



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 15, 2024

Day 52

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
McDougall
Sinclair
Sweet

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King and to his government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House members of the Association of Pakistani Engineers in Canada, or APEC. APEC provides professional help to newcomer engineers from around the world to settle in Alberta. My guests include Muhammad Azam Kahloo, president; Shahid Awan, general secretary; Tahir Siddique, past president; and Shahzad Zaffar, member and volunteer. I would like them all to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you one of my wonderful constituents who comes from the Homesteader Community League. She's here with a number of Special Olympians today. Her name is Jenny Murray, and I think she might be here with her mom, Gunda, as well. She recently brought home two silver and a bronze medal in snowshoeing in Calgary. In recognition of her incredible leadership in our community, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you listen closely, you can hear the jingle of medals. That is because we are joined today in the gallery by 60 Special Olympics athletes who competed in the Canadian Winter Special Olympics this year in Calgary and 20 coaches and volunteers. Although only a few get to win medals, we're all winners as we were inspired by these athletes throughout the entire competition. I ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has an introduction.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to rise today and introduce to you and through you an exemplary woman leader and recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II platinum jubilee medal from the Council of India Societies of Edmonton, Gunjan Sharma. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you the members of the #proudlyasian campaign, a volunteer collective that raises money to support racialized women.

Joining us are cofounder Serena Mah and team members Serena Tang and Breanna Brown. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you the Council of India Societies of Edmonton, an umbrella organization of Indo-Canadian charities and not-for-profits. They've been making significant contributions to the community for 48 years, since 1976. We have amongst us the executive team, led by a good friend of mine, Puneet Manchanda, who I used to know back at Enbridge when we worked over there. If you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you my friends from Calgary, Martin Belanger, Mike Bowerman, Sheldon Yakiwchuk, Andrea Lee from Camrose, Deena Boklaschuk, and from Edmonton, Eva Chipiuk. Please rise and receive the warm welcome from this House.

Mr. Stephan: I rise today and introduce to you two more dedicated executives of the Council of India Societies of Edmonton, a most excellent council, Jonmejoy Das Choudhury and Dhaval Patel. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to rise and introduce to you and through you two dedicated executives of India Centre, the home of culture and heritage for Indo-Canadians in Edmonton, Chander Mittal, who has been recognized by the Indian embassy in Canada for his outstanding contributions for 40 years. Joining him is Digraj Parmar. I ask them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

Rural Teacher Training

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, the rest of Canada and indeed the world see Alberta as a beacon of hope and opportunity as more and more people choose the province as their new home to live, work, and raise their family. To support the growth in population, Alberta's government is strengthening the education system. It is doing this by recruiting and training more teachers across the province to ensure every student has the support they need to succeed in the classroom. Yesterday through a \$1.7 million investment into two bachelor of education programs at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta we're supporting nearly 60 students in pursuing their teaching careers in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across the province.

By enabling students to complete most of their studies while living and working in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, Alberta's government is helping address the challenges of recruitment and retention. This is critical for the success of the province's education system because we know that when students can study closer to home, they're more likely to remain in their community after they finish their education. Mr. Speaker, this will create a workforce of teachers that are more connected to the rich cultures and the unique ways of life of rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across the province.

We recognize that investing in students today paves the way for a skilled and dynamic future workforce, which is essential for maintaining the economic vitality of our province. In turn it will lead to teachers destined to drive academic success and a passion for lifelong learning for students within these communities.

Mr. Speaker, as many people know, my mom was a teacher. My sister is a teacher. My wife is a teacher. So I hold such a deep appreciation for teachers. This makes me especially proud that our government knows that investing in education is investing in the future of our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Wildfire Evacuee Services

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to those in this province who are facing the threat of wildfire season, especially those who have gone through this before and are experiencing trauma or painful memories from previous fire seasons.

For those in need of emergency financial assistance as they leave their community: if you've been evacuated for seven days, you may be eligible to receive financial compensation. To learn more, contact the 24-hour Emergency Income Support Contact Centre.

Evacuees who require food or accommodation are able to report to a reception centre at the Cold Lake Agriplex, and RV and camping accommodations are available in Lac La Biche. The city of Edmonton has set up an evacuee reception centre at Clareview Community Recreation Centre. They will provide food, clothing, pet daycare, and health care; as well, the Red Cross will help arrange accommodations.

Supports for businesses can be found through the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

I encourage everyone to look into the following information tools as well. Alberta 511 will provide updates on road closures, and the Alberta Wildfire app and Wildfire Status Dashboard contain up-to-date information on where wildfires are burning in Alberta and how they may impact you. For those who have yet to face evacuation but their community may be at risk during fire season, guides for building an emergency kit and an emergency plan can be found at alberta.ca, and Public Safety Canada has a web page to walk you through the creation of your emergency plan.

Finally, there are mental health resources available for those who may be struggling. Evacuations can be stressful and overwhelming, particularly for those who have faced these situations before or have family members who may be at risk. If you need to talk, you can call the Mental Health Help Line at 1.877. 303.2642 or Health Link at 811.

The stress and fear of having to evacuate on those impacted is significant, and we all must work together to ensure that they are supported during this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Canadian Armed Forces Day

Mr. Wright: Mr. Speaker, since I was appointed to the role of military liaison, I've spent my time visiting with active duty members, our veterans, and their families, learning more about their unique stories. These brave men and women give and sacrifice so much, and it's important for me that we take time regularly to recognize and celebrate their service and sacrifices. This is why I'm excited to share that on June 2 Alberta will be celebrating the newly created Canadian Armed Forces Day in Alberta. This is a day of celebration of the members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are currently serving or those who have served in the past. I'm grateful for the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women for her declaration of this day in perpetuity.

1:40

Canadian Armed Forces Day will be a time for Albertans to salute and help our service members feel celebrated and recognized. In honour of our veterans and our service members our government provides free access to the Royal Alberta Museum and Royal Tyrrell Museum for Armed Forces members and their families. Additionally, I want to make sure that all veterans and service members know that resources and help are available. I've been meeting with organizations such as Veterans Affairs Canada, Homes for Heroes, the Newly Institute, the Legion, Edmonton Salutes, and the Military Family Resource Centre, just to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, we should all be proud of every Albertan serving in the Canadian Armed Forces and for those serving in locations in Alberta. Whether you're serving at the Edmonton Garrison, CFB Cold Lake, camp Wainwright, CFB Suffield, or serving in reserve units like the Calgary Highlanders and the South Alberta Light Horse, we just say thank you. Albertans, mark your calendars, and let's come together to celebrate Canadian Armed Forces members on the first Sunday in June.

Thank you.

Government Policies

Ms Ganley: The UCP are engaged in a war on information. They cut off federal funding to university research if they don't like the topic. Instead, they create their own research centre to manufacture the answers they want. I guess if you don't like what the actual science says, why not make your own? They give members' statements on how wildfires are the same as they ever were. No climate change to see here. They hold town halls to spread vaccine misinformation. It's bad enough that UCP policy seems to range between wilfully incompetent and deliberately cruel; now they want to deprive us of the very concept of truth.

For someone like me trained in experimental methodology, in logic and analytical reasoning, in arguing for the facts, it feels like an attack on everything I stand for. It's enough to make me want to scream, to call them every name in the book, but I won't. A fight like this calls for courage. The most important lesson I have learned is not from school or from law; it's from parenting. Courage is not rooted in anger; it is rooted in love, love for our kids' future and for the ideas and what they can build.

Courage isn't just standing up against something; that isn't enough. It's having a vision, an idea, something to fight for. It's easy to face an onslaught of bad decisions by shouting louder and calling names, but it's not how we win. Courage is putting your ideas out there and defending them as they grow. Even in the face of a war on information from this UCP government, Tommy Douglas's words still ring true: "Courage, my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world."

Drought Preparations

Mr. Rowswell: All Albertans, particularly those in rural communities, should be concerned about the variability of water supply. Not only can this impact our ability to get water supplied to our homes and communities, but in a drought this can have a severe impact on farmers and industries that we rely on tremendously. This is a real concern for my constituents after several dry years and El Niño causing a warm and dry winter across the country. Many rivers in our province are far lower than normal, and many reservoirs are below capacity.

This is why I was very happy to learn that last month Alberta signed the largest water-sharing agreements in our province's

history. These agreements, which are the result of months of negotiations between the government of Alberta and major water users, form one of the most proactive responses to this concern that I have ever seen. These agreements will allow Alberta to ensure that we make the absolute most of our limited water supplies as well as prioritize water to make every drop count if a severe drought is seen this summer.

Earlier this month Alberta also released its drought response plan, which will help guide the province through changing drought conditions this year if faced with an emergency situation. To support Albertans through these challenges in the future, the UCP government is also investing \$125 million over the next five years through the drought and flood protection program.

As is always the case in difficult times, I'm proud to see Albertans come together to tackle these challenges. This is precisely what makes Alberta the best place in the world. And it is because of this that I'm incredibly proud to stand in this Chamber and represent them and advocate for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia has a statement to make.

Calgary-Acadia Constituency Priorities

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Calgary-Acadia one of my priorities when I return to Calgary with our weeks off from Edmonton is to connect with as many Calgary-Acadians as possible. I want to learn their troubles, hear their concerns, and be able to raise their voice in this House to alert this government once again to the needs of Albertans. So here it goes.

More and more Calgary-Acadians are reaching out to my office in desperation because they can no longer afford their rent. I've stood in this House before and shared the outrageous rental increases and have asked this UCP government to provide immediate relief. Nothing.

Health care is always top of mind for Calgary-Acadians. Far too many constituents do not have a family doctor, and far too many are worried about having access to health care in crowded emergency rooms.

Then there's Kananaskis, where countless volunteer hours have been spent in the creation and maintenance of the trails, famous for their easy-to-access cross-country skiing, hiking, and cycling trails, that Calgary-Acadians enjoy.

I've received numerous e-mails about Bill 18 and Bill 20 from very concerned Calgary-Acadians. A constituent, Sam, summarized these concerns well, saying: "This bill is nothing more than an attack on democracy. We don't need political parties to help us pick our councillors. If a councillor does something that goes against what the people in their riding like, they will get dumped from office in the next election. That's how democracy works."

In this 31st Legislature a clear theme has emerged from the government bills. This UCP government is focused on making themselves more powerful, and Albertans are starting to notice. Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to represent Calgary-Acadia in this Chamber, and as their representative they deserve a government that listens to their concerns rather than a government imposing their ideology on them. Calgary-Acadians deserve an Alberta NDP government.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert-Morinville has a tabling.

Mr. Nally: Close enough.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table – and I have the five requisite copies – the 27 letters that were sent to the NDP minister for service Alberta in 2017 asking for life lease legislation to be enacted, just like Manitoba.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I have five copies of a media column entitled *Developers Donated at Least \$58,349 to Edmonton's Incoming City Councillors*.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Health System Reform

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when news of the Frankensteinian Bill 22 components were leaked months ago, concerns were raised about fragmentation, chaos, and system failure. The UCP ignored these warnings. The bill gives control of Alberta's health care to the same minister who did more damage to public education in four years than any other minister in four decades. To the Premier: why is she giving that minister more power to do even more damage to something as important as Alberta's public health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has risen.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Education minister did a tremendous job managing that file, which is why she's going to now do a tremendous job managing the health file. There was no leak. We were very forthright about what it is that we were going to do to refocus health care. We are going to have Alberta Health Services become Alberta hospital services so that they can focus on delivering the very best acute care, making sure that they deal with the emergent issues, making sure that they can deliver surgeries, having another entity that's going to focus on primary care and that's already demonstrating its value with the nurse practitioners deal as well as with mental health and addiction and continuing care.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this week we've been talking about an 81-year-old man who was left for three weeks in UCP hallway health care. This bill would not get him quicker access to a room, treatment, a doctor, or a nurse. What he would get is three more deputy ministers, three more departments, and one-third the accountability. To the Premier: Albertans desperately need more doctors and front-line health care workers, so why is she instead focused on appointing more UCP cabinet ministers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The problem is that Alberta Health Services doesn't have the connection to the community-based care that we know many of those who are needing alternative levels of care need to have access to. We did the assessment. There were 1,527 people who either need to have some kind of long-term care or assisted living, mental health treatment, addiction treatment. Maybe they're homeless. Maybe they need to have supportive living. All of those services fall within the Seniors, Community and Social Services portfolio. That's the reason there is going to be a collaboration, to make sure we get those folks where they can be treated best.

Ms Notley: The bill does none of that, Mr. Speaker. It does give the minister of chaos and destruction the power to change who people

work for and some of what they do as long as the work is, quote, substantially the same. End quote. This kind of murky uncertainty . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Notley: . . . will have only one result, health care workers won't want to work here. To the Premier: why is she so focused on repelling the very people who would be at the heart of fixing the health care crisis created by this UCP government?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:51.

Ms Smith: In fact, the Health minister is bringing calm to the system and giving opportunities for more front-line staff. Look, the fact of the matter is that there are only 38 per cent of nurses that work full-time in our system. It is the lowest level in the country. What that tells me is that they're not happy with the working conditions they have right now. We are going to make it so much better because they will have access to work in mental health and addiction facilities, to work in assisted living facilities, to be able to work in primary care. I think that we're going to continue to attract more health professionals to Alberta.

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

Ms Notley: Calm? Nothing could be further from the truth.

Gaza Protests and Law Enforcement Response

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, even after witnessing the militarized and excessively forceful removal of peaceful student protesters, this Premier's initial reaction was to justify and defend the actions of both police and university administration. To the Premier: did she or anyone in her office or any one of her ministers or anyone in their offices speak with anyone in administration at either of the universities about the possibility of siccing the police on these protesters before it happened?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The university administrators have made it very, very clear that those students who are on campus have the right to peacefully protest. However, 25 per cent of the protesters at U of A were students, and the rest were not. They've also made it very, very clear that their policy is that you cannot camp out overnight. I was pleased to see that the next day after the encampments were removed, there were 500 protesters that came back. They demonstrated peacefully, and that's exactly what the administrators wanted all along.

Ms Notley: I just heard no answer to the question.

Now, we are concerned about the police action. We called for the ASIRT investigation back on Friday, and we look forward to its findings, but we also have concerns about the outrageous decisions made by university administrators and their disproportionate and brazen clampdown on peaceful protesters in what should be the heart of free speech in our province. Again to the Premier: will she ensure the Minister of Advanced Education does her job and launches an investigation into the decisions made by the universities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I did indicate that if there was any evidence of excessive use of force, then ASIRT

would launch an investigation. They're analyzing the claims that have been made, and then they will do their work in due course. That's the way our system works. We have an oversight to make sure that there is an appropriate enforcement of the laws. I have said all along that we support free speech, that we support protesters in being able to go out and get their viewpoints heard, but they have to do it within the boundaries of the law. I'm glad to see that since the weekend they have been.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, faculty, staff, students, parents: they're all demanding accountability. The U of A associate dean of equity, diversity, and inclusion resigned, saying, "With police marching on our students . . . I can neither protect students nor facilitate the difficult conversations that are needed." To the Premier: in addition to the ASIRT investigation that she keeps conflating these questions with, why won't she ensure her minister uses section 99 of the Post-secondary Learning Act to investigate the heavy-handed decision to attack free speech on our university campuses?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going through and looking to see whether there is any evidence of excessive use of force, and ASIRT will do their work. The universities have made it very clear that they have private property. They also have the ability to set policy, and their policy is no camping out overnight. They were very clear about it. They gave notice to the individuals many times to be able to remove their encampments, and they did not. I'm pleased to see that after the encampments were removed, they came back, 500 of them, to protest freely. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Support for Wildfire Evacuees

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that all the thoughts and prayers of everyone in the Assembly are with those who are forced to evacuate Fort McMurray, and we are all grateful to all the first responders who are working hard to keep people and the community safe. This is a very difficult time for so many, and I know that Albertans will be there to support their fellow Albertans. But for so many this is a deeply traumatic time, and all supports need to be available. Will the minister commit to ensuring that there are counsellors available at evacuation centres to support those who have been evacuated?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the important question. As a northern Albertan who has been evacuated myself, my communities as well, I know how traumatic and difficult it can be for those who are forced to flee. Know that there are people to talk to. First and foremost, your family and friends: stay connected and close to them as that first line of defence. But, importantly, the government is here as well. There is 24-hour access to 211, a line dedicated to resolving any questions around need for supports, and you get access to same-day, affordable counselling through Counselling Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to encourage the minister to have on-site available counselling at evacuation centres.

