the science say? Well, the province has a cougar management plan, and it counteracts these decisions. The cougar management plan estimates a population of 1,559 cougars. The minimum viable population, Mr. Speaker, is 1,500 cougars, so clearly increasing hunting quotas is not going to help address the objectives in the management plan.

The minister has said that we have over 2,000 cougars in the province, but there's no data to back this up, and if there is, it's not publicly available, so that's why we need to have this data be publicly available. If that is true, that's great. Show me the money. Show me the data. Yeah, money and data is equivalent if you're a scientist. Did you get it? So this goes against the current management plan.

The other thing the minister has done is lift trapping quotas for fur-bearing species. Fur-bearers: I really hate that word in general, because all mammals bear fur, but I digress.

Mr. Schmidt: Do I bear fur?

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, sometimes. Yeah. Let's skip over that.

The harvest quotas for fur-bearers are in place to keep populations viable, presumably so that we can continue trapping them and we can continue to have the ecological benefits that those species provide. The most recent research for wolverines from 2024 estimated that there are 955 wolverines in Alberta, 544 adults. The International Union for Conservation of Nature sets standards for what classifies as a threatened or an endangered species, and for threatened species the standard is 1,000 adult individuals. Five hundred and forty-four adults estimated. One thousand individuals required for the animal to be listed as threatened.

8:30

Process in Alberta dictates that with this information, the minister who chairs the Endangered Species Conservation Committee should bring that committee together to review that most recent research and decide if wolverines need to be listed as threatened in Alberta, but rather than follow that due process and follow that science, the minister lifted trapping limits on wolverines altogether. I will agree with the minister that the previous trapping limit was already unsustainable. That is true. Lifting the trapping limit altogether does not make it more sustainable.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Looking at fishers and otters, also fur-bearers that had their trapping limits removed entirely, both fishers and otters are highly sensitive to trapping. They were both almost extirpated in parts of Alberta due to overharvest. Fishers were reintroduced to parts of Alberta in the 1990s, and otter reintroduction started in the 1980s and continued on for over a decade. We have no current population estimates for fishers and otters, but we do know that they are very sensitive to trapping and hunting pressure.

Here is another example where the minister has lifted the trapping limits without that decision being defensible with data. We don't have the data. We need to first understand what the population estimates are for these species before we can go ahead and lift the trapping limits. Data from dead otters or dead wolverines or dead fishers does not provide population estimates. That is not a methodology that exists to estimate populations. It is not a thing that is real. It risks species extirpation is what it does.

Mountain goats are another species that the minister has expanded hunting opportunities for. The minister introduced special licences to include mountain goats last year. Mountain goats are another species that are also very sensitive to harvest pressure, and throughout the 1900s mountain goat populations declined because of overharvest. Many populations were largely depleted by the 1960s, so we really reduced harvest because of that, and we stopped mountain goat hunting in the 1980s. Today there is a very limited hunt for mountain goats.

The reason why science is used to inform this decision is because we've learned some things about mountain goats by studying their

ecology. We know that they are very slow reproducing. They have babies later in life. They have fewer babies, and those babies don't often survive to sexual reproduction themselves. Because they are slow reproducing, they are slow to recover from harvest pressure.

There are six permits per year to hunt mountain goats. The minister's special licence adds two permits per year but doesn't identify where in the province those additional two mountain goats will be taken from. Because of that, it could essentially happen in a population that cannot handle those additional two individuals being taken. Scientists have said that this minister's special licence will negatively impact local mountain goat populations, and there is no scientific evidence for this management decision to have special licences for mountain goats because there are no restrictions on where they'll be. That's the essence of minister's special licences, that they don't have to apply the same rules.

That brings me to grizzly bears. I could probably talk about this for the next three hours. I'll try to limit it to just a few minutes. Last summer the minister created a special management program to hunt conflict grizzly bears. I do say the word "hunt" even though the minister has said it's not a hunt, but it technically is. It's just targeting who is the lucky person who gets to go out there on the landscape and hunt a grizzly bear.

The minister has said that this hunt is to reduce human-bear conflict. That directly contravenes the research. The research shows that hunting bears does not reduce conflict. It doesn't reduce conflict. All it does is create an opportunity for another bear to come in and engage in that same source of conflict. What reduces human-bear conflict is working with people to reduce attractants and to reduce the sources of conflict. The research is very clear there.

Mr. Schow: Oh, like cattle.

Dr. Elmeligi: The other part of this – yeah. You can reduce conflict with cattle by working with ranchers. Absolutely. The Waterton biosphere has done an incredible job with that, and they've had incredible success.

The other part of this, Mr. Speaker, is that there is a grizzly bear recovery plan, just like there's a cougar management plan and a mountain goat management plan. We have species management plans to inform population management, but we're not implementing them. The grizzly bear recovery plan ... [interjections] I don't have time. Sorry. Another time we could talk in the peace lounge.

The grizzly bear recovery plan has four main objectives, Mr. Chair, to recover grizzly bears in Alberta. Grizzly bear density through the recovery zone of each bear management area is not limited by human-caused mortality, populations are either stable or increasing, and there is a population size range that is reflective of the habitat within the recovery zone. There are also objectives for the ability of grizzly bears to disperse across habitats, for habitat security of grizzly bears in the recovery zone to be maintained or improved, and supporting grizzly bear conservation and management is increasing among Albertans, especially those living, working, and recreating in bear management areas.

You will notice, Mr. Chair, that increasing hunt or increasing the opportunity for Albertans to kill grizzly bears is not an objective of the grizzly bear recovery plan. I encourage all members of this House to have a look at the recovery plan and the 11 detailed recommendations to recover grizzly bears. They do talk about conflict, but none of those things are killing bears to address conflict because it doesn't actually work. The science is quite clear in this.

Section 3 of this amendment is about the total mortality. When you think about bears, for example, they can be hit by trains, hit by

vehicles on highways. They're also subject to poaching. All of those causes of mortality add up as well, so it's important, when we consider the maximum number of tags that are distributed for a species, that it's actually based on all the causes of mortality. Hunting and trapping might actually be a small percentage of the animals that are taken from the population, but a dead animal is a dead animal and is no longer contributing to that population. We need to consider the cumulative effects of human activity on wildlife populations even if those deaths are accidental.

