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The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 106

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 5, 2025

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 41 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025

The Chair: We are currently on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis. Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm proud to rise again today to speak to my colleagues about Bill 41, Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025 and address some misconceptions. This bill is about making smart, practical updates to how we manage wildlife in Alberta. It's focused on helping hunters, supporting ethical practices, and making sure our laws keep up with the times, especially when it comes to technology, enforcement, and alignment with federal laws.

Unfortunately, much of the debate we've heard so far hasn't actually been about what's in the bill, so let's be clear. Bill 41 does not make any changes to bear hunting. It does not create a, quote, open season, as we've heard. It does not allow people to hunt grizzly bears. What members opposite are referring to is a separate policy that deals with conflict bears, bears that pose a real danger to people or livestock. In rare cases when a bear is aggressive or causing serious problems, a trained Albertan may be called in as a last resort to deal with that specific animal. That is not a hunt. That is not a sport. It's about protecting people and property.

For the record this policy has been in place for nearly a year, and not a single grizzly bear has been harvested yet. Maybe the members opposite can define what an open season means to them. The member's opposite know that this policy follows the same guidelines as exist for fish and wildlife officers when it comes to destroying a problem bear, so it can't add to any more destruction that's already happening on the landscape now.

As for cougars: again, this has nothing to do with Bill 41, but since it came up, I'll say this. We've expanded the number of cougar management areas to better track and manage populations, and even with those changes, our quotas are still lower than what the previous government allowed. In 2018-2019, the NDP approved a quota for 167 cougars – that's 95 males and 72 females – with quotas as high as 18 cougars in one area. In the two years prior to that their quotas were 155 cougars each year; 86 males and 69 females. Compare that to today, under our government. The total is 132 across nearly twice the area as when the NDP were in power. We all know the importance of having a healthy cougar population across the province, but when the NDP were in power, I guess they didn't care at that time.

Now that we've addressed what this bill is not about, I'd like to take a look at the amendment proposed for it, amendment A1. Now,

going by some of the comments from the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, I'll just read from her comments.

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.

Well, I guess what I would say on that one is that I'm guessing that the member opposite wants to see an actual grizzly bear hunt, because now she's suggesting that we need to have tags allocated for each of these species, including grizzly bears. That's an interesting take right off the start.

She goes on to say:

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."

Well, Madam Chair, we already are doing this when it comes to looking at available scientific data, talking to people across the province, listening to stakeholders. I was kind of curious what independent wildlife biologists – I'm not sure how we find who or where all these independent wildlife biologists are, as far as talking to them, but just for the record I have talked to independent wildlife biologists in the past, actually the past couple of weeks even, about some of the numbers and what we need to do for managing wildlife. What wasn't listed in there, of course, was First Nations. We discussed these things with First Nations, too. I think by listing all these things specifically, there are some things that this amendment leaves out.

Now, amendment A1 proposes setting tag numbers based on what the member opposite would consider data, habitat, mortality rates, and making that data public. These are all matters that are not included in the scope of the bill; moreover many of these suggestions are not fully measured or are already implemented into practice. The member spoke about considering mortality rates when determining tags, but I'd like to point out the following in the amendment proposed. It says:

For each class of wildlife animal . . . the Minister must, no later than September 30 of each calendar year, determine the maximum number of tags that may be issued under section 14 in the following calendar year.

As the member should know, this would not be possible to abide by, as a number of mentioned mortalities happen over the cold winter months, and an especially cold winter could mean significantly higher mortalities.

Madam Chair, when we look at the wildlife numbers, we always look at the numbers in the wintertime when there's snow so that we can analyze, count the numbers, either by helicopter surveys or underground surveys. But by determining the numbers for the following year by September 30, we've missed that opportunity to gather that information that we need to make the proper decisions when it comes to numbers. Each year, the number of tags are determined after winter and after we've had a chance to see how mortalities have impacted population numbers. Determining tags prior to the winter months could be dangerously harmful to animal populations, and I would suggest it would be irresponsible.

The amendment goes on to say:

In determining the maximum number of tags that may be issued, the Minister must do the following:

- (a) consider the best available scientific data and analysis regarding population dynamics, habitat capacity and conservation status of the class of wildlife animal; [and]
- (b) consult with independent wildlife biologists and other stakeholders as the minister considers appropriate.

Madam Chair, we already do that. Every year we base tag numbers on the best available science, including population size, habitat conditions, and natural mortality. We consult biologists. We talk to First Nations. We talk to stakeholders and local experts before setting quotas. I'd also like to point out that the member's amendment also fails to mention First Nations, discussions with them.

The amendment continues:

No later than September 30 of each calendar year, the Minister must publish the following information on the publicly available website of the department administered by the Minister . . .

- (b) the number of tags issued in respect to each class of wildlife animal during the previous calendar year.

Madam Chair, we actually already publish all these tag numbers ahead of time. We're publishing right now what's coming up for the draw season that's coming up. If you look back on the website, you can see the past numbers going back multiple years, probably 10 or 15 years even.

Again, the September deadline would not be possible as we must consider the impacts of winter on animal populations. Aside from that, we already do that as well. Tags issued are publicly listed and much of the data used to make our decisions is easily accessible on open Alberta or through published studies.

While it may sound helpful, this amendment is redundant and, frankly, a step backwards. We already use science. We already follow careful processes. We already consider animal mortality. We also make decisions after all the information is available, unlike this amendment. It proposes forcing an early fall decision. This amendment would force irresponsible management, Madam Chair. We also consider input from First Nations, which this amendment fails to mention, again.

Those reasons are why I cannot support this proposed amendment. With that said, I hope my colleagues can join me in supporting Bill 41, as it is about practical focused changes, but not support this amendment. Bill 41 helps modernize our laws, improves enforcement, supports ethical hunting, and brings our rules in line with federal regulations and modern technology. It matters to hunters, to fish and wildlife and conservation officers, to rural families, and to anyone who wants to see responsible and ethical wildlife management in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there any other members that wish to join the debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill; no amendments before us. Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 41 one more time here. I just want to express my disappointment in the members opposite not being able to support the application of science and wildlife management.

7:40

That's what this amendment was going to do. This amendment was designed to do two things, make sure that wildlife management decisions were based in science and to make sure that data is publicly available. The members opposite just voted against both. In that one move the members opposite have voted against the use of science in wildlife decision-making.

The minister likes to play games with words, Madam Chair, and he likes to act as if this is just me, the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis, speaking on my own and just making things up out of thin air. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. McIver: She's here all week.

Dr. Elmeligi: Yeah. I'm here all week.

The minister likes to speak about misconceptions on this side of the aisle, but I would challenge him to have a consideration of his own or the UCP's own misconceptions. This bill does not open a hunt for bears, but what it doesn't do is guarantee the application of science in determining the number of trapping and hunting quotas and tags.

The minister spent a lot of time just then talking about September 30 as a date and how that doesn't work. "Oh, no. It couldn't work because, like, we can't just talk about it in the future. We can't talk about it in the past." Okay. Fine. Whatever. Change the date. I'm not super married to September 30. That could have been an amendment, but it wasn't. They shot it down. That's because the minister and the UCP have no interest in providing transparency and accountability or using science in wildlife-based management decision-making, Madam Chair, and that's what's really disappointing here today.

The minister said that the data is already published. Well, I beg to differ because over the last year I've heard the minister shout out random numbers about the number of grizzly bears there are in Alberta, and none of those numbers match the actual recovery plan, which is the most recent data that we have on population estimates of bears. Several of the decisions the minister has made in the last year go against existing government species management plans, like for cougars, like for fur bears, like for grizzly bear recovery plan. I went all over this when I presented this amendment last week. There's a reason why I proposed this amendment, Madam Chair, and that's because there is no data informing these management decisions.

I know that I also have talked to independent biologists and all of them are gravely concerned about the decisions that the minister has made. Some of them are so concerned that earlier today a couple of organizations released an open letter to the minister where they asked him to rescind the decisions to double female cougar quotas, adding six additional cougar management areas, and setting quotas in these new areas to non-zero numbers; expanding the minister's special licence species and seasons, particularly for at-risk species like mountain goats; allowing public hunting of problem grizzly bears, a threatened species; and lifting quotas on sensitive fur-bearing animals like wolverines, fishers, Canada lynx, and river otters.

Why do you think, Madam Chair, that these groups and the scientists who have provided them with data are asking the minister to rescind these decisions? They're asking the minister to rescind these decisions because they're not based on science. The science from biologists in this province who have devoted their careers to understanding these animals have actually found data that contradicts every single one of these ministers' decisions. It is gravely concerning not just to me but for the thousands of Albertans

who have e-mailed me asking how this minister can be making these decisions not based on wildlife science.

I'll be honest with you, Madam Chair, it's one of the reasons why I became an MLA, to bring wildlife science to the floor of the Legislature. So I'm thankful to the minister for that opportunity to yet again champion the need for sound, robust science informing wildlife management decision-making and policies.

While this Bill 41 does not contain this excellently worded amendment to ensure science is used and by the data is publicly released, the bill itself does implement actions that will affect wildlife populations. When we increase hunting and trapping opportunities, while I think that that's great, more people should get outside and appreciate the great wilderness that Alberta has to offer. While we're making that decision and we're also making it easier for people to hunt and trap, that's also fine. Couple that with totally unsustainable hunting and trapping quotas for several species at risk, and you have a problem. You've got more people interested and more people going out onto the landscape to engage in this form of recreation and subsistence, yet we also have removals of tag limits and trapping limits.

The minister correctly pointed out that still under the NDP government there were more cougar tags than there are under this UCP government. I'll just say: sure. I mean, that was six years ago. I think we've learned a little bit more since then. You would think, Madam Chair, that six years would be long enough for the UCP to get it right, but clearly it is not. The minister has suggested that lifting trapping quotas is good for data collection. Utter nonsense. An animal in a trap doesn't tell you how many animals are out there; it just tells you how many animals you've trapped. Give me a break.

The minister likes to talk about it as if it's like: what the member opposite would consider to be data. I'd just like to take this time, Madam Chair, to let you know that science is not an ideology. It is not something that you believe in. It is not something that you have faith in. That's the Creator or whoever you choose to believe in your faith. Science has nothing to do with faith. It is data. Data doesn't have feelings, data doesn't have opinions, and it doesn't have objectives. It is data. It is what people do with that data; that's when it turns into politicizing something that is never meant to be political. Wildlife management should not be political. It should be based on data, and in this particular minister's case it is not.

It is for that reason and also some questions around the ethics and conflict of interest that this minister has exhibited that some people are even e-mailing me asking for the minister to resign, Madam Chair. Some people are so upset about this minister's approach to wildlife management that they don't even think he should be Minister of Forestry and Parks anymore. I would be upset if many Albertans didn't think I was doing a good enough job and wanted me to step down. You'd think that that would be a little bit more impactful for some people in the House.

Lastly, I'll just say that the minister has accused me of not considering and consulting with First Nations. Again, Madam Chair, nothing could be further from the truth. I have two First Nations in my riding. I proudly meet with and talk with them regularly. I proudly meet with and talk with Indigenous leaders across Alberta regularly, and we have two on this side of the House that I proudly meet with and talk with regularly. The minister is correct that First Nations were not listed in this amendment, and they should have been and I will own that. I will say: yes, First Nations should have been listed, but there were many other stakeholders who weren't listed.

The only other thing I'll add to that, Madam Chair, is that as far as I can tell, the only stakeholders the minister has actually consulted with on his hunting and trapping limits are hunters and trappers. There are a whole lot of other stakeholders out there that

have an interest in wildlife management in Alberta, and they were not consulted on this: experts, independent biologists, Albertans, citizens, recreationists, people who don't hunt and trap. The reality is that hunters and trappers, although they have very much an important role to play in this conversation, are not the only people in Alberta who are interested in wildlife, and those other people also deserve to be consulted. I also know that First Nations were not consulted on Bill 41 because I asked them, so don't tell me that I don't consult with First Nations.

At the end of the day, Madam Chair, the UCP government has decided to vote against the application of science and wildlife management. I find that shameful. We could do so much better by our Alberta wildlife, and we are actively choosing not to.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just have to I guess make a few comments on here. She talked about there were some misconceptions in the amendment. The September 30 date wasn't a misconception. I mean, it's clearly written in there multiple times: September 30. That part of the amendment alone shows complete disrespect for using science to make decisions managing wildlife because you can't gather the data you need to make decisions by making the decision before you gather the data. That shows not only a complete disrespect for using data to manage wildlife but a complete lack of knowledge about wildlife management.

The member opposite considers this an excellent amendment. Well, it's far from being an excellent amendment. When we talk about the female quotas on cougars, for instance, the member opposite – I mean, I just went through the numbers. The numbers are the numbers. As far as in 2018 and 2019 95 male cougars were in their quota. Seventy-two females were in their quota. That's 167 versus 132 now, and we've extended the area to almost double what it was when the NDP were in power. Previous to that, 86 males, 69 females. I'll tell you what, Madam Chair. Mature male cougars on the landscape are important to have. With this kind of mismanagement that was happening when the NDP were in power, that's mismanagement.

