



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 4, 2024

Day 78

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 49

New Democrat: 37

Vacant: 1

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Yao

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Calahoo Stonehouse
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Hunter
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 4, 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 Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my honour to introduce to all members the ambassador of Spain to Canada, His Excellency Alfredo Martínez Serrano. His Excellency has been the ambassador since 2021. I had the pleasure of meeting with him earlier today. The ambassador is visiting our province this week to meet with government and private-sector officials to discuss strengthening the bonds of our two jurisdictions and the importance of pluralism, freedom, and democracy. His Excellency is joined in the gallery by the Spanish labour, migration, and social security counsellor; education attaché; and the honorary consul general of Spain in Edmonton. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, it's my pleasure to introduce to you the 900th Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the former Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, a good friend and colleague, Mr. Richard Gotfried. He's also joined by his son Justin in the gallery today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a school to introduce.

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I do. I'm proud to welcome the students from Champs Vallée school in Beaumont. I had a chance to chat with them a little bit earlier. They were very interested in the tour. I hope they get a chance to learn a little bit more. I would ask them to rise and please receive the welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Merci, M. le Président. J'ai le plaisir de vous présenter 52 élèves de sixième année de l'école Rio Terrace avec leur professeur Andrea Bluteau. J'invite mes invités à se lever et recevoir l'accueil traditionnel de l'assemblée.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a good friend of mine, Earl Thiessen. He's the executive director of the Oxford House. He's also a colleague of mine on the public safety Indigenous advisory council. Most importantly, he's a proud husband and father. He's doing amazing work through recovery. Our province is lucky to have him, and I'm grateful to call him a friend. Please rise, Earl, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you I'd like to introduce my very good friends. President Nathan Baldry of the Gateway stake for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is joined by Kim Gonzalez-Potter, their communications director, and her husband, Michael Potter. I ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to introduce to you Tracy Weselowski, the Woodcock family, and the Fakhar family. Geoff and Melanie Woodcock are here from New Zealand, where they run a charity that helped free over 4,000 people, 800 families, from slavery in Pakistan over the last decade. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Primerica Alberta leadership, who represent people in my constituency as well as across Alberta. I appreciate their vision for Albertans to make informed financial decisions. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you three members of the Maanaw Seva Association: Rohit, Amit, and Puneet. We appreciate the work you do in the community. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you three members of Alberta's distinct Métis settlements here today: Greg Gauchier, Peavine Métis settlement; Doug Bellerose, East Prairie Métis settlement; and Scott Cardinal, Kikino Métis settlement. They were in Edmonton here today to take part in the signing of a protocol agreement. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

Member Ceci: I ask that Heather Campbell rise, Mr. Speaker. Ms Campbell: professional engineer, master of law, three decades of experience in a diverse energy industry specializing in energy transition, a lifelong volunteer adviser, and many, many achievements and awards. She's my neighbour in Calgary-Buffalo.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce my very special guest, Dr. Mark Hamilton, who joined me this week in Calgary. Mark is a professor at the faculty of medicine and a neurosurgeon in Calgary. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to rise today and introduce to you, through you a senior community ambassador, Dilip Sharma. Mr. Sharma contributed to Fort McMurray's economic development and now resides in Edmonton. I would request that he rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, to you and to the hon. members of the Assembly I'd like to introduce a prime example of the amazing quality and character of one of the large number of immigrants who come to Canada and Alberta to make contributions. Oguzie Okorie

was born and raised in southern Nigeria and moved to Alberta in 2002. He's my legislative co-ordinator. Welcome to the House.

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you an aspiring member of our community, Harjot Singh. Harjot came to Canada in 2017 as an international student and has since been a successful entrepreneur. He has played a key role in my campaign in 2023 and the NDP campaign in 2019. Please join me in welcoming Harjot Singh.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you a youth community ambassador who tirelessly worked towards bringing sports to youth, Yugant Manchanda. I'd like him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. That said, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. His father also does a lot of the same things in the community. Please give them a round of applause.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Shafeena Premji, the founder and director of Milestone Menopause Centre of southern Alberta, and Dr. Nese Yuksel, president of Canadian Menopause Society. Both are family physicians and great advocates. I ask that they rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Pitt: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a great constituent from the riding of Airdrie-East, Mr. Gary Martin, who's visiting with us today. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you two highly accomplished guests with a keen interest in legislative proceedings. Harshavardan Maheskumar is an engineering student at the U of A. Anastasiia Kostyrko is a communications student from NAIT, and both are doing video productions of all 87 MLAs, including you, Mr. Speaker. Welcome them into your office.

The Speaker: That concludes the time allotted for introductions.

However, I would be remiss if I didn't introduce to members of the Assembly the hon. the Minister of Infrastructure. With a suit like that, he certainly needs an introduction.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has a statement to make.

Data Centre Investment Attraction

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Premier and the Minister of Technology and Innovation released Alberta's data centre investment strategy. This is a bold commitment to grow innovation and economic opportunity. Over the next five years North America will see hundreds of billions of dollars invested in AI data centres and the infrastructure to power them, with opportunities for Alberta to attract over \$100 billion or more of investment. In Alberta we have virtually limitless natural gas resources, world-class expertise in energy production, and a business environment that delivers what investors need most, speed and certainty.

1:40

Our AI data centre strategy is built on three key pillars: power capacity, sustainable cooling, and economic growth. Electricity is the lifeblood of AI data centres, and access to reliable, scalable power is critical. Our initial focus on off-grid power generation will help us scale quickly, but in 2025 we will roll out phase 2 of this strategy to streamline grid-connected infrastructure approvals. Let me be clear. In all cases we will protect the reliability and affordability of Alberta's electricity grid. That's a promise, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's cold weather climate helps with sustainable cooling and can increase the efficiency of data centre cooling systems by up to 15 per cent, offering a compelling edge to global tech leaders.

We also have huge economic opportunities. By building AI data centres here in Alberta, we're not just creating infrastructure; we are fostering innovation and establishing Alberta as a hub for high-tech industries. These investments will generate significant tax revenues and support critical public services like health care and education.

As we launch this strategy, we invite global investors and technology leaders to join us in Alberta. Our concierge program is already up and running, helping investors navigate our streamlined regulatory framework. We know we've got a great story to tell, Mr. Speaker, and we're just getting started. Alberta is open for business.

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

National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women

Ms Hayter: Merci, M. le Président. It's a late night. Women have to leave the grocery store. It's dark out, and we have to leave our offices. We have to walk to our vehicles; we look over our shoulders on that walk. We watch for dangers. We absorb our environment. Are we safe?

Young women and postsecondary students have to worry not only about meeting deadlines but also meeting the same fate as our sisters at l'école Polytechnique on December 6, 1989. Last week I had the opportunity to hear a powerful message from Nathalie Provost, a survivor of this massacre. Today we remember them. They were murdered simply for being women pursuing engineering as a career. On December 6, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women, let us reflect on the lives lost that day.

But how many lives have we lost since? Gender-based violence encompasses domestic violence; missing, murdered Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit people; homophobia; and transphobia. Our approaches to the epidemic need to reflect everybody touched by it. Government must commit to the concrete and measurable actions we can take as legislators and in community to prevent gender-based violence and to provide safety, shelter, and material support for victims.

As a mother I dream of a world where our daughters, sisters, and kin can focus on building their lives, not fearing for them. Here we are 30 years later, and we are still fighting for the right to feel safe; we're still fighting to be safe. We want to walk to our cars without fear and our keys clutched between our fingers, so on December 6 and always we owe the next generation a safer future.

Sessional Retrospective

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, as we near the end of this session, I want to take a moment to reflect on the remarkable work that we as a United Conservative government have accomplished for the people of Alberta. It has been a session defined by relentless hard work, unwavering determination, and a profound commitment to improving the lives of Albertans. I could not be more proud of what

we on this side of the aisle have achieved. From safeguarding the integrity of women's sports and creating a safer, more inclusive environment for them to compete to ensuring parents and families remain at the forefront of our children's education, we have delivered meaningful results. We are ensuring that children get to focus on being children so they can thrive as adults later on.

But, Mr. Speaker, our work extends far beyond legislation. It's about delivering real and tangible change for the people we serve. It's about ensuring that every Albertan feels safer in their community and that our economy is a beacon of opportunity and that our children are protected. Each initiative, each policy, each decision we have made has been driven by our vision of a stronger, united Alberta.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, while we've been hard at work delivering for Albertans, what has the opposition accomplished? Nothing. They've been so preoccupied with playing political games that they couldn't even secure a seat for their leader in this House, but perhaps that doesn't matter when their marching orders come from Ottawa. While they're busy taking cues from the federal government, we've been focused on standing up for Alberta's interests, protecting our values, and building our future. Each piece of legislation we've passed, every policy we've enacted has been a step forward in building the Alberta we all envisioned: a province where people can thrive, businesses can flourish, and families can prosper. The future of Alberta shines brighter than ever with the UCP charging ahead, delivering results that matter, and standing strong for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Menopause Treatment

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents and representatives of the Canadian Menopause Society, Dr. Shafeena Premji and Dr. Nese Yuksel, note that menopausal health affects millions of Albertans. Menopause is a natural phase of life, but too often it is underrecognized and inadequately addressed within our health care system. Menopausal women face not only the immediate challenges of menopausal symptoms but also long-term health risks. It is crucial that we support these individuals.

The economic and health implications of menopause are substantial. Menopause-related symptoms cost the Canadian economy an estimated \$3.5 billion annually in lost productivity. Up to 10 per cent of women report quitting their jobs due to severe symptoms.

There are a number of options to help menopause symptoms, including menopausal hormone therapy. Unfortunately, fewer than 10 per cent of eligible women receive MHT, the most effective treatment for menopausal symptoms. With limited access to treatment many women suffer unnecessarily, leading to significant disruptions in their lives.

I urge my colleagues to consider action on the recommendations of the Canadian Menopause Society. They call on us to enhance education and training for health care providers on menopause. They call for increased funding for menopause research, to establish specialized menopause care centres, and to promote public education to empower individuals with accurate information on menopause. They also call for us to make sure menopausal therapies are included as essential treatments under health care. By addressing these gaps in care, we can improve the health and well-being of Albertans, reduce long-term health care costs, and promote gender equity in health care.

Thank you.

Christmas

Mr. Stephan: Merry Christmas, Mr. Speaker and to each and every Albertan. When the angel heralded the birth of Jesus Christ, he said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

Mr. Speaker, sometimes there is too much fear; isn't it great that the message of Christmas is to fear not?

Mr. Speaker, all of us experience sadness and pain; isn't it great that the message of Christmas is good tidings of great joy?

Mr. Speaker, there is too much division and contention; isn't it great that the message of Christmas is to all people?

Well, some may ask: what is truth? Jesus said that He is "the way, the truth, and the life." Christians revere Jesus as the only begotten son of God, regarding His words and principles as true and His example as the way. Mr. Speaker, we see tribulation all around us. Jesus said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." There is always hope in Christ. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." All of us want more peace. Jesus is the prince of peace. Jesus invites us to be peacemakers, to seek forgiveness, and to forgive.

This Christmas many Albertans of many faiths will love and serve their neighbours in many wonderful ways. May the spirit of Christmas, the love of God rest in our minds forever.

Merry Christmas.

Racism Prevention

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, as Albertans prepare for the holiday season, gathering across that dinner table with friends and relatives, I urge them to think about being kind to others and rejecting the rising tide of intolerance we are seeing around the world. My colleagues and I have spent the last few months visiting many communities and hearing from our constituents regarding the rise of intolerance.

Members of the South Asian community, whether Sikh or Hindu, are experiencing hate. Jewish Albertans are experiencing a rise in anti-Semitism and Muslims an increase in Islamophobia. Palestinian Albertans are also experiencing racism that manifests through harmful stereotypes. They're called terrorists for simply creating awareness for human rights.

1:50

We as legislators must respect the accurate representation of Palestinian history and culture and not perpetuate the racist stereotypes of Palestinians or any other religious community. Enough is enough, and we must all do better for all of us.

We as policy-makers must commit to addressing hate crimes and ensuring inclusivity in public spaces. Institutions should adopt clear antiracism frameworks and hold themselves accountable so people feel valued, respected, and included. Addressing racism requires that we challenge stereotypes and foster open, informed dialogue. It involves recognizing the humanity and dignity of all Albertans regardless of ethnic or religious background while rejecting attempts to silence those advocating for human rights, justice, or our very humanity.

On this side of the House we're committed to being fair to all communities and acknowledge their voices, experiences, and traditions. Whether you are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Palestinian, we are all Albertans.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, the time is now 1:50.

Oral Question Period

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

Diabetes Treatment Coverage

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it was a slap in the face to see UCP MLAs hand themselves \$270 more a month for their MLA rent while so many Albertans are struggling. This is especially so for thousands of Alberta families left to pay out of pocket for their diabetes medication and supplies. They do not get a monthly top-up, they do not get diabetes coverage, and they certainly do not get pharmacare, because this government does not believe in making a deal to get folks life-saving medications. How does the Premier justify working against the interests of diabetic Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working for the interests of those who are on our plan that require 5,000 different types of drug treatments, and we want to make sure that more people are able to be on our plan as opposed to the two-drug plan that the federal government is putting forward. We have reached out to the federal minister. We want to integrate with our plan so that we can provide a broader base of coverage, but we aren't going to deny the thousands of drugs needed by tens of thousands of patients because of the plan the feds have put forward.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, nobody is asking them to deny. We are asking to make sure diabetics have insulin. It is straightforward, and it is a priority for Albertans. Families like the Mathisons were cut off from the Alberta child health benefit and are now left with \$600 a month in supply costs. Instead of being ready to sign a deal like B.C. has already done, the government seems to want to pick fights, refuses to allow families to receive supports that are available from their federal government. When will the Premier sign a deal with the feds to get families like the Mathisons the diabetes care they need?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our 5,000-drug plan also includes multiple drugs for diabetes as well as the test strips and other appliances that they need to be able to administer. We've done a consultation so that we can get some feedback on how we can potentially enhance our plan. The minister has said that the results of that will be available shortly, and in the meantime we are working with the federal government to integrate into our plan. The whole purpose of the Canada Health Act was single administration. We now have two administrations, and we need to get back down to one.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans urgently don't need a consultation, urgently don't need a working group; they urgently need insulin. Families can't afford to pay out-of-pocket costs for these expensive supplies, and most sure can't afford to pay for the knee and hip replacement surgeries that this government has planned for them, but as the Premier has been quoted to say, she wants to make it normal to pay out of pocket for health care. Why is the Premier wasting so much time dismantling health care instead of ensuring that Alberta families get the medications, surgeries, and family doctors that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have a mixed system. We have a large number of employers who have very generous private health plans that cover a large number of Albertans. We also have programs that we operate through Alberta Blue Cross to cover those who are most in need. The federal government didn't consult with us when they decided to come in with a two-drug plan and overlay it on top of what we already offer, which is why we are now working with them to make sure that we can bridge some of the gaps. I think everybody wants to make sure everyone has adequate coverage for their needs.

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

Indexation of Taxes and Benefits

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, we all need the Premier to think of the most vulnerable and the people who are falling through the cracks. Last night this government refused to accept our amendment to their deindexation bill. That means that every Albertan could be on the hook for more taxes, fewer benefits, more costs. Their bill allows the government to pay lower seniors' benefit, lower AISH payments, and to take more from tax-paying Albertans through bracket creep. It was their priority to inflation-protect their own MLA rents in Edmonton, but they won't protect benefits for vulnerable Albertans. Why not accept our amendment?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is mischaracterizing what we have done with the changes that we've made. The problem was that we have seven or eight different programs that were determining a different inflation rate at different times of the year. What we have decided to do is to give the advance notice to all those programs what the inflation rate adjustment is going to be. Based on the very first one that we set, which is in October, we have to tell the federal government how we are indexing our personal income tax rates. We looked at them year over year. From August to August it was 2 per cent. Year over year, from September to September was 1.9 per cent. We chose 2 per cent, and that's the raise everyone is getting.

Ms Gray: The Premier is mischaracterizing what they've done – they can now, behind closed doors, give everybody zeros with no consultation – and the Premier should know. Another former politician from this Chamber called deindexation a “pernicious tax grab called bracket creep.” That was her predecessor, Jason Kenney, who got marched out of her party. It boggles the mind why the Premier would go to that exact same trick, allowing her government to deindex income tax brackets, driving up everyone's taxes, cut AISH, cut seniors' benefits. These are vital dollars for people to survive. Why is she doing it?

Ms Smith: I think the members opposite need to answer for why they didn't index when they had four years in power. We restored indexation so that everyone will be able to get the regular and predictable year-over-year increases. There is nothing that is going to happen behind closed doors, Mr. Speaker. It is a requirement for us to tell the federal government what the index rate will be for our taxation, which we have to do by October 15 of every year. What will give people certainty is knowing that's the rate that's going to apply for all of the programs across the board.

Ms Gray: To hide their behaviour, the government will absolutely mischaracterize what's going on, including the fact that the NDP

did index and made people whole, while they cost billions. The government, on a whim, is going to be able to make everybody's taxes go up and benefits go down, and they're going to laugh all the way to the bank. The Premier should know she is overseeing the highest inflation in the country and – news flash – Stats Canada says that it's 3 per cent, not 2 per cent. Setting next year's limits lower will cost people. Why will she not stop attacking benefits and scrap this bill?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I'll speak more slowly this time so they can keep up. The year-over-year increase from August to August was 2 per cent. The year-over-year increase from September to September was 1.9 per cent. We had to tell the federal government what to index our tax brackets next year by October 15, and so we chose the higher of those two numbers, 2 per cent, so that we could make some certainty not only for our federal counterparts to set up the bracket increases but for all of the programs we offer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a question.

