LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

First Session, 43rd Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 14, 2025
Afternoon Sitting
Issue No. 65

THE HONOURABLE RAJ CHOUHAN, SPEAKER

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PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Her Honour the Honourable Wendy Cocchia, CM, OBC

First Session, 43rd Parliament

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Honourable Raj Chouhan

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BC NDP

Anderson, Hon. Brittny ..... Kootenay Central
Anderson, George ..... Nanaimo-Lantzville
Arora, Rohini ..... Burnaby East
Bailey, Hon. Brenda ..... Vancouver–South Granville
Beare, Hon. Lisa ..... Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows
Begg, Hon. Garry ..... Surrey-Guildford
Blatherwick, Jennifer ..... Coquitlam-Maillardville
Boyle, Hon. Christine ..... Vancouver–Little Mountain
Brar, Hon. Jagrup ..... Surrey-Fleetwood
Chandra Herbert, Hon. Spencer ..... Vancouver–West End
Chant, Susie ..... North Vancouver–Seymour
Choi, Paul ..... Burnaby South–Metrotown
Chouhan, Hon. Raj ..... Burnaby–New Westminster
Chow, Hon. George ..... Vancouver-Fraserview
Davidson, Hon. Tamara / Laanas ..... North Coast–Haida Gwaii
Dhir, Sunita ..... Vancouver-Langara
Dix, Hon. Adrian ..... Vancouver-Renfrew
Eby, Hon. David, KC ..... Vancouver–Point Grey
Elmore, Mable ..... Vancouver-Kensington
Farnworth, Hon. Mike ..... Port Coquitlam
Gibson, Hon. Diana ..... Oak Bay–Gordon Head
Glumac, Hon. Rick ..... Port Moody–Burquitlam
Greene, Hon. Kelly ..... Richmond-Steveston
Higginson, Stephanie ..... Ladysmith-Oceanside
Kahlon, Hon. Ravi ..... Delta North
Kang, Hon. Anne ..... Burnaby Centre
Krieger, Nina ..... Victoria–Swan Lake
Lajeunesse, Dana ..... Juan de Fuca–Malahat
Lore, Hon. Grace ..... Victoria–Beacon Hill
Ma, Hon. Bowinn ..... North Vancouver–Lonsdale
Malcolmson, Hon. Sheila ..... Nanaimo–Gabriola Island
Morissette, Steve ..... Kootenay Monashee
Neill, Hon. Randene ..... Powell River–Sunshine Coast
Osborne, Hon. Josie ..... Mid Island–Pacifc Rim
Parmar, Hon. Ravi ..... Langford-Highlands
Phillip, Joan / Amshen ..... Vancouver-Strathcona
Popham, Hon. Lana ..... Saanich South
Rotchford, Darlene ..... Esquimalt-Colwood
Routledge, Janet ..... Burnaby North
Sandhu, Harwinder ..... Vernon-Lumby
Shah, Amna ..... Surrey City Centre
Sharma, Hon. Niki, KC ..... Vancouver-Hastings
Sunner, Jessie ..... Surrey-Newton
Toporowski, Debra / Qwulti'stunaat ..... Cowichan Valley
Whiteside, Hon. Jennifer ..... New Westminster–Coquitlam
Wickens, Hon. Jodie ..... Coquitlam–Burke Mountain
Yung, Hon. Terry ..... Vancouver-Yaletown

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF BC

Banman, Bruce ..... Abbotsford South
Bhangu, Harman ..... Langley-Abbotsford
Bird, Rosalyn ..... Prince George–Valemount
Block, Lynne ..... West Vancouver–Capilano
Boultbee, Amelia ..... Penticton-Summerland
Chan, Hon ..... Richmond Centre
Chapman, Brent ..... Surrey South
Clare, Sheldon ..... Prince George–North Cariboo
Davis, Pete ..... Kootenay Rockies
Day, Brennan ..... Courtenay-Comox
Dew, Gavin ..... Kelowna-Mission
Dhaliwal, Mandeep ..... Surrey North
Doerkson, Lorne ..... Cariboo-Chilcotin
Gasper, Reann ..... Abbotsford-Mission
Giddens, Kiel ..... Prince George–Mackenzie
Halford, Trevor ..... Surrey–White Rock
Hartwell, Sharon ..... Bulkley Valley–Stikine
Hepner, Linda ..... Surrey–Serpentine River
Kindy, Anna ..... North Island
Kooner, Steve ..... Richmond-Queensborough
Loewen, Kristina ..... Kelowna Centre
Luck, Tony ..... Fraser-Nicola
Maahs, Heather ..... Chilliwack North
McCall, Macklin ..... West Kelowna–Peachland
McInnis, Scott ..... Columbia River–Revelstoke
Milobar, Peter ..... Kamloops Centre
Mok, Lawrence ..... Maple Ridge East
Neufeld, Korky ..... Abbotsford West
Neufeld, Larry ..... Peace River South
Paton, Ian ..... Delta South
Rattée, Claire ..... Skeena
Rustad, John ..... Nechako Lakes
Stamer, Ward ..... Kamloops–North Thompson
Sturko, Elenore ..... Surrey-Cloverdale
Tepper, Bryan ..... Surrey-Panorama
Toor, Jody ..... Langley-Willowbrook
Van Popta, Misty ..... Langley–Walnut Grove
Warbus, Á'a:líya ..... Chilliwack–Cultus Lake
Wat, Teresa ..... Richmond-Bridgeport
Williams, David ..... Salmon Arm–Shuswap
Wilson, Donegal ..... Boundary-Similkameen

BC GREEN PARTY

Botterell, Rob ..... Saanich North and the Islands
Valeriote, Jeremy ..... West Vancouver–Sea to Sky

INDEPENDENT

Armstrong, Tara ..... Kelowna–Lake Country–Coldstream
Brodie, Dallas ..... Vancouver-Quilchena
Kealy, Jordan ..... Peace River North

PARTY STANDINGS

Total seats – 93

BC NDP – 47 | Conservative Party of BC – 41 | BC Green Party – 2 | Independent – 3

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF RIDINGS

A

Abbotsford-Mission ..... Reann Gasper
Abbotsford South ..... Bruce Banman
Abbotsford West ..... Korky Neufeld

B

Boundary-Similkameen ..... Donegal Wilson
Bulkley Valley–Stikine ..... Sharon Hartwell
Burnaby Centre ..... Hon. Anne Kang
Burnaby East ..... Rohini Arora
Burnaby–New Westminster ..... Hon. Raj Chouhan
Burnaby North ..... Janet Routledge
Burnaby South–Metrotown ..... Paul Choi

C

Cariboo-Chilcotin ..... Lorne Doerkson
Chilliwack–Cultus Lake ..... Á'a:líya Warbus
Chilliwack North ..... Heather Maahs
Columbia River–Revelstoke ..... Scott McInnis
Coquitlam–Burke Mountain ..... Hon. Jodie Wickens
Coquitlam-Maillardville ..... Jennifer Blatherwick
Courtenay-Comox ..... Brennan Day
Cowichan Valley ..... Debra Toporowski / Qwulti'stunaat

D

Delta North ..... Hon. Ravi Kahlon
Delta South ..... Ian Paton

E

Esquimalt-Colwood ..... Darlene Rotchford

F

Fraser-Nicola ..... Tony Luck

J

Juan de Fuca–Malahat ..... Dana Lajeunesse

K

Kamloops Centre ..... Peter Milobar
Kamloops–North Thompson ..... Ward Stamer
Kelowna Centre ..... Kristina Loewen
Kelowna–Lake Country–Coldstream ..... Tara Armstrong
Kelowna-Mission ..... Gavin Dew
Kootenay Central ..... Hon. Brittny Anderson
Kootenay Monashee ..... Steve Morissette
Kootenay Rockies ..... Pete Davis

L

Ladysmith-Oceanside ..... Stephanie Higginson
Langford-Highlands ..... Hon. Ravi Parmar
Langley-Abbotsford ..... Harman Bhangu
Langley–Walnut Grove ..... Misty Van Popta
Langley-Willowbrook ..... Jody Toor

M

Maple Ridge East ..... Lawrence Mok
Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows ..... Hon. Lisa Beare
Mid Island–Pacific Rim ..... Hon. Josie Osborne

N

Nanaimo–Gabriola Island ..... Hon. Sheila Malcolmson
Nanaimo-Lantzville ..... George Anderson
Nechako Lakes ..... John Rustad
New Westminster–Coquitlam ..... Hon. Jennifer Whiteside
North Coast–Haida Gwaii ..... Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson
North Island ..... Anna Kindy
North Vancouver–Lonsdale ..... Hon. Bowinn Ma
North Vancouver–Seymour ..... Susie Chant

O

Oak Bay–Gordon Head ..... Hon. Diana Gibson

P

Peace River North ..... Jordan Kealy
Peace River South ..... Larry Neufeld
Penticton-Summerland ..... Amelia Boultbee
Port Coquitlam ..... Hon. Mike Farnworth
Port Moody–Burquitlam ..... Hon. Rick Glumac
Powell River–Sunshine Coast ..... Hon. Randene Neill
Prince George–Mackenzie ..... Kiel Giddens
Prince George–North Cariboo ..... Sheldon Clare
Prince George–Valemount ..... Rosalyn Bird

R

Richmond-Bridgeport ..... Teresa Wat
Richmond Centre ..... Hon Chan
Richmond-Queensborough ..... Steve Kooner
Richmond-Steveston ..... Hon. Kelly Greene

S

Saanich North and the Islands ..... Rob Botterell
Saanich South ..... Hon. Lana Popham
Salmon Arm–Shuswap ..... David Williams
Skeena ..... Claire Rattée
Surrey City Centre ..... Amna Shah
Surrey-Cloverdale ..... Elenore Sturko
Surrey-Fleetwood ..... Hon. Jagrup Brar
Surrey-Guildford ..... Hon. Garry Begg
Surrey-Newton ..... Jessie Sunner
Surrey North ..... Mandeep Dhaliwal
Surrey-Panorama ..... Bryan Tepper
Surrey–Serpentine River ..... Linda Hepner
Surrey South ..... Brent Chapman
Surrey–White Rock ..... Trevor Halford

V

Vancouver-Fraserview ..... Hon. George Chow
Vancouver-Hastings ..... Hon. Niki Sharma, KC
Vancouver-Kensington ..... Mable Elmore
Vancouver-Langara ..... Sunita Dhir
Vancouver–Little Mountain ..... Hon. Christine Boyle
Vancouver–Point Grey ..... Hon. David Eby, KC
Vancouver-Quilchena ..... Dallas Brodie
Vancouver-Renfrew ..... Hon. Adrian Dix
Vancouver–South Granville ..... Hon. Brenda Bailey
Vancouver-Strathcona ..... Amshen / Joan Phillip
Vancouver–West End ..... Hon. Spencer Chandra Herbert
Vancouver-Yaletown ..... Hon. Terry Yung
Vernon-Lumby ..... Harwinder Sandhu
Victoria–Beacon Hill ..... Hon. Grace Lore
Victoria–Swan Lake ..... Nina Krieger

W

West Kelowna–Peachland ..... Macklin McCall
West Vancouver–Capilano ..... Lynne Block
West Vancouver–Sea to Sky ..... Jeremy Valeriote

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025

The House met at 1:34 p.m.

[The Speaker in the chair.]

Routine Business

Prayers and reflections: Mandeep Dhaliwal.

[1:35 p.m.]

Introductions by Members

Scott McInnis: I'd like to welcome to the gallery today the summer tour guide group, as well as the Parliamentary Players.

I had a wonderful meeting with them yesterday. They'll be busy all summer touring visitors around the precinct, as well as some of the re-enactments that take place. I had, again, a great meeting with them yesterday. They wanted to know a little bit about MLA life.

I'd like to welcome them all to the House today. Please join me in making them feel welcome.

Hon. David Eby: We're joined today by 35 constituency advisers from across the province of British Columbia who work with government MLAs every day. They are the front line of our offices. I know the opposition and Third Party are well aware of the important role of these amazing people.

They are constantly met by people who are there to thank them for the amazing work of our government, so it's largely a feel-good job.

No, they often meet people who are profoundly upset about challenges they've had with provincial government. There's just a disconnect in a program, or they're not aware of an opportunity, or they need advocacy. So it's a really hard job. They take a lot of challenging cases and support people across the province.

I want to thank them so much for doing that incredibly hard work every single day, with a smile on their face, welcoming everyone in the community. I'm so grateful to all of them for their amazing work.

Susie Chant: Today we have some distinguished guests — and I hope to be able to say my friends, as well — joining us in the gallery. I am honoured to welcome the members of the Consular Corps of British Columbia, who are taking part in a series of ministerial briefings today.

The Consular Corps represents over 80 countries and four international organizations. These dedicated individuals serve as vital bridges between their countries and our province, providing assistance to their citizens. They also play an important part in fostering trade and investment, supporting people-to-people ties and building cultural connections.

I would like to acknowledge the dean of the Consular Corps, Ricardo Arredondo, consular general of Argentina, and all members of the Consular Corps who have joined us today.

I ask that all members of this House join me in offering a very warm welcome.

Sheldon Clare: Today I rise to welcome the representatives from Deafblind Community Services, affiliated with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, and representatives from CNIB as well: Penny Bennett; Mindy Tang; Brenda Stellar; Sherry Grabowski, vice-president, Deafblind Community Services; Janine Tucker, manager, Deafblind Community Services; Brenda McAlistair, my constituent from McLeese Lake; David McGregor; Elizabeth Dagg; Brenda Tough; Lisa McCarron; Patrick Milne, the chief operating officer of CNIB; Jane Savidant, the chair-elect of CNIB's national board; and Alice Clark.

While some of those members are not able to see or hear this introduction, they are joined with interveners who will help them, and you will see them around the precinct.

I wish that you would give them a very warm welcome.

I would advise that they gave a wonderful presentation to the opposition caucus earlier today.

[1:40 p.m.]

I thank them for their advocacy and their efforts in helping the deafblind community.

Hon. George Chow: Today I have the pleasure to introduce Dr. June Francis, who is in the gallery. Dr. Francis is the chair of B.C.'s anti-racism data committee. She is also the honorary consul for Jamaica in Vancouver. I always appreciate getting together with Dr. Francis and a great conversation.

Would the House please make Dr. Francis feel very welcome.

Steve Kooner: I'd like to take a moment to introduce two guests in the gallery.

Peter Si, the legislative assistant to myself, as well as my colleague here for Richmond-Bridgeport, as well as my other colleague for Kamloops Centre, as well as my other colleague for Kamloops–North Thompson.

We all appreciate Peter Si very much. We developed a good partnership with him. He keeps us on our toes and makes sure we are on schedule wherever we have to go in the Legislature. It's a great honour to have Peter here in the Legislature, in the gallery, to witness question period in person.

He's here with his mother, Wendy, and she's also witnessing question period for the very first time.

Can the House please make them welcome.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: I also want to welcome the interveners for the CNIB Deafblind Community. My

ministry is very proud to partner with them and be one of their funders.

Also in the gallery, my ministerial adviser, who supports both me and the Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility, Chris Mattock, is with us. It is his birthday.

Also from Nanaimo, my friend and amazing volunteer and campaigner, Mackenzie Frost. She's 15, I think, and really giving back to community.

With her is her superstar mom, my constituency adviser, Kirstin Mahaffy.

Will the chamber please make them all very welcome.

Amelia Boultbee: I would like to extend a warm welcome to Mayor Doug Holmes, who is here with us in the gallery today, joining us from the beautiful district of Summerland in Penticton-Summerland. I am very lucky to have a great working relationship with Mayor Holmes and his council.

Will the House please join me in making him feel very welcome?

George Anderson: I rise to recognize an outstanding young leader from Nanaimo, in my riding, Rocky Sloan, a student from Dover Bay Secondary, who is just one of 36 recipients of the prestigious Loran scholarship.

There are thousands of people who apply for it, and Rocky is one of those lucky individuals. The Loran Foundation looks beyond grades to find students of character, young people who lead with purpose, integrity and service, and Rocky embodies all of that. He founded his school's first French club, serves as student council president, started a non-profit for seniors to live independently and launched a fundraiser for B.C. Children's Hospital. Also, he plays the piano, the flute and tennis, proving that some people really do get more than 24 hours in a day.

Rocky is a remarkable young British Columbian, and we are proud to celebrate him today. I hope the entire House will join me in making Rocky feel welcome.

Welcome, Rocky.

Brennan Day: I'd like to welcome a group of grade 6s and 7s and future leaders from Queneesh Elementary School, which is situated on the traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, along with their teacher Wes Mann, from the beautiful Comox Valley.

I hope they enjoy their time today here in this beautiful building, seeing democracy in action, and that it shapes their future, as it certainly shaped mine many years ago.

Please let this House make them feel welcome.

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: I have two sets of groups that are here today.

[1:45 p.m.]

We have visitors from the Home Builders Association of Vancouver, members and their board of directors. I want to recognize Alisa Aragon-Lloyd, Cheri Stefanucci, Henri Belisle, Jonathan Meads, Sandro Stefanucci and Stephanie Meads.

As well, from the Ministry of Housing, we've got some folks here visiting from the corporate planning office. We've got Sally Eshuys, Shannon Mullen, Kash Akinkuowo, Cory Scott, Morgan Hurn, Alicia Mijares and Sarah Richer.

Can the House please join me in making all of these folks welcome.

Jeremy Valeriote: I'm very honoured to introduce the House to my parents, Mary and Gene Valeriote, loving parents and grandparents in our family. You might all be very surprised to learn that they are both chemists.

My dad worked 20-plus years for Cominco, now Teck Resources, on battery technology. My mom had a celebrated teaching career and wrote a book in the 1970s called Controversial Chemicals, the beginning of a trend.

They imbued in me a faith in science and public institutions, and they helped me develop the skills that I need to fill this role.

Will the House please make them feel welcome.

Mable Elmore: I join the MLA for Columbia River–Revelstoke to welcome the new summer cohort of parliamentary tour guides and Parliamentary Players here with us in the gallery. They are 17 university students from across British Columbia that join the permanent tour team for our busiest summer months. They welcome visitors each summer to parliament buildings, lead tours of the historic precinct and lead performances around the exteriors of the building.

On the parliamentary tour guide, we have Grace Wiebe, Lawson Farman, Hannah Link, Louisa Whitmore, Sol Eisenhauer, Samar Jain, Niloofar Riazibeydokhti, Kennedy Halwa, Madison Irwin.

On the parliamentary tour guide team lead, we have Pascale Grenier, Ryan Kniel; and Parliamentary Players Eric Barnes, Sam Frew, Annalyn Kind, Rodel Frazer, Makayla Madill and Jack Storwick.

I ask everybody to give them a very warm welcome for the work that they do to make us all very welcome.

Hon. Lisa Beare: In the Legislature today, we have two grade 7 classes from Pitt Meadows Elementary.

They're not here yet, but will the House please make them feel very welcome.

Darlene Rotchford: I want to recognize two very important people in the House today, especially during Local Government Week. I would like to welcome Duncan Cavens — I had the pleasure of sitting beside him during my time on local government; as well as, more importantly, his daughter Joelle, who is equally excited to be here

because she's a political dork, kind of like the rest of us in the House. She got a bit of a tour today and is super excited to be here for question period.

Will the House please make them feel welcome.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Joining us today, later on in the afternoon, are 27 grades 9 and 10 students from Alcuin College. They are accompanied by three parents and their teacher Jan De Beer.

Alcuin College is an independent K-to-12 school in North Vancouver. They foster curiosity-led learning and empower students to think critically and explore with purpose.

Will the House please join me in making them feel very welcome.

Pete Davis: I would like to welcome some students that are in the building but not in the gallery here with us yet from Flex Academy in Kelowna with their teacher Joe Eapen.

Please make them feel welcome.

Question of Privilege (Reservation of Right)

Elenore Sturko: I rise to reserve my right to raise a question of privilege with respect to an ongoing investigation ordered by the director of police services into information presented to me as MLA for Surrey-Cloverdale and the official opposition critic for Safety and the Solicitor General.

[1:50 p.m.]

Members' Statements

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA AND BIPHOBIA AND SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY

Stephanie Higginson: Saturday, May 17, is the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. We will join people around the world to recognize the many hard-fought gains that 2SLGBTQIA+ communities have achieved.

This year the theme is "The power of communities." It reflects the diversity and richness within the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities and highlights the strength and resilience that emerges from collective solidarity.

On this day, we reaffirm that hate and discrimination have no place in British Columbia. Everyone has the right to live without fear of violence or discrimination, and our government is committed to protecting the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Society has made progress, but discrimination and stigma continue to cause inequity and marginalization for 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

In some countries, and even in some parts of Canada, we have seen a re-emergence of increasingly regressive policies that are targeting 2SLGBTQIA+ people and, in particular, transgender communities. Alberta recently passed three pieces of legislation that are specifically targeting the ability of trans youth to fully participate in health care, education and youth sports. Unfortunately, in recent months, we have seen these same hurtful attitudes be perpetuated by some members of this very House. Equality rights should not be up for negotiation.

This government is driven by the core belief that B.C. is better because of our diversity. We have and we will continue to work relentlessly to advance equality and safety throughout B.C. for the two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual-plus communities of this province.

We see you, you matter to us, we stand with you in solidarity, and we will fight every day for equality with you and for you.

AVTAR SINGH DHILLON

Mandeep Dhaliwal: Mr. Avtar Singh Dhillon was recently awarded the King Charles III award for community service for his work with the Sikh Motorcycle Club. He came to Canada in 1970 and has spent over 50 years raising awareness about Sikh lives and the importance of the turban. He worked hard to protect the rights of Sikhs to wear turbans at work and in daily lives.

From 1977 to 1999, Mr. Dhillon led efforts to change the law so Sikhs could ride motorcycles while wearing turbans. After many efforts to change the law, in 1995, Mr. Dhillon filed a complaint with the B.C. Human Rights Commission. Two years later, in 1999, the B.C. Human Rights Commission ordered the B.C. government to amend the motorcycle helmet law.

Thanks to Mr. Avtar Singh Dhillon's dedication and his tireless efforts, Sikhs in B.C. can proudly wear their turbans while riding motorcycles. For this achievement, he was honoured with a gold medal by the top Sikh authority in Amritsar, India.

I am so happy today with Mr. Avtar Singh Dhillon and his family in the gallery.

Will the House please join me in thanking and welcoming Mr. Avtar Singh Dhillon and his family.

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK AND SUPPORT FOR OFFICERS

Amna Shah: I rise today to recognize National Police Week and to honour the courageous men and women who serve in uniform across our province.

From urban centres to rural towns, police officers are there not only in moments of crisis but in the quiet work of community-building. Whether supporting victims, responding to emergencies or walking neighbourhood beats,

police officers endeavour to uphold public safety with professionalism, compassion and resolve.

It's important to note that in this House, we are guided by those who know this work. The Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, the Minister of Community Safety and Integrated Services and the MLA for Burnaby South–Metrotown are all former police officers who have served valiantly. Their service in law enforcement brings a deep understanding of the realities facing both police and the communities that they serve.

[1:55 p.m.]

In today's world, policing is more complex than ever. The toxic drug crisis, mental health and community safety concerns require multidisciplinary responses. That's why we're backing our words with action. We've increased police academy training seats by 50 percent. We're investing $230 million into RCMP hiring across the province. And we're putting $100 million each year into gang enforcement, forensic investigations and community-based crime prevention programs. We're also partnering officers with mental health professionals through mobile integrated crisis response teams because we recognize that public safety and public health are intertwined.

As we mark National Police Week under the theme "Committed to serve together," let us renew our collective promise to build safer, more resilient communities for everyone.

To all officers serving across British Columbia: thank you for your service, your sacrifice and your commitment. We stand with you.

CHERUB'S INN MATERNITY HOUSE

Reann Gasper: Everyone wants to live in a community where people look out for each other, where support isn't just available in theory but actually shows up when it matters most. In Mission, we're fortunate to live in that kind of place. One of the clearest examples of that care in action is Cherub's Inn maternity house, a safe haven where young expectant mothers find not only shelter but dignity, support and hope for their future.

Cherub's Inn was founded by Sharlene Brooks, a woman who knows what it means to live through hard seasons and still choose compassion. Raised by a single mother who carried more than her share and still showed up with love, Sharlene learned resilience not as a choice but as a way of life. She saw up close the strength it takes to keep going when the odds are stacked against you.

When Sharlene's daughter became a teen mom, it became deeply clear to her just how many young women face that journey alone. Her daughter had support, something that many others don't. And the more Sharlene recognized the gap, the more certain she became that she had to do something about it.

That's what sparked Cherub's Inn, a place where young expectant mothers can feel safe, supported and not alone. Today, Cherub's Inn is a home to young women, some still in their teens, who need a place to stay and a fresh start. They get more than a roof over their heads. They get 24-hour support, access to health care, parenting help, life skills, baby supplies and someone to walk alongside of them as they take their next step.

This is what community looks like: not just talking about care but living it out. And at Cherub's Inn, they don't just believe in second chances. They help make them happen one room, one mom, one story at a time.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Steve Morissette: It's local government week in British Columbia, and I want to take a moment to say I love local government. Truly the hardest decision I had to make when I chose to run for MLA was knowing that if I were successful, I'd have to step away from local government. There's not a more transparent, connected or accountable level of government than the one closest to the people.

When you serve in local government, whether as a school trustee, councillor, mayor or regional district director, every decision you make is public. And I mean very public. You'll be asked about that zoning change in the grocery store, that budget vote at the hockey rink or that bylaw while walking your dog in the park. There's no separation between the people you represent and the life you live because your constituents are your neighbours, your friends and your family.

I want to give a special shout-out to our regional district rural area directors. They carry responsibilities similar to mayors without the support of a council. They do a lot with very limited resources, and my hat goes off to them.

To all the incredible folks in local government across this province: thank you for the countless hours, the hard conversations and the heart you put into your communities. You make democracy work where people feel most close to home.

Happy local government week.

[2:00 p.m.]

LARRY WIEBE

Bruce Banman: Today I rise to honour the life and legacy of a man whose name may not be widely known but whose impact was felt across this province and beyond: Larry Wiebe, who passed away, sadly, May 2, 2025.

If you've consumed a dairy product in British Columbia, chances are it got to you on one of Larry's trucks. Vedder Transport picks up milk from dairy farms across British Columbia and delivers it to milk plants for production. Larry was one of the quiet builders of our province, one of the pioneer families of Abbotsford who started with humble beginnings and built something extraordinary.

Larry took over the helm of the Vedder Group and through hard work and vision, helped build it into a multi-million-dollar success story. Under his leadership, the company expanded and modernized, switching their trucks to run on natural gas long before others were thinking about sustainability.

But for all of his business achievements, Larry Wiebe was, above all else, a humble, gentle and kind man. I had the privilege of knowing Larry personally, first meeting him when I was a student working as a waiter and later getting to know him better when I became the mayor of Abbotsford.

In spite of building an empire, Larry never lost touch with his roots: born in Chilliwack in 1951 and having to learn to drive a truck at the age of 13. Other than golf, vacations and spending time with family, one of his favourite things to do was to go to climb behind the wheel of an 18-wheeler and hit the road. That's where he felt at home — behind the wheel, not behind a desk.

At just 73, Larry was taken from us far too soon. As we mark dairy week in British Columbia, it seems a fitting time to celebrate a man whose life's work was deeply tied to that industry and to the people who depend upon it.

Abbotsford and British Columbia have lost one of the quieter types but a giant nonetheless.

May he rest in peace.

Oral Questions

WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION AND INVESTIGATION INTO DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION ON SAFE SUPPLY DIVERSION

John Rustad: Earlier this year the MLA for Surrey-Cloverdale released internal documents showing that taxpayer-funded safe supply opioids were being trafficked by organized crime. The government initially denied it, then claimed they've changed the policy.

But instead of thanking the whistleblower, an investigation into how the leak occurred was ordered.

Will the Premier confirm today that his police service director violated the NDP whistleblower protection law by referring this case to an investigative branch?

Hon. David Eby: This is an important matter. I thank the member for raising it.

First of all, let me say it's important that the House recognizes that the member for Surrey South was doing her job. I spent some time on the opposition benches. I recognize effective opposition work. This was certainly a case of that. If I had had those documents on the other government, I wouldn't have hesitated. She shouldn't get a phone call from police for doing her job. She was sent here by British Columbians to do a specific job. That she was doing.

I just want to correct the Leader of the Opposition. The document was part of a set of documents related to an extensive criminal and administrative investigation of pharmacies in the province. There was no denial.

In fact, there was an active investigation, both by the College of Pharmacists as well as police. This was the briefing of police to say: "Keep your eyes out for this. If you're seeing this, bring it back to us. Share information with us. We want to get to the bottom of it." That's the priority. That's where police should be spending their time and efforts.

I understand the thinking behind the member of the public service, the director of police services. He shared some information with police. It was released publicly. But I've got to say, in terms of just my own opinion about this thing…. I'm extremely reluctant to weigh in on where police put their resources.

I really hope that there is more effort going into investigating these pharmacies rather than anything related to the member and what she did in this House.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition, supplemental.

[2:05 p.m.]

John Rustad: Even though the Premier didn't answer the question…. The Premier, at one point, was a champion of whistleblower protection law, promising government employees would be safe from retaliation for exposing wrongdoing. Yet when the leak revealed the criminal diversion of safe supply drugs, leading to an apparent policy reversal, a police probe into the source was launched. This government is actively trying to put a chill on anybody who speaks out against them.

To the Premier, does the Premier honestly think that the public would believe that his police services director acted independently, and can he confirm that no direction was given to the police service director by anyone from his office or anyone from any of his ministers' offices?

Hon. David Eby: The director acted independently, as is required under the statute that he acted under. The police, in doing the investigation, are acting independently.

I canvassed to try to understand whether we were able to intervene in this ongoing investigation and to say that resources would be better directed elsewhere. I was advised that we are not able to. Police are independently doing this investigation.

I'll just correct the member. We did not direct this investigation. This was initiated independently. It's being conducted independently by the RCMP.

Bruce Banman: Last summer a Victoria firefighter was disciplined for writing an open letter about the public safety crisis occurring just steps from this very Legisla-

ture. The Premier said then, and I quote: "If someone gets in trouble for bringing me that information, I'm going to stand up for them, and I'd say, 'Yes, bring me the truth from the street that you see, and that will help me be a more effective representative for you.'"

However, we have now learned that the director of police services disagrees and will direct police to harangue whistleblowers who embarrass this government.

To the Solicitor General: will you fire director of police services Glen Lewis for initiating this witch-hunt?

Hon. David Eby: We introduced legislation to protect whistleblowers. We support whistleblowers bringing forward information that can assist us all in understanding what's happening in the province on the front lines.

Part of our review around health authorities is around shrinking the gap between front-line health workers that have information and the government so that we can deliver a more effective health care system. We want this information.

This specific case involved documents, photographs, information shared with police by the director of police services about an active criminal and administrative investigation of the College of Pharmacists.

I haven't talked to the director yet, but it's my understanding that it was the leak of that information related to those investigations that resulted in him issuing this direction. That's something that exists under his authorities for him to do independently under a law that has existed under both sides of this House. We are not able to direct the police to investigate or not investigate that.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Bruce Banman: The only whistleblowing we seem to hear around here is the Premier blowing Dixie.

The Speaker: Member.

Bruce Banman: The opposition has heard many stories from doctors, nurses — I personally have heard them — teachers, parents, municipal elected officials, Indigenous groups and many more who have serious concerns about what the B.C. NDP government is doing to their province. They're terrified to speak out because they see how this government treats people who raise questions about their precious policies.

To the Premier: will you fire the director of police services, Glen Lewis, before he initiates more retaliatory police witch-hunts against British Columbians who just want to speak out against this government and improve this province?

Hon. David Eby: The independent director has an important role to play in our system. That independence is part of it. The head of the Public Service will contact him and will understand the intention and what the plan was, and so on.

[2:10 p.m.]

The bottom line is if we interfered with that independence in a way that the member thought was favourable or not favourable to the government, he would be very upset about that. There is a reason why he has this independent authority. There is a reason why we cannot direct the police on this.

Let me say that it was important, the work that the member for Surrey South did, to bring this information forward. But I also want to recognize the context — that there were active police investigations, active College of Pharmacists investigations, all of which were supported by this government.

It was a briefing of police officers saying: "Bring us more information. If you're seeing these kinds of things, tell us. Help our investigation along." The exact opposite of what the member is alleging.

PERMITTING PROCESS FOR RESOURCE PROJECTS AND RESPONSE TO SUBSEQUENT PROJECT CHANGES

Jeremy Valeriote: We learned recently that Woodfibre LNG is looking to add a second floating hotel or floatel, which is a repurposed cruise ship, for construction workforce accommodation. They're planning to add it to the waters of the Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The floatel would accommodate up to an additional 900 construction workers, as it speeds up construction to squeeze the last profits out of this sunset industry.

The previous Environment Minister forced the first floatel into place by using the environmental assessment office's compliance and enforcement division to override the permit requirements of the district of Squamish, which is the local government tasked with protecting the interests of its residents when it comes to housing availability, public safety, waste management and some limited environmental impacts.

Will the new Minister of Environment commit to a process with more integrity for a second floatel, consultation with the local community and respect for the permitting authority of the local government?

Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson: Thank you to the member for the question.

The B.C. environmental assessment office has a comprehensive review process that examines any potential human health and environmental impacts for large projects such as this, and Woodfibre is no different.

To protect the environment and to support a strong economy, our government introduced a strengthened

Environmental Assessment Act. The EA process was improved to make sure a strong, transparent process is in place.

In 2019, the environmental assessment office introduced specific housing requirements following concerns about impacts to local housing and community safety. After a multi-year assessment and extensive engagement with Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Nation, the district of Squamish, various NGOs and the public, the EAO approved the use of the floatel as an alternative housing option. This was the first time that the environmental assessment office introduced this kind of requirement.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you to the minister for the answer and the highlighting of updating the EA process in 2019, which leads me to wonder why it's being sidelined now by bills in front of this House.

The fact is this community never asked for this project, and it's not in its vision of the future. Unleashing an extra 900 workers into this small community was not a preferred option, so the floatel may be a solution.

However, this is an example of industrial proponents' bait-and-switch, a familiar strategy. They lowball estimates of the number of workers and overall impact then move the goalposts once the project is approved, trampling on the quality of life of long-term residents of a community.

How will the minister empower EAO compliance and enforcement officers to ensure that project description specifics are accurate and reflect true project impacts and that there are consequences when the numbers are adjusted for the convenience of oil and gas multinationals?

Hon. David Eby: I think one of the challenges with this project was that a lot of people were anxious about the workers taking housing in Squamish, where there's already a shortage of housing. The creative solution that was come up with was to put people on a cruise ship, keep them out of town, support the growth and prosperity of our provincial economy and minimize impact on the city of Squamish.

Now they're saying they want twice as many workers. They want to hire twice as many people. They want to create more jobs in our province, and they still want to minimize impacts.

Now, it'll go through the environmental assessment process around an additional floatel for workers, but I do have to wonder about why we would be opposed to additional workers in British Columbia earning additional money in our province, building our economy and minimizing impact on the local housing market in Squamish. I can't imagine the member suggesting these workers should be housed in the community, impacting that housing market.

[2:15 p.m.]

It's hard for me to understand the member's perspective in opposition to what seems to be a pretty pragmatic solution that also increases the prosperity and growth in our province.

GOVERNMENT HIRING OF CONSULTANT ON DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE ISSUES AND FORMER ROLE WITH LEGAL AID B.C.

Trevor Halford: We now know that the Premier helped Michael Bryant secure the job at Legal Aid B.C. We now know that the Premier directed the Minister of Social Development to secure a contract with Michael Bryant for $175,000.

But in between that, on April 9, 2024, a very simple news release went out from Legal Aid B.C. about Michael Bryant's departure. We are also hearing of some very troubling allegations about Mr. Bryant's behaviour that led to this sudden departure.

My question is a simple one to either the Premier or the Attorney General. Is he aware of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Bryant's departure on April 9 from Legal Aid B.C., yes or no — to the Premier of this province?

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: As we discussed yesterday in question period, the investments that our government has made across every element of areas of care that people in the Downtown Eastside have identified that they needed — increased access to addiction treatment, employment services, housing….

We asked for some outside perspective to be able to look at what gaps remained in service delivery and, especially, to have an outside perspective on the kinds of systemic changes that we might have overlooked to an area that's been suffering from systemic problems.

Michael Bryant has held many roles, as we canvassed in the House yesterday, that bring that unique perspective to this work. These are all valuable perspectives to us. Based on his advice and also what we hear from those on the ground, we're going to continue to invest in people in the Downtown Eastside to make it better for those who live there and safer for community members.

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

Trevor Halford: Leadership matters. It does. The fact that we just had the Minister of Social Development get up in this House…. With all due respect, the question was to the Premier.

The Premier was the one that advocated for this individual to get the job at Legal Aid B.C. It is the Premier, in his own words, that directed the Minister of Social De-

velopment to execute this contract — to execute a contract with no terms of reference, no clear mandate — for his friend, for $175,000. None of this adds up. None.

The fact is that the Premier himself has now given a contract to one of his friends and will not even stand up and defend it. And the fact is that the Premier knows why this man is no longer the CEO of Legal Aid B.C. but still chose to direct his minister to execute this contract. The fact is he has done that under the guise of the tragedy that is going on in the Downtown Eastside, and that is absolutely disgusting. I guess we could all wish to have a friend like the Premier.

My question to the Premier is a simple one. Will he get up today and answer the question on why — why he chose to award Michael Bryant this contract, knowing exactly why he left Legal Aid B.C. and knowing exactly that there are no terms of reference, no consultation done whatsoever?

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker….

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members. Members.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Member, come to order.

The executive council has the prerogative. Whoever they want to answer the question, they will do it.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Stay quiet, Member.

Minister.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Because our government has invested in a way that no other government has, since 2017…

[2:20 p.m.]