7:50

We talk about the minister's special licences. Minister's special licences are raising \$1.2 million a year to go to wildlife management in this province right here; \$1.2 million. That's good money going to a good cause right here in this province.

Now, we're talking about all the e-mails. The member is talking about the e-mails she's receiving. Well, there's no wonder they're receiving so much e-mails because the NDP are providing so much misinformation to the public that people are getting upset, but if they knew the truth, they would probably understand a lot better what's going on.

Now, it seems like when people are elected in this place, the members opposite, if they have some sort of professional accreditation previous to it, they take that hat off and they put on an orange hat, and that orange hat is all about being NDP and all about being activists and not talking about common sense of what needs to be done.

I always get a kick out of the members opposite talking about conflicts of interest. Madam Chair, the Ethics Commissioner has allowed me to make the decisions I'm making specifically. We have a letter stating that. The members opposite know that. They keep bringing it up because it's all about smearing people and it's not

about doing anything properly. It's not about operating with science. It isn't talking about doing the right things for Albertans. It's all about smearing people, and I find that actually reprehensible.

I agree that all Albertans feel that managing wildlife properly is important to them. It doesn't matter if they only see wildlife once a week or once a month when they drive out of a big city and see an animal standing on the side of the road. They appreciate that, and I want to make sure that they can do that, not just the hunters and not just the trappers, not just the people that go out and are hiking in the outdoors or live in the farming areas that are seeing wildlife regularly but the people that only get out once in a while. They deserve and they need to see the wildlife and be able to appreciate it, because you don't appreciate things that you don't see.

Madam Chair, the amendment was a horrible, horrible amendment. It was an irresponsible amendment, and this bill brings a lot of balance back to the Wildlife Act. It modernizes things, and I expect that we should have good support on this bill moving forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to Bill 41? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, Madam Chair, this feels like it's actually turning into a little bit of a back-and-forth debate, so thank you, Minister, for that.

Here's a quote from a cougar biologist.

Recent changes to cougar management in Alberta instituted by [the Minister of Forestry and Parks] are not supported by Alberta's existing cougar management framework or current scientific information. Changes appear to be driven by anecdotal information from stakeholders with vested interests in hunting both cougars and their prey, all of which are contrary to accepted scientific information currently available. The changes have the potential to reduce Alberta's cougar population, contrary to the cougar management plan's stated objective to maintain a stable population of at least 1,500 cougars.

That news release I spoke about that came out earlier today, Madam Chair, from these organizations asking the minister to rescind these policies contains 35 pages of quotes just like that from biologists in Alberta, repudiating the minister's claims that his recent decisions on hunting and trapping are based in science.

I personally also really don't like this idea that I put on some kind of ideology hat when I come into this room, Madam Chair. I am a wildlife biologist. I have a PhD in wildlife biology. I went to school for a very long time to be able to stand in this room to say that, and it's pretty offensive to insinuate otherwise.

Thirty-five pages of data, Madam Chair, about wolverines, fishers, lynx, river otters, grizzly bears, mountain goats, cougars, all of which are decisions that the minister has made in the last year increasing hunting and trapping limits: none of those decisions are based on the best available science. The best available science changes over time, Madam Chair. That's why it's important that we continually update our decisions based on the best available science. We continually learn more, and on this side of the House we value learning and we value this idea of continual learning, continuing to update and inform policy and wildlife management decision-making. I don't need to go back and forth on how great this amendment was or how whatever the minister perceives it to be. I want to say that the important thing is that we're not using science to inform wildlife management decisions. It will have negative implications for wildlife populations across the province. The minister is obligated to protect wildlife populations through his decisions. That is literally his job, and he is not doing it.

In terms of the conflict of interest piece, Madam Chair, that's not coming from me. That's coming from constituents who are concerned about this minister's direct ties to the hunting and trapping community and how all of the decisions that he makes directly benefit the hunting and trapping community. That's not coming from me; that's coming from constituents. It's my job to represent them in this House, and I feel like I have done that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 41, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 41 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 40 Professional Governance Act

The Chair: I am looking for members who wish to join the debate. The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my honour to speak to Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act, in Committee of the Whole today. When I moved second reading of this bill a number of weeks ago, I spoke at some length about the necessity of this legislation. However, I know that some members of the opposition and the Member for Edmonton-North West in particular had some questions, so I will be using my limited time today to address some of these questions and, hopefully, provide some clarity to all the members of this House.

To begin, there was a question raised about the consultations that were undertaken with PROs in the development of this bill. Madam Chair, I'm sure the member will be happy to know that my ministry has engaged in extensive consultations with PROs since 2023, leading to the development of the Professional Governance Act. We have listened to their input, suggestions, and concerns, and this bill is really a result of that work. In fact, the executive director of the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists, one of those PROs, has publicly stated that in his almost 30 years of regulatory experience with the government of Alberta this has been arguably one of the most collaborative efforts among professional regulatory bodies and the government. We also continue to meet with our PRO stakeholders as a collective group as well as individually on Bill 40, including regarding the development of corresponding regulations.

I also know that the member was wondering whether the Ombudsman would be accessible by all 22 of the PROs. The answer to that is yes. The current legislation only allows four regulatory bodies to access the Ombudsman, and extending this ability to all of Advanced Education's PROs was one of the main motivations behind the development of this bill. That is in section 183 of this bill.

There was also a question about the other PROs outside of Advanced Education. To clarify, those other regulated professions will remain under their current legislation. In fact, the 29 health occupations have already been consolidated under the Health Professions Act, similar to what Bill 40 would do for Advanced Education's PROs.

While I know there was some concern around ensuring that the PROs have the autonomy to be able to conduct disciplinary proceedings and so forth without fear of government overreach, I can assure all members that PROs are delegated self-governing responsibility for all matters pertaining to application, registration, professional conduct, disciplinary actions, and ensuring public interest within the profession.

8:00

As you will see, the complaints process is a substantial component in this act. For most PROs the PGA's complaint process will bring modernization and will allow for alternative processes to address complaints. One PRO even told us that they were eagerly awaiting the PGA because their legislation is over 40 years old, and they can only hold complaints processes in camera. They have been looking forward to having a suite of tools to be able to address complaints.

On the lighter, or I guess heavier, side of things, Madam Chair, the same member had remarked that Bill 40 is significantly heavier than the Bill 23 that preceded it. Interestingly enough though it is only 13 pages longer, going from 200 to 213 pages, and is significantly shorter than the combined page count of all of the existing professional regulatory legislation that it would replace. So I'm not sure if that was completely accurate.

I believe there are also questions pertaining to the offences and penalty amounts set out in this bill. Offences and penalties are not currently consistent across professional legislation, including the types of offences, penalty amounts, potential for imprisonment upon third and subsequent offences, and relating to timelines for prosecution to commence for offences. So this bill would streamline, standardize, and modernize all offences and penalties into one overarching section that would be divided into separate penalty amounts for individual registrants and those for business registrants.

I also want to clarify that this bill does not change the relationship between PROs and postsecondaries. PROs already have entry-to-practice standards for their profession to gain membership, and these may include education, experience, competencies, and more. These entry-to-practice standards will continue under Bill 40.

I recall also that multiple members were wondering whether this bill would affect interprovincial labour mobility. Rest assured that I share your concerns, and I'm proud that Alberta is a national leader in eliminating barriers. However, Bill 40 is not the place for this work. Bill 40 would not amend any of Advanced Education's PROs' scope of practice, definition of practice, or registration requirements. These PROs are transitioning with what they currently have in place. They will not affect any current agreements that are already in place to address labour mobility. However, you will see that there is also a provision in the act to support compliance with other acts, namely the Fair Registration Practices Act and the Labour Mobility Act, two landmark pieces of legislation when it comes to labour mobility. Those acts are examples of how we are continuing to eliminate barriers to labour mobility in this province.

Finally, there was a question from the Member for Edmonton-South West on whether disagreement or conflict could be addressed internally within regulatory bodies rather than going through the court system and whether this bill would enable that. That member can rest assured that while an appeal can be made to the court of appeal in applicable circumstances, Bill 40 sets out a robust complaints inquiry process, providing for a comprehensive resolution process which sits outside of the court system. Additionally, the bill further contains a stand-alone section related to alternate processes for a complaints inquiry which specifically

relates to potential engagement of a mediator to try to resolve issues before even entering the complaints inquiry process.

Madam Chair, I hope that these responses have proven useful and answer some of the questions that members may have had. If there are more questions, I'm very happy and pleased to answer them going forward. I call on all members of this House to vote in favour of Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act, which marks an important step to continue protecting the public interest and providing the best possible services to Albertans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to add my voice to the debate on Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act, and as the minister has just described, it does impact several professions. Nine pieces of legislation, 28 supporting regulations, and 22 professional regulatory organizations are going to be unified under this one framework that pertains to Advanced Education. Of course, this isn't the first time the UCP government has done this type of kind of legislation that will combine many different professions. Certainly, Bill 46, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2020 (No. 2), Minister Shandro at the time put out legislation that impacted many health professions, including my own, the College of Social Workers.

You know, I appreciate the minister's comments that they did extensive consultation and that this will be a positive step forward and wanting to make sure that the regulatory bodies still have autonomy. This all sounds very, very good. However, certainly the history of the UCP and specifically with the bill that I'm talking about with the health professions that were impacted in the Health Statutes Amendment Act, Bill 46, from the UCP government, that's not what happened. There was actually a lot of government overreach, very little support for these organizations, these regulatory professional organizations, and a lot of chaos ensued. I hope history does not repeat itself because it was a significant loss for my own profession, and we continue to have many challenges in the profession of social workers because of that specific legislation.

I hope I can take the minister at her word because certainly there were not sufficient resources, not sufficient support in the transition. Our own shadow minister, the MLA for Edmonton-North West himself has said, and I'm going to quote here: we have to respect each of the traditions that all of these professions are coming from and make sure that we're not burdening them with unnecessary expense and bureaucracy as well. I hope the minister is hearing that, and it is absolutely essential.

There are five hallmarks of a profession, and these hallmarks need to be respected. Unfortunately, this government has decided many times to sort of muck about with professions. We see what they've done with the Alberta Teachers' Association. They've forced them into, you know, moving their pensions into AIMCo without their consent. They have now sort of a body that oversees all their professional disciplinary hearings whereas that is generally seen as one of the hallmarks of a profession, that you are self-governing. We know that despite some of the minister's words that we're hearing now, professions don't seem to have the respect of the government and the autonomy that they should have.

For the record I'll just explain what some of those hallmarks are. First of all, every profession has a code of ethics. That means that there are ethical standards that each profession follows. Beyond being, say, an employee of child welfare, which I was for many years, I knew what my profession asked me to do, and I knew what

my boss at child welfare told me. Sometimes those weren't the same, and guess what? My profession overrode that because I'm accountable to my code of ethics. I'm not just a good worker; I actually must fulfill as a professional that code of ethics.

There also needs to be an independent body. In my profession it's the Alberta College of Social Workers, and that body was split by this legislation I refer to, this Bill 46 previously, because no longer could the association and the regulatory body be together according to this piece of legislation. You know, that might be fine for the nurses who have, whatever they do, 80,000-plus members, but for social workers, we only have about 10,000. When you split off part of that organization, it's really the death knell for the association side because of course there's mandatory registration for the regulatory body, but it's just voluntary in the other way.

Sadly, I think that's what's happening in our province, much to my dismay. It has weakened my profession very much. I hope this bill is not doing that and that some of these sort of fledgling smaller regulatory bodies aren't going to be having those difficulties.

8:10

Another hallmark of a profession is, of course, mandatory registration, so it's not optional. If you are, you know, educated in that particular discipline, you must have up-to-date registration, which also means that you must have continuing competence so that you're on top of what's going on in your profession. Your degree from 20 years ago isn't going to help you today, so you have to make sure you keep up to speed, so to speak, in your profession. That's all part of mandatory registration.

Another aspect is self-regulating. You know, when you have a regulatory body, part of their governance is to make sure that you are following a code of ethics, that the members of your profession aren't – and that the public can put in a complaint and that can be investigated. Ultimately, a social worker, for example, could lose their license if there's some unethical conduct. Those are often in extreme cases. A lot of times social workers might have to take a course to improve their understanding of a particular aspect of their profession where they may have made a mistake. Sometimes there are issues around confidentiality, so they have to be supervised more stringently, those kind of things.

But, of course, this is all about protection of the public, and, of course, this is very important, and it's important that it be other social workers who are actually reviewing your work because they understand codes of ethics. They understand the state of practice. They understand the work that we do, and so when you have – all professions need to have this kind of a setup.

Another thing is just that there is knowledge, research done adding to the body of knowledge of that particular profession. These are all very significant aspects of being a professional, and they are unique. Just as the shadow minister from Edmonton-North West indicated, we must make sure these bodies are being supported, especially if they're a smaller body. The regulation needs to be not making it much more difficult or much more costly for them to do this work.

I'm hoping the minister is listening carefully to these regulatory bodies and making sure that they are not put at a sort of negative situation due to this new legislation because, of course, we want to strengthen our professions in our province.