Automobile Insurance Reform

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Finance minister warned Alberta drivers to brace for even higher car insurance premiums, 15 per cent over two years, costing families hundreds of dollars they just don't have. His justification: "The reason that the rates are going up is to get to the new model." The minister admits that his model is risky, but he's happy to let Albertans pay for it. Will he admit that gouging Albertans to protect insurance companies is a feature, not a bug, of his new model?

2:00

Mr. Horner: There's no gouging here, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy. We're near the end of this session, so we can keep the auto insurance tutorial going at least for another day here in this Chamber.

The cost is in the system. The cost is in the damage to vehicles. It's in the legal expenses. It's in the costs to the health care system. That is what we're moving towards this long-term reform for. We have tools within the regulator to watch the profit provisions, the profit levels of companies, and we do that. Under this government we lowered it by a percentage point and can force them to rebate it back to Albertans.

Ms Pancholi: The minister just demonstrated how out of touch he is with Albertans, that he doesn't think a 15 per cent increase in insurance premiums is gouging. The minister bragged about holding insurance company profits down by a whole 1 per cent, but Alberta drivers, who already pay the highest rates in Canada, will end up paying 15 per cent more. Let's say the average guy driving an F-150 already pays \$3,000 a year in insurance. With the UCP's 15 per cent hike he'll be forking out an extra \$500 per year because he lives in the UCP's Alberta. Is this the Alberta advantage that the government keeps talking about?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, Alberta currently has the second-highest auto insurance premiums in the country, behind only Ontario. We would likely be as high or higher if we didn't have the rate caps in place. That represents the difference in the actual cost of our system. That is what we're trying to skate towards in two years, actual reform to take costs out of the system, and we're doing it while minimizing job losses and bringing in a system that has the highest level of benefits of any care model in the country.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, when someone shows you who they are, believe them. After almost six years under the UCP Albertans have skyrocketing utility bills, the highest inflation rate, the lowest minimum wage, rising unemployment, a million people without a family doctor, and overcrowded classrooms, and somehow we also have the only government that thinks the drivers who pay the highest car insurance rates in the country should pay even more. The UCP has shown us who they are; let's believe them. Will the minister admit that the UCP just isn't in it for Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this minister will admit that there are lots of challenges in this province, and we have a 4.4 per cent growth rate because people from across this country still are choosing to call Alberta home. We're committed on this side to dealing with some of these large challenges like auto insurance. This is a model that will provide better care quicker, the highest level of benefits in the country. We've increased the level of income support. You won't need to find a lawyer, wait till you get sicker, and wait years for a settlement. It'll be immediate. People will get the care they need, and rates will come down.

Members' Acceptance of Gifts and Benefits

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, instead of using this session to address the affordability crisis or fixing our crumbling health care system, the UCP government has raised auto insurance rates by 15.5 per cent and increased income tax through deindexation. This Premier has also failed to correct the laws and ban the government from accepting gifts like Oilers playoff tickets. Instead, she missed her chance to show Albertans that their government isn't for sale. While Albertans struggle to pay their mortgages and utility bills, why does this government prioritize accepting lavish gifts from millionaire benefactors?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, we're very proud to have an all-ministerial response to affordability for Albertans. We are working on every single ministry to make life better. We are bringing forward reform in our health care. We are bringing forward reform in our insurance. We have the lowest taxes. We are attracting people from all over the world and all across Canada. They come here because life is better in Alberta. Very proud to be a part of a government that serves Albertans and puts them first.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, one year ago this Premier wasted \$80 million on knock-off Tylenol unsuitable for consumption, and Albertans never even got all the medication. Just six months later the Premier and her ministers were caught accepting private box seats for the Edmonton Oilers playoff games. It seems the only benefit from that \$80 million was securing this government VIP box seats. Albertans are furious with the greed in this government. Why did the Premier not pass legislation to prevent this from happening again, or is our government planning another playoff run?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the members opposite would agree that at that time when there was a shortage of Tylenol across this province, across this country, and in fact a shortage around the world, Alberta being able to secure that much-needed product for parents that were in fear – I had grandchildren who were suffering and needed that product, so I know there are many others across this province that valued the fact that our government was able to get that product into Alberta when we needed it most. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, without addressing the Oilersgate scandal, Albertans have the right to question the motivation behind each and every decision this government makes. This government approved profitable insurance companies to increase Albertans' premiums by 15.5 per cent, and they defended the opening of for-profit surgical clinics in the province. We don't know if they were promised hockey tickets to anyone in the cabinet for these decisions. Albertans demand transparency. Will the Premier commit to rolling back her gifts from rich lobbyist policies so Albertans can be assured this never happens again?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, happy to keep explaining how the auto insurance system works currently and what we're moving towards. We don't control – we don't control – the cost of insurance. Insurance is a system. We have aggregated premiums paid. We have the claims that come out. We have a rising cost of vehicles. We have a rising cost of disasters. The hailstorm in Calgary alone was one of the most expensive disasters on record, \$1 billion just in auto alone of \$2.8 billion. We're dealing with those things, and we're moving to a better, more fair system that focuses on care.

Alberta Energy Regulator Salaries

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, it pays to be friends with this government. While Albertans are struggling as a result of the UCP's cost-of-living crisis, the minister of energy announced that he was hiking the salaries of his friends at the Alberta Energy Regulator. The board chair will be making \$174,000 a year, and the board members will be making \$125,000 a year. What's worse: the minister thinks that these salaries are not competitive enough. How much more of a Christmas bonus does this minister plan to give his pals at the AER?

Mr. Jean: Well, they're not my pals, Mr. Speaker, but they are Albertans that know what to do with our energy, our Alberta oil and gas, a \$183 billion industry this year, \$23 billion paid to the people of Alberta for schools and hospitals and bridges and all those things they love.

But, Mr. Speaker, the interesting part is that the people of Alberta don't pay those wages that this member is talking about. The oil and gas industry does. Now, I don't know why he's standing up for big oil, but I appreciate the momentum that this member has in protecting Alberta's interests.

Member Brar: Given that the minister stated that the board chair of the AER was getting a "big, fat pay raise," given that the minister agreed with this side of the House that the situation he has created at the Alberta Energy Regulator was a "gravy train," given that the minister of jobs bragged how opposed he was to pay Albertans a living wage, can the minister explain why he is giving his buddies on the AER board a big, fat pay raise while his constituents get nothing?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that the reason why they're getting a pay raise is because they show up for work. Now, the phantom of the opposition, that is somewhere in this place possibly or somewhere else around Alberta, is not showing up for work. He had an opportunity just recently to show up for work and take a seat in Lethbridge, but he chose not to. I can't imagine anybody getting less money for a job than the current Leader of the Opposition that doesn't show up for work.

Member Brar: Given that Alberta has the lowest minimum wage but in UCP land their friends and supporters are being taken care of, given that in addition to the big, fat pay raise the minister gave the AER board, this government is lavish in supporting their

friends, given that the Premier's allies have gotten \$700,000 in no-bid contracts while all Albertans have gotten this session is a hike in their insurance premiums and deindexation of their benefits, will the minister show some leadership and roll back these big, fat pay raises for the UCP insiders?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, no. The answer is that I'm going to make sure that the oil and gas industry in Alberta pays the wages to regulate the oil and gas industry in Alberta. I think that's fair, and I think Albertans like that and they'll continue to do so.

2:10

What I do want to point out is that we have the highest weekly wages in the country, Mr. Speaker. The oil and gas industry provides so much wealth to the people of Alberta, and it's such a big job to manage that. I can't imagine that it takes much to manage the caucus of the opposition, because their leader doesn't show up for work. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Data Centre Investment Attraction

Ms de Jonge: Mr. Speaker, today the Premier and the Minister of Technology and Innovation announced a strategy to attract AI data centre investment to Alberta. Over the next five years North America is expected to see hundreds of billions of dollars invested in AI data centres and the infrastructure to power them. With Alberta being uniquely positioned to capture this opportunity with our vast natural gas resources, world-class expertise in energy production, pro-business environment as well as our cold climate, can the minister explain how this strategy will leverage Alberta's strengths to attract billions of dollars to our province through these AI data centres?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say this first. The world needs more Alberta energy, and that has never been more true than it is today. One of the biggest obstacles that data centres face today is access to electricity at scale. I've got good news for them. Alberta is a world leader in responsible energy development; we have virtually limitless natural gas, and we have the know-how to develop it. We also have a cold weather climate with efficient cooling, which can be 15 per cent more effective than in warmer climates. Combine that with our pro-business, low-tax jurisdiction; you can quickly see that Alberta is the best place to invest in this type of business.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that Alberta has these advantages to support AI data centre infrastructure when compared to other jurisdictions in North America and given that access to reliable electricity at large scale is paramount for the development of AI data centres, again to the Minister of Technology and Innovation: how will this strategy ensure that Alberta can meet the industry's needs for electricity without compromising the affordability and reliability of our existing grid?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question. Make no mistake. We will not do anything to compromise the affordability or reliability of Alberta's electricity grid, and that is a promise. But there's good news here. With proper due diligence we can ensure our system is designed for both speed and safety. With the right balance

between off-grid and grid-supported infrastructure we can attract \$100 billion or more of investment to Alberta over the next five years. Phase 1 of our strategy is focused on off-grid solutions to ensure we move with speed. Phase 2 will introduce streamlined policies for grid-supported solutions. There's something here for everyone. Alberta is a can-do province, and we can't wait to show the world what we're made of.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for his great work and his answer. Given that the Alberta AI data centre strategy includes references to supporting a streamlined, predictable, and common-sense regulatory pathway and given that Alberta has an outstanding record on red tape reduction, having reduced red tape by over 30 per cent in the last four years, saving Albertans and Alberta businesses billions of dollars, again to the Minister of Technology and Innovation: what steps is the government taking to ensure competitive project approval timelines?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, one of the other things I hear from data centre project proponents is that the next most important thing to them is speed to market. They are desperate to get up and running. Well, I've got more good news for them: Alberta is here to help. As you just heard, Alberta has the best track record in the country on red tape reduction. We are committed to keeping it that way. You know, that doesn't happen by accident; it happens by design. Another thing we have designed is our concierge service. We are working with data centre project proponents to help deliver massive time savings to those companies, because we know in Alberta that time is money, and in Alberta we can give you the gift of time. We've got a great story to tell, and we are just getting started.

Government Policies

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has experienced a significant increase in population growth over the past few years, leading to an increasing demand for infrastructure to support the services Albertans need. However, under this UCP government severe shortages in critical areas are resulting in overcrowded classrooms, long waiting times in hospitals, inadequate care for seniors, and a growing number of homeless people. My question to the minister is straightforward. Why is he causing hardship for Albertans and hindering the future growth and prosperity of our province?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, in the words of Ricky Bobby, "If you ain't first, you're last," and Alberta: they've been racking up a whole lot of firsts. Let me walk you through it: lowest personal taxes, lowest corporate taxes, zero sales tax. Per capita GDP growth: number one. Labour productivity? That's a big ten-four. Average weekly earnings? You got it; number one. This isn't even fair, Mr. Speaker. We've got the strongest economy in Canada, and when you plug in a highly skilled workforce, it means better jobs and bigger paycheques. You know what we call that? Shake and bake. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Deol: Given that this government is so intent on spending public dollars on private projects and given that this UCP government is building the schools with P3 models, the policy that even the previous PC government cancelled, and given that in addition to handing public money to private companies to build schools, this UCP government is hiring public servants to manage projects which were not part of the funding scope of the announcements, Minister, how much money will Albertans pay to hire these servants to benefit the UCP's corporate friends?

Mr. Guthrie: Well, here's the deal. Alberta is the best there is, plain and simple. Just ask my buddy from Strathcona-Sherwood Park. He'll tell you all about it. Venture capital is thriving, with companies raising almost \$400 million across 41 deals in the first half of this year alone. Technology firms are crushing it. Calgary's tech ecosystem grew more than 200 per cent. And our investment growth fund attracted over 1,000 full-time jobs and capital investment of more than \$700 million. Alberta is just a big ole winning machine, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deol: Given that the former RAM served as a community hub for decades and given that this UCP says that they will demolish it and leave green space, given that Albertans are skeptical about the UCP handling land in the public interest, given that the local communities have been very vocal in opposing the UCP's decision to destroy this structure, will the minister listen to Albertans' call and ensure public consultation happens before irreversible demolition takes place?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, from now on you're the magic man and I'm el diablo, which is Spanish for the fighting chicken. Speaking of poultry, the Member for Highwood can't be too upset with the growth in agriculture. The ag tax credit is getting interest from businesses like the Little Potato Company, bringing in \$39 million for a facility in Leduc; JBS, \$90 million in Brooks; P&H, \$240 million for a flour mill in Red Deer; not to mention dairy innovation targeting \$74 million and a milk plant in Blackfalds. Strongest economy in Canada, better jobs, bigger paycheques. Shake and bake, Mr. Speaker. Shake and bake. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Grassy Mountain Coal Project

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, the UCP keeps cheering coal mining in the beautiful eastern slopes, claiming there is an economic win. But the 2021 joint review panel consisting of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and the Alberta Energy Regulator rejected the Grassy Mountain coal project, not just because it would harm species at risk but also because it has very few economic benefits. Why is this government misleading on the few economic benefits the project would bring our province given its immense environmental cost?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, facts change. Technologies change. Opportunities change. One thing that doesn't change is the fact that this UCP government will listen to the people of Alberta. We've heard them loud and clear: don't coal mine like the NDP did; don't coal mine like the NDP wanted to do. They actually opened up category 2 land. They started the entire mess. That is now what Alberta is in coal mining. We will not do what the NDP in Alberta proposed to do ever.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the panel states that it is unclear that the company will "be able to produce a premium hard coking coal over the life of the project," given that it also states that "if the development and marketing of products with poorer coking properties becomes necessary during the life of the project, this may affect the price received and the predicted economic benefits of the project," given that this means there are neither economic nor environmental arguments for the Grassy project, why is the Premier ignoring Grassy's physical coal quality problems that cannot be fixed?

2:20

Mr. Jean: We are not, Mr. Speaker. We are not ignoring the people of Alberta. We are listening to them, and we heard them loud and clear. We don't want Elk Valley. We don't want what's happened to the NDP

in B.C. Do you know that just in the last few years, Vancouver, the port, has become the number one shipping destination out of North America for coal? That's the NDP legacy. That's not a legacy we're going to leave here in Alberta. Anything that's going to happen is going to happen right, but let's be clear. The AER is independent, they should be left to do their work, and the NDP should not interfere.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the Grassy Mountain project will bring mountaintop-removal mining to the majestic Rockies and given that the project already had a fair hearing and was rejected for causing too much environmental damage for too little economic benefit and given the rejection of the mine is one of the only decisions from the AER that inspired public confidence, yet the Energy minister interfered with the AER regulatory process to revive the project, why does the minister think he knows more than the joint expert panel that reviewed and rejected the mine?

Mr. Jean: I don't think so, Mr. Speaker. I listen to Albertans, I listen to experts, and being in this place, I get to listen to them. I have that great opportunity.

Now, is it elf on the shelf? Is it Santa Claus? Is it Rudolph? No, it's No-show Nenshi. Where is he? I don't know where he is, but I know he's not showing up for work for the people of Alberta, and I think that's what the NDP elected him for, wasn't it? Merry Christmas. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The honourable Member for Calgary-East has a question.

Immigration Policies

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an incredible honour to be invited to participate in the vibrant array of cultural events held in and around the great constituency of Calgary-East. These events offer a unique opportunity to learn about the rich diversity of cultures and traditions brought to Alberta by those who have chosen to make this province their new home. Can the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism share how newcomers enrich our province?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are so lucky to live in a province where you can literally go on a world tour of culture without even leaving your borders. There are hundreds of cultural festivals in Alberta every year. Alberta's rich cultural tapestry demonstrates the welcoming nature of Albertans and has done so for over a century. This is truly what makes our province the best place in the world to live, work, play, raise a family, and be happy.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the answer. Given that the federal government allowed over 2 million newcomers into the country last year alone and given that has put pressure on housing, education, health, and social services and given that the federal government has just announced they are drastically cutting immigration and given that those wanting to make Alberta their permanent home are worried they will have to leave because of those federal cuts, can the same minister tell us how Alberta is responding?

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

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for another good question. We hear this all the time. Alberta's position on this is that we would like to keep everyone who qualifies for our economic immigration program. In fact, we lobbied the federal government for more allocations, two times more, every chance we get, but the federal government is signalling that they will be cutting our program in half. Out of 472 allocations remaining for the year 2024, there are currently 40,000 people waiting for those spots; 40,000 people for 472 allocations.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the answer. Given that so many people have come to Alberta for a better life from all around the world and given that many more people have come in the past two years than ever before and given that Alberta needs talent and skill to fill job shortages from trades to tech to health, could the same minister tell us what Alberta's government is doing to support newcomers to our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question again. In the past five years we have streamlined the process for credential recognition, established the fairness for newcomers office, created the Alberta mentorship grant, launched ethnocultural and antiracism grants, created several advising councils for newcomers, implemented an antiracism action plan, and created the Alberta immigrant impact awards and even started the Premier's Summit on Fairness for Newcomers. What did the NDP do in the last four years? Nothing, nothing, nothing, and nothing again.