What I find the most frustrating about this bill is that it doesn't address the true issue in wildlife management in Alberta, which right now is that the minister has been ignoring his department's species management plans, he's been ignoring science, he's been ignoring recent research on population estimates, and he's been moving forward with all of that stuff. This bill, although it contains some great pieces to modernize hunting, doesn't actually get at the heart of what is the problem with hunting and trapping in Alberta. The problem is that we're basing tag limits on conversations we have with people in the street and not actually based on any kind of defensible scientific data or conversations with stakeholders. That's what this amendment is trying to accomplish.

Then, of course, the amendment is also trying to make sure that that information is publicly available so that when the minister is saying there's 2,000 cougars or 1,250 grizzly bears, which is also a very random number that I've never heard before, we know how he got to that number.

This amendment is really important. It makes the bill better. I hope all members vote for it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Any members wishing to make comments on amendment A1?

Mr. Schow: I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 40 Professional Governance Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered on Bill 40? The Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

8:40

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act. Alberta's workforce is being held back not by a lack of talent but by barriers that prevent new Canadians from practising in the professions they are trained for. The Alberta professional governance legislation that's in front of us is long overdue for an overhaul. Previously the UCP government tried to pass similar legislation back in 2022, but there were some concerns with it, so it did not proceed. We need to ensure that smaller professional regulatory organizations have the capacity, the resources, the mechanics, and the mechanisms to deal with any changes and any new rules. We don't want these changes and these new rules to be the ones that will worsen the situation of those who are already struggling with the barriers of accessing their credential licensing.

The regulatory tools should be improved. We do agree with that. But we must ensure that professional regulatory organizations are not being restricted in an unnecessary way. Within this bill there will be around 20 regulations under this act. A lot of those finer details are still unknown. We don't know how that will impact in terms of unleashing our workforce and increasing our productivity and at the same time addressing the wage stagnation and

affordability challenges. We do not yet know the full extent of what this legislation means for every specific professional regulatory organization.

I also want to talk about the real problem. The real problem, Mr. Chair, is that we're talking about engineers driving taxis here, nurses stacking shelves, doctors working in unrelated fields while our health care system cries out for staff. This is not just personal tragedy, but also it affects individuals. It affects families. It affects, specifically, our economy, and leads us to failures on many fronts.

While Bill 40 takes steps in consolidating the governance aspect of the challenges that are faced by many professionally foreign-trained Canadians, it misses the urgent opportunity to tackle one of the biggest economic drains that we face today, the lack of action on foreign credential recommendations. The system is costing us billions. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that unrecognized foreign credentials are costing our national economy between \$13 billion to \$17 billion each year. That's not just numbers. It is a measure of waste, it is a measure of underused talent, and it is a measure of lost productivity.

In Alberta we are feeling this more acutely than most other provinces. Our unemployment rate is higher than the national average. Our retention of skilled immigrants is lower than other comparable provinces. Use the examples of B.C., Ontario, or Quebec. According to Statistics Canada 40 per cent of immigrant professionals in Alberta are overqualified for the jobs they are currently in. Forty per cent. It's nearly four times when you compare to nonimmigrant populations. This should alarm us, and this should create us to think of ways of addressing this problem.

We talked about the influx of immigration to this province. The government has launched Alberta is Calling. We have people that have come to our province to make it home, contribute to our economy, and become a part of the Alberta family. But while we are importing talent and training them, we are again wasting because our systems and policies are set in a way that makes them underutilized. That will impact our productivity. It's a key measure of addressing in terms of our economy.

Let's use an example of our health care system. The system is in a workforce crisis. The labour shortage is bleak in our hospitals, home cares, clinics across the province, yet, Mr. Chair, a staggering 30 per cent of immigrants with degrees in medicine or dentistry or veterinary medicine or optometry are working in completely unrelated fields. This is 30 per cent, but when you compare it to the general population, it's 4.5 per cent, so you can see the difference here.

A significant number of the workforce that we could have capitalized on and maximally used are left underutilized. It affects the system, and it affects our economy. It affects the growth of the province overall. This is not a skills shortage; it is credential recognition failure. While Bill 40 addresses administrative streamlining, it does not rise to the urgency of solving this problem.

Yes, there is value in harmonizing 90 separate statutes and 28 regulations governing 22 professional regulatory organizations. There is no question on that. We all agree on that. The bill proposed a unified framework to replace fragmented legislation. Yes, that's a move that could improve consistency and efficiency. We do agree with that at the governance level across different professions, but here is the problem. Implementation is delayed until 2026, and that is assuming no further setbacks. Meanwhile, the foreign credential recognition committee that was created in Bill 203 last fall has yet to deliver a single public report. Remember part of that Bill 203 was that the committee was mandated to do a report within a year. It is almost a year and a half now, and we are yet to see any report from the foreign credentials recognition committee.

So while Bill 40 is progress, it falls short where it matters most: getting skilled professionals to work in the fields they are trained for. That is what we need. We needed it a long time ago, but it's still not happening. This government is tabling bill after bill around this field, but there is no real action to address the underlying problems within this.

Instead of these incremental bureaucratic instruments, administrative work, we should be laser focused on real solutions, creating a transparent and real-time dashboard that people can see on how their foreign credentials are recognized, regulating processing timelines so that we don't waste time so that people can get into their jobs, expanding access to training opportunities where they can upgrade where they need to so that they can get into the field that they have been trained in and that they want to work in and that we also need.

8:50

Strengthening the fairness for newcomers office that this government has created so that this problem can be addressed, to provide oversight, advocacy: those are some of the things that the office was supposed to do and provide information and a report on this.

On this side of the House we support this area of the work that needs to be addressed because, as I said before, it's tied to our economy. The most important resource that Alberta has is Albertans. It's the people. In 2019 we supported the Fair Registration Practices Act. We supported the creation of the fairness for newcomers office. As I said, we fully supported the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee that was created a year and a half ago. I brought forward here a motion, Motion 511, calling for dismantling the credential recognition barriers that hold our economy back. I appreciate that the government members have supported the motion.

Our approach is grounded in equity but also our approach is grounded in economic sense. Our future prosperity depends on how well we unlock our potential of those who choose to make this province their home. Mr. Chair, streamlining governance is very important, but streamlining without a real solution is not reform; it is just a waste of time. It destroys people's hopes, and it doesn't unleash our economic potential.

Bill 40 should have been an opportunity to lead with urgency to confront the backlog. We need to enforce transparency and lift the artificial barriers that are holding our economy back, and instead what the government is doing is what it does too often. The government does a lot of reorganizing the deck chairs while leaving foreign-trained professionals stranded and our economy short-staffed.

Mr. Chair, I really, really want the government to pair Bill 40 with real actions. I really want the government to do some work around removing the barriers that exist. We really want the government to not only table piece of legislation after piece of legislation that is administrative work, that doesn't impact people's lives.