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members. Members.

Order, Members. The minister has the floor.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: To support people living and working in the Downtown Eastside, opening 624 net new housing units and 40 new shelter spaces just over the last two years; renovating existing SRO units to improve health and safety; housing close to 100 people who were living in Crab Park in housing, meeting their individual needs — this is unprecedented investment in people. And to bring an outside….

The Speaker: Members. Members.

Please continue.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To hire Michael Bryant based on his experience with his own struggle with addiction and recovery, his work as a lawyer, his work with Legal Aid — these are all valuable perspectives that he brings to the work. That's why both myself as minister and all the members of the cabinet committee on community safety are glad and looking forward to receiving his advice.

GOVERNMENT HIRING OF CONSULTANT ON DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE ISSUES

Steve Kooner: Can the Premier confirm whether the city of Vancouver was consulted in the hiring of his friend Michael Bryant?

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: The work that Michael has been doing already involves interviews with more than 100 people with lived experience. He met within his first month of work with many officials in the mayor's office, with police, with other workers in the Downtown Eastside.

I was very glad yesterday to get a letter….

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members. Members.

Members, the minister has the floor.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was very glad to get yesterday, the Premier and I, a letter from the mayor of Vancouver indicating that Mr. Bryant had already engaged with his office, with senior city leadership and had very generously offered to loan him office space to carry out his work. We're grateful for that partnership and that offer of continuing to work together.

Rosalyn Bird: So that's a no.

Did the Attorney General or the Premier know why the Premier's friend Michael Bryant was fired from Legal Aid?

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: I think we've talked quite a lot about his credentials. I think we've already said….

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh. Members, the minister has heard the question. Let her….

Members. The minister will answer.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: As the members well know, human resource decisions between an employer and an employee are not a matter for this Legislature.

Korky Neufeld: Well, the chamber question period seems to be like *Groundhog Day* around here. Let's try this again.

Michael Bryant worked under the Attorney General's portfolio just last year. Did she know why the Premier's friend was removed from Legal Aid?

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you to the member for continuing to give me the opportunity to describe some of the outcomes of our government's investments in the Downtown Eastside, since I've answered all their other questions.

I'm really glad to be working — my ministry — with the Lookout Society in the Downtown Eastside. Their ethical employment program LEAP integrates supportive housing along with comprehensive employment services. For me to be able to meet people formerly homeless and addicted who have gone through the work that we have funded but has been delivered by organizations on the ground, to hear people that are now housed, now have more than full-time employment and are so proud of the work that they have done, that is one person at a time a sign of the investment that we have done in the Downtown Eastside.

There is much more work for us to do, and I look forward to Michael Bryant's advice.

Reann Gasper: At the heart of this issue…. This question is about to hit the heart of this issue. As government, they need to be accountable for this. These are not wasted questions that we're just repeating.

[2:25 p.m.]

How does the Attorney General feel about working in a government that promotes a friend of the Premier accused of misconduct while claiming to be a champion for women?

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: I'll take this opportunity to say how very encouraged I am to see two new data sets for outcomes in the Downtown Eastside. Up to March of this year, compared to one year prior, we have 3 percent fewer people in the Downtown Eastside on income assistance…

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh, Members.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: …and we have 7 percent fewer people who are unhoused. That is a sign that our investments are making a material difference in people's lives. We know there is more to do.

Kristina Loewen: The lack of answers here in covering for their friend is kind of embarrassing.

My question is for the Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity. Does she support the hiring of the Premier's friend Michael Bryant as the Downtown Eastside czar?

The Speaker: Member, questions should be directed to the executive council members, not to the parliamentary secretaries.

Kristina Loewen: I'll direct it to the Premier then. Thank you.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: Again, I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk about investments in the Downtown Eastside.

There are people receiving health care in the Downtown Eastside today because of the work that we have done to help more people access addiction treatment and care. Opening the new Road to Recovery treatment centre at St. Paul's was one. Expanding the Hope to Health clinic to increase capacity to help 50 percent more people with complex mental health and addiction challenges…. That was a $25 million investment.

That's what the debate in this chamber is about on our side. It's about investing in people and getting outcomes that change people's lives.

Sharon Hartwell: This is kind of symptomatic of what's going on in this House, that we can't get answers from ministers when we're asking the questions relevant to the people that we're supporting.

Does the Premier believe the Premier's friend, accused of misogynistic behaviour, should be reviewing services for vulnerable women? I would like the Premier to answer.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: Also, as another way to invest in community safety and support for people in the Downtown Eastside….

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh, Members.

The minister will continue.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: We've been working with police and Crown counsel to keep repeat offenders off the street and stop criminal gang activity in the Downtown Eastside, more than doubling funding for victim services and crime prevention after the old government cut it, standing up to organized crime and money laundering that has fuelled the toxic drug crisis and gang violence, and hiring more sheriffs to keep courts open and safe.

We know there is more to do. We're going to keep working to support people, and we're going to keep bringing in outside perspectives to identify the gaps in systems that remain.

Peter Milobar: Well, it appears the only person on the Downtown Eastside whose life this government has changed for the better is the Premier's friend Michael Bryant, over the last few months, who received his $175,000 contract to review the spending that this government is doing because they don't want to admit it's failing.

Does the minister think it's wise that Mr. Bryant should be reviewing non-profit agencies while actually working out of office space provided by those same non-profit agencies?

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: To be clear, Michael Bryant is not reviewing the operations of not-for-profits, but he is looking at systemic patterns and ways that we can, as a government, better deliver service.

I do appreciate Mayor Sim's offer of space. Michael Bryant has been working out of a number of different locations, and we're certainly open to new space if that is more comfortable for the partnership with the city.

[2:30 p.m.]

The Speaker: Member, supplemental.

GOVERNMENT HIRING OF CONSULTANT ON DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE ISSUES AND FORMER ROLE WITH LEGAL AID B.C.

Peter Milobar: Well, the lack of answers and, more importantly, the body language from the Attorney General, from the Premier and from other members of the cabinet says it all. We have a Premier that said he had all the answers when he became the Premier on how to fix the Downtown Eastside. We now have a review happening that the government is so proud of they kept it secret and only actually acknowledged it, finally, once the media started asking questions months later.

We find out it's for $175,000 for six months. We find out it's a friend of the Premier's who the Premier not only recommended to go work at Legal Aid, then got fired from Legal Aid under a cloud of suspicion around potential misogynistic behaviour…. But that wasn't good enough for the Premier. He still recommended and actually ordered…. We can use the words "recommended" all we want, or "suggested," if it's the Premier telling a brand-newly appointed minister who to hire in a role. The Premier told the minister to hire his friend for $175,000, not caring about the allegations in the background. Talk about some kind of hiring process.

Again, to the Premier, why would he recommend his friend — should have known full well the situation around Legal Aid, at a bare minimum — to take on to try to clean up his mess that he created as the Premier in the Downtown Eastside?

Hon. David Eby: There's an issue that got me into politics, which was the state of life of people living in the Downtown Eastside — crucially important to me for deciding to run for office in the first place.

In my time as Attorney General, as Premier, I'm not seeing the conditions in the neighbourhood improve. We made significant investments in housing, supporting people in different ways, but there is a cohort of people in the neighbourhood that are served by non-profit organizations, the city, the federal government, by our government, by private charities. The metrics, the outcomes, the improvements for that specific group — I just don't think we're seeing them.

I didn't know Michael Bryant before. He was hired independently by Legal Aid B.C. Worked with him as Attorney General….

Interjections.

The Speaker: Shhh, Members.

Hon. David Eby: The members have been wrong about 15 different things today. I can't correct them all. But he was hired….

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. David Eby: If I rose on privilege on every dumb thing they said today, we would be here all afternoon.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Members, just have some patience. It's almost done.

Hon. David Eby: I didn't know Michael Bryant. He was hired by Legal Aid B.C., independently of me. But I saw his work at Legal Aid B.C. He worked with Indigenous people. He worked with poor people, with people who are struggling, to get them access to justice in a meaningful way. There's some big restructuring there. I need him to use those skills in the Downtown Eastside to find ways that we can provide better supports for people.

He's struggled with his own addiction and recovery. He's got empathy. He's literally working out of spaces where I think a lot of British Columbians might not feel totally comfortable. But for many Downtown Eastside residents, that's the only place they feel comfortable.

You hear from them firsthand. That's a point of critique. It's been raised over and over again. He's got experience in law; he's a lawyer. He's got experience in government; he was a former Attorney General. He understands the challenge at play.

I look forward to seeing his report — I agree with the members on this — to be judged on the results of the im-

pacts on the Downtown Eastside, an issue that has been too long overlooked. I'll also accept their critique that we've got a heck of a lot more to do there.

[End of question period.]

Point of Order

Bruce Banman: I rise on a point of personal privilege, of an important matter before this House. I'd like to clear it up, if I may.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Bruce Banman: It's very serious. A cat has gone missing.

The Speaker: And are you apologizing?

[2:35 p.m.]

Bruce Banman: I think we need to clear this up, Mr. Speaker. My good name has been questioned in this House. It's even gone to the extent where a tabloid reporter, I believe, has been hired to be a commissioner and has allegedly wrecked a $350,000 Lamborghini.

With a car expense like that, you'd think he'd be working for the Premier's office, but I digress.

The Speaker: Member, come to the point.

Bruce Banman: I will get to the point. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The point is…. The facts are, Mr. Speaker, that I did go into your office, looking for you. What did I find?

The Speaker: You found a cat, and you took it away.

Bruce Banman: I found a cat, with no food, no water — there wasn't even a litterbox — surrounded by kittens.

The Speaker: And they're waiting for their mother to be returned.

Bruce Banman: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, good pet owners know that they should spay or neuter their pets. But I digress again.

Mr. Speaker, as I recall the events, said cat practically jumped into my arms because it felt abandoned. As all cat owners know, we do not own the cats. The cats pick who they want.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, the cat has had a wonderful time. It has travelled around the Legislature. It has travelled this province. It's been in the cockpit of a plane. It's been in the bridge of one of the B.C. Ferries. It's gone for dim sum. It even went to your office, Mr. Speaker. But sadly, the door was locked, and nobody was home.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, Macey is thrilled that you have promised to make a donation to the SPCA.

The Speaker: Too late.

Bruce Banman: Well, if the cat returns, that will be on you then, Mr. Speaker.

We don't pick the pets; they pick us.

I will make a donation to my local SPCA.

The Speaker: It's about time.

Bruce Banman: I encourage all members of this House to make a donation to their local SPCA and all cat lovers to do the same.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member. Have a seat.

Bruce Banman: Mr. Speaker, one more thing. If you will graciously honour your donation — and in addition to that, Macey has expressed that she would like to see all 93 ridings of this great province — I am sure that she will be back before you return from your chair to your office.

The Speaker: Member, for your information, I don't listen to people who steal cats.

Question of Privilege
(continued)

Harman Bhangu: I rise in response to the question of privilege raised on Monday by the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs. While I respect his right to bring this matter forward, I want to provide some context.

Over the past several months, I have received numerous phone calls from truckers and company dispatchers who have raised serious concerns about the union's operations, including what they describe as unfair labour practices.

While I do not believe this rises to the level of breach of privilege as defined by the precedents of this House, I remain open to any direction you may provide and trust in your judgment to rule appropriately.

Now, I understand that my use of the words "blatantly corrupt" and "systemic nepotism" are the focus of this question of privilege. In order to address this concern, and out of respect for the rules of this House, I withdraw these comments without reservation.

Reports from Committees

PRIVATE BILLS AND PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS COMMITTEE

Amna Shah: I have the honour to present the report of the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Bills on Bill M205, intituled Mental Health Amendment Act, 2025. The committee recommends not to proceed further with this bill.

The Speaker: Members, the committee's report on Bill M205, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2025, will be considered at report stage during the next private members' time.

Orders of the Day

Hon. Mike Farnworth: In this chamber, I call continued second reading debate on Bill 14.

In the Douglas Fir Room, Section A, I call continued committee stage debate on Bill 15.

[2:40 p.m.]

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

Second Reading of Bills

BILL 14 — RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS (STREAMLINED PERMITTING) ACT, 2025 *(continued)*

Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Members. We will call this chamber back to order, where we will be continuing debate on Bill 14.

Macklin McCall: I rise today, not with hesitation but with firm resolve, to speak on a matter that I believe strikes at the very heart of our democratic principles and the integrity of governance in this province. Today we are being asked to consider and debate Bill 14, 2025, the so-called Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act, a piece of legislation that on its surface may appear to be an innocuous administrative reform, a harmless efficiency measure. But let me be absolutely clear. This bill is anything but harmless.

This is not merely a question of process or red tape. No, this is a fundamental question of values, of how we as legislators respect the rights of the people we were elected to represent. It is about the relationship between government and citizens, between the state and the communities — especially rural and remote communities, who will bear the brunt of the consequences if this bill becomes law.

The government, under the Premier and his NDP caucus, is attempting to sell this legislation as a streamlining of approvals for renewable energy projects. But that word "streamlining" is a clever euphemism. What it really means in this context is centralization of power, reduction of public oversight and the silencing of local voices.

This bill hands unprecedented authority to bureaucrats and unelected officials. It bypasses essential checks and balances. It dismantles environmental reviews and Indigenous consultation protocols that took decades to establish. It does so not in the name of progress but in the name of expedience — expedience at any cost. Let us not mince words. That cost will be borne disproportionately by rural British Columbians, farmers, foresters, ranchers, small-town mayors, Indigenous communities — people who have lived on, worked on and cared for the land for generations.

I do not rise today merely to oppose this bill. I rise to defend democratic accountability, to protect rural livelihoods and to sound the alarm about the dangerous precedent this government is attempting to set. We should all be deeply concerned that, in the name of environmental virtue-signalling, the NDP is prepared to bulldoze our democratic institutions, trample on local autonomy and gamble with the livelihoods of the very people they claim to champion.

This bill is not just bad policy; it is an affront to the democratic values we hold dear. Over the next 30 minutes, I will outline in clear terms why Bill 14 is a betrayal of due process, a threat to rural communities, a distortion of environmental stewardship and a power grab that every member of this chamber should be alarmed by, regardless of party stripe. If we allow this kind of legislative overreach to go unchallenged today, what message are we sending about the future of governance in this province?

[2:45 p.m.]

I will not stand idly by while this government attempts to sideline local decision-making and erode the rights of British Columbians under the cover of renewable energy policy. I urge all members to listen with open minds and critical hearts. This bill deserves nothing less than our full scrutiny and, in my view, our complete and total rejection.

As we delve deeper into the details of this deeply flawed legislation, I must draw the attention of this House to one of the most shocking and dangerous elements contained within its pages, section 18(1)(d). Now let me read this section into the record for the benefit of the House and for the people of British Columbia who may be watching.

Section 18(1)(d) empowers the government to suspend or cancel licences and permits, including those for hunting, fishing and guide-outfitting, without a hearing, without warning and without compensation. This is not just problematic. It is an affront to justice, a slap in the face to due process and a betrayal of every British Columbian who plays by the rules, pays their fees and depends on their licence for their livelihood or way of life.

Let me be clear. This clause hands unelected bureaucrats the power to destroy businesses and lives with the

stroke of a pen, with zero accountability, zero transparency and zero recourse for those affected. We are talking about hard-working people, guides and outfitters who have built family businesses over generations, whose licences are not just pieces of paper but the very foundation of their incomes, their reputations and their identities — people who live in remote communities and whose livelihoods depend entirely on their ability to operate legally, predictably and with the security that only due process can provide.

Under this clause, these licences can be stripped away without a hearing, without so much as a phone call, a letter of explanation or an opportunity to respond. Not only that, but there is no mechanism for compensation, no pathway for appeal, no checks, no balances. It is astonishing to me that in a free and democratic society like ours, in a province that prides itself on fairness and equality before law, we would even entertain the idea that the government can revoke someone's ability to make a living without due process.

Due process is not a luxury. It is not optional. It is a fundamental pillar of our legal system and our democracy. It exists to protect the citizen from the state. It exists to ensure that governments, regardless of their intentions, are bound by law, accountable to the people and restrained from acting on a whim. Yet this government is asking us to casually toss aside that fundamental safeguard, all in the name of streamlining and efficiency.

Well, I say no. Efficiency without justice is tyranny in disguise. What happens when someone loses their licence, not because of misconduct but because a project nearby is deemed more politically expedient? What happens when an outfitter is stripped of their permit because a large corporation wants to develop wind turbines on that land and the government would prefer to clear the way quietly? Where does it end?

Let's be honest with ourselves. This clause is not about environmental management. It is about control. It is about eliminating opposition, removing inconveniences and silencing those who might stand in the way of the government's preordained agenda. We should not be turning our backs on the very people who steward the land, who live closest to it and who know it best.

These are not faceless operators. They are fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, business owners and members of our rural communities. What message does it send when their licences, issued by this very government, can be revoked without warning, without cause and without compensation? This clause is a violation of fundamental rights, and it must not stand. It should never have made it into the draft of this bill, let alone a tabled version before this House.

That is why I say, with complete conviction, section 18(1)(d) must be removed. It is incompatible with our democratic values, it is corrosive to the rule of law, and it sets a precedent that should chill every British Columbian to their core. I call on all members of this House, regardless of where you sit or what party you represent, to stand up for due process, stand up for justice and stand against this overreach.

[2:50 p.m.]

I now turn to what may be the most constitutionally troubling aspect of Bill 14, and that is the sweeping, unchecked powers it grants to both the B.C. Energy Regulator and cabinet, allowing them to override legislation, sidestep democratic debate and implement consequential decisions without ever returning to this assembly.

Let that sink in for a moment. With the passage of this bill, we would be empowering cabinet ministers and unelected regulators to do what should only ever be done in this House — make law. This is not merely poor policy; it is a direct threat to the principles of parliamentary democracy that this Legislature exists to uphold.

We have seen this movie before. Those of us who were here during the outcry over Bill 7 will recognize the playbook immediately. That infamous piece of legislation, which met widespread backlash across this province, attempted to expand ministerial discretion in ways that sidestep transparency, accountability and the rule of law.

Now the same heavy-handed, centralizing instincts have returned, resurrected and repackaged, under the guise of environmental urgency. Bill 14 allows cabinet, without public consultation, without debate in this chamber and without oversight, to make decisions that can affect land rights, regulatory obligations, Indigenous consultation, environmental exemptions and more. This is legislation by executive fiat, and it has no place in a democratic society.

When we grant regulators the authority to override legislation, when we place that much power in the hands of agencies that are not elected, not accountable to voters and not subject to the scrutiny of this House, we are undermining the foundation of responsible government.

The B.C. Energy Regulator, as capable as its staff may be, is not a democratically elected body. It is not answerable to the people in the way we are. Yet under this bill, it would be given the ability to circumvent laws that were passed through democratic processes, laws that were debated, amended and voted upon by elected representatives from every corner of this province.

What is the point of having a Legislature if the decisions that matter most can be made behind closed doors, by order in council or through regulatory discretion? This chamber is not a rubber stamp. It is the beating heart of democratic debate in British Columbia. It is where the people's business is supposed to be conducted with honesty, with scrutiny and with accountability, yet Bill 14 treats it as an obstacle to be bypassed. It treats democratic oversight as an inconvenience. It treats your voice and the voices of your constituents as optional.

We are not here to serve as a ceremonial body. We are not here to ratify the decisions of cabinet after the fact. We are here to debate, to challenge and to hold power to account. That is the essence of what it means to serve in a parliamentary democracy.

Let us be clear-eyed about where this road leads. If we normalize this kind of broad, discretionary power, if we normalize cabinet overriding legislation without returning to this House, then we are no longer operating under the rule of law. We are operating under the rule of decree. That is not democracy. That is not British Columbia. And it is not something any of us, regardless of party, should be willing to tolerate.

We are the stewards of this institution. We are the guardians of democratic practice in this province. It falls on us to say no when a government, any government, asks for the power to bypass the very system of accountability that gives this institution its legitimacy. This House must not cede its authority. It must not surrender its constitutional role, and it must not allow Bill 14 to pass with these dangerous provisions intact.

If we fail to act now, we may find ourselves looking back in a few short years wondering how we allowed this shift — this quiet, incremental erosion of democratic norms — to take hold. We must draw a line. We must stand up for the sovereignty of this assembly, and we must reject any attempt, however subtle or well packaged, to govern from the shadows.

As if the unchecked powers and environmental exemptions and the erosion of democratic oversight were not enough, Bill 14 contains yet another deeply disturbing component — the use of retroactive provisions and the removal of traditional appeal mechanisms. These two elements, buried deep in the legal framework of the bill, might not make headlines, but their implications are nothing short of profound and dangerous. They go to the very core of how law should function in a free and democratic society.

[2:55 p.m.]

First, let's talk about the retroactivity clause. Bill 14 grants the government the authority to apply decisions, fees and levies retroactively. That means a person or business — be it a guide-outfitter, a landowner, a small clean energy operator or even a local First Nation — could find themselves subject to new rules, penalties or obligations for actions they took before those rules even existed.

This is not just problematic; it is a fundamental violation of legal certainty, a principle that is the bedrock of civilized legal order. If the rules of the game can be changed after the game has already been played, then we no longer have the rule of law. We have the rule of whim. How can any citizen, any business owner, any community leader plan for the future, make decisions in good faith if they live under the looming threat that the government can reach backward through time and penalize them retroactively?

Retroactive law-making is something we typically associate with authoritarian regimes, not with responsible democratic governments. In fact, legal scholars and constitutional experts around the world regard retroactive laws with deep suspicion. They undermine trust, they create uncertainty, and they send a chilling message: your rights today may not protect you tomorrow.

But it doesn't stop there. Not only does Bill 14 allow retroactive decision-making; it also removes established appeal mechanisms that are meant to provide fairness and accountability in our legal system. Under this bill, British Columbians affected by key decisions such as the denial of permits, the seizure of land access or the imposition of levies would have no right to appeal in the traditional sense — no tribunal, no administrative review and, in many cases, no route to justice at all.

This is outrageous. Appeal rights exist not as bureaucratic nuance but as a vital safeguard against error, abuse and overreach. They ensure that decisions made by regulators, ministers and bureaucrats are subject to scrutiny and correction when needed. They uphold fairness. They prevent miscarriages of justice.

To remove these rights, especially in a bill that already centralizes power in the hands of cabinet and regulators, is to leave British Columbians defenceless in the face of government authority. It is to tell them, effectively: "You have no recourse. What we decide is final, and you will live with the consequences — retroactively, if necessary."

This is not merely poor legislation. It is not just a case of political overreach. It is, quite frankly, a violation of the rule of law. It strips British Columbians of predictability, security and the right to be heard. It erodes public trust in institutions, and it sets an alarming precedent for how future governments of any stripe might treat the law as a tool of convenience rather than a structure for fairness.

To every member of this chamber who believes in justice, regardless of your political affiliation, I say this. Today it is Bill 14. Tomorrow it could be something else, and the day after that, it could be your constituents who are left without recourse.

This House must never allow legislation to be used as a blunt instrument, especially not legislation that operates in the shadows of retroactivity and silence. British Columbians deserve a government that operates under the law, not above it. They deserve decisions made openly, prospectively and with mechanisms in place to ensure fairness. They deserve to know, if they are wrong, that they will be heard, not dismissed.

The retroactive provisions of this bill must be struck. The appeals mechanism must be restored. This House must reaffirm its commitment to the rule of law, the right of appeal and the principle that in a free society, justice must not be done. It must be seen to be done.

One of the most distressing and, frankly, infuriating aspects of Bill 14 is the way it disproportionately targets and harms rural British Columbians. It is as though the architects of this legislation looked across the vast, diverse landscape of this province and decided that rural people, the men and women who live closest to the land, could simply be written off as collateral damage. This is not just bad policy; it is a betrayal.

[3:00 p.m.]

Let me be very specific. This bill puts at risk the livelihoods of guide-outfitters, ranchers, hunters, trappers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous landowners and the small business owners who are the backbone of rural communities. These are people who are not just workers. They are stewards of the land, community leaders and cultural keepers. Many of them have lived in these areas for generations. They understand the rhythms of the land, the importance of balance and the deep relationship between people and nature.

What does this bill say to them? It says their licences — whether for outfitting, guiding, hunting or operating on Crown land — can be revoked without notice. It says their access to land can be curtailed without compensation, their family's businesses dismantled by fiat and their way of life sacrificed for someone else's political timeline. This bill treats rural British Columbians not as partners in the future but as obstacles to be managed as expendable.

From the Cariboo to the Peace River, from the Kootenays to the Chilcotin….

Deputy Speaker: Members, could I ask you just to keep it down a little bit at the back of the room? We're listening to West Kelowna–Peachland. Thank you.

Macklin McCall: I'll move back a bit here.

From the Cariboo to the Peace River, from the Kootenays to the Chilcotin, this bill lands like a hammer. I have heard directly from the people it would impact: outfitters who fear losing everything they've worked for, ranchers who are being kept in the dark about the future of their grazing land, families who feel voiceless in their own province.

To them, I say: I hear you, we hear you, and we will not let this go unchallenged.

This government has tried to frame Bill 14 as a forward-thinking piece of legislation, streamlining, modernizing, advancing the green economy. But what is modern or forward-thinking about writing off entire communities? What is progressive about ignoring the voices of people who live with the real-world consequences of these policies?

Jessie Sunner: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Jessie Sunner: Today we have students visiting us in the Legislature from the Alcuin College. They were introduced earlier by the MLA — for North Vancouver–Seymour, maybe? They're from North Vancouver–Lonsdale.

I just want to say that I see them seated in the gallery now, so if we could all just give them a warm welcome, please.

Deputy Speaker: Indeed, welcome to the Legislature.

Debate Continued

Macklin McCall: Let us not forget that the rural economy is not a footnote in this province. It is a pillar. It feeds our cities. It fuels our economy. It supplies our natural resources, and above all, it reflects the very spirit of British Columbia — resilient, resourceful and rooted in the land.

When we introduce legislation that devastates rural livelihoods, we are not just harming individuals. We are damaging the social and economic fabric of entire regions, communities that already face disproportionate challenges in health care access, infrastructure and investment.

This damage is not hypothetical; it's real. Under this bill, an outfitter with decades of investment can lose everything overnight. A family farm can find itself flanked by industrial energy corridors they were never consulted about. A trapline passed down for generations can be rendered useless, not by nature, not by mismanagement but by the careless stroke of a bureaucratic pen.

We should be supporting these communities, not sidelining them. We should be empowering local voices, not stripping them of agency. We should be consulting, not imposing; partnering, not punishing.

Bill 14 sends the opposite message. It says: "We in Victoria know best. We'll decide what's important. And if your life, your land or your legacy gets in the way, well, too bad." That is unacceptable. This House has a duty to all British Columbians, not just to urban voters, not just to developers, not just to politically aligned stakeholders. Our duty is to every family, every small business and every community across this great province.

Right now rural British Columbians are being told, in effect, that their voices don't matter, that their contributions are invisible, that their concerns are inconvenient. That's not the British Columbia I believe in. That's not the kind of leadership this Legislature should be endorsing.

We must stand with rural communities. We must reject the notion that progress must come at the expense of fairness. And we must ensure that no government, this one or any future one, has the authority to sweep away the rights and livelihoods of rural families under the cover of streamlining.

[3:05 p.m.]

This bill sends the wrong message; let this House send a better one.

As I move to conclude this address, I do so with both a heavy heart and a firm resolve. British Columbians deserve a cleaner energy future. No one in this chamber disputes that. But they also deserve something that is important, something foundational. They deserve justice. They deserve due process. They deserve respect.

Bill 14, in its current form, violates every single one of those principles. It pretends to be about progress, but it is built on exclusion. It claims to empower the province, but it silences the people. It wears the mask of green policy, but behind that mask is a quiet erosion of democracy, rights and accountability.

Let us be clear about what this bill really is. It is not a roadmap to responsible development. It is not a framework to fair regulation. It is a document of executive overreach, bureaucratic arrogance and deeply flawed priorities. With its sweeping powers, it casts aside the role of this House. With its retroactive provisions, it undermines the rule of law.

With its removal of appeals, it denies people justice. With its exemptions from environmental and cultural protections, it puts land, heritage and ecosystems at risk. With its impact on rural communities, it sends the message loud and clear that those who live outside the urban centres are second-class citizens in their own province.

That is not leadership. That is capitulation to expedience. That is what happens when ideology replaces dialogue and when process is discarded in the pursuit of headlines. This House must be more than a chamber of political convenience. It must be a safeguard of principle, a place where legislation is not just pushed through but where it is scrutinized, debated, tested and, when necessary, stopped.

We are not here to serve the short-term ambitions of a Premier. We are here to protect the long-term rights of the people. We are here to ensure that every British Columbian — urban, rural, Indigenous, non-Indigenous, business owner and land user — has a voice, a fair process and a government that listens before it acts.

We must not sacrifice democracy on the altar of expediency. We must not let political urgency trample constitutional principle. We must not let green become the excuse for unchecked government power. Clean energy is not the enemy, but injustice in the name of clean energy is. So I say, without hesitation and with great conviction, that this House must reject Bill 14 in its current form, or at the very least, we must amend it substantially, seriously and transparently to restore the principles of fairness, accountability and democratic oversight.

We must do better for the ranchers in the Peace, for the outfitters in the Kootenays, for the citizens who still believe that this Legislature is their Legislature and not just a rubber stamp for cabinet.

History will remember what we do here. Let it remember that we chose principle over pressure, that we defended process over power, that we stood not for the party but for the people. Let us do the right thing. Let us stand up for the people we serve.

Jody Toor: I rise today to speak on Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act, a bill that on its face promises to accelerate our shift to clean energy. But beneath the surface, it raises serious questions about democratic accountability, oversight and the role of local communities in shaping the future of this province.

Let me be clear from the outset. I support renewable energy. Our communities support renewable energy. We understand the need to transition to a more sustainable and secure power grid. We welcome projects that create jobs and strengthen energy independence. But that transition must be done right, with transparency, consultation and respect for the rule of law.

[3:10 p.m.]

Bill 14, in its current form, fails on all of those fronts. The government is asking British Columbians to hand over extraordinary authority to cabinet and to the B.C. Energy Regulator without offering clear guardrails, timelines or accountability. They are doing it in the name of speed, speed that comes at the expense of proper process.

Yes, let's support our growing economy, but let's not pretend this bill is just about energy. This is a governance bill. It rewrites how decisions get made in this province and who gets left out. In ridings like mine, Langley-Willowbrook, people care deeply about both energy and process. They want responsible development, but they also want to know that their local councils, agriculture protections and environmental safeguards are not being overlooked in the rush to build.

As Vaughan Palmer put it in the *Vancouver Sun*: "But on closer examination, the two bills do not actually repel any of B.C.'s heavy regulatory burden. Rather, they give the cabinet arbitrary powers to override existing rules, regulations and procedures on projects favoured by the NDP."

We support reducing red tape, but this is not about clearing red tape for everyone. It's about granting the Premier and the cabinet the power to choose winners and losers. When you centralize that kind of discretion behind closed doors, you don't just undermine trust; you invite abuse.

Clean energy must not come at the cost of clean governance. If we get this wrong, we will not only weaken the public confidence but risk leaving communities behind. In this House, it is our duty to ensure that doesn't happen.

The government has framed this bill as a narrow and necessary tool, something designed to fast-track nine wind farms and a transmission line from Prince George to Terrace. That's the story British Columbians are being

sold, but the text of this legislative bill tells a very different story.

Clause 2 of Bill 14 gives cabinet the ability to delegate any projects as streamlined, not through debate in this House but quietly through regulation. There is no obligation for consultation, no requirement for disclosure and no procedure for review.

Clause 1 expands the definition of renewable resources so broadly that the cabinet can add new energy resources at will — not just solar and wind but biomass, biogas, geothermal, ocean and, profoundly, any resource the government may later prescribe. This means the list of projects eligible for fast-tracking is not fixed. It's endless, and it's entirely at the cabinet's discussion.

This isn't about the nine projects. It's about the ones to come, projects that could be added without notice, without debate and without consent.

Let me be clear. We want more energy in this province, but we don't want it delivered through a process that sidelines communities and concentrates power in a small circle of insiders. That's the real risk here — not just the projects themselves, but, as we have already heard many times in this House, the precedent this bill sets.

Who decides what counts as renewable? Who decides what projects get special treatments? And who gets left out of this process? Right now the answer to all those questions is the same: cabinet. Not communities. Not Members of the Legislative Assembly. That's exactly why this bill cannot go unchallenged. If we surrender our role in shaping which projects move forward and how, we are not governing.

One of the most troubling aspects of Bill 14 is its treatment of environmental oversight, not by strengthening it, not by even reforming it but by discarding it entirely for certain projects. Clause 14 of the bill allows cabinet to exempt appointed renewable energy projects from the Environmental Assessment Act. That includes the nine wind farms and the North Coast transmission line initially identified.

It also includes any future projects the government decides to fast-track. This clause doesn't just bypass environmental review; it sets a precedent for skipping it altogether.

What does this mean in practice? It means no comprehensive analysis of accumulated impacts, no enforceable consultation obligations and no independent scrutiny of how these projects might affect our water, land, species at risk or climate.

[3:15 p.m.]

It means limiting one of the few tools communities and stakeholders have to advocate and hold the government accountable. The Premier says in this bill that it's about energy security. But what kind of security do we offer future generations if we're willing to strip away basic safeguards?

Langley-Willowbrook residents understand the importance of thoughtful, balanced development. We're a community that has worked hard to preserve green space, protect farmland and plan our growth. But Bill 14 takes that decision-making out of our hands and our communities. It removes the requirement for public input, bypasses public scrutiny and concentrates environmental decision-making within cabinet and a single regulator.

That's not a partisan critique. It's a warning. It's a warning that when you exempt powerful interests from transparency and oversight, you don't just streamline a project. You erode the public's ability to evaluate whether it's in the public good.

The people I serve, and British Columbians more broadly, deserve energy frameworks that represent and respect governance, community input and integrity. On all of those counts, Bill 14 fails, and we cannot afford to get this wrong. Bill 14 isn't just about permitting timelines, regulations or expertise. It touches the very heart of what defines our communities, our farmland, our cultural heritage and our public lands.

Let's begin with farmland. Clause 15 of this bill weakens the protection under the Agricultural Land Commission Act by allowing the B.C. Energy Regulator to approve non-farm use or subdivision of agricultural land reserve, ALR, land for renewable energy projects. That's not practical. That's a direct threat to the long-term advantage of B.C.'s farmland — the same farmland we rely on for food security, climate resilience and generational stewardship.

Langley-Willowbrook is built on agricultural heritage. Farmers here aren't just growing crops. They're anchoring an entire way of life. They're feeding families, supporting local economies and preserving open space. We've already seen development pressures bring farmland to the edge. Now, with this bill, cabinet can authorize ALR land to be carved up with minimal oversight and no public hearing. That is unacceptable.

Clause 16 goes even further, undermining the Heritage Conservation Act by giving the B.C. Energy Regulator the authority to determine whether heritage protection applies to a site. Even more concerning, the regulator also gets to appoint the decision-maker who makes that determination.

In plain language, that means a single unelected body can decide what counts as a heritage site, including sites of Indigenous cultural importances, and who has the power to make that judgment. There is no requirement for public consultation, no requirement for cultural expertise and no requirement to respect existing protection if the regulator demands them inconvenient.

Let's not forget that my riding is home to protected heritage corridors, historical farmsteads and ecologically sensitive land that we fought hard to preserve. The people care deeply about legacy — not just their land but what they pass on to future generations. When the government strips away local input and heritage safeguards, they're not

just rushing projects. They're erasing local identity in the name of speed.

Yes, we want energy, but not at the expense of bulldozing necessary farmland, not at the expense of dismissing the cultural voices who have fought to protect dedicated land and not at the expense of losing the character and identity that make our communities unique. Once we open this door, once you allow cabinet and a single regulator to rezone farmland, override community planning and redefine heritage, there is no guarantee where it will stop. That's not renewable energy policy. That's overreach.

[3:20 p.m.]

If there is one area where British Columbians expect clarity, it's safety. Yet Bill 14 introduces sweeping provisions that remove or weaken safety standards, not just for workers and contractors but for entire communities. Clause 17 allows for the Safety Standards Act to be disapplied for certain level 3 streamlined projects. That's not an administrative detail. That's an intentional choice to exempt high-impact projects from core safety laws. There is no explanation in this bill for why safety protocols, fire prevention systems or equipment standards should be considered optional and no transparency about which projects will be granted this exemption.

Let me ask plainly. Would this government ever suggest waiving fire codes for a school build or lift electrical standards for a hospital expansion? Of course not. Why is it acceptable to do so here simply because the projects carry a renewable label?

As I said before, my riding is not opposed to renewable energy, but our residents expect a basic protection. Fast-tracking a wind turbine installation doesn't mean fast-tracking past safety obligations, especially not when those are buried in back pages of bills with no process for public notice or review. The NDP claims to be the party of workers, yet they're drafting bills that let safety standards be stripped away for convenience.

The scope of government overreach doesn't end there. Clause 18 of this bill gives the B.C. Energy Regulator the power to cancel hunting, trapping and angling permits at its discretion, without any obligation to hold a hearing or provide justification. These aren't just recreational permits in many cases. They are how families feed themselves, maintain their culture and practices and steward the land.

In regions like ours, where rural and urban meet, these rights matter. Families have lived for generations off the land, working in partnership with nature. To hand unelected regulators the power to cancel those rights without appeal is more than bureaucratic arrogance. It's a direct threat to the values and freedoms many British Columbians hold dear.

Let's be clear. This isn't about opposing progression; it is about defending due process. A government that can cancel safety rules or revoke public rights without explanation….

What's missing from this bill are the guardrails that prevent abuse. There are no thresholds, no public hearings, no automatic reviews, no reassurance that decisions that can be made by the regulator will reflect the interests of people who actually live in those communities, such as mine. In short, there is no accountability, and where there's no accountability, there is no safety.