Presumptive WCB Coverage for Wildland Firefighters

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: I would like to begin by thanking all Alberta firefighters for their dangerous life-saving work that they do. The entire communities that are still here are because of their work and sacrifice. This work includes a higher risk of being exposed to penile and esophageal cancers, which are not covered by WCB. For over a year the job minister has claimed to be following science as an excuse not to act. Will the minister stop stalling and stand, thank the firefighters for their work, and commit to giving them the cancer coverage they deserve?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government acknowledges the significant risk that firefighters take to protect our communities, and we do thank them for that. Presumptions for certain illnesses acknowledge work-related risks and provide support to front-line workers and their families in times of need. Our government is actively reviewing research regarding presumptive coverage for work-related illnesses, but it should be noted that firefighters are still able to submit workers' compensation claims for work-related injuries or illness through the regular claim process. That remains open.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that this year firefighters responded to over 1,200 wildfires and given that despite the effort thousands of firefighters, support workers, and contractors put into protecting Albertans, this government is refusing to give them the WCB coverage they deserve and have been asking for, but given that this government moved at lightning speed to ensure that MLAs got a nice bump to their living allowance while firefighters are being told to wait, will the minister explain why funding UCP MLAs' living allowance is a higher priority than protecting our firefighters?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is committed to a systematic review of presumptive coverage associated with different professions. It's important to note that presumptions do not guarantee claim acceptance. Presumptions simplify the claims process by eliminating the steps required to link diagnosis to the job, but the claims process is still in place for those workers. Again, our government is reviewing new and emerging research, and we're committed to ensuring that all workers have access to the supports that they need.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that you keep reciting, "We'll go to the research" and they continue to save communities like Slave Lake in 2010, Fort McMurray in 2016, Jasper in '24, and countless others and given that this side of the House has raised the issue eight times already this session and this government has stonewalled these heroes every single time, can the minister tell this House how many times we have to ask before you will do the right thing and act on supporting Alberta's firefighters?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the previous NDP government failed to provide clear and consistent policy for workers' compensation, leaving many people vulnerable and unclear about their coverage. Our government has actively engaged with stakeholders and conducted thorough research to access the needs and assess the needs of firefighters. We are very grateful for the work that they do and all critical emergency staff that are devoted to our province. Through collaboration and evidence-based decision-making we aim to support front-line workers effectively while maintaining the integrity of our compensation system.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Evacuations

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Fort McMurray experienced yet another wildfire this past spring. While the fire was not near the town, caution led to the decision to evacuate parts of the community. These evacuations are extremely stressful and cause citizens undue financial costs related to fleeing their homes and their community. The wildland around Fort McMurray only has eight years of growth and should the fire have reached the town, it would have been manageable by municipal firefighters. My understanding is that the province directed the municipality to evacuate. My question is: why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of public safety, the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I want to thank the member for, of course, his advocacy in Fort McMurray. I know he does a great job of representing the people of Fort McMurray. Look, the decision to evacuate was made by the municipality after it seems that the provincial authority provided advice, which is why Bill 21 was needed for a clear communication process.

On the day leading up to that particular fire, up to the evacuation there were winds. There were temperatures drastically increasing. There were over 20,000 hectares that were burning and had burned. Mr. Speaker, we thank those firefighters and those first responders for the great work they did in protecting the town of Fort McMurray.

2:30

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, the state of that answer demonstrates that we must always show caution to ensure the safety of the residents.

However, other decisions were questionable. Given that the authorities stopped traffic from going northbound on 63 and allow traffic to go south on the entire twinned highway – this may have been relevant in 2016 but not this time – and further given that they

also wouldn't allow people to enter the city, making them line up along highway 881 for hours even though the city wasn't shut down, who made these decisions and why?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of public safety, the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Look, critical incident command is something that is not easy. Of course, we provide training for the folks in Fort McMurray as well as all municipalities, quite frankly, in the province of Alberta, education and training. I'll say that the decision on the highway closure was made by Alberta government's Transportation and Economic Corridors department. I can confirm that a comprehensive review of the evacuation process, including opening both highways, was taking place to assess its effectiveness and, of course, to identify any room for improvement. These are very fluid situations. I will say that in any critical situation we always learn from it, and we're doing that in this case as well.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, given that we have learned that the threat of wildland fires can affect the reputation of a community and may discourage people from making a home in these isolated areas given that people are afraid of losing everything they own, as was seen most recently in Jasper – the technology and the strategies exist to prevent forest fires from impacting communities – can the minister explain what steps are being taken to ensure that Fort McMurray and other municipalities will have the proper guidelines and support in place to defend against forest fires in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks has risen.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. As Alberta faces increasingly severe wildfire seasons, our top priority remains the safety of all Albertans. In response to the wildfire threat near Fort McMurray our government acted quickly, entering unified command with the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and deployed 120 firefighters, 14 helicopters, and other equipment to combat the fire. Our FireSmart and community fireguard are a key part to help municipalities prepare and mitigate the risks of wildfires affecting their communities. The reality is that decades of overprotection created unnatural conditions, leaving our forests vulnerable, which is why we do the work we do using controlled burns and selective harvesting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a question to ask.

Funding for REDAs

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade announced they intend to stop operational funding for regional economic development alliances, or REDAs. This unprecedented action will have a devastating impact on communities across the province. It could lead to projects being abandoned and opportunities for growth missed. What is most confusing of all is that the mandate letter from the Premier to the minister explicitly demands collaboration with REDAs. Will the minister explain why this government is willing to tear up its ministerial mandate, ignore the direction of the Premier, and ignore rural municipal leaders?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to work with municipalities across this province to help them succeed economically. An example is what's going on right now under the local government fiscal framework. They'll receive a 13 per cent plus increase in the largest funding package that they get from the

province for infrastructure. We've got a new \$20 million a year package to help with sustainability and economic expansion, which goes this year and two years beyond. We have always been there with municipalities and . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very clear that the minister is going to ignore the mandate letter from the Premier.

Given that REDAs play an essential role in the rural communities of this province and given that the current Minister of Finance has previously acknowledged that REDAs are an asset to Alberta and given that the economic development in the rural Alberta plan clearly marks collaboration with REDAs as a key strategy for economic growth and given that this funding change will especially affect small rural municipalities, since you had the pen, Minister, to the Minister of Finance: will you commit to the funding for REDAs? It's your budget.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is committed to regional economic development across Alberta, including working with our valued partners. Our regional economic development alliances, REDAs, play an important role in advancing economic and job growth across our province. Alberta's government has provided record levels of funding for three years, from 2024 to 2027, to our REDAs. A maximum of \$125,000 per year will be provided based upon each regional economic development alliance organization's membership and revenue.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for reading his speaking notes. Those are actual cuts from the last budget, and it's not the same amount.

Given that this new proposal-matching condition would painfully impact small rural municipalities with low revenue and given that the multiple representative organizations like Alberta Municipalities and Rural Municipalities of Alberta have adopted resolutions countering this proposal and given that this government itself has repeatedly acknowledged the importance of REDAs in policy action and executive directives, can the minister make a promise today to maintain current operational funding for REDAs into 2027?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member reading word for word from her sheet there as well. At least I can say that this is not my particular file; she is officially the critic for this.

I can tell you, though, that our new funding model will help REDAs transition from a direct operational support system with higher government intervention to a more competitive project-based funding system so our regional organizations can become more efficient and independent to better serve our communities.

Thank you.

Jasper Interim Housing

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, I want to wish everyone in this Assembly and across Alberta a Happy Christmas and all the best of the upcoming holiday season.

In October the minister announced he'll build 250 housing units with modular homes in Jasper. Instead of offering unconditional support and help, the minister told the media that he hopes to make a profit off the sale of the interim housing once the town is rebuilt. Why is the minister trying to make a profit, like Grinch, off the fire that destroyed 30 per cent of the town of Jasper instead of just helping?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, last night I had to teach the hon. member the difference between a red stag and an elk and a wolf and a coyote and a grizzly bear and a black bear. Let me explain to him exactly what's taking place in Jasper to help him out. This government is investing instead of using the processes that the NDP used when there were fires, which was to bring in expensive camps that nobody used. Instead, this government is recognizing that there is already an affordable housing challenge in Jasper. We're coming in; we're investing in building sustainable, manufactured homes to deal with the immediate issue and leaving behind a long-term legacy that will make sure Jasper can continue to serve the world for generations to come.

Mr. Kasawski: Given that to sell modular homes down the road, the minister needs Parks Canada to subdivide land in Jasper and lease it to the government of Alberta and given that the minister has repeatedly told media he will only provide stabilization funding to the town conditional to the lease agreements from Parks Canada and given that the government provides stabilization funding for the fires in Fort McMurray and Slave Lake without conditions, why is this government holding the town of Jasper hostage while they wait for the government to lease them land so they can make a profit off the Jasper fire?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member sounded like Ebenezer when he said: everybody that wishes Merry Christmas should be boiled in pudding and buried with a stake of holly through their heart. We, on the other hand, are like after the three spirits. We are providing housing up front. We will sell it for the community benefit so that we can provide more benefit to the community. We're providing \$2 million for funding for transit. The community knows they're going to get tax relief. We're Scrooge after the three spirits; they're before.

Mr. Kasawski: Given that the land that the province is trying to acquire is not enough to fit 250 housing units as promised – they'll be lucky if they can fit 50 – and given that the town of Jasper needs 600 additional housing units on top of what was lost in the Jasper fire and given the UCP's ham-fisted approach to prioritizing profit over people, is the minister truly interested in helping solve the housing shortage in Jasper and stabilizing the town revenue, or is he only a grinch interested in securing land leases in Jasper so he can sell houses down the road to his friends?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we are going to be able to fit the homes that we're building. We did a full assessment in partnership with Jasper. We're going to have 250 homes up in that community, and the first families are going to move in in the first week of February. Now, if the hon. member or his leader had bothered to show up during the fire process and actually see what is taking place on the landscape inside Jasper, they would know what is taking place. We've come up with a great solution supported by the town, supported by the national park service that's going to make sure people have homes right now, unlike the NDP, who wasted hundreds of millions of dollars using encampments that did not work when it came to . . .

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question to ask.

Alberta New Democratic Party Leader

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors has been tirelessly working this session to pave the

way for progress in ensuring our roads and highways effectively connect communities while driving economic development. Despite his extensive travel across Alberta, there remains one challenge he has yet to overcome: tracking down the elusive No-show Nenshi. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors, one question still lingers this session. Can you share which highway is your favourite, how it embodies this government's commitment to prioritizing safe transportation networks, and, while you're at it, can you solve the mystery once and for all: where is Nenshi?

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are 64,000 lane kilometres in Alberta, so it's hard to pick one, but I would have to say the South Pine Lake Road that takes me home would actually be my favourite.

But regarding No-show Nenshi or, what he's also lovingly being called, Nonexistent Nenshi, it's remarkable that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona led the NDP to be the largest opposition in Alberta's history, Mr. Speaker, but Nenshi doesn't care. He can't be bothered to show up for work. But watching the debates, looking at the vote count, it's surprising . . . [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to the Galleries

The Speaker: Members of the Assembly will be very familiar that engaging with members of the gallery would be wildly inappropriate on either side of the House, or quite frankly people in the gallery trying to engage members of the Assembly would be equally as inappropriate.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation has six seconds remaining.

Alberta New Democratic Party Leader (continued)

Mr. Dreeshen: Ouch.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, I think all the NDP wants for Christmas is a leader who actually shows up in this Chamber. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, given that accountability and representation are fundamental to our democracy and this government remains committed to upholding these principles and given that throughout this session our government has worked diligently and tirelessly, striving to bring meaningful change to every single Albertan, and given that it's worth pointing out that no member of the opposition has offered to step down to allow their new leader, and Trudeau's choice for Alberta, Nenshi to seek a seat in the Legislature, to the Minister of Justice: if one of the members opposite were to step down, would the government be prepared to call a by-election to ensure Albertans are represented fairly?

The Speaker: I'm not sure if this is a question that has to do with the administration of government. Perhaps because there is a question on if the member would call a by-election, but we're certainly close to the edge here.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer it. As the member said, accountability and real, effective representation are cornerstones and principles of democracy. That's why on this side of the House, day in and day out, members are working hard to represent Albertans, both in the House and in their constituencies.

I, too, find it shocking that the members opposite continue to engage in theatrics of leadership politics, but they're missing one critical component: an actual leader, Mr. Speaker. What I can say is this: if His Majesty's Loyal Opposition would step down, I'd be happy to recommend to this government . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans deserve transparency and strong leadership to stand against federal overreach and given that our government has been working hard this session to protect Alberta's interests and given that we know Trudeau and Nenshi are best buddies and given that it's no surprise that Nenshi and the NDP refused to stand up for our province and voted to protect Trudeau's emissions cap, to the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: what steps are you taking to ensure Albertans aren't left in the dark about federal policies affecting our environment and economy, and how are you fighting back against Ottawa's overreach to protect our province's future? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The only one with the call is the minister of environment.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP, we are showing up every single day to defend Alberta from Ottawa's eco radical agenda. We will continue to challenge the feds and win while the elusive NDP leader decides to just go along to get along with his shut-it-all-down friends in Ottawa.

I thought about maybe asking for unanimous consent to introduce the NDP leader, who decided to join us in the gallery today. I don't think we'll see him on the floor any time soon because there doesn't seem to be one NDP member willing to step down and give up their seat for their leader, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

Statement by the Speaker Constituency Office Christmas Gifts

The Speaker: Before you go to the other very important work that requires members to be at, I want to remind you that, as is the Speaker's tradition, your Christmas gift for your constituency staff – let me reiterate that the Speaker does not want to give a gift to you but to your staff – can be found in both of the lounges. I'd ask that you please pick them up before you head home, whenever that might happen over the next couple of days. I would never presuppose a decision of the Assembly and when this House may rise.

My team in the Speaker's office thanks all of your teams for the important work that they do on behalf of all members, so please, from my team to yours, thank you very much for everything that they do. [applause]

In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Opposition House Leader.

Bill 210
Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips)
Amendment Act, 2024

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 210, Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Tips) Amendment Act, 2024.

Everything is getting more expensive, and when Albertans choose to leave a tip for great service with their hard-earned money, they expect that that money will get to the intended target, the workers serving them. Six provinces have already created protections for workers' tips, but Alberta doesn't have this, and the tips don't always go where Albertans want them to.

This bill, if passed, would protect workers from having their tips unfairly pocketed by owners or management while accounting for scenarios where other staff, like cooks and food runners and hosts, can still be included in a tipping pool. Similar legislation received all-party support in Ontario. I know from Albertans directly that they would want to see similar protections here, and I'd strongly encourage all members of this House to vote in support of Bill 210.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a number of articles. It's going to be about seven tablings to showcase some data to back up the Minister of Infrastructure's answer earlier today and showcase that poor NDP policy destroys the federal economy. First is an article from the former Bank of Canada governor saying that the federal government has driven the economy into a recession.

Second is another article from the same former Bank of Canada governor that states that Canada is, again, going into a recession based upon low business investment and lost productivity.

Another one is Canada's poor GDP growth at only .3 per cent for Q3.

Another one is from Coldwell Banker, Mr. Speaker, that showcases the devastating effect of poor federal government policy and procedures and their impact on the economy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have a number of tablings that showcase that our UCP government's good policy is leading to the best investment and GDP growth in the country.

First is the Q3 update that shows Alberta's GDP accelerating to 2.9 per cent, the highest in the country, compared to Canada as a whole at only .3 per cent.

2:50

Second is an article showcasing investment poised to grow in Alberta and our province's economy continuing to strengthen.

The last one is an article with statements from a former CBSA agent and current Mount Royal professor that says that Alberta's plan and policy to address border issues, to stem off the 25 per cent possible Trump tariff, is quoted as: solid and the best in the country.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the five requisite copies for three tablings. One is a statement from Osler law: a regulatory fight between Alberta and the federal government creates uncertainty for the oil and gas sector.

The second one is 'Black Cloud': Alberta's Latest Fight with Ottawa Could Drive Oilpatch Investment Away.

Then the third one is a reference to what I talked about: the pension purge is Soviet-style. This is from the *New York Times*.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, members from this side have been asking questions on affordability and cost of living throughout the session. I would like to table five copies of a new report from Edmonton Social Planning Council on Edmonton's Living Wage Report. I urge all members to read the report.

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table an article from the British *Telegraph* announcing that Spain's governing socialist party is going to ban trans women from female sports.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Ceci: Thank you. I'd like to table five copies from a constituent of mine, Carol Armes. She's a lifelong advocate for accessibility who argues that we need provincial legislation for an accessible Alberta act, and she sent it to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Member Irwin: I'd like to table a letter from the Delton school parent council urging the UCP to advance Delton school through the design phase and accelerate construction. Delton school is old, it's inaccessible, and it's infested with rodents. Please support a new Delton school, Minister.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table an article from the notices of the American Mathematical Society entitled Courts, Commissions, and Consultations: How Mathematicians Are Working to End Gerrymandering.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an article from the Canadian Press that demonstrates another piece of evidence that the UCP needs to respect environmental impact assessments and treaty and Indigenous rights given that First Nations want impact assessment acts done.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from Taramay Curtis to table that has many questions asked to the minister of community and social services, specifically related to the need for affordable housing.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Nicolaides, Minister of Education, pursuant to the Education Act the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission annual report 2023-24.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, of which there were none. A three-time gold star to all members of the Assembly. Christmas is clearly in the air.