We know that there were over 6,600 people evacuated from the neighbourhoods in Fort McMurray yesterday. We know the importance of ensuring that everyone is safe, protected, and has the supports they need. First responders and firefighters are doing critical work to ensure that we protect the lives and the community. Can the Premier inform this House: has everyone in the evacuation area been safely evacuated, accounted for, and are they in safe locations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier, the minister of emergency preparedness.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, the information that we have that we've been provided through the unified command of Alberta Emergency Management along with the municipality of not just Wood Buffalo but, of course, Fort McMurray – I know myself and the Premier have also been in touch with the mayor. At this time we're not aware of anybody that has been left behind. We're also ensuring that we have extra RCMP officers that are able to assist and make sure they're providing protection in the community. Alberta's management and unified command has got this well in hand.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the stresses that are faced by those who are forced to evacuate. Families responding to the order to evacuate might face a situation where they don't have all the medication, devices, or the resources that they need. People need to know where they can get those items or prescriptions if they're left behind. We know that many of the health centres in some of the evacuation areas are not open 24 hours. Can the minister please inform this House where people being evacuated can find the location of their nearest health care centre or hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to inform the member opposite that the hospital is currently open as is the continuing care centre. They are in fact evacuating those individuals that are of the highest need to ensure, in an abundance of caution, that we are able to get those individuals out. They are in constant contact with their families. I know that pharmacies are stepping up in the local area and in other areas to make sure that anyone who needs their medication has access to it, and if they have any difficulties, we do encourage them to reach out to professionals, whether it's within Alberta Health or Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Gaza Protests and Law Enforcement Response (continued)

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eighteen legal experts employed by the law faculties at the University of Calgary and University of Alberta have condemned the disproportionate police response to legitimate student protests. "Students have a right to protest on Alberta's university campuses." The right to protest is protected by the Charter, section 2, freedom of expression, assembly, and association, and section 7 rights of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What does the government have to say about this assessment? Do you agree or disagree?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly aware of the events that unfolded at both the U of C and the U of A

over the past week. We've been in touch with students, we've been in touch with administration, we've been in touch with the police, and we've been in touch with other officials to learn more about what happened. As the Premier earlier mentioned, an ASIRT investigation is being considered and contemplated, subject to some of those findings. We'll hear more about that. Let me be absolutely and abundantly clear to all Albertans. Students, like all Albertans, have a fundamental right to protest. We will protect and uphold those values, and that's what we're going to do, full stop.

2:00

Mr. Sabir: These legal experts noted that the disproportionate response by police went far beyond what was necessary. They state that

under the Criminal Code, police officers cannot use force unless it is necessary to effect valid law enforcement purposes and cannot use more force than is necessary; to unnecessarily use force or use more force than necessary may constitute criminal assault and is a violation of the protesters' right to life, liberty, and security of the person under . . . the Charter.

Will the minister raise these concerns with ASIRT as they launch the investigation we called for last Friday?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier, the minister of emergency services.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It was brought to our attention that there may be some injuries in either Calgary or in Edmonton. As a result of that, we have engaged ASIRT, and ASIRT is doing their preliminary investigation. If a full-scale investigation is required, then the expectation would be that ASIRT do a full-scale investigation.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Sabir: The Canadian Civil Liberties Association also raised serious concerns with the response to student protests. They say that even if one does not support the issue raised by the protests, it is a police duty to respect the protesters' freedom of expression and freedom to protest because those freedoms are a crucial part of our democracy. The Civil Liberties Association also notes that there were cases of injury to protesters while the police publicly said there were none. Many Albertans are deeply concerned about the abuse of power and erosion of democracy. To the minister: what is the timeline for the ASIRT investigation to do its work?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague the minister of public safety mentioned, ASIRT has been engaged. They are conducting their preliminary investigations. Albertans and students can rest assured that if there are findings of excessive force, ASIRT as an independent organization will investigate and will provide recommendations going forward. Once again, let me be absolutely clear. Students have a right to protest in this province. They have the right to freedom of speech. They have the right to exercise their freedom of expression, and they are entitled . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, they are entitled to peaceful assembly. These are constitutionally protected activities that the government of Alberta deeply values and that we will uphold, full stop.

Rural School Closures

Ms Chapman: The UCP have closed the doors of 14 rural schools since taking office. When schools close, it robs children, teachers,

and families of the opportunity to create lasting connections. These closures have also forced families to leave small towns because under this UCP government there was nowhere for children to learn. These actions unfairly favour urban students. We know that Alberta has the lowest funding per student in Canada. Rural schools close because they can't afford to operate under the UCP. How did the minister allow this to happen?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, our government is absolutely committed to making sure that we're building schools in every corner of our province, and Budget '24 demonstrates that. In addition, we're also making sure that our school boards are able to allocate the resources that they need and determine operations. Of course, school boards are in the best position to make those determinations. Sometimes there's a community that has a really low utilization or low population, and we leave it to our school boards to figure out, of course, how best to allocate their resources within their . . .

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

Ms Chapman: Given that one rural school in Alberta has been forced to consider alternatives like offering a four-day week just to keep its doors open and given that children have the right to learn in their communities and not spend hours and hours stuck on a school bus just because the UCP doesn't want to fund rural schooling and given that what rural schools really need is a government that supports them, will the minister please inform this House how many students, teachers, families, and school staff have been impacted by these closures?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, just to provide additional detail as a follow-up to my previous commentary, I mentioned that we're committed to building schools in every community and every corner of our province. I'd like to expand on that. Budget '24 provided full construction funding for a replacement school in Red Earth Creek, also received construction funding for a new school in Nanton, also construction funding for a replacement junior high in Medicine Hat, and construction funding for a new school in Leduc, Lac La Biche, and Fort McMurray as well, and other projects are in the pipeline for those communities.

Ms Chapman: Given that a good government wouldn't force school closures just because schools and communities are small and given that a proper government wouldn't underfund education based on bad guesstimates of enrolment growth and instead would fund based on actual enrolment, given that a government that cares about rural families wouldn't close their schools but would work hard to keep those schools open so their children can have the same access to education that students in urban centres get – Alberta desperately needs more schools, not less – given that I didn't hear an answer, can the minister explain how this government allowed 14 rural schools to close?

Mr. Nicolaides: Let's talk about what a proper government would do, Mr. Speaker. A proper government wouldn't tell people to leave Alberta and go to B.C. to find jobs there. A proper government wouldn't drive away investment and dry up investment in the province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. You might not like the answer, but the minister is entitled to give it.

Mr. Nicolaides: They definitely don't like the answer because they don't like their record, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have rejected their

record, and Albertans won't forget their record. They drove people out of the province. They dried up investment. They actually told Albertans to go to B.C. to find a job. Under our government we've made Alberta a place of hope and opportunity once again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Transportation Network Work Stoppages

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Annual labour disruptions within the transportation sector are severely hampering Alberta's economy and damaging Canada's reputation as a trading partner. As a landlocked province Alberta relies heavily on our railways and neighbouring ports in B.C. to link us to vital markets across the world, supporting thousands of jobs in various sectors across the province. The effects of shutting down our access to these markets each year over year cannot be overstated in the demands of the immediate decisions. It needs immediate action. Can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors update this Assembly on what the government is doing to advocate on behalf of Alberta to avoid any labour disruptions to our transportation network?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, work stoppages at our ports and railways are different than regular union strikes. That's why the Premier wrote to the Prime Minister. I myself as well as the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade wrote to our counterparts in Ottawa, with the federal labour and Transport ministers, to make sure that the federal government understands the seriousness of this situation. This government obviously respects the collective bargaining process, but we also respect the millions of Canadian workers that are hurt by rail and port strikes across the country with temporary layoffs or curtailment of production. We want to stand up and protect all workers across this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that last summer we saw similar labour disruptions at the B.C. ports and given that it's one of Canada's busiest ports – last year's strike caused extensive delays in the shipment of goods, leading to inventory shortages, increased transportation expenses, job losses – and further given that the same unions are once again . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Getson: Further, given that these same unions once again are threatening to shut down Canada's west coast ports, to the same minister: what were the impacts of last year's port strike in Vancouver, and why is it important that the federal government take action to stop this from becoming an annual occurrence?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Last summer Canadians saw weak leadership by the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa during the west coast port strike. About \$785 million worth of cargo was affected by that strike, and instead of back-to-work legislation last summer, the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa – guess what? – they did nothing. However, a year earlier

that same Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa within 24 hours had back-to-work legislation ready to go. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The NDP don't like to hear this, but the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa a year prior within 24 hours when the Montreal port went on strike had back-to-work legislation in Parliament and supported it. Apparently, eastern Canada is more important than western Canada to that Liberal-NDP coalition.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's government has raised the issue of labour disruptions paralyzing our economy on several occasions with the NDP-Liberal coalition of chaos, the government now in Ottawa, and further given that despite the threat of a shutdown of Canada's west coast ports and Canada's two major railways the federal government has not taken any concrete action to protect our transportation network . . .

Mr. Sabir: It did happen at the Coutts border.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. If the member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall wants to ask a question, I encourage him to get his name on the list, stand on his feet, and ask one. Until then, the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has the call.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would comply that he is a "number" from next door on that aisle.

To the same minister: what can be done to stop the supply chain disruptions and work stoppages from becoming the norm in Canada?

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:11.

The hon. the minister of transportation.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've asked and we've continued to ask the federal government to actually amend the Canadian Labour Code to enable the federal cabinet to impose binding arbitration and avoid disruptive work stoppages at our national railways and ports across this country. The NDP could actually do something; they just choose not to. Actually, look at the NDP leadership candidates. Their hopeful, Gil McGowan, who runs a union that collects millions of dollars in mandatory union dues but couldn't raise \$50,000 voluntarily from workers across this province – the NDP support for unions is pretty thin when it comes down to it.

Indigenous Consultations on Energy Development

Member Arcand-Paul: The Woodland Cree First Nation set up a protest camp almost two weeks ago near the Harmon Valley oil field near Peace River because WCFN is owed meaningful consultation and final authority over what industrial development occurs on its traditional lands. What everyone can agree with in this House is that WCFN is owed a duty to consult, and it is clear that this province has failed to live up to its duty. To the minister. You've stated repeatedly your contentment with the Crown's discharge of the duty to consult in this province. Why have you failed WCFN so miserably and caused this relationship to break down with proponents in the Peace River region?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member knows, consultation is what the province does, and we don't negotiate private deals. The consultation was done, and then it's up to the private parties to negotiate impact-benefit agreements. They are doing that at this point, and the province does not get involved with that.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that WCFN has indicated its concern for the expansion of Obsidian Energy's operations in its traditional territory following an unprecedented magnitude 5.6 earthquake, which was connected to this proponent's fracking, given that these concerns have been well known for over a year yet nothing has been done, which has led to this second protest camp, and given that I've already cautioned this minister that this was a likelihood back in March, but the deputy minister assured us all, "There will be no Oka here in Alberta. The government respects treaty rights," Minister, if this were remotely true, why are we seeing WCFN gaslit by a proponent with procedural . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: As I said, Mr. Speaker, consultation is something this province takes very seriously, and we work with all the First Nations and the Métis settlements and everyone else that has the ability to have that consultation done. We've streamlined that process. We've allowed the geomapping to overlap so that we know exactly who has to be consulted when a project goes forward, and we take it very seriously. Our consultation process is very thorough in Alberta, and we take it very seriously.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given, Mr. Speaker, that sounds like consultations are leaving nations like WCFN in the dust, setting the stage for chaos in our province's industries – seems like economic certainty might be at risk in Alberta – and given that just a few months ago the minister stated that the 10,000 to 15,000 consultations which are done in Alberta every year "keeps this province moving" and given that First Nations equally want to see prosperity from the ongoing taking of natural resources from this territory, further given that to date WCFN's concerns have gone unaddressed, will the minister commit today to revamping the ACO, or will he allow for more of these situations to unfold, thereby creating uncertainty for all parties involved?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the member pointed out that 12,000 to 15,000 consultations are done every year in this province. That's what keeps this economy going, because the rest of the world wants Alberta's oil and gas. Our First Nations are our partners in prosperity, and we work closely with them to make sure that they are partners at our table, and we will continue to work with them, and we will help them where we can to facilitate, but we cannot get involved when two parties are negotiating.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Water-sharing Agreements

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a few weeks since the government announced the largest water-sharing agreements in history, several weeks where these agreements were words on paper expressing intent, but because they're not legally binding, they don't require anyone to act. The drought response plan says that in stage 4 drought, the management action is to "develop and implement water-sharing agreements with large water users." Why

is the government not following its own emergency response plan and requiring the implementation of the water-sharing agreements?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure what the member opposite is talking about. The signatories to the water-sharing agreements are doing exactly what they agreed to do when those water-sharing agreements were signed. Every two weeks all of those water users come together to essentially go over the information that we have about water levels in those areas, and then they make a determination on whether or not they need to activate those water-sharing agreements. In the Red Deer and the Bow river basins it is not necessary to do that at this time, but water users in the Oldman did decide to move ahead and implement those agreements last week.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that activating the water-sharing agreements is a collaborative decision among participants and they do meet regularly but the public is not aware of when these meetings happen and what the results are – the government is not party to these agreements, and the water-sharing agreements define triggers for implementation as a list of considerations, not quantifiable data measurements or data itself – given that we keep hearing that the government is waiting for snowpack data but that data already exists and can be found online, why has the minister not required that all of the water-sharing agreements be activated now?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, because in not all basins do they require these to be activated right now. There are five triggers that will be considered when deciding if an agreement needs to be activated. Of course, that's snowpack and moisture data; final decisions by irrigation districts on water allocations per acre; the reservoir levels, river flows, and seven-day forecasts; water demand; and then, of course, we recognize that there are local challenges or issues that might differ from community to community and area to area. We do in fact have that snowpack data. As we've said publicly, this group will continue to meet every two weeks and activate if necessary.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that we live in a province where hope is a strategy, I guess we can all hope for more rain to fill the reservoirs. Given that there are no enforcement mechanisms in place to make sure that Albertans honour these voluntary agreements – we can hope everyone will do their best – and given that we don't know how much water small and medium licence holders withdraw because we don't have that data, we can hope that these data gaps won't matter when we're going through the worst drought in decades. What's the minister hoping for these days? That thoughts and prayers will address the drought since our government won't?

Ms Schulz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the hours and weeks and months that all of these water users across southern Alberta put into bringing together these water-sharing agreements: calling that hope and a lack of a plan is wildly disrespectful to the municipalities, the irrigators, and the other water users in the system that worked so hard to bring these water-sharing agreements into place. We had over 20 different water users at that announcement saying how historic this was and how beneficial having these agreements in place were, and the member's comments are completely disrespectful of all that work.

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

Elk Point Hemp Processing Plant

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Elk Point and Frog Lake First Nation are communities within my constituency that have seen a downturn of fortune of late. The oil activity that once fuelled them subsided and has led to unemployment rates several points higher than the provincial average. It is for exactly this reason I've been advocating for additional development and investment in this area. This is why I've been delighted to hear about the investment from the province. Could the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade please share with this House the details of this announcement?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the member for the question. On May 3 we announced that Canada's largest uniform company, Logistik Unicorn, will be investing in Alberta with a new project in Elk Point. Through a partnership with Frog Lake First Nation called Askiy Hemp, they will be cultivating hemp on the First Nation and building a large processing plant in Elk Point that will process 40,000 tons of hemp stalks a year to be used for uniforms. This investment was secured after months of work by Invest Alberta and this government, including advocacy from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, and was supported by \$1.1 million through Alberta's rural stream of the investment and growth fund.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that my constituents in this region will be extremely happy to hear about this funding announcement and given that this investment will diversify the Elk Point, Frog Lake economies and contribute to the well-being of their residents, could the same minister please share about the size of the investment of this project, how many jobs are expected to be created that are permanent as well as the construction phase of this wonderful project, sir?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Elk Point facility represents tens of millions of dollars of investment and will create 33 permanent full-time and 50 temporary jobs. But this project is about more than just this singular investment. It will help breathe economic life back into these communities, a point reiterated to me by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Through the investment and growth fund we've announced eight grants that will create an estimated 900 permanent full-time and 500 temporary jobs, with a total private capital investment of \$400 million. We lead Canada in job creation, with 90 per cent of all private jobs added in Canada between October 2023 and March of this year created in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for this answer. Given that this is tremendous news for my constituents and, in addition to the jobs directly created from this investment, there may be broader economic benefits in areas such as hemp cultivation, what is the anticipated overall economic benefit for residents in Elk Point and Frog Lake because of this super-duper investment?

Mr. Jones: Super-duper indeed, Mr. Speaker. This investment by Logistik Unicorp is expected to add more than \$10 million to the province's GDP during construction, with impacts concentrated in Elk Point and the Frog Lake First Nation. In addition to the 33 permanent full-time jobs, this investment will contribute to the growth of Alberta's value-added agriculture sector thanks to the cultivation of hemp on 125,000 acres of land in Frog Lake and neighbouring Indigenous communities. Alberta remains the economic engine of Canada, with rural Alberta securing great investments like these every day.