One of the most dangerous aspects of Bill 14 is not just what it enables, going forward, but what it retroactively excuses. Clause 21 of this bill validates any action taken by the B.C. Energy Regulator since April 1, 2024. That means the government is reaching back in time to declare that anything done even potentially outside of existing law is now suddenly legal, no matter the impact, no matter the public consequences.

This retroactive authority is a direct attack on legal certainty and public accountability. When a government can change the rules after the effect, it sends a chilling message to communities, to investors and to every citizen who believes in due process. The rules are whatever the cabinet says they are, even if you followed the law at the time. This is not a good governance. It is democratic oversight. It is bureaucratic retrofitting designed to cover tracks, not build trust.

Clause 13 is equally alarming. It allows cabinet to amend, disapply or apply key sections of the Energy Resource Activities Act through regulation. That means major legislative powers are being shifted from this chamber, from the people elected, representatives, to executives. It gets worse. That power can be delegated further to the B.C. Energy Regulator or even to any person assigned by the minister. In theory, one unelected official could be handed the power to rewrite the law without ever coming before this House.

[3:25 p.m.]

This government has approached this bill as though oversight is a liability and public consultation is an obstacle. Let's be honest about what this bill does. It gives this cabinet the ability to declare any project as streamlined, and it gives the regulators the ability to waive or rewrite laws that would otherwise require legislative debate. This bill doesn't just move fast; it moves behind closed doors. It centralizes power in a way that is incompatible with open government, and it sets a precedent that future governments of any stripe could use to override laws without a vote, without a hearing and without the public ever knowing what changed.

If we allow this kind of retroactive, unaccountable governance to become the norm, we risk eroding the very foundations of our democracy. The strength of our system isn't measured by how quickly a law can be passed; it's measured by how well that law serves the people it's meant to protect.

One of the most unsettling trends emerging from this government is its quiet but deliberate dismantling of local

democratic authority, and Bill 14 is yet another step in that direction. This legislation also paints a clear picture of a government that no longer sees municipal government as partners but as obstacles to be bypassed. Bill 14 allows cabinet to fast-track renewable energy projects and allows entire permitting pathways through regulation without input from local governments, without consistency from official community plans and without accountability to the people who live in these communities.

Let's be clear. This isn't doubtful. The government has already signalled its intention to centralize power over land use. This bill strips local governments of the opportunity to represent their ridings on issues that directly affect them, whether that's transmission lines, crossing farmland or a wind farm impacting rural habitat and property values.

In Langley-Willowbrook, our residents take local planning seriously. Our official community plan wasn't created overnight, and it was developed through public consultation, with care, collaboration and compassion. That's how planning should work, but under Bill 14, that entire process can be overridden at a stroke of a pen.

This government claims to value consultation, but how can that be true when local leaders, planners and citizens are systematically excluded from decisions that will reshape our communities? If this bill is so benign, so targeted, so limited in scope, why hand the power to sidestep every layer of local regulation to unelected regulators or a cabinet? We know what happens when this kind of authority is abused. We've seen it in other sectors. Centralized control means centralized mistakes. When local knowledge is ignored, the consequences are always felt on the ground.

Municipal authorities are not a barrier to progress. They are a safeguard of democracy. Our communities should not have to fight their own provincial government just to have a say in their future. Yet this bill sets up that exact conflict, and it does so with no checks, no timelines, no reassurances that the local voices will ever be heard.

We cannot allow this kind of bill that disrespects the work of councillors, planning departments and residents who give their time and energy to shape where and how we grow. Bill 14 undermines that work. It undermines the principle that those most affected by a project should have a seat at that table.

Another deeply troubling feature of Bill 14 is its lack of guardrails around levying fees and financial decision-making. Specifically, clause 12 and clause 22 grant the B.C. Energy Regulator authority to improve any levy or financial obligations on projects retroactively and without a clear formula. This is not how you build a fair, competitive energy market. It's how you create a two-tiered system, one that's ripe for political favouritism.

[3:30 p.m.]

What's to stop a well-connected developer from securing a sweetheart deal while a competitor down the road is hit with an arbitrary fee? What protections exist to ensure these financial decisions aren't influenced by lobbyists, donors or political insiders? There are none. That's what this is about: picking winners and losers behind closed doors.

Under subsection 22(2) of the bill, the regulator can issue a certificate requiring to pay any amount of fee, not based on impact, not based on scale, not based on a clear framework or legislation — just any amount. This lack of financial transparency opens the door to inconsistencies, favouritism and even abuse.

When power is this centralized and unaccountable, the public starts asking fair questions. Who gets fast-tracked? Who gets exemptions? Who gets a break on fees? And without mandated reporting or public disclosure, we won't know.

The chamber warned that such sweeping powers should not be justified simply by involving urgency. Yet here we are again. A different bill, but the same dangerous approach.

If you want to create a business climate that encourages investment in renewable energy, this is not the way to do it. Investors need clarity. Communities need fairness. British Columbians need accountability. Bill 14 offers none of those things. Instead, it grants a small circle of unelected officials the authority to impose costs, modify obligations and rewrite the rules, all without having to explain themselves. That's not how you build confidence; that's how you erode it.

When governments ask for extraordinary powers, they owe the public an extraordinary level of transparency. Bill 14 does the opposite. It centralizes the power, avoids legislative scrutiny and buries decision-making behind bureaucratic doors. Even if the intentions are good, and let's give the government the benefit of doubt, the process matters. Public trust is not something you demand; it's something you earn. And this government is spending that trust like it's disposable.

My riding of Langley-Willowbrook, like so many across this province, cares deeply about both the future of energy and the integrity of those decisions made. They believe in responsible development, but not at the expense of safeguards that have long protected our environment, our farms and our democratic institutions. It's rooted in real experience of closed-door decisions of developers with privileged access of rural and suburban communities left out of conversation.

People need to know that their voices matter, that their concerns will be heard, that their local government and regional plans still mean something. Bill 14 sends the opposite message. It says: "We'll decide. We'll delegate. We'll exempt. And you will find out later, if at all."

This bill validates decisions made before this bill was even introduced. It gives cabinet the ability to rewrite

rules retroactively. It lets the regulator override community plans, safety laws and heritage protection, at will. They are not just technical changes. They are systematic shifts in how power is used in this province.

Our democratic work doesn't work unless people believe it's working for them. When government begins sidelining communities, ignoring First Nations and rushing bills through without meaningful oversight, that belief starts to demolish.

We are not opposed to building things. We are opposed to sidestepping the process that protects people, in the rush to build. Bill 14 is not just about energy. It's about governance. It's about the values. Most of all, it's about who gets a seat at the table when decisions are made that affect everybody.

Let us be very clear that British Columbians deserve energy, but they also deserve accountable government. This House has a choice, a choice between endorsing a bill that centralizes power, undermines community consultation, weakens environmental oversight and opens the door to political favouritism or choosing a better path, a path that reflects the values of fairness, transparency and democratic integrity.

[3:35 p.m.]

The NDP wants to frame this debate as splitting support for clean energy or a stand in the way of progression, but that's a false choice. We are here today because we support clean energy. What we do not support is a blank cheque handed to a cabinet and an unelected regulator to operate without meaningful limits, without checks and without public accountability.

This bill is not about whether renewable energy should be built. It's about how. Under Bill 14, the how is dangerously vague, open-ended and politically convenient. This isn't red-tape reduction for everyone. This is red-tape reduction for those who have political connections to fast-track their projects while others wait in line. We cannot, in good principle, support a piece of legislation that sacrifices due processes, invites regulator inconsistency and leaves our communities voiceless in decisions that affect their land, their livelihood and their legacy.

We owe it to our communities and to the future generations to get this right. I reject Bill 14 in its current form, and I urge every member of this House to do the same. At the end of the day, our job is not just to build projects; it's to build trust. And we cannot do that with this bill that integrates power at the expense of people who are elected to represent. Let's prove to British Columbians that we can grow our energy future without abandoning the integrity of governance.

Donegal Wilson: I rise today to speak to Bill 14, the Renewable Energy (Streamlined Permitting) Act. Before we dive into the technical details of this bill, I want to take a step back and talk about what's really at stake here.

Bill 14 is not just about renewable energy; it's about authority. It's about who gets to make decisions, how those decisions are made and who gets left behind in the process. This legislation hands sweeping powers to cabinet and to the B.C. Energy Regulator, bypassing environmental oversight, overriding existing legislation and weakening the role of this very Legislature.

It allows cabinet to unilaterally determine which projects are in and which are out, which projects deserve full scrutiny and which get a free pass. That's not due process. That's a government picking winners and losers behind closed doors.

We are told that this bill is meant to streamline the permitting process for nine wind farms and one transmission line. But the legislation doesn't stop there. It gives cabinet the ability, at any time, to designate any renewable energy project as streamlined through regulation — no legislative debate, no oversight, just a stroke of the pen to bypass the laws of our province.

Then we look at how those projects will be treated. Environmental assessments? Optional. Safety standards? Suspended. Agricultural land use rules? Waived. Heritage designations? Delegated to a regulator who can choose who decides whether something is significant or not. To me, this is not regulatory efficiency; it is regulatory erasure.

Even more concerning, this bill applies retroactively. What message does this send to project proponents, to Indigenous nations, to communities and to landowners? It tells them: "Make your application, but the rules can be changed at any time, and you'll have no say in it."

What message does it send to industry? Unless your project is politically convenient, your permit might be stuck in limbo, while someone else's project leaps ahead with a government blessing. This is not how you restore investor confidence in British Columbia. This is not how you promote sustainable development. And in my opinion, it's certainly not how you govern this province.

[3:40 p.m.]

I want to be clear. I support the idea of reducing duplication in the permitting process. I support timely decision-making, and I support renewable energy development. I campaigned on those items, but the path to those items and outcomes cannot be through unchecked authority, retroactive validation and the systematic dismantling of oversight. The rules and process should be fair, transparent and understood by all. This bill gives too much power to too few people, and that should concern every member of this House, regardless of which side of the aisle you sit on.

Let's talk about the structure of this bill, specifically the three-tiered streamlining system that it creates. Bill 14 divides energy projects into three classes: level 1, level 2 and level 3. On the surface, that might sound like a reasonable way to organize things, but when you look

at the actual application of these levels, a troubling pattern emerges. The lower the number, the more regulation applies. The higher the number, the fewer rules, the less scrutiny and the more discretionary authority is handed to cabinet and the regulator.

Let's start with level 1. This is the base category, essentially a catch-all for projects that haven't been specifically designated by cabinet. These projects still require permitting processes, and the regulatory framework remains largely intact. But the government has made it clear these are the less preferred projects, the ones not on our priority list.

We move to level 2, currently designated for the North Coast transmission line and any other projects cabinet decides to add later. Here entire sections of the Energy Resource Activities Act are suspended. It appears that the regulator is no longer bound by permitting requirements, and key provisions around records, public investigations and dormant site obligations are thrown out. Safety plans are not even necessary.

By the time we reach level 3, we are operating almost entirely outside the normal bounds of oversight. These are the cabinet's handpicked projects, and they are handed a blank slate. The Environmental Assessment Act doesn't apply. The Agricultural Land Commission is sidelined. Safety standards can be waived, and wildlife permitting can be cancelled.

It all happens with no guarantee of public transparency. Who gets to decide which projects get this treatment? Cabinet. No legislative process, no published criteria and no review panel. Just an order in council, and suddenly, a project is elevated to elite status in B.C.

What's worse, these levels aren't based on risk. They aren't based on size or location or their environmental impact or to communities. They're based on discretion, which means two projects doing the exact same thing in similar locations could face completely different regulatory burdens, simply because one was liked more by government.

Let's call this what it is. It's not a streamlining framework but a hierarchy of political favour. It's a system that fast-tracks favoured projects while leaving others buried under red tape. It creates uncertainty for project proponents, distrust in the regulatory system and a dangerous precedent where the rules don't even apply.

I appreciate that the government has recognized that their current process is flawed, but instead of fixing it to make B.C. investable again and create stable jobs, we have chosen to handpick projects that can go around due process. If we're serious about streamlining, let's do it for everyone. Let's build a single, accountable, transparent process that applies equally to all projects, regardless of who's in the photo op. We need to ensure that regulatory fairness is not up for political negotiation.

We've heard a lot of talk from this government about the need for faster permitting, cleaner energy and job creation. But those outcomes will remain out of reach for many, under a bill like this, because what this legislation really says is: if your project isn't politically aligned with government priorities, good luck.

We have small towns across B.C. that are struggling to get water treatment upgrades approved, where basic infrastructure projects languish for years in permitting backlogs. Just last week, in estimates of the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, we shared some of the backlogs we have on water licences and land applications. Combined, we have thousands of applications that are waiting to be processed, with some going back almost ten years.

[3:45 p.m.]

Bill 14 does nothing to address this backlog. We have ranchers, loggers, mill owners and clean energy innovators who can't get a straight answer from government on what's required to move forward. They're just sitting in the queue in good faith while the other projects, projects favoured by this government, will step over them and bump them even further down the list.

Meanwhile, the Premier stands up and says, "We're cutting red tape," while creating a system where only some projects get access to this so-called single window.

Let's be clear. I support the concept of a single-window permitting process. I think every project, big or small, should be able to navigate the system without hitting the wall of interministry confusion and contradiction that exists today.

But that single window should be open to everyone, and under Bill 14, it's not. In fact, rural proponents are at an even greater disadvantage, because if your project doesn't make the government's shortlist, if it isn't one of the selected nine wind farms or part of the North Coast transmission line, you're still stuck navigating the same fragmented, slow-moving, multiministry approval process that has plagued this province for years.

Even worse, this bill creates the perception — and in some cases, the reality — that urban or industrial-scale projects with political backing get special treatment, while regionally critical projects are left behind. This creates real uncertainty for investors, for local governments and for families who just want to see jobs returned to their communities.

Let me say this plainly. If we create a system where the government arbitrarily decides which projects move forward and which don't, we will not rebuild investor confidence in this province. We will not attract the kind of responsible, long-term investment that creates the jobs that we need in rural B.C.

The result? Entire communities are left waiting for housing approvals, waiting for energy connections, waiting for government to treat their priorities with the same

urgency and respect as those of a politically convenient wind farm.

My constituents don't need special treatment. They need fair treatment, and a government permitting process that is efficient, consistent and transparent, not one that leaves them at the back of the line because they don't fit the current narrative. This legislation doesn't deliver that. It widens the gap and, in doing so, further erodes public trust in a system that already feels rigged against rural British Columbians.

In addition to creating a two-tiered permitting regime, Bill 14 goes much further. It tears down some of our province's most fundamental environmental and cultural protections quietly, through exemptions, through discretionary powers and through the erosion of our laws that have until now provided some measure of public accountability.

Let's begin with the Environmental Assessment Act. Clause 14 of this bill outright exempts the nine wind energy projects, the North Coast transmission line and any future cabinet-approved projects from undergoing an environmental assessment. That means no requirement to assess cumulative effects, no public consultation and no independent review, even for massive, landscape-altering projects. Let's call that what it is: a rollback. We were told these projects are low-impact, but how can anyone judge impact when the process to evaluate it has been deliberately removed?

Next I'll speak to something close to my own riding, the Agricultural Land Commission Act. Clause 15 allows for non-farm use, subdivision and even soil or fill dumping on protected agricultural land. The Keremeos, Similkameen Valley, is full of wind. Are farms going to be overridden with renewable energy windmills?

This will be done at the discretion of the regulator. No hearing, no notice and no ALC oversight. In case there was any doubt, clause 24 amends the ALC Act to make it clear that its rules do not apply to Bill 14 projects. This should be alarming to every person in this province who believes in protecting B.C.'s farmland. Once you carve exemptions like this into the agricultural land reserve, you weaken our entire system, and we've seen before how hard it is to get our farmland back once it's gone.

[3:50 p.m.]

Then we have the Heritage Conservation Act. Under clause 16, the authority to designate and manage culturally significant sites can now be delegated to the regulator or even an employee of the regulator. These are sites of historical, cultural or Indigenous significance, and instead of being handled through the heritage branch or through established protocols, that responsibility can now be passed to someone with no heritage experience or, worse, someone that has been tasked with fast-tracking a project. Short-term gain may irrevocably destroy an irreplaceable heritage site. That is a clear conflict of interest, and it opens the door to political interference and irreversible damage.

Clause 17 weakens the Safety Standards Act, explicitly exempting levels 2 and 3 projects from creating needed safety plans and provisions that exist to protect workers, communities and the environment.

Clause 18, perhaps the most quietly controversial, delegates powers under the Wildlife Act to the regulator, including the ability to suspend or cancel permits for hunting, trapping and angling — possibly creating new lineal lines, contrary to the many investments this government has had to rehabilitate roads and land for wildlife.

This is not a theoretical risk. The government's own backgrounders admit these powers are being granted, not requested, and there's no requirement for justification, consultation or public notice. That means entire groups — outfitters, First Nations or residents — who rely on those permits could have them revoked, based on a decision tied to a development project.

We've seen this tactic before in Bill 7, and British Columbia has pushed back hard, because even if they support renewable energy, they don't support trampling over our environmental laws, our wildlife management or the cultural protections we have in place. This bill repeats those mistakes.

I'll say this again. I support renewable energy development but not if it comes at the cost of the very values we claim to uphold, and not if it bulldozes over our food security, our cultural heritage and our wildlife protections in the name of bureaucratic convenience. Streamlining should not mean sacrificing stewardship. It should mean clarity, certainty and consistency, not exemptions for the powerful and silence for everyone else.

One of the most concerning aspects of Bill 14 is the vast and virtually unchecked power it hands to the B.C. Energy Regulator and the complete absence of built-in accountability. Let's remember that the B.C. Energy Regulator is not elected, it does not report to this House, and under this legislation it is being given the authority to rewrite the rules it operates under, with little to no oversight from this Legislature. Let me walk through what that actually means.

Under clause 13, cabinet can make regulations to apply, disapply or modify entire sections of the Energy Resource Activities Act as they relate to streamlined projects. The regulator can be authorized to disregard rules, even core regulatory functions, if government so chooses. In addition, the regulator will be empowered to impose fees and levies, including retroactive charges dating back to 2024. These can be imposed not just by the regulator itself but by a person or class of persons with delegated authority.

Is there any reporting requirement back to this House? No. Is there a schedule of fees subject to legislative approval? No. These costs could be imposed quietly, without

public debate and without recourse, or even waived altogether for projects identified.

The regulator will also be able to exercise powers under other acts, including the Wildlife Act, the Heritage Conservation Act, the Agricultural Land Commission Act and the Safety Standards Act. All of this is set out in clauses 15 through 18. In many cases, the regulator can further subdelegate those powers to an employee.

This legislation is silent on who approves those appointments, who audits those decisions or what qualifications they must meet. To me, this is not a model of efficient governance. It's a framework for regulatory capture. We're giving one entity, the Energy Regulator, the ability to override the rules, define new rules, and enforce the rules with virtually no checks. The Legislature, where laws are meant to be debated and scrutinized, is cut out entirely. That should concern every member in this chamber, regardless of party.

[3:55 p.m.]

Today it's about renewable energy projects. Tomorrow it could be the ability to override municipalities and the people that were elected to manage them. To some, that may sound like an unlikely example, but I can assure you that it's not. As I stand here today, in another chamber of this House a very similar bill to do just that is coming through the Legislature. When governments centralize power this aggressively and when independent oversight is removed, the public loses trust. And once trust is lost, even good projects face opposition.

We have a duty to ensure that British Columbians can have confidence in how decisions are made, not just what decisions are made. Bill 14 fails that test. It prioritizes control over credibility, and in doing so, it sets a dangerous precedent for the erosion of legislative authority in this province.

If there is one clause in this bill that every legislator in the building should be deeply concerned about, regardless of how they feel about renewable energy or permitting reform, it is clause 21, titled "Validation." Let me read directly from the bill summary. "All things done by the board, the commissioner, the regulator or an employee or official of the regulator…."

Pete Davis: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Pete Davis: We have in the House today with us a group of students from Kelowna, led by their teacher Joe Eapen.

They're from Flex Academy in Kelowna. My wife actually works with this school. Flex Academy is a school that encourages students to explore their passions through flexible, self-paced education. The school values independence and innovation.

What we're doing here, students — if you guys can see me; I know you're behind me; there you are — is we're just debating a bill right now that's been put towards the House. We have to have quorum, so we've got to have people on both sides of the House to listen to speeches and to debate the bill.

Let's make this group feel welcome.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Welcome to everybody in the gallery today.

Debate Continued

Donegal Wilson: Welcome to the Legislature.

I'm going to continue. Let me read directly from the bill summary. "All things done by the board, the commissioner, the regulator or an employee or official of the regulator during the validation period…are conclusively deemed to have been validly done."

What is the validation period? It goes all the way back to April 1, 2024, more than a year before this legislation was even introduced. What this government is proposing, in black and white, is to retroactively legalize any actions that may have been taken without legislative authority — to reach back in time, sweep up potentially improper decisions and declare them valid after the fact.

That is not how the rule of law is supposed to work. If actions were taken without the appropriate legislative authority, they should be reviewed, not rubber-stamped. If processes were bypassed, they should be investigated, not rewritten to make them look acceptable.

Instead, this clause grants blanket amnesty for any overreach, any procedural shortcut and any regulatory misstep that may have occurred over the last year in relation to these projects. No list of actions, no transparency, no explanation, just a sweeping clause that basically says: "Trust us. Everything's fine."

Perhaps most troubling, this clause is retroactive and explicitly states that it "must not be construed as lacking retroactive effect" just because it doesn't name the specific actions being validated.

This is not a minor administrative tool. It is a dangerous precedent. It undermines the role of this House as a check on executive power. It weakens public confidence in our legislative process. And it sends the message that if government acts first and asks permission later, it can always clean it up after the fact with a line and a bill.

What is to stop this from happening again? If we normalize retroactive validation, we invite future governments of any political stripe to do the same, to make decisions in secret without proper authority and then come here seeking a retroactive blank cheque to avoid account-

ability. To me, that's not responsible governance. It's governance by erasure.

No one in this House should be comfortable with this kind of legislative manoeuvring, because once you allow a government to rewrite the past, it becomes harder and harder to hold them to account in the present.

[4:00 p.m.]

Before I close, I do want to address the elephant in the room: the fact that this government has declared this bill, Bill 14, to be a confidence vote. I want to pause and ask why. This is a majority government, not a minority, not a coalition on the brink. The NDP hold enough seats to pass any legislation they choose, and they have a standing agreement with the B.C. Greens that gives them an even wider margin of support. Therefore, winning the vote against the official opposition when they hold more seats than us certainly does not mean that they have our confidence in their ability to govern.

Then why are Bill 14 — and yes, Bill 15, in the other House — being tied to a confidence vote? I think they're trying to send a message to the public that any criticism of this bill is an attack on the government's very ability to function, but that's not how confidence votes are supposed to work. Confidence motions exist to ensure that governments maintain the trust of the House on matters fundamental to governance — things like budgets, supply bills and core mandates, not legislative one-offs designed to fast-track some projects with sweeping regulatory exemptions.

In this session, we've seen several confidence votes from this government, and it raises the troubling question of what they're afraid of. Are they unsure that their own members support this bill? Are they testing the Greens to see whether they'll fall in line, or are they simply using confidence as a political shield, hoping that by turning every major bill into a loyalty test, they can silence real scrutiny?

Let's be honest. A government with a majority doesn't need to prove it can outvote the opposition. That's math. It's not a mandate, and it's not a demonstration of our confidence in your ability to govern. Voting down a bill like this — one that centralizes authority, removes public oversight and retroactively validates past actions — needs to happen. We need to vote it down. It is an attack on our democracy.

I hope that all MLAs in this House look at what is happening and ask themselves: is this what your constituents sent you to do? Was it to pass legislation that centralizes power to the government, delegates authority to a third party, and removes the voices of 46 MLAs in the opposition from oversight?

I hope you agree that giving any government the ability to bypass our legislation, which elected MLAs before us worked hard to put in place, is not okay.

If the government truly believed this bill would stand on its own merits, they wouldn't be using procedural tactics to quell dissent. They'd be defending it, answering questions and letting the legislative process do what it's meant to do: hold government to account.

Bill 14 may be dressed up in the language of clean energy and streamlined permitting, but underneath that title is a blueprint for sweeping executive control. This is not how we build public confidence. This is not how we promote fairness. This is certainly not how we attract responsible investment to British Columbia, especially in rural regions, where economic development depends on clear, consistent rules that apply to all.

We are told that this bill is about efficiency, but efficiency without integrity is not something we should be legislating. We can support renewable energy without tearing down the laws that protect our land, our water, our wildlife and our democratic process. We can create a single-window permitting system that works, but we need to ensure it works for everyone, not just for the politically connected.

British Columbians are not asking for shortcuts. They are asking for fairness, for transparency, for the same opportunity to move projects forward as those in the government news releases.

As the opposition and as an MLA who represents the rural communities in the Boundary-Similkameen, I cannot support this bill in its current form. We need legislation that unites B.C.'s goals of energy development and the principles of responsible governance, not a bill that divides us. Until this government shows that it is willing to create a process that respects both, I will stand opposed.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Member. Recognizing the Minister of Housing.

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: Thank you so much. I appreciate that, hon. Speaker. Thank you for the time. I just saw so much fun happening in this place, I thought I'd join into the debate a little bit. It is my pleasure to stand to speak in favour of this bill, for many reasons.

[4:05 p.m.]

I think one of the first reasons I'll start with is that we need to build. We need to build, and we need the energy in this province in order to build. We are dealing with unprecedented economic threats in Canada right now. I just was listening to the Premier of Ontario and the Premier of Manitoba talking about this very question: how do we navigate the challenges we're dealing with right now with the economic threats that are being imposed on us by the U.S. administration?

In that press conference, their message was: "We need to build. We need to turn this challenging situation into opportunity and prosperity for everyone in our communities." This is what this bill is about. This bill is about un-

locking the power, the energy, of our province in order to fuel the growth of our economy.

Now, I have a lot of things to say about this bill, and I want to share some of them, but I have to address some of the comments made by the opposition. Even in their own platform, they talked about getting rid of red tape to get construction moving faster, to get projects moving faster.

I've got a lot of documents in front of me. I won't spend too much time, but on page 7 of their platform, it says: "Reduce provincial regulatory burden by 25 percent. Reduce red tape. Eliminate bottlenecks in our economy." There are pages and pages of them talking about how they want to create economic opportunity in this province by reducing the hurdles, in order for us to build our economy. I find it perplexing that now, in opposition, they're arguing the exact opposite of what they campaigned on.

I won't spend too much more time on it. I know that my colleague the minister who brought this forward will have more to say, but it's fundamental that we harness the energy that we have, to be able to advance economic development.

This is not about just these projects. When it comes to housing, what I hear consistently is: "We need power. We need to be able to move quickly." Now, I'm grateful that B.C. Hydro has laid out a strategy, a vision for how we're going to not only have the energy as we go forward but how we're going to be able to respond to the housing sector to be able to ensure that new developments get access to power in a timely and effective way with less cost. That's an important step, and I'll touch on that in a second.

What's vitally important is that in order for that to happen, we need energy. We need to be able to produce energy, and we need to do it fast. What we're talking about here isn't about not having checks and balances in place. Those checks and balances exist. What we looked at when we made some major changes to housing is we said: "How do we get the outcome we want — all the checks and balances — and also get rid of redundant process?" That's what we're trying to do here.

All the things that my previous colleague across the way talked about, hypothetical scenarios, all are considered in this work. What British Columbians have made clear — I can tell you that I knock on doors in my community regularly — and what people in my community tell me is that we need to get things built. Whether that's infrastructure in our….

[The bells were rung.]

Deputy Speaker: If we could just pause the minister's time. Thank you, Hansard.

The Minister of Housing.

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: Thank you, Chair. I was trying to check to see if I'm called into that House to vote, but I'm sure they'll have plenty of people. If someone's watching and I'm supposed to be voting, I'm speaking. I'm sure they'll find someone else to get in there.

Interjection.

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: Yeah, thank you.

The opposition Whip says he'll take care of my vote for me. I appreciate his support in that. Yeah, he's got my back.

I appreciate that. Thank you.

[4:10 p.m.]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll get back to what we were talking about here.

We need to be able to unlock not only this investment in energy but that leads to unlocking billions of dollars of potential future investment into critical minerals, into other economic opportunities.

Forget, for a moment, the huge amount of job opportunities that come for communities, especially in rural communities. Forget the huge amount of potential investment that we'll see get unlocked because of this investment. Members in this House have been saying: "How does this create certainty for people?" Industry is craving certainty. Industry is craving an opportunity for us to create regulatory efficiencies so that when decisions are made, they're done in a way that ensures protection for the environment, ensures all the values that we as British Columbians hold dear are there, but, at the same time, ensures that we're able to get to decisions in a timely manner.

We've heard from the new Prime Minister that he wants to build Canada. That's great. We want to build British Columbia. But we need to do that by making sure that we're able to build infrastructure, critical infrastructure like this, in a much quicker way. I'll be as blunt as I can. If we want to succeed as an economy in the face of the threats we face from the Trump administration, we need to do this. We need to do this in a quicker way.

I appreciate that maybe there's a message box that the opposition has been given, and the message box is: "Just keep repeating the same lines over and over again." I haven't heard any real critiques of why this is a bad thing. I've heard a lot of things, but I haven't heard any real critiques of why we shouldn't take steps to unlock energy investments in this province. I heard from people who say this is not about renewable energy. Well, let's just be honest. For some of them, it is about renewable energy, but I'm going to assume that it's not for everybody.

Surely we can agree in this place that we have to look at our processes and ensure that we're able to move fast on infrastructure. I know that they agreed during the election, because it's all over their platform. I know they agreed, because their leader talked about it, talked about the need for us to be able to reform our processes so that we can get to better outcomes and more investment certainty in our province. I know that; I heard that. What

has changed, from what they presented to the public in the election to now? I don't know. I haven't heard a clear answer on that.

That's frustrating. I'm sure it will be frustrating for their constituents, because many of these projects are in their constituencies. The people that are going to be working are going to be in their communities. The people that are going to be working are going to be spending dollars in their communities. By the way, it's a huge, huge economic opportunity for Indigenous communities that are participating in these projects. I can't recall these many investment dollars being invested in any infrastructure projects in British Columbia's history that has had this level of Indigenous participation.

If somebody knows of others, let me know, but this is massive. This is going to help change those communities. You know what? That's what we want to see as we move forward. We want to see more collaboration between Indigenous nations, the province, industry. That, I think, is the strength of this province. When we have projects like this come forward, it gives me a lot of hope that we can move forward in a good way.

I think what's more important than all these things, as I said earlier, is the ability to unlock additional investments. We know there are a lot of problems. When I was the minister for jobs and economic development, I heard from people all the time: "If we had power, we could do this. If we had access to energy, we could do this." They talked about a whole host of economic development initiatives.

I was lucky enough to travel to the Netherlands on a trade mission a couple of years ago. When I got to share with them the power of B.C. Hydro and the clean power that we have in British Columbia, they were amazed. They were amazed at what we were able to do in British Columbia.

[4:15 p.m.]

When we talked to those businesses, it was actually hydro that was the greatest opportunity, in their mind, in order to unlock investments in British Columbia. They saw that the work from hydro was enabling and giving them more opportunities and was actually positioning them in a greater way to make investments in British Columbia. It is our greatest asset, but we need to expand that. This is what this bill is about.

Lastly — I know there are other speakers — I think that this is not only about economic development across the province. This is to ensure that we can continue to have good housing opportunities and energy being produced for that. I see these projects in conjunction with other work that we're doing around building the critical infrastructure — whether it's schools, hospitals, etc.

Interjection.

Hon. Ravi Kahlon: The opposition Whip…. I appreciate his efforts to ensure I was represented in the building.

This unlocking of investment not only will help us with critical minerals, with other important resource development projects across British Columbia, but it also will help us advance housing. Housing is critical to the economy; housing is the economy. I always say health care is the economy. Housing is part of the economy as well.

Again, I want to say to B.C. Hydro, to the minister, I appreciate the new strategy that's been released. I know this is a critical part of that. We need this to pass. I urge members in this House to support this. If this passes, this helps unlock the power that helps us unlock economic development opportunities — which helps us also, at the same time, unlock huge opportunities to build the housing we need in communities throughout the province.

I'm going to be supporting this bill, and I certainly hope that my colleagues across the way reflect on their commitments to British Columbians in their platform when they're speaking about these projects.

One other page I should just highlight for myself. When they were talking about housing, they said: "We're going to eliminate process, and we're going to speed up construction of housing." When they talked about mining, they said: "We're going to enact one project, one permit." The list goes on, section by section, about how they were going to streamline and expedite development in British Columbia. "What has changed?" is my question. What has changed, from this document that they put out to the public to now?

I hope that my friends across the way will put their partisanship aside, consider their own document, and actually support this bill because this will be good for British Columbia. It will be good for our economy. Not only that, but this will be good for the Canadian economy.

Tony Luck: Once again it's an honour to stand in this House in debate on bills that are being brought forth in the House from the other side, from the government here.

It's interesting to hear from the minister there about where we have gone and what we campaigned on. He's absolutely right. We did campaign on building and improving the province, in doing things and getting red tape, but we did not campaign on bringing in a draconian law that has to do with the heavy hand of government — a nondemocratic bill. Why do they think they need to do that?

Today I rise to speak in strong opposition to Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act. At first glance, this bill claims to remove red tape, accelerate renewable energy and create a modern framework for wind energy and transmission development. On the surface, it sounds promising. We'll all support a clean energy future. We all want to reduce emissions, protect our environment and create good-paying jobs in the process.

If you dig deeper, and I have, you'll discover that this

bill is not about renewable energy at all. Well, maybe slightly, but it's more about control. It's about secrecy. It's about authority concentrated not in the hands of an elected representative — basically, they want to neuter this House and stop it from passing bills — but in unelected officials, cabinet orders and a regulator that is granted power, which, frankly, sounds alarming to every British Columbian.

A lot of British Columbians are alarmed. As I go through my riding and listen to my constituents, the emails and that, they're not frustrated; they're angry. They can't believe this government is bringing these bills in — Bill 14, Bill 15. They tried to slip Bill 7 by us all, but we were able, by public opinion, to get clause 4 taken out of that one.

[4:20 p.m.]

Let's be clear. This government has a track record when it comes to overregulation and heavy-handed intervention. In the past, we used to know the NDP as the New Democratic Party. Well, that "new" is beginning to have a new nuance to it. What kind of new democracy? In my head, I'm starting to use the "non-democratic party," so I might use that through my speech, because that's exactly what this NDP seems to be betraying themselves as — a non-democratic party.

For years, they've been creating a thicket of regulatory uncertainty that has driven investment out of British Columbia. They've built a reputation for layering barrier after barrier, drowning proponents in paperwork, conflicting standards and ever-changing requirements. After layering on barrier after barrier, making it more difficult and more expensive to get any major projects off the ground, the government now wants to portray itself as the champion of efficiency and innovation.

I don't know how many of you remember the story in the Bible about a man walking on a path, and suddenly, he has an epiphany. It's called the road to Damascus. Suddenly, he sees the light. That's kind of how I feel about this non-democratic party here. They've suddenly seen the light. They've had this epiphany, and now….

Interjection.

Tony Luck: Read that again? You like that piece? I could do that, but I'm time-constricted. I'll write it out for you, my friend.

They want to rewrite the story that they themselves created, but British Columbians will see through it. This bill is not a course correction. It continues to be a power grab. Make no mistake. This is not limited, targeted reform to improve specific bottlenecks in the permitting system. It is an all-encompassing overhaul that puts the regulator and the cabinet in the driver's seat of virtually every aspect of energy development in the province, from approvals to environment protection to the cancelling of existing rights and licences held by British Columbians.

Bill 14 gives unchecked authority to the B.C. Energy Regulator and the cabinet. It allows cabinet to designate any renewable energy project as streamlined, not just the nine wind farms and the North Coast transmission line initially identified in the paper. And they can do this by regulation, behind closed doors, without consultation and without the public ever seeing the debate unfold in public.

Legislatures decide which laws apply, which protections to waive and which communities will have to live with the consequences. This is an affront to democratic principles that this House is meant to uphold. We've all been elected to uphold the democratic power of the House.

It should be deeply concerning to anyone who believes that decisions about land, communities and livelihoods should be made transparently with full accountability to the people who elected us. We are the servants of the people. They elected us to make sure that we hold ourselves and this House accountable.

Let's look at the communities in my region: Merritt, Hope, Lillooet, Lytton, Harrison, among the few. These are proud places. People there care deeply about their environment, their heritage, their safety and their ability to enjoy the land. They fish. They hunt. They trap. They know the land. They don't just live on the land; they live with the land. They steward it. They pass their knowledge of it from one generation to the next. For them, fishing, hunting and trapping are more than recreation. They're a way of life, part of their culture and their identity.

Yet this bill allows the government, through an unelected regulator, to strip their rights, cancel permits, override safety standards and even decide what counts as a heritage site. Sounds like a little bit of back-pedalling here going on from some of the laws they put in place earlier.

It gives one individual the power to decide whether land that is sacred to Indigenous People or historic to British Columbians deserves to be protected or bulldozed. It does so without consultation, without local voices at the table and without any requirements to respect the people who have lived on this land for generations.

The people of my riding deserve better. All British Columbians deserve better. They deserve respect, not to be ignored and overruled by bureaucrats in Victoria. Remember, they elected us to be here to safeguard their land and their right to live.

[4:25 p.m.]

Let me walk through the legislation a little bit so everyone understands what's at stake. Part 1 of the bill sets the definitions, but more importantly, it opens the door wide for expansion. The term "renewable resources" is identified so broadly — biomass, biogas, geothermal, hydro, solar, ocean, wind or any prescribed resources — that virtually any project, any activity or any technology the gov-

ernment deems convenient can be swept into this framework later on by the regulations.