Having said those few comments, I will cede my time to another member. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members who wish to join the debate on Bill 40 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 40, Professional Governance Act. You know, I appreciate that it is supporting modernizing professional governance, and these laws do need updating. I appreciate the minister's intention and aims to modernize governance and to reduce waste and improve credentialing recognition.

I do have some concerns, though, around ministerial powers, especially with them being able to appoint unlimited public members, as well as section 212. It's going to give the minister input on educational and training standards, and that's an area where professional expertise and autonomy really matter, especially when we're going to be considering that many groups are working to embed gender-based analysis, Indigenous knowledge, or trauma-informed practices. I'm hoping that this work would be respected by the minister.

Bill 40 doesn't clearly outline what happens when a professional voluntarily resigns from their regulatory board and then later wants to return. Right now, each PRO sets its own rules for reinstatement. Those rules could carry, you know, wide differences and some may require reapplication fees, proof of ongoing competence, or retaking exams. That could create barriers for people who step away from their profession for an extended period, most often women to care for their children, aging parents, or family members with disabilities.

Of course, regulators need to make sure some returning professionals are still competent, but without clear and consistent rules across all of the PROs there is a risk that the re-entry process could arbitrarily overly, you know, sometimes become burdensome or even punitive. Especially smaller and underresourced PROs might lack the capacity to create fair pathways back. That could even disproportionately affect people, who are often women, whose careers don't always follow that straight line. We should absolutely expect competence, but we also need to ensure the processes for it are demonstrating it's transparent and it's reasonable; it doesn't punish people for stepping away from work to care for others.

I strongly supported the amendment by the Member for Edmonton-North West. I appreciate his work on this. That would have limited ministerial appointments to less than 50 per cent of board membership, so it was disappointing to see it defeated by this government. It was a safeguard that would be essential to maintain professional integrity and independence. Without limits or transparent criteria this opens the door as well to partisan stacking, and it risks undermining organizations that uphold gender equality and human rights.

Credentialing recognition, you know, also is a missed opportunity. With significant labour shortages right now credential recognition barriers remain a major economic drain and hardship, especially for immigrant communities. It misses the opportunity to address credential recognition for international educated professionals at a gap that disproportionately impacts immigrant women working in sectors like health care, education, and engineering. It's streamlining the governance without addressing the systematic barriers as it unlocks the economic potential of highly skilled women currently underemployed here in Alberta.

Bill 40 gives the minister broad new powers to influence the internal governments of PROs. That raises a few red flags. Sections 202 and 208 are especially concerning. Section 202 lets the minister order a PRO to change its bylaws, code of conduct, or code of ethics if they believe it is in the public interest. Section 208 says that PROs must consult the minister before making bylaw changes and are legally required to consider any feedback without defining what consider means. This opens the door to potential political interference, especially in areas like equality, diversity, and

inclusion. We've already seen this government move to remove references to EDI in postsecondary funding agreements and cut supports for gender-diverse students.

Given that record, it is especially concerning that PROs who include EDI practices in their professional ethics and registration standards could be pressured, quietly or directly, to strip those out. The legislation offers no explicit protection for EDI framework or the autonomy of PROs to include them. Albertans deserve to know their professions will continue to uphold fairness, respect, and inclusion, not just technical competence.

The ministerial appointment, you know, gives power, and it allows that minister unlimited appointments of public members. I go back to really wishing that we had accepted the MLA for Edmonton-North West's amendment on this. It's now going to become risky with politicizing independent professional bodies. If these groups are meant to be independent and led by people from within the relevant profession but the government can stack them up with people they choose, it could lead to political interference. It could prevent decisions being made based on expertise and listening to the experts and instead become political will.

Professional regulatory organizations have concerns with transitions, the implementation of the admin burden on small PROs. You know, according to section 218 two professional regulatory organizations, school business officials and consulting engineers, are being deregulated. Were they directly consulted before this decision was made? Did any of the PROs request to be deregulated, and if so, what criteria was used to determine who stayed and who didn't? It's important that these decisions are transparent and reflect the will of the professions involved.

8:20

Bill 40 says that public members can serve up to 10 years, but that clock resets just after two years. Why is it so short? That creates an easy workaround to keep the same people in place almost indefinitely, which could open the door to partisan stacking of these boards.

Section 42 also allows the minister to ignore said term items if they believe it's necessary for the effective operation of the PRO, so I'd like to know what definition of effectiveness is being used and what guardrails will be placed to stop this from becoming a blank cheque for political appointments.

I appreciate the minister being here to listen to our concerns today, and I appreciate the intention of the act so far. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. member, might be important to mention not to mention the absence or the presence of any member in this Assembly. Just a caution moving forward.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise on behalf of the Official Opposition, the Alberta NDP, to speak in support of Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act. We recognize that this bill is an important step forward in modernizing Alberta's professional regulatory framework, and we appreciate the government's efforts in addressing a pressing need to update the governance structures of professional organizations in this province.

The Alberta NDP acknowledges that the aim of this bill is to streamline processes, increase transparency, and enhance accountability across the various regulatory bodies that govern over 75,000 professionals in Alberta. These professionals, including engineers, veterinarians, architects, accountants, and others, are integral to the well-being and safety of the public. All this bill

intends to create: a more efficient and modernized governance system that can meet the needs of our rapidly evolving industries, which is a goal we wholeheartedly support. It is critical that Alberta's regulatory framework reflects the needs of a competitive global economy while ensuring that professional standards are maintained to the highest degree.

We appreciate the provisions in Bill 40 that make use of new technologies such as electronic voting and digital document management, which can modernize the regulatory process and make it easier for professionals to engage with their governing bodies. By removing unnecessary administrative barriers, Bill 40 could help Alberta remain a leader in attracting skilled professionals from other provinces and even internationally. Indeed, these changes hold the potential to make Alberta an even more attractive destination for talent, supporting the province's broader economic goals.

However, while we are supportive of the overall vision of this bill, we also recognize that careful scrutiny is necessary to ensure that it is implemented in a way that fully respects the autonomy of professional regulatory organizations and does not undermine their ability to govern their respective professionals effectively. We believe that asking the right questions at this stage is crucial. Rather than opposing this bill, we seek to improve it by raising important issues that, if addressed, could make this bill even stronger and more effective for everyone involved.

Let us start with concerns over ministerial powers, particularly the sweeping authority granted to the Minister of Advanced Education under section 37 of the bill. This section allows the minister to appoint an unlimited number of public members to the governing bodies of professional regulatory organizations. While we understand that the purpose of including public members is to ensure that the public interest is always prioritized, we must ask: why is it necessary to grant the minister the authority to appoint an unlimited number of public members? Historically regulatory bodies have been designed to maintain a delicate balance between professional expertise and public oversight. The concern is that an unlimited number of appointments could disrupt this balance, potentially criticizing the boards and affecting their ability to make independent, informed decisions. Could this lead to the potential for political interference or, worse, the stacking of these boards with individuals whose interests may not align with the professional standards of the organizations they are meant to govern?

How will the government ensure that the public members appointed by the minister are individuals who genuinely understand the needs of the profession they are overseeing? It is crucial that these individuals have the necessary expertise to contribute meaningfully to the governance of regulatory bodies, not just political influence. What qualifications will be required for public appointments? Will there be measures in place to guarantee that these appointments are made based on merit rather than political affiliation? Could we implement a more balanced and transparent process for public member appointments? For instance, could a consultative approach be used, where professionals within the regulatory organizations themselves are involved in recommending or selecting public members? This would ensure that the voices of professionals are considered and could help maintain the integrity and credibility of these boards.

Next, we have serious concerns about the timing of this bill and the lack of clarity surrounding its implementation. While Bill 40 sets a broad framework for change, many important details will be determined later through regulations, which will be developed after the bill's passage. This leads to several important questions. How will the regulations be developed, and who will be involved in shaping them? Given the significant impact these regulations will

have on the lives of professionals across the province, it is essential that the process be transparent and inclusive. Will the stakeholders, especially professionals from smaller organizations, be actively involved in the creation of these regulations, or will they be developed behind closed doors? It's important that these regulations are not only written with full consultation but that professionals have a chance to shape the outcomes directly.

What guarantees will there be that the consultation process is meaningful? Will there be specific timelines for public consultation and opportunities for professionals to voice their concerns? Given the size and complexity of the regulatory changes proposed in this bill, we must ensure that every affected party has a chance to provide input on how the regulations will be designed and implemented. How can we ensure that professionals are fully informed of the scope and impact of these changes? One concern is that professionals might not fully understand the implications of the bill until the regulations are finalized. How will the government ensure that sufficient time is given to allow professionals to prepare for the changes once they are implemented? Without clear communication and a reasonable transition period there is a risk that many organizations will be unprepared, which could lead to disruptions.

Another significant concern is the potential impact on smaller professional organizations. While Bill 40 aims to streamline the governance process, we are worried that smaller regulatory bodies, which often have fewer resources and staff, might be overwhelmed by the new requirements. Smaller organizations are vital to Alberta's professional ecosystem, and we must be careful not to harm their ability to function. This raises several important questions. What provisions will be made to support smaller professional organizations that may lack the resources to comply with the new framework? Could we see a situation where these smaller bodies are forced to consolidate with larger organizations to survive or, worse, lose their independence altogether? This is a serious concern for professions that operate on a smaller scale but still provide critical service to Albertans. Could the one-size-fits-all approach be detrimental to the smaller organizations that already have specialized needs? While the intention behind this framework is good, we must ensure that the regulations are flexible enough to account for the unique challenges faced by smaller bodies. For instance, could certain requirements be adjusted or phased in for smaller organizations, allowing them the time and resources they need to adapt?

May I know how much time ...

Member Irwin: You're good to wrap.

Member Boparai: Okay.

Finally, as we have said before, while we support the modernization of Alberta's professional governance system, we cannot lose sight of the importance of maintaining professional autonomy.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, the Alberta NDP supports the goal of Bill 40, to modernize Alberta's professional regulatory framework in a way that is efficient, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the public and professionals alike. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members on Bill 40 in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 40, Professional Governance Act.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 40 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

8:30

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 44

Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be very short in my remarks. I've already spoken at Committee of the Whole on this bill, and I did introduce an amendment where we were looking at ensuring that there is appropriate consultation being done with the minister of environment with the creation of regulation.

The one thing that I'm still waiting to hear – and I'm wondering if at some point we'll get an update from the minister, maybe this evening – is that there was an environmental impact assessment that was being done for the proposed biodigester project in his riding, and we were waiting for that report to come back. The report was supposed to be released at the beginning of April, and it still hasn't been released yet. I think that's what's raising some of the concerns around these projects and how the ministry of environment is looking at ensuring the protection of the quality of water around the tailings pond as well as managing the odour in relation to these projects, and we haven't really heard what the plan is in regard to that.

So I just want to put it back on the record that, you know, we would like to see the report, and we would like to be able to see what the recommendations are from the ministry of environment in relation to the project and then to ensure that as regulations are being developed, those recommendations are taken into consideration for future projects. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 44, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025. Our agriculture sector is foundational to the province's economy, contributing \$10.3 billion in GDP in 2023 and employing 83,000 Albertans. These agricultural operations produce a considerable amount of organic waste in the form of manure, crops, crop residues, and animal remains, but handling such large amounts of organic waste, especially manure, in an environmentally friendly manner is a challenge. Producers and stakeholders are exploring various options to tackle this issue and have found that using anaerobic digesters to be a promising option.

Anaerobic digesters are specially designed tanks used to facilitate the anaerobic digestion process under a controlled atmosphere, and during this process micro-organisms stabilize the waste organic matter and release biogas as a by-product. Biodigesters are already operating in the province, and according to the Canadian Biogas Association there are about 300 active biogas projects in Canada currently. Alberta operates a handful of municipal and landfill biogas plants, and though agriculture ones are very uncommon, we currently do not have a specific regulatory framework for biogas projects. So the proposed changes in Bill 44 that are designed to provide certainty for those who store and use biogas production by-products as a nutrient source to grow crops are definitely needed.

There is a growing interest globally for biodigesters as jurisdictions around the world grapple with issues of waste management and emissions reductions. Biogas is a fast-growing

form of bioenergy that sits at the middle of two big challenges: the increasing amount of waste, and the need to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. Energy produced using biogas is a renewable, unlike natural gas, and, apart from livestock manure, a considerable amount of straw and other crop roughages, municipal sludge, and food residues such as fat, oils, animal remains can also be made available for biogas production. Previous estimates show that about 1 to 2 per cent of the total energy demand of Alberta could be derived from mainly agriculture and organic waste materials. Even though this percentage is small, initial efforts to utilize the available waste organic materials to produce renewable energy may be an important step in reducing fossil fuel usage to slow global warming effects.

In areas where energy supply is unstable, biogas systems present a smart and valuable opportunity road map. Farmers, ranchers, agriprocessors produce about 3.4 million tonnes of organic waste annually, mainly from livestock manure and food processing. Currently only about 5 per cent of this organic waste goes to two operating biogas facilities in Alberta. With the vast majority of these organic materials, they're either sent to landfills or waste management facilities.