With that, I take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to make a comment? I see the Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak again on Bill 40 just briefly. As I had said during the second reading of this bill, certainly many of the 20-some-plus organizations were very interested in making these reforms that Bill 40 does allow. This UCP government did try to

work on this back in 2022 but, you know, apparently they have reached some better conclusions here in 2025 with Bill 40.

You know, there's just so much in this bill. I mean, it's looking at overhauling the regulations and the operations of, as I say, more than 20 different professional associations here in the province of Alberta. The bill: it's long. It's 213 pages. And we needed to canvass each of the affected organizations to make sure that there isn't a fault in the bill and there isn't government overreach as well. That's the concern that I have here with Bill 40, and I have a number of things that I just want to bring up in regard to the ministerial powers that are built into this bill.

The first area that I wanted to point out to people is, you know, the ministerial powers to appoint board members to a professional organization. We know that this is a long-standing practice of Conservative or UCP governments; same thing, right? They reach into our various boards, agencies, and commissions and make appointments there and have a temptation always to stack the deck in those organizations to a particular political ideology and/or making appointments that political considerations supersede professional credentials or experience or other attributes that someone could bring to any given agency, board, or commission board. This is the same issue that exists in these professional associations by the minister being able to appoint members to these boards. We have to make sure that we control that so that we're not undermining the board with political considerations over ability and capacity and professionalism and other experiences that people can bring to a board. You know, that's from page 157 of this bill, and I just wanted to point that out.

I have a solution, Mr. Chair. You know, I'm always trying to be helpful, and I do have a way to make sure we can mitigate any problems that might happen. I like helping people and helping the UCP government even. Sometimes it's not a bad idea because they're making laws, of course, here that will govern anything from the APEGA – right? – one of the largest professional organizations in the province, to chartered accountants, geoscience land surveyors, professional planners, shorthand reporters – I've always wondered about that one; we did contact them, I think – and so forth.

I do have an amendment for this bill. The amendment: I'll just talk about it a little bit first. You know, it's around limiting the powers of the governing government, whoever that government happens to be at the time, to not exceed the total number of appointees exceeding 50 per cent so that basically they can't control that professional association. The professional association can control themselves, which is essentially what we're trying to do with Bill 40: professionalize these things to protect them from legal challenges and so forth and to serve both their members and the public.

The Deputy Chair: This amendment will be referred to as amendment A1. If the member could read it into the record, that would be helpful.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Sounds good.

Myself moving that Bill 40, Professional Governance Act, be amended as follows: in section 24 by adding the following after subsection (1), and that addition is, "The number of public members appointed by the Minister must be less than one half of the governing body," and (b) as well in section 37(3), striking out "The Minister may appoint any number of public members" and substituting "Subject to section 24(1.1), the Minister may appoint any number of public members."

Okay. Basically the minister still can make those appointments but they would be constituting less than 50 per cent of any given board that governs a professional association. You know, Mr. Chair, this brings to mind another issue that I have around Bill 40, because, as I said, we canvassed this amongst the affected 22 groups, and people had some small issues but not substantive ones, but there's a larger issue around the UCP government reaching into other professional associations in a more punitive and in a more sort of retaliatory way.

9:00

I think about the Law Society, for example. They're not included in Bill 40, but I'm just wondering what's next in line for this UCP government to regulate and change the independence and the integrity of other associations that they have a problem with. We see the Law Society of Alberta, for example, in the news quite a lot, from trying and applying discipline to lawyers that were also MLAs in the UCP government. I know that the UCP government was trying to reach in and affect those hearings. You know, what's to stop them having a similar bill to go after people like the Law Society and so forth?

I'm very concerned about political overreach into our professional associations, and this amendment will protect the 22 or more organizations that are in this bill, and this will also bring attention to, I think, these other professional associations, you know, that we here will be here to protect them and to protect the integrity and the independence of them when they function, right? The Law Society, all of the medical associations, the Alberta Medical Association, the doctors, nursing: all of those are not included in this particular bill, but I would be very concerned for the UCP government to strike next to some of those associations.

My amendments, by limiting the appointments of board members to professional associations, the appointments by the government, to less than 50 per cent helps to mitigate that and helps to protect the professionalism of these groups in the first place. That's what most of Bill 40 does do, right? It's helping those associations do their job to protect the public, to protect their members and so forth, and that's all good. What we don't want is overreach on a political level that somehow interferes with the integrity of professional associations to do their job.

I hope everybody reads the bill. I mean, it's pretty simple, really. I hope that you might consider supporting it. With that, I will leave the floor to someone else to talk about it. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Amendment A1. I see that the Member for Edmonton-West Heday has risen.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, my goodness. It is refreshing to be able to get up here and speak in favour and in support of a government bill for the second day in a row and, tonight specifically, to support this amendment proposed by my good friend from Edmonton-North West, who has proposed an amendment to section 37(3).

My understanding of this amendment in the context of this bill is to constrain the amount of political appointments to governing bodies. What I understand is to not stop the political appointments, but I do note that there is no limit as to how many appointments can be made by the minister; perhaps a small oversight by the minister, or perhaps some intentional drafting. Either way, for the sake of the governing bodies that will be affected by this legislation, this amendment is absolutely necessary to cap the concerns about endless political appointments to the professions that are affected

by this bill, particularly of public members that may not have expertise in the governing body's affairs.

While I say this, I do believe it is nigh time for the Professional Governance Act to become law in this province, and I applaud the Minister of Advanced Education for her diligent work on this bill, which has been needed for quite some time. I also understand that there is much work yet to be done under this bill, particularly in regulation, and I look forward to reviewing those when they are developed, Mr. Chair.

The key components of this bill are far reaching. It is truly modernizing for many professional organizations in this province, for the modernization of electronic processes, including e-signatures, electronic records, and virtual meetings, already mainstay processes that Albertans have come to rely on in this modern age, especially during the pandemic, when our society was forced to shift online.

I would be remiss to not also note for anyone watching at this late hour – hi, mom. I'm just kidding. You're not watching. This is so boring. She's a schoolteacher who's probably very likely resting or getting ready for her very busy tomorrow of her overcrowded classroom. But to anyone else actually watching this, who will likely not read this tome of a piece of legislation – it's pretty thick; go have a read – this act does not cover the legal profession, as my good friend the Member for Edmonton-North West mentioned. It also doesn't talk about teachers or health professionals. It is very specific to the enumerated professions, regulatory organizations, which are numerous and range from professions such as engineering, accounting, land surveyors, and many, many others that have been asking for this type of legislative certainty for some time.