School Construction in Calgary-Elbow

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, Altadore school in my constituency of Calgary-Elbow is crowded. I spoke to a parent who's beside themselves at how many kids are in classrooms and how complex the children's needs are. I told him that the UCP government is funding construction of only one new school for the 7,000 new students attending Calgary board of education public schools this year. Unsurprisingly, this parent did not think this was a reasonable answer. When will folks in Altadore get a better answer than piling 7,000 children in a city of 1 million people into one single school?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, 18 projects are on the list for the Calgary metropolitan region. Construction funding was provided for two new schools in Airdrie, two new schools in Calgary, one new school in Chestermere, and one new school in Cochrane. Additional projects have been awarded design funding. Once the designs of those projects are completed, they'll be able to move forward. Currently in Calgary a new high school in Cornerstone has received design funding, a new elementary school in Redstone has received design funding, and more.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, given that Airdrie and Chestermere are not Calgary-Elbow, given that the Elboya school in my constituency of Calgary-Elbow is also crowded and given that it's French immersion and parents with kids in French immersion programs know how important staff ratios are, given that I've had students ask me if this is what they can expect from now on and given that I've had to tell them that only half of entering students are funded according to the moving average formula and Alberta has the lowest per-student base funding in Canada, will the minister meet with the parents and students in Elboya school and explain his funding decisions?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is right. You know, all of Calgary is not in Calgary-Elbow, but we do take Calgary-Elbow and all communities in Calgary seriously. Based on the member's question, I wanted to grab the latest copy of the Calgary board of education's priority capital projects for the next three years, and just going through it, I don't see that the Calgary board of education has flagged any projects for Calgary-Elbow. I may be wrong, but I see projects here for Cornerstone, Sage Hill, Redstone, Cityscape, Walden, Nolan Hill, Aspen Woods. There's more as well.

Member Kayande: Given that there's a parent council meeting at my own kid's school in a few weeks, where we will be talking about overcrowding, and given that it's my kid so I'd like to attend and given that I'd love to be able to deliver news that something will change but with a capital plan that doesn't provide anything even close to the capacity increases that 9,000 new students need next year, will the minister agree to join me at the meeting and give these parents better news, or should I tell those assembled that we're just

going to have to live with overcrowding until the UCP is replaced in 2027? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Nicolaides: Cornerstone high school and other Cornerstone elementaries, Mahogany, Redstone, Sage Hill-Kincora, Sherwood-Nolan Hill, Cityscape-Redstone, Cornerstone, Walden, Livingston, Nolan Hill, Aspen, Saddle Ridge, Mahogany, Legacy, Cityscape, Carrington, Walden, Seton, West Macleod: these are the priority projects that the Calgary board of education has identified. Our priority as government is to work with all of our school boards with the priority projects that they've identified, provide funding to ensure those projects can be built. I'd encourage the member to continue to chat with his colleagues and other trustees with the Calgary board of education. If you have any . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has a question.

Collegiate Schools

Mr. Wright: Some of the best collegiate programs in our province are located in my charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. Collegiate programs bring together students with similar interests to benefit from enriched courses, specialized facilities, and enhanced learning opportunities through a unique delivery model. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Education: what is our government doing to support schools offering collegiate programs in my constituency and across the province?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, that's a very important question. Collegiate schools play such a critical and vital role in not only our history of school choice and promoting school choice in the province but helping to ensure that young Albertans are able to learn the skills and competencies that are essential for success. In the budget we're investing \$2.1 billion over the next three years for priority capital projects. That includes \$123 million specifically for public charter schools and for other infrastructure to support the growth of collegiate schools as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that schools offering collegiate programs specialize in particular subjects and fields and that their hands-on approach helps young Albertans gain and develop life skills and experiences and further given that I recently met with WestJet, who stated their dire need for pilots and aircraft maintenance engineers, and that collegiate programs in my own riding provide a pathway for students to enter these careers, to the same minister: how do collegiate schools help build the future workforce and instill practical skills in young adults in high school?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, the primary focus of collegiate schools, Mr. Speaker, is to give students access to specialized programming in unique areas, including the trades, that has alignment with our labour and workforce needs. The member is absolutely correct. Of course, under our government's watch WestJet signed an MOU making Calgary their Dreamliner hub and moving a lot of their operations here, which we're proud of. Of course, that requires more workforce, and through some of our collegiate programs we'll be able to help support growth in labour workers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that we know that Alberta is the best place to live, work, start a business, and raise a family and given that our government is committed to helping young Albertans prepare for the rapidly changing workforce and further given that collegiate schools help fill that commitment, can the same minister please share what this government is doing to ensure collegiates in my riding and across the province and the students who attend them are supported with the funding they need to thrive while growing and evolving education and our workforce?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, one of the things that we do specifically for collegiate schools is that we ensure that they are provided with adequate start-up funding. We know that as a new collegiate school comes online, during those early years there can be additional costs associated with start-ups, so we do provide targeted start-up funding to assist with that. In fact, this next school year seven new collegiate schools will be coming online across the province. In total Alberta Education is investing over \$9.3 billion to our education system to ensure that our schools have the resources that they need to continue to deliver a world-class education.

Substance Use Data

Member Eremenko: Twenty twenty-three has been the deadliest year on record for opioid use deaths, but we don't know the full extent, Mr. Speaker, because the government has yet to release December figures. As it relates to deaths, the last data point on the GOA substance-use surveillance system is from November 2023, where 138 Albertans tragically died of opioid use. Now, typically there is a lag of a few months, but five, Mr. Speaker? The UCP used last year's election as an excuse to not release the data for several months. It was because of politics then, and I reckon it's because of politics now. Will the minister commit to releasing December 2023 drug poisoning death figures before the end of May?

2:30

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the numbers come out independent of my office. I don't make decisions on those timelines. I'm happy to see them come out as soon as they can.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, our government is moving forward on the Alberta recovery model because of the crisis we face today. There is nothing compassionate about letting individuals who suffer from opioid addiction remain in addiction with no off-ramp off it. The human, compassionate, and Alberta response is bringing them access to recovery, getting them out of addiction with life-saving supports.

Member Eremenko: Given that Ontario and B.C. have reported on the entire first quarter of 2024 while Alberta has yet to close its reporting on the '23 calendar year and given that this government is insistent on a one-size-fits-all approach to mental health and addiction treatment without a leg to stand on from an evidentiary perspective and given that in roughly six weeks the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction will be quadrupling in budget and mandate as a result of taking over care from AHS, can the minister tell us if the government is making decisions without current data, or do they just have the data but won't make it public because it shows a situation under the UCP's watch that is going from bad to worse?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the NDP and their policies across Canada have been one driving force when it comes to addiction policy, and the only response has been one that has led to harm production in jurisdictions like Vancouver and London, Ontario.

That will not happen in Alberta. I visited a recovery treatment centre this morning where I had an individual . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Williams: Very welcome to hear the comments from the member opposite if he's willing to rise to his feet accusing us of horrific things which are not true.

The alternative to the Alberta recovery model is one of despair that continues facilitation. I spoke to an individual in recovery this morning who told me, after his mother and grandmother, drug dealers, with the recovery option he faces the first chance . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Eremenko: Given that the minister's comments are interesting because earlier just this week the Public Accounts Committee was told from this ministry that the substance-use surveillance data is updated in real time in a quarterly, monthly, and even weekly schedule and given that five months is none of those things and given that if this government wants to make evidence-based decisions, they need the – you guessed it – evidence, which they then have an obligation to share with the public, will the minister commit to ensure that this data is tabled by May 31 and outline what steps he has taken to ensure delays like this never happen again?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to release the data as soon as it passes through my office. I will stand our record up against the NDP's every day of the week. The model that they propose . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: The model that they propose, Mr. Speaker, will only further harm Albertans and lead more people down a path of pain, misery, and, eventually, death. Our model is one of hope. We use evidence like Dr. Keith Humphreys, who is a three-time adviser to the President of the United States, wrote the *Stanford-Lancet* Commission, and we partner with institutions like Harvard and others so that we have the absolute best information informing our system. The members opposite seem to be allergic to data, which is why they opposed our Bill 17. Happily, it passed yesterday. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

COVID Vaccination Information

Dr. Metz: Vaccines are safe, and they protect lives, Mr. Speaker. This isn't my opinion; this is a fact. In only a couple of days the members opposite will host an event that not only questions this basic medical fact but claims that vaccines are responsible for the deaths of children. The government's own publicly released data says that this is a false claim. Will the minister agree with the data published by her department and inform her caucus members that getting vaccinated is the safe and responsible thing to do?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, vaccines do remain available for all Albertans. Particularly for children, parents are in the best position to make those decisions. Of course, we've stepped up our campaign this year. We've actually doubled

the amount of funding that we have for vaccine information out to all Albertans. We're going to continue to do that, because, of course, we want Albertans to be informed and also to make the best decisions for themselves and their families. We're . . .

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

Dr. Metz: Given that this UCP event, that will feature the chief government whip, will not only be spreading conspiracy theories about vaccinations but will also feature doctors who have lost their licences or been found to be incompetent and given that, in addition to the antivaccination claims from the UCP backbench, the UCP board of directors is demanding that the government impose their antiscience, antivaccine views, will the minister reject their antiscience views and not impose them on Alberta's health care workers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not involved in this event. In fact, it's being done by a constituency association. But, that being said, as a rehab practitioner in my former life working at Michener Centre, I have seen the results of individuals who have not been vaccinated, to devastating effect in terms of developmental disabilities as well as severe handicaps. Of course, we're going to continue to make sure that vaccines are available and that people have choice.

Dr. Metz: Given that this event was found to break the terms of service of Eventbrite, leading to its removal from the site, and given that the Premier, the leader of the UCP, declined to take responsibility for an event hosted by a member of her caucus and featuring at least one member of her cabinet and given that the Alberta vaccination policy should be dictated by science and not by Take Back Alberta, is the Premier really comfortable having an event-booking website show more leadership than her, or will she call for this event to be cancelled?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to reiterate that all vaccines remain available in Alberta. The COVID vaccine has been available for children since August 2022. Nothing has changed in that regard. Parents are in the best position to make those decisions for themselves and their families. There are many conditions that have to be looked at when going forward with a vaccine. That will continue to be the case.

Federal Policies

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, Albertans pay billions funding equalization. It is rigged. Quebec's Premier says that his favourite thing about Canada is equalization. Quebec and others game equalization, seeking to glut themselves on the labours of Albertans. Here is the truth: if Quebec left Canada, Alberta would be better off. Also, they can take Trudeau with them. To the minister. Albertans had an equalization referendum. We do not want be ripped off anymore. What's happening?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Albertans were clear in the equalization referendum that it's not fair for our province. We all know that the formula for equalization is structured in such a way that does not provide any benefit to Alberta. The best way to get that formula changed is to ensure that the federal government, who, to steal a

line from the hon. member, is very bad, changes hands in the next federal election so that the Trudeau-Singh coalition is sent packing and real change can be pursued.

Mr. Stephan: Given that this socialist NDP-Trudeau axis is no good for Canada – they are making us poor, Mr. Speaker; our per capita GDP is falling like a rock – and given that they have more than doubled the national debt, \$1.2 trillion, and that they are the worst ever and given that they hold us back, they cost us lots, they are a net negative, and they are dead weight, to the minister: how is Alberta succeeding in spite of this socialist NDP-Trudeau government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. The difference could not be more stark. While the federal government now spends nearly the entire Alberta budget just on interest payments, which is also more than they spend on health care transfers to the provinces, we're balancing the budget, only one of two jurisdictions in the country to do so this year, while providing record levels of funding to health care and education.

2:40

Mr. Stephan: Given that this NDP were very bad for Alberta – under them there was a net loss of private-sector jobs in Alberta; they were no good, Mr. Speaker – and given that Trudeau is a national emergency for the economy and that he has made himself a danger and a threat to our freedom and prosperity, to the minister. Socialist Trudeau and this NDP were very bad for jobs. How is our record of jobs compared to theirs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. When the members opposite were in government, they lost 183,000 jobs. They told people to move to B.C. to get a job, called Albertans sewer rats and embarrassing cousins. On the other hand, we're doing quite well on that front. We've created 90 per cent of the private-sector jobs in all of Canada in the last six months, and in the last year we're the only province in Canada with more private-sector job growth than the public sector. ATB has pointed out that Alberta is creating jobs, on an overall basis, at twice the rate of the rest of Canada and, when it comes to the private sector, at five times the rate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 1:51 the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Referring to Proper Titles

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted, I rose on a point of order. When the hon. Leader of the Opposition was speaking, posing a question to the Premier, the member said, from my unofficial records, of course: "The bill does none of that, Mr. Speaker. It . . . give[s] the minister of chaos and destruction the power to change who people work for and some of what they do" and so on and so forth. This specific instance, referring to a minister by a title that is not their actual title or by a different constituency or by their own name, is inappropriate.

This was actually done on June 8, 2020. Dang. We were sitting in June. At the time the Minister of Municipal Affairs rose on a

point of order as the Leader of the Opposition had said, “Last week the Member for Calgary-Acadia arrogantly Shan-splained to the Legislature that only one doctor was leaving Crossfield” and so on and so forth. The Speaker’s ruling, of course, said:

I’d like to read a section of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 619, chapter 13, Rules of Order and Decorum, References to Members, as a reminder to the Assembly.

During debate, Members do not refer to one another by their names but rather by title, position or constituency in order to guard against the tendency to personalize debate.

This is a very important point for the Official Opposition.

And I continue to quote you, Mr. Speaker.

A Minister is referred to by the portfolio he or she holds.

The two main party leaders may be referred to as . . .

and, of course, this is with respect to the House of Commons, so it doesn’t particularly apply [here].

You went on to talk about the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister. But, again, the Speaker will not allow a Member to refer to another Member by name even if the Member speaking is quoting from a document such as a newspaper article. As the Chair has noted, a Member “cannot do indirectly what cannot be done directly.”

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I quote you: “as I’ve noted, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states that members shall refer to ministers by their title.” I do believe this is a point of order. You have ruled this in the past. I do cite 23(h), (i), and (j), that such language would create disorder in this Chamber, and ask that, should it be a point of order in your ruling, the member apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I’m aware of that ruling. It is true; I ought to have said and meant to, in fact, say: the minister whose policies have driven a great deal of chaos and destruction. For not framing it that way, I apologize and withdraw my remark.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:11 the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader rose on a point of order. I’m not sure if he or the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader intends to take it.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At that time the government whip in speaking to the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader – I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but what I heard was: and he should comply; he is a mumbler from next door on that aisle. Under Standing Order 23(j), “uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder,” as well as referencing *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 13, page 623, “personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order.”

At that time, Mr. Speaker, you had just finished intervening because of heckling. You had provided a caution, but the government whip chose to pile on and not only to do that but to insult the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader using unparliamentary language and apparently mocking his accent. Such behaviour is unbecoming of all members. I ask that he apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The government whip.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Actually, Mr. Speaker, I’ll stand and point this one out. While it was heated debate, absolutely – there was back

and forth, and the members opposite, you called them to order when I was trying to ask a simple question – I actually did a little play in language. I don’t have the benefit of the Blues, and I don’t want to throw the Speaker under the House. I heard you call him “number.” You probably called him “member.” I just played on the same one, “number,” from across the aisle. It wasn’t meant with any discord intent. I apologize and withdraw, but it wasn’t “mumbler.” I said “number” because I thought it was a play on words.

The Speaker: I appreciate the apology. What I heard was: I wasn’t making fun of the hon. member; I was making fun of the Speaker. I’m not sure what’s worse, but I do have the benefit of the Blues, and that is exactly what happened. The Speaker misspoke, and the member took the opportunity to repeat that unfortunate incident. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded, and in the strongest way possible would recommend that the hon. the chief government whip would refrain from taking opportunities to make fun of the Speaker in the future.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Ethics Commissioner

34. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Shawn McLeod be appointed Ethics Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a five-year term commencing May 26, 2024.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 8, 2024, after a nearly six-month search process for the right candidate, the committee recommended to the Assembly that Shawn McLeod be appointed to the position of Ethics Commissioner. As you are aware, Alberta’s Ethics Commissioner serves as an independent officer of the Legislature, guiding Members of the Legislative Assembly, political staff, and senior designated officials in accordance with the Conflicts of Interest Act legislation. This person investigates concerns, offers counsel, and reviews private disclosure statements, ensuring transparency from senior officials in our government.

2:50

The search process for this position was meticulous. It begins with taking applications that are then vetted by a third-party executive search committee. Then those candidates are presented to the committee, which is a bipartisan committee of members supported by the LAO staff and the public service. It included several stages of interviews, reference checks, and security screening, Mr. Speaker, which goes to say that all the names presented to the committee by the third-party executive search committee were presented and could be considered eligible candidates for the position.