The Canadian Alliance for Net-Zero Agrifoods estimates that the industry could be about 25 times bigger, reducing methane emissions substantially. This could displace about 6 to 8 megatonnes of agricultural methane and fossil fuel emissions. We know biodigesters can be job creators and are part of a sustainable economy and support the management of animal waste and other organic materials. They can produce high-quality, concentrated liquid organic fertilizer for improved land management and increased crop yields, building and maintaining healthy and productive soils needed for sustainable food production.

Bill 44 would move current rules around managing digestates, produced by anaerobic digesters when they break down organic material such as manure, from a memorandum of understanding into the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. Currently the AOPA is not clear on how organic material can be managed, and this has led to regulatory uncertainty for agricultural operations regarding storing and using digestate generated from manure.

But given the state of potential corruption and the corrupt care scandal with this UCP government, my question is: can we trust that the UCP is doing this for the right reasons or for potential self-serving agendas? What I do know for sure is that on this side of the aisle we support investment that helps our province manage our waste while creating jobs in rural communities.

Investing in biodigesters is a win-win for both the cattle industry and the environment, and we need to support our cattle industry, particularly while they're facing the headwinds of tariffs and uncertainty. Our agriculture industry is particularly at risk as the U.S. was the destination for 49.8 per cent of Alberta's agriculture exports in 2023 alone.

Madam Chair, there is no doubt that we need to encourage more investment in rural Alberta. We need to be supporting our farmers and ranchers, who have come under immense pressure over the last few years from climate change, drought, and now the ongoing and unpredictable threats of U.S. tariffs. It's interesting that while this UCP government is taking the necessary measures to support producers in Bill 44, they're simultaneously putting the industry further at risk by not having a comprehensive plan to insulate Alberta's industries from tariffs, and even going so far as to allowing coal mining on the eastern slopes, a decision that's been slammed by agricultural producers, impacting grazing lands and critical water quality. So why is this government choosing to take one step forward with Bill 44 but two steps backwards, hurting the industry in other ways? This definitely shows a disconnect between

ministries and their planning, on policies being put forward that aren't meant to truly help our economy within industries.

Moreover, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council has found that the agricultural industry could face more than 100,000 job vacancies by 2030. This trend means that operations will need to replace valuable industry experience and knowledge held by senior and older workers who've been in the industry for some time. Labour shortages are one of the most serious issues in agriculture because they have a direct impact on local food security, economic development, and the sustainability of the sector.

8:40

These are some very serious challenges looming on the horizon for our agricultural industry. While Bill 44 certainly takes steps in the right direction to support the agricultural industry, I would say there's still a very long way to go.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 44, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025. This bill is actually focusing on biodigesters, and my colleagues and the shadow minister of Agriculture and Irrigation have actually spoken to this bill at length very effectively.

As my colleagues have actually said it before, I'll reiterate that we support this technology and we support biodigesters. We also see that our province is a bit behind in this technology when it comes to biodigesters. We even also see the country needs to do more. Looking at all that information, it is not only environmentally friendly but also creates jobs within the communities. There are a number of reasons this technology is popular amongst other jurisdictions and they have been moving forward on this. That is why the Alberta NDP supports any investment and any step that protects our environment while creating jobs.

We also have good examples in our province. Looking at this bill, it's solely focusing on the project that was approved in 2023. I'm trying to see what this project was. This was in Rimrock, a biogas plant in High River, approved in 2023, with appeal submitted in 2024. So there has been some work going on. There are issues in front of the Environmental Appeals Board, and we are discussing this legislation in the House while that work is still in the process. That is the only flag I see, looking at two examples. One example we already have in the city of Lethbridge, in the province of Alberta.

The other example – I know a lot of people would probably not know that I come from India, and, you know, this technology has been tried again and again with a lot of regulatory flaws in environmental clarity. It was started when I was a child, like probably in elementary school. I know that we would go to visit places where people were just starting these projects, to use the food-based and manure to produce gas and help people and to support agriculture products and agriculture. Then I also see those projects, you know, shutting down within years. When I went to India this year, I saw that after maybe 30, 40 years they have started trying it again. If you know anything about India, India's population, a majority of the population, 70-80 per cent of people live in villages, and their main profession is agriculture. That's why this could be very useful and very popular.

[Mr. Rowsell in the chair]

At the same time, this needs to be done with lots of care. The issues related to this, the smell and the other kind of bacteria and a

lot of other things, it's very complex to deal with in dense population communities and where agriculture is relatively small.

When I was looking at those experiences and I was looking at, like, how this was built in Lethbridge and that that is working very successfully, and when we already have that success in our province and how this bill is taking that experience into consideration, there was a process. There was a public hearing, public consultation. An MOU was signed, and I came to know that the project in Lethbridge is also established in the industrial area. Their issues related to downstream smells were addressed in advance, and there was a lot of support from the community because of that. In that the project itself has been working very successfully.

But then we see this. It says clearly that the appeal board actually had to report back to the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas. It's supposed to be by April 9, 2025, but there is no clue, there is no report, there's no information. Has the ministry received the reports, feedback, and recommendations back from the appeal board, and if not, why didn't we wait for that? Why are we trying to ignore that important piece of work?

The other thing that we see is that it does not even – you know, the MOU is signed between the three different entities, two different ministries, the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas, Agriculture and Irrigation, and the other entity is Natural Resources Conservation Board. We see that the bill does not actually mention the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas.

So, as we see, this is a bill that is focused on a very, very important issue that can be very helpful for our province in a number of ways, but then there's still a lot of concern why the government is trying to push it through without that information. What is the Environmental Appeals Board's report going to be? How is the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation going to address those concerns without the involvement of the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas? Those concerns are still there.

As we see, this is a good piece of legislation to discuss in the Legislature, very timely legislation, but moving ahead without all those concerns is quite concerning. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Any others wish to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Riverview, go ahead.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to add my voice to the debate on Bill 44, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025.

We know that this legislation creates and clarifies rules for biodigesters and manure use, and we know biodigesters can be job creators and are part of a sustainable economy. They support the management of animal waste and other organic materials, and so this is obviously something that is important because we have a large farming population and cattle industry. If this waste from animals can be put to good use, sort of a renewable energy almost, that is always a good thing.

8:50

This is going to allow that organic waste from the agricultural sector to be diverted from landfills to biogas plants, and when used to produce biogas, it can be used to generate heat and electricity. So it's a very useful way to utilize animal waste that would just end up in our landfills. You know, we're very pleased to see this legislation come forward. Alberta has kind of been a bit of a laggard in this area, so I'm very pleased that the minister has brought this forward.

Manure from feeding operations can be used as fertilizer. The bill will allow for storage, composting, or application to land of manure or vegetable waste products. This can really use a product that

would just be in a landfill in a very useful way to help in other ways. Certainly, this is legislation that we in the NDP caucus do support.

We do have some biodigesters already operating in our province although not that many. There are about 300 across Canada. This legislation will help us have some good regulations, guardrails for Albertans who want to get into this sector. Alberta operates a handful of municipal landfill biogas plants, though agricultural ones are very uncommon in the province. Hopefully, this will stimulate different companies to start developing them and, you know, help them to have guardrails around them.

We know that sometimes – I know this happened in my riding, even though I have a city riding. There was a biodigester sort of at the edge of my riding, more in an industrial area, that had a lot of complaints about odour and smell and things, that were really creating quite a bit of difficulty in the community. Many complaints were put forward regarding this operation, and eventually it was closed down because they couldn't seem to get it right. You know, it was very difficult for the community. People living not far from this industrial area had to put up with this foul-smelling plant. Sadly, that couldn't go ahead because they didn't seem to have the proper way to manage the odour that was coming from the plant. Hopefully, that won't be an issue for organizations or companies that do take this on. We really see this as a positive move forward for Alberta.

I just wanted to quote from the Alberta cattle feeders. They're saying that

investing in biodigesters is a win-win for both cattle feeders and the environment. These systems allow us to capture methane, reduce our environmental footprint, and turn waste into renewable energy. Biodigesters help us improve efficiency, reduce odour, and contribute to Alberta's energy independence. As cattle feeders, we're committed to responsible resource management and see biodigesters as a critical tool for advancing sustainability in our industry.

Overall, I mean, this is a piece of legislation that we in the NDP caucus do support, and we're happy that the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation has brought this forward, and I will be voting in support.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. You know, I wasn't planning to speak to Bill 44, but I am quite passionate about manure. No. Actually, one of the reasons why I wanted to speak to it – right? I see the Member for Highwood nodding. I must say though, one of the reasons why I did want to join debate on this bill is because it is about agriculture, and I have to give props to our incredible agriculture shadow minister, the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. I had the opportunity to sit in an agriculture round-table with her not too long ago, and it was pretty incredible just to see the diverse agriculture stakeholders who she's connected with.

I think one of the other reasons why I really wanted to speak to this bill is because I've heard the members opposite, including the Member for Calgary-West, in particular, talk a lot about – and Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I may have gotten his riding wrong but the minister for FCSS. I've heard those members multiple times refer to us on this side of the House as having urban privilege and not spending time in rural Alberta and not understanding issues around agriculture. I want to get on the record once again, as I have a few times in this House, to talk about, you know, perhaps my own rural privilege. In fact, I'm someone who's spent more of my life living in rural Alberta than I have in urban Alberta and so have many members on this side of the House. Many

of us were born and raised in rural Alberta and have significant connections to the agriculture industry. I haven't had the chance to personally counter some of those claims from the minister.

I see the chair looking at me a little bit thinking maybe I need to connect to the bill, but it is connected to the bill because we have deep connections to agriculture. I think it's really rich and really unfair when members, even members who were born and raised in urban Calgary, accuse us of things that simply aren't true because I think everybody on this side of the House and, in fact, in the Chamber agrees that agriculture is such a key industry in our province. You know, many of us spend a lot of time not just at Calgary Stampede but at rural events across the province, connecting with our rural members. I was just at the Alberta NDP Convention, one of the largest conventions we've had, and we had members all across the province. We had members from a whole lot of rural ridings. I spoke to folks from Ponoka, from Okotoks, from Black Diamond, from all parts in between. I'm talking a lot about southern Alberta because that's in my head a lot right now, but I wanted to ...

Ms Sigurdson: Peace River.

Member Irwin: That's right, Peace River. I did talk to folks in Peace River as well, Peace River country, the area that the member from Edmonton-Riverview is from and, in fact, my mom as well. Again, lots of rural connections on this side of the House.

Anyway, back to Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025. Again, a lot of my colleagues have said a lot on this bill, but I want to just talk about the piece around biodigesters in particular, noting as my colleagues have just the fact that we've seen biodigester projects be quite successful in the past. Even in communities like Lethbridge we've seen those successes, and we've seen that they can be job creators and are a big part of a sustainable economy. I know that on this side of the House we speak a lot about the role of job creators and trying to do what we can to support investment in this province, and I think, again, that's something that everyone in this Chamber can agree upon.

However, I do think it's important to mention what has been shared by some of my colleagues, some of the concerns around the Rimrock project in particular. You know, we wouldn't be raising any flags if we hadn't seen a UCP government completely embroiled in other scandals. So as one of my colleagues mentioned, it's hard to fully trust this government with the pattern that we've seen of corruption from this government and very much their self-serving agendas.

To conclude my remarks – I know it's been quite riveting for the multiple people watching at home on my commentary on Bill 44 – I do, you know, want to give some credit to this government for moving forward with Bill 44. I think when we have opportunities to agree in this House and to talk about the mutual wins, we need to do that and we need to celebrate that.

Again, as somebody who grew up – I didn't grow up on a farm, but I was on the edge of town in Barrhead, Alberta. I had cows in my backyard. As someone who grew up with cows in my backyard, I really do think we need to support the cattle industry as well.

9:00

With that, I'm going to conclude my riveting debate and encourage everyone to support this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there others that wish to speak to Bill 44?

Okay. Given that, are you ready for the question on Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 44 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 49

Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and just make a few brief comments on Bill 49. I just want to start by, first of all, acknowledging some of the good pieces of the bill. Certainly, when we feel the government is taking a step that's positive, we want to acknowledge that, and we want to offer our support.

What I will say in Bill 49 is that we support the changes that the minister of public safety is making in regard to scrap metal dealers. These are amendments to the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act. These are positive steps forward. Really, it's a long overdue response to a problem that we know has been escalating for years. We have been hearing about this, as I know the minister has as well. You know, this is a recognition of what Albertans and law enforcement have been saying since 2020.

Now, the original legislation had some significant enforcement gaps that left communities a bit vulnerable. Between 2021 and 2024 we did see that copper wire theft in Alberta increased by a staggering 93 per cent. In Calgary alone we saw incidents rise by 135 per cent. For five years Albertans have been dealing with the consequences of metal theft. That means damaged vehicles, interrupted utilities, increased costs for businesses and consumers.

These amendments are a step in the right direction, but we have to ask and do wonder why it took maybe the time it did to get here, but we are glad to see these pieces move forward to address these enforcement issues. These proposed amendments focus on streamlining the court process and improving record keeping. Those are positive steps. The requirement to record the vehicle information numbers for catalytic converters: also a common-sense measure.