I mention this because the legal profession is watching us very keenly and specifically the government and what this Assembly does with respect to our profession. The Premier has intimated a few short months ago that this government was going to start intervening in other self-regulating professions such as with lawyers. Mr. Chair, this is a very real concern with this legislation. It is something that I did immediately have my hackles up on with respect to Bill 40, but I'm very glad to not see any changes to the Legal Profession Act in this piece of legislation, but I digress. We are putting Albertans and this government on notice that we know what the Premier has intimated, and we will keep vigilant if this is any precursor to changes to the Legal Profession Act.

Back to the crux of this amendment, though, Mr. Chair. I quickly want to acknowledge a profession that is being included in this bill. I mentioned engineers, accountants, and I also mentioned land surveyors. At this time I want to reiterate comments from Brian Munday, who is the executive director for Alberta Land Surveyors' Association. He goes on to say that

land surveyors are responsible for protecting the property rights of Albertans by providing certainty on property boundaries that underpins economic growth in our province. The Professional Governance Act will give us greater opportunity and flexibility to ensure land surveyors have the competencies and skills they need in these modern times. We are ready to go.

Mr. Chair, I have worked on numerous historic files in and around Alberta in the traditional territories of many First Nations, and let me tell you, the competencies and skills needed for this profession have certainly come a long way from the early days when my people made treaties on these territories. Many First Nations are still finalizing land claims and treaty land entitlement claims because of improper land surveys. Nations like mine actually were shortchanged because of improper surveys done in the early 1900s. This profession does so much more than just protecting the property rights of Albertans, and it is a very good

thing that this legislation is coming in to usher some more certainty in the competencies and skills of land surveyors.

However, we are still human, and errors will still happen. This is part of the reason why I want to talk about this amendment. This is not to the content of this bill, but we need to be very alive to the fact that the increase in appointments from the minister, especially of folks who might be lay people who do not have the expertise of the governing bodies that they represent, may pose certain concerns for us to think about.

For example, and going back to my land surveyor reference I just made, in section 11(1)(b) of the Land Surveyors Act as it presently reads, it states:

when the number of elected Alberta land surveyors does not exceed 10, one member of the public, or when the number of elected Alberta land surveyors is more than 10 but not more than 20, 2 members of the public, who shall be appointed by the Minister after consultation with the Association for a one year term of office.

Here in this current drafting of the Land Surveyors Act is a clear check on the ministerial appointment of public members, but under this current drafting of 37(3) without the amendment it does not have this check in place. I do believe that this needs to be addressed, and I'm thankful for my friend for proposing this amendment. This amendment is in line with the wording of even this one example that I highlighted.

I also believe, Mr. Chair, that this bill, as forward looking as it is, must also consider the needs of some much smaller associations of professions. From my understanding there are template bylaws and other constating documents that will be developed from the government, which I'm extremely heartened to hear about. I will caution, though, only as a point of caution possibly to those professional associations themselves, to not apply bylaws cut and dry. I'm not alleging anything untoward; I just know from my career that sometimes cookie-cutter bylaws and constating documents don't often apply equally or as simply. My recommendation is to have them reviewed by a lawyer prior to putting them into force. I bring this up because this amendment also goes to the heart of this concern. If the minister is appointing many nonexpert public members to these boards, I'm incredibly concerned that these same nonexpert public members of these boards to protect the public interests are not necessarily the experts in the corporate governance of the governing bodies and the professions in which they govern. We need certainty for these types of appointments for the governing bodies affected by this legislation.

9:10

A piece of anecdotal evidence of this. A few First Nations that I worked for had received draft election codes from the ministry of Indian affairs, as it was then called, in which the recitals contained several clauses that went against my client's own governance mechanisms but also clauses that would offend the constitutional rights of some of my client's members. A junior lawyer would be able to pull up the examples of this on a quick CanLII search to find these several examples of copy-and-paste election laws. Or I guess back in the day it would have been typed out on a typewriter, with a copy from Indian Affairs, of election codes that were drafted as some sort of template to facilitate the imposition of non-Indigenous governance systems on First Nations or the imposed chief and council system that we would have been forced to accept.

Mr. Chair, I bring this up because I'm very excited about this amendment proposed by my friend. It is on the ever so exciting topic of – you guessed it – corporate governance. You see, in my early days of practice I took up many corporate files because the drafting of corporate bylaws or other constating documents are like

little puzzles. I still take them on from time to time because I love putting the little pieces of corporate governance together. We do need limits on numbers of members but certainly of public members to ensure the streamlined processes of these governing bodies. You need to fit in the ways of communicating between different agents within the corporation or association. You have to figure out where the corporate record office is, which may also be different than the actual head office of the corporation. You also have to include important things like how the board will vote or how a vote will be won by assessing quorum. Certainly, these are things that nonprofessional or lay people, public members of these associations will need to refer to, so these bylaws need to be quite robust. But if we have an unlimited amount of lay people on these governing bodies, then I worry that if we don't have robust bylaws, then we won't have the guidelines for these public members to understand how the governing body is supposed to work.

Mr. Chair, I promise you this is not going to get any more exciting for perhaps you or any of my colleagues in here. Corporate governance is truly something that we must elaborate quite expansively on when it comes to Bill 40. Not only are we creating streamlined approaches for many professional associations in this province; we are also providing the legal framework for some of these entities within this bill. This amendment goes to the heart of this. While I acknowledge the government may have some impetus behind wanting to uncup the number of directors of an association, I would urge the government against this, both in my professional opinion but also as a legislator who just wants to make Alberta a better place for all Albertans.

While we have heard from both sides of this House on this amendment – I guess we haven't yet. Maybe one of the other members will jump up. I do think that there is some merit in moving this amendment forward, keeping in mind the importance of good corporate governance. While I'll admit that I've sat on my fair share of boards, I do know that when you create uncertainty with respect to anything on the boards, pandemonium ensues. I've seen the paralyzing effect on boards when there is ambiguity or too many cooks in the kitchen trying to navigate complex decisions as a unit. Mr. Chair, I do think that this amendment aims to address this concern and will be much appreciated by the stakeholders that will be impacted by this legislation when it does come into force. When there are too many cooks in the kitchens, things become too complicated. A simple stew becomes a need for precise management that will cause even the most experienced head chef much grief. You may have inexperienced sous-chefs, busboys, pastry chefs, expeditors, et cetera, et cetera, who will all need to be managed by a few of those experts.