As you see, Mr. Speaker, members of the committee undertook a lengthy and thorough process to find the right candidate for the Ethics Commissioner position, and Shawn McLeod emerged as a standout choice. Shawn McLeod has years of experience in nonpartisan executive roles. He has legal expertise as a member of the Law Society of Alberta and a valuable cultural background as a member of the Bonaparte First Nation.

Mr. Speaker, after reading the position profile approved by caucus members of the committee alongside Mr. McLeod's bio, I have no doubt that he is the right candidate for this position. For instance, the required knowledge, experience, and skills listed by the committee included demonstrated, profound knowledge of law and adjudication experience. Well, Mr. McLeod is a lawyer who has worked in both the private and public sectors and has extensive experience in legal counsel.

Candidates required proven expertise in the interpretation and application of legislation, regulations, and policies; working knowledge of the parliamentary system, government functions, and processes and the public sector as well; experience in decision-making at a senior level related to sensitive and complex issues. Mr. McLeod was a deputy minister for two different departments, labour and immigration and jobs, economy, and northern development, and was a special adviser to Executive Council. I can't imagine someone more qualified than him for this role.

Another requirement was the ability to lead, influence, and negotiate innovative solutions to complex and diverse issues with a variety of stakeholders and balance the needs and interests of these diverse groups. Mr. McLeod worked in legal counsel in the Alberta Labour Relations Board.

Mr. Speaker, it is standard practice that after a select special committee reports on this search for the Ethics Commissioner to the Legislative Assembly and recommends the appointment of the Ethics Commissioner, the Lieutenant Governor in Council appoints the Ethics Commissioner on the recommendation of the Assembly for a term of five years with the possibility of reappointment. The committee looked for a person with, and I quote, a progressive record of accomplishments, credibility in a related career, respect within the community, public-service orientation, and an understanding of the political context. It is clear that Mr. Shawn McLeod meets all of these requirements and exceeds expectations.

I have full confidence that Mr. McLeod will fulfill his duties with fairness and integrity, and I am looking forward to the Assembly supporting this recommendation and all members of this House working with Mr. McLeod as Alberta's new Ethics Commissioner in the near future. I also want to take this opportunity to thank all members of the search committee for undertaking this important work and the dedicated staff who supported them throughout this important process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is, I want to say, with a great deal of sadness and disappointment that I rise to speak about this recommended appointment by the government and those that will vote in favour of this motion and just disappointment in general that this is where things have come to. It is our view in the Official Opposition that the proposed candidate for the position of Ethics Commissioner in the province of Alberta is a deeply inappropriate choice and that it will ultimately reflect very poorly not only on the government ultimately that put them into that position but also, quite frankly, on this whole Assembly and ultimately on our system of democracy across the province.

Let me start, Mr. Speaker, by talking about the history and the role of the conflict-of-interest and ethics legislation within our system of democracy. It's a longstanding feature of democratic systems all across parliamentary democracies, and indeed in other democracies as well, that there should be legislation that acts independently to protect voters from what would otherwise be self-interested decisions on the part of those elected in the course of engaging in deliberations on behalf of the voters of any particular

jurisdiction. Unfortunately, that has had to happen because of, you know, many, many years of history in a whole range of democracies where we have seen elected officials unfortunately engage in decision-making processes that appear to be far more interested in serving their own personal and private interests than in serving the collective interests of a broad range of the citizens of the province.

It's not a new piece of legislation. It's not something that, you know, happened when the NDP was in power or anything like this. This has been a fundamental piece of legislation that has been in place in this province, first brought in, I believe, under then Premier Peter Lougheed in one of many efforts to modernize Alberta's democratic system and to ensure that we have those kinds of safeguards and protections in place.

It's a really critically important piece of legislation, and it should be a critically important piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, for all of those who take our roles in this Assembly seriously, who take seriously the trust that the people of the province put in us to make decisions with respect to a whole range of matters that impact on their daily lives. As elected officials we should take very seriously the role that we have in this House. It is protected by this piece of legislation, this conflict-of-interest legislation.

So that's what it's for. But unfortunately that piece of legislation can only be as good as it is enforced and it can only be as alive as the person who is charged with the responsibility of enforcing it is objective and capable. When you undermine that role by turning it into something else, then you undermine the legislation and through that you undermine the integrity of this whole Assembly and the work and the trust that each of us should have with our own individual electors and, frankly, citizens of this province across the board.

Let's talk a little bit about the history. I know there was a time, Mr. Speaker, when both you and I served in opposition and there was a different government in power. It was the Progressive Conservative government. Some of the observers of that Progressive Conservative government, as it got longer and longer in the tooth and became more and more comfortable with what was starting to add up to four decades in power, used to refer to it as Tory land. That was a term that was used to refer to a whole bunch of self-serving, nest-feathering decisions taken by a government that had grown far, far too comfortable with power; far, far too entitled to their role; far, far too presumptive about their inalienable right to be elected by the people of this province.

So when we were in that role, you will recall, there was this description of a thing called Tory land. Right around the time I first got elected in 2008, we had to deal with the fact that there was an appointment of a new Ethics Commissioner and that Ethics Commissioner was also a partisan selection of the Tory land PC government.

3:00

Like the current selection, that Ethics Commissioner had a long record of donations to the PC Party. As a result, opposition members at the time were very concerned about that selection. We said: "This is worrisome. We are very worried that this person will end up serving to protect the Tory land PC government from accountability through the conflict-of-interest legislation rather than enforcing the conflict-of-interest legislation."

Fast-forward about four years, when, I believe, at that time the now Speaker was an opposition member of the Legislature. Maybe he was a staffperson for the opposition at that time. I could be wrong. My apologies. Either way, we were all in and around these buildings. Fast-forward to that time, and there was, in fact, an occasion where a member of the PC caucus was engaged in a number of inappropriate activities that were investigated both

criminally and by other professional associations, and unfortunately the management and the oversight of that controversy was not handled well by the Ethics Commissioner, who had been appointed over the objections of the opposition because of his strong political ties to the Tory land PCs. So a number of us in the opposition rose, Mr. Speaker, to raise our concerns about that particular Ethics Commissioner.

Now, I'll speak to that in a moment because I think it's really important for the members opposite to know just how profoundly the positions of their now leader and other members of their party have changed on this matter, but before I get to that, let me just go a little bit more through the history. Of course, what happened, Mr. Speaker: it was such a scandal – and it was one of the long list of scandals that the Tory land PCs were dealing with – that they tried to deal with the matter by actually doing something just a little bit different and coming to the all-party committee with a proposal for a new Ethics Commissioner that everybody would agree with. The Member for Edmonton-North West, if I'm not incorrect, sat on that selection committee, I believe.

An interesting thing that developed then – and I believe it was in about late 2013, early 2014 – was that all members, regardless of what party they represented, who sat on that selection committee came together to agree to recommend unanimously the appointment of the now former or about to be former Ethics Commissioner, Madam Justice Trussler. That was pretty exciting because there was consensus by all members of the House, and there were a lot of folks who were very proud that we'd been able to find consensus. It reflected the import of the role, and it reflected the strong relationship between all members of this House and the principle of ethics and integrity that is so important to that piece of legislation. So she was appointed.

Then, when there was a new government in 2015 and the Alberta NDP was in the government, during our term there was the opportunity for a renewal of that contract, and the Ethics Commissioner wanted to continue. We said to ourselves: "Well, it was a consensus at the time. That was really good. That shows respect for this Assembly. That shows respect for our democracy. That shows respect for the people of Alberta." So we reappointed that Ethics Commissioner, who was the product of consensus of all members of the House, who, by the way, included members who were at the time part of the Wildrose opposition caucus, which I believe the Member for Airdrie-East was part of at the time. So that's great.

Then just a few months ago the position came up for renewal again. Once again the Ethics Commissioner made it clear that she was willing to continue serving, but at that time a majority of the members of the committee, in particular government members on that committee, decided it was time for her to go.

Now, obviously, the other thing that happened between the time in which her appointment was renewed and the time in which she requested that it be renewed again is that she did her job. When a complaint came forward about the now Premier engaging in behaviour that breached the terms of that conflict-of-interest legislation, she considered that complaint and she engaged in a fulsome investigation, and she concluded that indeed the Premier had breached elements of the conflict-of-interest legislation. Now, I will grant you that that was dramatic. It was unprecedented. You don't normally have Premiers that do that. It's not a good thing. It's a horrible look. It's bad for all of us. It's bad for democracy. It's bad for Alberta. But, Mr. Speaker, that is not the fault of the Ethics Commissioner. It is not the fault of Madam Justice Trussler. It is the fault of the Premier.

What we see is that we're moving on to a new selection as a result of a decision to frame this as the fault of the Ethics Commissioner.

I say that because, in fact, the Member for Airdrie-East actually made a point of suggesting that the Ethics Commissioner was a partisan appointment and that she was engaging in partisan politics. Mr. Speaker, she had been a judge. There was no record of donations to any political party from that Ethics Commissioner. Not at all. She had been the product of a consensus-based selection process twice before that, so it is outrageous that the Member for Airdrie-East would suggest that she was partisan. What was partisan was the ridiculous behaviour of the Premier at that time, for which she was held accountable by an officer of this Assembly, which is exactly the way the legislation is supposed to work.

Let me go back, Mr. Speaker. This is not just me waxing poetic about what I think. Let me go back to what members of the Wildrose opposition caucus had to say the last time they were managing dealing with an Ethics Commissioner who was also a partisan appointment, a partisan person who had donated money to the Tory land PCs. Let me point to a couple of quotes from *Hansard*, quotes from the then Wildrose Party's I think it was the Justice critic, MLA Saskiw. November 19, 2013, he asked a question about whether the Justice minister, in relation to the Ethics Commissioner decision, was going to make sure that the Ethics Commissioner was "more interested in upholding the law instead of keeping members of the PC family safe from ethical oversight." He was deeply concerned that the choice being made by the Tory land PCs at the time was a choice that was more focused on keeping government members safe from ethical oversight, and the reason he thought that was because the person appointed had a strong record – a strong record – of partisan relationship with the Tory land PCs.

Subsequently – was it subsequently? Yeah. It was the next day, in fact. The same critic for the Wildrose opposition asked a question which is not dissimilar from one that our very own House leader asked. It was a question, Mr. Speaker, related to the concern that had been raised by the House leader for the then Liberal caucus. I'll just read this whole question into the record because it really does raise an important issue. Mr. Saskiw says:

Mr. Speaker, the long-standing member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre publicly stated and provided compelling reasons that she is "extremely uneasy about having [her] intimate personal details disclosed to an individual who is not neutral," and that she felt helpless and frightened with the product of a fundamentally flawed Ethics Commissioner selection process.

He went on to ask:

Will the Premier commit here today to change the selection process for an Ethics Commissioner ...

And then it goes on.

... to an all-party

so that we can – "objectively neutral instead of risking having someone with close connections with one personal, political party?"

3:10

Oh, how things have changed, Mr. Speaker. That was the Wildrose opposition, so deeply concerned. But it wasn't just their Justice critic. It wasn't just that their Justice critic maybe just sort of had nothing else to do and decided to take up some time in the House dealing with something that was really under the dome. No. In fact, their leader was also very concerned, and I quote from a December 4, 2013, news article, the headline for which is Remove Alberta Ethics Boss: Wildrose Party. I am quoting this article.

Wildrose opposition leader ...

And then it describes the name, which is the same name as our now Premier, that person's name.

... released a statement saying that it is "truly disturbing" that Wilkinson did not find a conflict of interest. She said Wilkinson, who serves as an independent officer of the Legislature, is a "well

documented” past supporter of the Progressive Conservative party.

“He has lost all credibility with our caucus, as well as with the vast majority of Albertans, and he can no longer be trusted to carry out his duties.”

And then she goes on. This is something.

“As such, Wildrose MLAs will no longer be meeting with Mr. Wilkinson for any reason, nor will [they] submit any documentation to his office. As soon as possible, Wildrose will table a motion in the Legislature to have Mr. Wilkinson removed as Ethics Commissioner.”

This former leader of the Wildrose, who is now the Premier, also said Redford owes Albertans an apology for previously saying she was not involved in the contract decision.

Of course, this all related to a matter around conflict of interest around the tobacco litigation.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder. I mean, maybe our caucus should make the same decision, because here’s the issue. Here’s the issue. We have a person that is being proposed to take on this role who ran for the nomination for the UCP in Edmonton in 2019 who has given multiple political donations not only to the UCP but to the Conservative Party. You know, it’s very clear. Since then he’s worked, strangely, as a special adviser, with really almost no job description that we can extract from anybody, for the deputy minister to the Premier, which I find – you know, I once had a deputy minister when I was Premier. I can tell you that anyone in that deputy minister’s office earning a salary that is akin to a deputy minister’s salary working on an amorphous special project: I certainly would have met them, and I find it shocking that the Premier claims she’s not even met this fellow. It is quite striking. It’s very, very hard to get.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, here’s the bottom line. When you go back to the days of PC Tory land, one of the things that was a really, really critical component of PC Tory land was nepotism. Another one, though, which goes above and beyond basic nepotism, is the matter of hypocrisy. And what I’ve just outlined is next-level hypocrisy. Next-level hypocrisy.

Now, we’ve got a government – as I said at the beginning, this is a fundamental piece of legislation, and the role of an officer of the Legislature is fundamentally important to the functioning of this Legislature, the credibility and integrity of this Legislature, and our democracy overall. But what we see here is a continuation of an ever-increasing number of decisions by this UCP government to snub their noses at these principles of independence, integrity, transparency, respect for democracy.

Let us not forget – and I’m sure the Speaker himself cannot forget – that wonderful, exciting time when this member was asked to leave the Assembly in the midst of a very passionate debate around the matter of the then UCP government firing the Election Commissioner in the midst of the investigation of former Premier Kenney: hardly a balanced decision, that matter, firing somebody while they’re in the midst of investigating someone for a breach of the Election Act.

And what else have we done? Well, since then members opposite have repeatedly cut the budgets of independent officers of the Legislature over the last several years. They have ignored the reports and the recommendations of independent officers of the Legislature over the last several years, most recently ignoring the recommendations of the Ombudsman. And, of course, we know that when it comes to the principle of democracy, this is a government that spent about \$10 million advertising to Albertans right on the eve of a provincial election after rewriting the law to allow themselves to do that.

So this is a government that has demonstrated profound levels of disrespect for the issues of democracy, of accountability, of the

grassroots, of integrity of those in this House. This decision, Mr. Speaker, and this recommendation to promote somebody with clear, documented ties to the UCP is a continuation of that pattern. I’m not here to say if he’s a good person or a bad person. There is a fundamental principle: justice must not only be done; it must be seen to be done. And on matters like this, “Trust me” is not an answer.

On matters like this it must be clear that this person is objective and neutral, and on matters like this it is fundamentally clear that this person does not come to the table with the required level of neutrality, the required level of independence from partisanship that was in fact advocated for and established not only by the members of this side of the House, both in opposition and when in government, but also by members on the opposite side when it served their interests. So this is a clear indication that the decisions made only get made when it helps the folks on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, that is the clearest reason why we need a stronger Ethics Commissioner than we have ever needed before, because the folks opposite have made it very clear that it is, in fact, their own self-interest that drives the vast majority of the decisions made by this UCP government.

Thank you very much for taking the time to listen to me. I certainly hope that members opposite will think about the representations that they have made to their own constituents, to those who they have claimed to be advocates for democracy and grassroots voices, too. What this is is PC Tory land, folks. I’m looking at you in the back row. This is PC Tory land. How quickly will it be that you embrace it because you’ve been told to, or will you stand up against PC Tory land?

Thank you. [some applause]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the chief government whip.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:20 Time Allocation on Government Motion 34

36. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Government Motion 34 is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the motion, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 36. It’s a time allocation motion and allows for up to five minutes for an hon. member of the Official Opposition to respond. It would seem that the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall intends to do just that.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it is unbelievable and it is shameful that after just one speaker out of a 38-member opposition caucus has spoken, they will time allocate this important proposal to appoint a UCP insider as Ethics Commissioner to 60 minutes. If you divide that by 38, they want every one of us to use a minute and a half, 95 seconds, to talk about this important appointment that they are going to make.

They are bringing this forward to curtail debate in this Legislature, curtail democracy, and appoint someone who they think is their insider and will serve their interest, not Albertans’ interest. Since the UCP took over, we have seen the use of these kinds of time allocation motions more frequently. In the last five

years they have used time allocation motions 45 times to curtail debate and curtail democracy in this province. That's shameful, in particular for a side that talks about free speech and debate. It is truly shameful for this government that they have used time allocation motions 45 times. That's a heavy-handed motion that will just let this government get away with what otherwise they think they may not be able to get away with.