Rural communities have been disproportionately affected by copper wire theft – we know that – with critical telecommunications infrastructure being repeatedly targeted. We appreciate that this legislation is aiming to help protect that infrastructure. When that copper is stolen from rural areas, Mr. Chair, we recognize it's not just an inconvenience; that can leave entire communities without access to emergency services.

We'd like the government to also make a commitment to properly resource our law enforcement agencies. Now, the move to traffic court for minor offences is an administrative improvement. That is good. Metal theft isn't just property crime. It's an attack on public safety and critical infrastructure, so we need to ensure that the penalties for that reflect the severity of the impact of those crimes, including the downstream effects on emergency services and public utilities. We appreciate that the minister has recognized, acknowledged that the problem is here and he's moving forward, but I would note, Mr. Chair, that it's important, and we continue to call on this government to take a comprehensive approach and a larger, holistic view of what addressing crime and community safety really is about.

Yes, improving the penalties, improving the systems, improving the monitoring, these different pieces: that is important. The

enforcement is incredibly important, but we have to make sure we are providing the funding and supporting the funding that is needed for that enforcement. We know that changes that the government has made to the Traffic Safety Act and other things have impacted municipalities and their ability to be able to fund policing, so we need to be taking those considerations when the government is making changes to policy.

We also need to continue to address the root causes of crime. It's important to be tough on crime and tough on criminals, yes, Mr. Chair, when they commit these crimes, but we must also be addressing the root causes that drive social disorder that can drive people to a place of desperation. We must ensure that we have the resources that people need to address mental health and addictions. Right now we know we are facing up to three months' wait time for individuals to be able to voluntarily go for treatment. These are things that can drive people towards crime.

But we do support the stronger protections for rural infrastructure and ensuring that the penalties match the serious impact of these crimes. We are happy to work with the government to develop some of these comprehensive solutions and to support the good pieces where we can. I just wanted to be clear on the record, Mr. Chair, that we support this piece of Bill 49.

Now, speaking of pieces we support, there's also a piece, though, about which we do have one concern, Mr. Chair, so I do have an amendment that I would like to move. I'll send it over to you. One of the other pieces we have in this bill – it has a number of pieces. I've talked a bit already about the concerns about the provincial police force and some of the pieces there. I just spoke to the scrap metal. One of the other changes is some changes to some of the language.

The Acting Chair: Excuse me. I've just got to read it.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely.

The Acting Chair: Sorry about that.

This will be amendment A1.

Mr. Shepherd: There are concerns around some changes to language around compensation following a natural disaster or an occurrence. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View to move that Bill 49, Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 1 as follows: (a) by striking out subsections (6), (7), and (8); (b) in subsection (9) in the proposed sections 7.01, 7.02 by striking out "section 6(1)(c), (c.1), (c.11) or (d)" wherever it occurs and substituting "section 6(c), (c.1) or (d)."

Our concern, Mr. Chair is that the bill as currently written, it certainly appears to us, would enable the government to retroactively change who qualifies for financial assistance. They could retroactively change how much they receive, what the conditions are to qualify even after applications have been submitted. We should be very clear about what that means. Say we have a family who loses their home in a flood. They can complete all the paperwork. They could do that properly. They could follow every rule in place at the time only to find out the government changed the rules retroactively, and they no longer qualify. That creates a situation, I think, that's really untenable, where Albertans simply can't trust the government's promises of support during some of their most vulnerable moments.

Now, the legislation specifically allows regulations to be retroactive to April 1, 2025. April 1 of this year. We have at times seen some concerning patterns from this government when it comes to their disaster response, from hesitance to declare an emergency to delayed support at times during wildfires and floods. This

government has often demonstrated more than once that it needs more accountability in emergency management, not less. But what we have here in this bill is apparently them looking to take the power to retroactively change the rules about financial assistance after Albertans have already applied for help, and, Mr. Chair, I just can't find that being reasonable. It's certainly not fair. It certainly doesn't reflect the principles of good governance. I think when disasters strike, affected Albertans are already facing some pretty tremendous stress and uncertainty. In those moments they are looking to government and they're looking to support programs with the expectation that the rules are going to be consistent, that they're going to be clear, and that they're going to be fair. The provisions that we're seeing in Bill 49, that we are seeking to remove, would destroy that trust precisely at the moment when Albertans need it the most.

9:10

It's an issue, really, that extends beyond emergency management. It speaks to the fundamental relationship between citizens and their government. When a government can retroactively change the rules about financial assistance, well, that kind of undermines the rule of law, certainly procedural fairness, and then that creates a precedent where government commitments ultimately, then, if they can be changed retroactively after the fact, are essentially meaningless. It means that citizens can't rely on the rules as they exist when they take action, again, Mr. Chair, at some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

Emergencies require swift, decisive, and compassionate government action, and they require rules and processes and systems that Albertans know they can depend on. Because of those concerns, we are bringing forward this amendment. I look forward to hearing perhaps the minister's thoughts, and we hope we'll have the support of all members of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there others who wish to speak to amendment A1? The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I do thank the member for bringing this amendment forward. However, he's incorrect. I appreciate what the member had said, but quite frankly this is simply about DFAA. That's the disaster financial assistance program, which is money that we get from the federal government. We had to be nimble and respond to the changes that the federal government was making. If we do not make these changes as recommended by the department and as worded, then Albertans will miss out on money that would be available by the federal government, and that's something that, quite frankly, I'm sure the member could agree we don't want to do.

We want to make sure that money that is being offered by the federal government is money that, you know, we appreciate the federal government making available to them, but all this is is responding to changes that the federal government has made to make sure that we are not leaving any money on the table. I know the member opposite in question period most likely will be becoming after me if I left money on the table, right? I don't want to be doing that.

I do appreciate the amendment that the member brought forward, but there is absolutely no ill intent here. All this is is responding directly to changes that were made at the federal government level by Minister Sajjan, who's a minister who I worked with very, very well when he was in that position. He advised me of these changes, and this is just really in response to that.

I'm afraid that I'm going to have to ask all members of this House to not accept this amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Member for Edmonton-City Centre, go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the minister's remarks, his explanation. I just want to clarify with that minister, then. There are some changes in specific language here. Is this language corresponding to language on the federal side so it's just a question of matching the language in this legislation to the federal regulations or legislation?

Mr. Ellis: Simple answer for the record: the answer is yes. Just responding directly to the changes that are being made by the federal government, again, to maximize for anybody who has been affected by a disaster, to make sure that they get the maximum value from the federal government in case they are a victim of a disaster.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there others who wish to speak to amendment A1? Okay.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Acting Chair: Who wants to speak to Bill 49? Go ahead.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Certainly, I thank the member opposite, of course, for that amendment, and I think it's fair to say that I think, hopefully, the explanation was reasonable.

I do, Mr. Chair, have an additional friendly amendment that we would like to make. I'll have this for you before I talk any further.

Sorry. Mr. Chair, maybe somebody could talk for a minute.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, go ahead.

Member Irwin: All right. Again, you know, I wasn't planning to speak to Bill 49, but I am passionate about this one as well. You know, I do want to start off on a serious note in that many of us in this Chamber hear all the time about the importance of public safety. I know in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood it is a concern that I hear a lot. I think it's incredibly important that we have these conversations in good faith. I'm very proud of the work that my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre is doing on this file, and I know he's spoken with stakeholders all over the province.

You know, I think the minister has also done some of that engaging with stakeholders, but I would have liked to see him support our amendment. It's unfortunate to see that he was unwilling to do so. That's a pattern with this UCP government. On this side of the House we've put forward so many amendments over the six years that I've been an MLA, thoughtful amendments with an incredible team. We've got a lot of legal experts on this side of the House.

Mr. McIver: So many.

Member Irwin: So many. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is mocking me a little bit. But it's true, is it not?

Mr. McIver: No, I'm mocking him.

Member Irwin: Okay. Well, we have.

I was starting to say before I was rudely interrupted that I can count on I think two of my hands the number of amendments that this UCP government has accepted in the time that I've been an MLA. I do remember there was one amendment they accepted on something when we were doing Bill 8 in 2019. I can't even

remember what I had for lunch yesterday; I don't know why I can remember this. But it was, like, just because they'd made an error in the bill, so it was just something technical, and it was like: come on. I mean, all jokes aside, though, that was a very troubling bill, so it was unfortunate that they wouldn't accept our other amendments.

Anyways, I digress. You're good for me to continue going, Chair?

The Acting Chair: Absolutely.

Member Irwin: Okay. I wasn't sure. He looks at me so intently when I speak, so thank you.

You know, I just talked a little bit about my connections to rural Alberta, just like many of my colleagues have as well. I think that in Bill 49 we see, we know the importance of listening to rural Albertans when it comes to public safety. Again, I've had those conversations. My dad lives in very remote rural Alberta, and he's one of those people who does have to deal with issues of crime in rural Alberta.

I'm sure I will have more to say on Bill 49, but I really just wanted to use my opportunity to speak to urge the minister and the members on that side of the House to really think about effective governance and what that means and think about when they put forward a bill like Bill 49: who exactly are they listening to? And are they willing to work with us as the largest Official Opposition in Alberta's history?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

Who else would like to speak on Bill 49?

Mr. Ellis: I would. I just want to make sure you have the paperwork in regard to the amendment. Is that correct?

The Acting Chair: Yes, we're good.

This will be known as amendment A2.

Go ahead.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much. Of course, I want to take a moment and thank the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for her words. Yeah, seriously. Thank you very much. It was very kind of her to do that.

As I indicated, a friendly amendment here, as the chair indicated, A2. The Member for Calgary-West would like to move the bill to be amended as follows. Sorry; am I able to speak, Mr. Chair? Just to be clear.

The Acting Chair: Yeah. Go ahead.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Thank you. Section A: 1(9) is amended in the proposed 7.02(1) by striking out "6(c)" and substituting "6(1)(c)." And section B: 3(20)(a) is amended in the proposed clause (b): (a) in clause (f.1)(i)(D) by striking out "mitigation" and substituting "mitigating," and (b) in clause (f.5)(vi) by striking out "social demographic" and substituting "socio-demographic."

Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, this was brought to my attention. These are drafting errors. I certainly would never want to throw members of the public service under the bus. I don't think anybody in this Chamber would. I know how hard they all work to work on behalf of all Albertans, quite frankly, but quite simply there were lawyers on this file that just made some very minor drafting errors. Certainly, nothing here takes away from the meaning or spirit of that particular bill, and I would encourage all members to support the changes here.

Thank you very much.

9:20

The Acting Chair: Are there others that would like to speak on amendment A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Acting Chair: Now, are there any other people that would like to speak to Bill 49? Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, go ahead.

Ms Wright: I aim to follow instructions, Mr. Chair.

All right. Tonight with our discussion of Bill 49 I wanted to focus on, really, just a couple of concerns that I personally have noted. I do want to state categorically that, of course, all of us agree that every single Albertan deserves to feel safe and supported, and as other colleagues have noted, we certainly do know that many of our constituents are feeling not safe, not supported. Every single Albertan deserves to be able to trust that when they make a 911 call, a call for that emergency response in whatever that frightening situation might be, that help is on the way.

We're all here because we want better for all Albertans. We're all here because we know that's possible. And I would say with a fair amount of confidence that all of us agree as well that safety is not and should not be a partisan issue. All Albertans are entitled to community safety and support services and an effective addressing of crime, and it is also important that there's equity in how each one of those services is delivered. For me, Mr. Chair, one of the issues then becomes how best to grapple with this notion of public safety, this thing that holds Albertans' security and peace of mind at its heart, and what's the best solution for this particular problem.

Sort of putting aside all of that for the moment, though, with the knowledge that we know, that most Albertans would prefer this UCP government not pursue this new policing agency, I do in fact have a question, and that is: where are the workers in this discussion? That's because I can only find one reference to workers in this bill. It's located in section 33.4(5). What it says is that "an independent agency police service shall perform additional duties and responsibilities [as] prescribed in the regulations." So once again everything comes down to the regulations, and it's not really clear where workers will fit. It's not really clear where the sheriffs that we've heard an awful lot about will fit in this new agency.

Where are the folks? As I mentioned, the sheriffs, who right now are in the midst of bargaining and who today work in our courts, transport inmates, and are part of special task forces: why aren't their voices central to the debate of this bill? Why haven't these conversations with those who represent them happened? While I'm not given to making guesses or inferences without basis, I'd say that certainly some of the discussion that we've had previously in this House, particularly when we get into the discussion of unions and how valuable they may or may not be, might have some bearing on this particular issue.

I did want to digress. Those who know me know I can sometimes go down rabbit holes, and I really wanted to touch on that rabbit hole of unions and why they are important. We've heard comments about union overlords and union bosses and the failure of unions and the union is going to want you to believe. Except that unions – and this does, of course, include unions who represent not only police service members but the sheriffs as well – are about making life better. It's not just about their own membership. It's also about society as a whole.

We know that strong unions, for instance, can set pay standards that oftentimes non-union shops will follow. We know that unions mean better pay, reduced wage gaps, particularly for those folks who may be underserved. We know that unions can provide jobs

with really good benefits, that union members can look forward to a dignified retirement. In Alberta one of the things that we also know is that generally – not always, of course, but generally – folks who belong to a union, and this includes private sector, so it's not just public sector I'm talking about, will often see an increase of their wages of anywhere between, say, 6, 7, 8 per cent, all the way up to 15 per cent.