It's open-ended. So while the government wants the public to believe this is only about nine wind projects, the reality is they're writing themselves a blank cheque. There is absolutely nothing stopping them from adding dozens, hundreds or even entirely unrelated projects at their whim.

What exclusions? Only hydro dams for now. But even that exclusion is not written in the legislation itself. It's buried in a briefing note, a side document to this whole thing — not binding, not public law. There is nothing in the actual statute that would prevent cabinet from reversing that tomorrow with a simple regulation. No debate, no public consultation, no vote in this Legislature.

I ask myself, when this bill passes, what are we doing here? Are we going to go on a permanent vacation? Why would we be needed here to pass legislation or hold this government to account? The people have elected us to do that. That should alarm every member in this House, because this is about more than definitions. It's about giving cabinet the ability to expand its reach whenever it chooses, without any accountability.

Clause 2 designates the North Coast transmission line and the nine wind farms as streamlined projects. Great. These are the projects the government keeps highlighting in their talking points, pretending that this legislation is narrowly focused and limited in scope. But then, buried right alongside those projects, the bill also includes the terms "prescribed renewable projects." That could be code for anything cabinet wants, because there's nothing defined in the legislation to put front ends or back ends on this legislation. Whatever they want — no public hearing, no legislative debate, just an order in council.

My good friend across the aisle here, the Minister for Municipal Affairs, was talking earlier about us wanting all these projects moved, getting rid of red tape. He's absolutely right. We campaigned on that. Those were solid campaign promises we made to the public. But they misconstrued a little bit. We don't need heavy-handed legislation like this to get rid of red tape, get permits moving to the forest industry and all those…. We don't need this kind of legislation to do it. What are they afraid of? Why are they having to do this? Is it cabinet solidarity or something? We're not sure.

This isn't just about the progress named today. It's about opening the door for cabinet to add any project — large or small, urban or rural, controversial or not — into this framework at the stroke of a pen. No one outside cabinet gets a say. That should deeply concern everyone in this House, in every community across this province and every citizen that goes to the polls and votes for democracy when they go to the polls.

Here's where the power really gets concentrated. Parts 2 and 3 of the bill introduce a three-tiered system of streamlining. The higher the level, the more laws and protection the government and the regulator can simply toss aside.

At level 1, the regulator is given the ability to delegate instruments and authorities within its own house — already a significant concentration of power, but only the beginning.

At level 2, the real erosion of public oversight begins. Key sections of the Energy Resource Activities Act, the very law meant to ensure responsible development, are stripped away entirely. Section 38, gone. No requirement to keep records or submit reports. Section 40, gone. No obligation when permits expire, leaving the public in the dark on anything. And entire divisions — divisions 2.1, part 3.1 and part 4 — are eliminated. That means no management of dormant sites, no oversight of orphan sites, no public transparency, no accountability.

At level 3, the regulatory framework is completely dismantled. Gone are sections that require ownership interest to be disclosed, which enforces suspicion for violations, or that allow the public to request investigations. Safety standards, gone. Environmental protections, gone. Any semblance of independent, arm's-length oversight — guess what — gone. This is not streamlining. This is rubber-stamping by government fiat. British Columbians deserve a lot better than this.

[4:30 p.m.]

Then we come to clause 11 of the bill, one of the most concerning clauses when it comes to how this government plans to manage fees and costs to all this. Clause 11 grants the regulator the authority to impose fees without consent or oversight of this House. They are not minor administrative fees. These are costs that could be significant, unpredictable and decided entirely at the regulator's discretion. Once again, no transparency, no accountability, no input from elected representatives and no recourse for the business communities or individuals who may be impacted. This is very, very similar….

I was speaking to Bill 15 yesterday, and a lot of the same language in this bill was in Bill 15. There's a trend here, and it should be very concerning for all of us in this House, even members on that side of the House. But it gets worse.

Clause 12 takes this even further. Under this clause, the regulator can impose levies, not just going forward but retroactively. That's like going out and buying a car and the dealer phoning you up three months later, saying: "Hey, you owe us another $1,000." It doesn't make sense.

[Mable Elmore in the chair.]

That's right, this government is giving itself the power to invent a tax, apply it backward in time and charge British Columbians for costs they couldn't have possibly anticipated or planned for. Once again, no consultation, no notice, no debate in the chamber. Oh, that's right. We're not sitting in the chamber. What's the point? It's taxation

without representation, plain and simple. I think there was a party thrown for that a number of years ago.

Then there's clause 13, which may be the most dangerous of all. This clause allows cabinet to amend the Energy Resource Activities Act, the law that governs the regulator itself, simply by regulation. In plain English, that means cabinet can rewrite the laws that determine how the regulator operates, what its powers are and what checks are or aren't in place to limit its authority. They can do this without ever coming back to the House for a vote. Well, why would they? We're not here. There's no need for us.

What kind of precedent does this set? That a future government could rewrite our laws, environmental laws, our health and safety standards all by regulation, without debate, without scrutiny. This is not democracy. This is not transparency. That is, quite frankly, authoritarianism wearing the mask of regulatory reform.

A lot of this reform can be done without the heavy hand of government. This side of the House believes in offering up the carrot, not the stick. Clause 14 takes things even further by disapplying the Environmental Assessment Act entirely for selected wind projects at whim and the North Coast transmission line.

Now, I understand the government's frustration with the current environmental assessment. I think we all have a little bit of frustration with some of the acts out there. But we don't need the heavy hand of non-democratic legislation to be able to fix some of those things. That's what this House is for. Bring proper bills to the House. We'll look at them, we'll work them in committee, and we'll work it out. But to have a heavy hand of non-democratic powers is not right for the people of British Columbia. We have been elected to do much, much better.

I understand the government's frustration with the current environment. It has been slow to modernize. We all know that the framework for renewable energy projects, particularly wind, is outdated and in need of reform. We would agree with you on that. Let's sit down in committee through a proper bill without sticks in it, and we can work through that together.

But let me be clear. Suspending environmental assessments altogether is not the answer. Environmental review is not just some bureaucratic hoop to jump through. It is a process that ensures that our projects are developed safely, sustainably and in a way that respects communities, local ecosystems and Indigenous rights. How can we go back to the people of Hope, Harrison and Merritt and say: "Yes, this massive transmission corridor is coming through your community, but there will be no environmental assessment"?

We're already hearing that about the windmills that are going to go up. Some are going to be in my own riding. In my own riding, some of these windmills are going to be going up, and there's already the talk about that. How do they put these up without environmental assessments? Well, that's what they can do, or that's what they want to do. It's not what they can do right now, but that's what they want to do.

[4:35 p.m.]

So heaven forbid this bill passes. We don't want this bill to pass.

What does that say to the Indigenous communities that have spent decades fighting for their voices to be heard, for consultation, for recognition of their rights and stewardship over these lands? Removing environmental assessment is not efficiency; it's erasure. It's ignoring the people most affected by these projects, and it is a recipe for division, litigation and broken trust.

Clause 15 takes us even further down this concerning path. It allows these so-called streamlined projects to override the agricultural land act. A number of my colleagues have already discussed this. This is already happening out there. I'm getting calls about this happening already. That means energy projects covered under this legislation will have the authority to bulldoze productive farmland, to subdivide it for industrial use or to bring in soil and fill that can permanently alter the land.

That's happening in my riding already. We've got letters from people in our riding — 37 illegal dumps on farmland in the Lower Mainland. This is already happening. I'm beginning to wonder: is this bill here to cover up something? Is this a cover-up bill? It's really a concern for me, because some of these things are already happening, all without any oversight, review or approval from the Agricultural Land Commission itself.

There is no requirement for consultation with local farmers, no obligation to consider the long-term impacts on food security or local agriculture. This isn't streamlining. It's stripping away the rights of farmers and rural communities to have their own say on the land and the land use.

It doesn't stop here. Clauses 16 through 18 allow the regulator to override the Heritage Conservation Act, the Safety Standards Act and the Wildlife Act. Think about that for a minute. This means the regulator can decide that safety standards no longer apply to a project. They can cancel hunting, trapping and angling permits with no notice, no hearing and no compensation to those that have purchased licences, purchased leases on land and all those kinds of things to allow their business to proceed.

They can unilaterally declare that a burial ground, a sacred Indigenous site or a place of historic importance doesn't qualify as heritage. It'll be up to cabinet — not the Legislature, once again, but up to cabinet, a few select individuals. They don't even have to justify it. This is a stunning and unprecedented concentration of power.

Then, as if everything I've already outlined wasn't concerning enough, we arrive at clause 21. This clause delivers what can only be described as insult to injury. It retroactively validates any action the regulator has taken since

April 1, 2024, even though, as we all know, this act was not in force at that time. It isn't even in force now.

In other words, even if those actions were taken outside the existing legal framework, even if they overstep the current laws, this bill wipes the slate clean. It pardons any regulatory overreach after the fact with no transparency, no scrutiny and no accountability. I think we're all getting a little tired of those words. Every clause, every action, every speech is talking about that. There is no proper oversight for these bills.

This is a shocking disregard for the rule of law. That's how we feel on this side of the House and amongst our constituents out there. They're shocked at this bill coming forward. They're shocked at Bill 15. They're shocked at Bill 7.

It doesn't end there. Clause 23 is equally disturbing. This clause allows the government to cancel previously issued environmental assessment certificates and simply declare those projects permitted overnight, with no conditions, no public input, no regard for the communities or First Nations that fought to have these those conditions attached in the first place.

Imagine you were a small community group or an Indigenous government that spent years, possibly decades, negotiating conditions to protect your drinking water, your wildlife habitat or a sacred site. With a stroke of a pen, this bill lets the government rip up that agreement and deem the project fully approved, with no obligations remaining. That is not just disrespectful; it is a betrayal of trust.

I just can't imagine that happening. I don't know if I'd want to be a minister that would come back into that riding or that area and try to explain that to the constituents that had their years of work just thrown out.

[4:40 p.m.]

Let's put this all in perspective, though. If Bill 7 was this government's attempt to centralize economic power and override public oversight, then Bill 14 is the energy sector version of the same authoritarian playbook. It's the same song, just a different verse.

Here's the irony. This is the same NDP government that spent years vilifying past governments for weakening environmental rules, for threatening the ALR and for failing to consult Indigenous communities for years. Yet now they bring forward a bill that does all those things and worse, and they have the audacity to expect British Columbians…. Even their own constituents, we're hearing, in their own ridings are concerned about these bills. So they better go this week and do some work out there. And they have the audacity to expect British Columbians not to notice. Not in my riding; not in this House.

In Merritt, residents have been asking for meaningful flood protection for years. They have seen firsthand what happens when government ignores local expertise and delays critical infrastructure.

In Lillooet and Lytton, entire communities are still reeling from devastating climate disasters — wildfires, floods, landslides — that have upended lives, destroyed homes and left people feeling abandoned by this government.

In Harrison and Hope, people tell me they support renewable energy, but they want it done correctly. They want it done right. They want it done democratically. They want to be part of the conversation, not sidelined by decisions made in Victoria boardrooms or back rooms or cabinet meetings.

Bill 14 sends a very different message to them: "We don't trust you. We don't trust your councils." What this government is telling us is: "We don't trust you as council. We don't trust you as constituents. We don't trust your councils, your environmental stewards or your traditions. We'll decide what matters most."

You have the power to do that under this bill if you want to. I know you are over on the other side of the House and smiling and everything, but that's what this bill is telling us. If it doesn't tell us, then accept our amendments that will be coming down.

"We'll decide what matters. We'll decide what's safe. We'll decide what's sacred and what gets built." It almost sounds like a Dr. Seuss novel, doesn't it? This is not leadership. This is arrogance. Renewable energy does not require sacrificing democracy. We can have clean power and still uphold Indigenous rights. We can streamline approvals without gutting safety, heritage or environmental protections. We can invite investment and still respect the people, the communities and the traditions and make our province even stronger if we respect democracy.

What we can't do and what we must not allow is for unelected regulators and cabinet ministers to rewrite the rules of this province behind closed doors. Once again, that's why we were elected: to represent our constituents. They had a fair chance at openness and being able to have accountability. This bill opens the door to abuse. It opens the door to massive overreach, and we all know from history and experience that once that door is open, it's hard to close it. This bill, I don't believe, even has a sunset clause in it.

Once these kinds of powers are granted, they rarely come back under democratic control without a right. Let me be very clear. British Columbians want to see renewable energies built. My constituents — the people of Merritt, Hope, Lillooet and Harrison — all support wind farms and transmission lines. They've got them running through those ridings already. But they want to make sure it's done right.

They want these projects done right. They want meaningful consultation — early, honest and transparent. They want proper environmental reviews that look at risk, at impacts and at sustainability. They want heritage protection maintained, not erased, not gone at the stroke of a pen. They want farmland.

They fought hard. I sat down with some councils in regional districts. "Tony, you're not here to get rid of ALR." I said: "No, we're here to protect it. We know how important it is." And it was that government across the floor that brought in the ALR.

Interjection.

Tony Luck: Absolutely.

They want farmland preserved, not paved over, and they expect Indigenous voices to be respected, not sidelined. What they do not want is more backroom deals. They do not want to wake up one day and find the province has changed considerably because we've had a government that just comes and, at the stroke of a pen, can change things, build things, remove things, do all the things that they do not want without accountability, without overarching legislation that helps secure their future.

This House must stand up for due process, for balance and for reason. That's why we're here today. That's why we're elected. I've mentioned that a number of times. This bill is not about clean energy; it's about concentrated power. And that is not, and has never been, the British Columbia way.

[4:45 p.m.]

Even one of their old, former Premiers — we all know who that is — has said Bill 7 was an affront to democracy. I'm guessing he would probably say the same about this bill and Bill 15 as well.

Interjection.

Tony Luck: You don't think so? I think I got it on paper, in writing.

Interjection.

Tony Luck: No, I said he would probably say the same thing about that.

I challenge all members of this House, on both sides of the aisle, to take a principled stand, not against wind power, not about clean energy, not against the transmission infrastructure we need so badly, but against the erosion of democratic oversight; against government decisions made in secret, behind closed doors — again, laws that write this legislation and the people it represents out of the process entirely.

Thank you for your time. I know I will not be supporting this bill. I would like to see some amendments made to it. Maybe I can support it amended, but, at this time, I cannot support this bill as it stands.

Lorne Doerkson: Thanks to my colleagues for allowing me the opportunity to say a few words on Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act.

Moments ago I think the Minister of Housing had asked for some real-life examples, and I want to bring some of those critiques to this chamber. While I will digress a little bit, I assure you I'm going to tie it back, in every instance, to Bill 14.

The first thing I want to chat a little bit about are some of the references to campaign promises and suggestions by the Conservative Party. Nothing has changed with respect to our hope that we can move projects along quicker.

I referenced in past speeches a fellow by the name of Dan Perrin, who is a miner at Lac la Hache. He actually lives in Lac la Hache, in my riding, but he mines on the Fraser River. I can tell you that at the moment he lost his permit to mine, all of the commerce in his business stopped. Three years waiting, during a time where he pretty much was bordering on bankruptcy…. During that time, his business slowly died while waiting for permitting.

Here's the interesting thing. When his permits were approved, I phoned Dan Perrin and talked to him. He couldn't talk to me because he was so busy hiring people, buying three used trucks and a new digger for his operation. I don't know what he paid for the digger, but I can tell you this much: they're million-dollar pieces of equipment.

Everything that Dan Perrin was doing was a taxable event to this province — everything that he was doing, because he got one permit approved. All of that means less taxation for the rest of us. When we have businesses flourishing, when we have things like mining operations moving forward, even wind or power, any of the energy that we're talking about in Bill 14….

I am certainly supportive of moving permits forward. There's no question about that. But my residents are afraid, and I'm going to get into a few of those examples.

The challenge that we've seen is a government that has introduced proposed Land Act changes and backed up on that. We've seen other changes come before this House. We've seen other powers that have been talked about, under Bills 7, 14 and 15. There is a lot of concern. I can appreciate that government members may not want to hear that, but I'd be shocked if they're not hearing it. I would truly be shocked if they're not hearing it.

In Cariboo-Chilcotin…. This is a letter received by one of my constituents. I won't read the letter in its entirety, but I do want to draw attention to a couple of important quotes and important paragraphs.

[4:50 p.m.]

"Acting Associate Deputy Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development: I, Paul Rasmussen, consider your grazing lease, RAN 07735, to be terminated as of December 31, 2020." This letter was written on December 21, 2020. This is how abrupt things can be on our landscape with the laws that we have now, with the things that are happening now.

You think about somebody like the Harris family, who lost their grazing lease in the West Chilcotin — on a dif-

ferent note, for certain, and one that needs to be discussed in a more fulsome way in this place, frankly. When you consider what happened to the Harris family — four generations of a ranching family in the Tatlayoko Valley — they were compensated $41,773. That's what they were compensated, to lose their grazing lease in the Tatlayoko Valley.

Of all the people that want to live in the Tatlayoko Valley — I'm one of them — the reality is that the damage that that did to their family and the damage it did to their business is nothing short of staggering. So when we refer to concerns in Bill 14, specifically under section 18 of this bill, it does draw a lot of concern.

Now, I've talked to the Minister of Energy about this. I hope that we can pursue this in a better way through the committee stage of the bill. He's well aware of the concerns that I have. I have guide-outfitters, which I've been public about.

I may just come back to this letter, because it is shocking to think that you get a call as an MLA, on what was very near Christmas Eve, I believe, to find out that these folks have got six or seven days to get off of a Crown grazing lease. Now, I can appreciate that might not mean a lot to some people in this room, but the reality is that there is equipment out there. There are waterers. There are all kinds of different things.

As I explained and as I will continue to explain, I do have concerns with respect to anything that could just upend any kind of a lease or any kind of a contractual agreement that we have right now under that clause 18. I've discussed this again, as I said, with the minister, and I hope to have more fulsome conversation with him about it.

I've advocated in this place with the past minister of Indigenous affairs — and, I believe, in the Premier's estimates as well, although don't quote me on that, Hansard — on many occasions, for Doug and Julie McMann in the West Chilcotin. For ten years, they have been trying to get a better understanding of why they are unable to use their guide-outfitting licences in the way that they were issued, why there has been no compensation and why that loss has been so significant to that family.

You bet I have concerns, under section 18, with respect to anything that could happen to those licences, and I definitely want to understand that. This is what Doug and Julie have said to me:

> "Our business, Skinner Creek Hunts, has been operating ethically in the Tatlayoko Valley of the Chilcotin region for years, winning stewardship awards for responsible land use, yet despite our proven record as business owners, we have been systematically harassed and blocked from operating. The B.C. NDP government has stood idly by, allowing these injustices to continue unchecked. Over $750,000 in taxable revenue has been stolen from us, not because of market forces, not by poor business decisions but by government negligence."

I believe that this bill does give that power. Frankly, it wouldn't matter to me if it was an energy bill. It wouldn't matter to me if it was a land bill. It doesn't matter to me. I don't think that government, of any kind, should have the kind of power that we're talking about with respect to backing up on any of these land use situations.

[4:55 p.m.]

I guess the other thing that I have great concern about is just the lack of transparency. I'm not talking about transparency in this bill. We've got it; it's here. It's on the floor; we'll debate it. But you know, we have a power project that's happening right now, a potential power project happening in 70 Mile House, and it was learned of in the local newspaper. Residents found out. They had many questions, and these are questions that you would hear in rural B.C.

When you have 500 cows out on a Crown range tenure, and you see somebody putting a piece of equipment out on the back 40 — and you're not sure how much that piece of equipment is worth, whether it's worth $10,000 or it's worth $1 million — to collect the rays of the sun to better understand if it's going to be a good place to have a solar project, the concern you first have is: "Who left the gate open, in going out to put that machine out?" The second concern you have is: "If one of my cows damages this, am I suddenly liable for this?"

Well, all of those things can be talked about in a public way through public consultation. Our residents own it; it is their province after all. Our residents are owed that kind of communication. Sadly, I feel as though we are getting further and further away from that point all the time.

I have all kinds of examples. The Minister of Housing suggested that they would like to see some examples.

I've got a gravel pit on private property, which has been held up for four years, another ranching family that is looking to try to navigate a permitting system that has become absolutely chaotic. I think the Stafford family has probably been mining gravel on their property for four generations. I think the gravel from that actually paved Highway 20.

Suddenly, somebody shows up one day and says, "You're no longer allowed to mine that gravel" — somebody from the government, of course — and that commerce ends. I can't stress it enough that the funds that have come from that gravel pit over the years, the taxation that this province has received over that resource, are incredible.

I'm certainly for helping or hoping that we can move permits forward in this province, but I have example after example of real-life situations that are not hypothetical. They're happening to our residents now.

That's why I feel obliged, really, to share the concerns of some of the residents in Cariboo-Chilcotin. Cariboo-Chilcotin is the most beautiful riding in British Colum-

bia, but it is a vast riding. It stretches now from Kamloops all the way to the beautiful lands of the Ulkatcho people in the West Chilcotin. There is a vast amount of property, Crown grazing leases, with guide-outfitting, trappers, all of these people that make their living from the land. I can assure you that the ones that I have talked to about Bill 14 are very, very concerned.

In the case of Doug and Julie McMann, you know the government has gone as far as having these businesses appraised. We've had conversations about it for years, but this bill does not talk about compensation if someone ends up in that situation. I definitely want to better understand that part of the bill or if that has ever been contemplated, because just to end these tenures is frightening, in my mind, and extremely concerning.

I want to talk about environmental assessments here a little bit. I can appreciate that some of these projects are going to be fast-tracked, but I've seen what an environmental assessment looks like at the old, proposed New Prosperity mine in my riding. It was massive. I mean, the information that was collected — I think it was about $100 million to put that program together.

[5:00 p.m.]

I'm certainly not in favour of doing things irresponsibly on the land, and I don't think the minister is either. I can appreciate that there's a high call and a high need for power, but we have to be very, very careful about how we proceed on these projects, because those things have not been considered. I can only speak for Cariboo-Chilcotin, but those things have not been contemplated well in my riding.

We have access issues everywhere through my riding. So when we look at the potential of new wind power, or solar — it doesn't matter to me what we're going to build here — we have to contemplate the effects that it has on the people that are living on the land, the people that are ultimately left to deal with the outcomes of what government decides. I can assure you that I have heard from so many in my riding on this topic.

Going back to the 70 Mile power potential project, I don't think anybody is opposed to the project itself, but we have reached out to the Minister of Water and Land. We have reached out to have fulsome conversation on this exact topic, as a community, because we want to better understand the project.

I'm sorry that I am a little bit wary, I suppose, of bills like Bill 14 or other bills that propose to make pretty significant change on the landscape. I hope and I think that we will see, obviously, an opportunity to hear from the minister and get clarity in the later stages of this bill when we have an opportunity to ask clause-by-clause questions.

I can assure you that in the case of Harris, McMahon, Stafford, Perrin and many more, there are many, many questions on this topic. Again, I think that there are other areas of the province, too, that are concerned about this, whether it be fishing rights on rivers…. There are other communities that are very concerned about changes that have maybe not been done in the best way.

I mean, I introduced a petition here a year ago from Pender Harbour. Things have changed on a dime there, and residents have been very frustrated. And that is my biggest concern, that under section 18 of this bill, things could change for our residents, and they could change extremely quickly.

I have an interesting story to share with the House because I think it really points to what is happening on our landscape and the confusion out there for just about everyone. The sources can be confirmed in the *Williams Lake Tribune*.

One of my friends purchased a piece of land for the purposes of gardening, if you can imagine. Kim Tuerlings, by the way, grows the best vegetables in Cariboo-Chilcotin, just as a footnote. They had an amazing farm at 150 Mile House, did so well that they wanted to expand that farm. They purchased a piece of property, and I can assure you that they did that with all of the excitement you could possibly imagine about starting a new business, moving your family into a new property.

In the course of moving to that property, they put in a driveway. They put in a mobile home. They put in a septic system, and then they called B.C. Hydro. And B.C. Hydro says you can't develop on this piece of property because it's an arc site.

[5:05 p.m.]

Nobody knew that. Nobody knew that except B.C. Hydro. It was too late.

Kim Tuerlings is an Indigenous woman who was extremely frustrated that she had done damage to what was a potential archaeology site. It has taken two or three years to work through that — two or three years. Now they've been compensated. I'll give credit where credit is due. But this points to the level of frustration on our landscape.

If, under Bill 14, we're going to create more of that by way of not consulting the public, not consulting our residents, then I say vote no to Bill 14. The public is owed ample opportunity to comment on all of the things that the government proposes to do, whether it's wind power, solar power…. It doesn't matter to me.

The bill does refer to renewable resources as being biomass, biogas, geothermal, hydro, solar, ocean, wind, prescribed resource. I can appreciate that we're doing this to move along some projects by way of wind energy, but this bill is open to a lot more.

And if it's going to create more havoc on the landscape, if it's going to create more frustration for our residents, if it's going to cause the loss of use on our landscape by so many people — frankly, so many people that are providing taxation dollars to this House, to this Legislature, to run this province — then again, I can't say more strongly that we have to vote no to this.

I'm grateful for the time here today, and I'm grateful that my colleagues let me jump in out of order here. I do definitely look forward, in a big way, to committee stage. As I said before, I've talked with the Minister of Energy, I've tried to explain some of my concerns, and I hope that those concerns will be contemplated.

I think that when we make or take action on our landscape to in any way change somebody's use of the land, we need to consider compensation. I'm not the first one to say that. I don't have tenures on the land. I haven't had occasion to have a business that way.

It is shocking when you think of hearing those words, receiving a letter on December 21 saying, "I, Paul Rasmussen, consider grazing licence number blah, blah, blah to be terminated as of December 31, 2020." And I can't stress this enough. This letter was issued on December 21 of the same year, and I can tell you that the conversation I had with the Harris family was shocking.

If this can happen under clause 18 of Bill 14, then I cannot stress enough the concern that so many residents are going to have. Again, it's not just ranchers. It's not just guide-outfitters. Those are the ones that I've focused on, but trappers are concerned out there. I've certainly heard from a number of trappers that have grave concern about this bill.

Madam Speaker, I'm grateful for the time here today. I want to thank you for the work you've done in your community. I haven't had a chance to do that publicly. I know it's been an incredibly stressful time for you, and I'm grateful for the work that you're doing in your riding and for the people of the Filipino community.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak here today. I appreciate the time.

Brent Chapman: I rise today on behalf of the official opposition as a proud member of the British Columbia Legislature to firmly oppose Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act.

[5:10 p.m.]

"Streamlined" sounds thrifty, utilitarian, maybe clever. But we are seeing this in so many practices this NDP government touches.

ICBC. The victims of car crashes have their compensation streamlined, yet they feel shortchanged. No real appeal process, just take what is offered. Sometimes it is next to nothing, with no recourse. Autobody shops are now in charge of estimating damages and approved repairs that commence. But this streamlined process is leaving the smaller, independent shops on the verge of bankruptcy waiting for ICBC to honour their end of the streamlined process.

Physiotherapy and massage therapists are finding their confidentiality with their ICBC patients under threat, as ICBC wants a streamlined process to all patient medical records, beyond the case that ICBC is paying for. Why? Has privacy lost its meaning?

This government is now telling municipalities what density is going to look like, whether they like it or not. Again, no need for discourse. Streamlined approaches are a lot more draconian than they sound.

Homebuilders and construction companies are under the yoke of the perpetual, complicated permits — building codes and regulations that are promoted and boasted about by this government as being responsive, efficient and, maybe, streamlined. Ask any builder; it's anything but.

Anyone who comes into contact with this government knows that what they say has little to do with what they want to do. Our transit is constantly being streamlined — more efficient, more effective — but more people are waiting for less service. The promise is there. There's just nowhere near the benefit provided. Most projects are behind schedule and over budget.

Health care. You dial yourself a doctor and walk in, but nothing is as promised or promoted. With all the computers and data available, you would think every interaction would be streamlined. But British Columbians seeking help have never waited longer for that help.

This bill represents not only a profound overreach of executive power but a troubling departure from the principles of democratic accountability, environmental stewardship and economic pragmatism. Let me be clear. This is not a speech against the concept of renewable energy. It is a speech against how this government, the NDP government of British Columbia, is using the guise of renewables to centralize power, gut oversight and impose sweeping, unchecked regulatory changes, with minimal scrutiny and accountability.

Bill 14 on its surface proposes to streamline the permitting process for renewable energy projects. The government argues this is a necessary evolution to encourage renewable development, initially targeting nine wind farm projects and the North Coast transmission line. But anyone who reads past the title of this legislation will realize that Bill 14 is a Trojan Horse, an authoritarian gateway to override the environmental, social and procedural safeguards British Columbians have come to rely on. Consolidation of power and erosion of oversight….

One of the most egregious features of Bill 14 is its allowance for cabinet by order in council to designate any renewable energy project it sees fit as eligible for streamlined approval — no debate, no consultation and no vote in this Legislature. This fundamentally disrespects the principles of representative democracy.

In our current system, energy projects, whether they be renewable or not, must pass through a number of checks and balances, often involving multiple ministries. This ensures that issues like environmental protection, Indigenous rights, agricultural land use and public health

are weighed very carefully. The NDP's Bill 14 throws that process right into the shredder.

By creating a single window for approvals, the government claims to be eliminating red tape. In reality, they are eliminating accountability. The new system centralizes decision-making in the hands of a few bureaucrats and cabinet ministers, bypassing the robust, multi-agency scrutiny that these massive infrastructure projects demand.

Moving on to retroactive legislation and regulatory uncertainty, clause 21 of the act is a deeply troubling piece of retroactive legislation. It permits regulatory actions taken since April 1, 2024, even though this act had not yet come into force at that time.

[5:15 p.m.]

This is a complete affront to legal norms and investor confidence. If a government can change the rules retroactively, how can any investor, landowner or local government trust this system? How can you plan for a future under the rule of law when the law can be changed to apply to actions taken before it was passed? This uncertainty discourages responsible investment and sets a very dangerous precedent. We, in the official opposition, believe in stable, transparent regulatory frameworks. This government clearly does not.

The creation of a renewable orphan fund, a quiet concession of risk, is another element of this bill — the establishment of a separate orphan fund for renewable energy projects. At first glance, this might sound like a precautionary move. But let's call it what it is: a quiet admission that many of these projects are likely to fail, go bankrupt or walk away, leaving behind environmental or financial messes that taxpaying British Columbians will be left to clean up.

Why do we need a new orphan fund? It's because, just like we've seen in other jurisdictions — Spain, Germany, California, even Alberta — mass deployment of renewable infrastructure without economic realism and proper safeguards leads to failures. Wind turbines that stop turning. Transmission lines that go nowhere. Companies that pack up and disappear when subsidies dry up. The NDP knows this risk, yet they are charging full speed ahead. They have learned nothing from the sobering examples abroad.

International precedents really provide a cautionary tale. In Spain, the early 2000s saw a massive push for solar and wind energy. Generous subsidies flooded the market, creating a boom. But that boom quickly turned to bust when the government realized it couldn't afford the massive public expense. Thousands of companies collapsed. Tens of thousands of jobs evaporated.

In Germany, the famed Energiewende was hailed as a bold step toward a renewable future. But what was the result? Skyrocketing electricity prices, over-reliance on unstable energy sources and the ironic resurgence of coal to stabilize the grid when the wind doesn't blow or the sun doesn't shine.

These are not mere footnotes in energy policy. They are dire warnings. Yet the NDP seems determined to repeat these mistakes, with British Columbians, again, footing the bill.

Environmental and agricultural concerns also…. This bill exempts many of these projects from the Environmental Assessment Act. Clause 14 outright disapplies the EAA for selected wind projects and the North Coast transmission line. Other projects can be exempted via regulation — again, at cabinet's discretion. Let us ask: why are we building a renewable future by tearing down our environmental protections?

Clause 15 allows for non-farm use of agricultural land reserve land. It allows for subdivision of this land. This is a direct threat to B.C.'s agricultural sector. We are sacrificing food security on the altar of political expediency. Once subdivided or repurposed, farmland rarely returns to its original use. With this bill, B.C.'s best growing lands could be paved over with turbines and transmission stations, all without meaningful oversight.

There's also unilateral power over heritage and wildlife. Clause 18 provides further alarm. The B.C. Energy Regulator is empowered to override heritage designation for lands of cultural significance to B.C. communities or First Nations. The regulator gets to pick who decides what counts as heritage. This is not reconciliation; this is the opposite.

[5:20 p.m.]

Clause 18 even allows the regulator to suspend or cancel hunting, angling and trapping permits at will. What on earth does streamlining wind farms have to do with restricting long-standing outdoor traditions in B.C.? The connection is tenuous, if not nonexistent. Yet the power is granted, and it's dangerous.

Fees, levies and retroactive costs. Clauses 11 and 12 allow the regulator to impose fees and levies, including retroactive ones. These are taxes by another name, and they can be levied not just by the regulator but by any person or class of persons with delegated authority.

Where is the oversight? Where is the financial accountability? None exist in Bill 14. British Columbians deserve to know who's imposing levies and why. They deserve financial transparency. Instead, this NDP government gives us regulatory murkiness and retroactive taxation.

The B.C. Energy Regulator is from the watchdog to a political tool. So what happens here? One of the most chilling provisions lies in clause 13. The cabinet may, by regulation, modify or disapply sections of the Energy Resource Activities Act. This is the statute that governs how our energy regulator operates. In other words, the government is giving itself the power to change the rules that govern the regulator without returning to this Legislature.

Let me be blunt. The NDP is giving itself the power to

rewrite the referees rulebook during the game. That's not governance. That's manipulation, and it undermines the credibility of every decision the regulator will make under this new regime.

I wish to briefly raise a concern reported just last week by the *Asian Pacific Post*. On May 14, 2025, the headline read: "First Nations Alarmed by B.C.'s Fast-Tracked Agenda." Rightfully so. The article cites growing concern among Indigenous communities that their voices are being sidelined by the very fast-tracked processes being lauded in Bill 14.

Leaders are quoted as saying that they were not meaningfully consulted, nor were their stewardship rights considered in the design of these projects. That's concerning. This contradiction is not just hypocritical; it is harmful.

We go on to safety standards. Clause 17 removes application of the safety standards for level 3 streamlined projects. Why? Is safety a barrier to efficiency in the eyes of this government? Do we want infrastructure built faster, or do we want infrastructure built right? The government has made its choice, and I believe it's the wrong one.

We've erased public input. Clause 10 removes provisions under the Energy Resources Activities Act for public investigations, dormant sites and environmental reporting. The public will no longer have a formal route to request environmental reviews, no recourse if problems arise, no avenue for community engagement.

This is not a climate plan. It is a power plan — power for cabinet, power for bureaucrats and power away from the people. This is a flawed and dangerous bill. I say again: this is not a debate about whether renewable energy is good or bad. It is about whether the path we take to build that future is democratic, accountable and rooted in sound policy.

Bill 14 fails on all fronts. It hands near unchecked authority to cabinet. It permits retroactive legal action. It strips environmental oversight. It compromises agricultural land. It enables regulatory overreach. It silences the public. It potentially ignores Indigenous voices. It treats the energy regulator as a tool of political expediency, not as an impartial watchdog.

I stand against this bill. I believe in responsible development and believe in energy diversity that includes gas and oil, responsibly produced and regulated. I believe in internal combustion vehicles — trucking, ferries, rail and air travel — that keep our economy moving. I believe that the future should be built, yes, but not at the expense of transparency, accountability and our shared democratic values.

Bill 14 is not the way forward. It is a dangerous step backward, cloaked in green. I urge all members of this house to vote against it.

[5:25 p.m.]

Deputy Speaker: Recognizing the member for Maple Ridge East.

Lawrence Mok: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, I want to take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the Filipino community in the recent festival tragedy. And I share your sorrow in this.

Today I rise with deep conviction to speak against Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act. On the surface, it may appear to be a step toward progress, a promise to streamline the approval process for renewable energy. But when we take a closer look at this bill, it becomes very clear that this bill does nothing far more consequential….

It centralizes immense decision-making power in a way that neither reflects the values of transparency and accountability nor respects the people of British Columbia, whose lands, livelihoods and public dollars are most affected. And I have to say, I truly find that very troubling.

Let me be absolutely clear. These projects are not just spots or lines on a map. They span vast landscapes, involve hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, touching many years, even generations, of land stewardship and community trust. Yet this bill hands sweeping authority to a single regulator, removing the necessary checks and balances that are fundamental to good governance. This House, this very place where we are meant to debate and safeguard the public interest, is being written out of the process.

Let's take a closer look at some examples. Clause 13 gives cabinet the power to modify, apply or ignore parts of the Energy Resource Activities Act without ever needing to return to this Legislature for approval. That's not a minor detail to gloss over. It is a profound shift in how decisions are made in this province.

Then there's clause 21, which retroactively declares all actions taken by the B.C. Energy Regulator since April 1, 2024, to be lawful, even if they were legal at that time. This doesn't just change to how we move forward; it rewrites history.

I believe British Columbians know when something crosses the line, and this bill, this sweeping consolidation of power, is a clear overreach. I have no doubt that if the roles were reversed and members of the government sat on this side of the chamber, they would be raising the same concerns I am today, because no government, no matter how well-intentioned, should be allowed to grant itself the authority to rewrite the rules and erase the processes that protect our democracy.

Quite frankly, this bill offends our most basic democratic principles. It undermines due process, shuts out public accountability and opens the door to closed-door decision-making. And who bears the brunt of that? Our rural communities, Indigenous nations and all those who live on and care for the land.

The government speaks of nine wind farms and a transmission line. What British Columbians deserve to

know is that this bill gives them the power to extend beyond those projects without limits and without oversight.

[5:30 p.m.]

To my colleagues across the House: I understand the desire to improve efficiency. I share their sense of urgency when it comes to moving toward clean energy and the importance of streamlining projects. But efficiency must never come at the expense of accountability. We cannot confuse unchecked authority with innovation. We cannot claim to be streamlining when what we are doing is sidestepping the very processes that protect people, land and law.