Once, I think on a time allocation motion, one of the UCP members who was also a member of this committee said this:

Now, does anyone else find it amusing that this government brought forward this independent officer of the Legislature, an office which is supposed to be nonpartisan in the application of its roles and responsibilities, yet they time allocate? They do not let members of this House debate this position, try to make it more transparent. Nothing says partisan like time allocation, and that's exactly what this government is doing for an independent officer of the Legislature that is supposed to uphold democracy, that is supposed to be nonpartisan. What is this government hiding?

That's the question we also want to ask: why are you so afraid of debating this position, this appointment? Why can't you just stand up in this Legislature, talk to Albertans, talk to your constituents on why you think a person who ran for a nomination for the UCP, not last century or last decade, just four or five years ago in Edmonton, is the best candidate? Why do you think a person who donated thousands of dollars to the UCP and the PC Party is the candidate that you should use a time allocation motion to appoint to an independent office of the Legislature? That's truly shameful, and I urge all members of this House to think about your role as legislators, think about how this motion impacts your ability to represent your constituents in this Legislature.

As I said, the UCP has used this kind of motion 45 times. Forty-five times all of us have been shut down by this government on matters that are important to Albertans, that are important to our constituents. I urge all members of this House to stand up for democracy, to stand up against these heavy-handed, undemocratic moves of this UCP government, and to stand up for democracy in this province. Let's oppose this motion and this appointment.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 36 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:26 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Notley
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Arcand-Paul	Goehring	Pancholi
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Boparai	Haji	Renaud
Brar	Hayter	Sabir
Ceci	Hoyle	Schmidt
Chapman	Ip	Shepherd
Dach	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Kasawski	Sweet
Eggen	Kayande	Tejada
Ellingson	Loyola	Wright, P.
Elmeligi	Metz	
Totals:	For – 45	Against – 35

[Government Motion 36 carried]

Ethics Commissioner

(continued)

34. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Shawn McLeod be appointed Ethics Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a five-year term commencing May 26, 2024.

The Speaker: The hon. member does have time remaining should he choose to use it. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has the call.

Mr. Dach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been delighted to follow the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition, leader and former Premier, for many, many years, but I'm not so delighted this afternoon to necessarily follow the incredible soliloquy in opposition to the appointment that's been proposed by the Government House Leader in Motion 34 to appoint Shawn McLeod as the new Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, the website of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta indicates that independent officers of the Legislature "are impartial, nonpartisan officers that operate independently from the Alberta government, political parties and individual elected officials and are responsible to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta." Now, that's from the Legislative Assembly website. It is really, really unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that government members, in forcing through this appointment, did not adhere to the dictates of what the public is led to believe is actually the role of legislative officers, including the Ethics Commissioner.

Once again, officers of the Legislature are impartial, nonpartisan officers that operate independently from the Alberta government, political parties, and individually elected officials and are responsible to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. This gentleman, who the government proposes to appoint, has put his name forward as a candidate for the UCP nomination in Edmonton-Riverview, has a publicly available post showing he canvassed with other UCP candidates, has donated thousands of dollars to the UCP, spent the last five years working to support UCP ministers and the Premier in government, Mr. Speaker. This is anything but a nonpartisan appointment.

The government members seem to laugh at the opposition and Albertans with disdain. One would have thought, Mr. Speaker, that the goal might have been to follow the dictates of the Legislative Assembly job description and appoint somebody who was absolutely squeaky clean, nonpartisan, but, then, in fact, the goal of the majority of the members on the selection committee was clearly,

right from the get-go – and I, of course, was a member of that committee and still remain so. The goal of the UCP government majority on the Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee was simply to railroad through a partisan appointment, much to the detriment of our democratic process.

Now, after the last election, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans held out some modicum of hope that the UCP government, that was a mere 1,500 votes away from being the opposition – 1,500 votes away from being the opposition – would demonstrate a measure of humility as a government, but that's not the case. Not an ounce of humility on that side. Instead what they've done is revert to the type of Conservative rule that I grew up with and that others have alluded to, including the member of the Official Opposition in her discourse. The democratic process or democratic pursuits are not what this Conservative movement is all about. They fail to demonstrate any humility. They double down on engaging in democratic pursuits that tilt the balance in their favour.

You would hope they would try to engage themselves in democratic pursuits to win the approval of a larger slice of the vote in the next election, but it's not what they have chosen to do. The government is so shocked at nearly losing the last election that they have decided to change the rules and inject into this committee a gerrymandering type of way to plant the next UCP insider as the Ethics Commissioner. Now, to listen to the government members speak, Mr. Speaker, they talk about the process being meticulous. Well, in fact, this was a failure by the government majority to be meticulous in their adherence to the nonpartisan history of this position.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the past, as I alluded to, government appointments by Conservative governments, successively over 44 years, were made in an effort to hand appointments to Conservative supporters, party members, donors, party insiders. Well, that historical practice is now on steroids, as evidenced by Motion 34. The entitlement, the inalienable right – it seems as though the Conservatives, the UCP movement claims some God-given right to govern in this province, and when something threatens that, what they do is try to change the rules to tilt the tables in their favour.

3:50

Now, the current appointment that the government hopes to have completed by Motion 34 is yet another unholy example of this entitlement that this government feels. It unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, will go down in history yet again as an example of the type of politics Albertans had hoped they'd left behind. Albertans had thought maybe we'd turned a corner and grown up and become a much more mature democracy after having, finally, a term of somebody other than the Tories in power, the New Democratic Party government, and now a second election where they darn near lost.

Now, indeed, the humility that we had hoped would be used and adopted by the Conservatives is nowhere to be seen. Once again, the concern of political bias being raised with this appointment is real, and Albertans understand it completely. To see the Minister of Justice stand up and talk unashamedly about this process being something that followed all the rules and nothing to see here, it is ridiculous to justify because the facts deny it. The fix was in right from the get-go on this committee, Mr. Speaker. Albertans need to pay close attention to the partisan nature of these appointments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in support of Government Motion 34 and the recommendation from the Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee, that Mr. Shawn McLeod be appointed as Alberta's new Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, before I delve further into the qualifications and skills that make Mr. McLeod such a great fit for this important role, I think it is important to first discuss what exactly the role of the Ethics Commissioner entails. While time will not permit me to fully explore each aspect of this complex role today, the Ethics Commissioner has a number of significant duties under the Conflicts of Interest Act as well as the Public Service Act and the Lobbyists Act.

Among many others, some of these responsibilities include the following: one, supporting Members of the Legislative Assembly, political staff of the Premier and ministers, and designated office holders in understanding their obligations under the Conflicts of Interest Act and the Public Service Act and by giving advice on individual issues; two, investigating complaints from any person respecting alleged breaches of the Conflicts of Interest Act by a Member of the Legislative Assembly and filing investigation reports with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for tabling in the Legislature; three, under the Conflicts of Interest Act providing advice and recommendations of the application to Members of the Legislative Assembly and former ministers; four, reviewing and approving the codes of conduct for various Alberta government agencies, boards, and commissions; and five, exercising responsibility over the lobbyists registration system under the Lobbyists Act.

Among many other duties, Mr. Speaker, given the magnitude of these responsibilities, it is of paramount importance that Albertans are able to trust in the nonpartisan and sound judgment of the Ethics Commissioner. For nearly six months the committee considered several candidates from across the country, and it is my belief that as a result of this tireless work, the committee has found the right person for the job. Not only does Mr. McLeod have years of experience in executive and leadership roles, but he also has a deep understanding of the moral obligations of MLAs, ministers, senior officials, and political staff.

Rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans can have full confidence in Mr. McLeod's character. In fact, Mr. McLeod brings years of experience in nonpartisan executive roles, including as Alberta's deputy minister of labour and immigration and jobs, economy, and northern development. Mr. McLeod carries a strong record of achievement at the executive level in public-sector administration, overseeing fiscal and human resource operations. His long history of nonpartisan public service and leadership will make him an asset in enhancing the accountability and integrity of government for years to come.

What's more, in considering Mr. McLeod's extensive background as a high-level public servant, it is evident that he is experienced in decision-making at a senior level related to sensitive and complex issues, one of the key requirements for this position. Through his background as not only a former deputy minister but also having served as an adviser to Executive Council, Mr. McLeod brings proven expertise in the interpretation and application of legislation, regulations, and policies and a working knowledge of the parliamentary system, government functions, and processes and the public sector. Furthermore, as a lawyer with extensive legal counsel experience in both the public and private sectors, Mr. McLeod clearly has a demonstrated knowledge of law and adjudication experience, which could prove invaluable in this role.

Mr. Speaker, these are all key requirements for the position of Alberta's Ethics Commissioner as outlined in the position profile that

was agreed to by all committee members from both sides of the aisle. In this context Mr. McLeod's experience, his expertise is extensive, it is relevant, and, quite frankly, it is impressive. As a former high-level public servant in nonpartisan executive roles, as a lawyer with significant legal counsel experience, and as a member of the Bonaparte First Nation there is no doubt at all in my mind that Mr. McLeod will be able to dutifully and judiciously carry out the functions and duties that come with being the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, it is for these reasons and so many more that I am proud to support the recommendation by the Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee to appoint Mr. Shawn McLeod to be Alberta's next Ethics Commissioner. I would urge all members of this Assembly to join me and support this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against this appointment. The Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock was speaking, so let me share a quote. It's a bit dated but very relevant today as well. The quote is:

I reflect on the work that we've done as a committee here . . . and I believe that our role was to work diligently to find an individual that we could be confident in, that Albertans could feel confident that that individual was here to strengthen and protect democracy . . .

I believe that what we need to do here is to find an individual that Albertans can feel confident in, that that individual will help to strengthen and protect our democracy here. Other individuals that we had come before us came forward without the history within this province, negative history . . . or however you want to describe that, and I believe carried as much capability and ability to fulfill the role . . .

It does make me nervous, going forward, with recommending this individual, and I will not be supporting this motion.

That was the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock in 2018, sharing his concerns for democracy and for the sanctity of independent officers of the Legislature. Not sure what changed so quickly in just a short five years.

While I'm sharing quotes, let me share another quote that's even more interesting.

Through the work that this committee undertook in this search process, I felt that there were better qualified candidates that should have been put forward . . . I fear that the public may view this appointment in a negative light, thus actually creating more distrust in our [democratic] system here in Alberta, which is exactly not the intent of what we are supposed to be doing here today . . . I fear there could be a perception that the public will see that as bias moving forward, again, not meant to be the intent of what this legislative office is meant to do.

Mr. Speaker, that's a direct quote from the Member for Airdrie-East from 2018. But I guess now tables have turned, and none of that is any concern for them.

4:00

But as the Official Opposition we will not be supporting this proposal, this motion, because we believe that these independent officers of the Legislature should be nonpartisan, independent people. That's an important office. I do know that the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock talked about the role of this office. I can also share some practical examples of what this office has done.

This office once investigated the Minister of Municipal Affairs and found him offside conflict of interest laws and fined him for \$500. That was not long ago. I was part of the Legislature when that

happened. That's the same office, Mr. Speaker, that also found the Premier, the current Premier, to be offside section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act and found that she was interfering in the administration of justice over the Artur Pawlowski case, a now convicted criminal in relation to the Coutts blockade and plotting to kill law enforcement. How important that office is: you can tell. That's the office that will also administer the gift limits that they raised and removed in some cases of the government caucus and members of this Legislature.

The Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock also talked about his qualifications. I'm not saying whether he is not qualified. He certainly served as a deputy minister in this government, also served as an adviser, special adviser, to Executive Council. If the member would know how cabinet works, that special adviser, I think, advises cabinet, and that's working very closely with the Premier and the government ministers, so that does raise a certain concern that that person will not be seen as independent because of those well-established, well-documented ties to this UCP government.

I will outline three major concerns with this appointment. One is that this person has been working with the UCP government in different capacities, and even up until February he was listed as working for the government as a special adviser for Executive Council. Clearly, there are strong ties between this person and the UCP government, its Executive Council. Based on that, we think that appointment is motivated by those close ties with this government.

The second thing I would say is that this person also has well-documented ties of partisanship. He submitted his name as a UCP candidate in 2019 in Edmonton-Riverview. That's a matter of public record. He did later on withdraw. I think that's a good decision because I don't know why you would run as UCP in Edmonton, but he also donated thousands of dollars to the UCP and the Conservative Party of Canada. That's clear partisanship that he is supporting a certain party, certain political stripe.

In an independent office which is supposed to be nonpartisan, you just not only need a person who is nonpartisan, but you have to look. The public should perceive that person as nonpartisan. I think, given that history, the public will not see that person as nonpartisan. We will not see that person as nonpartisan.

Then there were procedural things that also make this appointment very troubling. Midway through the process the government caucus chose to replace one of their committee members, the Member for Red Deer-South, with the chief government whip, the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. Committee substitutions are standard procedure; nothing wrong with that. But what happened in this case is that when we started this procedure, we as committee members also agreed that once the interview state starts, we will avoid substitution.

Sure, rules still allow for substitution, but, Mr. Speaker, what's fundamentally unjust and unfair is that the Member for Red Deer-South was part of all the interviews. He sat through all the interviews, but he was not there to make the decision. The chief government whip, who didn't hear a word from any of the candidates, who didn't even know who the other candidates were unless they were discussing it among themselves, voted on record to appoint a person who he didn't interview. That is fundamentally unfair.

That also, I guess, shows us clearly that this was a decision that was made beforehand – even those people interviewed: everything was just a formality – and that's the reason the UCP voted in block to appoint this person. They needed that final vote to get this person through. Otherwise, their votes would be a tie. So a person who didn't interview anybody gets to make a decision about all the candidates, who will be rejected, who will be appointed: that is a fundamentally flawed way to make these decisions. If the

government really wants to correct that, they could have just gone back to the drawing table and asked for interviews to be done again so that their chief whip can be part of the votes and control the votes.

One last thing which also shows why the government is choosing this person. The Member for Airdrie-East, again, described, I would say, the purpose of this appointment in something like: oh, I am looking forward to Shawn McLeod in this office and his integrity, how he will stand up against the partisan attacks and how NDP has used this office for their political purposes. That's the stated purpose of this appointment by a member of this committee. That is shameful.

One, we never used that office for political attacks. The person who sits there right now, Madam Justice Trussler, has been there for a long time. She was on superior court judiciary for 30 years, had no partisan ties, had no history of any political donations whatsoever. What they describe as, I guess, partisan attacks: I think they need to think about their own conduct, own actions, because there's a long decision written, reason provided why the Premier was offside the provisions of the Conflicts of Interest Act. That's the role of the Ethics Commissioner, to provide safeguards on conduct of all members of this Legislature in a nonpartisan, nonbiased, and independent manner.

Given this long and documented history of this person with the UCP, I don't think we can trust this appointment. I don't think Albertans will trust this appointment. I urge all members of this Legislature: think about this. Think about this institution, an institution of democracy, and dare to stand up against the Premier's decision to appoint this partisan person to an independent office of the Legislature, and vote against this appointment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has the call.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to be able to speak to Government Motion 34 appointing Shawn McLeod as a five-year term to the office of the Ethics Commissioner. As a member of the select special search committee I am pleased with the committee's decision to move forward with an appointment for Shawn McLeod. I do truly think he was a great candidate that is well suited for this position to serve members of this Assembly, our families, and, by extension, the people of our province.

4:10

I also saw it on the previous search committee, when the NDP were government, where the NDP created a special office called the Election Commissioner specifically to investigate complaints against political parties, which is interesting because this function already existed in the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. So when we're talking about pretty blatant partisan appointments, the NDP don't have a leg to stand on, and that is, in fact, their legacy.

I would like to address some comments that I did make in the search committee in which I misspoke and mischaracterized the current Ethics Commissioner Marguerite Trussler's integrity in the office. While I was trying to say that the NDP very clearly have tried to use the office of the Ethics Commissioner for their partisan political attacks against the government, which is truth and which is fact, in no way did I mean to disparage Marguerite Trussler, and I do apologize profusely to her. That was not at all what I meant, and I have actually already sent a note to her on the side expressing my sincere apology to her. When you're wrong, you're wrong.

And the NDP continue to be wrong. I'll correct the record just one more time, and I'll be brief as I know there are many that want to speak to this. The Leader of the Opposition is already disparaging our new Ethics Commissioner. She says that Shawn McLeod was

the deputy minister to the Premier, which is not, in fact, the case at all. He was the deputy minister to labour, and the Blues will later show the record to members of the opposition who may or may not join the debate; I'm not sure.

Anyway, I am pleased with the work of this committee. I'm pleased to have been a member on this committee. We spent a lot of hours and a lot of time in deliberations trying to choose the right candidate for all members in this Assembly, and I'm very pleased with this appointment.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

The Speaker: I encourage the hon. member to direct her comments through the chair.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, it's a shame that that member had to cut her comments short and seemingly had to rush at the end there all because of the decision of her government to stifle democracy in this House. I would like to put on the record: very shameful. For those folks at home just tuning in, folks just joining us in the gallery, the UCP have introduced what is called time allocation, thus limiting debate, which is certainly an undemocratic move for sure.