Mr. Chair, these are wages that all employees should be receiving, not just unionized employees. Again, it's about that equity. Albertans work really, really hard. All Albertans deserve better pay. All Albertans deserve jobs with benefits. They deserve to take the sick time that they need just because they're sick. They deserve to have a job to get back to when they return from being sick. They deserve, as I mentioned earlier, pensions for a dignified retirement.

So, too, do the sheriffs, that we've often had conversations about with respect to this particular bill, the sheriffs who are now, along with other members of AUPE, in the midst of bargaining and this week in fact are in the midst of taking a strike vote. One of the reasons why they are taking that strike vote is because they are thinking that this government does not respect them, does not respect the sometimes often dangerous work that they in fact do. We've heard many, many times, unfortunately, that the sheriffs weren't privy to this plan. They weren't privy to what was going on in Bill 49, that there were little to no consultations with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. I would have expected that there would have been since these are the folks that, according to the minister, are going to form the basis of the workforce.

What these folks are worried about, of course, is that there's an announcement but there are no details. As often is the case with this government, all of the details are in the regulation instead of in the act itself. Far too many announcements that come from this government, in fact, end up having workers being left to assume, to try and figure out what it all means. But the trouble with assumptions is that you fill in gaps because you just don't know. It would be better, it seems to me, if people, particularly the 600 or so folks that we're talking about, had some idea of what might be happening to them and their jobs and their future.

One of the things I am worried about as well – and it's really, I think, because there's a bit of mixed messaging going on, so it does in fact become a wee bit confusing – is that there could be another underlying message that's permeating everything. It may be that it's not all of the sheriffs that might be moving over to this new agency; it's only a portion of them, just some of them, which, of course, creates division in the force right now, which, as I've mentioned, is in the midst of bargaining with this government. Hinting that, should this legislation pass, some will move and some will not is a bit of a divide-and-conquer sort of tactic and to me is really, really unfair for those workers that, as I've mentioned, oftentimes are involved in some really dangerous work in order to protect all of us. In my view, certainly, to be charitable, it's unhelpful in the least. What it also does is very much contribute to the worry and concern on the part of these Albertans who work very hard on our collective behalf.

You know, these are folks that are there every day in the law courts. They transport inmates, and they make sure that there's safety in those sorts of situations. They work in communications, they track sheriff units across the province, they monitor surveillance equipment, they inform response agencies of emergencies. They gather evidence of criminal activity and investigate specific property-related complaints. They enforce traffic safety laws. We've often seen them on the highway, all of our highways.

They're also fish and wildlife officers, conservation officers, which means, of course, that they're responsible for that aspect of enforcement, but on occasion those officers also are called to assist in some sort of more traditional policing environments. We know that there are about 1,200 or so sheriffs in Alberta, and I think about 100 or so of those are conservation officers. What exactly is going to happen to those conservation officers? Are they going to continue to be conservation officers, or are they going to be asked to move into this new department that we have no information about?

9:30

If the folks who are working in the transport area are moving over, what will happen then to folks who need transporting? Will we have to have a whole bunch more folks engaging in training? What will happen to the sheriffs who are presently at the law courts? Will they be reclassified? Will they receive additional training? In addition to all of that, all of these folks then, who perhaps are moving over, should the bill be passed, what compensation will they be offered? Will they be paid on par with municipal police forces or with the RCMP? Will they have access to presumptive coverage as other first responders do? Will they be classified as first responders given that in some of their situations right now, I would venture a guess, they probably are not? And if not, then why not?

This workforce, as I've mentioned, because of the breadth of the job that they are expected to do, because of the way in which their jobs have changed, are indeed subject, I would think, to traumatic events that perhaps they didn't expect to be subject to. They, then, should be covered under the presumptive coverage auspices of the WCB.

In addition to all of that, of course, these are the folks who are just about to begin voting on whether or not to strike. They're looking for respect from this government. It would seem to me, Mr. Chair, that when a government is looking at changing the entire nature of an entire force's body of work, all these workers who work on behalf of Albertans, they might have wanted to have included at least a wee bit of information about what this work might indeed have looked like. That, I think, would've formed the basis of moving towards a little bit more of a respectful environment for these folks.

We've heard that the bill is about supporting Alberta sheriffs, particularly in light of the fact that for some their scope of practice has expanded, as I just said. Why not show them the respect they deserve? We've heard as well that there is a need for increased and better training, funding, pay, again, since the scope of practice has changed, yet this bill gives us absolutely no details about that. Sheriffs were left in the dark about all of these sorts of things. You know, you think about when you're in the middle of a job, it's a really lovely thing to be able to kind of know what the future holds, to have some idea of what your pay structure might be, of what you can expect with a pension, of what your benefits would be. Honestly, it's, I think, the very least that this government could offer these workers.

You know, again, another question – I tend to have lots of those – who exactly is this bill meant for? As I've mentioned, we know Albertans as a whole are not interested in the establishment of such a service, and bill after bill seems to answer to what only a small number of folks are pressing for. But it is not, Mr. Chair, what Albertans want or even necessarily what Albertans need.

The Acting Chair: Are there others? The Member for Calgary-Acadia, go ahead.

Member Batten: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to rise and join the debate in opposition to Bill 49, Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. First of all, I just want to remind the House that, of course, this is not the first time that this idea of an independent police force or police agency has been brought forward to Albertans. This is something Albertans have very clearly said that they do not want, they are not interested in. In fact, 86 per cent of Albertans want to retain the RCMP, and 84 per cent believe that this government needs to focus on what matters.

Before I get too much into addressing some of the arguments we've heard from the minister, I do want to just kind of repeat what some of my colleagues have shared on this, actually a number of times today already, which is that Albertans already have some pretty strong distrust in this government. They already feel tricked. They already feel, "I was a little bit abused by this," right? They are annoyed that this government cannot demonstrate maturity inside this Chamber and take accountability for the role of what their government has done in the last six years to bring Albertans to this situation. And they're annoyed that this government continues to try to blame all their failures on prior governments.

Now that I've just kind of reminded the House of that, just to speak to a few of the arguments that we heard from the minister: high vacancy rates, poor response time, and providing a choice to Albertans. Well, let's just talk a little bit about that high vacancy rate piece, adding to, of course, the debate brought forward from my colleague. Looking at the workforce – I need to compare this a little bit to health care, Mr. Chair, and the reason is that there are a finite number of workers. We are in a workforce crisis. That is where we are. So this means that if we shift people from one place to the other, we are not fixing a problem; we are creating a new problem. We are diluting the folks we already have. This is straightforward math. What I would love to see is this government working to bring these particular workers into the province and providing the resources for the workers who are currently here.

Mr. Chair, what is concerning – well, one of the many things that are concerning – about this bill is the potential to treat different levels of law enforcement differently, those who maybe are unionized, maybe the sheriffs versus the city police versus RCMP versus this new independent force. There seems to be a misunderstanding amongst police officials about what this bill will actually do to them specifically, so I would love to hear that, more from the minister in terms of: what does this actually look like for the sheriffs, for the RCMP, for our city police, and so on?

What does this mean? Are we going to be pulling from their emergency services? Are we going to be diluting all the work that has been done in trying to keep our urban centres protected? Like, am I supposed to tell my constituents that the work that we have seen in order to bring safety to Calgary-Acadia is now going to get pulled? I would love to hear what messaging I'm supposed to bring to my constituents, because they have very clearly said that they are not interested in an independent police agency. They're not.

They would really like to see this UCP government stop trying to pull the wool over their eyes. Albertans would truly like some transparency and accountability from this government. Before trying to push through any of these initiatives that have already been brought forward to Albertans, Albertans have already said no, perhaps this government would be better spending their time rebuilding trust between Albertans and them.

They could build trust by spending the money, the large amount of money, Mr. Chair, that has been predicted that this new force would cost; Albertans would like that spent on – I don't know – the child care subsidy. Let's bring that back and have over 70,000 children access to affordable child care. That's a good one. Or, you

know, maybe we would implement some of the E coli panel report's recommendations. That would be good. Education maybe. Oh, my goodness. Could we address class size? How about the complexity inside the classroom, workforce management there?

Now health care. Mr. Chair, Albertans would love to see our health care system actually invested in and not blown up. Right now we have a measles outbreak inside this province. What would have been really nice is had this government – oh, I don't know – used any reference to any research previously done, given it a thought for a few seconds maybe, understood measles a little bit more so they could do their job, but instead what we had was a complete delay of action, and we went from I believe it was 10 cases up to more than 200. Albertans would have loved to see investment in public health, in education for folks so they can keep themselves and their families safe. But we don't see that. We also have a syphilis outbreak.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

9:40

Now, it is mind boggling to me that this government continues to not focus on Albertans' priorities. They've been incredibly clear; they do not want this police force. They would like investment in our health care, in our education. They would also like, you know, Popsicles; that would be nice. Of course, Popsicles is in reference to another brilliant action this government took, and, yes, that is sarcasm, Madam Chair. Not too long ago there was an order issued and followed that directed them to remove snacks, including Popsicles, from AHS . . .

Member LaGrange: False. Still false.

Member Batten: . . . and as much as I can hear the Health minister telling me that that is incorrect, she should really check her information.

Member LaGrange: Nothing could be further from the truth.

Member Batten: Nothing could be further from the truth.

Now, what Albertans would really like to see is an investment in what's best for all Albertans. Follow what Albertans are asking for, not whatever pet project this government might be wanting to push forward, and maybe stay out of the relationship between a physician and Albertans; Albertans are asking for that.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but I'm finding it really difficult to understand the parts of the bill that you're actually talking about. Right now we're on Bill 49, and I know you were just getting to your point on this at this moment. Please proceed.

Member Batten: Thank you, Madam Chair. So, yes, why I was bringing up those other things is that those are the priorities I am hearing from my constituents that they would like this government to focus on. My constituents would like this government to focus on Albertan priorities and not on things that Albertans have already said they do not want.

With that, Madam Chair, I conclude my debate.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. This is an act that unfortunately empowers an Alberta police force, and the people of Alberta don't want it. The people of Alberta don't want an Alberta police force. The municipalities of Alberta don't want it. I grew up

in St. Albert and therefore I was policed by the RCMP. The RCMP, it's a police force that I feel like I can trust and I can count on.

Some of the conversation on the merits of an Alberta-specific police force have been extremely interesting and, frankly, from the government side, I've actually found it very deeply moving when they've been talking, when some of the members opposite have been talking about the rural crime problem. It is serious. It's a very big deal. I don't know what it would be like to pick up the phone and call 911 and be told that my wait is a very long time when there is something happening and I need help now.

I don't appreciate the political weaponization of the rural crime problem. I don't appreciate being told that I don't care about people, because I do. I think it's a very big deal. I think if the problem is that the RCMP is understaffed, we should get them staffed up. But it turns out that the staffing problem is a staffing problem that is affecting every police service in Alberta and throughout the entire country in every municipality. It seems as though there are just elements of the job that are difficult for people to accept, and I get it because it is a very, very hard job, although it is extremely rewarding, I know, to be there for people and to help them. Policing is very much a helping profession, so I think the fact that it is difficult to staff it makes it really challenging to make sure that people get the help that they need when they need it.

Now, part of the reason why the motivation for an Alberta police service, which, again, nobody wants – I believe that we heard the statistics; 89 per cent of Albertans don't want it. None of the municipalities want it. It would be extremely expensive to set up, and I draw the analogy to the insurance law that is being passed, where the minister said, you know: \$3 billion to stand up a public insurance company sounds like a lot. Yeah. It is a lot, and it's got to be thought of very carefully. But the hundreds of millions required to stand up an Alberta police force are also a lot, and we're not getting anything for that. It's just money out the door for no reason.

Why is the government doing this? Of course, one of the reasons is that this is part of, you know, that good feeling that I was talking about, that legacy. That feeling of growing up with the RCMP policing me is part of one of the ties that bind us to Canada. It's one of the emotional ties that makes us Canadian, at least in this province and at least in western Canada, and the free Alberta strategy explicitly said that Alberta should take over policing. When people heard this, they didn't like it, partly because it is a tie to Canada, partly because it is expensive, partly because standing something up brand new sounds like a real risk when we've already got a system that works.

It's very similar to the logic behind taking Albertans' CPP away, which came from the same free Alberta strategy. I'd just like to point out for the record, you know, as everyone knows, the Twitter handle of the Premier's chief of staff is literally FreeAlbertaRob. That's where this comes from. It comes from a disrespect for our nationhood. While the UCP can go on and talk about this as though it's like, "Oh, well, Alberta is not getting a fair deal," which I agree with – doesn't mean that I'm willing to destroy my country for plastic straws – it is much easier to destroy the country if we don't participate in Canadian institutions like the CPP and like the RCMP. That's what this is about, and that's why they're so committed to it. Madam Chair, this is the reason why I can't support this bill.