The hon. the Government House Leader appears to be anxious to rise.

Mr. Schow: I am, Mr. Speaker, but I was waiting for you to call Orders of the Day for me to ask for unanimous consent, something very important.

The Speaker: Perhaps I'll call Orders of the Day, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Schow: Well, maybe you should, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you doing that. Thank you very much.

I'd like to congratulate all members of the Assembly on having no points of order, though it is an interesting time of our day. This has been great.

I will now rise to ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the afternoon sitting, including the first bell in Committee of the Whole.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a request for unanimous consent that the members of the Assembly have become accustomed to.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 33 Protection of Privacy Act

The Deputy Chair: Any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 33, the Protection of Privacy Act. This is part of a pair of bills by which the government is making a number of changes to the legislation around privacy and freedom of information in the province of Alberta.

Now, these are significant pieces of legislation, Mr. Chair. I had the chance to speak to Bill 34 the other day and talk about the very deep concerns about how this government is undermining the freedom of information system to make it far harder for Albertans to actually know what their government is doing. This is the other side of the equation, where we are talking about how this government is using information it has and possesses about Albertans.

Certainly, this is a hot topic of conversation, and rightfully so these days. Personal information is a considerable commodity. It is the basis by which so much of the Internet functions and by which so many people in the digital realm actually make their profit. Of course, few entities hold as much personal information about Albertans as their government. Certainly, I think we should be looking very carefully at any legislation which impacts how that information is used, whether in public hands or in private.

Now, what we have in front of us here, Bill 33, is concerned primarily with how individual information is used within the public realm. The government, you know, does declare that they have consulted with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Let's be clear, Mr. Chair. Timelines about when you hold those consultations make a big difference about whether you are actually providing wholesome consultation.

I remember going through this with the previous Minister of Health Mr. Tyler Shandro when he brought in changes around health privacy information, and he insisted that he had of course consulted with the Information and Privacy Commissioner at the

time. The Information and Privacy Commissioner had a very different view on what that consultation actually was.

In this case, it's my understanding that the minister has claimed that they have consulted, but the Information and Privacy Commissioner certainly has some thoughts about this legislation, so either the government chose not to listen or the government didn't really truly try to consult. Certainly, it would seem that the legislation itself was not presented to the Information and Privacy Commissioner before it was tabled in this House.

To note a particular concern that's been brought forward by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, which correlates with some of the changes that were made also in Bill 34, she talks about sections 3(1)(s) and (t) and how under those "in their role as ministers, members of the Executive Council," so the ministers, "[can] process or hold records that should be protected by [the Protection of Privacy Act]. Excluding these records," she says, "as these sections currently do" in the legislation that's in front of us "is contrary to the purposes of the Act." She says, "It is unclear what the policy rationale or public interest benefit would be from this change."

My concern, Mr. Chair, is that if the Information and Privacy Commissioner herself, the expert in protecting the privacy and the information of Albertans, is looking at this document and saying, "I can't see any policy rationale or any public benefit," then this is a change being made for the government's political benefit. I can tell you who I trust between the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who sits independently and is an expert in these matters, and the highly partisan government, which has already demonstrated through Bill 34 and so many other steps that they are acting out of their own political interest and not the interest of the people of Alberta.

3:00

Now, the Information and Privacy Commissioner goes on to say that

this is highly concerning, particularly given that a public body may disclose personal information under section 13(1)(g) to a member of the Executive Council if the information is necessary for a member's performance of a duty.

To be clear, she says it's concerning because under this legislation as it is drafted, personal information from a public body can be disclosed to Executive Council simply by saying that this is necessary for the member's performance of a duty, no other protections, no other caveats.

Now, this reminds me, Mr. Chair, when I think back to my time as critic for Health and the former Minister of Health, Mr. Tyler Shandro, there was a little bit of an incident involving some doctors' private information. There was a complaint, in fact, that was brought against the former minister through the Law Society of Alberta about him calling two doctors after hours on their personal phone numbers which he obtained from a public body, Alberta Health Services. These were doctors who simply attended the funding announcement, attempted to engage with the minister while he was there; did not get that opportunity. The minister sought to get in touch with them after, and Alberta Health Services provided their private, personal phone numbers to the minister.

Now, if there had been any evidence that Mr. Shandro had personally specifically requested the phone numbers, there might have been a significant concern. My understanding from the review that was done by the Law Society is that there is no evidence that he, in fact, asked specifically for the phone numbers; he simply expressed an interest in getting in touch.

However, what we are seeing set up here according to the Information and Privacy Commissioner is a change in the legislation that would in fact say that would be perfectly all right for a minister to do. If they feel it is in the interest of the execution of their duties, they can reach out to any public body and ask for the private, personal

information of an Albertan. That seems to me, Mr. Chair, to be too sweeping a power, and indeed the Information and Privacy Commissioner agrees. She flags it as a significant concern. She recommends that those sections be removed from the legislation.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner also raises concerns about breach notification. In particular, she says that breach notification – that is, letting people know when their information has been improperly shared by a public body – “should include a provision for assessment of harm; a requirement of the public body to [in fact] provide a report to the Commissioner about” how that breach was caused, the steps that were taken to mitigate the risk to those individuals from that breach and prevent it from occurring again.

The commissioner then has the power to issue recommendations on receiving that report, and the commissioner then can go on to say whether they accept or reject those recommendations. They can work with the public body. In her view, those additional requirements “should be included in [this] Act before it takes effect to ensure that,” should a breach occur, there is proper “notification, remedy, and prevention of recurrence.” But it is my understanding that under this legislation that is not contained and that in many respects this government is cutting the commissioner out of the loop. Again, this is deeply concerning, Mr. Chair.

In so many ways we have seen this as a government that wants to control everything, that wants to take power over everything, over municipal councillors, over local bylaws, over university research, all while removing accountability through bills like Bill 34 so that Albertans could actually get less information about what a government which is taking more power to itself is doing.

Again, Mr. Chair, we are dealing with legislation about Albertans’ personal information, and I can tell you that members of the UCP, members of their political party, are very sensitive about how government is handling their personal information. I’m guessing that these ministers, this government, have not sat down and had a fulsome conversation with their membership, particularly not ahead of the Premier’s leadership review, about the changes they’re making in this legislation that empower them to make much freer use of Albertans’ private, personal information held in the hands of government while simultaneously through Bill 34 making it far, far harder for Albertans to actually find out what they’re doing with it. Again, a government that wants to take more power unto itself, more information to itself and give less back to Albertans.

I’m deeply concerned by a number of things here, Mr. Chair. There are a number of other concerns that were raised by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, but thankfully we find ourselves here at Committee of the Whole, where we have the opportunity to introduce amendments. I have a sneaking suspicion that when I take my seat, we may have the opportunity to look at some changes we might be able to make to make this bad bill a little better.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also rise to speak to Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act. Protection of privacy is important, as my colleague was talking about. It’s important for human dignity, people’s rights. Government brought forward this piece of legislation without doing their homework, without consulting with people who know about this area of law. For the most part, the changes that are contained in it are pretty self-serving for the government, and they do nothing to advance the protection of privacy for Albertans at large.

With that, I will be moving an amendment, and I have the requisite number of copies of that amendment. I will wait until it’s distributed, and then I will explain what it does.

The Deputy Chair: Members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall may proceed.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act, be amended as follows: (a) in section 3 (i) in subsection (1) by striking out clause (t), and (ii) by striking out subsection (5); (b) in section 29(6)(a) by striking out “section 4(1)(a), (t) or (w)” and substituting “section 4(1)(a) or (t).”

In short, what this amendment is doing is this. Government exempted the record of communication between political staff, a member of executive and staff. They did exactly the same thing for the FOIP, and they are doing this here as well.

Mr. Nally: You should have asked me a question.

Mr. Sabir: If the minister would know anything about the bill, we would certainly ask questions. Media did ask questions, and the minister had shown zero understanding of these provisions, what’s contained in the act, and had provided members of the public and media also with talking points that do not make sense. For that reason, they have to call me from their end and talk about these changes.

3:10

I will, for the benefit of the minister and everybody, explain those changes. At any given time there can be a number of political staffers, and there could be a lot of data that exists there among political staff and ministers, and that’s public data. That’s, for the most part, Albertans’ data. One, they are exempting that through FOIP, and here this Privacy Protection Act won’t apply to those provisions either.

Another thing is that they are yet to decide what qualifies as political staff. That will be determined behind closed doors through regulation. That’s deeply concerning, and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who understands this area far better than cabinet ministers: she has flagged and she has raised serious concerns about this, that there can be unlimited amount of data, public data that can exist in this space. Exempting that from FOIP, exempting that from privacy protection legislation is unheard of. No other jurisdiction should do that. Alberta should not do that, and this amendment essentially will fix that problem.

The second thing is that we are striking out subsection (5), which gives government authority to define what political staff is. Since we are striking out clause (t), government won’t need that power to define political staff.

The third thing that this provision does. In 29(6)(a) government made certain changes, got information with reference from the Access to Information Act, and they are again protecting Executive Council confidences. I’ve been part of Executive Council, so I do know that cabinet deliberations are important. Cabinet advice, confidentiality are important, but, Mr. Chair, they have added protections for their own facts as well. The background factual information that they relied on to make a decision: that’s a kind of provision that would not be needed in an open, honest, transparent, and democratic system, so that’s why we are striking that as well.

With that, I would urge all members of the House that these provisions are here to stay regardless who is in government, and we should think about our role, how we are protecting Albertans’ privacy. We should think about how we are making government more transparent, making government more honest.

If government has nothing to hide, they wouldn't seek those kind of blanket exemptions, so clearly they are hiding something, their political staff and ministers. That used to be FOIPable over there for four years, and government has not provided any explanation. There could not be any reasonable explanation for this, and as the commissioner said, there can be a huge volume of data that can exist in this sphere that will have no protection of this act. Therefore, it should not be the way the government has drafted it. I urge all members of the House to think about this provision, think about your constituents, and vote with your conscience.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Any other members to speak to amendment A1? Seeing none, I will ask the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:15 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

Batten	Ellingson	Loyola
Boparai	Elmeligi	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoffman	Schmidt
Dach	Irwin	Shepherd
Deol	Kayande	Wright, P.
Eggen		

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 16	Against – 44
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

3:20

The Deputy Chair: Members, we are back on the main bill, Bill 33. The Member for Airdrie-East has risen.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have an amendment to move.

The Deputy Chair: Members, we will refer to this as amendment A2. The hon. Member for Airdrie-East may proceed.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 33, the Protection of Privacy Act, be amended in section 29(6)(a) by striking out “section 4(1)(a), (t) or (w)” and substituting “section 4(1)(a), (s), (t) or (w)”.

Mr. Chair, this amendment is going to do exactly what it says it's going to do, and I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I will allow all members to receive a copy before we proceed.

Are there any others wishing to speak to amendment A2? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 33. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen to speak.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm going to take a few minutes this afternoon to walk us through the very thoughtful public letter delivered by mail to the Minister for Technology and Innovation from Information and Privacy Commissioner McLeod. I want to touch on a few things that are highlighted in this public letter that speak to concerns with this specific legislation.

First, let's start on a positive because I sometimes get asked: are there any things that the government's doing that you agree with? I will say that when I think a motion from the government or a bill from the government isn't going to make things worse – that's my standard these days – I am happy to vote for it. Not a super ambitious bar that I have set for the government.

Let me focus on a few of the things in here that are not going to make things worse. The requirement for public bodies to implement privacy management programs and conduct of privacy impact assessments, PIAs, generally: I think that's a good idea. The requirement to report breaches: I definitely think that's a good idea. The data part that's in this bill is also quite positive, I think, and the prohibition of the sale of personal information. These are, I think, four of the six pieces that the commissioner herself outlined as being positives.

But there are several serious concerns in this legislation. I want to focus specifically on paramouncy. We do this often in legislation. We say that this legislation takes precedence over other legislation related to the act. It makes it a lot easier for people who might have to deal with litigation or even officials within government itself or within the offices that oversee the legislation that are related, like the independent office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, to be able to know clear delineation of where priority stands in the legislation. The commissioner was very clear in saying that it was important that if this is to be the legislation that trumps all other legislation – I teach the little people in my life card games often and we talk about, you know, trump cards – this is not identified in this current bill.

Without a paramouncy clause
she goes on to say on page 5 of 18
in PPA ...

Again, I think there are some good things in it.

... subordinate legislation other than a statute or regulation (e.g., a bylaw) could be used to override the important protections for privacy, such as, for example, the prohibition on selling personal information enshrined in PPA.

If we wanted to ensure that the things that I hope we all agree are good components within this legislation, that they stand the test of time and that they're seen as being paramount over other pieces of legislation or that they trump other pieces of legislation, we should actually go about saying that in this bill so that everyone knows that they can't lean on older legislation that has provided oversight for FOIP or PIPA to say that they still have the ability to sell the information because it wasn't outlined in prior bills. It's important

that the prohibition of those components be given paramouncy so that they can actually be enforced, Mr. Chair.

If the other legislation fails to address these matters consistently with PPA, they will absolutely be in conflict. The commissioner goes on to say,

furthermore, the inclusion of a paramouncy clause in PPA recognizes the fundamental and quasi-constitutional nature of PPA as a law that is designed to protect privacy rights.

This provision would ensure that if there may be a conflict of information between various pieces of legislation, the privacy rights that have being codified in the PPA, which we are considering today, prevail to the extent of any conflict. If we do actually want to ensure that all legal counsel, all employees related to this legislation know that we do in fact intend to enforce the fines and other provisions, we need to say so in this legislation, that this is paramount.

That would probably be one area that people would want to consider making an amendment to because definitely if it isn't clear that this is paramount, then it will be open to interpretation. Our intention, I think, in this House is to provide clear direction.

One example I want to give around the sharing of information or common or integrated programs of service, as she speaks to on page 6, is – I was a minister, and I know that there is a need to have information sharing and a desire from the public to have information sharing, particularly when it comes to health records, between when you go to an emergency department, for example, and when you are meeting with your family doctor. You'd rather not have to go through the specifics of what happened there – things like prescriptions and a basic report are available – but if other things come up in that meeting, knowing that there can be a sharing of the information, but how that information is to be protected and what types of consequences there would be for anyone who does indeed breach the confidentiality piece, for example sharing between a PCN and a specialist and the inverse of that.

With electronic health records we know that it's easier than ever for people to be able to access the information they have. I know I find that tool incredibly helpful and have used it many times since it came into effect at the time of the Alberta NDP being in government. It also means that there is a greater potential for there to be breaches of the file because it is so much easier for us to access these days, so ensuring that there's clear oversight on the privacy of that information and what types of consequences will be in place should it be breached.

Earlier this week, I believe it was, a report also came out from the commissioner highlighting a number of health breaches that took place by offices not disposing of paper records or ensuring a fair transfer of them and then the deletion of them and a breach of electronic records as well as those paper records. Clearly, there are a number of issues. The commissioner there has proposed that we have some of the same levers as they do in other provinces like Ontario when it comes to the breach of information and the consequences thereof and that the commissioner herself or himself or themselves be able to actually implement those consequences without it being delayed by further red tape.

Also, I want to touch on the data matching piece. The commissioner goes on to say,

this process needs to be transparent to ensure the public is aware that new personal information about them being generated. Transparency is particularly important when new personal information about an individual is generated without their knowledge. An individual's awareness of how their personal information is collected, used, or disclosed is essential to their ability to control it.

I think this is a very common-sense recommendation being made by the independent officer when it comes to if new information is being collected about you, you knowing how they're getting that

information and where it's going to be used. I think many of us don't want an overreach by a government or an agency of government, and if they are creating new ways to gather information and how they're going to use it, it should be a basic right of any individual here in the province of Alberta.

3:30

She also goes on to say that matching to create data derived from personal information for research and analysis would be permitted by a public body to carry out that data matching. Then in that area she recommends that the data matching include the data source, the description of the personal information that's created, and the purpose for the matching. She also urges our Assembly to define the terms "research" and "analysis" and that "for the addition of any prescribed purposes under section 17(1)(c), consultation in the form of review and comment by the Commissioner be required before any purposes are prescribed thereunder."

Then I do want to touch a little bit on the next section around excluded personal information. She speaks to:

under sections 3(1)(s) and (t), in their role as ministers, members of the Executive Council may process or hold records that should be protected by PPA. Excluding these records, as these sections currently do, is contrary to the purposes of the Act and it is unclear what the policy rationale or public interest benefit would be from this change.

I know that, again, when I was minister, I needed to have information that the department possessed to be able to make informed decisions. She's going on to say how important it is that information that political staff or the minister hold have safeguards around it to ensure that it is protected, properly disposed of, and that it only be gathered for necessary situations.

Giving that clarity to all Albertans about when a minister might access their personal information, for what purpose, and then how it will be disposed of, I think would go a significant way to increasing the trust between the current government or any future government and individuals in this province. I think there is a lot of nervousness generally in the world about government overreach and government making punitive decisions against individuals, so this, I believe, would be of benefit to us all.

Those are some of the key things I wanted to speak to. Again, there are a number of components in this bill that don't make life worse and might even make it better, so let's make sure that it's enshrined. Let's make sure that it takes a paramount position over other legislation. Let's hear what other amendments come forward. It would be nice if we could vote in support of this, but there are a number of serious concerns at this point.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 33? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do rise to speak again to section 10, one of the quite important clauses of this piece of legislation. Its heading says Protection of Personal Information. This is the provision that deals with the obligation of a public body to protect information that's in their possession, private information, and also sets out a test that when a public body fails to protect that information or there is some unauthorized disclosure, when a public body should disclose that to individuals and to the commissioner. That's the main provision here.