You cannot fast-track trust, you cannot legislate over communities without them, and you cannot replace democratic debate with retroactive permission and call it progress. If that doesn't sound the alarm, I truly don't know what will.

I now turn to more specific concerns, beginning with the removal of the Environmental Assessment Act for projects under this bill, an omission that not only weakens environmental protections but leaves communities in the dark about what is happening in their own backyards.

Talking about environmental oversight, our responsibility as representatives in this chamber goes beyond drafting legislation. It is about standing as stewards of the future. As representatives of the people of British Columbia, we are entrusted not only with the care of our democratic institutions but with the protection of the lands, waters and communities that sustain us all. The decisions we make here will echo for generations, shaping the environment our children and grandchildren will inherit.

That is why I rise today with serious concern about clause 14 of this bill. This specific clause proposes a sweeping change, one that removes the requirement for environmental assessments for nine wind energy projects, the North Coast transmission line and, most significantly, any future projects this cabinet may choose to exempt by regulation. That could include any large-scale developments like wind, solar, hydro, geothermal, biomass and biogas.

For this House's information, I'm also an electrical engineer.

This legislation will allow entire classes of major energy projects to move forward without environmental assessments or public involvement. That's not streamlining. That's sidelining. What we are witnessing here is not just a shift in procedure. It is a quiet but dramatic rewriting of how decisions about our shared land and future are made. And when oversight is removed, the voices of people, of our constituents and communities are silenced right along with it.

Environmental assessments are not red tape to be cut through. They are the only remaining bridge between communities and the developments that impact them. These assessments offer a crucial pause, a moment to assess what this means for the land, the water, the air and the people who rely on all of it. They bring together knowledge from scientists, traditional keepers of the land, local residents and environmental experts so that we don't walk blindly into harm's way.

This process exists not just to check boxes but to protect what is replaceable, our ecosystem, our health and the rights of Indigenous peoples, whose relationship to this land predates all of us here. And above all, it is a way of honouring the principle that decisions of this scale should never be made behind closed doors.

Yet under this bill, all of that can be easily swept aside with a single regulation from cabinet. The government assures us that reforms are coming, that these are only temporary exceptions and that the projects in question are low-impact.

[5:35 p.m.]

Where is that reform, and when will it be ready? Until then, we are being asked to dismantle public oversight with nothing tangible, nothing binding in its place. So of course we must be against it instead. That isn't responsible governance. That's asking the public for blind faith without clarity, without safeguards and without a timeline.

We have seen where blind faith leads us. Look no further than the broken promise of the $1,000 grocery rebate, a reminder that good intentions don't equal results and vague assurances don't protect the public interest. We know what can happen when projects are rushed through without full review. The evidence is all around us — landscapes scarred, water systems degraded, communities left to pick up the pieces. This isn't theoretical. It is a well-worn pattern in our history.

Suffice it to say, if this bill becomes law in its current form, British Columbians wouldn't just lose a process. They will lose their rightful place at the table. They will lose the chance to shape what happens in their own backyards, to speak up before it is too late to protect what matters most to them. Think of the farmers who know every inch of their land, or the coastal fishers whose lives depend on healthy ecosystems. These people deserve a voice, not a notice after the fact.

Clean energy is absolutely necessary. I agree that the urgency is real, but if we allow that urgency to override accountability, we risk losing more than we gain. No energy project is worth sacrificing the trust of the people or the principles of democracy itself.

I now turn to a part of this bill that strikes especially close to home: its impact on agriculture. Let me begin with something we all know deep down. Farmland is sacred. Once it is lost, it's lost forever. We don't get it back anymore. It's not a resource we can manufacture or restore on demand, and that's what makes clause 15 of this bill so deeply alarming. Clause 15 hands sweeping power to the B.C. Energy Regulator, an unelected body, to ap-

prove energy infrastructure on lands that belong to the agricultural land reserve.

If that wasn't enough, clause 24 actually changes the Agricultural Land Commission Act itself, stripping the ALC of its longstanding authority when it comes to projects covered under this bill. This means that decisions about whether farmland can be developed for industrial use no longer rest with those who understand its value as farmland. Instead, they fall to a regulator whose mandate is energy, not food, not farming, not long-term land stewardship. This decision-making will happen far from the farms, far from the people whose livelihoods depend on them and far from the communities who rely on that land for food security.

This isn't just about cutting red tape. This is about clearing the path for energy development to take precedence over farming, even on land that has been protected for decades. Once a field is paved or built over, it doesn't return to what it was before. We lose more than just the land. We lose the harvest it would have produced, the jobs it would have sustained and the legacy it would have carried forward.

British Columbians are already feeling the pressure of rising food costs and supply chain uncertainty. Farmers are being asked to do more with less, often under increasingly difficult conditions.

[5:40 p.m.]

Now, under this regulation, they are being told that their farmland can be relocated for industry with no meaningful consultation, and sometimes without so much as a warning.

We are told these impacts will be minimal, but if that were truly the case, then why does this government need to strip the ALC office authority altogether? Why dismantle a system that has served as a shield for our farmland for decades?

Yes, renewable energy is essential, but so is food security. These two priorities must live side by side, not one at the expense of the other. The future we need to build must include clean power and thriving farms. We cannot afford to create a world where food production is treated as negotiable, where farmland is seen as available, just waiting for a different purpose.

Climate leadership that does not protect food security is incomplete. It is shortsighted, and it sends the wrong message to the next generation of farmers, that not even land in the ALR is safe, that not even land set aside for agriculture is guaranteed.

If we allow this bill to pass unchanged, we won't just be amending legislation. We will be reshaping our collective priorities. We will be sending a signal to the developers that the Agricultural Land Commission no longer stands between them and farmland. And we will be telling the farmers who have cared for these lands, who have built our rural economies — in fact, our families — that their place in our province's future is conditional.

British Columbians deserve better than that. Our farmers deserve better than that. Our children and grandchildren will one day rely on the food and the land we either protect or lose. They deserve better than that too.

With regards to the heritage site protection, some values must stand above efficiency, among them the protection of heritage. The stories, sacred sites and cultural landmarks that tie people to the land cannot be replaced, relocated or reimagined once lost, yet clause 16 of Bill 14 undermines exactly that.

This clause amends the Heritage Conservation Act, not to strengthen it but to move authority away from those with cultural or historical knowledge. It allows the minister to delegate decision-making power to the B.C. Energy Regulator, which, in turn, can assign those responsibilities to internal staff — staff who may have no background in archaeology, no connection to Indigenous knowledge, no understanding of the cultural weight these sites carry.

This is not just administrative streamlining. It is a fundamental change in who holds the responsibility to protect what is sacred. It risks turning meaningful heritage into a check box on the development form. Sacred sites are not obstacles. Oral histories are not delays. Traditional territories are not blank spaces on a map to be filled with industrial use.

When those who are advancing development are also empowered to decide what heritage is preserved or dismissed, we create a dangerous conflict of interest. Heritage cannot be rebuilt once it is destroyed. We can't unearth what has been paved over. We can't hear stories that were never asked to be told.

This isn't about opposing renewable energy. It is about ensuring that in our pursuit of the future we don't erase the past. We must do both, protect the land and the legacy it carries. Efficiency should never come at the cost of memory, identity or respect.

[5:45 p.m.]

Now I want to talk about public safety and wildlife protection being suspended. Laws that protect our safety, our wildlife and our environment are not meant to be flexible. They are meant to be firm guardrails, ensuring that as we grow and build, we do so responsibly.

Bill 14 undermines those very foundations by quietly carving out exceptions where these protections no longer hold. For example, clause 17 introduces a new class of energy projects, so-called level 3 streamlined, which can bypass full compliance with the Safety Standards Act. These are not low-risk community initiatives. They are high-impact developments approved at cabinet's discretion, where oversight becomes optional and safety standards can be sidestepped in the name of speed.

Clause 18 deepens the concern, allowing the minister to transfer key responsibilities under the Wildlife Act,

such as permitting for hunting, trapping and angling, directly to the B.C. Energy Regulator. This move places complex conservation decisions in the hands of a body whose primary mandate is project facilitation, not ecological stewardship.

This is more than a change in paperwork. It is a change in priorities. These clauses signal a dangerous shift from principled, expert-driven governance to unchecked administrative discretion. There's no built-in appeal process, no guaranteed regional oversight and no clear framework for accountability.

We are being told clean energy will not compromise our laws, but these provisions suggest otherwise. When environmental protection becomes a matter of convenience, it is not just nature that suffers; it is the credibility of our institutions. Rules that can be easily waived aren't protections. They are suggestions, and that's not good enough.

Moving on to levies and fees. Bill 14 makes a quiet but powerful change to how financial responsibilities are handled in B.C.'s energy sector, one that should concern us all. Clause 12 gives the B.C. Energy Regulator the authority to impose levies retroactively, dating back to April 1, 2024, before this legislation has even passed. Once posted online, those changes are binding. There's no way to appeal them, no opportunity for discussion. They simply take effect.

Clause 11 goes even further. It lets the board, with Treasury Board approval, raise, reduce or waive fees entirely. There are no fixed formulas, no consistency. One project could be charged. Another could be exempt. It's all discretionary, and none of it is transparent.

This isn't just administrative flexibility. It is a shift in how trust, finance and accountability operate within government, industry and the public. There are no clear guidelines for how these costs are calculated, no requirement that they reflect the size or impact of a project, just broad, unchecked authority applied after the fact.

This uncertainty doesn't just impact companies. It ripples out to communities. Delays, confusion and lost confidence in public process follow. Without a fair system for levies, everyone is left guessing.

[5:50 p.m.]

We are not debating whether levies should exist. We are asking whether they are being applied in a way that is fair, consistent and open to challenge. When rules change retroactively with no oversight or accountability, it is not streamlining. It is governance by improvisation and, yet again, a cause for deep concern.

To conclude, Bill 14 represents a fundamental shift in how we govern and protect the people and land of British Columbia. The choices we make today will shape the future for generations to come. As policy-makers, it is our duty to ensure that the laws we pass are rooted in transparency, accountability and respect for the communities we serve.

This bill, however, undermines those very principles. It consolidates power in the hands of a few politicians, bypassing the voices of those who will be most affected. It places the well-being of communities and the protection of land and environment at risk.

It is crucial to remember that progress is not solely measured by the speed of development or the number of projects we can push through. True progress is measured by how we balance innovation with responsibility, how we grow without losing sight of the people and places that make this province what it is.

We cannot allow expediency to replace thoughtful, inclusive decision-making. We owe it to our children, our grandchildren, our communities and our shared environment to stand firm in protecting the rights of those who are impacted by these decisions. We cannot allow their voices to be silenced. Nor can we permit critical protections to be stripped away in the name of efficiency. The stakes are too high. This is not just about the projects themselves. It is about how we govern, how we listen and how we ensure that our democracy remains strong and vibrant.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to reject Bill 14 and stand with the people of British Columbia. For all these reasons, I continue to stand with my colleagues on this side of the House in strong opposition against this bill.

Deputy Speaker: Recognizing the member for Prince George–Mackenzie.

Kiel Giddens: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to join others who have thanked you for your very hard work in your riding in a very challenging time. Thank you very much for all you're doing for your community right now.

Of course, I am rising today to speak to Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act. To no surprise, I express my serious concerns with both the substance of this legislation and, of course, the unprecedented powers it seeks to place in the hands of cabinet.

This is obviously part of a pattern of bills we're seeing before us in the Legislature. I keep using the word unprecedented every single time we're seeing one of these bills come forward. But of course, Bill 7, Bill 15 and what we're talking about right now, Bill 14, are all unprecedented power grabs.

Let's start with what we all agree on though, I think, as we're talking about this bill today. British Columbia's permitting system needs reform. That is not in dispute. Anyone involved in resource development — whether it's in renewable energy or mining or forestry or infrastructure — will tell you that the current permitting system is complex, inefficient and burdensome to try to navigate.

I was just at the Minerals North Conference a couple of weeks ago and talked in a keynote speech I gave. And really, today, proponents have to navigate a crazy web of approvals from multiple ministries and agencies, each with their own processes, timelines and requirements. It slows down projects, increases costs and discourages investment in our province at a time when we should be actually attracting that investment.

I recently met with one of the major mining companies in Canada, one of the mining majors here. They're not investing in B.C. This particular company I talked to is only managing reclamation at old properties. I asked them what is holding them back in B.C., and they said that it's actually an attractive jurisdiction for the quality of mining claims. It's attractive even for our rigorous environmental protection, in many ways.

[5:55 p.m.]

It's also a place where the goalposts of regulatory processes move, if they even exist at all. That's ultimately what's holding back mining in B.C. It's holding back renewable energy too, and it needs to change.

A single-window approach to permitting where proponents can access a more streamlined, coordinated process could be a solution worth considering. But what the NDP government has introduced in Bill 14 is not a balanced, responsible approach to streamlining approvals. It's a radical shift of unchecked authority to the Premier, to the Energy Minister. Companies actually want a clear but rigorous process, but this is not it.

This legislation is being packaged and sold as a simple tool to get renewable energy projects such as wind farms and transmission lines built faster. The government is quick to point to the nine wind farm proposals and, of course, the North Coast transmission line as the projects this bill is intended to accelerate. But as is often the case with this government, the devil is in the details.

If we take a look at the closer language of the bill, we find buried in the fine print a clause that should set off alarm bells for every member of this House and for every British Columbian who values transparency, fair process and local say in how our lands and resources are managed. This legislation does not limit itself to these nine projects. It contains a provision that gives cabinet the authority, by order in council, to expand this new permitting framework to any renewable resource project they choose. There are no clear definitions, no geographic or project-specific limitations, no requirement to return to this House for debate or public discussion. The decision is entirely at the discretion of cabinet.

We don't know if these wind projects that the government talks about are even the right projects because we're taking the Utilities Commission right out of the equation here. We have to take the government's word on the fact that these are the projects that are the right ones for ratepayers. At the end of the day, I ask myself: are these the right projects for ratepayers in this province?

If the cabinet wants to apply their, really, cherry-picking framework to any project, whether it's in the Peace region, the North Coast, the Cariboo or anywhere else, they can do so with the stroke of a pen — no community consultation, no environmental assessment, no checks from this Legislature. This is not streamlining. We're centralizing authority in Victoria and stripping away the voices in my community and for all the people who live, work and depend on the lands that these projects would actually be on.

In Prince George–Mackenzie, this is especially concerning. We have a long history of resource development, and we know that when decisions are made without local input, without respect of the people on the ground, the consequences are not just environmental; they are economic, social and cultural. We know that proper process matters. When projects are pushed through without due diligence, they actually end up facing delays later on. They face community opposition and even court challenges.

This is creating precisely the kinds of bottlenecks that the government claims it's trying to avoid. Bill 14 is not a solution to these challenges. It's a dangerous shortcut, one that sidelines local governments, Indigenous leaders and rural communities while concentrating power in the hands of cabinet.

What really keeps me up at night when I read through Bill 14 isn't just what government says it wants to do; it's what the bill actually enables them to do. It enables them to pick winners and losers.

That's unacceptable. If cabinet decides they want to fast-track any other renewable energy project — this could be a solar, geothermal, wind or anything else that they decide fits the bill — they can do so without environmental assessment. There are problems with that. They can do it without public hearings. They can do it without local voices, without even proper Indigenous consultation, we believe — without any of that accountability the people in my community and right across northern B.C. expect as a basic right.

These are arbitrary powers, open to bad decisions, unintended consequences, and even worse, they could be open to political interference. That's not the only part of what's wrong with this bill. Bill 14 also gives the energy regulator the authority to change the very laws that govern its own conduct.

[6:00 p.m.]

Think about that for a moment. A regulator appointed by the government, given the green light to rewrite its own playbook whenever it wants. How are proponents of projects supposed to have certainty of what the rules are? Remember when I talked about Barrick Gold or the mining company I was speaking of. This won't get them to invest. When the goalposts keep changing, it creates investment

uncertainty, and uncertainty is where final investment decisions go to die.

If that wasn't enough to scare off investment, let's add the cherry on top. This bill gives the regulator also the authority to create new fees and levies and to make those charges retroactive. The previous speaker spoke about that as well. That means companies, some of which have already spent years planning and investing in British Columbia, could be blindsided by fees they had no way of knowing were coming.

Let's be honest. This isn't the way to attract investment in our province. Companies can handle clear rules. They can handle risk. What they can't handle is a government that changes the rules halfway through the process and then sends them the bill after the fact.

This reminds me, of course, of Ronald Reagan's famous line that some of the most terrifying words someone can hear are: "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help." That's exactly what I think this bill is actually doing. It's government saying it knows exactly how to run projects. Well, the private sector knows how to run projects, not government.

If we want to be serious about bringing clean energy investment to British Columbia, we need to provide certainty. Bill 14 does the opposite. It injects chaos into our permitting system and gives too much unchecked power to people who are not accountable to the communities that they're impacting.

Another feature of Bill 14 that on the surface might seem reasonable is the establishment of a new orphan fund. This is something that has been common in the oil and gas industry. In principle, I think we can all agree that if a company abandons a wind farm or a transmission line, there should be a fund in place to ensure those sites are cleaned up properly. I think that is a responsible policy.

Once again, when you peel back the layers of this bill, the fine print is what actually worries me. The fund would be entirely managed by the BCER in this case, who will have full authority to determine what levies get applied to projects to fill the fund. There's no clear framework laid out in the legislation for how these levies will be calculated, no formula for ensuring fairness between project types or operators and no public transparency about how these decisions are actually going to be made.

We focus way too much on enabling legislation and need to tell British Columbians, need to tell project proponents what we're actually meaning to do here, because we're injecting uncertainty into the system.

This raises serious concerns. Who's going to bear the brunt of these costs? Will responsible operators be punished for the failures of others? Will costs balloon out of control, only to be passed down to ratepayers, to communities, to families already struggling with affordability? That's not how we build public confidence in renewable energy projects. It's how we undermine it.

The bill also gives the regulator sweeping powers over heritage designations. Under Bill 14, the regulator is authorized to apply or remove heritage status from any lands deemed to be of cultural significance, whether those lands are important to British Columbians, to local communities or, of course, to First Nations. But the real kicker here is that the regulator gets to pick the individual who makes that decision.

Let that sink in, folks, here. An unelected regulator appoints someone who answers only to them to decide if, for example, a burial site, a place of spiritual significance or a historic landmark, deserves protection. There's no mandatory consultation process, no transparency built into the decision-making and no appeals process for those who disagree with the outcome. This is undermining the reconciliation process with Indigenous communities while creating more arbitrary decision-making.

As someone who has worked on major projects, I can tell you that this is not an area where arbitrary decisions are a good idea. Projects will be tied up in court in no time.

I wish I could tell you that the overreach in Bill 14 ends there, but unfortunately, it doesn't. The deeper we go into this bill, the more concerning it became to me. One particularly shocking provision allows the BCER to suspend or outright cancel hunting, trapping and angling permits.

[6:05 p.m.]

This has been talked about, but this wasn't a drafting error. This is something that I think many other members have spoken about. It's not a minor clause tucked away as a formality. It's right there in plain text. The regulator is granted the authority to revoke these licences as it sees fit. For the people in my riding of Prince George–Mackenzie, that's part of their way of life, and to have uncertainty into their way of life for hunting, trapping and angling permits is a big deal.

I ask this House: what on earth does that have to do with renewable energy permitting? The answer is simple: nothing. We shouldn't have this clause in the bill at all. There's no logical connection between streamlining energy project approvals and interfering with the personal rights of British Columbians to hunt, fish and trap. These are legal activities. They're vital to our culture, especially in northern B.C., where I live.

This clause is really a glaring example of how wildly overboard and heavy-handed this bill actually is. It's the kind of power that should never be given to any regulator, let alone one that is not elected and has no direct accountability to the people whose lives they're impacting.

Yet somehow even that is not the most extreme overreach in the legislation, so I'm going to continue further through the bill here.

In what perhaps is another of the most reckless provisions of them all, Bill 14 authorizes the regulator to remove the application of the Safety Standards Act for the so-called level 3 streamlined projects. This is not a small

loophole. I'm really concerned with this part of it. This is the government giving itself and its regulator the power to bypass the very safety standards that exist to protect workers, communities and the environment.

As the opposition Labour critic, I can't stress enough how dangerous this actually is. Safety regulations are not optional. They are not red tape. They are there to prevent accidents, protect workers on the job, safeguard the public from unsafe infrastructure if it's not built properly and ensure that when projects are built in this province, they're built with the highest standards of care. That's what British Columbians expect of us.

To allow any project, renewable or otherwise, to move forward without these protections is beyond irresponsible. It's reckless. It sends a message to workers across British Columbia that their safety is negotiable when political priorities demand it. I can't believe this is coming from the New Democrats. This is the so-called party of workers. How can we be having this in place?

It completely undermines the trust the public places in this Legislature and in the regulatory bodies we're talking about when we empower them to oversee these projects. This government likes to say that they're the champions for workers. They like to say they care about safety, but actions speak louder than words.

The action they're taking with Bill 14 to hand the regulator the power to cut corners on safety whenever it suits them is unacceptable. This is not good governance. It's not respect for workers. It's actually a reckless abandonment of our duty to protect British Columbians. It's one of the main reasons that I can't support this bill.

Let's not lose sight of the larger picture here. This is the same NDP government that for the past seven or almost eight years has made it harder and harder to get projects approved, built and operational in this province.

They've layered regulation upon regulation, wrapped industries in red tape and created a climate of uncertainty that has driven away private investment and led to project cancellations across multiple sectors, from mining to forestry — we're seeing major challenges, including in my riding — to LNG. We've seen projects that have left and other energy infrastructure that's left hanging, not knowing the conditions in place for their success.

Of course, in my riding of Prince George–Mackenzie, we've seen firsthand what happens when government overregulates, when it stalls permits and creates bottlenecks in the name of bureaucracy. There are companies waiting years for forestry permits. There are water permits for many energy projects that are held up. Other permitting is a huge challenge.

[6:10 p.m.]

These are projects that can bring good jobs, investment and opportunity to rural and northern British Columbia, but they've been delayed, derailed or even abandoned entirely. That has real consequences for families in my region and across the province, for the workers counting on those projects and for the small businesses also relying on them.

Now, suddenly, when they're faced with consequences of their own decisions — a collapsing investment climate, a stagnant resource sector and growing frustration from communities and industry alike — this government wants to pivot. They want to claim the mantle of efficiency and streamlining now. They want to tell British Columbians they've turned over a new leaf.

Instead of bringing forward thoughtful, balanced reforms to the permitting system, reforms to things like the Environmental Assessment Act — reforms that maintain transparency, respect communities and uphold our environmental and safety standards — they've chosen the shortcut approach here.

Let's be clear about what Bill 14 is. This isn't just about clearing up permitting logjams. This isn't about fixing inefficiencies. This bill is about consolidating power in the hands of cabinet. It's about cutting out the people, cutting out the Legislature, cutting out the very voices that are the most affected by these projects.

British Columbians are smart, though. They see through the government's sudden change in tone. They won't be fooled into thinking that giving cabinet the ability to exempt projects from environmental reviews, suspend safety standards, revoke hunting and fishing permits and rewrite the regulatory rulebook behind closed doors are a sign of progress. They'll recognize this for what it is: a desperate move by a government that has boxed itself in and now wants to bulldoze through the very safeguards that protect our environment, our communities and even our democracy.

Of course we need to fix the permitting process. Of course we need to create an environment where renewable energy projects can actually thrive. But that can't come at the expense of Indigenous consultation, community and public engagement, environmental stewardship or the safety of workers and communities. When you strip those protections away, you don't just lose public trust; you risk undermining the very projects you claim to want to advance.

I would know. I worked on the LNG industry in this province. We worked incredibly hard with stakeholders, with rights holders to get that project right, to make sure that we had durable public trust. I don't think losing that durable public trust is good for anybody. It's certainly not good for projects.

Bill 14 is not about balanced permitting reform. It's a raw power grab. It's Bill 7, which I spent hours and hours in committee stage debate on. It's Bill 7, version 2, except now the focus is on energy projects here instead of arbitrary procurement directives and things of that nature that are in the hands of cabinet, not in the hands of people, not in the hands of this Legislature, certainly. The pattern

is the same. We sideline the public. We cut the Legislature out of the process and really give unchecked authority to regulators here but, of course, also to cabinet ministers.

I think British Columbians want to see clean energy built, but they want it built right. They want it built responsibly, and they want to get it done quickly as well. Streamlining is actually an important part of what we need to do in this province, but Bill 14 doesn't deliver that. It fails the test of responsible governance, and it fails the test of transparency. That's, to me, a failure to the people of British Columbia. They expect so much more.

Obviously, it's no surprise I'll be voting against this bill, and I urge every single member of this House to, in fact, do the same. Regardless of party, take another look at the bill. I think there are serious questions that we need to continue to ask, and I hope those questions can be canvassed in committee stage before the government uses closure to stop the debate on this bill, because British Columbians deserve that transparency.

We need to stand up for the principles of fairness, democracy and accountability and not just trust this government's judgment. That's what we're doing with this bill. We're handing over this arbitrary power to government's judgment. British Columbians deserve better than that.

I want to get projects done. I want to build projects in my own riding. I want to see ridings across the province where energy projects, including renewable energy, have a chance to succeed. But it needs to be done on the basis of fairness. It needs to be done on fairness for ratepayers, as well, taxpayers — projects that actually make sense, not arbitrary decisions in the hands of cabinet.

[6:15 p.m.]

That is why I won't be supporting this bill. Thank you for the time today, and I'll yield my time.

Elenore Sturko: Good evening to my colleagues here in the House. I, of course, am rising to speak about Bill 14. It's the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act.

This bill raises some serious questions. This is a bill that is about the centralization of executive power into the hands of the NDP cabinet and an erosion of due process, democratic oversight and respect for those who work on the land, who steward our wildlife and sustain B.C.'s rural economies.

I have to say that I was compelled, listening to the speech from my colleague from the Cariboo-Chilcotin…. A lot of my colleagues that are working in rural areas already have experience with the issues that will be exacerbated, in my opinion, by Bill 14, some of the overreach and some of the arbitrary decisions that the government will be able to make with regard to things like access to land, fishing licences and land tenures. I find that to be very, very concerning. I want to thank my colleagues from across the province for taking the time to express those concerns on behalf of their constituents.

British Columbians and members of this opposition are not against renewable energy, but we are against government overreach that disguises itself as efficiency. As the MLA for Surrey-Cloverdale, which is one of the fastest-growing and most dynamic constituencies in British Columbia, I also know that people that I represent expect that development be done transparently and safely and with respect for our community.

We have a very proud history, in our province, of land and wildlife stewardship. One of the things that brings a lot of people here to live in British Columbia, if you weren't lucky enough to be born here but are lucky enough to have moved and live here, is that we have this amazing access to land. One of the concerns, of course, under this bill is that those accesses could be changed or limited without oversight.

From the protection of critical habitat zones to the establishment of the agricultural land reserve, British Columbians have always insisted on balancing economic development with long-term environmental and community care. That is one of the things that I am really proud of about our province: our ability to find that balance and to really be a province, I would say, that values economic development but also holds almost…. It's our cultural way of life to appreciate the environment and to want to spend time in it.

This bill, I believe, breaks that tradition. It discards the important checks and balances that we have over that development balanced with protection of our environment and community care. The bill empowers the B.C. Energy Regulator, a non-elected body, to override the legislation that governs its own conduct. This regulator, directed by cabinet, could also be able to apply or disregard whole sections of the Energy Resource Activities Act without any accountability to this Legislature.

To be clear, Bill 14 gives cabinet power to exempt any renewable energy project — past, present or future — from key laws like the Environmental Assessment Act, the Agricultural Land Commission Act and the Wildlife Act, all by regulation, with no public hearing, no debate and no scrutiny.

This bill sets a precedent, because if cabinet can exempt energy projects from foundational laws, what is there to stop them from doing it in other sectors? When the government starts to pick and choose which laws apply to which industries, what type of uncertainty will this create for development?

I find that it's troubling that this legislation allows the regulator not just to ignore existing rules but to alter the very framework that governs its own authority. To me, this is like giving a referee in the middle of the game the power to rewrite the rules in favour of one team.

[6:20 p.m.]

We know that when the government picks winners and losers in the energy sector, deciding which projects are fast-tracked and which are smothered in red tape, it can distort the market, and it really does undermine merit-based innovation.

The distortion doesn't just impact energy companies; it impacts construction firms and equipment suppliers, landowners and workers, because everyone outside of the government's favoured projects now has to operate under uncertainty. They're wondering if their rights or contracts will still matter tomorrow. British Columbians deserve the best and safest and most efficient technologies to win, not those that have the best political connections or those that are cherry-picked by government and bureaucrats.

I also have some concerns with section 18 of this bill. This clause allows the minister responsible for the Wildlife Act to delegate to the energy regulator the power to suspend or cancel hunting, angling, trapping and guide-outfitter permits indefinitely and without hearing. Government wants to allow bureaucrats to cancel your hunting and fishing licences without warning, no explanation and no right to appeal. There is no mention of compensation, no requirement to prove wrongdoing, and there is no independent oversight in this process.

What will this mean to British Columbians wanting to access and enjoy public lands — not only hunters, anglers and trappers but also campers and hikers and recreational users who rely on fair access to the wilderness for their health, their economic activity and their outdoor lifestyle?

The ability to responsibly access the back country is not a privilege that should be granted by bureaucrats; it should be a right. It's a right that has helped define British Columbia. Bill 14 threatens that right by empowering unaccountable officials to restrict access arbitrarily with no requirement to consult the people who it affects, with no recourse to challenge a decision and no safeguards against abuse.

Whether it's for recreation, tradition or responsible wildlife management, this government's approach might be seen as an attack on the public's right to use their land. Access to the wilderness is part of what makes our province unique. There are families from every corner of the province who enjoy hiking in the summer, fishing in the fall, hunting responsibly to provide for themselves or to connect with their tradition.

My colleague from Prince George mentioned that particularly in rural areas, hunting and getting out in nature are important. I would argue that it's also important to people that live in the city. Although we live in a city with many parks, there's something really special about being able to access the back country, to be able to go in a place that is undiscovered to you.

When my kids were very young, some of the first activities that we did was take them out into nature. We wanted them to have an opportunity to learn bushcraft. I actually used to — I haven't done it since I lived in B.C., mind you — in Ontario, Northwest Territories…. I used to hunt for ptarmigans and grouse. I went goose hunting.

I took my kids. One of the first outdoor trips I took my son on was hunting for ptarmigans. We didn't catch anything, though. He was singing the whole way. But we had a great time, and we wanted our kids to be able to have that appreciation about where their food comes from, or the value, even if you buy your food in a grocery store.

That importance of understanding our connection to nature and our connection to animals on the land, I think, is a really fundamental part of growing up as a British Columbian. I would hate to see legislation brought in that would impede that ability for people in this place to connect with land that really is a part of our cultural identity as British Columbians.

Access is something that people truly cherish, as I said, not just for recreation but for identity and their connection with nature. When this government empowers bureaucrats to erase those connections with the stroke of a pen, are we losing more than just access? Are we at risk of damaging that way of life that we have come to be blessed with here in British Columbia?

Clause 15 of this bill impacts the protection of the Agricultural Land Commission. It permits cabinet to authorize non-farm uses, subdivisions and soil disturbances on ALR land without public consultation or hearings, all by the stroke of a pen. Cabinet can already do this. They can already take land out of the ALR and use it for other purposes.

[6:25 p.m.]

In fact, they did this to build the works yard for the new Surrey-Langley SkyTrain. In my riding of Surrey-Cloverdale, where we have the new SkyTrain line being constructed, the cabinet made an order to remove Fry's Corner from the ALR so that it can be now turned into industrial land.

You know, having the SkyTrain is great. I know that people in my riding are excited to have this new transit development. Many are not happy with seeing that piece of land taken out of the ALR and turned into industrial land. Once it's made industrial, particularly if they're doing heavy mechanics or doing any kind of industrial work there, it can't go back.

Currently it's not growing food, but there are lots of other agricultural uses. It could have been used as a place to, for example, put greenhouses. We could have used it for food, but we can't now.

Look, these things do happen where we need to make decisions where we have to use ALR land. But should this kind of legislation come in that just makes this the default without public hearing and behind closed doors? I don't think that this is the right thing to do. I think, in fact, that knowing how scarce productive farmland is…. That's the

key. Not all farmland is equal. I think it's extremely important for us to protect farmland as much as possible.

Really, the threat of the tariffs, I think, and the possible impacts to our economy and disruptions like we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic to supply chains were a wake-up call for all of us about the importance of food security. I think removing those kinds of protections and making it easier for decisions without public consultation to be made with respect to removing land from the agricultural land reserve to be used for purposes other than growing the food the British Columbians need, not only to feed ourselves but to drive our agricultural economy, is something that we definitely should be concerned about.

That's something that doesn't just affect Surrey-Cloverdale. It doesn't just affect Langley or Delta. This is something that would impact the entire province. I think that it definitely is a pause for concern. Farmers are already under pressure from rising prices and red tape. One has to wonder if this opens the door to industrial energy projects trampling over farmland that we should be preserving for that food security I mentioned.

The NDP often talk about cutting red tape, but Bill 14 really is, in my opinion, an example of the NDP government consistently trying to take over what it fails to manage properly. They take it away from public view, and they put it into the hands of government bureaucrats and without that accountability.

What it reminds me of, and I don't know if this is a good analogy or not, is when you're younger, and you ask someone to help you tie your shoe, but instead of showing you, they just do it. It didn't really benefit you in terms of the learning or the growth that you really needed. It didn't make the process easier for you. Someone just bulldozed you. They took over. They just tried to do it themselves.

That's what this government has done, not only with Bill 14. Truly, this is, I think, the third piece of legislation this session where you see a government that talks about removing red tape, and they talk about streamlining, but really, what it is, is trying to just take over everything, trying to run everything. Not really making way and making things easier for free enterprise at all but seizing the power and really taking away opportunity, as it were, from free enterprise, from businesses, from organizations, from farmers and communities to really be active participants and grow from what should be a collaborative process instead of one that is very authoritarian, if I might say.

I also have some concerns with clause 17. This one removes the application of the Safety Standards Act for level 3 streamlined projects. In other words, proper safety regulations don't have to be applied to some massive infrastructure developments if the cabinet decides to say they don't.

[6:30 p.m.]

As opposition critic for Public Safety, I do have concerns about that and the impacts of removing regulatory safety oversight from infrastructure projects.

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

We are switching Chairs here, I see, so I will welcome the new Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Well, thank you, Member.

Elenore Sturko: Chair, I am just in the midst of discussing some concerns that I have and why I won't be supporting Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act.

As I was saying, clause 17 removes the application of the Safety Standards Act under certain streamlined projects. British Columbians understand the importance of proper oversight. They do, particularly when it comes to safety. We've had things happen in this province, in our history, where tragedies have actually happened, where we've seen…. Actually, sadly, just a couple of years ago, a crane, for example, collapsed in the Interior, and there were fatalities.

The need for us in this province to not cut any corners when it comes to safety, I think, is paramount. The fact that there would even be a suggestion that we would do this — for the sake of expediency, to remove any kind of safety measure from an infrastructure project — is really concerning. I think British Columbians should be concerned.

I hope that my colleagues and I have an opportunity, once we get into the committee stage of this bill, to really dig into that, to find out what, if anything, the government is planning on doing to mitigate any risks associated to this. What evidence do they have that making these changes proposed in clause 17 of Bill 14, Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act…? What impact is that going to have?

This is a government that has, time and again, made decisions that have led to unintended consequences. But even though they're unintended, they are consequences, whether it was a mistake or not. Unfortunately, when you're talking about removing a safety regulation or reducing requirements for safety oversight, those unintended consequences could be significant. They could be severe. Someone could be paying for that with their life.

Let me ask you: who would be liable when something goes wrong, if a turbine collapses, when a worker is injured, when groundwater is contaminated? Will it be the minister, will it be the regulator, or is it going to be the taxpayers once again footing the bill for government shortcuts?

Accountability matters, and Bill 14 makes sure that nobody is held accountable. The government wants us to believe that these massive infrastructure projects can simply

be exempted from the very protections that are designed to keep people safe.

I understand our need for power in this province. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you…. We were debating another bill. A minister in this House stood up, and I would liken it to, essentially, blaming municipalities for slow development. But in my community of Surrey, we have, in Campbell Heights, a number of projects that are stalled and delayed or factories and businesses that are unable to expand because they don't have enough power.

This isn't just something that got dreamt up overnight. This is the reality of what's been happening and piling on the congestion and the problems over the last eight years of this government. Instead of taking a measured approach, all of a sudden they want to grant themselves the power to just arbitrarily make decisions behind closed doors, removing public oversight, getting rid of required safety oversights. We can see what happens when this government tries to take over.

[6:35 p.m.]

I think we need to make sure that, going forward, whatever the pressures may be, whether they come from an external source such as the administration in the United States imposing tariffs, impacting our economy, threatening our sovereignty….

Of course, we have to take action, and we have to do everything we can in this place to protect British Columbians, their economic well-being, their health and well-being. But cutting corners on things like safety…. I don't know. I think that's a step too far, in my opinion. It's one of the reasons why I'm not sure that I would be comfortable at all supporting this bill, and I hope that the government certainly provides more clarification on that.

There's also clause 16, which allows the regulator to decide unilaterally whether or not a land has heritage or cultural significance. I think it's very interesting that this would be coming about. I know — or I suspect, at least — that this has something to do with the fires that happened in Lytton, for example, where some of the delays, from what I'm told, are related to some of the archaeological work that's being required.

Does that now mean that this work is no longer important because the government's decided it's not important anymore? They've granted themselves the ability to say it's not important and simply mow over or build over or run over the heritage that is in this land, whether it is Indigenous heritage or other heritage, other historical artifacts or items that might be important and relevant to preserving in the province of British Columbia.