About the rural crime problem, the saying attributed to Winston Churchill – he probably didn't say it, but of course it's been said by many others, including I remember Rahm Emanuel said it to his great misfortune – was "never let a crisis go to waste," which in a positive sense is that when there is a crisis, let's work on it, make sure that we don't ever have that same crisis again or work on it and

make sure we don't have a similar crisis in the future. But, unfortunately, the way this government works is that they never let a crisis go to waste for their agenda. That doesn't help the people of Alberta.

So when there is insufficient Tylenol, when there is insufficient acetaminophen, they go out and buy Turkish Tylenol because this is an opportunity to throw some money into UCP friends' pockets, and who can let that crisis go to waste? Or when there's a problem with lab services and, you know, labs aren't working out for people: well, let's not let that crisis go to waste, and let's privatize it all to DynaLife. This is a government that, frankly, never lets a crisis go to waste for corruption. That's how this works.

Now we've got an Alberta police force that is coming and something that nobody wanted, and it is tied to a very real crisis in rural crime, which this bill will not help. It's using this crisis to create a purported solution that will not address it and will not work so, similarly, creates scope, I fear, for the same sort of corruption that has enveloped the health care system. It really makes me sad, because this is a government that could learn from the last two years of chaos. It's a government that could decide that – you know what? – we're actually going to address the rural crime problem by addressing the rural crime problem.

9:50

Instead, what we got is this. We got an Alberta police force that nobody asked for, that municipalities don't want, that everybody mistrusts in an atmosphere of a government that has, like, very incredible and meaningful allegations of corruption against it. You know, we're in a very fulsome debate here, and perhaps this is a time to take a step back and think about whether this is actually how this government wants to govern.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise once again in the House to add some comments to Bill 49, Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, on behalf of my constituents. When I'm looking at this bill, it does a few things that impact quite a few acts, and one of those is the Police Act. This is my main concern I will focus on. I know I had a lot of feedback on the scrap metal issue in the past when we discussed the bill under the previous government, but I would like to focus on the Police Act in today's comments.

This bill establishes something that looks like the groundwork for a potential provincial police force, that the government has been actually creating rhetoric around for last six years. The bill redefines independent agency police services as corporations with more defined governance, creating a mechanism for municipalities to enter agreements with these police services. This bill also is setting up administrative frameworks for budgeting, reporting, and oversight. It's also limiting ministerial and oversight board interference in police operations, defining the relationship between services and local governments through police service policing committees. It updates disciplinary and compliance processes, provides more instructions for police statements during investigations.

Alberta's Police Act, that was established in 1988, is the primary legislation governing policing services throughout Alberta, replacing earlier fragmented regulations. The act holds the framework for municipal police services, the Alberta Law Enforcement Review Board, and standardized policing requirements across the province. It also defines complaint disciplinary processes and the relation between local police commissions and the provincial government. The act provides the legal basis for RCMP's contracts to deliver

policing services in many Alberta municipalities and rural areas. The act was amended by the UCP government last year, in spring 2024, to allow the provincial government to create an independent police service which would take on duties performed by Alberta sheriffs. In November 2024 the province appointed an independent agency police oversight board to establish an oversight framework, develop guidelines and policies, and give input on recruitment.

The provincial police force was proposed by the Alberta Fair Deal panel. Even the panel's research showed that a provincial police force was unpopular. The plan has been widely opposed across the province. The establishment of an Alberta provincial police marks a fundamental shift from reliance on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to now a provincial entity.

More than 1.5 million Albertans, over a third of the province's population, are served by Alberta RCMP through 113 detachments throughout the four leasing districts. It's very important to remember that before the election the Premier said that the UCP would never pursue a provincial police force. The province of Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study: Future State Report notes that the "sources of funding, including the potential loss of federal subsidies and the split of future costs between the province and municipalities . . . should be studied further by the Government of Alberta." To date this additional feasibility study has not been done, and the true costs remain unknown. Additional releases by the government of Alberta do not provide any further details or specific accounts for these costs.

Despite this significant position, the UCP is keeping the door open to establishing an Alberta provincial police. One of the reasons the government is citing is that the federal government may not renew the RCMP contract seven years from now. Madam Chair, if this bill is passed, the bill would create an independent provincial police service as a Crown corporation that would take over duties currently performed by Alberta sheriffs. The bill would prevent the province from giving direct orders to the new police service to ensure independence.

A new police agency is not included in Budget 2025, and there is no information on the cost of the transition or the timeline, so there are a lot of issues. I think I'm going to have maybe other time to speak to it, but it appears to be the government is actually – I don't know – stepping away from their promise they made in both ways. The promise they made, what they will do when they come in power, that was, like, they will fix health care in 90 days, they will fix the education system, they will open this many schools, and they will roll back the cuts. That didn't happen. On the contrary, when the Premier was challenged by the media on the election trails, the Premier said she will not move on the Fair Deal Panel's report on creating provincial policing. There are a lot more questions, and Albertans are opposing it, so there's no sense to support this bill at this stage at all.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to make a motion to adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

10:00

Bill 45

Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025

The Chair: Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's 10 o'clock, and I'm sure everyone is excited to talk and debate with me on Bill 45, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025. I do struggle with this bill. So far there are a few UCP government bills with the same pattern of creating a bigger government, introducing heavy-handed interventions in different sectors, and sending waves of uncertainty in our province.

This bill makes oil and gas emissions data exclusive to the province and restricts federal officials from collecting emissions data directly from Alberta-based energy companies without provincial authorization. By the way, this includes both the physical facilities and plants as well as corporate offices where these records are kept. It's more like another power-hungry bill, more powers for the Premier and her ministers, another political stunt, and, frankly, another performative act that continues to waste taxpayer money.

This resembles some sort of state ownership of the oil and gas sector's data and facilities. I don't know about you, Madam Chair, but I've seen this before somewhere, state ownership of data. I think it was in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez. It was also in Cuba, that has majority state-run enterprises. And the question is: is that where we're headed? Maybe the UCP can just say that they want to nationalize the oil and gas sector and own it. So much for the free market. This is not a conservative government.

Madam Chair, this is, again, interventionist, and it's far reaching. It is big-government oversight. Even the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada president actually said, and I quote here: if the province wishes to ban certain types of other government officials from our sites, we the industry are not going to get involved in that; that would be up to the province to enforce it. End quote. The private sector wants to do what they're good at, doing private business. It does not want to get involved in the UCP's shenanigans and their sad fights with the federal government and everyone under the sun.

Madam Chair, I have gotten up so many times here in this House and spoken against this government's nonsense of power concentration, which right now, in retrospect, was just a warm-up to this current flirtation with separation from Canada. We have seen this circus before, both in Government Motion 16 and Government Motion 53, which were the Premier's sovereignty acts.

The UCP's musings of controlling private emissions data in Bill 45, barring federal employees from entering oil and gas facilities, controlling oil and gas data, and this ongoing flirtation with separation from Canada is actually the biggest threat to attracting investments to the oil and gas sector right now and basically to any other sector in this province. Bill 45 and all these bills that give more powers to the UCP government will clash with the Canadian Constitution at some point. They stoke fear, inject investor uncertainty and separatist sentiments in the province. All this will cost us stability, investments, big energy projects, and jobs, Madam Chair.

We could lose our Alberta advantage, and we need to learn from our country's history and what happened in Quebec, Madam Chair. One can only see what happened in Quebec: financial institutions such as TD and the Royal Bank of Canada literally relocated their head offices from Montreal to Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s. Montreal was once Canada's financial centre, and it lost ground to Toronto. [interjections] Is that heckling now?

The Chair: Hon. member, comments through the chair.

Ms Al-Guneid: Madam Chair, the UCP needs to recognize that this power concentration and separatist attempts are causing massive investor uncertainty already. My constituents in Calgary-Glenmore have told me time and time again that they feel strongly Canadian

and proudly Albertan. Albertans are proud Canadians. There is no contradiction. The UCP government needs to stop this separation nonsense and this pattern of power concentration and ignoring the rule of law.

Now, Madam Chair, I do understand the industry's concern on the federal emissions cap. I do. Unfortunately, the federal emissions cap comes down on us without understanding Alberta's existing carbon management frameworks and without sufficient consultations with industry and impacted communities. We do have robust, made-in-Alberta tools like Alberta's technology innovation and emissions reduction – that's TIER – regulation that does provide policy certainty while reducing emissions. I will always champion Alberta's TIER program. It has brought billions of dollars in investments to our province. It has held bipartisan support since former Premier Stelmach introduced it and survived six Premiers. The UCP government needs to stay in its lane and focus on strengthening, expanding, and building on TIER, which is within the provincial jurisdiction.

Capital flows in stable jurisdictions with policy certainty, recognizing we need pathways to slash our emissions from the sector because of climate change. Especially now, because of the threat of the U.S. tariffs, the UCP government needs to strengthen our systems and reduce uncertainty to attract new investments in this uncertain environment. Our biggest trading partner is becoming our biggest threat. To date TIER, or Alberta's industrial carbon pricing, has helped Alberta attract billions of dollars in investment, creating thousands of jobs. We've seen the Alberta carbon trunk line at \$1.2 billion, the Shell Polaris CCS project at \$840 million, Air Products' net-zero hydrogen at \$1.6 billion, and Dow Chemical at \$11 billion. All of these projects will produce 2,000 to 3,000 jobs, with Dow Chemical being the highest at 7,000 jobs.

It's actually stunning listening to the Dow Chemical CEO, who said that one of the main reasons they chose Alberta and Canada is industrial carbon pricing and how it helps in creating their net-zero facility in Alberta. They invested \$11.6 billion in Alberta. Now, the Dow CEO shared a few times – and this is on CNBC network – and I quote here: the reason we decided to go to Canada first is because Canada has a price on carbon, so I can recover the higher cost to strip the CO₂ with the price on carbon, and the government is obviously offering some incentive for new technologies to decarbonize. End quote. Dow's president goes on to explain that carbon pricing is not a carbon tax, and he explains, quote: "A carbon tax becomes a cost to me that I end up passing on to the consumer. It is inflationary. A price on carbon creates a market mechanism that allows me to recover that cost, and that creates a return for the investor. In my view, if you want to decarbonize, you want the capital market to play." End quote. Why is the government not working with this program, that is within our provincial jurisdiction, and let the market play instead of controlling private-sector emissions data as per Bill 45?

The Dow project is very interesting as it builds ethylene in a net-zero facility based on hydrogen, on carbon capture technology. It is a circular system – I know it's 10 o'clock, and we're talking about carbon capture – in which you strip the carbon and use hydrogen instead, which helps the company achieve its net-zero facility in Alberta. Dow is producing petrochemicals and plastics. Now, as we know, sadly, Dow's project will be delayed because of the tariffs. We know the Premier thought she had a big win, so how is that going?

10:10

Anyways, Madam Chair, we have to slash our emissions and bring more projects like Polaris, carbon trunk line, and Dow's, but intervening in private business and barring federal employees from

doing their job to monitor industry emissions will neither help us with slashing emissions nor protect our critical infrastructure. It will only further add investor uncertainty.

I spoke about it here at length. There is an oversupply of credits right now, which is pushing prices down. Investors are uncertain about the future of carbon pricing in Alberta, and we know TIER is due for review next year, in 2026. So one thing the Premier and her environment minister can do right away – well, first, they can stop the political stunts of sovereignty and separation and meddling in private business, as we see in Bill 45, and two, they can face Trump's aggression and his tariff threats towards Alberta's energy sector by adding more stability in our policies that we can actually control, like Alberta's industrial carbon pricing.

What is the minister doing about the 2026 TIER review process to improve investors' confidence? Former Alberta Premier Jason Kenney and the former environment minister Whitney Issik strengthened the industrial carbon price in Alberta. To her credit, the Premier has actually shown commitment to TIER, and I quote here where she said: we're going to continue with the industrial carbon pricing strategy because it is working.

Madam Chair, instead of Bill 45 and this heavy-handed government intervention, have the Premier and her minister started consulting with the industry in any formal way on the 2026 TIER review? Not the informal select consultations that are being done at the moment; I'm specifically talking about formally notifying the electricity sector, the petrochemical sector, the steel, the cement, the oil and gas, and every sector that will be impacted by the 2026 review. This is what the Premier and her ministers could be doing right now. Instead of this fearmongering, intervening in private business, and controlling private business data and causing a potential national unity crisis, they can be actually working for the industry by stabilizing our policies and showing some policy certainty in the next few years.

This bill is a political stunt. It should not become law, especially with section 3, that literally states that "this Act binds the Government of Canada." This section needs to go. With that, I would like to introduce an amendment on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to strike section 3.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed, and I think you already noted you're moving on behalf of another member.

Ms Al-Guneid: Yeah. I'm moving on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to strike out section 3.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. Striking this section because while I understand that the UCP government wants to assert its authority over provincial matters – and, yes, resource development is a provincial matter – this section can be deemed unconstitutional. Emission management is also a federal responsibility and a national concern and of national concern, so this provision is likely to face legal challenges and could be overturned if deemed to infringe upon federal jurisdiction or violate constitutional principles. What we see here in Bill 45 are not the actions of a democratic and free province that believes in the Canadian Constitution and that respects the rule of law. Emission management is both a provincial and federal responsibility.