Mr. Chair, it says,

if an incident occurs including the loss of, unauthorized access to or unauthorized disclosure of personal information in the custody or under the control of a public body where a reasonable person

would consider that there exists a real risk of significant harm to an individual as a result of the loss,

then they should consider reporting it to individuals, to the commissioner, to the minister. That's a very vague test.

The minister in introducing this bill said that there will be a mandatory reporting of breaches. Mr. Chair, nothing can be further from the truth. The test they put in, the reasonable person test, that's a legal test that's used in criminal law, that's used in tort and many other areas of law. It's quite, I guess, a fluid kind of test. First thing, what you consider as a reasonable person, that's a determination. Then foreseeability of the risk, that's a determination there. The nature of the risk, whether it's a real risk or just perceived risk, potential risk, and then the likelihood of the harm to individual: if there is a likelihood, is it significant, as this legislation says? As you can see, that makes it very complicated, puts in a bar that I think will be easier for public bodies to ignore any breaches of these privacy protections.

With that, I want to move an amendment to correct this provision, to make this provision a bit better.

The Deputy Chair: We will refer to this amendment as A3. The member may proceed.

Mr. Sabir: I didn't keep a copy in this case, or at least I lost it.

The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall moves that Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act, be amended in section 10(2) (a) by striking out "where a reasonable person would consider that there exists a real risk of significant harm to an individual as a result of the loss, unauthorized access or unauthorized disclosure" and (b) striking out clause (a) and substituting the following: "(a) the individual to whom the personal information relates."

As I was explaining, all I am doing in this amendment is that I am taking out that where a reasonable person would determine whether there is a real risk and whether there is significant harm and then disclose. All I am doing is to make the disclosure mandatory. Wherever there is a breach, Albertans have every right to know that their privacy was compromised. Whether there was a real risk of harm or not, that's up to Albertans to decide whether there was some harm caused to them by unauthorized disclosure or some kind of breach.

It leaves the provision intact. It says basically now, if the amendment goes through the House, that if an incident occurs where there's a loss of information, the public body must give notice without unreasonable delay of the incident to the following. Then we are saying the individual to whom the personal information relates.

If government really wants to put in a strong privacy protection, that's the charging provision, that's the provision, they should make it clear that wherever a public body will breach Alberta's privacy, they will notify them without reasonable delay. They will be honest about it. They will be open about it. They will be transparent about it and not put a legal test that where a reasonable person would consider there exists a real risk of significant harm to an individual and not make any disclosure, any notification to individuals impacted by this.

This change, if government accepts this, it will make this provision stronger. It will create stronger privacy protection. This is something the Information and Privacy Commissioner has highlighted in her submissions as well. This is something Albertans, university profs, academia have noted. I'm hoping that government would consider this amendment seriously and make notices for breaches of privacy mandatory in this province.

With that, I urge all members of the House who care about Albertans' privacy to vote for this amendment.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We move back to the main bill, Bill 33. Are there any members wishing to provide comment to Bill 33? Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do know that I have colleagues who would want to speak to this bill, but I thought that while I am on amendments, I might try one more time to make this bill a bit better. That's the concern my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora talked about. We want this Protection of Privacy Act to be the bill that deals with Albertans' privacy. As the commissioner noted, my colleague noted, this bill doesn't have a paramountcy clause, meaning that government can pass another bill tomorrow, authorize the collection of information, and do whatever they feel like with that information without the protection of this bill.

With that, I will move an amendment that will just add a paramountcy clause in this bill.

The Deputy Chair: The amendment will be known as amendment A4.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall moves that Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act, be amended by adding the following immediately after section 3:

Relationship to other acts

3.1 If a provision of this Act is inconsistent or in conflict with the provision of another enactment, the provision of this Act prevails unless

(a) another Act, or

(b) a regulation under this Act

expressly provides that the other Act or regulation, or a provision of it, prevails despite this Act.

As I mentioned in my opening comments, this amendment is making Bill 33 paramount to all other pieces of legislation dealing with Albertans' privacy unless this act or any regulation under this act provides otherwise. If government wants to be taken seriously, if government is serious about Albertans' privacy and they're not hiding anything, they should make this legislation paramount to all other pieces of legislation that exist or may pass through this Legislature so that Albertans can be assured that there is one piece of legislation that deals with their privacy and that's paramount to all other pieces of legislation.

I urge all members of the House who care about Albertans' privacy, please vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Members, we are back on the main bill, Bill 33. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to speak.

Member Loyola: Yes, indeed, Mr. Chair. Yes, indeed. When it comes to Bill 33, it seems that the government has just missed the mark completely. The minister – I would beg that he would reconsider a lot of, well, what he's put inside of this bill because, as we have seen from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in their own letter to the minister – yeah – they've essentially just missed the mark.

I know that my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has gone through a number of amendments here trying to at least appeal to the members on the other side of the House, appeal to a certain level of just reason, just to be rational about these things, but it seems that the members on the other side of the House – there's no other way to put it, Mr. Chair – are just hell bent on pushing through this piece of legislation as is without regard to Albertans and then especially to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

One of the issues, as has been highlighted by the commissioner, of course, is that the commissioner will lose all ability to compel documents, making it difficult to perform investigations. You know, Mr. Chair, I'm not one to kind of fall into conspiracy theories. When you see the facts before you, you start seeing what the government's all about. If it's going to be impossible for the commissioner to compel documents so that they can't do investigations, well, the immediate question after that, I guess, from all the members on this side of the House is: well, what are they trying to hide?

Of course, the members on the other side of the House try to play like: oh, we're the most transparent government in the history of Alberta. They can't be any more wrong. [interjections] Yes. With bill after bill after bill that they presented in this session, they have created opaqueness. They've created, like, this – and not only that. They get rid of agencies, boards, and commissions or try to dial them down as much as they possibly can and put more authority in the hands of the ministers when it comes to the bills that these gentlemen and ladies on the other side of the House have presented in their legislation. So, for me, it's absolutely essential that we have to ask ourselves: "Why? What are you trying to hide?" Mr. Chair, this is the question that Albertans are asking us.

The cabinet and Treasury Board are also going to be made more opaque by this bill, and it's no longer going to be possible to learn who and what has been advised to the cabinet and the Treasury Board. So we're not even going to know – they're going to bring in legislation between now and the next election. You know, I can only hope that after the next election Albertans can see how this government is when it comes to transparency, that Albertans really get a grip on what they've been trying to do, centralizing power in the hands of ministers. Right, Mr. Chair? [interjections]

Of course, through you, Mr. Chair. You know, I can hear the members on the other side beaking, but of course I'm talking to you, Mr. Chair. I'm not talking to them; I'm talking to you. It's really important that on this side of the House we really want things to be transparent. We're not going to know, when this bill passes, should it pass – and I assume it will because, you know, the members on the other side have a majority. What this bill will do is make it so that we won't even know what has been advised to cabinet and now the Treasury Board.

3:50

Now, I understand that the decisions that they make have their secrecy to them, but at least we should have the information and the data upon which they were making their decisions, Mr. Chair. At the very minimum we should have that. That's called transparency when you provide the data and the research that you've used in order to make the legislation that you're bringing forward into this House, and Albertans deserve that and no less.

The members on the other side of the House supporting this bill should take a good second look at it. The fact that the Privacy Commissioner won't have the ability to compel documents from this government so that they can't even perform investigations, well, that just makes it even worse. You know, the chairs of provincial agencies as defined in the Financial Administration Act that are also – well, of course, they're not subject to the act. But this could lead to more situations like – the members on this

side of the House remember that Canadian Energy Centre. You guys remember the Canadian Energy Centre? Yeah. Well, imagine all the money spent and the decisions made because of the Canadian Energy Centre. With that alone Albertans should be extremely concerned.

You know, Mr. Chair, I could go on and on and on when it comes to this government, this bill, and the fact that they are being anything but transparent. Anything but transparent. Albertans, let's make sure that we're paying close attention to the members on the other side of this House, because transparency is not what they're all about.

The Deputy Chair: Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act. Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will make one more attempt to make this bill a bit better. I have an amendment to move, and I have the copies.

The Deputy Chair: This is amendment A5.

The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to proceed.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act, be amended as follows:

(a) by striking out 26(1) and substituting the following:

Privacy impact assessment

26(1) Subject to section 27(1)(j), a public body must prepare and submit a privacy impact assessment to the commissioner in accordance with subsection (1.1).

(1.1) The commissioner may establish requirements with respect to the circumstances, manner and timeline in which a public body must prepare a privacy impact assessment.

(b) in section 27(1) by striking out clause (j) and substituting the following:

(j) request a public body conduct a privacy impact assessment or provide a copy of a privacy impact assessment to the commissioner.

(c) in section 62 by striking out clause (h) and substituting the following:

(h) prescribing the requirements with respect to a privacy impact assessment for the purpose of 26(2)(d).

In short, what this provision amendment is proposing to do is this. Government added a provision with respect to privacy impact assessments. They didn't make them mandatory. Two, they also said that they will be only shared by the commissioner in prescribed circumstances. All we are saying is that privacy impact assessments are good tools. The commissioner should have a proper role in it. Government should not be assigning themselves homework and checking it by themselves. That's why we have an independent officer of the Legislature. That's what it's doing, essentially, making the privacy impact assessment process better and involving the commissioner to review it and provide feedback on that. Government also, unless they have that, should not start, I guess, making plans without getting approval from the commissioner or getting comments on their privacy impact assessment. This will make this privacy impact assessment process better. This will give the commissioner the role that they should have in this process.

With that, I urge all members of the House to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Members, amendment A5. Any others wishing to comment on amendment A5?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 33. Any members wishing to provide comment on Bill 33?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 33 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That's carried.

Bill 35 All-season Resorts Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to Bill 35? The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and oppose Bill 35. I'm so glad to hear that my friend the Minister for Tourism and Sport is excited to hear my comments, and I certainly hope that I don't let him down. I couldn't stand leaving this place for the Christmas season knowing that I had disappointed him so greatly.

I oppose this bill for three reasons, Mr. Chair. First of all, Bill 35 is another attempt by the UCP to sell off and close down Alberta's parks. Secondly, this bill destroys the process for creating big projects and creates potential for political interference. I certainly wouldn't want my friend the Minister for Tourism and Sport to get himself into trouble. And, finally, these all-season resorts that the government is promoting are nothing but playgrounds for the wealthy, that will prevent Albertans from enjoying their own backyards.

First of all, on the first point, that this bill sells off or closes down Alberta parks. I, of course, direct all members' attention to section 6(3). Interestingly enough, it says,

(3) No area of public land shall be designated as an all-season resort area if that land is

(a) a provincial park or provincial recreation area . . .

But then you go to subsection (4), and it says,

(4) For greater certainty, an area of public land referred to in subsection (3) . . . may be designated as an all-season resort area after

(a) the Lieutenant Governor in Council rescinds the designation of the land

(i) as a provincial park or provincial recreation area under the Provincial Parks Act.

It's obvious to anybody who has eyes to see that this is again the UCP trying to sell off Albertans' parks.

We know that the first attempt came in February of 2020, when the then minister of environment released a list of hundreds of parks and recreational areas that he intended to sell off or close down. After months of telling people that that actually wasn't the plan, even though that was their expressly stated plan, they backed off because they were subject to so much public backlash against this proposal. But instead of dropping this terrible idea that Albertans are opposed to, they've merely regrouped and tried again. We know that the Ministry of Forestry and Parks has actually gone through and dedesignated a bunch of the parks and recreational areas that were on the original list that was published by the minister of environment and parks in February of 2020.

4:00

But that wasn't enough, Mr. Chair. I guess we're seeing that the UCP has a policy of no parks left behind, and now this government

is giving itself the power to sell off or close down any other parks that they want to turn into these all-season resorts. You know, we here in the Alberta NDP pride ourselves on our record on parks. My former colleague Shannon Phillips created a significant gift to the people of Alberta when she designated the Castle provincial park and the Castle wilderness area for the people in southwestern Alberta. We also created the largest protected area of boreal forest in the world when we expanded parks protections in northern Alberta.

On top of that, I was proud, in my last term, to introduce a private member's bill that would have required the government to come to the Legislature to seek permission from all members before they tried to sell off or close down provincial parks. Unfortunately, that bill was defeated by the members opposite, and at the time they stated that: "Oh, we don't have any intention of selling or closing down provincial parks. We've heard loudly and clearly from the people of Alberta that that's not what they want, and they can trust us that their parks are in good hands, and they don't need to pass this legislation because parks are adequately protected as is." Mr. Chair, we know that nothing is further from the truth, and Bill 35 is evidence to the fact that the UCP is continuing to wage its war on parks.

Secondly, Mr. Chair, this bill overrides the well-established processes for developing big projects on public lands in Alberta. You know, if you want to drill a well, cut down a tree, dig a hole in the ground, there are well-established processes that have been in place for many, many years, and Alberta prides itself on doing an excellent job of regulating these activities so that when activities are in the public interest, they can proceed in an environmentally sensitive manner. Now, I have many quibbles with the lack of enforcement, turning a blind eye to many of the environmental infractions that go on on public land, but by and large we have a system that works reasonably well. It strikes a reasonable balance between protecting the public interest, protecting environmental interests, and allowing economic development to go ahead.

But this government seems to think that those processes don't work well for them, because they're intent on treating Alberta's public lands like it's their own playground and they get to decide when and how their friends get to take advantage of public lands, and they push Albertans out of the process entirely. Bill 35 sets up a process where the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, the Public Lands Act, all of the land-use plans are thrown out the window, and the minister is entirely in charge of what legislation applies, which sections of those legislation applies, or even if they apply at all.

Moreover, just to make sure that nobody can question the minister's decision, they're actually excluding those decisions from judicial review, which is an extraordinary measure. I can't imagine why any government would want to remove the power of the people to take this government to court, to have their decisions reviewed by a court, other than the fact that we know that they're terrified of scrutiny. Openness and transparency are something that they are allergic to, Mr. Chair, and we see it time and time again, and we're seeing it here again in Bill 35.

What this bill gives the minister now is almost complete political control over the development of all-seasons resorts and the rules that apply to those developments. So if the minister, you know, has a good friend who is interested in developing an all-seasons resort and that good friend happens to buy him tickets to an Oilers game during the playoffs, well, all of a sudden the way will be paved for the minister to allow that all-seasons resort to be developed. We know that this current minister is not above taking tickets from people who have potential interests in what the government is doing.

The minister himself has gone on record saying that he took tickets to an Oilers game earlier this year; wouldn't tell us who it is. Maybe it is actually one of these all-seasons resource developers;

the people of Alberta would like to know. We have a lot of opportunity here in Committee of the Whole for the minister to stand up and come clean with the people of Alberta and at least tell us who bought him that ticket and let us know whether or not it was somebody who has an interest in developing one of these all-seasons resorts. But, apparently, the UCP is fine with that process, and we will see nothing but more of these lavish gifts lavished on ministers with the hope of paving the way for developments that their friends want.

Finally, Mr. Chair, my final point is that these kinds of all-seasons resorts are not necessarily the kinds of economic development that the people of Alberta want to see in our province. We know that all-seasons resorts cater to extremely wealthy individuals, and we know that the people who are employed in these types of all-seasons resorts don't make very high wages and that the communities where these all-seasons resorts are located generally don't see the benefits of the economic development. What we are going to see is that provincial parks and other valued public lands are now taken away from the people of Alberta for their free enjoyment and given to the minister's friends and wealthy outsiders to enjoy at a very, very high price. Well, nobody benefits.

So for all of those reasons, I urge my friends here in the House to vote down this bill.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen to speak.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to begin my remarks on Bill 35 by stating unequivocally that this is a province that I love. With the exception of a few years spent between Quebec and Saskatchewan, Alberta has been my home for the better part of my life. It's been the place where my parents took my brother and I camping. We went to Jasper; we went to Banff; we went to Rocky; we went to all those places in between. It's been where my parents took my kids camping for the first time. It's been where I got to take my own kids down to Drumheller, driving my lovely old Chevy Corsica that scraped the bottom of the road.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

I myself had an opportunity when I was much, much younger, though this was in B.C., to work, indeed, in the tourism sector and very much enjoyed that summer spent there and currently have a number of friends whose family members are involved in the tourism sector. This is the place that they want to be. They love the sector, they love contributing, but they also see the limitations, and they do have some worries about not only their own selves and where it will land them in the future but also what the development that they are now kind of a part of—whether or not that development will actually be sustainable and sustainable in a good way.

I also know, Madam Chair, that Albertans want to make sure that if there are changes—and these are broad, sweeping changes we're talking about with this act—those changes have been considered thoughtfully and appropriately and carefully and that there has been a plethora of voices who have had their chance to be heard. Albertans want to make sure that things are done correctly and in the right way, the best way possible. Albertans want to make sure that the effects of any of these long-lasting changes, what it is we'll be leaving for our children, what it is we'll be leaving for the seven generations to come, will be appropriate and will truly be the best as stewards of this land. These are the sorts of things that I know Albertans think about.

4:10

As a result, there are a number of concerns that come to mind with the tabling of this bill, Bill 35. As I mentioned before, I

completely understand some of the economic numbers that have been thrown around, the billions of dollars a year, potential diversification of our economy. But, again, will that be sustainable and will it be sustained in the right way? Will we be going forward in the right way as stewards of this land?