It empowers regulators to choose who makes the decision about what is culturally significant. The Premier and cabinet have effectively appointed themselves in charge of this province's heritage. In Surrey-Cloverdale, my riding, or anywhere else in B.C., no one should have their history, land or cultural space redefined by unelected officials operating behind closed doors.

What matters to a community should be determined by the people in that community, not by bureaucrats who are pushing through a political agenda. Clause 16 of Bill 14 allows for no external review, no requirement to consult landowners or community members, no safeguards. You have to ask: what impact might this have on reconciliation? That's a huge question.

As we discuss the government's unprecedented efforts to strip away oversight, I'd like to highlight one of the biggest contradictions that is actually embedded in Bill 14. That is one that actually exposes the shallow nature of this government's green agenda, the environmental fallout from the technologies that it rushes to approve. This bill fast-tracks nine wind energy projects without a serious review of the long-term impacts of the life cycle planning of the project. The public isn't being told what happens at the end of a turbine's life.

I want to be clear that I actually am very interested in wind power. I'm interested in all kinds of different technologies. I've actually seen many presentations related to wind turbines, and I think that it's something that definitely could be a power solution for us. We also need to have a plan.

Wind turbine blades that can span the length of an airplane's wings are made of composite materials that can't be recycled. Once they're decommissioned, often in just 20 to 25 years, they are often destined for landfills, where they become a massive non-biodegradable waste.

I went to the States after the election. I was lucky enough to take my family on a holiday after all the effort that all of us here in this place put in to win our seats. I know that that effort was large on all sides, in every riding. I wanted to take a break.

We actually drove from Surrey down to California, and we stayed in Palm Springs. When you pass through that, there's a valley that you go through — Indian Wells. There are all kinds of little communities in the same area.

[6:40 p.m.]

You pass by a field that is like literally thousands of wind turbines. It's pretty cool. But one of the things that you see there is a lot of broken parts lying on the ground. So as neat as it was…. Actually, when I was driving by, I was like: "Oh, that must produce a lot of power." It was almost like an alien landscape. It's a desert there, and all you see are these thousands of white wind turbines.

But all the parts lying on the ground…. Broken turbine blades, different mechanical parts lying around. I wonder if the Minister of Energy and Climate Solutions has a plan. What is our plan? Do we know what's going to happen to these projects in the long term?

Is our landscape going to look like the valley that my family travelled through? Are we going to become that landscape in some of these precious territories that

we have, in some of these areas that are currently being used by ranchers for grazing their cattle, by hunters, by outdoors people? Are we going to have a circumstance in British Columbia where we, 20 years from now, have that alien landscape with a bunch of broken pieces lying on the ground?

What impact, environmentally, will that have? Will there be an unintended consequence to this rush for us to remove certain processes from expediting these renewable energy projects? Is it going to create those unintended consequences for the future that my kids, your kids, grandkids are going to be having to deal with?

They will. This stuff eventually catches up with us. Long after I'm retired from this place, this stuff will catch up with us. I think that these are important conversations to have. When you remove these types of oversights, like Bill 14 does, and these types of community consultations and opportunities for discussion, when do we have that conversation? When will we get the answers on what some of the plans are to deal with that kind of extra environmental burden?

Yes, they're green technologies. Yes, you can harness the power of the wind and generate energy through wind turbines. But what do we have in terms of a plan for their life cycle? In the United States and Europe, the blades from the turbines are already stacking up in disposal sites. As I just spoke about there, you have to wonder: are we next? Will we end up with a problem in the future?

With no recycling plan, no mandate for disposal innovation, no funding mechanism to manage the waste, will the burden fall on local communities? Will it fall on landowners? Will that responsibility then fall to the very landowners and groups of people and communities who were excluded from the consultation under this bill?

The irony here is appalling: a government that claims to be the champion of climate action approving projects that might generate thousands of tonnes of waste.

Welcome, Minister. I'm sorry that you missed that. I was talking about a personal experience, seeing in California the number of blades on the ground.

Interjection.

Elenore Sturko: You'll read it in *Hansard*. Somebody has to read it.

Deputy Speaker: Members, it's not necessary to discuss who's in the House. Thank you very much.

Elenore Sturko: It's barely there. It's barely there.

Interjection.

Elenore Sturko: I appreciate that. Thank you, hon. Chair.

I'll just wrap up here. I have concerns, and I think I've laid that out. There are more, but I do look forward to the committee stage.

I won't be supporting this bill, certainly not as it stands now, because, as I think I've laid out, there are a lot of exclusions that happen in this legislation that send things behind closed doors, that have government simply taking over instead of doing what it should do, which is work with people.

Instead of tying the shoe, teach the person to tie the shoe. Work with the community to speed things up. Work with different groups to improve processes. Don't simply take over. That's not what a partnership with community looks like.

[6:45 p.m.]

In my opinion, that is not how we should be getting things done, just by simply steamrolling over groups and removing due process and important oversights as we move forward with these projects.

With that, I will conclude. I appreciate the opportunity and thank all the members of this House for the opportunity to speak to the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act.

Rosalyn Bird: Today I rise in opposition to Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act. The title may be new, but the approach has become familiar. This is not a bill solely about expediting nine wind farms and a transmission line. This is a bill about centralizing power and handing over sweeping authority to cabinet ministers. It's a repeat of Bill 7, where the Premier is trying to bypass democracy and grant himself and his cabinet total power for the next few years.

I think it's fair to say that we want responsible energy development. We all want to ensure stable energy supply for the future. Speeding up project approvals is essential in a country where it far too often takes years to reach decisions.

We, of course, heard concern from industry, from local communities and from everyday British Columbians that the current system is slow, it's confusing, and it can be extremely expensive. Developers have to navigate through multiple ministries. Timelines often drag on for years. Because of this, good projects, projects that would boost our economy and improve energy reliability, get delayed or even abandoned due to complicated permitting processes. That has to change.

British Columbia should be a place where investment is encouraged, where jobs are created and where important infrastructure can be built without getting stuck in red tape. That's what this side of the House has always supported. But this bill completely removes established checks and balances. It threatens farmlands and heritage lands. Its true goal is to further empower the government and cut out the role of debate here in the Legislature.

As members of this Legislature, no matter our party

affiliation, we should be concerned any time the government tries to bypass the very institution we were elected to serve and protect.

Furthermore, this legislation allows the B.C. Energy Regulator to rewrite the rules that govern its own actions. Let me say it in another way. Bill 14 grants the B.C. Energy Regulator the authority to amend, suspend or disregard sections of the very law that defines its mandate, the Energy Resource Activities Act, and does so without requiring any approval or any oversight from the Legislature.

I may support making the B.C. Energy Regulator more responsive and modernized, but it is not with this bill, where the goal is coupled with the disposal of accountability and democracy. As elected representatives, we have a responsibility to strive for and adhere to the principles of good governance, solid fiscal policies and management, while always striving for transparency and accountability. This bill essentially erodes many of these principles.

Impactful legislation builds confidence in leadership and elected officials. It builds support for policies that benefit individuals, communities and our province as a whole. When residents feel assured their government has their best interests at heart, they are more likely to embrace initiatives aimed at improvement that can be found in reducing red tape, streamlining processes while ensuring sound resource, environment and land protection and stewardship. When communities and industries work together, they are more flexible. They are willing to make concessions and find the best solutions. This bill does not enable that process.

I want to in particular highlight how renewable energy projects, specifically the ones in this bill that streamline permitting, will impact ridings like mine, Prince George–Valemount, and northern communities, which are largely rural.

[6:50 p.m.]

Under this bill, guide-outfitter, hunting, angling and other Wildlife Act licences can be cancelled or suspended indefinitely, without so much as a hearing — no appeal process, no compensation.

If you are a guide-outfitter or a fisher and make your living off the land and, in return, are a steward of the land, your ability to earn your livelihood will become very vulnerable under Bill 14. At any time, the government could decide to install a new wind farm where you trap or hunt, and suddenly, immediately, you can no longer step on the land you worked on for years, decades or maybe generations. There is no recourse, no compensation. Your input as a citizen would simply not matter to the government — once again, eroding confidence.

These guide-outfitting, trapping and angling licences are not just mere permits. They're not just pieces of paper. They are businesses that attract tourists and spending in our province. They sustain families. They represent significant investment in equipment, in gear, insurance, training and many skills.

Additionally, guide-outfitters deeply understand wildlife in British Columbia, and they provide valuable data and reports about observations in the field. As my colleague from Prince George–North Cariboo said, guide-outfitting and angling and hunting are not just niche pastimes. They are the lifeblood of rural B.C., deeply integrated into local economies and land stewardship models.

These are the pastimes that drew my husband and I back to Prince George — spending time outdoors, hunting, fishing with our grandchildren. These are times that we cherish. They're times that we don't want to see disappear.

It is a similar scenario for cattle ranchers and grazing leases. It could be decided by decree that wind turbines will be installed on the land you ranch on, and that will be that. Let me tell you, cows do not like the sound or the vibration of wind turbines. It spooks them. They will refuse to graze near turbines, and ranchers have reported that when turbines are placed near livestock, their cattle birth rates decline, directly impacting their livelihood and being able to support their families.

As per this bill, heritage lands can also be easily overturned, heritage designation removed in the name of political expediency. What happened to preserving our heritage for future generations and ensuring that our grandchildren and their grandchildren can benefit from the lands and sites of historical significance? There are many sites around the North that my husband and I have taken our grandchildren to, to help them understand where we come from, how we got here. Those should be preserved.

ALR designation will also become easily removable, even though this is prime farmland that we need for our province's food security. The agricultural land reserve protects the best farmland in this province and country, land that feeds families and sustains rural economies. Yet under this bill, energy projects can bypass normal ALR restrictions. That means that wind turbines, substations and access roads could be approved on protected farmland with no meaningful review. Once ALR land is gone, it is gone for good.

There are already troubles in my riding in regards to agricultural land. It is being purchased in large amounts, and the access is being denied to local residents. This bill furthers that. It's shocking to think that meaningful designations like heritage land and ALR land are rendered insignificant and can be revoked instantly once the government decides they want to build a wind farm to score more political points and to improve their public image as the heroes and the champions of renewable energy.

This draws our attention to the bigger picture, the real story — that this bill will override critical environmental protections as well as safety standards. This government

says that the bill will help us to build renewable energy faster. Faster, at what cost?

[6:55 p.m.]

The environmental protections British Columbians rely on are not immune from this bill. In fact, they are actively weakened by it.

Take the Environmental Assessment Act. Under the current regime, major projects, even renewable ones, must undergo an independent, science-based review. That process considers environmental impacts, alternatives, Indigenous rights and community input. But under Bill 14, cabinet would have the power to exempt certain energy resource projects from that assessment altogether.

That means a transmission line through a caribou habitat, or a wind farm on heritage land could avoid independent environmental review, not because it's safe but because the government says it's urgent. And we know from the history of Bill 7 that this government likes to cook up a sense of urgency to justify their power grab.

Now, I have emphasized already how Bill 14 could disproportionately affect northern and rural communities. But the truth is that we need to look at this government's model of governance. This kind of authoritarian rule, this thirst for power, this continued example of a dictatorial style of governing impacts all British Columbians, no matter if you reside in an urban or a rural community.

Let's be objective when considering this legislation. Bill 14 is not about getting projects built faster. It's not about strengthening our economy or improving the lives of British Columbians. This is about the government using another piece of legislation to try to give themselves power over the province in their unending quest to try to bypass the opposition voices in this House and circumvent the voices of the electorate.

Myself and my colleagues on this side of the House are not attacking renewable energy. Completed properly, renewables are essential to our future. However, this bill is reckless — no transparency, no involvement of local governments, no or minimal consultation with communities and various impacted groups or resource sectors.

What happens when a Premier, a cabinet minister or a political aide decides a project isn't aligned with their current priorities? Under this bill, they can change the rules without legislative approval. They can reclassify a project. They can grant exemptions or impose fees after the fact, even mid-construction. They don't have to justify it publicly. They don't need independent reviews. It's an unprecedented concentration of power that undermines the confidence in our permitting process, public consultation process, the integrity, transparency and accountability of governance.

I want to emphasize that regulation isn't the enemy; uncertainty is, and Bill 14 multiplies uncertainty. It concentrates authority in the hands of cabinet and the B.C. Energy Regulator without building in the guardrails that ensure fair play, due process or accountability.

In fact, clause 12 of this bill goes so far as to allow for retroactive financial charges, meaning a project's finances can be upended midstream by arbitrary new costs. Clause 12 of this bill gives the B.C. Energy Regulator, or anyone, to delegate authority to have the power to impose fees, levies or other financial charges retroactively to April 1, 2024….

Think about what that means. Project developers, investors who made decisions in good faith, who followed the rules in place at the time, can now be penalized under a new set of rules — rules that didn't even exist when they acted, when they investigated, when they chose to invest.

It gets worse. There is no requirement that these retroactive charges be fair, consistent or even subject to appeal. They can simply be applied after the fact with no recourse, and companies are just expected to pay.

[7:00 p.m.]

That sets a very troubling precedent. How can we expect to attract investment to this province when businesses can't count on regulatory certainty, when a project approved in May could suddenly face new costs in September, not because the facts changed but because the rules did, retroactively? This isn't just poor governance. It sends a clear message to investors. British Columbia's regulatory environment is unpredictable. It is unstable and vulnerable to political interference.

I would also like to register my concerns with clause 17. Clause 17 of Bill 14 quietly removes key safeguards provided by the Safety Standards Act for level 3 streamlined projects. In practical terms, this means that certain renewable energy projects or developments, those pushed forward with the greatest political urgency, would no longer be required to follow the same workplace safety standards that apply to other industrial projects in British Columbia. This exposes workers, first responders and nearby residents to far greater risk.

The purpose and the role of health and safety legislation in Canada and this province is to provide a legal framework to protect workers from health and safety hazards on the job. It sets out duties for workplace parties and the rights for workers. It establishes measures and procedures for dealing with workplace hazards to protect the employees, workers and visitors to worksites.

The construction of wind turbines, the installation of electrical substations, the development of high-voltage transmission lines involve serious hazards — possibly falls, electrocution, fire and the use of heavy machinery. So why is this government choosing to carve out exemptions from safety regulations in precisely the projects where risks are already high?

We've already seen what happens when the government steamrolls local concerns. In the Peace region, wind energy projects have gone ahead without clear consulta-

tion. Landowners have been left in the dark. Water sources have been disrupted and local governments sidelined. It's not partnership; it's imposition, and it breeds mistrust.

I wish that this bill was simply about streamlining and cutting red tape and fast-tracking. But it is not. Generally, those are the terms that ignite those with backgrounds in economics and development. But this government is using those terms in a way, saying: "Hey, we're going to do what we want, and we're going to do it quickly, so that no one has a chance to intervene or voice any opposition."

Residents of Prince George–Valemount and the residents of British Columbia don't deserve that treatment. This bill concentrates power in the hands of a few and silences the voice of many. It treats public input as a nuisance instead of a necessity. That's not how to build a sustainable future; that's how you sow division and distrust.

What we need is a clear, consistent and democratic framework for energy development — one that protects the public interest; one that ensures proper environmental review; one that includes, not excludes, local communities and First Nations. We need a process that earns public trust. We absolutely can accelerate project approvals. We can cut through unnecessary red tape. We can offer the certainty that investors are looking for. And we can do all of that without compromising the core principles of responsible, transparent governance.

[7:05 p.m.]

British Columbians deserve better than Bill 14. We deserve transparency. We deserve accountability. We deserve a government that respects the people it serves. I urge all members of this House to stand up for those principles.

As we look forward, let us remember that our collective voices are powerfully capable of shaping policies and making changes that reflect the diverse needs of B.C. residents and our communities. Also, we must consider the legacy we choose to leave behind for future generations.

In conclusion, I must reiterate my strong opposition to Bill 14. I encourage all those in this House to seriously consider the short- and long-term impacts of this legislation. Will everyone, please, seriously consider the importance of cultivating, not eroding, confidence in our provincial government? It cannot be overstated. Confidence is what binds us as a province, strengthens our democracy and empowers us to strive for a better tomorrow.

Together let's advocate for leadership that embodies honesty, integrity and commitment to all British Columbians. Let's leave a future that all of us are proud of for our children and our grandchildren. Let's protect our land. Let's protect our energy and all contribute to positive environment and land sustainability and protections.

Bruce Banman: Before I begin, we often have time away from our families. This House has heard me talk about my grandchildren once before. One of them actually asked me what I do. So I would just like to do a shout-out to my grandson who's actually up watching. I said: "Well, here I'm about to get up and talk about a bill. This isn't the exciting stuff like question period." So I'd like to just do a shout-out to my grandson Grayson and his mother, Angela, who is actually watching from home.

Yeah, everybody can wave. That'd be great. Give a clap. Democracy in action.

I rise today in opposition to Bill 14, entitled the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act. At first glance, the title of this legislation sounds harmless, even hopeful. Streamlined permitting for renewable energy, kind of sounds like progress, sounds like responsible governance — something we have not seen from the NDP side of the House, I will say. It sounds like the government is finally waking up to B.C.'s looming energy shortfall. That would be a refreshing change from what we have had in the last eight years of this government.

But wait. The devil, as always, is in the details. And buried deep in the fine print of this bill is something far more insidious. It's not just a shift in how we approve energy projects but a shift in who holds power in this province. This bill actually is not about energy; it is about control.

Now that sounds an awful lot more like this Premier and the NDP. It's about control, taken from local governments, stripped from the Legislature and handed in bulk to cabinet — and a regulator, unelected — that is being turned from referee into a rulemaker and a judge. I ask you: what good is any legislation if it guts accountability on its way to implementation?

Let's start with the basics. The government claims the bill is necessary to address B.C.'s growing demand for electricity. And on that front, they are absolutely right. Our population is growing. Industry is expanding. Electrification targets are ambitious.

[7:10 p.m.]

We need new supply, and we need it fast. As we know, for at least last year and, I believe, the year before, British Columbia imported 20 percent of its electricity. We didn't sell it. We used to be a gross seller of electricity. We imported 20 percent.

Here's the problem. For the last seven years, the NDP have been asleep at the switch. They have spent a better part, dare I say, of two decades opposing, delaying and suffocating the very infrastructure that would have prevented this mess we are now in. This is the party that said no to LNG, no to Trans Mountain and no to mining expansions. For a while, it even said no to the Site C dam. They are truly the party of no — no new development.

Now they want to drape themselves in the green cape of urgency and claim to be the champions of clean energy. Their history speaks otherwise. They said no. It's a bit like a firefighter showing up with a bucket of water to the fire they actually started and then demanding a round of applause. "Look at me, how great I am. I came with a

bucket to put it out." They started their own dumpster fire. They've been opposed to everything.

Let's talk about what this bill actually does. Bill 14 establishes three levels of streamlined permitting for renewable energy projects. Okay. What the heck does that mean? Well, it means entire classes of projects — wind farms, transmission lines, solar arrays, what we call dispatchables — can now bypass environmental assessments, local land use approvals and existing safety standards, simply because cabinet's whim says so: "I like this project. Let's bypass everything."

Once a project is designated as streamlined, the oversight is tossed out the window. It's now up to the B.C. Energy Regulator — I use that term loosely — to decide how the project proceeds, how it's regulated, and which rules apply, or don't. The bill gives the unelected regulator the power to rewrite the very law that governs the regulator. I'm going to repeat that one. It allows the regulator to oversee the laws that regulate the regulator.

Gee, what could possibly go wrong with that? It waives public safety standards, overrides local zoning decisions, cancels or suspends hunting and angling permits and imposes fees and levies. Oh, but wait a minute. There's a catch on that one. They get to do that retroactively, after the fact. Gee, what could possibly go wrong with that? Surprise, surprise. Retroactively, they can make you pay for something you didn't even know you owned. Wow. That sounds fair.

Now, if you're wondering whether this bill comes with a sense of proportion, well, it doesn't. It does come with a staggering sense of entitlement. Let's zoom in on clause 13 for a minute. This is the real sleight of hand. You know, it's like watching a magic trick. Clause 13 gives cabinet the power to disapply or modify sections of the Energy Resource Activities Act, at will, whenever they darn well feel like it, without public notice and without a vote in this House.

[7:15 p.m.]

Let me repeat that, because it's worth driving that point home. A core piece of B.C.'s energy legislation — the law that governs how energy projects are approved, managed and monitored — can now be rewritten by an unelected regulator, by regulation. There is no bill in this House, as we are discussing now. There will be no debate. There will be no oversight. In other words, there's no watchdog watching the watchdog. It's kind of like a fox guarding the henhouse, really. In what world is that acceptable?

It makes me wonder what colour the sky is on that side of the room. What rosy glasses are they looking through that are not a part of reality? This is not streamlining. Let's call it what it is. It's strong-arming; it's bulldozing. It's not governance; it's government by executive decree. Gee, you know, there's somebody else who does a lot of executive decrees. A guy across the line in the United States has been doing that. This House over on this side has been screaming their heads off about it, and now they want to do the same thing.

That should cause everybody to lie awake at night — to give any government that kind of power. It's not streamlining; it's strong-arming. The worst part is that they're pretending it's a necessary fix for the problems they actually created.

Let's talk about why these projects are stalled in the first place. It's not because the permitting process is too slow. It's because the government has created a regulatory maze so dense, so confusing and so politically toxic that no investor in their right mind wants to touch B.C. infrastructure without three lawyers and a prayer — a hope and a prayer at that.

[The bells were rung.]

Deputy Speaker: Member, if you could just pause, we'll pause the clock as well. Thank you.

Bruce Banman: I would respectfully request a short recess. I am the Whip. A part of my duties as the Whip is to ensure that in the vote that is going on next door…. I am the only one that can assign names to vote, and I do know that there are a couple that need to be assigned, Mr. Speaker. May I reserve my right to continue and have the 15-minute recess?

Deputy Speaker: I'll give you seven, Member.

Bruce Banman: All right, that'll work.

Deputy Speaker: We're in recess for seven minutes.

The committee recessed from 7:18 p.m. to 7:21 p.m.

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

Deputy Speaker: All right. I'm going to call this House back to order. The Whip of the opposition is back earlier than anticipated, so we'll get back to hearing Abbotsford South.

Bruce Banman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do appreciate being allowed to go and do my duty in the other House.

For those at home that don't know, we actually have two Houses going right now, and there are debates going on simultaneously.

Getting back to Bill 14. Having driven investment away, this government wants to appear like heroes by offering a single-window approach, but it's not a window. It's a trapdoor. Projects will be pushed through without community input, without independent review and without even a glance at whatever is proposed from this Legislature.

That's not how you build public confidence. That is how you lose it. It's how you abuse it.

Let's turn to clause 14, the environmental carve-out. Under this clause, wind farms and the North Coast transmission line are exempt from the Environmental Assessment Act. And any project without a dam, which includes almost every kind of renewable infrastructure, can be added to the exemption list later by decree of cabinet.

Now, think about what that means: no requirement to assess habitat destruction; no analysis of species at risk; no study of noise, erosion, migration of birds, hydrology or cumulative impact — just a green light and a shovel in the ground because they say so.

Let me be blunt. Not all renewable energy projects are low impact. Wind farms require massive land clearings. They displace birds and bats. Their blades end up in landfills, or worse, in an incinerator. Their lubricants are petroleum-based, and their construction uses tens of thousands of tons of steel and concrete because they sit on a massive base. Yet this government wants us to believe, because they're so-called green, we should look the other way. "Hey, hey. Nothing to look at here. Look the other way. No, no, no. Don't worry about all those concrete trucks and all that steel coming in. No, no, no. It's all good. It's green."

That is not science. That is nonsense political spin, pun intended. We should be applying the same standard of scrutiny to wind, solar and geothermal projects as we would to any other industrial development.

[7:25 p.m.]

If we don't, we'll repeat the same mistakes of the past. And this time, we'll do it in the so-called name of progress. In other words, rather than look at red tape, which they created on all projects, and talking to industries and figuring out what we could actually eliminate to make it better for all industry, they're going to pick so-called green ones and do whatever the heck they want. It is a nightmare in the waiting.

Let's talk about what this bill really means to communities like my own, Abbotsford — communities that have watched government after government treat local decision-making as if it's a nuisance; communities that are growing, investing, building, only to be told that their voices no longer matter when it comes to what gets built, where and how. Under Bill 14, municipalities have effectively been gagged and sidelined.

This bill allows projects to override local zoning laws. It allows transmission corridors to cut through agricultural land, which is definitely in my riding. And it allows solar and wind projects to be approved without the consent or even the consultation of local councils and stakeholders.

Let's call this what it is. It's a hostile takeover of local governance. If that sounds familiar, it's because we've seen it before, sadly, in this House. We have seen it in Bill 7 in the same top-down model, in the same disregard for regional input, in the same centralization of decision-making in Victoria, far from the people who will actually have to live with the consequences. We have also seen it in Bill 15.

This government's attitude to deal with Trump is to out-Trump Trump by giving themselves a magic wand to wave around and bypass all the nonsense that they actually created. Here's what Bill 14 says to local government: "We expect you to deal with the fallout, the infrastructure strain, the housing pressure, the land use conflicts. But hey, hey, don't expect to be consulted or be involved in the decision-making in any way, shape or form."

Here's what it says to British Columbians: "You can vote for your MLA, your mayor, your city council, but none of them, none of them can stop a project. Once cabinet decides it's streamlined, it's streamlined."

Let's be clear. This is not regulatory reform; it is regulatory erasure. Let me remind this House that Abbotsford is no stranger to infrastructure planning. Abbotsford has been a leader in flood mitigation, a leader in farming, a leader in sustainability, but we've also seen what happens when government ignores local expertise, when decisions are made behind closed doors and the public loses faith. Once public trust is broken, my god, it's hard to earn back. That's what's going to happen here.

Let's talk about the economic impact. Bill 14 doesn't just remove environmental review and local input. It adds something dangerous in their place: financial unpredictability. Clause 12 allows the B.C. Energy Regulator to impose levies, fees and costs retroactively. That means a developer could start a project, invest millions and comply with every rule on the books only to receive a bill a year or so later for a cost they never agreed to or budgeted for. Now I ask you: what kind of investment climate is that? Talk about a poisoned carrot.

[7:30 p.m.]

What investor, what government, thinks it's fair to rewrite the financial terms of a project after the ink has dried and been signed? This is insanity. Talk about chasing the very kind of investment you may want away in droves. This is regulatory ambush. It creates uncertainty, and it's the opposite of what B.C. needs right now.

Look, we are in a competitive global economy. Clean tech companies, energy investors and infrastructure developers — they've got choices. They don't have to bring their money here to invest. They can invest it somewhere else. They don't have to come here, and if we create an environment where rules can change overnight with a whim, fees can be put whatever they want and can be applied after the fact, retroactively, and regulations can cancel permits with a signature, why would anybody with two licks of sense want to invest a nickel here? Why would they come?

Let's be honest. The B.C. NDP has spent the last several decades making this province one of the hardest places in

North America to build anything. Whether it's housing, highways, ports, pipelines, you name it, we've made delay and uncertainty the NDP brand. It's the hallmark of their symbol.

Now suddenly, this government claims to have seen the light. They've woken up. Yeah, sure. What they want is to fast-track clean energy. It's not a conversion. It's a cover-up and a distraction. It's a rush job. It's a desperate scramble to fix a shortfall and a mess they created by trying to look busy instead of being honest about the scale and the demands of our energy needs. And they're doing it by handing unchecked authority to an unelected regulator that answers only to themselves or cabinet.

Now let's talk about the regulator for a minute. The B.C. Energy Regulator used to be exactly that — a regulator, an umpire, a neutral body, very similar to yourself, Mr. Speaker. That neutral body was meant to enforce the law, not have the ability to write it.

Under Bill 14, all that has changed. The regulator now has the power to modify their own governing legislation: "Gee, you know what? That's awkward that I have to follow that rule. Oh yeah, that's right. I can rewrite it at my own discretion." Talk about: "Hold my beer, and watch this." What could possibly go wrong with that? Decisions where safety standards don't apply, or maybe they do; suspending or cancelling hunting and angling permits; and override decisions made by other statutory bodies like the Agricultural Land Commission….

What the heck happened to the checks and balances? What happened to the idea — that noble idea — that laws should be written in this chamber and not in back rooms?

We've created a regulator that no longer regulates. It now governs. That ain't right. And it governs without the scrutiny, debate or accountability that British Columbians have come to expect and bloody well deserve.

[7:35 p.m.]

Make no mistake, when things go wrong, as they inevitably do when oversight is stripped away, it won't be the regulator that takes the blame. It will be the communities that are left to clean up the mess, the municipalities told to fix the roads, manage the fallout and deal with the residents who were never consulted in the first place — in fact, just plain ignored.

Let's revisit clause 21, the retroactive validation clause. The clause says that any regulatory action taken since April 1, 2024, even before this bill was introduced, is now deemed legal, as if the law had already been passed. Let me get that straight. This government acted like the bill was already law, and now they want this Legislature to sign off on it after the fact. If this doesn't raise every alarm bell in the building, I don't know what the heck will.

It isn't legislation; it's cleanup. It's post facto justification for overreach they didn't want to get caught doing. They're here to rubber stamp for decisions already made. We're not here to rubber-stamp decisions already made. We're here to legislate, to debate and to hold government accountable, as painful as that may be at times. Or at least that's what we're supposed to be here for.

Let's take a moment to examine the staggering hypocrisy at the heart of this bill and the heart of this government's approach to energy policy. For years, the NDP opposed major infrastructure. They delayed, protested about Site C, opposed it. They created chaos in the LNG sector. They absolutely suffocated mining expansion under piles and piles of new red tape.

They have wrapped every project proposal in regulatory duct tape and then seemed confused when investment dried up and the lights started flickering off. Now facing an energy shortfall of their own making, they have the unmitigated gall to show up with a plan not to build responsibly, not to reform broken systems, but to fast-track pet projects with zero transparency.

The people of Abbotsford have long understood the importance of energy infrastructure. We're an agricultural hub, a transportation corridor and a growing urban community that needs reliable, affordable and expandable power. We're not opposed to renewables. We're opposed to rushed, unchecked and poorly planned development. Bill 14 doesn't give us clean energy. It gives us backroom deals, with the Premier's office holding the pen and the regulator holding a rubber stamp.

Now let's talk about farmland. Clause 15 of this bill allows projects to override restrictions of the agricultural land reserve, the ALR. That means clean, arable farmland, the kind that feeds British Columbia and supports family farms in the Fraser Valley, can now be converted for industrial energy projects without even going through the Agricultural Land Commission.

Now, I ask you: in a world where grocery prices are rising, where supply chains are stretched and where drought and flood risk are increasing every year, why on earth would we make it easier to build wind turbines on farmland? Where is the planning? What's the long-term thinking?

If this government truly cared about climate resilience, they'd be protecting farmland as a critical buffer against supply shocks. Instead, they've decided that land use protections are just another piece of inconvenient red tape to bulldoze in the name of green branding.

Now, with safety, in the time I have left, this bill…. If clause 17 of this bill enables the regulator to override sections of the Safety Standards Act for certain projects…. Yes, that's right. We're removing safety standards now. We're making it better for workers. Yeah, right. In what world is that acceptable? This isn't theoretical. These projects involve heavy machinery, high-voltage transmission. They're dangerous places. Why would we ever allow the safety regulations, the ones meant to protect workers, communities and emergency responders, to now all of a sudden be optional?

I could go on and on. This bill fails on every front. It's not strategic. It's not measured. It's not accountable. It gives us no long-term power security, no fiscal framework, no environmental confidence and no assurance that the public interest is being protected.

[7:40 p.m.]

Instead, we get centralized, corner cutting and a government trying to rebrand itself as pro-development after realizing it's already boxed itself into a corner and the energy crisis.

As I conclude my remarks, I want to return to the core truth of this debate. Bill 14 ain't about clean energy. It's about unchecked, unfettered control. It's about power. The B.C. NDP government wants us to believe that this bill represents bold leadership, but what it actually represents is administrative panic cloaked in green branding, rushed and rammed through this House and handed off to a regulator that now has more power than many other ministries.

Bill 14 asks us in this House to endorse a future where environmental assessments are optional, farmland can be repurposed overnight, safety standards can be ignored, community voices are irrelevant and the cabinet gets to write their own rules at will.

Quite frankly, coming from the farming community, this bill stinks, and nobody should support it, not a single person. It is awful, and it is nothing more than abuse of power.

Thank you very much for the time.

Mandeep Dhaliwal: Bill 14 is not good for British Columbia. This bill gives too much power to the Premier and cabinet. It takes power away from MLAs. It takes power away from the people. We support renewable energy. We support wind farms. We support clean energy projects, but we cannot support this bill.

Why can we not support Bill 14? Because it is about control. It is about the government taking more power for itself. This is wrong. Bill 14 gives the government authority to make decisions without asking MLAs. This is not democracy. Democracy means MLAs elected by the people make decisions together. But Bill 14 takes away that power.

The government says this bill will make things faster and easier, but faster is not always better. Easier for the government does not mean better for the people. Good decisions need oversight. Good decisions need debate. Good decisions need democracy.

This bill lets the government skip important steps. It lets them skip environmental assessment. It lets them decide what land is heritage land. It even lets them remove safety standards. Safety standards protect our workers and families. Heritage land is important to our communities. The environment is important to everyone, but Bill 14 lets the government ignore these important things.

Bill 14 gives the B.C. Energy Regulator too much power. This regulator can make new rules by itself. It does not need approval from MLAs. It can decide to impose fees. It can impose new taxes. It can even cancel hunting and fishing permits without clear reason. This is too much power. This is power without oversight. This is power without accountability. This is power without democracy.

Bill 14 reminds me of Bill 7. We saw the same problem before. Bill 7 tried to give the government too much control. People spoke out. People said no. The government had to change Bill 7 because people said it was wrong. Now we see the same thing again in Bill 14.

[7:45 p.m.]

Bill 14 affects energy projects across B.C. It could affect every community. It could affect every family. We have seen this before. Too much power in one place is dangerous. It hurts our democracy. It hurts our province. British Columbians deserve better. MLAs represent their community. MLAs understand local issues. MLAs should have a say in decisions. But Bill 14 takes away that voice. It takes away our voice.

This government says they want renewable energy projects. We want them too. But renewable energy projects need oversight. They need rules. They need transparency. Bill 14 does not give us that. This bill allows government to make decisions in secret, decisions without public input, decisions without debate. That is not good governance. That is not democracy.

We must ask ourselves, why does the government want so much power? Why does it not want to talk to MLAs? Why does it not want oversight? The answer is clear. The government wants control. But the people of British Columbia want accountability. They want transparency. They want MLAs to do their jobs. They want democracy.

Bill 14 is not democratic. Bill 14 does not respect MLAs. Bill 14 does not respect the people. We say no to this bill. We must protect our democracy. We must protect our oversight. We must protect our province from bad governance. Renewable energy is important, but we must do it the right way, not by unchecked power, not by ignoring safety, not by ignoring heritage, not by ignoring democracy.

This bill gives too much power to the Premier and cabinet. They can decide what is best without input from communities. They can ignore local voices. They can make decisions behind closed doors. This is wrong. Transparency is important. People deserve to know how decisions are made. But Bill 14 lets the government hide the decision. This is not acceptable.

The government says renewable energy projects are urgent. We agree that renewable energy is urgent. But urgency does not mean ignore important processes. Urgency does not mean bypass democracy. This bill removes important protections. It allows government to ignore environmental standards. It allows government to avoid re-

sponsibilities. It allows government to silence community concern.

MLAs were elected to present the people. MLAs know what their communities need. MLAs must be part of the decision. But Bill 14 silences MLAs. It silences the voice of the people. Bill 14 creates a dangerous precedent. It allows future government to take even more power. It weakens our democracy. It weakens trust in government. We must be careful with our laws. We must protect democracy every day. We must protect transparency every day.

This bill does not protect democracy. British Columbians deserve renewable energy projects done right. They deserve decisions made in the open. They deserve to have their voices heard. They deserve real democracy.

[7:50 p.m.]

Bill 14 fails the test of good governance. It fails the test of democracy. It fails the people of British Columbia. We cannot support a bill that weakens democracy. We cannot support a bill that ignores communities. We cannot support a bill that gives too much power to the government.

Today we stand together against Bill 14. Today we ask every MLA to vote against this bill. We must send a clear message to the government. We must tell them clearly this bill is wrong. We must repeat our message clearly. This bill is dangerous. This bill hurts democracy. It hurts transparency. It hurts accountability. It takes power away from the people and gives it to the government alone. This is not the way to build our future.

Renewable energy is part of our future, but it must come through open and honest discussion. It must come through proper oversight and democracy process. The people of British Columbia expect MLAs to speak for them. This bill ignored that expansion. It ignored the people. We must remind ourselves why we are here. We are here to represent the people. We are here to protect democracy. We are here to ensure the government listens. This bill does not listen. This bill only dictates. It only takes power away from the people.

We cannot allow this to happen. We cannot let democracy suffer. We must be clear. We must say no. We must vote against Bill 14. Every MLA has responsibility today. Every MLA must stand for democracy. Every MLA must protect the rights of their communities. Our job is clear. Our job is to defend democracy. Our job is to say no to bad legislation.

Let's send a strong message today. Let's reject this bill clearly. Let's show that democracy matters more than control. Let's vote against Bill 14. Let's protect our province. Let's protect democracy and our people.

Steve Kooner: I rise today as the elected Member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia for Richmond-Queensborough, and as the Conservative official opposition critic for the Attorney General, to offer my strongest and most unequivocal opposition to Bill 14, the so-called Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act.

Before I begin my remarks, let me provide an overview. This is not a short statement, because the stakes are high. Bill 14 touches on too many aspects of our legal, environmental and economic framework to be taken lightly. I will outline the legal dangers of this bill, drawing on my years of experience practising as a lawyer and in my current role as Attorney General critic, to demonstrate how this legislation undermines the foundation principles of our great province of British Columbia, such as natural justice, the rule of law and the separation of powers.