This cap on how many public members are appointed is absolutely necessary. When we talk about ensuring that the public is included, this isn't to try and prevent public members. This isn't to try to include the public interest in these governing bodies. It's to ensure that the effective function of these governing bodies is done in a way that helps them do good work and doesn't prevent a minister from interfering with those works. I'm sure that the minister opposite that proposed this good piece of legislation doesn't want to interfere with these professional associations. I take note of the potential concerns that might come out of that with respect to scandals, and I wouldn't want to see the minister embroiled in that if there were too many members appointed to, for example, the land surveyor governing body or an engineering governing body or APEGA, as my friend mentioned in his remarks for the amendment.

So yes, Chef – sorry; I mean Mr. Chair. I have been watching *The Bear* when we're not in session, and I may have brought this anecdote into this, into my speaking notes here.

When there are too many directors – and what I'm trying to say here: this type of chaos is created by unchecked appointment of public members under the current drafted 37(3). So while I fully support this bill, I do think that these amendments will enhance the necessary work this bill intends to do, and I urge the UCP to support this amendment to truly make this bill even better and make decisions that our governing bodies will do under this act copacetic and ensure that we have public members that are capped. Already, as the legislation states, we've heard from stakeholders that they want this type of amendment, and we should be putting this in place so then, that way, their concerns are taken into account.

We also need to understand that the current legislative regime already captures the concerns that we have with making sure that public members are capped at a certain amount, so by approving this amendment, we are already doing what the law stipulates and we are just making sure that this piece of legislation is updated with respect to 37(3) to ensure that we are following through with what our legislation already states.

We're not recreating the wheel here, Mr. Chair. We are doing things that are already in legislation but may have been an oversight by the minister. I do want to just commend that this is something that we need and it is something that our stakeholders have been asking for, but I do want us to make sure that we are doing the best possible job in this Legislature by proposing good amendments, by proposing good law so then, that way, these institutions have the legal certainty that they need to do the work that they need to do for their professions, for their members, because I wouldn't want to see anything happen with respect to any kind of interference with too many public members that might be appointed at the will of the minister.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do urge all members of this Assembly to support this amendment. I certainly support this amendment, and I would like to hear what some of my other friends on the other side might think about any changes to this bill.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to comment? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to the amendment that was brought forward by my friend from Edmonton-North West which amends section 24 in order to limit the number of public members that the minister can appoint to a governing body and also amend section 37(3) to limit the number of public appointments to these governing bodies.

I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-West Henday for bringing some passion and interest to the topic of corporate governance. It's not something that we see very often in day-to-day life, a passion for corporate governance. I'm glad that my friend from Edmonton-West Henday displays that, because even though it may not always be the most – you know, they're not going to make TV shows about corporate governors. My friend from Edmonton-West Henday said he was watching *The Bear*. I wonder what the corporate governance equivalent of *The Bear* might be. I don't think there is one, and if they tried, it would . . .

Member Arcand-Paul: *Succession*.

9:20

Mr. Schmidt: Ah, yes.

Regardless, the existence of self-governing professions in Alberta has served this province extremely well for about a century, and I'd certainly like to add a little bit of my own personal experience with work in the self-governance of the engineering and geoscience profession. I am a member of APEGA, one of the

associations that's being impacted by this legislation, and I have several years of experience as a volunteer on the Investigative Committee of APEGA, which is a committee that is established by statute. The current engineering and geoscience act sets out a requirement for APEGA to have this Investigative Committee, and the Investigative Committee's role is to investigate complaints against members for either unskilled practice or unethical conduct. Currently it – or at least when I was on the board, it had a number of members, 20 members I think, of APEGA, and we had one public member of the board. It was our job to investigate these complaints that came forward.

Certainly, we appreciated the enthusiasm that the public member brought to the work, but his scope was limited to only reviewing those complaints of unethical conduct. He was incapable of participating in the complaints about unskilled practice because in order to review a complaint of unskilled practice, you need to have expertise in the area that is the subject of the complaint. I recall that when we had complaints brought forward to us at the committee, the head of the Investigative Committee would set out the nature of the complaint and then ask for volunteers to participate in the investigation but stipulate that volunteers should have experience with the type of practice that was the subject of the complaint.

For example, if somebody had complaints about improper electrical engineering in a condominium, they would request that the person who conducts the investigation have experience with electrical engineering. In my case I had an opportunity to investigate a complaint about unskilled practice against somebody who claimed to be doing hydrogeology, a very niche area of expertise, Mr. Chair. I was the only member of the Investigative Committee at the time who had any expertise in hydrogeology, so I was glad to be able to offer my services and time to investigate that complaint. But the only way that I could do that was to have had education and experience working as a hydrogeologist.

This amendment will seek to limit the number of public members that the minister can appoint to the Investigative Committee that APEGA will be required to set up through this legislation, Mr. Chair, and that only makes sense. When you're dealing with hundreds of complaints of unskilled practice every year, you need to have a roster of qualified professionals to be able to meaningfully investigate those complaints. If we have a committee filled with public members who have no education or expertise in engineering or geosciences, APEGA will be unable to effectively investigate those complaints, and its ability to regulate the profession will suffer as a result.

And that's not the only committee that APEGA is required to have. Right now they've got boards of examiners, which set out the requirements for admission standards and professional practice standards for the practice of engineering. They've got the Practice Review Board, which develops and maintains professional practice standards, guidelines, and bulletins. These are not trifling matters that any member of the public can just learn on the job, Mr. Chair. The practice of engineering and geoscience is something that takes a long time in both school and in work to be able to do reasonably well.

My fear is that if we don't pass this amendment, then the government can appoint whomever they like to any of these boards, and its ability to conduct meaningful investigations, conduct meaningful disciplinary actions that uphold the integrity of the practice of engineering and geoscience and maintains public confidence in the ability of engineers and geoscientists in Alberta to be able to do their work skillfully and ethically. Then we will all suffer as a result. Mr. Chair, for those reasons I urge all members of this House to adopt this amendment and make sure that the

experts, the members of the regulatory agency that are given the responsibility of governing themselves maintain that ability and that it's not taken away by a minister who's keen to appoint a bunch of public members and swamp these organizations with people who don't have the expertise to regulate these professions.

Thank you.

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

The Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Chair. I move that we adjourn debate.

Mr. Sabir: We can vote on the amendment.

Mr. Schow: Oh, okay. I'd like to rescind that motion. I didn't know we were . . .

An Hon. Member: First day.