You know, it is truly an honour to serve in this House, and we have such a privilege. I just came from visiting some fantastic students from a few schools in the lovely riding of Edmonton-Decore. The MLA there and I had some wonderful conversations, and one of the things I talked about was that in the whole province of Alberta there are only 87 of us who do this job. What an honour; what an absolute privilege. I think sometimes we forget about just how much of a privilege it is, and I think every day we should be reflecting on the role that we have. Why do I say all this? What's my point? Well, because it's an absolute slap in the face when we are appointed to serve on committees and to serve in this Chamber and we don't take those roles seriously, and that's exactly what we saw.

I'm proud to serve on the Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee. You know, we spent many, many hours – bonding hours, I think I called it – including during constituency week in meetings and in interviewing candidates. There were many qualified candidates. Despite the clear warnings from the NDP members of the committee – and, again, for those folks watching, maybe it's the teacher in me: when the government talks about the committee making a decision, please know that there are four NDP members of the committee and there are five UCP members. So when they talk about it being a decision of the committee, it was a decision of the UCP members of the committee. I really just need to make that clear. Despite the warnings from us and despite the clear evidence against choosing Shawn McLeod, the UCP members of the committee voted to recommend him. We've made it very clear in the committee meetings and in our minority report that we did not support that decision. Why? Well, as my colleagues, as our leader has already said so clearly, this should not be a partisan selection. It is absolutely crucial that all independent offices – think about the words “independent offices” – of the Legislature should be just that. There should be no perceived or real bias in order to carry out that work.

This candidate, Shawn McLeod, has a clear record of partisanship. As has been said, he put forward his name for UCP nomination. He's got social media posts showing he's been active canvassing with the UCP. He's donated thousands of dollars to the UCP and the Conservative Party of Canada. We can't dismiss that as: “You know what? That was decades ago. You know, this was

before his career in working in government and whatnot.” No, no; this is very recent history. In fact, from a quick search of his donations you’ll see that there were donations as recently as just a few months ago, and that’s all publicly available. So don’t let them say that there’s not a clear, very recent record.

As has been said very well as well by my colleagues, he spent the last five years working in government roles. I mean, I won’t be critical of someone working in government roles. Hey, I worked for the government of Alberta. I worked as an executive director in the Ministry of Education, nonpartisan work, and did that to the best of my abilities. [interjections] The folks heckling over there: I’m really looking forward to them joining debate. It would be great to hear their justification.

So we’re not being critical of that, but Shawn McLeod had recently a role, a nebulous role, of special projects working under the Premier, and as the Leader of the Official Opposition so clearly pointed out, when she was Premier, there’s no way that she would have had someone working in a key leadership position and not know who that was. Yet the Premier claimed that very thing in this Chamber, and that’s a matter of public record. So it makes you wonder: is the Premier, you know, maybe not being fully truthful with the facts here, or does she not know who is on her staff? Either way, it’s alarming because there’s a very clear partisan affiliation here.

Despite what members opposite have said – you know, they’ve said this a few times – that we shouldn’t be attacking Shawn McLeod’s character, it’s not about that at all. This is not an attack on him as a person; it’s an attack on the partisan appointment. I would bet that Shawn McLeod would be well suited to other positions, perhaps the private sector. There’s a long list of things that he probably would be quite qualified for but not for the role of Ethics Commissioner for the province of Alberta. [some applause]

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Irwin: Thank you. It’ll give me a second to catch my breath. I wish I didn’t have to rush. Gosh, if only there hadn’t been time allocation.

Listen, of course, many of the proceedings were in camera, and I will have to be, obviously, very careful. I can’t share any of those in camera proceedings, but it’s on the public record that there were other candidates, and you can imagine that there would have been highly qualified candidates who would be spectacular for this role without any signs of political biases.

To get back to those meetings that I alluded to earlier, let’s talk a little bit about that. As I noted, we spent a lot of quality time together deliberating, spending a lot of time on interviews. I felt that that was meaningful work, and I felt that we’d had some very good conversations, but after all of those interviews and prior to the final deliberations suddenly there was a change in committee membership. The Member for Red Deer-South was very quickly replaced with the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, who is as well the chief government whip.

All of this had happened – as my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall had pointed out, you know, that’s typically not a strange thing. We often have committee substitutions. But we had all agreed as a committee, both orally and in writing, that there would be no substitutions. That was an agreement we had all made, all of us, so it’s a serious flaw that someone who wasn’t there for all the interviews, who didn’t spend that invaluable time with those deliberations was suddenly now on the committee.

4:20

I have to tell you – and this is all public record as well. I double-checked *Hansard* here. You know, we raised these concerns very

clearly in one of the committee meetings, and we were chastised. We were made to feel bad, that it was a personal matter and that we shouldn’t be questioning it. I’ll tell you: a mere hour and a half later, after that committee meeting, that same Member for Red Deer-South, who was apparently dealing with a personal matter, was in here ranting about who’s the boss . . .

Ms Pitt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order. The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Ms Pitt: I rise under 23(h), “makes allegations against another Member.” The member, who is speaking about the membership of another member on this committee, is upset that the committee membership had changed. She doesn’t have the full accounting of the personal details of the member yet doesn’t expect him to do other aspects of his work, which she has no details of, Mr. Speaker. This is clearly not helpful for decorum in this House. This is clearly an allegation being made against another member, and I would ask her to apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order. The member was not making an allegation, but the member is calling into question government behaviour on committee business and, I think, making a reasonable point. Under time allocation I ask that she be allowed to continue.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I would just perhaps advise the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to direct the comments at the motion at hand. I think it certainly moves in the direction of a point of order when you question whether or not something was a personal matter or not. I just might provide some caution and provide the opportunity to proceed.

Debate Continued

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, again, this is all in *Hansard* as well from the committee transcripts. I’d refer anyone to those.

The point is that there had been an agreement made. We had all been on the same page, and suddenly that had shifted without an explanation. I will leave that point at that one. I would urge people to read both committee and *Hansard* transcripts on this if they’d like to find out more information.

Again, the questions raised by all of us on this side of the Chamber are about fairness – right? – are about, you know, the lack of accountability and transparency from this government. I think about all those candidates who spent much time going through the process with us and how it would make them feel to not be given the same treatment, the equal treatment that they should have received.

I’ve made it very clear, both in committee and in this Chamber, that I do not support the appointment of Shawn McLeod as Alberta’s next Ethics Commissioner. I warn the members opposite that it was truly something that they would have to live with, something that we will continue to bring up – and we will; you’ve got our commitment that we will – especially given the fact that we know that there were other candidates and that this government had

an opportunity to do the right thing and choose someone who didn't have a clear record of partisanship.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and speak in support of Government Motion 34 and the recommendation from the Select Special Ethics Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee that Mr. Shawn McLeod be appointed as Alberta's new Ethics Commissioner. During this lengthy search process, which lasted almost six months, the committee considered many candidates from across the country, and I truly believe that the right person for the role has been recommended.

Mr. Speaker, before I go any further, let me elaborate on some of the key duties of the Ethics Commissioner. In Alberta the Ethics Commissioner has a variety of responsibilities, including receiving and reviewing annual disclosure statements filed by designated senior officials, designated office holders, and political staff in the Premier's and ministers' offices; supporting members of the Legislative Assembly, political staff of the Premier, ministers' staff, and designated office holders in understanding their obligations under the ...

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted. The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Repetition

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(c), "persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session," only because we are under time allocation. The member is entering into debate the exact same content we've already heard from other speakers. Given there is time allocation and not wanting to remove the member's ability to contribute, I ask that we get to the substance and not reread the job description.

Mr. Schow: I disagree, Mr. Speaker. A matter of debate. The hon. Member for Taber-Warner has every right to give a speech in this Chamber, as much as the members opposite, time allocation or not. I would leave it in your hands.

The Speaker: To expedite our opportunity to get back to debate, I do agree. This is a matter of debate.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, supporting Members of the Legislative Assembly, political staff of the Premier, ministers' staff, and designated office holders in understanding their obligations under the Conflicts of Interest Act and the Public Service Act and by giving advice on individual issues; investigating complaints from any person respecting alleged breaches of the Conflicts of Interest Act by a Member of the Legislative Assembly; filing investigation reports with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and tabling them in the Legislature as well as reporting all investigations and decisions to cease an investigation or a refusal to conduct an investigation; and reviewing and approving the codes of conduct for various Alberta government agencies, boards, and

commissions: these are just some of the many responsibilities of this position. Given the importance of this role it is critical that the Ethics Commissioner is someone who holds the principles of ethics and transparency.

In the position profile, that was agreed to by all members of the committee, one of the key knowledge and experience requirements was a demonstrated knowledge of law and adjudication experience. As a lawyer with extensive legal counsel experience Shawn McLeod not only meets but clearly exceeds these requirements.

Another key requirement from the position profile is experience in decision-making at a senior level related to sensitive and complex issues. Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that Mr. McLeod clearly meets this requirement, holding years of invaluable experience in nonpartisan executive roles, including as Alberta's deputy minister of labour and immigration and of jobs, economy, and northern development.

In these nonpartisan roles Shawn McLeod has demonstrated success in guiding, managing, and developing a professional workforce, which was also a key consideration for the committee. Mr. Speaker, his extensive and recent leadership experience as a nonpartisan public servant demonstrates Mr. McLeod's ability to act impartially and as a nonpartisan, independent officer of the Legislature, serving in the best interests of all Albertans.

This experience gives him a relevant and comprehensive understanding of government and interacting with senior and elected officials. Not only does Mr. McLeod have years of experience in executive and leadership roles, but he also has a deep understanding of the moral obligations of MLAs, ministers, senior officials, and political staff, all of which is going to prove invaluable in meeting the demands of this very important role.

For all these reasons, I am confident in Mr. McLeod's ability to serve Albertans dutifully and impartially as the next Ethics Commissioner, upholding ethical standards and transparency despite any narrative that the opposition is trying to create and heckling about. Mr. Speaker, it is truly disappointing to see the NDP attack the character of Mr. McLeod when he has a lifetime of nonpartisan service and achievement. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Hunter: Finally, I would like to reiterate that I am confident that Mr. McLeod will be an asset in enhancing the accountability and integrity of governance for years to come. I stand here today in support of the committee's recommendation, the all-party committee recommendation, for Mr. McLeod to become Alberta's next Ethics Commissioner, and I call on all members to join me in supporting him.

4:30

But before I finish, Mr. Speaker, I did want to ask one question, that I hope that the hon. members will be able to answer: did the NDP ever appoint someone to agencies, boards, or commissions or independent offices that were partisan or had an axe to grind or who had donated to the NDP during their reign? I imagine that the pointing fingers on the other side would come back to them.

Member Ceci: Oh, yeah. Sit down.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

A point of order is noted. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Schow: I'm rising on a point of order, and I'll do this quickly. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, sitting on the opposite side, telling the hon. Member for Taber-Warner to sit down repeatedly is wildly inappropriate for this Chamber. That member has the privilege to sit in this Chamber, duly elected by the good people of Taber-Warner to represent his constituents, Mr. Speaker, who's doing that very well, has done for multiple terms. It's inappropriate and disrespectful for the Member for Calgary-Buffalo to say that to that member. Shame on him.

Member Ceci: I retract and apologize.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in opposition to this motion, Motion 34. In the main this person, whoever holds this position, has both enforcement and educational responsibilities. They, of course, have management, transparency, and accountability responsibilities. That's because this position and this office is about meeting the public's expectation that those serving a government, either elected or not, must deliver a higher standard of integrity than might be found elsewhere. That makes it a tricky role to inhabit because it's also about preventing issues in the first place. Even the perception of a conflict of interest can indeed break public trust. Additionally, the role involves having difficult, sometimes incredibly personal conversations. Again, that means the level of trust demanded and required on the part of the office holder and by the office must be held to a higher standard.

In order for that office to be seen to be effective and trustworthy, both the office and the person holding that office must be, quite simply, above reproach, without any perception of bias at all. To underscore this, written in the job description is a primary requirement of the job itself. It does state that the Ethics Commissioner is a nonpartisan, independent officer of the Legislature. All independent officers are meant to serve the public interest, not the interests of those folks subject to the office's oversight. The position is independent so the person involved can conduct independent investigations without prejudice. The position is nonpartisan, so the person involved will not be seen at all to be unfair or favouring one person or a group, whatever their political affiliation.

Certainly, if one is considering candidates for such a position, it should be clear that any measure of direct political involvement would mean that an applicant's candidacy should not be considered. As we have heard, the recommended candidate, as a matter of public record, has been a nomination candidate for the UCP, a UCP donor, a volunteer for the UCP, and indeed has worked recently in support of this UCP government. These are all recent events, as my colleague pointed out, not over a decade ago. They're within the last five years. There exists for this candidate a clear, strong, and recent history of partisanship.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to let you know that I hold both a teaching certificate from the province of Alberta as well as a leadership certificate. As a result, I am a professional teacher who is required to follow a number of different codes of conduct. I needed to follow the Alberta teaching code of professional conduct. I needed to follow the EPSB's division staff code of conduct, the teaching quality standard, as well as Alberta's leadership quality

standard. That meant that I personally had a number of ethical and other responsibilities to uphold. As an example, I needed to act always and consistently in the best interests of students. Not only that; my behaviour, both in the classroom and out of the classroom, also had to be beyond and above reproach. I needed to maintain the dignity and honour of the profession at all times. I was a teacher at all times regardless of whether or not I was in the school or out of the school.

Certainly, in the course of my 24 years there were occasions when I needed to seek some clarity on things included in any one of those codes of conduct I was responsible for upholding. That meant I needed to seek out counsel. That also meant I might be discussing a worry or a concern – it could be something incredibly personal – so I needed to trust completely the person I was required to speak to those issues about. I needed to know I could not only trust them with any information I was sharing but that their discretion, their fairness, their understanding, their understanding of not only the codes of ethics but also all the processes involved were absolutely above board.

That issue of trust is at the heart of what we're discussing today. Trust, or I should say, rather, lack thereof, is also at the heart of what appears to be an ingrained pattern of behaviour with this UCP government.

During our committee's work agreed-upon processes were overridden and ignored, and by not holding the interests of Albertans first and in the centre and advocating for what the position of Ethics Commissioner means and should be and represents in terms of the upholding of democratic values, the importance of all of those checks and balances and the impact it has on a government's legacy and how it will be remembered – this recommendation inherent in Motion 34 is an example of this government's need to exercise inappropriate control and authority over an independent officer of the Legislature.

Further, as a teacher, one who taught many years' worth of grade 6 students to believe, value, and hold in high esteem this place and the people who work in it, I cannot tell you the level of disappointment I am feeling right now by allowing the recommendation of someone who is so clearly partisan in such an office. It means the office itself is diminished and undermined, and this is something that simply shouldn't have happened. Albertans must have faith in the ability of all its independent officers to be impartial and to act in that position without political or perceived bias. On that basis, I urge all members of the House to vote no for this motion.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this motion of this appointment. I've had the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices since I was first elected in 2015, and during the time that we served in government, I had the distinct honour of chairing that committee for a period of approximately about three years. During that time I served as the chair for three search committees for independent officers of the Legislature: for the Auditor General, for the Election Commissioner, and for the Ombudsman and public information officer.

In response to the Member for Taber-Warner, I can tell him that, absolutely – and he could certainly feel free to go and do the research or have their staff do the research, and certainly I imagine they would have if they could have – they would not be able to find any connection between any of the individuals that were selected for those positions and the New Democratic Party of Alberta. I say

that with full confidence, Mr. Speaker. Each of those individuals was fully nonpartisan. They had no ties with our party. They had no ties with our government. They cannot say the same for the individual they are appointing as the Ethics Commissioner for the government of Alberta.

I would also remind the Member for Taber-Warner, Mr. Speaker, that there is a considerable difference between an independent officer of the Legislature and a member of an agency, board, or commission. If the member is ignorant of that fact, if he is not aware of that difference, then I am concerned about the work he is doing as a legislator.

Ms Pitt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Pitt: Man. The members of the NDP. I rise under 23(h), “makes allegations against another Member.”

Mr. Shepherd: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Debate Continued

Mr. Shepherd: But it is certainly a difference that every member of this Assembly should be well aware of in the line of their work, Mr. Speaker. The independent officers of the Legislature go through a very different process. They are not appointed directly by government. They are not appointed directly by a minister. They go through an extensive search process, as we’ve been talking about. There is debate, there is vetting, and in their service they are taking on an enormous responsibility.