There are gaps in the legislation that's before us. To begin with, as with many of the bills that we have seen brought forth from this government, it leaves much of the decision-making in the hands of one person. Not just a small group of people but one person. All seems to funnel through that particular one person, the job of the minister. I'm not entirely sure that so many of the decisions that will need to be made, as these are inherently complex proposals, should land only on that minister's desk. There seems to be an awful lot of complexity, and I know that previous speakers on this side have talked about the level of complexity that's involved, the level of expertise that's involved and that would be expected when making decisions of such import.

Beyond all of that, of course, there's the need, the requirement, the duty to consult based upon our Constitution of this land. I don't see anything in this bill, the way it's stated right now, about that duty to consult about hunting, harvesting, fishing, and medicine rights of Indigenous peoples. I don't see that those rights are inherently included here.

It's not only about that, of course. It's about wildlife. It's about conservation. It's about regional plans. It's about land-use planning. I very much worry, Madam Chair, about many of those long-term ramifications, the encroachment of what might now be public land, and suddenly, inadvertently, perhaps haphazardly because of the way decisions might be made, it becomes private land instead, and then all of those things that my children and my parents and I enjoyed will no longer be available for us to enjoy.

Now, in terms of whose voice actually gets to be heard when any of these decisions that are going to have to be made get made, I certainly have many, many concerns about this. As I mentioned, it's a complex process. We know that there's an expectation of expertise that's required when such complexity is at stake. We know we have to consider things that come from us in the land of agriculture, municipalities, local community groups, wildlife management, safety for both wildlife and people. Where's the consultation? We certainly haven't heard anything other than: we've done lots of consultation. There is nothing to give us any indication of what that consultation actually was and where it might lead into the future.

I wonder about the necessity to work with municipalities as well, who should have a voice in any of these developments that might come to fruition. One might assume they've been part of the process so far, but, again, we don't know. I have learned over the years because, as I was often fond of saying to my students, I'm old and ancient, and one should never make assumptions. You should never assume that things have been done or that they will be done. Things really do need to be codified and things really do need to be written down, and the things that need to be codified and written down are not found in this document.

If an all-season resort is approved, groups who have opposed the development under this bill do not it seems have the ability to make any sort of judicial appeal. This impacts conservationists, community groups, ecologists, environmental groups, and it also absolutely impacts Métis settlements and First Nations. All-season resort developers will have the ability to appeal to the Court of Appeal with due cause if their applications are not approved, and that's fabulous, but nobody else gets that chance, and I wonder why this particular deck is so completely stacked.

I'm sure there will be questions about infrastructure, buildings that need to be built, roads that need to be upgraded, which small businesses will be located there, which medium-sized businesses

will be there. I'm sure that all those folks would love to have a say. Again, coming back to the question of consultation. Again, curious as to why so many of the folks who will undoubtedly be impacted by any such development have suddenly lost their voice. Why make it exceptionally difficult for those folks to say what they need to say and then to appeal if they don't like the decision?

Not only that; I have concerns about the amount of workforce and what the conditions of work might be. As my colleague just a few minutes ago talked about, many of these jobs that are in the tourism industry end up being minimum-wage jobs. Whether or not you see a minimum-wage job as kind of an entrée to a job that might be life sustaining, family sustaining isn't the point. The point is that when you look at the median incomes of many of these resort communities that are in B.C. right now – thankfully, there's an awful lot of data about those resort communities – you find that the median income even in a place like Whistler, which we know has been around for a number of years now, is around \$40,000 a year. That means that there's a bit of a problem that these jobs in fact aren't necessarily quality-of-life-sustaining jobs. That's a problem.

If we're going to be expecting that 100,000 more people are going to be working in these jobs, we want them to devote their lives not only just to the job and to their career, but we want them to have a life in this new community in which they are living and working. If they are not earning enough money to sustain that life, then we've already set them up for failure before they've even begun.

Not only that, when we think about the 100,000 extra people, we know that we're going to need a diversity of expertise. That means that we need to be thinking about things like apprenticeships. Which apprenticeships might we need to have a few extra seats for, and is that work already started? If it hasn't started already, we are already behind.

It also means that we need to be thinking about our K to 12 education and programs like the registered apprenticeship program. We need to be talking to kids already about this new booming sector that might be coming. It also means that we need to be talking about career pathways.

We need to be talking as well to our construction brothers and sisters to make sure there will be construction brothers and sisters to do the building that will be required. I wonder, given the lack of consultation thus far and given the lack of consultation that seems to be kind of a part of the fabric of this government, if there have been any discussions with this particular group. Where are these construction jobs going to come from? Where are the people who are going to be doing this work coming from? Will they be coming from parts outside and come and do the job and then go away, or will they be from Alberta? Will they be able, again, to have that life-sustaining, family-sustaining job here in communities that they love?

What is this government doing to make the people want to come and work in these beautiful spaces? What conditions is this government beginning to help set to ensure that people will not only be interested in these jobs, in living in these places, in contributing to these new, developing local economies? What's the actual workforce strategy? What thought has gone into the planning thus far? What conversations have happened with stakeholders and which stakeholders?

As I mentioned earlier, Madam Chair, I do indeed love this province. I like the fact that I've lived a fairly privileged life and I've been able to travel through most of the province. I want people to be able to have that same experience. But I also want to make sure that when we're discussing such a broadly based thing, we do it in the right way, that we do it with sustainability in mind and we

do it making sure that the voices of all Albertans are heard, not just a tiny few.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to Bill 35?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 35 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:19 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

4:20

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For:

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

Against:

Batten	Ellingson	Metz
Boparai	Elmeligi	Sabir
Calahoo	Stonehouse	Hoffman
Dach	Irwin	Schmidt
Deol	Kayande	Shepherd
Eggen	Loyola	Wright, P.

Totals:	For – 41	Against – 17
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[The clauses of Bill 35 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report bills 33 and 35.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 35. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 33. I wish to table copies of all amendments

considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 33 Protection of Privacy Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act.

Madam Speaker, we've had a lot of discussion on this bill over the last number of weeks. I appreciate the time that the members have put into this. It's some important legislation. But before we get into this too much further, I do want to just say a bit of a thank you to some of the hard-working civil servants who had a hand in helping to write this bill. I want to thank Maureen Towle, who is assistant deputy minister; Hilary Faulkner, who's our executive director; Meredith Giel, executive director; also Meghan Smith, who is a manager from the team. I also want to thank two folks from Legislative Counsel, Jamie Speer and Lara Draper.

[The Speaker in the chair]

They worked really hard on this, Mr. Speaker. I want to especially say, you know, that Jamie Speer was telling me that he had worked on this bill several times in his career, and every single one of those times that work fell flat and never actually made it to this Chamber and never made it to the finish line. So I want to say a special thank you to Jamie for your perseverance. The work that you are doing here today I think is closer now than ever before to bringing much-needed modernizations to our privacy legislation for public bodies.

Mr. Speaker, you know, my custom on bills that I am a sponsor of is that I try to look at some of the comments from the opposition and, wherever possible, find some ways to address their concerns, to highlight that we've listened, that we've heard, and wherever needed, to clarify and sometimes even correct the record. So let me take a few minutes to do that here. I don't think we're going to need a long time, but I do think it is important to go through this exercise.

Mr. Speaker, I note some of the comments from the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall talking about how he disputed the fact that there would be mandatory breach notifications. The mandatory breach notifications are an important provision that we know the Privacy Commissioner wanted us to bring forward, and it's an important principle to say that if there has been a breach that is going to cause a risk of significant harm to an individual, that individual in Alberta needs to know about it. We as a government believe that that's the case, and that's why we are making it law that that will be the case.

Mr. Speaker, there were some concerns that he raised about common or integrated programs and that the bill doesn't have sufficient guardrails for protecting data in common or integrated programs. Nothing could be further from the truth. The whole point is to say that right now there are issues where folks in one government department, like Health, and another government department, like Seniors, Community and Social Services, are trying to help the same

Albertan, and they need the information that each other has, but they're not allowed to tell each other. We're all about giving the best result to Albertans. We're all about making sure the right information is in the right hands at the right time to deliver the best possible service, and that's what these provisions in Bill 33 are all about on the common and integrated programs. We want to give the best possible service to Albertans, and we want the right information in the right hands. What we are doing with this legislation is going to make sure that happens.

Guess what, Mr. Speaker? Of course, there's going to need to be some fleshing out of more details in the regulations. That's the way our system works. You have the enabling legislation that outlines the vision and the high-level direction and strategy of what we're trying to accomplish, and then the regulations backfill that and fill in the rest of the details. We're going to carefully craft those regulations in significant consultation with the Privacy Commissioner to make sure we get those right. I'm confident that many of the concerns that the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall raised are, essentially, either incorrect or will be addressed in regulation.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Sherwood Park raised a number of concerns. Well, first of all, he made this claim that the government's promise not to sell citizens' information is seen as insufficient. I don't know if he's even read the bill. We felt it was important that – we already don't sell Albertans' information. Let me be perfectly clear. We felt so strongly that we shouldn't ever do that, so let's put it into legislation. What more stronger of a protection can Albertans expect than for there to be explicit prohibition in legislation against the practice of selling personal information? I think perhaps the Member for Sherwood Park maybe has misunderstood the bill, and I encourage him to read it again.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, he also mentions that Bill 33 does not apply to medical records or information held by private companies: well, of course. We have three types of privacy legislation. We have what is now being considered under Bill 33, which is the public body privacy legislation, and then we have the private-sector privacy legislation, which is called PIPA in short form, and then we have the Health Information Act for the health information. Of course Bill 33 does not apply to those other two pieces of legislation, but I can assure all Albertans through you that we are committed as a government to having the strongest privacy protections in the country and the strictest penalties for privacy violation.

We have been perfectly clear since we launched our privacy management framework and our data ethics framework in January of this year that we are committed to the strongest protections and strictest penalties. We have a multistage series of initiatives that will lead us to that future of strongest protections and strictest penalties, and now Bill 33 is the next stage of that.

We've also, of course, announced our online privacy portal, that's coming very soon, Mr. Speaker, that will give Albertans access to see what information government and public bodies have in the course of delivering services to citizens. They will even be able to file an online complaint immediately through the convenience of their mobile phone, if they wish.

Mr. Speaker, we are taking more steps than the former government, the NDP government ever did to strengthen privacy protections and to bring about more transparency and to put Albertans more in control of their information and how they interact with their government.

Guess what, Mr. Speaker? We have an all-party committee – the NDP know about it because they sit on this committee – that is looking at PIPA, on the private-sector privacy legislation. That committee is going to be bringing forward recommendations to my department very soon. I look forward to seeing those

recommendations. We've slated a lot of time in 2025 to do that important work, to re-evaluate the PIPA legislation and to bring forward recommendations on further strengthening that.

Mr. Speaker, this is part of our plan, that we have been clear to Albertans right from the start: we will ensure you have the strongest protections and the strictest penalties in the country. That is our commitment to you. I just wish the NDP would pay attention to the message that we're providing to Albertans instead of trying to provide misinformation.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Sherwood Park said things like: privacy is crucial for "human dignity, safety, and self-determination"; it enables other human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination; that protecting privacy is foundational for a democratic society. Look, these are all great things to say, but if the NDP really cared about privacy, why is it that they spent four years not touching privacy policy that clearly was out of date, that needed to be updated? That's why we're here today.

If they really believe this, they could have focused on privacy modernization when they were in government, but for four years they didn't touch it once, Mr. Speaker. Instead, what did they focus on? They focused on creating the carbon tax, the first carbon tax in Canada, which created incredible hardship on Albertans and ultimately paved the way for Justin Trudeau to make it a national program.

They like to talk about affordability, Mr. Speaker. They imposed the single biggest tax hike in Alberta history, and they never even campaigned on it. They increased personal income taxes. They wasted \$3.7 billion on a foiled crude-by-rail debacle, wasting tons of taxpayer dollars and getting almost no additional capacity to global markets. Let's all think back to Bill 6, the assault on the family farmers.

These are the things that they focused on. They never touched privacy legislation. It wasn't important to them, so I don't really take seriously all of their waxing and waning of all these nice statements. There's nothing behind it, Mr. Speaker.

Instead, what you have on this side of the House is a government that is focused on modernizing privacy legislation because it is necessary. It's important. We value the privacy of Albertans. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? We're well on our way to having the strongest protections in the country and the strictest penalties in the country.

Mr. Speaker, to wrap up, we are aware that the NDP highlighted that the OIPC has highlighted some recommendations of what they would like to see as next steps. Let me just clarify for everybody's benefit how involved the OIPC was in the process of developing this legislation. We met with the OIPC almost a year ago to signal: "Guess what? We're working on modernizing privacy legislation. We know this is important to you. It's important to us, too. We want you to have early and often access to the process so you can provide input at every stage of development." We have worked hard to make sure that as much as possible of her feedback has been incorporated.

Now, of course, we're going to carefully look through her recommendations that have come since introducing this bill. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? We are confident that the vast majority of those recommendations will be addressed through the regulations. As I said before, it is very common in our system. You have the enabling legislation that is the broad brush strokes and the key strategic direction, and then the details are ironed out in the regulations.

You know what I said to the Privacy Commissioner? I said, "As we begin work on these regulations, we want you to be involved every step of the way. You are going to have access to our team, and you are going to have a steady stream of input into that process," because we value the Privacy Commissioner's input.

The regulations are the appropriate tool to provide that additional clarity. The OIPC will be involved extensively in that process. We look forward to beginning that work, but before that work begins, Mr. Speaker, we will need to pass this legislation, and I encourage all members of this House to support this legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Technology and Innovation has moved third reading of Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act. Is there anyone else wishing to add comments or add to the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to get up and correct the record. The Minister of Technology and Innovation complained that we didn't fix everything in four years when we were in government. There were 44 years of Conservative government mess. It wasn't possible, but we did try our best.

Second thing. The Minister of Technology and Innovation thanked many in the public service who worked on this bill and ignored, omitted thanking the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who provided a very useful, thoughtful critique of this bill.

The minister also claimed that things I said were either incorrect or will be addressed in the regulation, which makes me think that the minister also didn't read his legislation, just like the minister of service Alberta.

The minister said that I said that there will be no mandatory breach reporting, and the minister said that nothing can be further from the truth. Mr. Speaker, I can read section 10 again for the benefit of the minister.

If an incident occurs involving the loss of, unauthorized access to or unauthorized disclosure of personal information in the custody or under the control of a public body where a reasonable person would consider that there exists a real risk of significant harm to an individual as a result of the loss . . . the public body must give notice, without unreasonable delay.

So there is a legal test, quite complicated, high bar. The public body has to think that if a reasonable person would think that there is a significant risk for significant harm because of that loss of, unauthorized disclosure or access to information . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: It's only then that the public body is required to inform the individual and inform the commissioner.

There is no mandatory breach reporting requirement in this bill. Even the previous bill had a stronger provision than this, so I strongly suggest that the Minister of Technology and Innovation read this bill or get some help from somebody. If not, the commissioner quite helpfully has provided a plain language interpretation of this provision, so they should refer to those provisions.

Third thing. I want to say that provisions with respect to common or integrated programs are good provisions, but there are no guardrails. Again, the minister used the words, and I quote: nothing can be further from the truth. The minister should tell that to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner because she included that there are no guardrails. These provisions are good. We need that, but we need to have stronger guardrails there. So that's there. The minister was not completely correct there, either.

4:40

What they are doing is they are creating these new provisions, adding these new provisions about common or integrated programs, and they are prescribing in regulation when and where privacy impact assessment will be required, when they will be required to report it to the commissioner. We suggested that there should be

mandatory breach reporting. There should be mandatory privacy impact assessment reporting to the commissioner, and the commissioner should be involved in this process where we are embarking on these new, I guess, program provisions.

In short, this bill falls far short. The government doesn't have to take our word for it; the government should read the letter that the Information and Privacy Commissioner sent to the minister and at least listen to them. I, again, thank the Information and Privacy Commissioner for speaking truth to power and telling this government to go to the drawing board and rewrite this bill because this is weakening privacy protection. This is serving government interests because the government is adding exemptions for political staffers. The government is not extending privacy protection to the data that exists between political staffers and ministers of the Crown. This is weakening Alberta's privacy protection. So for the bare minimum they should get to the drawing board, listen to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and take Alberta's privacy seriously.

I urge all members of this House: if they believe that Albertans have a right to strong privacy protections, they should vote against this bill and send a message to this government that they need to do a better job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Would any other member wish to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 33, the Protection of Privacy Act—you know, I enjoyed learning a little bit more about this topic, to be honest. In doing so, I reviewed the recommendations from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

There are some good things in this bill, and I really want to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Bhullar-McCall because . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Calgary.

Dr. Elmeligi: Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Sorry.

The many, many amendments that he has proposed to this bill and to Bill 34 also are really just an effort to make this bill better. We're not saying that the bill is fatally flawed like some of the other bills we've debated in the House this session, but that this bill could be strengthened. It's unfortunate that the members opposite were not open to considering how those amendments could make the bill stronger.

There are good things in the bill, like I said, like the prohibition of sale of personal information in section 11, the substantial fines for offences committed under the Protection of Privacy Act, the requirement for public bodies to implement privacy management programs and conduct privacy impact assessments. All of these things are good.