Mr. Schow: Certainly not my first day, but you know.

The Deputy Chair: No others wishing to make comments at this time?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

Mr. Schow: We adjourn debate on that, Mr. Chair, and rise and report progress on bills 41 and 40.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 41 and Bill 40. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 49 Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate April 17: Mr. Williams]

The Acting Speaker: Are there members wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to rise and speak to Bill 49 because I think that there are a lot of problems with this bill, and I'm not even sure I'll be able to get through them all. First and foremost, it enables a transition to a provincial police force. There are a lot of reasons that that is a problem, but time is limited in here, so I will be focused.

Before I even get into that, I did want to start by talking about a problem I see with the amendments to the Emergency Management Act, which is the first part of the bill amended, so right at the front. Initially what it appears to be doing is changing the words “payment of compensation” to “provision of financial or other assistance,” which sounds like a name change, although it is a troubling name change because compensation implies full compensation whereas provision of financial or other assistance implies otherwise. This is compensating places for disaster like fire, particularly when the fire has spread from a provincial jurisdiction and into a municipal jurisdiction. Essentially, what they’re changing are the words that are used to refer to the compensation to the municipalities for the time of their first responders.

9:30

And it allows a bunch of changes to regs, and that always concerns me, Mr. Speaker, especially with this government. You know, they have a propensity, a tendency. They’ve gone from one King Henry VIII clause, and we’re seeing another one to try to take from the Legislature the power which properly belongs to the Legislature and give that to themselves behind closed doors in a cabinet, where Albertans can’t see it.

Normally a name change on its own would be suspicious, and the reg-making power is more suspicious, but what is really concerning here is that they’ve added transitional provisions. They have provisions talking about when the transition from one set of rules to another set of rules occurs, and that time is April 1, 2025, so it’s retrospective in that regard. Mr. Speaker, I really think that if you’re not actually changing the rule, so if there’s not a change in substance of the rule, in this case payment of compensation to municipalities under this Emergency Management Act, then you don’t need to say when the rule changed; you only need to say that this is the effective date of the rule change if there is a substantive change. In my view, this is a substantive change.

We won’t know until we see the regulations, but if I were a municipality who might be seeking compensation under this, I would be extremely worried. I think it’s just worth flagging that because I think it’s highly problematic. It’s another instance of, well, essentially this government trying to pad its bottom line by appropriating money which does not belong to it.

Another big problem here is, obviously, the transition to the provincial police force. Let’s start with the big and obvious one, which is to say cost. PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates that the transition costs are \$366 million plus an additional \$200 million a year over and above costs. That’s half a billion dollars in the first year alone for the same or worse service, so literally this is a government that wants to pay more for the same or worse. That should be a problem to, well, everyone who pays taxes, honestly. That’s a huge, huge problem with this.

The second is that it probably won’t work. For the sake of argument I’m going to make a weird assumption, and that is to say that I’m going to take the minister at his word that the problem is vacancies. Now, this is a pretty big assumption, and the reason it’s a pretty big assumption is because both the RCMP union and the RCMP themselves have come out and said that the minister is – well, for the sake of being parliamentary, let’s charitably characterize it as mistaken about those numbers.

Mr. Speaker, I was a union lawyer. I worked in labour and employment. I will tell you that when you can get management and the union to agree on something, that thing is almost certainly true. There tends to be a lot of disagreement in that world, and in this

case we have complete agreement about the minister being totally mistaken about the problem he’s trying to solve.

Let’s make that assumption anyway and assume that the problem is, in fact, that the RCMP is unable to get human resources. Well, let’s consider why that’s happening. There’s actually a really obvious solution – it’s in news articles; it’s well known to anyone in the community – and that is recruitment. There has been a challenge with recruitment in policing not just in the RCMP; in all policing for quite some time. This is a problem for forces across the country. It’s heavily discussed amongst police forces. We have a recruitment problem that’s been notorious for years, and there’s no indication that moving to a provincial police force will change that. In fact, quite the opposite.

[The Speaker in the chair]

What, essentially, we would have to do in order to make this new provincial police force a solution to a recruitment problem is pay more – and not a little more; a lot more – adding, again, to the already bloated cost of \$366 million to transition plus \$200 million a year over and above what’s currently being paid. Again, at this point we’re assuming that the service is at best equal to the service we’re receiving now. So for at best equal service we are now paying, you know, more than \$200 million a year. That’s a pretty big problem.

Even beyond that, like, if we look to the case of Surrey, which has turned into its own debacle, they tried to transition away from the RCMP. Guess what, Mr. Speaker. They found out they couldn’t recruit people. They were trying to pay an extra \$20,000 recruitment bonus. They still couldn’t recruit people. It was a complete disaster. They had to try to walk it back, but then they couldn’t walk it back because it’d already gone too far. It wound up in a court case, and now the province is having to pay a bunch of money to the municipality to cover these excess costs. It was a pretty bad choice. So we have an example. We have an example where this was tried, and it didn’t work, not even a little. I think it’s a pretty clear case that, even assuming the minister is correct in his statement of the problem, which he probably isn’t, he is definitely not correct in his statement of this being a solution.

Let’s imagine the outcome the minister actually is looking for. Imagine that next year we can look at this issue and we can say that Alberta-wide crime has dropped 9 per cent, rural crime has dropped 11 per cent, rural detachment property crime down 27 per cent. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. That would be a heck of a solution, wouldn’t it? Well, we don’t actually have to imagine that because it happened. That’s from an article from 2018. This province faced a rural crime problem, and the RCMP and the NDP government got together and created a solution, a solution that was focused on intelligence-led policing, a solution that used teams that could be moved around the province, that focused on offenders, that focused on observing offenders and their behaviour and figuring out who the offenders were, because 80 per cent of the crimes were being committed by 20 per cent of the individuals, and solved the problem. That was a \$10 million investment. A \$10 million investment. It’s – what? – one-fifth of what they want to pay each year. Sorry; it’s less than 10 per cent. It’s 5 per cent of what they want to pay each year. Sorry. I correct that. Yeah. For 5 per cent of the cost that they’re proposing to have, they could have a solution that they know works, that has been implemented before.

They’ve got the problem wrong. They’ve got the solution wrong. They’ve got a lot of costs. What else is going on here? Well, the next problem is the nobody-wants-this problem, which is that local leadership definitely isn’t looking for it. This doesn’t have support. In fact, it has objection. It has objection

from the rural municipalities association. It has objection from, basically, municipal leaders across the province. This isn't what they want.