I cannot support this bill, and I'm introducing this amendment on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for those passionate submissions. The member made a great deal of effort in trying to disparage this government for standing up for its industries, standing up for the energy sector, standing up for those who are looking to invest in Alberta. But when this government looks for ways to protect our industry, our businesses, our producers, our production facilities from federal overreach, the members opposite are quick to criticize.

The member opposite did not say a single word of criticism to the federal overreach that we've been experiencing for a very long time in this province, Madam Chair, the interference, the unlawful attempts by the federal government to damage our industries and interfere with our constitutional right to develop our resources in this province. You'll notice that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore spoke a great deal before I got up but not once against federal overreach. Not once did the member criticize the federal government, the Liberal government, for the repeated assault on Alberta that's been happening for a decade.

The member mentioned something about this bill as being a reason why industry is not interested in investing in Alberta. I would disagree, Madam Chair. I think the lack of criticism for Bill C-69, for example, is a much bigger reason why industry is not investing in Canada, and we heard radio silence from the member opposite. We saw recently the clean electricity regulations that the federal government announced, regulations that would cause significant damage to this province, but once again, radio silence from that member and the rest of the opposition. The carbon tax, of course, the infamous carbon tax that the member opposite, again, said nothing about.

No, Madam Chair. I would say to you and to all members of this Assembly that this is not an amendment that we should support. The members should know, especially the member who moved this motion, the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, that the Constitution in this country is absolutely clear. Again, section 92A of the Constitution says that

In each province, the legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to

- (a) exploration for non-renewable natural resources in the province;
- (b) development, conservation and management of non-renewable natural resources . . . in the province,

and, finally,

- (c) development, conservation and management of sites and facilities in the province for the generation and production of electrical energy.

That is exactly what the Constitution says, and it is exactly opposite to what that member said.

I would simply say to you that this is not an amendment that I can support. I hope members of the Assembly agree with me. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 45 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am happy to speak on the Critical Infrastructure Defence Amendment Act, 2025. I wish it weren't so late in the evening, but nonetheless here we are. This bill

is designed to prevent federal enforcement of their proposed emissions cap by making it illegal for federal officials to access emissions data from Alberta's oil and gas producers. It prohibits site visits by federal employees or contractors without provincial authorization.

10:20

The Alberta NDP have also expressed significant concerns with the federal government's proposed single-sector emissions cap for the oil and gas industry. We formally requested withdrawal of the proposed emissions cap pending the development of more realistic and evidence-based emissions targets and funding commitments. The federal approach creates unnecessary economic distortions and should focus on regulatory mechanisms.

This bill, however, shows consistency in this government's approach. We have seen that instead of negotiating, they will fight. This bill is really performative. There is no attempt to even have a discussion with the new Prime Minister. I guess it shows that if you don't know how to negotiate and you don't have a reasonable idea to propose, you can always just fight it. Of course, when you know how to fight, you just fight, and if you don't have a position on negotiation, then you better not go forward with that. Contrast that with the negotiation between Rachel Notley and an NDP government that got a pipeline to tidewater. That is a high bar, though, and it's too bad that Alberta doesn't have a government that can try to accomplish something meaningful for Albertans through negotiation rather than threats and a fight. Whiners will whine, and fighters will fight.

Another consistency for this government is the lack of any actual goals. Is there even a plan to work toward environmental sustainability, or will they simply continue to deny that climate change is man-made? We need to both sustain our energy economy and consider the environment so that we actually have a future.

We've seen the same approach in health care. We see destruction of a system, particularly developing pillars that have nice names, but no real plan as to how to build a new system. One of the first rules of making big things happen is to plan first and plan well. Need to consult with experts, but in the health care system the experts have fled and do not want to work for this government.

It would be nice to see a plan instead of just destruction. We need to have a plan that then can minimize the chance of having black swans swoop in, which are highly improbable events that have a very significant consequence. This government did not have a plan for health care, or it would not have created the chaos and decision paralysis.

Is there a plan for climate? It's been easy to name these pillars but a big surprise, it seems, for this government to find out how truly complex the health care system is. There is way more than primary care, hospitals, continuing care, and mental health and addictions. What about specialty care? Where does that fit? There was no plan, so all of these things are happening as they go, and I fear that the climate change plan is the same. We have a whole sector called public health that is now being chewed up and moved into other areas.

I guess that it's too much to expect for this government to have a plan for the environment when they don't even allow the words "climate change" to be spoken within their ministries. It's kind of like not allowing the word "vaccination" to leave their lips. Vaccination is one way of being immunized. We're finally hearing the word "immunization," but it's a bit late after things have gotten out. Vaccination is one way of becoming immunized; another is

getting infected. That is just not the way we should be going, especially now when we're looking at a measles problem.

Let us get back to the government consistency that we're seeing in this bill. Another thing they're doing is hiding data. Of course, this time they're hiding the data from the federal government, and the data that they're hiding is the emissions data. We're used to that in health care. We used to have good reporting on all kinds of outcomes, on wait times, and instead, this is being hidden.

So what are some of the things that we really need to know? Instead of creating practical solutions for Alberta's energy future, why is this government focusing on symbolic legislation that leads to nothing to help energy workers or our communities? Can the minister explain how making it illegal to collect emissions data will create a single job or help Alberta's international reputation as a responsible energy producer? Is this government more interested in manufacturing conflicts to distract from its failures on health care, education, and affordability than in protecting Alberta's interests?

I ask these questions honestly. I hope we can get answers, but I will now cede my time to one of my colleagues.

The Chair: Are there any other members to join the debate on Bill 45?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 45 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 49 and report bills 40, 41, 44, and 45.

The Chair: Sorry; can I clarify? We'll rise and report on Bill 44 with amendment.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 41, Bill 40, Bill 45. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 44. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 49. 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 Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 44

Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025.

10:30

If passed, this bill will help grow our agricultural sector, including the livestock sector, while helping us build an emerging industry, the biogas industry. Now, my ministry has worked really hard on this bill, Madam Speaker. We've worked with many of our stakeholders, with other government ministries, and with the Natural Resources Conservation Board.

The Agricultural Operations Practices Act helps ensure Alberta's ag industry can grow to meet opportunities presented by markets in an environmentally sustainable manner. Alberta's agriculture and food processing sectors are seeking economical and efficient solutions to manage waste and reduce the amount they send to landfills. Proposed changes provide more flexibility and regulatory clarity to manage organic material and digestate, a by-product of biogas production, which could be used as nutrient sources to grow crops and improve soil health. We've managed digestate through a memorandum of understanding for about a decade. Formalizing this approach through legislation would provide clarity to the biogas and ag industries, which we think will attract far more interest to Alberta.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to take a quick moment to thank all those in my ministry that worked hard on helping to bring this legislation to life, including my deputy minister John Conrad; my executive director Jamie Wuite; my director Virginia Nelson; my program analysts Trevor Wallace, Deanne Madsen; and our AOPA engineer Vince Murray. Their tireless efforts, as we know on this side as ministers, are very important to get this work done, and I just wanted them to know how much they are appreciated.

Now, Madam Speaker, I believe many of my comments throughout this have addressed many of the concerns of the opposition, but some of the concerns brought up just recently tonight in debate I do want to address. Of course, I do appreciate the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Manning. Of course, I understand as well as she understands that we want to make sure that everything done in the province is done in an environmentally sustainable manner, protecting the environment.

These changes with AOPA are independent to, of course, the environmental process that is under Environment and Protected Areas and, even more so, a far arm's length away for the approval still when it comes to biogas facilities that is done by the National Resources Conservation Board. Like I said, that's an independent approval, and they consider everything: air, emissions, odour, water management, and all environmental aspects. I do want to comment as well that many of the biogas facilities that I've seen are biodigesters, which are very common across U.S. and the EU. We've seen a massive reduction to odour levels, up to 45 per cent, which I think is going to help in that manner as well.

To the comments made from the Member for Edmonton-South: I do take offence a little bit to her comments about the fact that in one way we're hindering the agricultural sector while helping the agricultural sector. Madam Speaker, I think it's important that we

do a little history lesson here. Those of us on this side of the House, all of us, really remember Bill 6, a flagship of the NDP when they were in power. To quote our now Minister of Municipal Affairs, at that time our Minister of Municipal Affairs said that the NDP was creating a socialist Disneyland through this.

Madam Speaker, when you read some of the comments of what was happening at the time, Bill 6 was a bill that made it so families couldn't help families, friends couldn't help friends, neighbours couldn't help neighbours, and it was only after thousands of protesters showed up at the doorsteps of the Legislature that they even decided to amend their own legislation. Prior to that bill even hitting the floor, they never consulted one farmer. Zero consultation happened during that.

As ag minister I will tell you that if you're going to talk the talk, you need to walk the walk. Here on this side of the House we have through our agriprocessing investment tax credit a record amount last year, \$3 billion of agriprocessing and value-added investment. We have strengthened the feeder association loan guarantee. We have expanded the next generation loan for the next generation of farmers. We haven't attacked the agricultural industry like the members opposite did when they were in power to a point in which the industry quoted that the NDP was attacking their businesses and their entire way of life. That's why the opposition was one and done. They did not respect rural Alberta. On this side we will tirelessly work for rural Alberta, our farmers and ranchers that we know are the backbone of our economy.

With that, this is an excellent bill, Madam Speaker, a bill that will advance our agricultural sector, and I know it will create many more opportunities so it can continue to thrive in the future. With that, I move third reading of Bill 44.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It was certainly entertaining hearing a reprising of the greatest hits from a time when, certainly, most of the people on this side of the House were not here.

Speaking to this bill directly, it's my pleasure to rise and just say a couple of things. I know it's very late, but I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to this bill. Around RNG, renewable natural gas: this could be something that really helps farm communities and farming operations and dairies and other agricultural operations to really make an impact, a positive impact around climate change. In the United States data from the EPA suggests that biogas generation there amounts to 60 million cubic feet a day equivalent of natural gas, including and in addition to which is about 75 megawatts of electricity.

It's the electricity generation from biogas that I want to specifically address here. Of course, the rules around electricity generation from any source, including green sources, is very much up in the air. This is an opportunity for the government to help agricultural operations not only create renewable natural gas products but produce renewable, dispatchable electricity from these RNG operations. Agricultural operations have a very specific and important interest in how electricity markets function in this province.

The fact that there is legislation, that this House is considering separately, that gives entire amounts of power to the minister to determine this as he chooses, taking it out of the AUC process, makes it a little bit challenging and is kind of a way that this government could actually be bringing rural operators who are generating renewable natural gas more into the fold and actively consult with them. The concept of generating electricity from them and yet saddling them with additional costs as the electricity

legislation contemplates is not going to help them actually economically embark on these projects.

Second thing is that we in Canada have from an industrial standpoint relied on carbon pricing. This was an initiative that was first introduced by Ralph Klein. It was, I believe, the first carbon price for industrial operations in the entire western world, and it's been incredibly successful at driving down emissions. But carbon price is under threat, and it may be that carbon price alone cannot motivate these investments, so what they have relied on in the United States to get a flowering of renewable natural gas projects from both agricultural and landfill types of operations is the Inflation Reduction Act.

[Mr. Rowsell in the chair]

It may be that we need an Inflation Reduction Act style of investment in order to make these types of projects economical and to really kick them off. The Inflation Reduction Act also offers not just incentives for renewable natural gas but also incentives for power generation from renewable natural gas and incentives for hydrogen generation from renewable natural gas. You can create an entire supply chain where companies that are creating truly green products that help manage our climate change problem get motivated from that with a number of investment tax credits and production tax credits that help them make these investments and help create the business case for it.

10:40

I recommend to the minister that if he wants to see more of these styles of projects – and I think we all do. I think that we in this House are united that we need more renewable natural gas because it provides additional revenue streams for agricultural producers and also helps address our climate crisis. We can do both of those things, and I think that is a great way to talk to the federal government to try and get that to happen rather than going to war with plastic straws, for example.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The final point that I want to make is around PFAS. I apologize to *Hansard* for the next phrase that I'm going to say here very late

at night. PFAS are perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances. These are forever chemicals.

Mr. McIver: Well done. If anyone can pronounce that, I gotta at least give you a shout-out here.

Member Kayande: That is a C minus in organic chemistry from the University of Alberta.

Mr. McIver: A pass.

Member Kayande: It got me there.

Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances are forever chemicals. One that is very well known under the brand name is Teflon. PFAS in digestate is a huge, huge problem. I would urge the minister in perhaps a subsequent legislation or if there is regulation that can be done to this – what happens is these forever chemicals: it's more of a problem in landfills, I'm sure, but they end up in a waste stream, in the compost. It goes into the renewable natural gas supply chain, comes out as digestate. That digestate gets put on land, and it sterilizes it. It kills the productivity of the land. It causes cancer in farmers. It is a looming environmental catastrophe if these chemicals find themselves onto productive farmland because the productive farmland ceases to be so and cannot be used to grow crops. I really urge monitoring of digestates and ensuring that what farmers are putting on their lands is appropriate for that purpose.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join in on the debate? Seeing none, the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and congratulations to my esteemed colleague for passing third reading. I now move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 6, 2025.

[The Assembly adjourned at 10:44 p.m.]

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