These are fundamental. These are fundamental legal principles that I have studied and have gone to school for and have practised. So I take them very seriously. The principles of natural justice, rule of law and separation of powers must be respected.

[7:55 p.m.]

I will address the implications of Bill 14 on agricultural land. Agricultural land is really important to me because Richmond-Queensborough is that part of Richmond that has most of the farmland. There is a lot of farmland that separates parts of my constituency, and my constituents are very concerned about farmland. So I will address the implications of Bill 14 on agricultural land and local autonomy, especially the way this government bill guts protections under the Agricultural Land Commission Act.

I will show how this is not just a threat to rural farmers and farmland but to food security in British Columbia. I will highlight the voices of those who have sounded the alarm, from city councillors to farm organizations. Then I will go on to talk about Bill 14's attempt to bypass the critical environmental oversight and the heritage safeguards of British Columbia, as well as Bill 14's unprecedented and authoritarian power to cancel hunting, angling and trapping licences without any hearing, compensation or appeal.

I'll talk about the economic aspects. I will illustrate how this bill, like Bill 7 before it, compounds regulatory instability and sends the wrong message to investors otherwise eager to contribute to the prosperity of our province, particularly those in renewable energy, clean tech and rural infrastructure. I will provide evidence of capital flight, failed projects and the chilling effect that this government's retroactive legislation has already had on British Columbia's declining investment climate.

Lastly, I will introduce a Conservative alternative, a vision for community-led transparent and accountable energy development that respects property rights, Indigenous consultation and environmental due diligence that works for all British Columbians.

This must be a detailed case because the stakes are so high, as I mentioned earlier. The people of Richmond-Queensborough and of this great province of British Columbia deserve nothing less. Despite Bill 14's benign title,

the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act, this legislation represents an alarming and unconstitutional centralization of power, an assault by this NDP government on the due process, a demolition of public consultation and a direct threat to property rights, community self-determination and the rule of law.

Let me be clear. This bill is not about renewable energy like this government claims. It's about bureaucratic dominance, unchecked discretion and erosion of democracy.

I will now address a legal perspective on the threat to accountability. As someone who has practised law in British Columbia for approximately 18 years, for well over a decade, before entering public service as a member of the Legislative Assembly, I have a deep respect for the rule of law, the principle of natural justice and the separation of powers.

I have a deep respect for these principles because, before going to law school, I really believed in justice and the principles of justice and living by them. That's what motivated me to go to law school, to actually learn legal skills so I could help a lot of people at the grassroots level because I came from an immigrant family where my elders, my parents and my grandparents struggled with the English language, and I had to translate.

At times, I found myself, when I was a little child, picking blueberries at the blueberry farm, working with other immigrants that struggled with understanding the law. So I told myself that when I would grow up, I wanted to possess these legal skills so I could help as many people as possible.

[Mable Elmore in the chair.]

I spent a lot of time learning the legal principles and understanding them, and I took an oath to uphold them. That's why they're really important to me.

Bill 14, in regard to the rule of law, the principle of natural justice and the separation of powers ignores all three. It gives unelected regulators the power to overrule statutory protections while denying British Columbia citizens any meaningful right to appeal.

[8:00 p.m.]

This is not streamlining. That is big government overreach, big government overreach when there's no consultation, there's a top-down approach, and that's how decisions are made.

In my legal practice, I represented countless clients who faced arbitrary decisions by administrative bodies. Through my personal experience, I saw firsthand how everyday people were affected by government policies. I saw examples of families fighting expropriation, small businesses blindsided by retroactive permits and immigrant entrepreneurs stuck in endless regulatory loops. Bill 14 would enshrine those same injustices in law across the province.

As Attorney General critic, I believe it is not only our role but our duty to scrutinize laws that give too much discretion and too little oversight. The courts of this province do not look kindly on legislation that sidesteps procedural fairness, the principles of natural justice, as cases like *Knight v. Indian Head School Division No. 19, 1990* affirm.

This government should know that Bill 14 is legally reckless and constitutionally fragile. When I became a lawyer many years ago, I swore an oath to uphold the laws of this province and this country, not to make it convenient for bureaucrats to circumvent our laws. The same principle should guide this Legislature.

Let me now turn to urban and rural voices alike that deserve respect in our province. In urban ridings such as Richmond-Queensborough, we feel the disconnect when laws are passed that override local knowledge. Actually, Richmond-Queensborough is a very special riding because, although it's an urban riding, as I mentioned earlier, it has a significant agricultural-rural part to it, where agricultural business and agricultural livelihood are a big part of the constituency that I represent. I regularly hear from farmers because there are so many of them in my constituency as the farming part of Richmond.

Let me go further. Rural communities would be even more concerned by this legislation. Rural communities are even more vulnerable. They are way more vulnerable than the urban centres. Because for them, land is not just a policy issue; it's their livelihood. Multiple generations depend on that land.

Sometimes you see great-grandparents, sometimes you see grandparents and sometimes you see three or four generations. You see the children, the parents, the grandparents and then the great-grandparents living on the same piece of land and also working in the same agricultural business to feed the whole family. So when there's an impact on their land, it's more of an impact on their livelihood.

We must not allow the divide between Victoria and the rest of British Columbia to widen by this legislation. We must look out for people that not only live in urban areas but also live in the rural parts of our province.

Let me ask this. When the first constitutional challenge to this bill is filed, who will defend the indefensible? When the first judicial review strikes down a hasty regulatory decision under Bill 14, who will answer to the taxpayers who footed that legal bill? The time to fix this is not after it is passed into law. The time to fix this bill is now.

[8:05 p.m.]

Let me turn now to how this bill will have impacts on local government authorities. As someone who represents a riding that spans both Richmond and New Westminster, two communities with strong local councils, I'm deeply concerned about the precedent this bill sets for municipal disregard.

Under Bill 14, decisions that were once guided by local governments can now be overridden by provincial regu-

lation without so much as a consultation or notice. The Union of B.C. Municipalities has consistently raised alarm about provincial overreach, and this bill is a textbook example of that.

In Richmond, city council has fought hard to maintain planning authority over ALR land, industrial zoning and waterfront development. This government's Bill 14 strips them and other municipalities of that power. With top-down rule, it says: "Victoria knows best."

The reality is that it's local officials who hear from residents, who manage land use conflicts and who are accountable every day. If Bill 14 passes, municipalities will become spectators to decisions that affect their water, land, traffic and economy.

Let me now turn to the illusion of green policy and the reality of….

Deputy Speaker: Member, can I ask for your indulgence to make an introduction? Would that be all right?

Steve Kooner: Okay.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Introductions by Members

Deputy Speaker: Everyone, I'd like to welcome my team here from Vancouver-Kensington: Perisa Chan, Maria Fe Infante, Mac Caragan, Carlito Pablo and Kathleen Serrano.

They're just really dedicated to community service. They do a great job serving folks and helping people, and I really appreciate working with this team.

I ask everybody to please give them a very warm welcome.

Thank you very much, Member. I appreciate that.

Debate Continued

Steve Kooner: I was discussing the illusion of green policy and the reality of authoritarian overreach. That's where I left off.

While the residents of Richmond-Queensborough want to see smart, sustainable energy solutions, they also expect government to respect due process and uphold accountability. Bill 14 fails on all counts.

Clause 13 of Bill 14 allows cabinet to modify, suspend or apply provisions of the Energy Resource Activities Act at will. That means that the very rules that govern the energy regulator can be rewritten by cabinet, without bothering coming to this very Legislature.

In essence, the legislative referee will get to rewrite the rules for the game in the middle of the match and, as always, in favour of this radical government's priorities. What possible democratic justification can there be for allowing a single government's executive body the powers to override laws passed by this elected assembly?

As Attorney General critic for the province, I must sound the alarm bell that this kind of regulatory fiat is corrosive to the rule of law. It abandons the principle of legal predictability and replaces it with the NDP's big-government administrative whim.

Clause 13 also violates well-established doctrines of delegated authority and the limits of regulatory discretion set out in Canadian case law. In the *West Fraser Mills Ltd. v British Columbia (Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal)* decision — a 2018 case of the Supreme Court of Canada; citation is 2018 SCC 22 — the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed that statutory delegations must respect the enabling statutes, structure and intent.

[8:10 p.m.]

Bill 14 does the opposite. It allows the cabinet to change the enabling framework itself. It turns subordinate legislation into a tool for executive self-rule.

Now let me turn to unaccountable power over land and water and discuss that topic. Clause 14 suspends the Environmental Assessment Act for designated wind and transmission projects. The North Coast transmission line and nine selected wind farms are only the beginning. With a simple regulation, cabinet can add more and remove others.

Clause 15 allows the regulator to override the Agricultural Land Commission Act, giving itself the authority to authorize non-farm use, subdivisions and fill usage on ALR land. Let us remember that the agricultural land reserve was created to protect B.C.'s food security and farming communities from urban sprawl and industrial encroachment. Now the government proposes to trample over this sacred trust with the stroke of the NDP's bureaucratic pen.

Coun. Carol Day of Richmond said it best: "You can't pave over farmland and then expect it to feed your population." Similarly, the B.C. Food Systems Network has repeatedly warned that diminishing the ALR undermines the province's capacity for local food resilience. The B.C. Agriculture Council has also flagged concerns that industrial projects bypassing land-use planning will devastate farming operations with irreversible effects.

In Richmond-Queensborough, a community where urban pressure constantly threatens farmland and where families depend on ALR protections, the implications of this bill are staggering. Farmers and residents alike are asking: "Who decides what our land can be used for? Is it the community, or is it cabinet?"

Let me move on now to discuss clause 18. Perhaps the most egregious section, clause 18 allows the minister to delegate the suspension or cancellation of hunting, angling and trapping permits without notice, without appeal and without compensation. Let that sink in. No due process, no judicial review, just arbitrary cancellation.

As Attorney General critic for British Columbia, I must again raise the alarm. This violates fundamental principles of administrative fairness. Permits that represent livelihoods, generational traditions and legally held rights can be cancelled without justification.

This provision also raises serious constitutional concerns under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which guarantees the protections of Aboriginal rights. Hunting, trapping and fishing are not just recreational activities. They are protected practices with deep cultural significance.

The Supreme Court in *R. v. Sparrow*, 1990, established that any government interference with Aboriginal rights must pass a rigorous justification test. Clause 18 sidesteps that entirely. This provision is a direct assault on rural British Columbians, Indigenous communities and anyone who dares to live close to the land.

The government has decided that bureaucrats may now cancel your hunting or guiding licence on a whim, with no hearing, no record and no responsibility. Once again I ask: if this is permitted today for energy projects, what's next — water licences, fishing permits, forestry tenures? As you can see, I have many reservations and many concerns about this particular piece of legislation.

Let's move on further to clause 17. Clause 17 is another dangerous betrayal. It excludes level 3 streamlined projects from the Safety Standards Act. In other words, the NDP government wants to fast-track massive wind farms and transmission lines without applying the province's core safety laws.

[8:15 p.m.]

This is not theoretical. These are high-voltage installations. They involve cranes, turbines, buried lines, concrete pads, industrial chemicals. They create serious risks for workers and surrounding communities. I want to add that we need to protect the workers in this province. We need to protect the safety standards for those workers.

In 2021, WorkSafeBC reported 20 serious injuries on wind farm construction sites, including falls, electrical burns and equipment crush injuries. Internationally, Germany and the United States have both documented turbine blade failures, tower collapses, and electrocutions in deregulated energy builds. These are real, known dangers.

I ask the government: when an accident happens, and it will, who will bear the legal liability — the regulator, the minister? Or will they simply hide behind retroactive indemnities and red tape? This is governance without accountability. Richmond-Queensborough residents, many of whom are skilled tradespeople, electricians and engineers, understand the critical importance of applying safety codes. When safety is sidelined, lives are put at risk.

Let me turn to clause 16 of Bill 14. Clause 16 of Bill 14 allows the regulator to decide what counts as heritage. It even allows the regulator to choose the person who will make that decision. This is a fundamental conflict of interest. You cannot have the body building the project also be the body deciding whether the project damages cultural heritage. In Richmond-Queensborough, where many cultural sites, temples, immigrant legacies exist along the Fraser River, this matters. Are we really to trust that an unaccountable NDP bureaucrat chosen by this government will protect our heritage and history?

Now let me move to clause 21 and talk about retroactive law and how rule of law can be undermined with this particular provision. Clause 21 of Bill 14 is perhaps the most legally troubling of all. It retroactively validates all actions taken by the regulator since April 1, 2024 — retroactively applying up to over a year ago. This is law-making by time machine. It tells citizens and businesses: "You thought the law protected you? Too bad. We changed it. Retroactively."

Attempts at retroactive legislation have already failed in B.C. In *British Columbia v. Imperial Tobacco Canada Ltd.*, the Supreme Court cautioned that retroactive laws must be narrowly tailored to serve a compelling public purpose. Bill 14's blanket validation of past regulatory actions undoubtedly fails that test, and the legal risk is significant.

If landowners, Indigenous groups or businesses lose rights or contracts because of retroactive validation, they will sue this province. Taxpayers could be on the hook for millions in legal fees, in damages and in regulatory uncertainty, all due to NDP short-term thinking and lack of foresight.

[8:20 p.m.]

I'd like to turn now to interjurisdictional issues. Bill 14 also creates serious jurisdictional ambiguity. Many renewable energy projects, especially transmission lines, cross federal land, Indigenous territories or migratory bird habitats. The federal government's Impact Assessment Act still applies in many such cases. What happens when a project approved under this NDP bill conflicts with federal law? Legal chaos, judicial gridlock and years of delay.

Let us not forget the Supreme Court's recent decisions, like Reference re Impact Assessment Act, 2023 SCC 23, which reaffirmed the constitutional balance between federal and provincial powers. British Columbia should be working with, not against, our federal counterparts to ensure that renewable projects respect environmental law and Indigenous consultation. Bill 14 invites legal conflict and regulatory confusion at every turn.

There is a clear message for the next generation. We must also think generationally. What are we teaching young British Columbians when we say that heritage designations can be overridden, farmland can be bulldozed and rights can be revoked, all without notice? What examples are we setting for our students, our apprentices, our future leaders?

In Richmond-Queensborough, many students are worried about many issues and many questions. Will I be able to afford a home? Will my community have clean air and water? How can I trust the government to follow the law?

Bill 14 answers those questions with a dismissive shrug. Although characteristic of this NDP government, it is completely unacceptable.

I urge all members of this chamber, regardless of party, to ask themselves: do we want a future where governments can exempt themselves from the law? Do we want a future where rights can be cancelled without reason? Do we want a future where land, heritage and safety protections are optional? That is the future Bill 14 offers.

Let us recall the caution of the famous Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, who warned that "'emergencies' have always been the pretext on which the safeguards of individual liberty have been eroded," or Milton Friedman, who observed: "Concentrated power is not rendered harmless by the good intentions of those who create it."

Ian Paton: I rise to strongly oppose Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act. It is the NDP's attempt to appear that they are streamlining wind farms in British Columbia. This is after they have poured on countless regulations and burdens making it prohibitively expensive to complete projects in this province. They have discouraged investment in B.C. but have finally come to see the light, that enabling investment benefits all British Columbians.

However, this legislation makes giant leaps, questionable leaps, about the operation of the B.C. Energy Regulator. This regulation gives all the authority to the NDP government and the energy regulator, including the changing of rules that govern it, the regulator, all without approval of the Legislature for those changes.

[8:25 p.m.]

It enables them to cancel hunting, angling and trapping permits as they see fit. It enables them to suspend safety standards. It enables them to single-handedly decide what land is heritage and what land is not. It allows them to single-handedly make changes to the agricultural land reserve.

All of this with little oversight, with little accountability and no reporting on actions. Bill 14 is little more than the authoritarian powers the NDP wanted in Bill 7 but applied to energy projects across B.C. The NDP claim that they are advancing nine wind farms and a transmission line with this project, but it gives them unlimited power over any project they choose in the future in this province.

B.C. has moved quickly in recent weeks to introduce a number of new bills that would speed up the approval and construction of infrastructure projects, from transmission lines to hospitals and schools. The speed and scope of the legislation has raised concerns among many critics.

This proposed law is an echo of the NDP's U.S. tariff response bill put forward in March but later walked back after critics said it gave too much power to the Premier's office. Instead of one piece of legislation, the government now appears to be carving up the previously proposed law into several bills. This bill expands that same power grab. Even the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs has raised concerns that the infrastructure bill would water down environmental safety and could steamroll Indigenous rights.

I stand in this House today deeply alarmed by the legislation before us. Bill 14 is not just a bill about renewable energy. It is a bill about power, both electrical and political power, and who gets to exercise it.

British Columbia's agricultural land reserve is one of the province's proudest and most necessary institutions. As a lifelong farmer, I have always believed that once we start compromising farmland, it never ends well. You can't grow food on a paved road or highway.

Let me begin with what this bill means for the agricultural land reserve and the Agricultural Land Commission. Clauses 13, 14 and 24 are devastating in their implications. They strip away independent oversight and hand over authority to the British Columbia Energy Regulator, an agency that has never been responsible for protecting farmland in the past.

With the stroke of a pen, cabinet can override agricultural protections that have been in place for generations, all in the name of streamlining. Clause 13 allows cabinet to make regulations that override existing laws, including the Agricultural Land Commission Act. Clause 14 exempts designated renewable energy projects from oversight altogether by the Agricultural Land Commission. Clause 24 gives the B.C. Energy Regulator the power to approve non-farm uses and subdivisions of farmland, powers that previously belonged solely to the Agricultural Land Commission.

This is an astonishing reversal. It effectively guts the ALC's mandate and leaves our farmland at the mercy of bureaucrats who are not trained to evaluate soil classifications or assess long-term food security impacts.

We are not talking about a one-off exemption. We are talking about a systemwide override mechanism. Once a project is designated by cabinet as streamlined, virtually every safeguard disappears, from environmental assessments to public consultation to Agricultural Land Commission reviews. This is not only a violation of the spirit of the Agricultural Land Commission but of democratic governance. The regulator now has the ability to change its own rules, impose retroactive fees and reclassify heritage or ALR land, all without legislative input.

Let me illustrate just how absurd this gets. If a beef rancher in Cranbook wants to reconfigure a grazing parcel, they have to go through the ALC. But if a solar developer wants to bulldoze that same pasture and install fencing and battery stations, they go straight to the energy regulator. The ALC is not even consulted.

A fruit grower in Keremeos wants to build a new packing shed to expand her orchard operation. She is stuck in a bureaucratic morass with the ALC for a year. But a foreign-owned company wants to bury lithium-ion storage

underneath the same orchard, and suddenly it's all systems go.

A blueberry farmer in Pitt Meadows is told that a gravel access road is problematic because it might compromise topsoil on his farm. But a 60-metre-wide turbine? Sure, no problem. The regulator will handle that.

[8:30 p.m.]

In the Bulkley Valley, a forage producer near Telkwa can't subdivide his field to pass it on to the next generation to build a second or third home. But a multinational energy firm can dig trenches, pour concrete and create a drilling site across from it without so much as a phone call to the Agricultural Land Commission. This is not progress. This is policy vandalism. This is policy absurdity masquerading as innovation, and it must be called out here in this Legislature.

I draw no comfort from the government's claim that this is only about nine wind projects and a transmission line. That's just the beginning. The powers in this bill are not time-limited, not scope-limited and not infrastructure-limited. They can be used to push through anything cabinet decides is worth fast-tracking, without a hearing, without an appeal, without accountability, without talking to local governments.

Let's be blunt. Bill 14 is not a climate plan. It is a control plan. It is about who holds the pen and who gets cut out of the process. Ask rural British Columbians. Ask Indigenous communities. Ask municipal councils. This isn't streamlining; it's steamrolling. The agricultural land reserve was created precisely because B.C. recognized the finite and irreplaceable value of our farmland. The idea that this land can now be turned over to industrial energy infrastructure without a serious science-based agricultural review is outrageous.

I can tell you that my father, by the same name, was one of the founders of the agricultural land reserve in this province back in 1973, along with Mr. Harold Steves. My father went on to become the chairman of the Agricultural Land Commission in the late '80s, early '90s, under the Socred government. So my father and my family know one heck of a lot about preserving and saving farmland in this province and the value of the ALR and the value of the Land Commission and the commissioners that are there to make decisions about saving our agricultural land, and they are not to be steamrolled by this NDP government and the legislation of Bill 14.

This government has spent years claiming to stand for food security.

Interjection.

Ian Paton: Do you deny that my father was the chair of the Agricultural Land Commission and was one of the founding fathers of the ALR?

Interjection.

Ian Paton: Well, you're chuckling at me.

Interjection.

Ian Paton: My father was a founding father of the ALC.

This government has spent years claiming to stand for food security — that we support Buy B.C., support local food, support farmers. But now we're cutting the ALC out of the conversation entirely. What does that say about our priorities? What does that say to families that have spent generations stewarding this land?

Yet agriculture is just one part of the disaster this bill represents. Bill 14 isn't just about land use. It's about concentration of power, removal of public oversight and dismantling accountability across the board.

Let's look beyond agriculture. The Wilderness Committee, certainly not one of the province's most conservative voices, has warned that Bill 14 allows key energy infrastructure to be built without comprehensive environmental assessments, and they are correct. Clause 14 exempts specific renewable projects from the Environmental Assessment Act. That means no public hearings, no cumulative impact studies, no community engagement.

I want to talk about projects such as the George Massey Tunnel that has been so dear to me for so many years, being elected here eight years ago. Nothing has happened with the George Massey Tunnel. We're told that they're still waiting for an environmental assessment to move forward with the replacement of the George Massey Tunnel. Well, with Bill 15 and this one, Bill 14, it looks like we're going to steamroll that. We might not even need an environmental assessment for the George Massey Tunnel to get going and be replaced.

The B.C. Green Party, far from endorsing this legislation, has called it vague and dangerous. The member for West Vancouver–Sea to Sky specifically criticized the lack of clear definitions and the extraordinary discretionary powers being handed to cabinet. That's by the two members of the Third Party, the Green Party, in this House.

First Nations have gone on record stating that Bill 14 represents a betrayal of the government's own commitment to reconciliation. I wonder, with the George Massey Tunnel replacement that they talk about, the tunnel that's going to be built — they talk about an environmental assessment that still has to be approved — what the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm First Nation and Tsawwassen First Nation are going to have to say about this if the environmental assessment is overlooked and bypassed.

[8:35 p.m.]

Let's be clear. This bill is not about renewable energy; it is about political control and regulatory shortcuts. It is about taking decisions that should be made by scientists, by land use experts, by communities and elected boards and, instead, centralizing them in the hands of a regulator that answers only to cabinet. It takes out the ability

for my Delta council to even be involved with decisions about land in Delta and projects in Delta, because they'll be overridden by Bill 14 and the provincial government legislation.

The most troubling part: once a project is designated by the minister as streamlined, it becomes exempt from multiple statutes. It becomes exempt from the Environmental Assessment Act, the Land Act, the Forest Act and, yes, the Agricultural Land Commission Act.

The Agricultural Land Commission, let us not forget, was put together by this government, the NDP government, in 1973. And I hear all the time: "Don't touch." Yes, I agree. I agree it's a good thing, but don't touch it.

Why would you play with the commissioners that are appointed by this government to make decisions on agricultural land in this province? It is an independent, third-party tribunal that government is not supposed to play with. Government is not supposed to overreach.

Even the Minister of Agriculture is not to make decisions on behalf of the Agricultural Land Commission. Now we're being told that Bill 14 will override decisions by the commissioners, the chair and the executive director of the Agricultural Land Commission. With a signature, laws fall away. This is not democracy; this is executive fiat.

Now let me return, as I must, to the question of farmland, because while all of these issues are important, the issue of farmland is existential. Once you pour concrete on class 1 soil, you'll never get it back. Once you sever the continuity of a working farm with transmission corridors and substations, that farm becomes vulnerable to parcelization and abandonment.

Once you set the precedent that the ALC can be bypassed at will, you have destroyed the very purpose for which the Agricultural Land Commission was created in 1973 by this NDP government. Farmers in Delta, in Abbotsford, in Armstrong, in Creston, in Peace River, in Vernon and in every part of this province deserve to know that the land they work will not be sacrificed for political convenience.

I'd like to read out part of a letter that was sent to the Minister of Energy and Climate Solutions from the B.C. Cattlemen's Association. I'll quote from part of their letter:

> "We have concerns about exactly how green this energy really is when we are confronted with a lot of contradictory evidence about what is required to manufacture these windmills, the material and energy used in their assembly and the ability to recycle or reuse the materials in what is realistically a very short lifespan of only about 20 years.
>
> "Our main concerns are more in the process and transparency, or lack thereof, that has taken place in moving these projects forward. These projects will take place on Crown land which our members have tenures on, grazing their livestock on Crown land tenures.
>
> "We feel there are two main areas of focus that our members and the voters of B.C. deserve an explanation of." I go on to quote: "The lack of consultation and engagement with local residents and tenure holders, informing them of the projects, their locations and the possible impacts to them and their community.
>
> "Secondly, the elimination of the environmental assessment is unacceptable for projects of this size and location. While power generation utilizing wind is considered green, there are aspects of the construction of the units which could have extreme impacts on the surrounding environment, especially wildlife, watersheds, species at risk and salmon-bearing streams."

Once you set the precedent that the ALC can be bypassed at will, you have destroyed the very purpose for which the Agricultural Land Commission was created. Farmers in Delta, Abbotsford, Armstrong, etc., deserve to know that the people reviewing land use decisions are accountable to science, to food security and to agriculture, not to energy targets or ideological timelines.

[8:40 p.m.]

If we allow Bill 14 to pass in its current form, we are setting a precedent that decisions of immense consequence can be made behind closed doors, without appeal, by entities not answerable to the people of British Columbia. That is not democratic governance. That is not responsible land use. That is not how we build a just, sustainable future here in British Columbia.

The Agricultural Land Commission is not perfect, but it was designed for one thing, to protect agricultural land. When you allow a politically appointed regulator to override the ALC, you are not balancing priorities; you are bulldozing them. That bulldozing doesn't end with farmland. Bill 14 opens the door for unelected officials to cancel or suspend wildlife licences — hunting, trapping, angling — without a hearing, without compensation and without appeal.

This bill silences local voices and strips away heritage designations. It allows the same body that used to greenlight gas wells to now waive safety requirements for renewable infrastructure. What message does this send about what we value? Even if one supports the goal of decarbonizing our energy supply, and many of us do, this is not the way to do it.

Real leadership would mean investing in environmental analysts, local permitting staff and Indigenous liaison officers. It would mean building renewable energy with communities, not over them. We don't reject renewable energy. We reject authoritarianism dressed in green. We want progress, but we want it rooted in planning, consent and principles.

We must ask: if the permitting system is too slow, why hasn't this government improved it? Why haven't they modernized the digital systems that underpin it? Why

is the solution always to cut corners, instead of building capacity? British Columbians want clean energy, but they also want clean governance. They want a government that respects process, not one that circumvents it. They want farmland preserved, not parceled out under cover of climate action. They want Indigenous consultation that's meaningful, not tokenized. They want certainty, not uncertainty, of a regulator that can change the rules midstream.

If we allow Bill 14 to pass in its current form, we are setting a precedent that decisions of immense consequence can be made behind closed doors, without appeal, by entities not answerable to the people of British Columbia. That is not democratic governance, that is not responsible land use, and that is not how we build a just, sustainable future. This isn't a debate about whether we support renewable energy. Of course we do, but energy infrastructure must be planned with respect, with consultation and with land use integrity.

We cannot build a low-carbon future by destroying the land that feeds us. We, on this side of the House, are not letting this bill pass without a fight. To every farmer, rancher, hunter and local government across this province who feels ignored by this bill: we hear you. We stand with you. British Columbians want clean energy, but they also want clean governance. They want a government that respects process, not one that circumvents it. They want farmland preserved, not parcelled out under the cover of climate change.

We believe in clean energy. We believe in good governance, in transparency, in planning, in farming. We believe in the future of agriculture in British Columbia. The people of Delta did not elect me to roll over while the government strips away land protections that took generations to build. I know my colleagues from the Interior and the North feel the same way. Once farmland is industrialized, you cannot get it back. You lose food security, you lose local economic capacity, and you lose public trust.

While I've got a few minutes on the clock, I want to talk about 150 acres of beautiful prime farmland in Cowichan Bay.

For whatever reason, this NDP government that I'm looking at is supporting the breaching of the dike by the Nature Trust and Ducks Unlimited, who bought this farm from the Dinsdale family many years ago and are willing to let the salt water rush in and flood these 150 acres of prime farmland in Cowichan Bay, which has been feeding dairy cattle, sheep, goats, beef cattle for centuries. For some reason, the Nature Trust and Ducks Unlimited have made a deal with this NDP government to allow this dike to be breached and to flood these 150 acres of prime farmland with salt water.

[8:45 p.m.]

Once trust is broken and once democratic oversight is dismantled, it is also very, very hard to get back. Without farmland, there is no food, and without food, there is no future.

Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder, Members. Hours are getting late. Keep your remarks temperate and through the Chair.

Amelia Boultbee: I rise today to stand unequivocally against Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act. This bill, introduced by the NDP government under the guise of streamlining clean energy approvals, is in truth an example of authoritarian overreach that offends our democratic principles, threatens rural livelihoods and strips away due process and accountability.

The government proclaims that this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fast-track renewable power projects, but behind the optimistic rhetoric and buzzwords about clean energy lies a deeply troubling reality. Bill 14 concentrates unprecedented power in the hands of the minister, cabinet and an unelected regulator, enabling them to bypass environmental safeguards, trample on local rights and even cancel British Columbians' licences and livelihoods without a hearing or compensation. It treats fundamental checks and balances as mere inconveniences to be swept aside.

Let me be clear. Everyone in this House supports building renewable energy and reducing red tape. We all want affordable, clean power and jobs for our communities, but we cannot, and must not, achieve those goals by dismantling legal safeguards and steamrolling over the people we serve. As an opposition MLA and, importantly, as a proud representative of rural British Columbians, I will not stay silent while this government attempts to move this legislation under the banner of expediency.

[The Speaker in the chair.]

Bill 14 is not a streamlining. It's a steamrolling of due process. It's a dangerous power grab, and it must be challenged. In my remarks today, I will focus on two aspects of the bill.

But noting the hour, I move adjournment of the debate and reserve my right to continue my speech in the next sitting.

Amelia Boultbee moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Jessie Sunner: Section A reports progress on Bill 15 and asks leave to sit again.

Leave granted.

Hon. Lisa Beare moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

The Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Proceedings in the Douglas Fir Room

The House in Committee, Section A.

The committee met at 2:46 p.m.

[Nina Krieger in the chair.]

Committee of the Whole

BILL 15 — INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS ACT

The Chair: Good afternoon, Members. I call Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, Infrastructure Projects Act, to order.

On clause 1.

Kiel Giddens: I'm rising today to speak to Bill 15, the infrastructure amendment act.

The official opposition will have several critics who are involved in this. The member for Langley–Walnut Grove is here, the member for Penticton-Summerland. The member for Surrey–White Rock will be joining in a moment, and we'll have several critics who will have questions for this bill. Myself, I'm our Labour critic for our caucus, so we'll have some questions related to that.

Let's maybe get started. Part 1, of course, is on the definitions, so we're going to get into those. Maybe before we do, if we could start, I'm wondering why these specific terms, these definitions, were selected and defined, and were there any that were, perhaps, deliberately excluded? If the minister could provide some detail into that list and why these specific definitions are included.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The terms that are defined under section 1 are the terms that are required for the operation of the act, and they have specific definitions as they pertain to the act. Any words that are not defined will follow the regular dictionary meaning of those terms.

Misty Van Popta: Okay. So reading the list and reading some of the definitions that are outlined, there seems to be a bit of a theme of vagueness or circular talk where it says: "Refer to the act." You read the definition in the act, which is just a word that is in the definition as the word.

[2:50 p.m.]

I was wondering why, in certain circumstances, definitions…. Especially when you can have it defined as per the dictionary and things that you just referenced before, we've got some that are clearly not defined as what they encompass and as more of a circular concept. In terms of the word "infrastructure," it says: "Refer to the act." You look at the act, and it says: "Infrastructure." If you could just explain some of the reasoning behind that.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Infrastructure project is defined under definition 1, and that includes the planning, development, construction, modification and dismantling of infrastructure. So the phrase that is being defined under section 1 is "infrastructure project."

Kiel Giddens: Thanks to the minister.

I recognize that infrastructure project is what is defined, but I think we're trying to understand a little bit more about what criteria are used to determine whether a project qualifies as "an infrastructure project" in this case.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: One of the challenges of this debate format is that sometimes I turn around, come up with an answer and then forget what the question is. So if I do that, please know it is not intentional. Please, I ask members to clarify if I don't quite get it.

The term "infrastructure project" in this case is defined in order to emphasize that we're talking about infrastructure projects that have planning, development, construction, modification and dismantling components to them — phases — as opposed to an infrastructure project that might be a social infrastructure project. This definition points to…. We're really talking about construction projects.

The Chair: Recognizing…. I'll come to you right after. I saw the member for Prince George–Mackenzie first.

Kiel Giddens: Thank you, Madam Chair. Lots of interest in this bill, so I'm sure we'll have members from all parties asking questions as well.

I appreciate the response from the minister. I guess when we're looking at infrastructure projects, yes, there are all types. I'm trying to really get into what exactly would be included and not included. To be a little bit more specific of what I'm getting at, would that include privately funded projects, or is it limited to public capital projects?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: As we go through the sections of the bill, it will become clear that the act applies to certain types of projects, namely category 1 projects and category 2 projects. The definition of the infrastructure project…. By defining "infrastructure project," we are emphasizing that we're talking about construction projects. But the act will apply, the various sections will apply, to

category 1 projects and category 2 projects, and those are defined as such under definitions.

[2:55 p.m.]

Really, I think in terms of what projects are encompassed, I would say the phrase "infrastructure projects" actually encompasses more projects than the act will affect, because the act only affects category 1 projects and category 2 projects, which are categories of infrastructure projects.

Rob Botterell: One of the primary concerns related to Bill 15 is how its terms and application are almost entirely undefined. Key terms will instead be defined later through regulation, which risks or eliminates or reduces opportunities for scrutiny and feedback on the details that will shape this bill.

[George Anderson in the chair.]

This is a fundamental issue with this bill, because it's hard to understand what it covers and what specific examples we can get to. So having as much clarification as possible of these definitions will support future accountability when the regulations are developed.

My question to the minister is: why does the language of the bill leave all key definitions — like category 1 project, category 2 project, provincially significant infrastructure project, provincial permits, qualified professional — to be determined by the Lieutenant Governor in Council in regulations? Why can't, for example, at least a definition of "designated project" be added to the legislation?

To amplify on that, can the minister provide any clarification today on what will constitute a category 1 and category 2 project? What distinguishes these two categories of projects?

[3:00 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: There are two categories of projects that the act will apply to. As we will go through the various sections of the bill, members will see that there are tools that can only be applied to a category 1 project, and such tools could only be applied to public sector projects delivered by the provincial government. When we go through section by section, I think that much will become clearer.

At a high level, category 1 projects are those projects that are delivered by the provincial government. Our intention is to designate all projects delivered by the Ministry of Infrastructure under category 1, following royal assent.

Category 1 projects could also apply to projects delivered by other ministries. At this time, the only other major capital ministry in government is the Ministry of Transportation and Transit. However, at this time, the Ministry of Transportation and Transit is comfortable with the tools and authorities that they currently have within their legislation. Because the Ministry of Infrastructure is a new ministry, we will need to designate those projects as category 1 projects to give the Ministry of Infrastructure authority to access the tools in this act.

Under category 2 projects, there is a section that refers to category 2 projects, and I'm happy to go into extensive discussion on that under that section of the bill. I recommend that that would be the best place to have a fulsome discussion on it.

Rob Botterell: Thank you, Minister, for the answer.

If cabinet intended to designate a critical-mineral mine under this bill, what category of project would the mine be defined under? What limits will be placed on which mines can be provincially significant infrastructure projects?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The example that the member provides, if it were deemed provincially significant, would be classified a category 2 project.

[3:05 p.m.]

There are several sections related to the designation of projects under this category later on in the bill. I recommend that we go through those clauses in more detail.

Rob Botterell: I appreciate the answers to these questions, but I don't see the specific criteria defining the definition. How can the Legislature know with any confidence the intended scope and impact of this bill unless these definitions are put into the bill?

We've heard the Premier say that this bill is about hospitals, schools, maybe critical mineral mines, and not LNG. But without definitions in the act, this is not a binding legislative requirement. It's a promise or a commitment, and times change and commitments change. A future government could choose to use these very definitions and significantly expand the application of these definitions because there are no guardrails.

My question to the minister: did the minister consider adding criteria to these categories and chose not to define them in greater detail — and not just this one, but others? Why? Why wasn't there a greater definition provided?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I do believe that there are sections later on in the bill that are very relevant to this conversation. However, I'm happy to provide an initial response now.

For greater certainty — I'm happy to read into the record at this time because we know that the *Hansard* record is relevant to the interpretation of acts, particularly under court challenge or in the future — category 1 projects are projects that are delivered directly by the provincial government through its ministries. Examples of projects that are delivered through the Ministry of Infrastructure which will be designated category 1 projects include schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes, cancer centres.

We do not currently have any major projects under the next categories, but if we did, they would also be included: — correctional facilities, courthouses. There is an intention of government to replace the plant and animal health centre that was lost during the atmospheric river event. There are a few more like that, but they are publicly funded, provincially funded projects delivered by the province.

In addition to that, a category 1 project could include those projects that are delivered by the Ministry of Infrastructure, including roads, highways, bridges, tunnels, SkyTrain, and so forth.