I guess what we're left with is something that's wildly unpopular, costs more money, and probably won't work, which leads us to the question: why would you do it? You know, why would you choose this as a policy solution? I mean, on its own it seems just poorly thought out, right? I'll admit that I don't trust the UCP much on complex policy matters. They don't seem to do a good job of, well, particularly anything, Mr. Speaker. I mean, could it just be that they're just completely mistaken? I suppose so, but it doesn't seem like that's likely. When you add it to other things, it all adds up to making a case.

9:40

We have the RCMP transition: unpopular, costs more, doesn't work. We add it to other things, like, say, for instance, the sovereignty act or the seemingly unending saga of the UCP resurrecting the idea of a provincial pension plan over and over and over again even though Albertans have resoundingly rejected it multiple times, even though it wouldn't do or have any of the benefits that they suggest and people just don't want it or – I don't know – we come to more recent comments, comments from the Premier about, well, refusing to participate with the rest of the country in fighting tariffs. All the other provinces are aligned. All the other provinces think that this is a problem. Our Premier, apparently, thinks it's a big win. I wouldn't agree that it is a big win.

When you take this provincial police force, which is such an epically bad idea, and you add it to all of these other things – the sovereignty act, the pension plan, the refusal to participate in the rest of the country, the threatening, the low-level suggestions by various parties amongst this government that perhaps we should consider a separation referendum – Mr. Speaker, what it looks like to me is that this isn't just an absolutely terrible idea. This goes beyond being an epically bad plan and, in fact, delves into one more step that this government is taking in an unending attempt to leave this country.

Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans have been crystal clear on this. I mean, they've been clear on the RCMP, they've been clear on the Canada pension plan, and they've been clear on the idea of separating from Canada. They don't want it. They don't want it.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that is bad. I would urge all members to vote against it, and I would urge many members over there who represent rural constituencies with rural citizens who have real concerns about crime, concerns that could be addressed effectively with a plan that has been used in this province before that has been proven to reduce rural crime – I would ask those members to go out and talk to those constituents. I would ask them to go and talk to leaders in their municipalities who absolutely don't want this and really consider whether it's a good idea to support this legislation because I think, resoundingly, it isn't, and ultimately we are all answerable to our constituents. I would strongly advise the members over there to consider the actions they are taking and the part that those actions play in a larger plan, which is a plan that Albertans, by vast majority, do not support. Albertans are Canadians first. Albertans are proud Albertans and proud Canadians. Those things are not mutually exclusive.

Mr. Speaker, I will simply end by saying that this is a very bad bill, and I would urge all members to consider it very carefully and vote against it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate on second reading of Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency

Services Amendment Act? The hon. the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 49. Before that, I also want to clarify a misconception. People think that whatever happens here, the debates that are happening here, people don't watch, but even at this time there are three Albertans who are watching the debate on this important piece of legislation. I happen to know them as well: Hardeep Parihar, Shah Faisal, Akif Bahadur. Two of them are in my constituency office. One of them is in the constituency office of my friend from Calgary-North East. I thank them for their dedication to the work they do and their enthusiasm to watch the proceedings in this House.

With that, I will come back to the bill and start where my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View left off, that we are accountable to Albertans. In a democratic system elections are held every four years on regular intervals, and parties make their offer to Albertans. Based on that offer, Albertans elect members and elect their government.

Last election the UCP offer to Albertans didn't include many things that the government is doing now. It didn't include an Alberta provincial police force. In fact, prior to election, the UCP commissioned a PricewaterhouseCoopers report that showed clearly how expensive this boondoggle will be, and the UCP dropped that conversation about an Alberta provincial police force, and they didn't include that in their offer to Alberta. They didn't get a mandate from Albertans to establish a provincial police force, and here we are debating in this House Bill 49, that will pave the way for the UCP to establish a UCP police force.

It has nothing to do with public safety. It's all about this government's politics of stoking separatism. As my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View was saying, there are many things. If you add them up together, this government is taking steps that are dangerous. They are stoking the flames of separatism.

This bill will not help us with public safety in any measurable manner, but at least the government did not make the case for that. While debating Bill 49 in the House the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services made certain claims that were not correct. The RCMP union, their management both contradicted the minister's claim. They openly contradicted it. They published open letters. If the government was really serious about public safety, there are many things that they could do. Alberta provincial police force is not one of them.

There is decades of research, academic literature that clearly shows, clearly establishes that if you want to address crime, if you want to address and improve the justice system, you have to focus on social determinants of justice, which are also the social determinants of crime. They happen to be access to education, access to housing, access to health care, access to employment, access to mental health supports. However, when we look at that, the UCP is completely failing on all those fronts.

9:50

If we talk about education, this UCP government is investing the least amount of funding on a per-student basis across Canada. If they were serious about social determinants of justice, they would spend money on education. Instead of spending a billion plus dollars on this boondoggle, they would focus their priorities on education.

If they are serious about addressing public safety, they will address the housing crisis. Alberta has some of the highest rent across the country. We have seen houselessness skyrocket in our bigger cities, Edmonton, Calgary, and across rural communities, and they have yet to do anything about it.

When we look at employment, Albertans are losing jobs. They're fearful that because of tariffs coming from the south, there will be more uncertainty, there could be more job losses. Yet they will go down to the States to take selfies, enjoy cocktail parties instead of focusing on addressing employment issues, job loss issues facing this province. When we talk about employment in the last six years, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's minimum wage is stagnant, and we have seen inflation skyrocket over these years.

When we talk about access to mental health, they're building some recovery communities. However, the fact remains that up until last year we were losing six Albertans to addictions. We have not seen any meaningful action from this government.

In this day and age, if we look at our justice system, Indigenous communities are still overrepresented in our justice system. Person of colour communities are overrepresented. Black communities are overrepresented. If the government really wants to be taken seriously, they should focus on issues that are facing our justice system, that will help us improve public safety, but that's not a priority for this government. Doing things that will help them stoke separatism: that's the priority for this government, and that's the reason they're bringing forward this piece of legislation.

Instead of focusing on public safety based on research, based on evidence and listening to people on the front lines, people who know about public safety, they are just prioritizing their politics over public safety. As the saying goes – I think I have heard many police chiefs say it as well – you can't police yourself out of crime. You need to focus on the root causes of crime, you need to focus on social determinants of crime, you need to focus on social determinants of justice, and the government is not doing any of that.

So I don't think that we will be supporting this bill. One, it's costly. It will cost Albertans a lot of money, over a billion dollars over a six-year period. That's what the government's own report says. It will also cost \$360 million plus in start-up costs. Again, that's the government's own report that says those things. Overall the cost for policing will increase anywhere from \$732 to \$754 million.