One of the things that did strike me, however, Mr. Speaker: why were bills 33 and 34 separated? I'm still kind of struggling a little bit with that. In particular, I'm struggling with that in relation to paramountcy. My colleague did mention paramountcy in regard to this bill. Bill 33 does not contain a paramountcy clause, but Bill 34 does, and this means that if there is a conflict between this act and any other act, it's not clear which act sets the direction. If it's the other act, it actually means that this act cannot provide the same privacy protection as Bill 34 or the former FOIP Act did.

That creates space for information to be collected or disclosed in a way that does not conform with its original intent. All that does, Mr. Speaker, is open up risk in regard to private information. So it's not clear to me why a paramountcy clause was not included in this act. Most privacy laws in Canada do contain a paramountcy clause, and this act is weakened without one. That's why one of the

amendments suggested was to include a paramountcy clause. It's kind of funny how it would have just made the act better, as I said.

The online world has really changed how we view privacy and sharing, so it is important that this bill be updated, and I am in support of that. But with this online world that we live in now, it's easier for information to be integrated within systems, and it's also really easy, Mr. Speaker, for people not to truly understand or comprehend how their information is being collected, gathered, collated, and disseminated. So having some oversight that better defines how this online information is going to be integrated into systems, how Albertans understand the risks associated with that, and how those risks are mitigated is something that I look forward to being in the regulations associated with this act, since they are not in this act. I will say that the failure to establish these controls and oversight may threaten the privacy rights of Albertans and risk failure of these kinds of projects. I hope that that's something that will be included in the regulations.

One section that I find particularly concerning is the section around excluded personal information, sections 3(1)(s) and (t), where ministers can process or hold records that should be protected by PIPA or the privacy information act. Excluding these records is contrary to the act, and I'm not quite sure why these clauses were included or phrased in that way. These clauses mean that a member of Executive Council or a minister may collect, use, or disclose personal information for any purpose and communicate that same information to a political staffer and is not required to protect it. As we have talked about with Bill 34, we also can no longer FOIP those political staffers. It starts to paint a picture for me, Mr. Speaker, where ministers and political staffers can be collecting and discussing personal information of Albertans, and Albertans don't even have an opportunity to understand how their personal information is being discussed in that realm. That, I think, is highly concerning for me, and I don't think that Executive Council should have that ability.

The other piece I'll just quickly refer to is this idea of disclosure in the best interests of a minor. Authority to disclose personal information without consent of a minor is particularly troubling. Minors who have the capacity to decide for themselves about if their information should be disclosed should be part of those conversations. We teach our kids to think about this with online safety. I spent many hours with my girls talking about keeping their personal information safe while being online. I spent a lot of time talking about this, and it seems to me that it's very concerning that then the government puts a clause in a bill that doesn't necessarily require the consent of minors for gathering and sharing their information.

It is also very unclear to me who defines what is in the best interest of minors, as we have seen with bills 27 and 29 and 26. The political interference in defining what is best for our minors is not always left up to parents, so I worry about that in the context of this bill as well. I just worry about what it means for our kids and who's actually responsible for them. Hopefully, it's the parents and not the minister's office.

With that, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak to this bill, Bill 33, Protection of Privacy Act.

After spending 35 years as a physician, protecting privacy is something that is, of course, critical. Of course, I recognize that the Health Information Act is separate from this act, but it makes protection of personal information of all sorts an automatic thing that is just in my head all the time about being very careful about what gets disclosed to anyone about anything. Absolutely, I agree

that we have needed updates to our privacy act for a long, long time and protection of privacy is a very important matter. The existing legislation definitely is outdated.

4:50

There are, however, a few things in this act that bring me some concern. First, in section 10, which addresses compromised data, the head of a public body is only obligated to report this to a commissioner and the impacted individuals if a reasonable person would consider there could be a real risk of significant harm to the individual. But we all know that harm to one person is not harm to another person; some people need a much greater degree of protection of their privacy for a wide variety of reasons. So I do not see that that bar is reasonable. If there is a breach, it should be recognized as a breach. Why is this threshold so high in this legislation? Also, I really feel that the commissioner should automatically be involved if there is a breach of data regarding a person.

One of the other things is that the commissioner really will have very limited oversight regarding the privacy management programs and privacy impact assessments, and I do not believe that this should be left up to the perhaps 1,200 public bodies. We need to have experts that can oversee the plans rather than having each public body perhaps believe they know what they're talking about but not necessarily be there with state of the art. Also, it adds red tape by asking a person to first complain to the public body before making a complaint directly to a commissioner. I would object to this clause. I think that the complaint should be able to go to the commissioner.

I'm also concerned about the timeline of investigations being doubled from 90 days to 180 days. I recognize that there are increases in the number of requests, so why are we not empowering more staff to do the investigations – we have a larger population; there are increased requests – rather than requiring the same people to do the investigations and just take longer and build up a waiting list, as we are doing day after day after day in the health care system by not providing more people and supporting more people to do the work that needs to be done? Also, this bill gives the commissioner the ability to discontinue inquiries. It's very unclear how that decision will be made, so I feel that there needs to be a little bit more of a check on that decision-making power.

Now, there's something else that I don't believe anyone has spoken to. That is the fact that after data has been used by a public body for the reasons it was collected, it will be perhaps no longer needed by that public body. It gets turned into nonpersonal data, and section 23 of this act says that "a public body may disclose non-personal data created under section 21," which allowed the creation, "to another public body for any purpose, and to a person other than a public body" under certain circumstances, including that it's to be used for research and analysis.

Now, we are in the world of artificial intelligence, and nonpersonal data is increasingly discoverable. It is much easier today than it would have been 20 years ago to identify who that person is that lives in postal code T3-whatever and has five children of certain ages that went to a certain school even though their name and exact address and other information may be removed to make it nonidentifiable. This is something that I really feel is a problem in that this data can be given to anyone. There are no real limits on who could get that data. This is something that the public really needs to be aware of.

I would add that to my comments about this bill. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Speaker: The hon. member – seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate. That appears to have been waived.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:56 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

5:00

Against the motion:

Batten	Ellingson	Metz
Boparai	Elmeligi	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoffman	Schmidt
Dach	Irwin	Shepherd
Deol	Kayande	Wright, P.
Eggen	Loyola	

Totals:	For – 44	Against – 17
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[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

Bill 34 Access to Information Act

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 34.

I'd just like to hit a couple of the high notes about this bill so that we know what we're talking about. First of all, this bill is essentially modernizing outdated and aging legislation, and all the OIPCs across the country asked every province in the country to update their FOIP laws. The FOIP laws in this province are so old you might have downloaded them onto a floppy disk from your Commodore 64. There are a couple of you that remember that, a few that don't.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This is outdated legislation, Madam Speaker, and we are simply updating it to reflect the digital world that we live in. To be clear, every OIPC across the country asked us to do this, and in fact we were the last in the country to do it. Every other province has updated their FOIP laws. We took a little longer to do it because, quite frankly, we wanted to get it done right.

Right now – and I don't want to presuppose the outcome of the vote that's coming up – if we pass third reading on this bill, we will have FOIP laws that will be aligned along jurisdictional lines. Don't get me wrong. Every province is a little bit different, but at the end of the day there will be no light between us when it comes to

offering access to information for Albertans. We'll be similar to other provinces, and we'll be similar to the feds, Madam Speaker.

There have been some questions about political staff that have come up. I just want to be clear. There's nothing new here. Political staff have always been exempt, Madam Speaker; it just hasn't been clear. So we are providing the clarity in legislation so that it's clear to everybody that political staff are exempt because, at the end of the day, FOIP is about access to government records. FOIP is not about access to political conversations. Now, I can understand the zeal on the part of the other side. They would love to FOIP political conversations, but those are not government records. Government records will be available to Albertans; political conversations are exempt. They always have been. There's nothing new there.

Something that I'm particularly proud of, Madam Speaker, is the proactive disclosure that we're putting forward. We have proactive disclosure right now, but it's not very clear, and it's implemented a little differently, depending on the public body. Here's the thing. We know that there are certain things that Albertans are just going to request routinely. If we know that, why would we make them pay \$25 for a FOIP request and then wait 30 days to get the information? Let's just proactively disclose the information now. This is important. We know that Alberta is the most freedom-loving jurisdiction in Canada if not North America, and we embrace openness, we embrace transparency, and proactive disclosure is part of increased openness and transparency, and we believe that reflects good governance.

Now, Madam Speaker, let's address the commentary from the members opposite over the last few weeks. While they are quick to criticize the bill, let's be clear. They barely understand it. I'm not even sure if they read it. Now, what we saw tonight was quite interesting. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall stood up to discuss Bill 33, but he spent just as much time talking about Bill 34. It was odd and kept getting them confused, but if that wasn't bad enough, then Edmonton-Ellerslie stood up, and Edmonton-Ellerslie spent 20 minutes talking about Bill 34 while we were debating Bill 33. You can't make this stuff up. A member, an elected official, spent 20 minutes in this House, in this House of democracy, and spent 20 minutes debating the wrong bill. Where is the press gallery? This is absolutely outrageous, that an elected official would spend 20 minutes debating the wrong bill in this House. That's something that, quite frankly, perhaps he should resign. In fact, if he does, it would be a good opportunity for his leader to run in that riding.

Now, we know that's not going to happen, and the reason it's not going to happen is because we know why their leader is not running. It's because he's read the polls. You know, he can't win, so he's waiting until the polls change, Madam Speaker. We could be waiting a while.

Mr. Shepherd: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly we exercise a broad degree of latitude in our debate, but I would say, under 23(b), I believe, speaking to something that is off the topic, there is nothing even remotely connected with the leader of the Alberta NDP as a party, whether or not he has a seat in this House, and the bill in front of the House. I would just simply ask that the minister return to the topic at hand.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I believe the member, the hon. minister, began his comments by referencing what members of the opposition were referring to in relation to this particular bill, so he was talking about this particular bill and the

debate that took place involving members of this Assembly. I cannot think of anything more relevant than speaking on the bill before this Assembly and referencing the debate that took place in this House. This is clearly not a point of order, and I hope that you would agree with us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I think maybe all members might agree that the hon. minister was probably not speaking directly to the bill at the time of which the point of order was called, but I'm certain he will do so now and has the opportunity at this very moment.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In fact, we will talk about Bill 34, even if they don't want to. Instead of engaging with the substance of the legislation, which includes changing the game on proactive disclosure, they defaulted to vague talking points and surface-level objections when they did discuss the bill. They were so offside on Bill 34 and Bill 33 and how they came together, in the two weeks we spent discussing Bill 34, they only asked me one question in question period. I'm not sure how I interpret that. Do they just agree with Bill 34? They have nothing to ask me? Perhaps they just didn't read it? It's unclear to me, but I would encourage them to use question period to discuss bills that are before this House.

Their lack of understanding mirrors their actions when they were in government. How could we expect input from a party that treated FOIP like a loophole and dodged accountability? The irony is not lost on me, Madam Speaker. Once again, let's be clear. This bill isn't just about catching up; it's about learning from the past. Unfortunately, the record of the previous NDP government on transparency gives us all the more reason to ensure that this legislation is airtight. Under their administration FOIP became a tool for obstruction rather than transparency.

I gave a few examples last night, but let's review some of those examples of how the opposition treated FOIP. Let's start with the 800,000 e-mails that they deleted in their first year of government. Madam Speaker, this is unbelievable, to delete 800,000 e-mails in the first year. You've got to wonder how long it must have taken for them to do that. In fact, it was such a big job that they had to pay everybody gift cards to do it. This is unheard of, for a sitting government to pay staffers gift cards to delete e-mails. You've got to wonder: what did those e-mails say? What were they hiding? What were they covering up? That was outrageous.

5:10

An Hon. Member: We should get Tommy Dang to find out.

Mr. Nally: Well, listen, yeah. Absolutely. That's not lost on us. The other side had an ethics critic that actually hacked into the AHS website, Madam Speaker, to access health records. That was the NDP ethics critic. So I guess it's all par for the course.

I'd like to reference Jill Clayton. In fact, I'll ask you, Madam Speaker. Jill Clayton was the prior information and privacy officer. Would you be interested in knowing what she had to say on the NDP? Would the rest of the House be interested in knowing?

Some Hon. Members: Yeah.

Mr. Nally: Okay. All right. You convinced me.

Madam Speaker, Jill Clayton, the information and privacy officer under the NDP, said that the NDP had no respect for FOIP,

no respect whatsoever. That's because they meddled, and that's because they interfered.

Now, the NDP, when they were in government, also were criticized by the OIPC for underfunding the office. They underfunded that office so much that the backlog was unbelievable. Again, it just goes to the interference and it goes to the meddling that happened on that side of the House, Madam Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The NDP may claim to champion transparency, but their actions tell a very different story, Mr. Speaker. Under their leadership FOIP requests were stonewalled, delayed, and manipulated, leaving Albertans in the dark. Bill 34 ensures that no government, ours included, can hide behind outdated laws or bureaucratic red tape. This legislation will protect the public's right to access information and strengthen their trust in the system and make sure that no government ever acts like they acted between 2015 and 2019.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is about looking forward while addressing the failures of the past. The NDP had their chance, and they failed. Now we are correcting their mistakes and building a stronger, more transparent Alberta for the future.

I therefore move third reading of Bill 34, the Access to Information Act. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction has moved third reading of Bill 34. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen to add to the debate.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my second opportunity to hear the minister speak about Bill 34, Access to Information Act, and quite frankly none of us are better off hearing what the minister has to say about this bill.

I will correct a few things. The minister said that political staff have always been exempt. That claim kind of shows the minister's understanding of this legislation. The minister is saying that political staff have always been exempt while legislation has not yet even defined who political staff are. That clearly tells us who has read the bill and who has not read the bill. A thing that has yet to be defined: the minister is claiming that they have always been exempt. That's incorrect, and I think that's misinformation. That's a claim that government should not be making because this term yet needs to be defined.

The second thing is that when we were in government, I think the communication between staff, ministry staff, and ministers, e-mails on your @gov.ab.ca e-mail were FOIPable, and we did release documents.

The minister was lecturing us about ethics. I think we will not take lectures from that side of the House because it's not even a year yet that the Premier was caught violating ethics rules. There is a 17-, 18-page ruling of Commissioner Trussler, released on the 17th of May 2023, that says that she did in fact break the law. She violated section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act. We will not take lectures from that side. Their former Justice minister was caught interfering in the administration of justice over a traffic ticket. Their Municipal Affairs minister was fined \$500 by the Ethics Commissioner for participating in a debate that furthered some private interests. So we will not take lectures from that side of the House.

Ms Hoffman: What about Shandro?

Mr. Sabir: There are a few other Justice ministers who, in the interest of time, we'll let go.

Then the minister also said that while we were talking about Bill 33, we did spend time on Bill 34. Again, that also goes to show how much the minister understands his own piece of legislation. The

reason we are talking about Bill 34 in Bill 33 debate is that Bill 33 is incorporating definitions from FOIP, like Bill 34. We have to look into the definition section in order to make sense of Bill 33. That's called incorporation by reference. That's what Bill 33 is doing. Bill 33 is incorporating exemptions by reference from Bill 34. That's the reason we talked about Bill 34 exemption definitions while debating Bill 33.

Then the minister talked about that we should use QP to ask him questions about it. Seriously. I think the minister thinks QP is everything and there should be only QP, no debate, nothing, and in 35 seconds he will explain to us what's in Bill 34, which he failed to do in I don't know how many attempts the minister made. That's the level of understanding, that the minister will prefer a 35-second answer on a – I don't know – 60-page bill and not debate that in the House. That's deeply troubling, and that also goes to show how much time government wants to spend on public policy-making and debating that on its merits.

As the current commissioner noted in her 13-page letter addressed to the minister, in very plain language, this bill is making access to information more difficult. Let me read section 7(2)(c) from the act. It's found on page 19 of Bill 34: "provide enough detail to enable the public body to locate and identify the record within a reasonable time with reasonable effort." What does that mean? The public body will decide what's reasonable time and what reasonable effort means. Albertans have the right to access information, they should get that information, and public bodies are accountable to the people of Alberta. They should make every effort to find that record and give it to Albertans. That's not called modernizing the act; that's called throwing more roadblocks in the way of Albertans' right to access information. That's in the legislation.

5:20

Before, if a public body was not able to process a request, the commissioner used to get involved. Now a public body is getting the power that "the head of a public body may disregard a request made under section 7... if responding to the request would unreasonably interfere with the operations of the public body." That's a broad power given to a public body to refuse access to information. That's taking this access to information regime back in – I don't know – decades back. It's not modernizing. It's making it difficult, giving public bodies the opportunity to decline access to information requests if they think that will unreasonably interfere with the operation of the public body. I think that if some request is frivolous, some request doesn't merit consideration, then the commissioner could decide that that's against section 9 of the act.

Similarly, in section 27, cabinet and Treasury Board confidences, government is adding more exemptions. In section 29, more exemptions. Earlier the minister of service Alberta was reading us a quote from Jill Clayton. She also said that exceptions should be narrow and limited. This section: if nothing else, if government cannot read this bill, they can at least count the exemption provisions. The previous bill has four fewer provisions than this bill. At least this should give an idea to the minister that this bill contains more exemptions, not fewer and just simplifying them.