4:40

What we have here and from what we have heard here today is that we have had, I would say, some serious aberrations of the process, again, Mr. Speaker, to switch out members of the committee after having agreed not to do so, to appoint someone who has not attended any of the interviews. Again, having been part of that process, I can tell you it is incredibly important to be present there, to hear the questions that are asked, to participate in those things if you are going to make that kind of a judgment. These processes are robust. It involves a great deal of confidentiality around information that is shared, so to be switching out a member who has not in any way participated in those interviews, has not been part of that process, to make such a momentous decision: I do find that concerning.

Ultimately, what is most concerning, Mr. Speaker, is what has been laid out by many other members, but it is important enough that I think it is worth laying out again, that when you are specifically choosing an individual who has not only donated to the governing party but sought to run for nomination with that party, that does not rise to the standard which has been articulated multiple times by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in the last few weeks in trying to defend their egregious Bill 20, the standard that justice must not just be done, but it must be seen to be done. That’s enough reason, apparently, to follow conspiracy theories in banning voting tabulators in the province of Alberta but apparently not enough to consider serious concerns about the gentleman being appointed as Ethics Commissioner.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, as has been noted by columnists such as Don Braid and others, this is an individual who worked extremely closely with the government. This was not just any ordinary public servant; again, as has been noted, this is a gentleman who worked on a special project directly linked to the Premier’s office. As others have said, it is highly, highly doubtful that anyone could be in that position, do that sort of work and never have crossed paths with the Premier herself. So I stand with my colleagues who have raised deep concerns with this appointment.

As someone who has been through the process, who chaired the process, and, frankly, Mr. Speaker, as someone who has two eyes that can see the simple facts in front of us, I will not be supporting this motion, and I do not believe this gentleman should be appointed as the Ethics Commissioner for the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: There may be 60 seconds remaining or less.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every second is valuable when we are trying to protect democracy. I would like to emphasize . . .

The Speaker: My apologies. I was wrong; there are less than 12 seconds remaining.

Ms Gray: I’d like to emphasize I do not support Government Motion 34.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 36, that was passed previously in the Assembly earlier today, the time for debate on Government Motion 34 has now passed.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 34 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:44 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

5:00

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Notley
Arcand-Paul	Goehring	Pancholi
Batten	Gray	Phillips
Boparai	Haji	Renaud
Brar	Hayter	Sabir
Ceci	Hoyle	Schmidt
Chapman	Ip	Shepherd
Dach	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Kasawski	Sweet

Eggen	Kayande	Tejada
Ellingson	Loyola	Wright, P.
Elmeligi	Metz	
Totals:	For – 43	Against – 35

[Government Motion 34 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 16

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 16, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, to quote a friend and a colleague: red tape reduction is good; red tape reduction works.

But we need to go back in time and sort of ask ourselves: how did we get here, Madam Speaker? I'm going to take you right back to 2015. You may remember the accidental government that was the NDP. They were ill-equipped and unprepared to govern. They descended upon this Legislature equipped with nothing more than their childlike enthusiasm, and then they started to systematically dismantle our resource industry.

Do you remember what the first thing they did was? Even before Bill 6 I think they did the royalty review. They were convinced they were going to find billions of dollars, and they spent a year. They put the whole industry on pause, Madam Speaker, while they did this royalty review, only to discover by their own officials that actually the royalty system in place was already pretty good. It was already fair. It found the balance between investment attraction and protecting the resource that Albertans own.

They made a few minor changes and massages, Madam Speaker, but in the course of doing that, we lost billions of dollars worth of investment. Investment fled. Industry was so scared of what this socialist regime was going to do, they went to other jurisdictions, friendlier jurisdictions. In the course of that four years they lost 180,000 jobs, most – well, all of them, practically – private-sector jobs. You saw the public service like the Alberta Energy Regulator, of course, get bloated and was allowed to grow and expand.

But, Madam Speaker, the accidental government created a job crisis, which we solved, by the way, and the way that we solved this job crisis was by campaigning in 2019 on a platform of fiscal restraint and efficiency. We said that we would balance the books. We said that we would cut taxes, and we said that we would reduce red tape to attract investment back to the province.

Madam Speaker, people are flocking to Alberta at unprecedented levels, and investment is flowing. I'd just like to tell you about a couple of examples that are significant and noteworthy. One of my favourite ones is Dow Chemical, a \$10 billion investment in a net-zero ethane cracker. That's going to be 7,000 jobs during peak construction, by the way.

Now, you've probably heard the left attack plastic. Well, Madam Speaker, we know that plastic is not the problem; waste is the problem. The very idea that we have a net-zero ethane cracker shows that industry is the answer, and they will innovate, and they will come up with their own solutions to create more responsibly produced plastics in this case. It's going to be a significant investment for the province; great jobs for Albertans.

But that's not all. Look at Air Products. Air Products is the world's biggest hydrogen producer, and they chose Alberta to build their first net-zero hydrogen facility, Madam Speaker. It's going to be a \$1.4 billion facility; 2,000 jobs during peak construction.

But that's not even the one that makes people stop in their tracks. The one that makes people stop in their tracks is Heidelberg, a net-zero concrete factory. It's going to be a \$1.2 billion investment. They're going to be producing concrete. It's going to be net zero. Again, this is because industry is stepping up, and they're coming to this province, and they're making investments.

Another good one, and I can't sit down without mentioning this one: De Havilland. De Havilland is building water bombers, and they're going to be doing that in Wheatland county and Strathmore. I bet that if you'd have asked those nice folks in Wheatland county and Strathmore if they thought they'd be building airplanes 10 years ago, they never would have seen that coming, but that's what's happening.

And don't forget about the Amazon \$4 billion cloud computing investment in Calgary. There's a small handful of those around the world, but we got one in Alberta, Madam Speaker, because they're attracted to a business-friendly environment like we've created. So we're going to continue to move in that direction.

Bill 16 is the eighth red tape reduction bill we've brought forward since 2018. Every one of these bills have saved Albertans and Alberta businesses time and money and have made our province a more affordable place to live and do business. In the last four years we have completed more than 700 red tape reduction initiatives and eliminated four regulatory requirements for each one we've added. We have reduced 33 per cent of the red tape in this province, and we have saved job creators and Albertans \$2.75 billion, Madam Speaker.

And do you know who noticed, besides Albertans, because we made life better for them, and investors, because they chose Alberta as a destination for their investments? The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the CFIB. The same organization that gave us a failing grade when the NDP were in government gave us an A, and it was the highest score in the country. We continue to lead the way in red tape reduction. All of this work has saved \$2.75 billion for Albertans and job creators. That's the most important number of all.

Bill 16 is significant because it not only marks a major milestone in regulatory reduction in Alberta, but it also shows we're not slowing down. The amendments to the Red Tape Reduction Act within Bill 16 would further entrench the work of red tape reduction and legislation, reinforcing the culture change that has occurred in government. This includes making changes that would legislate our commitment to no net increase in regulatory requirements, ensuring our progress in reaching the one-third reduction milestone is not undone. Ultimately this would mean that any new requirements we bring in must be off-set by a reduction in others. Moving forward, red tape reduction will continue to focus on enabling changes within Alberta's government that bring tangible benefits and improved service delivery for Albertans.

Other common-sense changes in this bill respond to input from Albertans and Alberta businesses. They will improve access to justice through digital solutions, spark innovation in the transportation sector, and support vulnerable Albertans. Madam Speaker, the changes we've made through all of our red tape reduction bills have helped make Alberta one of the most business-friendly environments in all of North America, and job creators are taking notice of our efforts to make it easier to invest and do business here. Hundreds of Albertans have shared their red tape reduction ideas on our cut red tape website, and through our engagement with industry we've listened carefully to the recommendations of experts from a broad

spectrum of industries and sectors. Recommendations from Albertans will continue to guide us in making their lives better through meaningful red tape reduction changes.

Madam Speaker, our government made a commitment to making life easier for Albertans and Alberta businesses by reducing unnecessary red tape. We promised to reduce red tape by a third, and we delivered. We continue to garner national recognition for our work, and we're not done yet.

5:10

I'd like to thank all members for the healthy and fulsome debate that's taken place about this bill. I look forward to future discussions on how we can make life easier for our province's job creators, taxpayers, and families. I would invite all members on both sides of the House to join us and vote in favour of supporting this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise in the House and make brief comments to this Bill 16, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. This bill, this omnibus bill I would call it, amends about 17 different sections of different acts, but I barely see, as usual since this ministry came into being in 2019, how this bill is going to serve everyday Albertans. I remember those comments when the previous minister was asked once, bringing a similar type of omnibus bill in the House; the media asked a question, what the bill was proposing to Albertans. The minister commented and answered that he didn't know; ask the related ministries.

After five years of that practice and looking at this bill and the ministry's claim that the red tape reduction bill is so good and the ministry is doing this and the ministry is saving lots of money – but going through all these sections, I can see that this bill doesn't do anything new but merely addresses some of the government's own errors of not acting on time when it comes to the Mental Health Act if they would have done as was expected from them.

The previous NDP government passed a bill in 2018, and the government really failed to proclaim it. Technically, they are fixing that error in this bill, and when they are doing so, the situation has been changed in the past four or five years. Once again, it seems that in bringing the proposal to amend the Mental Health Services Protection Act, the government did not go back to the stakeholders. The government did not consult with the stakeholders. Similarly, the changes they are bringing under this act are without any additional resources to the College of Alberta Psychologists, the additional responsibility they will have. If this bill passes, they will not have the accurate or proper resources to implement the changes under this.

But the remaining changes, when I see this Commercial Tenancies Protection Act, I think this is something the UCP would have probably been looking for the opportunity to do because this is merely the help that was provided to the small businesses during the COVID period. The small businesses have not yet actually recovered fully to the previous COVID times, and this bill doesn't actually propose any help for them.

I was also looking at the Income and Employment Supports Act. The changes proposed under this act are actually making this act more vague and much less helpful to everyday Albertans.

With that, I would like to conclude my remarks, Madam Speaker. In this form I'm not really convinced by the minister's claim that we should support this bill. This bill does not really help what

everyday Albertans are calling for. This bill doesn't address anything of that. I would ask all members to oppose this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that would like to join the debate on Bill 16? The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to express my views on the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. As my colleague mentioned, this government just talks about cutting red tape, yet they have doubled the size of the red tape reduction bill. It is clear that they are more about hitting the quotas than governing efficiently.

A few weeks ago or months ago the minister cheered or celebrated about the success of land titles, but by ruining the system for four years and then fixing it with millions of dollars of resources, that's not called mission accomplished; it's called zero work. That's a simple example. It took them four years to ruin the system, and then they fixed it by wasting millions of dollars. It's the same – this bill is less about the red tape reduction and more about fixing their own errors, their own mistakes, by wasting Alberta taxpayers' dollars, their money.

They're repealing the ACTA regulation that they failed to proclaim for over five years to finally regulate mental health professionals. Yeah. We do talk about mental health a lot, but we don't see much of the change in the system. Why don't you go and talk to the people from the different industries, different professionals? They are at the point of thinking to leave Alberta because of all this unnecessary red tape. Even some of their own members, the UCP's own previous members or candidates, do admit that at the ground level, but they don't see any result. Had they consistently supported Albertans, they wouldn't have allowed such a glaring issue to slip past their attention.

Madam Speaker, as my colleague said, this bill is just another formality, and we know there are no consultations that have been done, especially the people I talk to, small businesses, corporations, or different industries in Calgary . . . [interjection] Sorry. I thought it was another point of order.

Mr. Schow: On you? Never.

5:20

Member Boparai: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Speaker, as we talk about the CAP, College of Alberta Psychologists, right now, the lack of needed resources, the 2024 budget ignores this crucial issue. People have been waiting months and months and years to get the work done, but files are carrying dust somewhere.

Albertans gave them a chance, elected them to work for them, to make their lives better, but we don't see anything at the ground level. I don't know if you are aware that with this bill the UCP has claimed that the government of Alberta announced that it has saved Albertans and Alberta businesses, like, hundreds of millions or billions of dollars, but in reality 45 per cent of the companies are close to bankruptcy. People are leaving Alberta. We are saying something but doing something else. It's totally opposite. We have seen so many examples of that. We have seen the UCP track record. Anything health related, education related, transportation related they delay and underfund until they can shrug it under the rug. This cannot happen again. The UCP has also overburdened our court and justice system, and although digitizing services is a step in the right direction, it is not really enough. Lots of work needs to be done. Yeah.

With the concluding remarks, I urge everyone to oppose this bill. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others who wish to join the debate on Bill 16? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Bill 16 is the eighth red tape bill brought forward by the UCP. Once again, I want to talk about some of the missed opportunities with this bill, and I'll go back to one I had brought up last time I rose to speak about this but with more detail, knowing that the minister is here. I'm happy to have his audience.

Just before I get into the missed opportunity, the irony is that this government claims to reduce red tape but then is in constant addition of blue tape. We're going to get that trending, I believe. So much additional blue tape in this province thanks to the UCP with Bill 18, Bill 20, now bills 21, 22. We'll see where this goes. We're not here to debate those bills, but it is so ironic. I think what's comical is when stakeholders or here in this House we've said: well, won't there be some additional operating costs for the government with some of these new gates you're trying to put in place or some of those new authoritarian positions you're trying to create? It's comical when they say: I don't think there will be any additional operating costs. It's impossible to understand how you add new layers of government and it doesn't cost anything more. We're looking forward to hearing all of the breakdown and layout of the no additional costs that are going to come from these other bills that you've brought forward after all of the rich consultation that you have still to do.

How will university professors access those research grants without additional costs when they have to consult with the provincial government first?

Mr. Nally: Doesn't sound like Bill 16.

Mr. Kasawski: We're going to get to that. I don't want to lose time, Minister, so thank you very much.

Eliminating voting machines: how will that save money in Alberta? So excited to find out. The additional requirement for villages to have council meetings digitally: so excited to find out how that's going to save money.

Last time I rose to speak, I brought up a more equitable provincial charitable gaming model in Alberta – it must be coming across your desk at some point, Minister – something that has been recommended by RMA in 2017 and Alberta Municipalities in 2018. In fact, the sponsor of the Alberta Municipalities resolution was the city in your riding, St. Albert.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. I just ask that you direct your comments through the chair, not directly to the minister.

Mr. Kasawski: Madam Speaker, it was in 2018 that Alberta Municipalities in St. Albert recommended that we get a more equitable provincial charitable gaming model in Alberta, especially benefiting smaller communities and counties in this province. Their resolution was brought forward, recognizing that charitable organizations provide a valuable service across Alberta and their sustainability is of the utmost importance to Alberta societies and that Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis helps to ensure the sustainability of charitable organizations through revenue generation made possible by volunteer charitable casino events. But there's an inequitable model for the disbursement of casino revenue by charities that currently exists, and the frequency of revenue-generating opportunities varies greatly based on the location in the province. RMA and Alberta Municipalities have brought forward a resolution to bring this forward, and I have asked for this to be added to this bill.

Madam Speaker, I would ask that maybe the minister would consider an amendment to this bill that would bring forward a more equitable model for casino revenue for charitable organizations. In 2010 there was significant stakeholder consultation on this.

Madam Speaker, I see that there's an offer from the minister to speak on this. I welcome that intervention.

Mr. Nally: You know, I couldn't resist, and I appreciate the member accepting the intervention. Now, I realize this has nothing to do with Bill 16, but I couldn't resist. I know we're getting to that. I can't wait till we unwrap that onion. But my question to the member is – just to recap because I want to make sure that I understood. You are advocating to redo the charitable gaming model that will benefit – through the chair, to the hon. member: this is a question. He is advocating to redo the charitable gaming model to the benefit of smaller communities. Of course, my question then would be: what would you say to the Edmonton charities that will then get a smaller piece of the pie? That's what I would like to hear the answer to, Madam Speaker, and then I can't wait to hear how this connects to Bill 16 because that will really be exciting for all of us.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The typical payout for an event in Calgary is \$64,000. For Camrose it's \$20,000. It feels like a really imbalanced payout for the same amount of work. We have a limited number of casinos in this province that nonprofits have the opportunity to work at, and we have a massive imbalance in the amount of work you put in and the amount of payout you get. We should look at a more equitable model that benefits everybody across this province, all organizations. In Edmonton the typical payout would be almost \$76,000, but in Grande Prairie it's \$35,000. The same amount of work; not an equitable distribution of the monies. RMA and Alberta Municipalities have considered this, with a resolution that passed in Alberta Municipalities, which Calgary and Edmonton are members of. A typical payout in Red Deer is \$22,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. I'm having a hard time finding the relevancy to third reading of Bill 16. I'll just remind you that we are in third reading. The time for amendments on this bill in Committee of the Whole has passed. This is third reading of Bill 16, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

Mr. Kasawski: Well, Madam Speaker, then I'll just say what a missed opportunity by this government to bring forward a bill that could have been so much better, that could have brought more equitable distribution for casino revenue for nonprofits in this province, a constant missed opportunity, and then just more blue tape additions from this government with all their other bills. I'm not sure how we're going to be making this province better with passing this red tape addition bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 16 in third reading?

Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close debate?

Mr. Nally: Waive.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

5:30

Bill 19

Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move third reading of Bill 19, the Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

I want to thank all of my colleagues here for their support on this important piece of legislation. The Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act has been carefully designed to make utility costs more affordable and predictable across the province. Bill 19 will end the use of variable rates when setting local access fees for electricity and natural gas service distribution. Bill 19 will also enable changes to the name of the default rate for electricity. That will provide more clarity for Albertans to better understand the nature of this rate and to make it more stable and competitive.

Madam Speaker, the rules for applying franchise and local access fees for basic utility services should be consistent across the province. The hard-working Albertans in one municipality should not feel the pinch of these fees related to variability in market prices more than those living in another. Bill 19 will support long-term affordability and price stability across Alberta through amendments to the Municipal Government Act, the MGA; the Electric Utilities Act, the EUA; and the Gas Utilities Act, the GUA. Bill 19 will also ensure that the Alberta Utilities Commission has stronger regulatory oversight pertaining to electricity and natural gas for all municipally owned service providers.

Madam Speaker, Bill 19 will enable administrative amendments in the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, the Electric Utilities Act, the Government Organization Act, and the RRO Stability Act. These are amendments needed to rename the default rate for electricity, currently known as the regulated rate option, or the RRO, to the rate of last resort. This new name will more clearly communicate to Alberta consumers that the default electricity rate is not regulated nor determined by the government. If Bill 19 is passed, our government will work with stakeholders to update regulations, that will be brought forward by the end of this year, to align the rate with its new name.

We will be updating Albertans on the many actions and next steps that we are taking to ensure that Albertans have electricity and natural gas systems that are affordable, reliable, and sustainable for generations to come.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to further highlight, as I've spoken to in the House before, that when it comes to this government, they like to procrastinate and procrastinate on the issues that really do matter to Albertans. You know, we get things like bills 18 and 20. We get things like the sovereignty act. We get so many things that demonstrate that this government is so focused on their own ideology, so focused on trying to push their Conservative perspective of the world and the free market on every Albertan and every aspect and every institution of our society, yet on the actual issues that matter most to Albertans, this government procrastinates and procrastinates and procrastinates.

Madam Speaker, this bill, Bill 19, is too little too late. You know, I completely understand the members on the other side. They may not agree with a cap on electricity prices. They may not agree with it, and I get it, but the Albertans who are suffering most because of this government had to go through three years – three years – for this government to come up with another option to actually help them meet their basic needs.

I want to tell you, Madam Speaker – and I want to get it on the record – that there were a number of, specifically, seniors in my riding who were coming to me and saying: my electricity bill has

gone up over three times, sometimes four times. You know, the government can point a finger across at us and say: well, it's your guys' fault. But the truth is that this government has had since 2019 to come up with concrete – concrete – alternatives, options, and now, finally, we're getting Bill 19? Finally?

We have a number of Albertans who are living paycheque to paycheque, and when their electricity bill went up by three, four times, that's when this government should have acted. That's when this government should have figured out: look, these people are in dire need of assistance. You know what? They can tout the free market all they want, but all it demonstrated to Albertans is that even in a free market there are people who are priced out of the market.

Then we had Albertans that were absolutely forced to either pay their electricity bill or pay the rent, but they couldn't do both, so many of them had to move in with family. Many of them had to pay their electricity bill with a credit card, Madam Speaker, because it was either that or get the electricity cut off. It was either that or not be able to pay the rent. It was either that or not be able to pay for groceries. And that's what this government calls success?

They've actually had since 2019. And you know what? If they weren't ready to make a decision that would have actually helped Albertans, then they should have waited. They should have waited to take the cap off until they had a reasonable alternative that was going to be able to actually help Albertans so that they could make it to the end of the month, Madam Speaker.

That, I believe, is the role of government, to not make life harder for Albertans but to actually come up with concrete solutions. You know what? Again, I tell them: you may not have agreed with the rate cap, but you sure as heck shouldn't have taken the cap off and then allowed electricity prices to just skyrocket and then have people in the dire predicament of having to choose between either paying the electricity, paying for groceries, paying for rent, or paying their mortgage. I think that would have been the responsible thing to do.

Here we have, finally, a bill that is going to help Albertans with a regulated rate option, but it's too little too late, Madam Speaker. This government should have done better. They had the time to do it, and they failed Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate on Bill 19 in third reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to offer some comments on Bill 19. I want to first address a couple of the issues that I have concerns with on this bill, and the first is, of course, the monkeying around that the government is doing with the local access fee. You know, the government is dislocating its shoulders patting itself on the back for how much money it's saving the people of Alberta, allegedly, by fiddling with the local access fee, yet it does nothing for the people in Edmonton-Gold Bar when it comes to saving money on their power bills.

Madam Speaker, we've heard time and again from the members of the UCP that the measures here in Bill 19 will only impact the local access fees that are currently paid by the city of Calgary. You know, while my heart bleeds for the hard-done-by citizens of the city of Calgary, my heart bleeds much, much, much more for the people in my riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar, who are getting no help from this government when it comes to reducing their power bills.

I echo the concerns that I heard from my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie. What are we going to do? What am I going to tell the seniors of Edmonton-Gold Bar, who have seen their power bills

shoot up by hundreds of dollars a month? When they hear the Minister of Affordability and Utilities talk about the great changes that he's making to the electricity system, they're right to assume that that's going to be a tangible financial benefit to them. They won't see the difference on their power bill after this legislation is changed.

5:40

I hear from the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar all the time that we need to focus on all of the costs of electricity. We get charged here on the Official Opposition side of the House for focusing too much on the generating costs of electricity and not talking enough about the transmission and distribution fees, that often cost more, in total, than the generation fees for electricity. Now, that hasn't been the case over the past year. When you're paying 25 or 30 cents a kilowatt hour under the regulated rate option, your generation fees are much, much more than the transmission and distribution fees. Most of the time, Madam Speaker, when people get their power bill, they look at all of the other fees that are tacked on at the end of their bill and see that it comes to much more than the cost of generation, and they wonder why that's the case.

I think the Minister of Affordability and Utilities owes them an answer. Why are they paying so much money for transmission and distribution? They have a responsibility, as my friend from Edmonton-Meadows says, to do something to reduce those costs as well that people are seeing on their power bills. Now, one of the reasons, I suspect, that we see such high transmission rates is because the Utilities Commission and the Market Surveillance Administrator and all of the other regulatory organizations that are under the purview of the Affordability and Utilities minister are falling down on the job when it comes to holding transmitters and distributors accountable for the charges that they're charging their customers.

You know, it was only a couple of years ago, Madam Speaker, that ATCO was found to have been guilty of improperly charging their customers for – how to put it? – let's say, bribes that they made to their contractors in order to do the work in the municipality of Jasper. That one single decision that ATCO made, to overspend on that construction of their transmission line, cost their customers millions of dollars. The ATCO executives knew that it was happening and blew the whistle, and it was only because of the courage of somebody in ATCO to come forward with the evidence and bring that to the Utilities Commission that ATCO was caught red-handed. Then they had to go back and refund the Utilities Commission and, through the Utilities Commission, their customers millions of dollars.

But how much of that is going on that the Utilities Commission isn't even looking at, Madam Speaker? That case only came forward because somebody within the company couldn't stomach being involved with that kind of scheme and blew the whistle. Why didn't the Utilities Commission or whoever is responsible for it uncover that? How many other kinds of financial shenanigans are going on when it comes to the construction costs related to transmission? I'd like the minister to reassure Albertans that we're not paying the price for ATCO's largesse mismanagement, potential illegal dealings when it comes to the transmission costs.

We know that on the generation side there is a lot of impropriety when it comes to running up the costs of electricity in the market. That's perfectly legal.

My friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is either pretending to spool electrical wire on a spool, or he's telling me to wrap it up. I'm not sure, Madam Speaker, what that motion means. Yeah, he's trying to be an electrician. You know, under this government you

can call yourself an electrician no matter what your training is. It's not a compulsory trade anymore, Madam Speaker. So my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, I guess, is doing some electrical work.

The point being, Madam Speaker, that there is much work that the government needs to do to get electricity costs under control, not just dealing with local access fees and renaming the regulated rate option the rate of last resort, but there's additional work in getting transmission and distribution fees under control. A good place to start would be looking into the business practices of ATCO and all of these other companies that build transmission lines.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on third reading of Bill 19, the Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his electrifying comments. I promised to make a mom pun joke; I had to do it. I just want to keep my comments brief because I do think that what has been stated by some of my colleagues needs to be emphasized once again on behalf of my constituents because it's really the issue.

The biggest challenge here is the timing and the fact that Albertans have been calling out for years for this government to address the mistakes that they've made, the decisions, the conscious decisions, that they made around ending the power purchasing agreements, around economic withholding to allow for Albertans' electricity rates to skyrocket way beyond any other rates other Canadians were facing across this country for years, Madam Speaker. That is what we have been calling out for the UCP to do. Instead, they waited until now, three years later, to actually do something.

I want to take a quote from Blake Shaffer. Many of you will know him: you know, University of Calgary economist, probably one of the individuals in this province who is best versed, I have to say, in electricity. This is a quote from him, Madam Speaker. He said:

Making these changes now, especially in the name of affordability, is a little like showing up to a streetfight and telling your bloodied friend: "I've got your back!"

It's too late. The crisis has passed. The time for changes was 3 years ago.

For those of you who maybe, perhaps like me, had been watching, actually, the posts from Blake Shaffer for some period of time – because he was giving some incredibly important advice to Albertans about the RRO for many years and was telling folks to get off the RRO, to get onto contracts. Of course, easier said than done for some people because so many folks were not able to actually get a contract. They didn't have the credit history or the credit score to be able to do that. Instead of addressing that issue, Madam Speaker, the government chose to actually offer a cap but then make those same Albertans who couldn't afford or weren't able to get onto a contract repay that cap. So it was no cost to the government; all cost to those taxpayers who can least afford to be able to do it.

But the thing is, Madam Speaker, that, you know, Blake Shaffer had been saying, as many folks had been, that the RRO, of course, was incredibly expensive because that variable rate was incredibly high, and as a result of that Albertans were paying way more as they couldn't get off it.

Now the government has changed it, under Bill 19, to the rate of last resort, but the irony is that now is actually the time when being on the flexible variable rate actually is better, actually costs less for Albertans. They're making this change and calling it the rate of last

resort when at this moment in time it actually shouldn't be the last resort because for some folks it's actually a good idea to get off their contracts and to get onto this rate because it is lower than what their contract rates are.

So, actually, this change in the name, which is the only thing that the government is really doing in this bill when it comes to this regulated rate, is actually not even that helpful because they're now telling Albertans it's the rate of last resort, but in honesty right now that actually should not be the rate of last resort for everybody. It certainly is an option for Albertans who are looking to save money when this government has failed to take any concrete, tangible measures to help with the affordability crisis. This actually might be a time to consider getting off a contract and onto the, quote, unquote, rate of last resort.

Once again, too little too late. This is this government's – when it does something that's not, you know, a total threat to democracy and undermining our institutions and actually causing harm to Albertans, when they do something that's okay, they're actually doing it too little too late. This is really the calling card of this government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for sharing their expertise. I rise today to speak to Bill 19, the Utilities Affordability Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. I'll be honest. Understanding electricity, how it works – well, not really how it works but how we're charged for it and how it's distributed is a complicated topic for me, and I know it is for many of my constituents as well because that's what I hear from them.

5:50

But what I do want to do is – I'll start just by echoing the call from my colleagues and saying: hey, thanks for showing up. Thanks for coming out three years too late to shield Albertans from volatile utility rates. When we come to the party late, sometimes we kind of ask: well, what has been happening before we got here? Well, what's been happening before we got here is that Albertans have been spending a lot of money on volatile utility rates over the last three years. What's happened to that money, Madam Speaker? Well, it's just gone.

To weave an example from the life of Banff-Kananaskis, this is kind of like having an epic wipeout at the ski hill, losing the money that's in your pocket, hoping that you'll find it in your jacket pocket next winter when you put on your old ski jacket, but then realizing that actually what you've done is that you've donated it to the ski hill landscaping team in the spring. That's what this is. That money is just gone. Constituents never get to have it back. They don't get to find it in their old ski jacket pocket next winter.

This is another example of this government not taking affordability seriously and not acting in a prompt manner to actually address affordability when it's a problem for Albertans in the moment.

This legislation also doesn't help Albertans that are currently stuck on the regulated rate option. What happens to them until this bill takes effect next year? The UCP created this mess when they lifted the electricity rate cap, and now they have to create legislation to fix it, which I find kind of funny. They're going to fix it in 2025, so Albertans will still have to wait several months with higher utility bills before anything changes, Madam Speaker.

We'll just add this to the long list of things that the UCP keeps saying they're going to do to address affordability that's just going

to come into effect later. A tax break that was promised during the campaign: that's going to be implemented later, coincidentally right before the next provincial election. Electricity cost changes: well, we're going to do that later. Engaging on changes to insurance: well, we're talking about it. Affordable housing stock: oh, it's coming later. The fuel tax: oh, that came back this year, actually. So we're, like, delaying actions that actually make life more affordable for Albertans and then, of course, bringing back the fuel tax, which made life more expensive for Albertans.

So I'm a little bit unclear how the UCP is actually making life more affordable for Albertans today, now, this moment. Oh, wait; they're not. But don't worry, Alberta, because affordability measures are coming later.

Mr. Jones: Intervention?

Dr. Elmeligi: Would you like – sorry; I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon, Madam Speaker. I did not notice the member opposite. Please. I will take the intervention.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. [some applause] I certainly don't deserve a round of applause.

Madam Speaker, I've heard a lot about rate caps, but I'm not convinced the members opposite understand how those are paid for, so if the member could elaborate as to who is paying to create the rate cap. Could it be that all ratepayers are subsidizing some rate users? I'd just like the members opposite to clarify, because they seem to be very big fans of rate caps, how they work.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well . . .

An Hon. Member: You don't have to answer.

Dr. Elmeligi: I don't have to answer. Thank you. Your colleague says that I don't have to answer. I'm just going to keep going. I told you at the very beginning that I didn't actually know everything about electricity, so thanks for reminding me.

I do want to acknowledge that this bill does change the RRO to the rate of last resort so people can understand it better, which I appreciate, but there are many other components of electricity rates and electricity bills that are hard to understand for folks.

I wanted to take a little bit of time to share an e-mail that I received from a senior constituent in Banff-Kananaskis who had some questions about how electricity rates are calculated, and my question is really: how does this bill address these points for my constituent? My constituent was expressing that there are fluctuations in electricity prices that are hard for people on a fixed income. I do understand that this bill takes a step towards addressing those.

My constituent has concerns that there is a wide disparity in electricity rates among different providers. That is difficult because there's a disparity in electricity rates, but there's also disparity in the additional charges on an electric bill, which can make it hard for people to navigate. They actually have to do the math to figure out which provider will give them the best price, or the best value, for electricity in their home. This, I think, makes it really hard for consumers to choose the most cost-effective choice. I don't know how this bill addresses those issues.

My constituents also are interested in measures that ensure transparency in billing practices and address the impact of additional charges on low- or fixed-income Albertans in particular, and I don't know how this bill addresses those concerns. How are our most vulnerable Albertans, our low-income, our fixed-income Albertans being served by this bill?

My constituent also asked for regulatory reforms and assistance programs to ensure affordability, but I don't see those reflected in this bill either, Madam Speaker.

As somebody who lives in a rural community that has arguably one of the highest costs of living of any community in Alberta, I feel like there are disproportionate electricity fees for rural communities. This bill takes steps towards addressing the challenges with fluctuating rates, but will it go far enough to address the issues that constituents are raising with me directly? Maybe. Hopefully. We'll see in the regulations. I guess we'll just have to wait and see if the bill will actually address the issues that Albertans are bringing forward in their entirety.

With that, I conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? Seeing none, I'll ask the minister to close.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to very briefly address some of the comments. This bill does reduce fees for those who are in Calgary by clarifying and creating equity across all of Alberta on how those fees are calculated. It does create

more transparency. Please note that variable rates, which sometimes are the lowest rates but are variable, are equally accessible to anyone all across Alberta through our competitive retailers. They have many programs. Please note that the RRO is not lower than those other rates. The RRO is set higher than all of those right now. I would ask that anybody who's got questions about their bill to talk to the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

The NDP seem to never look to the future on these problems. These challenges addressed by this bill set clarity and transparency, particularly for the regulated rate option, for the future. While it is low right now today, thanks to our work, we will make sure that it is low for the future, when things change. We are addressing the root problem, which is our market structure. There's more work to be done. This is a great first step, and I ask everybody to vote for this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

Mr. Schow: Chair, I move that we adjourn the Assembly until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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