This government is already in debt. They have a deficit of over \$5 billion, but they think it's fine to borrow more so they can pursue this boondoggle.

Mr. Schow: Is that a conversation you really want to have, about deficits?

Mr. Sabir: Yeah. Look at your own budget. Your own budget documents say that you have a deficit of \$5 billion, which is likely to increase. It might go . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sabir: If oil goes down, the deficit could go higher.

Nobody is asking this government, no Albertans are asking this government – municipalities are not asking for it, Alberta Municipalities is not asking for it, Rural Municipalities of Alberta organization is not asking for it – to borrow money to pursue their pet projects like the Alberta police force. Nobody is asking this government to establish an Alberta pension plan. People want this government to focus on issues that matter to them, that they are facing every single day.

I said that one of the social determinants of justice is health. In Alberta Health Services there are those corruption scandals, too, but I was not going there, if you think. Almost 800,000 Albertans don't have access to a family doctor, yet the government thinks that this is a priority for them. Those who don't have access to family doctors I think deserve that access.

There are many Albertans in our rural communities who don't have access to health care. Talk to your constituents. At any given time there are 25-plus emergency rooms that are closed in rural communities. People want access to those services. Instead, the government is focused on borrowing money so they can create an Alberta provincial police force and they can stir up separatism more to further their political agenda.

I urge all members of this House to think about it. Albertans didn't give you a mandate to do this. Albertans didn't elect you to separate from Canada. Albertans elected you to focus on their priorities, advocate for their needs, their priorities, which are health care, education, employment, a functional justice system so that they can be safe in their communities. The government completely got this wrong. I urge all members to vote against this piece of legislation.

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

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin on Bill 49 I want to appreciate my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Only he could masterfully weave together the police legislation with a guest introduction. I appreciate his political multitasking. Of course, a warm welcome to the dedicated staff, including Matt Callaway. Now they know that their presence is officially on the record.

Mr. Speaker, I rise as the MLA for Calgary-North East, a resident of Calgary-North East, and a neighbour of hard-working Albertans and as someone who has worked alongside the very people this government so often chooses to ignore when it comes to public safety.

10:00

Let me be clear. I support front-line officers who serve with integrity, but Bill 49 is not about strengthening safety; it's about power, politics, and pushing a provincial police force Albertans have already rejected. Mr. Speaker, 86 per cent of Albertans want to keep the RCMP; 84 per cent say that there are far more urgent priorities than dismantling a system that's working. Not a single municipality – not a single one – has come knocking asking this government for this new police service.

I ask this House: who is this bill for? Certainly not for the people of Calgary-North East, Mr. Speaker. In my community public safety doesn't feel like a slogan. It's not a line in a political pamphlet. It is very personal, Mr. Speaker. It's a mother texting her daughter: don't take the train tonight. It's a small business owner wondering if their shop will be broken into again. It's families telling me they feel less safe now than they did five years ago, and they are not wrong. Under this UCP government crime in Calgary has gone up. According to Stats Canada violent crime, property crime, and hate incidents have all been on the rise, especially in urban and racialized neighbourhoods like mine. While we debate legislation in this Chamber, people in northeast Calgary are debating whether to walk to the grocery store after the sunset.

But instead of investing in what works – community policing, mental health supports, addiction services, crime prevention programs – this government is busy pouring millions of dollars into a restructuring scheme that nobody asked for. The same government that said they wouldn't pursue a provincial police force before the election is now pushing it under a new name, hoping Albertans won't notice. We noticed, Mr. Speaker.

We also noticed that while the minister claims that there are only five officers in Peace River, the actual number is 29; that while the minister claims 911 calls are going unanswered, 97 per cent are answered within two minutes; and that while he blames the RCMP

for rising costs, a first-class constable in the RCMP usually earns less than their Calgary and Edmonton counterparts. Mr. Speaker, this government is not solving a safety crisis; it is manufacturing one.

Here's what worries me the most. Under this bill municipalities could be forced to shoulder massive, unpredictable costs if they adapt to this new police service. Budgets could be destabilized, services could be cut, and who pays the price? Not the UCP. The families already struggling to afford groceries, utilities, rising insurance costs will be left to cover the tab for an unnecessary, billion-dollar police experiment. Let me remind this House of the math. A full transition to a provincial police service could cost about \$1.4 billion. Add to that \$1.170 million Alberta would lose in annual federal RCMP funding. That's \$1 billion more gone and still no timeline, no feasibility study, no transparency at all.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve to feel safe, but they also deserve to know the truth. That's why Alberta NDP has already put forward the commitments. We have pledged to increase funding for integrated hate crime units, expand community-based police, strengthen mental health crisis response teams, and, crucially, support municipalities, not saddle them with secret bills and hollow slogans. We believe public safety isn't achieved by building a new bureaucracy; it is built by trust, by partnership, and by showing up.

To my constituents in Calgary-North East: let me speak directly to you. You told me that you want better lighting at LRT stations, not more confusion about who is in charge of policing. You want timely emergency response, not political theatre. You want to know your kids can walk home safely no matter where they went, no matter what they wear, no matter how they look and where they live. You're not asking for a new logo on the side of a cruiser. You are asking for dignity, for safety, and for peace of mind.

To the hard-working RCMP officers and Alberta sheriffs who serve our communities: thank you. We may debate policies in this Chamber, but we respect your service every single day. You deserve leadership that empowers you, not misleads the public about your work.

Mr. Speaker, we do not oppose reforms. We oppose waste. We oppose deception. We oppose a bill that hijacks public safety to push a partisan agenda. I say this with resolve. The Alberta NDP will not stand by while this government plays political dress-up with our security. We will continue to fight for real safety rooted in truth, accountability, and community.

To every family in Calgary-North East: I stand with you, and I will keep showing up for you.

I request all members of this House to vote against this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate? Are there others? Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[The voice vote indicated that motion for second reading carried]

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

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Ellingson	Kasawski
Brar	Elmeligi	Miyashiro
Ceci	Ganley	Renaud
Chapman	Goehring	Sabir
Dach	Haji	Schmidt
Eggen	Ip	Tejada

Totals:	For – 43	Against – 18
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[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a second time]

Bill 51

Education Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate April 28: Member Tejada]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has five minutes remaining should she choose to use it. Seeing not, are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Minister of Education to close debate.

Mr. Nicolaides: Waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 51 read a second time]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:29 p.m.]

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