Similarly, I think the commissioner's comments are very helpful. I urge the government to read those comments, take this bill to the drawing board, and stand up for Albertans' access to information. That's what an honest, democratic, and transparent government does. That's what Albertans expect from their government. As it stands now, I urge all members to read the bill, read the commissioner's comments, and reject this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On third reading of Bill 34. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the call.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be very brief. One comment I want to make on Bill 34 is that they are requiring that the request be possible within a reasonable time and reasonable effort, as has been mentioned, but at a time when this government is moving things around – just look at the health care system, breaking it up into many different pieces – moving things to different ministries, changing the names on everything, it is going to be tremendously challenging for anyone to have much of an idea about who to ask and what they’re going to call their request.

What is reasonable? It would be very, is very, subjective. I think, based on this wording and the fact that there’s information people need but the changes made by this government are making it impossible for either the people in the ministries to even find where that information is, let alone have a clear request, it makes this whole bill one more way that we’re becoming less and less and less transparent.

I urge everyone to vote against this bill, and I will wrap up.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About a year ago the *Globe and Mail* did about a two year long study over how access to information works in provinces across Canada. It’s the kind of journalistic effort that we see too little of these days, you know, just taking a lot of time and doing very thorough work. It found that Alberta was actually outstanding in the field of freedom of information act requests, and by that I mean literally out standing in the field.

Of the 253 requests that the *Globe* sent out to the various different provinces, Alberta, and I will quote: 1 in 5 requests in Canada were granted in full; just half of the requests were completed within 30 days, the typical legislated guidelines. There was, however, one glaring hole in the data: Alberta. The province’s 22 ministries refused to answer the *Globe*’s questions for basic data on how freedom of information is working in Alberta. At first the province claimed there were no records, a questionable assertion given that every other jurisdiction had and provided the records. The Premier at the time said that Alberta aimed to remedy this problem.

Now, see, this is a pattern with this government. My esteemed colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall pointed out that the Ethics Commissioner had found the Premier of this province to have violated the Conflicts of Interest Act, and instead of changing behaviour, the government fired the conflict of interest commissioner. Now, finding that somebody, a large media outlet, cares about the freedom of information act, the government, instead of continuing to violate the act, has decided to change it.

One of the key elements that’s extremely problematic is the protection for political staff communications, which are not defined within the act but are left for regulation: oh, trust us. This is a significant change and a significant carve-out to the freedom of information that is available to Albertans.

Let me remind this House and the people of Alberta that this is the government that their taxes pay for. People have a right to know what their government is doing with their money. That’s the benchmark and the reason why these freedom of information acts exist. It’s not because governments like it; it’s because a healthy democracy requires it. We, frankly, know that this is a government that doesn’t care very much about a healthy democracy. Witness the fact that I’m standing in this House, when I didn’t have to run against the Premier of this province when she refused to hold a by-election in the riding that I currently hold.

The political staff communications. This is something that I remember from working at many, many firms that were highly regulated. If we didn’t want something discovered and it was discoverable, then we would, like, just include a lawyer. Just include the lawyer in the trail, and then if it ever goes to discovery, then you get to say – you know, then it’s work, right? The opposing party has to do the work to say: “No, no, no. This is actually not privilege; this is just a communication that the lawyer was CCed on.” This carve-out for political staff means, in any communication: just include a political staff member, and it doesn’t have to be produced.

Member Irwin: Shameful.

Member Kayande: It is. It’s really bad.

This carve-out: what it means, unfortunately, is that the people of Alberta don’t know if they’re getting their money’s worth or not. I think it’s too bad.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Bill 34 at third reading.

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

Mr. Nally: I’ll waive.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:29 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Batten	Ellingson	Metz
Boparai	Elmeligi	Sabir
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoffman	Schmidt
Dach	Irwin	Shepherd
Deol	Kayande	Wright, P.
Eggen	Loyola	

Totals:	For – 46	Against – 17
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[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

Bill 32

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate December 3: Ms Chapman]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington has 12 minutes remaining.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to stand and speak once again to Bill 32, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). In her UCP leadership campaign the Premier said: I will urge caucus and Treasury Board to immediately approve the indexing of AISH and other benefit programs for low-income seniors and the vulnerable; it's simply the right thing to do. I agree with that statement. I think everyone on this side of the House agrees with that statement, but I have to question the Premier's and the government's commitment to that statement. If this was so important to you, why is there an opt-out clause in the indexing in the bill? The bill permits Treasury Board to prescribe a percentage, to look past the 2 per cent or inflation. The communication from the government on this bill does not disclose that the ability to prescribe a percentage is there, but it is indeed there. The ability, should the government, Treasury Board choose, is there to fully deindex, and it is included. Let's review what that means.

An article in the *Canadian Tax Journal* discussed the effects of indexation and inflation on the tax system. The article notes that "where inflation occurs without indexation in the tax system, it has the same effect as a tax increase but is less transparent to the public." So why is this government not being transparent with the public? Indexing at a rate lower than inflation, as has been suggested in this bill, has the same result, a tax increase to the public. Crafting legislation that creates a floor, a lower rate that will apply if inflation is higher, and including the ability to set the index at zero if they so choose results in taxpayers paying more, the government collecting more, those on benefits receiving less.

Not only is this government doing their best to pretend that this is not the case; even worse, they aren't telling Albertans that this legislation does give Treasury Board the ability to ignore both the 2 per cent and the rate of inflation, that with this legislation Treasury Board could set the escalator to zero or no increase at all should they choose. Should the government feel that there are dark clouds on the horizon and that they need to exercise restraint, this legislation gives Treasury Board the ability to deindex tax brackets, AISH payments, housing allowances, seniors' benefits, and income support.

The Premier and the Finance minister have both been clearly communicating that, indeed, dark clouds are on the horizon. In fact, the minister has indicated in his communications that deficits may be possible in 2025. I think we've all heard on several occasions this government's opinion of deficits, and if push comes to shove, this government is going to cut services before they post a deficit. With this legislation we can see where those cuts might come from. In order to exercise restraint, they could set the escalator to zero, raising Albertans' taxes and cutting the real financial supports to vulnerable Albertans.

If the Premier truly cared about vulnerable Albertans, as she has claimed in her leadership race, why would the legislation include an index rate below inflation? If the Premier truly cared about vulnerable Albertans, why does the legislation include the ability for Treasury Board to set the index rate at zero if they so choose, increasing taxes and cutting financial supports? I hope the Finance minister will inform the public that Treasury Board could set the index rate to zero if they choose and why that was included in this legislation.

And if there is no intent to use this power, why is it there? This legislation opens the door for Albertans to pay higher taxes and vulnerable Albertans to have their real incomes cut, and the government appears to be doing their very best to cover this up. The government claims to be helping Albertans, but hidden in their

legislation is the ability to deindex, just as Jason Kenney did in 2020 and 2021, costing Albertans \$650 million. Albertans need to pay attention and see what the government doesn't want them to see.

5:40

Before I cede my time on this bill, I'll take a moment to talk about halal mortgages. To be clear, yesterday in this House we voted in support of the clauses to allow halal mortgages. However, after engagement with the Muslim community and our constituents, we introduced an amendment to acknowledge the community's concerns. The community was asking for, in a letter sent to the minister, consumer protection against predatory pricing and setting affordability guidelines. They asked to provide oversight through the establishment of a committee to approve product offerings. The community has the experience in Manitoba of halal mortgages being offered at a premium price that has resulted in a very low uptake of the product, and they don't want to see that happen here in Alberta. Regrettably, the motion proposed by this side of the House was defeated by the government. Clearly, the government is not really listening to the community that this legislation is meant to serve.

Bill 32 could have been an excellent piece of legislation, but it falls short of protecting Albertans and serving the community. On this side of the House we stand with the people and oppose this bill as it is written. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in the debate, or shall I call – the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 32, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). Like my colleagues, I am opposed to this bill.

This bill has big implications for affordability, and with its deindexing and what that will do for benefits and tax brackets, it got me thinking about affordability in my riding and what the affordability issues in Banff-Kananaskis that I hear about are. What is top of mind for my constituents? The cost of food, rent, gas, minimum wage not going up, inflation going up everywhere, child care, elder care, the problem of aging in place and how difficult that is in rural communities, cost of medication that isn't covered by AHS or even benefits, car insurance. The list goes on.

I know all of us in this House are hearing about affordability challenges of Albertans, and this government should be making life more affordable, but this bill doesn't do that. With this bill Albertans will pay higher taxes and receive lower benefits in times of high inflation. That's right now. We are all struggling with that right now. In times of high inflation I can't even tell you how much more groceries cost in Canmore than they cost in Edmonton. It is almost double. In times of high inflation that high inflation hits tourism-based economies, like Canmore and Banff, really, really hard. At a time when people are struggling to pay rent, the fact the cost of groceries has almost doubled or more in the last few years is really, literally taxing for my constituents. It's especially hard hitting for those constituents that are on benefits or on some kind of fixed income, because their wages or their income, obviously, is not going up.

Alberta has higher inflation than the national average, and this bill deindexes benefits and tax brackets right now, during these times of high inflation. So while people will be paying more for goods and services, they will be getting comparatively less from their benefits, again targeting a vulnerable sector of the population. For my constituents this can make their medications more expensive or food and nutrition more out of reach. For the elders in my communities who are aging in place, this may make it more

difficult for them to do so, and I can't tell you how many seniors I talk to that literally live with a daily fear that they will have to leave their community to move to a home in the city when they really don't want to. It all comes down to availability of elder care spaces and the cost to be there.

One constituent e-mailed me, from Bragg Creek. She's 69 years old, and she has level 3 osteoporosis. She feels lucky to have a good doctor and family, but now she's forced to choose between medication that is covered by AHS and Blue Cross and a better medication that isn't covered but will cost her \$9,600 a year. That change of medication could be the difference between her ending up in hospital and her actually being able to improve her osteoporosis condition, to be able to stay at home and out of hospital. She's living on a fixed income, and she's also supporting a whole family of people in the house that her and her husband are fortunate enough to own outright, but the cost of living is so high that her children and grandchildren live with her also. So it's really important for my constituent that she can afford medication to keep her out of hospital.

The other part of this, obviously, is that if she ends up in hospital, it will eventually cost us a lot more to treat her than it would if there was coverage for this more expensive medication. I'm not suggesting that we cover this medication. What I am doing is providing an example of what this kind of legislation means for people like my constituent, who's on a fixed income.

What about other constituents in Canmore? Rent went up at the end of October significantly: \$1,350 for a one-bedroom, \$1,800 for a two-bedroom, \$2,100 for three bedrooms. This is the Canmore affordable housing option: rent increases of 17.5 per cent a month. Who lives in affordable housing, Mr. Speaker? Everyone. People on benefits. People on benefits, who now, with this legislation, may risk the chance of getting less money, will be struggling to pay rent and to stay living in the community that they love.

A couple of years ago Canmore passed three motions in their town strategic plan of 2023 to '26 calling on federal and provincial governments to help with housing. That has not happened, and this bill doesn't do that either.

Really quickly – do I still have two minutes?

The Speaker: You have nine minutes remaining.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. I'm going to actually conclude my remarks there, Mr. Speaker, but I'll just say, the EV tax: I also don't love it. That's all.

The Speaker: Before the Assembly is third reading of Bill 32, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). It looks like the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen. Let me double-check my list. The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 32, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). I want to start by saying that government has introduced changes to allow an alternative mortgage financing option, sharia-compliant mortgages. That's a good change, but at this point I think they are just enabling ATB and credit unions to explore those options. I think we look forward to the next steps of how government will make sure that these products are available to Muslim Albertans in particular.

As my colleague from Calgary-Foothills mentioned, we have also heard from many in our communities who are dealing with halal mortgages, alternate finance mortgages that they have not been consulted on this particular bill. It's quite a sensitive, complicated area, and there is huge diversity of faith and traditions. I think it will be quite a bit of work to come up with a product that will be acceptable to the Muslim community at large, but, again, I

thank the government for bringing forward this important change. We fully support this change in this piece of legislation.

Other things contained in this bill are quite problematic. Government is making cuts to many important programs, to assured income for the severely handicapped, to housing benefits, to income and employment support benefits, to senior benefits. The government is making cuts. Government can spend as much as they want, but what essentially they are doing is they are deindexing these benefits and they are also giving themselves power. Should they choose to make the increases zero, they would be able to do that.

5:50

When in 2019-2020 the UCP got elected, the first thing they did, at a time when inflation was through the roof, is that they deindexed benefits: AISH benefits, income support benefits, employment support benefits, seniors' benefits. They kept that pause there in place throughout the high inflation time. They only have recently started indexing them, but now they are again decreasing those benefits, cutting those benefits. I don't think that's acceptable.

Government realizes that the cost of living is a concern. That's the reason government added a good 14 per cent increase to MLA living allowances. They added more than, I believe, 70 per cent to the daily allowances. Before there was a \$193 allowance if some out-of-town MLA wanted to avail a hotel, and now they made that almost \$350. It's not that the government doesn't understand that cost of living is impacting everyone, but government is picking on the most vulnerable, those who are on fixed incomes, to further cut their benefits, further reduce their benefits, and that's the reason that we will be voting against these changes.

But I want to say this on record, make it very clear, that we do support halal mortgages, sharia-compliant mortgages, the enabling provisions in this legislation that will give authority to ATB and credit unions to explore those alternative financing options. We do support those provisions. We are willing to work with government. We are willing to connect government with the Muslim community, with people who have worked in this area and make sure that we get this right.

With that, I will cede my time to my other colleagues who want to weigh in on this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize the hour is pressing, so I'll be brief in my remarks. I want to say two things about Bill 32. First, I, like all of my colleagues in the Alberta NDP caucus, am fully supportive of the bill's intentions to enable provincially regulated financial institutions to offer alternative finance mortgages. That is, we support the government taking action to support Albertans to be able to take a loan and buy a home in a way that aligns with their faith, largely known as halal financing. As my colleagues have noted, we've heard concerns from some in the community about what the actual implementation of that is going to look like. We talked about the example in Manitoba, where government moved but created something that is largely unusable by the majority of the populace.

It is incredibly important that we get this right. It's not a small thing. Having ready access to affordable halal financing, well, is going to be transformative for a growing number of Albertans who practise Islam as well as a few other faiths. If the government fails to follow through, if the financing that they develop, that they enable proves to be unaffordable and out of reach, that's going to be a huge disappointment to those communities. So we fully support and indeed I fully hope that the government follows through on that promise in that substantial way.

Now, unfortunately, that piece of the legislation which I do support is tied to one which I simply cannot, that being that with Bill 32 this government is allowing itself to decide behind closed doors the rate at which they are going to match inflation in terms of paying out benefits to Albertans and collecting taxes from them. That is to say, Mr. Speaker, that, regardless of what the rate of inflation is in a particular year – 3 per cent, 4 per cent, 5 per cent – the government is awarding themselves the power to decide to make their rate zero. To be clear, inflation grew by 3, 4, 5 per cent, and the government will say, “We are not going to increase benefits to those in need,” which is an effective cut of 3 or 4 or 5 per cent to Albertans who are already struggling with affordability under this government and the highest rate of inflation in Canada.

Secondly, the government can choose to set that rate at zero, and that will mean that every Albertan, effectively anyone above the lowest income bracket, will pay more taxes. The government can make the decision to do that behind closed doors with no notice to Albertans. That is what this legislation empowers them to do, something no government before them has been able to do.

Of course, it is what the UCP did do when we had a Premier who had the courage to at least stand in this House and bring forward a bill announcing his intentions, by which he took away that indexing of income taxes and therefore collected hundreds of millions of dollars of more income tax from Albertans. Premier Kenney at least had the courage to do that here in the House, standing in front of Albertans. This government through Bill 32 is saying that they do not have that courage. They want to do it in the backroom at the cabinet table.

To be clear, through you, Mr. Speaker, to all Albertans, in Bill 32 this government is awarding itself the power to give you zero rate on inflation, effectively choose to raise your taxes or cut your benefits with no notice to you. That is why I will be unable to vote in support of Bill 32. As much as I support those provisions around halal financing, as much as I want to see those options available for Albertans – every Albertan, regardless of their faith, should be able to have the dream of buying a home – every Albertan should also be able to trust that their government will have the guts to stand and tell them when they intend to raise their taxes or if they intend to cut their

benefits. Unfortunately, this government lacks that courage. It lacks that honesty and transparency with Albertans.

We will have to see, Mr. Speaker. As we go into that budget next year, as the government has been talking about how challenging the finances are, as this government has been repeatedly downloading costs on municipalities and everybody else while taking benefits for themselves like a 14 per cent increase for all of their members who have residences outside their constituencies or sitting in skyboxes or all kinds of other benefits, trips around the world on government business, we will be watching to see what they are going to choose to do to Albertans with these new powers they are awarding themselves. Will they choose to raise Albertans’ taxes by the back door while they enjoy benefits themselves? Will they choose to cut the money going to folks that are already struggling on AISH, on income support, on seniors’ benefits?

That will be the test of character. That will be the test of this government’s courage, whether they are willing to take the sacrifice or whether they are going to do what they have continued to do in government and download that sacrifice, that pain onto Albertans. That would be a shameful thing, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that on this side of the House we are going to continue to be here to fight on behalf of Albertans for affordable insurance, affordable electricity, for a government that has the courage to actually ensure that those in greatest need continue to receive the benefits they deserve, having been the government that introduced indexing, Mr. Speaker. The next government, of course, the UCP, came in and immediately removed that in the same bill in which they increased every Albertan’s taxes. When these ministers stand and brag about indexing, it was only after they deindexed and made life miserable for hundreds of thousands of Albertans depending on government benefits and hundreds of thousands of more Albertans who paid more income tax for three years running.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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