Category 2 projects. We have stated publicly many times and publicly released that category 2 projects are those projects that would be delivered by entities outside of core government ministries. That would include local governments, the federal government, First Nations, Crown corporations and private sector proponents as well.

But in order to be designated a provincially significant project, those projects would need to create significant economic, social or environmental benefits for people in British Columbia. Factors that are currently under consideration include whether a project significantly contributes to public infrastructure, critical mineral supply, food or water security, human health and safety, energy security, post-disaster recovery, trade diversification, access to new markets, supply chain security, replacing U.S. imports, British Columbia's climate goals and housing.

[3:10 p.m.]

Those projects would require First Nations consent and have support from First Nations. The criteria will be publicly released and, prior to that public release, I welcome feedback from members of the opposition as to how these criteria should or should not be considered. I think that is a valuable opportunity through this debate, as well, but happy to read that intention into the record now.

Kiel Giddens: I appreciate the minister's reading into the record the category 1 and 2 intent, but I think the House Leader of the Third Party made some very good points that really highlighted our concerns. As we get into the definitions, there are a lot of things, as the House Leader of the Third Party said, that are not defined. It's very challenging for the public to understand what those are.

The reason I started on the definition of infrastructure project…. I realize that's very wide and that some of that is not covered under the scope of this bill. They're projects that…. They may be an infrastructure project as defined, but they're wide-ranging across the province.

I think it is important, for the public to understand the scope of the bill, that intent is there. People need to understand what the government is trying to achieve here.

As we speak right now, I'm missing a meeting that I was supposed to have in my office downstairs, for example, with a rare earth metals company in my riding. It was a constituency meeting. They're trying to understand, I believe, how they will proceed under the current rules.

In this case, a lot of what the minister described just there are arbitrary powers. When you move the goalposts, when you make it arbitrary, it makes it very difficult for those final investment decisions. It makes it challenging for investment, particularly for a junior mining company to move into a major investment, in that case.

As we look to define "infrastructure projects" overall, we're looking at who's in and who's out, in this case. Category 1 projects, obviously, we're talking about lots within government control, but that category 2, it sounds like, is wide-sweeping across the province. So the public is trying to understand what exactly that is here.

I look at other projects in my own riding. I have a new data centre, for example, up in Mackenzie. They would like to understand whether they would be captured by this.

So maybe just for further clarification of an infrastructure project, particularly as it relates to category 2, what are other examples? Particularly in the private sector, in this case, I want to get to what would be defined as an infrastructure project that would be covered under the scope of this bill.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I realize that I neglected to read into the record exclusions, as well, because we have made those quite public. I'll catch up on my last response by stating clearly that we have publicly stated multiple times that the decision-making criteria will expressly exclude the use of this act on LNG facilities, pipeline projects, overdose prevention sites and low-barrier housing.

We have made these statements public because the act is not there to ram controversial projects through. I want to make that very clear. Public involvement and public engagement are incredibly important. There are many projects that would benefit from this act in terms of streamlining, but those benefits do not include being able to ram a controversial project through an unwilling and unsuspecting community.

[3:15 p.m.]

For greater clarity, for anybody who is listening with a potential idea for a category 2 project, it should be made clear that no project should expect that the environmental standards that they need to meet will change. The environmental standards will remain the same.

As well, no project should expect that being designated a category 2 project and provincially significant would somehow allow them to sidestep our provincial obligations to Indigenous peoples and our obligations under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

The tools, which we will be able to walk through one by one, are there to reduce redundancies and duplication, not standards. Many of these tools might enable a project to reach a decision sooner rather than later, but it does not

change the standard to which those projects must meet in order to reach that decision.

No project that is designated as a category 2 project is automatically assured approval. This is about getting to yes or getting to no on decisions more quickly so that projects are not languishing in uncertainty, one way or the other.

Misty Van Popta: I'm going to jump to the first definition here, "approval authority." When I read the definition, I've got that it means "(a) a specified authority, (b) an agent of a specified authority, and (c) any other prescribed person or entity." I'm going to leave that (c), which is the "other prescribed person or entity," for further down my question list.

This is an example of kind of a circular definition, where you've got the words "approval authority," and the definition is "a specified authority." Could the minister please respond to what authority actually means in this context?

[3:20 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Under section 1, definitions, the term "authority" is not defined under definitions. The term "approval authority" is defined, which means a specified authority, an agent of a specified authority and any other prescribed person or entity. These are defined as the decision-making body for local governments, including regional districts and municipalities, and University Endowment Lands and the Islands Trust, their agents and any other prescribed person or entity.

I also want to recognize that the questions that members have raised around category 2 projects, in particular, are incredibly important. I value the questions, and I value the opportunity to provide greater clarity.

I look forward to having further discussions later on in subsequent sections, but given the importance of this question to members and the fact that my previous answers were a little bit muddled and broken up, I'll provide, for greater clarity, my response on that again, which is that a project of provincial significance must have First Nations support and provide significant social, economic or environmental benefits to British Columbians and significantly contribute to the priorities of British Columbians, such as public infrastructure, critical mineral supply, food or water security, human health and safety, energy security, post-disaster recovery, trade diversification, access to new markets, supply chain security, replacing U.S. imports, British Columbia's climate goals and housing.

[3:25 p.m.]

However, the following will be explicitly excluded: LNG facilities, pipeline projects, low-barrier housing projects and overdose prevention sites.

I wanted to say all of that more clearly in case I failed to do so clearly earlier.

Misty Van Popta: Can cabinet have power to declare any private firm or Crown agent an approval authority?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: No.

Amelia Boultbee: I appreciate what the minister is saying about reading some clarifications into the *Hansard* record — in particular, around the definition of a category 2 project. As far as I can see, there's nothing actually in the bill that says that category 2 is only a public project or public infrastructure.

The point that I'd like to make is just that, to my mind, it's a bit of a bad practice, from a legislative drafting perspective, to rely so heavily on *Hansard*. In theory, I think, a member of the public or someone doing business in British Columbia should be able to pick up this bill and be able to tell from the definitions and from reading it what it is intended to achieve.

My question, using a category 2 project as an example — what the minister just read into the record, and including the exclusions — is: why was that not just included in the bill? Why are we relying on *Hansard* for that to be fleshed out?

[3:30 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: In announcing the tabling of the legislation and the revealing of the legislation, government laid out its principles publicly. We believe that it is important to hear from partners and stakeholders about whether we have hit the mark on the description of these types of projects. We think it's important for us to take that time to engage with First Nations, with environmental groups, different sectors and the business community, to hear from local governments and the federal government, particularly in the context of a lot of the work that is happening nationally, and to hear from opposition members as well.

I think that this debate…. Part of what I hope that this debate will allow is the opportunity for opposition members to actually offer their perspective on what we have proposed here as well.

Amelia Boultbee: If I'm understanding the minister correctly, then, if I'm a member of the public and I want to understand what this bill is intended to do, I'm supposed to go to *Hansard* and read the debate; I'm supposed to look up any public releases that the government has put out and read the bill?

I would respectfully submit that we could probably do a lot better with the drafting of the bill. No piece of legislation can be fully exhaustive, but a member of the public should be able to pick up a bill and read it and know what it's intended to do.

On that note, we will be proposing various amendments that I hope our friends will consider.

Misty Van Popta: Well, I'm just going to circle back to approval authority. I previously asked about private firms or Crown agents, and the minister's answer was no, that they wouldn't be able to have the power to declare them as an approval authority. But I want to flip to definition (c) for "approval authority" that says: "any other prescribed person or entity."

If a private firm or a Crown agent is not included in that definition, could the minister please define who an approval authority would be, under a prescribed person or entity?

[3:35 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The term "approval authority" is only used within division 3, part 4, and relates to an approval authority from which a constraint might be removed. So approval authority means an approval authority within the local government context.

Trevor Halford: I am pleased to join the committee stage at this time. I was able to catch most of the minister's statement on this particular clause here. The minister talks about the inclusion of MLAs, but really, on this legislation, that comes down to the authority of cabinet and their decision-making ability within cabinet.

At this time, I would like to propose an amendment. Would you like me to…?

The Chair: If you'd like, you can move the amendment, and we'll take a brief recess in order to determine whether or not it is in order and circulate it to members.

Trevor Halford: Absolutely. I'll move the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Members, we will take a ten-minute recess and return at 3:48 p.m.

The committee recessed from 3:38 p.m. to 3:57 p.m.

[George Anderson in the chair.]

The Chair: Good afternoon, Members. I call Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, Infrastructure Projects Act, back to order.

Trevor Halford: I'm going to withdraw that amendment. I want to make sure we get it right, so we're working on that right now. But we do have further questions that my colleagues and I will be progressing on.

Amendment withdrawn.

Misty Van Popta: For public entities designated as an approval authority, will they be bound by the same fiduciary duty and conflict-of-interest standards as regular infrastructure projects? Or can they be overridden with this bill's overall authority?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Nothing in Bill 15 changes an approval authority's fiduciary duty or standards around conflict of interest.

Misty Van Popta: If a for-profit entity or consortium is appointed as an approval authority, will its records be fully subject to B.C.'s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act? If not, how can taxpayers scrutinize safety-critical decisions?

[4:00 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: An approval authority is defined in the act as the decision-making bodies: local governments, including regional districts and municipalities; the University Endowment Lands and the Islands Trust, their agents; and their other prescribed person or entity. We're talking about local governments.

Trevor Halford: I thank the patience of the committee for this. We want to make sure we get this right. I'm going to propose my amendment. I think it's in order now, and I'm happy to table that. I do have copies, to make this as expedient as possible.

The Chair: Can you move the amendment?

Trevor Halford: I move, in Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, intituled Infrastructure Projects Act, to amend as follows:

[**CLAUSE 1,** ***by deleting the text shown as struck out:***

"approval authority" *means*

(a) a specified authority,

(b) an agent of a specified authority, ~~*and*~~

~~*(c) any other prescribed person or entity.*~~]

The Chair: We'll take a brief recess.

The committee recessed from 4:02 p.m. to 4:07 p.m.

[George Anderson in the chair.]

The Chair: I call Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, Infrastructure Projects Act, back to order.

On the amendment from the member for Surrey–White Rock, the amendment is in order. We're on clause 1 as amended.

Shall the amendment pass?

A division has been called.

[4:10 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.]

Before putting the question, a reminder to all members that only members of Section A or their duly appointed substitutes are authorized to vote.

The question is on the amendment.

Amendment negatived on the following division:

YEAS — 6		
Kooner	Halford	Van Popta
Boultbee	Mok	Botterell
NAYS — 6		
Toporowski	Brar	Davidson
Routledge	Ma	Glumac

The Chair: Seeing that the votes are equal, as Chair I must exercise a casting vote as per Standing Order 10. The principles of casting the vote are described on pages 74 to 76 of *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*, fifth edition.

With respect to consideration of a bill, the principles are further translated for clarity. On page 75 it's noted that the Chair should vote in favour of passing a clause or a schedule to maintain the bill in its existing form; against an amendment or subamendment to a clause or schedule to maintain the bill in its existing form and to allow further discussion; in favour of the title of a bill to allow further discussion by advancing the bill one stage; in favour of a motion to rise and report to the bill.

Therefore, I cast my vote against the proposed amendment.

We're on clause 1.

Trevor Halford: Do you want me to just allow for the minister's staff to come back in?

The Chair: Yes. We'll take a minute break. Thank you.

The committee is in recess for two minutes.

The committee recessed from 4:18 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.

[George Anderson in the chair.]

The Chair: I call Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, Infrastructure Projects Act, to order.

Trevor Halford: Given category 1 versus category 2 jurisprudence, with category 2 projects, they can bypass an environmental assessment, I guess, entirely when paired or expedited under 7.1 of the Environmental Assessment Act. Why is there no statutory test baked into the definition that would help it almost survive a court challenge?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The member's question — my interpretation of it is related to the tools that a category 2 project would be eligible for. It is not relevant to the definition, but I'm happy to provide greater clarity that nothing in this act allows for….

Rather, this act does not change the rules of what needs to be assessed under the environmental assessment. I'm happy to canvass the details of the tools related to environmental assessment at the relevant section of the bill.

Trevor Halford: So just clarity regarding category 2. Can category 2 projects, under any circumstances, bypass the Environmental Assessment Act?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: If a category 2 project meets the definition under the Environmental Assessment Act as needing an environmental assessment, it will still require an environmental assessment. But it is possible for a category 2 project to not meet that definition and therefore not have the Environmental Assessment Act applicable to it.

Trevor Halford: Just looking at category 1, specifically around Crown…. I guess we call it Crown competition. How will the minister, how will cabinet ensure that Crown corporations are not using what I would call insider status to secure category 1 treatment in terms of whether or not they're competing with the private sector?

[4:25 p.m.]

What mechanisms, safeguards, guardrails will be put in place to make sure that Crown corporations are not given any favourable treatment when it comes to securing category 1 status?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: A Crown corporation is not eligible for category 1 status.

The Chair: You're on clause 1.

Kiel Giddens: I just appreciate the clarification from the minister. As we're going between category 1 and category 2 projects and as we're going through definitions, it's just also important…. We kind of have to jump back and forth because of what's not defined.

The minister talked earlier about the Minister of Transportation being the other relevant minister that does have powers, as infrastructure projects, and as I understand, other ministers could be designated.

I want to just get into the definition of "minister." Is it referring to the Minister of Infrastructure and any other minister designated? Would that be correct, or could it be reassigned to any other portfolio? I guess we just want to try to understand how that would work.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Minister is not defined in section 1 of the bill. But what I believe the member is asking is: who is the minister, and can the minister mean someone else?

For the purposes of this act, because it is an act under the Ministry of Infrastructure, the minister in this case is the Minister of Infrastructure. For the question of assignment of that word to other ministers, I'll note that acts are assigned to ministers at the formation of cabinet, and that's how cabinet structures are created.

Kiel Giddens: This is the reason I'm asking. As we get into part 2, "Minister's Powers," and then obviously as we get a designation of infrastructure projects, and particularly on the recommendation of the minister, I just want to make sure I understand that full scope of authority. It sounds like it's more common practice in other…. Aligning with regular legal precedents.

The minister is nodding, so I'll take that, and I can move on from there.

[Susie Chant in the chair.]

As we get into, particularly, category 2 projects, and because we're referencing the definitions, I just want to make sure we have a good understanding now for when we have to talk about it later. I guess trying to understand…. Because it's not explicit in the definitions or anything like that, I think it would be good for the public to understand a little bit more.

The minister did talk a little bit about what test a project would need to be provincially significant, but could that be elaborated on further? Is there a cost threshold? For example, in the EA process, reviewable projects regulation sets out exactly what tests a project is reviewable for under that act. But what would be an example or what would be a criteria that the government would use to set provincially significant projects in this case?

[4:30 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: For a project to be designated under category 2, it must have First Nations support and provide significant social, economic and environmental benefits to British Columbians; and significantly contribute to the priorities of British Columbians, such as public infrastructure, critical mineral supply, food or water security, human health and safety, energy security, post-disaster recovery, trade diversification, access to new markets, supply chain security, replacing U.S. imports, British Columbia's climate goals and housing.

However, the following will be explicitly excluded: pipeline projects, LNG facilities, low-barrier housing and overdose prevention sites.

Those are the government principles that we have laid out publicly. We believe that it will be important for us to hear from partners and stakeholders, notably First Nations, environmental organizations, local governments, federal governments, members of the opposition, as well, and different sectors in the business community. It will be important to set a certain level of readiness for the project as well.

And the project will need to have…. Well, there's no sense in setting a project to be designated as category 2 if none of the specific tools allowed for in the act do anything for them. They would have to also be a project that actually has a challenge that could be, in theory, solved by the act. So that's also a constraint.

Kiel Giddens: Maybe just as a follow-up to that, why wasn't that prescribed explicitly in the act? I appreciate the minister is reading into the record those specific criteria, but would it not have made it more clear so then later in regulation each of those points that were made could actually be defined even further? Is that something that was contemplated? If not, why wouldn't it be more explicit?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: We did publicly communicate these factors and believe that it was important for us to communicate that publicly and hear from partners and stakeholders and allow that engagement, to hear from local governments whether the criteria that we've noted here are the right ones.

[4:35 p.m.]

I'm hopeful that during this debate, we can also hear from members of the opposition as to whether or not these criteria are appropriate, in your view, and whether there are other factors that we haven't considered and that we should consider.

Kiel Giddens: I guess part of it is ensuring…. With those guidelines that were put out, it's still unclear how the designation is actually determined. Maybe a follow-up. It's looking at local governments and First Nations in particular. They're probably the ones that would raise this question.

Will the government consider, perhaps, publishing clear guidelines or a framework outlining how the designation is determined for those local governments and Indigenous communities, so that they have a little bit more of an example of how to approach a project with government, how to discuss it and how they have a say in how it becomes determined?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Yes.

Kiel Giddens: Thank you for the very quick answer. That sounds helpful.

Along those same lines, as a follow-up, maybe: has the government considered or conducted a legal review to determine whether the lack of the definition being defined right in the act itself raises any administrative law risks or anything like that?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Yes, a legal review was conducted.

Kiel Giddens: Just in defining or trying to figure out the definition of a category 2 project and flipping pages between…. One thing that I'd hoped would be in the definitions was really how a category 2 project designation was made. Is it made solely at the discretion of the minister, or does it require cabinet approval as well?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The definition points to section 4, where we are happy to canvass this in more detail.

Kiel Giddens: Okay. As we get into a "provincially significant" project, I'm wondering. If we're considering which types of projects could eventually get to that category…. I talked about a First Nation or local government bringing their views forward. I've looked at a project like the Massey Tunnel, for example. That might be an easy example of one that could be designated provincially significant, or maybe that would apply under category 1.

I also talked earlier about if we get into category 2 projects like a rare earth–metals mine project, like the one in my riding that I talked about. I'm trying to figure out how those will be determined. That's going to be something that's still quite uncertain, I think.

[4:40 p.m.]

Maybe the minister could describe: when it does happen, will those be published publicly somewhere? How will that occur so that the public understands which ones are, in fact, provincially significant?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I note that the member's questions are very valid and important. They also are relevant to sections other than section 1, but I know that the member is asking questions in good faith. Happy to provide an answer here, but strongly encourage us to move through the section so that we can canvass these questions in more detail in the relevant sections.

To the member's specific question, jumping over to section 4, if the designation of a project is done by order in council, all orders in council are publicly released. They're gazetted, as all regulations and orders in council are.

Kiel Giddens: Yeah, I definitely realize some of this is early days, in the definitions, but because I want to make sure if we need more things defined…. I guess that's part of the reason I was canvassing some of these questions, but I'll maybe save some of them for later, that I was going to ask.

I'm looking at, in the definitions, the relationship to other legislation and how the definitions kind of carry between other acts. I know the member for Surrey–White Rock talked about the Environmental Assessment Act a little bit too. How do the definitions match up, align, with other important acts that would be applicable, such as the Environmental Assessment Act, in this case?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The definitions under part 1, definitions, section 1, are all the definitions that are created for the purposes of interpreting this act. If there are references to definitions that are defined in other acts in other sections, those sections will state that clearly.

Kiel Giddens: Have municipalities or Indigenous communities been consulted on the scope of the definitions and particularly the provincially significant category 2 component?

[4:45 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: We have had conversations with partners about the context of the act.

Going back to my previous response on category 2 projects, we will be consulting with partners and stakeholders on the framework that determines the eligibility framework for that, basically.

Rob Botterell: Through this afternoon, we have been discussing and seeking clarification on various aspects of this clause, and the minister has indicated that and has helpfully read various aspects of a proposed framework into *Hansard*. I just wanted to clarify my understanding of the law as it relates to the use of *Hansard*.

Certainly, post the Supreme Court of Canada decision in Rizzo, in 1998, there is more flexibility on recourse to *Hansard*, but also not a lot of guidance on weight. Typically, courts won't look to other materials like *Hansard* if an instrument is clear on its face. So while I appreciate the responses of the minister clarifying a framework which is still subject to significant further input, as the minister has indicated, with key stakeholders and other interested parties, it's fundamentally a work in progress.

When I look at clause 1, and I realize we're going to get into a lot more detail once we get to clause 4, there is a recognition that over time, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may designate and take a different approach to the framework than the minister is outlining, whether it's in future years of this government or a future government of the same party or another party. There's no assurance that I see in clause 1 or the related clauses later on that the assurances that are being provided now cannot be modified in the future.

Moreover, with the approach taken by the Supreme Court of Canada in Rizzo, certainly my view, my understanding is that where legislation is clear on the face of it, it would not be a bar to including projects that have been excluded or, alternatively, modifying the factors that will define provincially significant projects.

So while I accept the minister's assurances that for the time being, this is the framework, this raises two questions for me.

[4:50 p.m.]

What is the harm in holding off on this legislation until the fall? So treating it as an exposure bill so that we can have that further input that the minister is seeking reflected in the framework that we go with. And, secondly, so that we can take the time to draft amendments to this legislation so that the criteria that we're talking about are actually in the legislation.

That's two questions. Sorry. But they're linked. Why

can't we do this as an exposure bill, do the work and then draft the legislation and introduce and pass it in the fall?

Secondly, would you agree that the approach taken here is not written in stone?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: All legislation and regulations can be amended at any time to modify the intent and purpose of that legislation and regulation, which is why it is incredibly important to be clear about our intent and purpose, which I believe I have made clear.

My ministry was created in November of 2024 in response to the fact…. It was created at a time when our government is implementing an incredibly ambitious infrastructure plan, the most ambitious infrastructure plan in B.C. history. It was recognized that a ministry of infrastructure whose core business, core work, was the delivery of construction projects was incredibly important to government's ability to deliver the critical infrastructure that communities need in a way that is better, more efficient, more economical and with greater urgency as well.

A significant amount of this act actually formalizes the establishment of the ministry. In addition, it provides the ministry with important tools to move projects along. In particular, if this legislation is successfully passed, the first projects that will become designated projects under the act are those projects at the Ministry of Infrastructure. We're talking about schools, hospitals, long-term-care centres, cancer centres, the plant and animal facility and other provincial buildings from which provincial services are delivered.

We have seen in the past where critical community infrastructure projects have been held up by challenges that government does not currently have the tools to deal with, so we have been called upon by British Columbians to build that infrastructure more quickly for them. That is why we're committed to carrying on the work of this legislation.

[4:55 p.m.]

Trevor Halford: Just prior to my colleague from the Green Party asking questions, my colleague the MLA for Prince George–Mackenzie asked questions on consultation.

The minister talked about embarking on that consultation process. Can the minister outline the specifics of that consultation process — when it would begin, when it would end, terms of reference, who it would include, whether that be First Nations or local governments? Has that been mapped out?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I provided a list of partners and stakeholder groups that we would want to consult with in the development of the criteria for provincially significant projects, and we would want to develop that engagement plan with them.

Trevor Halford: Thanks to the minister for that. That stakeholder list that the minister refers to…. Sorry, I might have missed something. Was that done prior to the beginning of committee stage, or is that list available in terms of who those groups are — whether groups, individuals, bands, local governments? Is that list of stakeholders…? Has the minister publicly tabled that list?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Yeah, I provided a…. Pardon me. It's not a list of specific stakeholders or organizations. Rather, we described the stakeholder groups and partner groups that we are looking to hear from — environmental groups, local governments. We'd want to talk with the federal government, different business communities and different sectors, opposition members of course, through this debate. In particular, we would need to work closely with First Nations on how they would like to be engaged on this matter.

Trevor Halford: Thank you to the minister for that. Those are extreme generalities. I think that would be incredibly…. I struggle with the fact that we're talking about this legislation and the minister is…. It's almost like they are trying to fix the plane while it's flying here. We're asking specifically about consultation plans. The minister has just said that stakeholder groups and….

Does this government not have a list? I know the minister just referenced generalities, whether it's First Nations, local governments. I'm asking about specific groups. Whether they're unions, whether they're…. It could be ICBA. It could be different. It could be a number of things. It could be UBCM. It could be the city of White Rock. It could be the city of Richmond. It could be groups.

Does the minister have a list of specific groups — not in generalities, not municipalities, not First Nations, not contractors, but specific groups — that they would be targeting for consultation? Obviously, this would be after the fact, since this bill has been introduced. But is there a plan from this ministry in terms of consultation, when it will begin, when it will end and the specific groups and individuals that will be allowed to…? Thank you for including the opposition in that as well. Will there be specific groups and individuals that will be included within that consultation?

[5:00 p.m. - 5:05 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I'll do my best to provide as fulsome a list as I can. These are, in greater detail, the groups, organizations, people that we have done broad engagements with, and it will give you an idea of who we're going to be circling back around to. It might not be a complete list. Also, very happy to receive suggestions from members, for any gaps that they would recommend we fill.

Engagement has been had with the chairs of school districts, with all superintendents of school districts, all

presidents of post-secondary institutions, CEOs of health authorities and the chairs of health authorities.

There have been engagements with the staff and executive of the Union of B.C. Municipalities, B.C. Business Council and the over 100 business representatives that they brought with them, B.C. Chamber of Commerce, the Climate Solutions Council, Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, Surrey Board of Trade, First Nations Leadership Council, rights and title holders, as well as, of course, all chiefs and modern treaty nations, environmental groups, Clean Energy Canada, B.C. Construction Association, B.C. Hydro, professional regulating bodies, the Council of Forest Industries, Mining Association of B.C.

We also have an engagement set up with all mayors and chairs of local government.

Trevor Halford: I thank the minister for that list. The minister can…. I'll ask a couple questions here.

Were those meetings or consultations done prior to the tabling of Bill 15?

The second question I would have is: were those organizations asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement prior to having that consultation or the meeting, regarding the specific legislation?

[5:10 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: There's a mix in the list I provided. Some engagements occurred prior to the tabling of the bill; some engagements occurred after the tabling of the bill.

We do have a constitutional obligation to protect the privilege of the House and ensure that MLAs are the first to see legislation in its public form. In order for us to engage anybody prior to tabling legislation in the House, non-disclosures are used in order to protect that privilege that members have.

Trevor Halford: Thank you, Minister, for that.

Since the bill was tabled, has the Ministry of Infrastructure or the government of B.C., specific to Bill 15, asked any organization, group or individual to sign a non-disclosure agreement, as of today? Going forward, will they be requiring non-disclosure agreements as they embark on the consultation that the minister has alluded to?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: No NDAs have been signed since the tabling of the legislation in the House. We do not anticipate any NDAs being used for the consultations around the development of further regulations.

I will note the caveat that NDAs are required for privileged information of the House and also cabinet confidence–privileged information. We don't anticipate that, but I just want to be forthcoming about that. In those situations, in order to access that information, non-disclosures would be required.

[5:15 p.m.]

Trevor Halford: I just want some clarity on the actual timelines. In an ideal situation, consultation would occur prior to legislation being tabled, and prior to legislation being passed. That's really what consultation should be, because if this is passed, it is set in stone as legislation. You can consult all you want, but it's firm. It's concrete at that point.

I know my colleagues from the Third Party will have questions coming up shortly, but again to the minister: are there timelines on when this consultation will be complete? Do they have that?

She has listed out some organizations. I think that's great. Obviously, there's going to be some expansion to that. I think that's great, too, but at the end of the day, one of the frustrations that we've heard from groups, individuals, local governments, municipalities, regional districts and First Nations is the lack of consultation.

Again, we are embarking on this now as we are at committee stage, and it's an evolving process. I get that. I disagree with it, but I respect what the minister is saying. In terms of following through on that consultation…. A lot of organizations are saying to us: "Well, it's great to have that conversation, but this is already happening in real time, and we're playing catch-up ball."

Does the minister have an ability to say when she would like to imagine that the consultation will have begun? She already alluded to that, but when would that consultation specifically for Bill 15 be completed?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: For greater clarity, we are not consulting in the future about Bill 15. Bill 15 is tabled as it is.

What we're talking about, for future consultations or subsequent consultations, are elements of the work that follow from the passing of Bill 15 — so regulations that are enabled by Bill 15 definitions and the designation of projects that are…. Or pardon me. Strike that, because that didn't make sense.

The framework for the designation of provincially significant projects is enabled by the existence of provincially significant projects in Bill 15. So the act is tabled as it is. There's no more consultation on the act itself. It's the elements that follow, because this bill enables other work to happen.

Trevor Halford: This is what I believe is one of the fatal flaws of the bill. The minister can talk about the act, and I understand the act, and I understand that it's sitting here, staring in front of me. I get that part of it, but the fact is that they are talking about things after the fact. They're consulting after the fact on the legislation.

I can say that one of the primary frustrations is for the minister to get up and say: "Okay, well, we're not consulting on Bill 15, so to say — it's an act — but we're consulting on the impacts that it's going to have." Those are my

words. The minister didn't use the word "impact," but that's what I am saying.

We're going to consult on the effects that it will have on First Nations, local government, proponents, regional districts and certified professionals. We'll have those conversations after the fact, on the impacts that it'll have on those specific groups and on how they will fit into this legislation.

[5:20 p.m.]

I think one of the key frustrations is that's not consultation. We have Bill 15 in front of us, and we'll talk about all the flaws that we see within Bill 15. The minister is saying: "We've done consultation on Bill 15, the act. We'll just consult on the impacts that it will have."

I guess I would just try and understand the minister's logic in that time frame of having those conversations after the fact, rather than having them before or during the drafting of the bill that we are discussing today.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Chair, I'm hoping for your guidance on this. I think that the member's questions are extremely important, but I believe that it is not relevant to this particular section of the bill, which is around definitions of terms.

The Chair: On clause 1, Member.

Trevor Halford: Yeah, thank you. It was the minister that, prior, engaged on the consultation process. I think if we're going to have that conversation, then…. We can't get halfway through that and then, all of a sudden, it's not a fair conversation to be having. I'm asking very specific questions on consultation, and if they don't fit in here, I don't understand why we would have been doing this 15 minutes ago.

The Chair: Just to respond to the minister's query, in clause 1, there is a fair degree of latitude to sort of work around and look at various things. So I think we're okay.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Okay, good. Thank you. I do want to provide that latitude as much as possible. So thank you so much for that.

The act is set. It has been tabled. I have heard the member's concerns and criticisms. I take that feedback, and I accept it. I will say, though, that it would be pretty presumptive of us to begin engaging on regulations and policies that are not legally enabled without the passing of the legislation. The legislation enables those regulations and those policies to be made in the context of the act, and that work follows the passing of the legislation.

Trevor Halford: Maybe this is a chicken-before-the-egg scenario, but we are talking about a very significant piece of legislation here. We have heard from multiple groups that represent thousands, if not tens of thousands, of British Columbians with specific concerns regarding Bill 15. Within Bill 15, even in the definition phase, there are impacts to those organizations and groups.

My question to the minister is very specific. When will that consultation conclude? She has already outlined some of the groups, and I understand there's going to be expansion on that. But when will that consultation conclude, and what will it encompass? Are these meetings the minister is going to be doing personally, and the deputy minister? Is there going to be a group that's set up? How does the minister envision that that consultation begin and end?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I answered previously that we would like to work with these partners and stakeholders on understanding how they would like to be engaged in this process. The timelines for engagement depend on the regulation or policy that is enabled by the act that we're talking about. Different regulations and different procedures will take different, various, amounts of time. I'm happy to engage in those conversations when we get to the various parts that enable that work to happen.

Trevor Halford: The Premier, the minister, various other members of cabinet and MLAs have talked about their view of the importance of this bill, and timing and urgency, and the urgency of getting infrastructure built in B.C., some of which we have not seen done in the last eight years.

[5:25 p.m.]

Whether it's hospitals, schools, bridges, we understand the lack of infrastructure we currently have. It's a huge deficit right now. You would think, with that deficit…. With the importance that the Premier has put — he spoke to it last night — on Bill 15, you would think that the minister would have a very comprehensive consultation plan to help put at ease some of the minds of some of these groups that I just referenced that are having extreme concern with this piece of legislation.

I have not heard a single thing from the minister, other than listing some of the groups, in terms of what their plans are for consultation. It leads me to believe that there is no plan for consultation. There's just this: "Well, we want to have feedback on what that consultation should look like." So that's telling me that there is absolutely zero plan in terms of how that consultation will be executed by the minister, her ministry or the Premier, for that matter.

Again, is the minister able to provide a concrete plan and table on how consultation will be done with organizations, and the minister has listed some of those, on timelines, on how that consultation will proceed, how it will be done, how the feedback will be assessed? Are they still trying to figure this out? It's a very simple question. What is

the consultation plan to deal with the impacts that people will be getting from this piece of legislation?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: There are various sections of the bill that enable different work to be undertaken or the development of different regulations. Just by way of example, the streamlined environmental assessment process…. The act allows the development of a streamlined environmental assessment process. It depends on the tool, and it depends on the regulation. It will be important for us to work with partners and stakeholders on the extent to which and how much they are involved in the development of various regulations.

Trevor Halford: I would assume that the minister would be confident that this legislation is going to pass as is, right? This has been legislation that has been introduced weeks ago. I would think within that, even through the drafting of the legislation, they would have embarked on some plan for consultation.

Now, we know that there was limited consultation prior, when they were doing the framework and NDAs were signed. We get all that. But the impacts that this bill is going to have on local governments, First Nations, contractors, schools, almost every corner of British Columbia are massive.

What I'm hearing from the minister today is that there is no plan in place in terms of how this government, this ministry, is going to consult those that are going to be impacted. It almost seems like it's getting made up on the fly. "We want to figure out how people want to be consulted."

We're at committee stage. This bill has been talked about for weeks in that House and outside of it. What we're hearing from the minister today is that there is no plan for how they're going to execute consultation on this bill, or at least allow people to express how this is going to impact them or to explain how this legislation impacts them, by government.

Again to the minister: is she able to table today the consultation plan that her ministry has developed specifically on Bill 15?

[5:30 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I'm going to address something the member said earlier and say that the debate in the House is incredibly important. I believe it would be overly presumptive of me to assume that a bill that we have tabled will pass as is, without amendment, without listening to the debate. I believe strongly that it is the privilege of this House to determine whether a bill ultimately passes or not and that that due process is important.

When it comes to the consultations on the elements that will follow the passing of this bill, it is also important for us to engage in dialogue with partners and stakeholders. I use the example of working with First Nations and consulting with First Nations because we often hear, from rights and title holders and First Nations partners, that it's important for us to consider their capacity situation as well — and their capacity needs, their timing and their needs — in these sorts of engagements. It is not appropriate for us to dictate how that engagement works without that conversation with them.

I will say that we do intend to begin this work in June, but that conversation, and that dialogue on how the engagement occurs, is underway.

Trevor Halford: I thank the minister. I appreciate the minister's ability — I mean this with all sincerity — to consider amendments and changes to the bill. I think we'll have a healthy debate on that as we go forward. Imagine that.

I'm also referencing comments the Premier has made where he anticipates no changes to this bill, which he said publicly. Again, I'm coming to the conclusion here that there is no concrete plan that the Ministry of Infrastructure, the minister or the Premier has in terms of consultation on Bill 15.

I've canvassed this enough, and we'll move on because there are other important topics to do. But from this line of questioning, I'm coming to the conclusion that there is no concrete consultation plan that this ministry has either embarked on or is about to embark on, on such a critical piece of legislation.

The Chair: Did you have a question there?

Trevor Halford: No, just a general statement.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I disagree with the member's characterization but accept that disagreements are commonplace in the House. There will be consultation on the elements that follow from this bill.

Misty Van Popta: Okay, we're going to bring it back to more definitions. We're going to go back to category 2. If the minister could please provide this, what is the process for a project to be deemed category 2? Does the entity approach the government, or is it an application? Is it ministry-driven? What prevents effective lobbying from bumping better-suited projects?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Given that the actual designation of that category of projects is in section 4, I recommend we canvass that question in section 4.

[5:35 p.m.]

Misty Van Popta: Okay, I'll try one more time. I might get the same answer, though. Prior to the tabling of this bill, has the minister had any conversations with private firms, unions or special interest groups about projects they benefit from being designated as category 2?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: No, I have not.

Misty Van Popta: Regarding category 2, which independent body, not cabinet, will hear an appeal if a local government or First Nation believes that its vital interests have been overruled by a provincially significant declaration?

Interjection.

Misty Van Popta: Yes, sorry.

Is there an independent body that's not cabinet that can hear an appeal if a local government or First Nation believes its vital interests have been overruled by the designation of being provincially significant?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: For greater clarity, the designation of a project itself doesn't actually do anything. It's dependent on the tool that is used. The designation provides access to tools, of which there are different ones, which may have different impacts that we can discuss under the relevant sections.

Chair, if I may request a five-minute recess.

The Chair: Okay, a recess has been requested, so this committee will be in recess for the next five minutes. I would request that everybody be back at 5:43, please.

The committee recessed from 5:37 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.

[Susie Chant in the chair.]

The Chair: I call Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, Infrastructure Projects Act, back to order. We are on clause 1.

Rob Botterell: We've talked about the ability, and the minister has referenced the ability, that legislation and regulations can be amended. We certainly agree. We've had a fairly extensive discussion around the range of interested stakeholders in this legislation. We've also had a bit of an exchange, I'll call it, around how that consultation may unfold on some key elements related to the legislation.

The minister has talked about the framework. The minister has talked about how category 1 and category 2 decisions and provincially significant project decisions will be made and the factors and invited further input from the opposition and from numerous groups on the framing of those elements. That's one aspect of breathing life into these definitions.

Just as a practical matter, further consultation will occur. Certainly, the UBCM and First Nations have expressed an interest in consultation on the elements because that is the clarity that they're looking for.

The way that will likely unfold is that we'll all be busy now reviewing legislation and performing our role in the Legislature between now and the end of May. In June, there'll be an invitation for further input. In July, even if it's fairly accelerated, there'll be input provided. Through July and August, at least, and maybe early September, there'll be engagement with First Nations. By the time September rolls around, that consultation, on a fairly accelerated basis, will be complete.

We can't prejudge the outcome of that consultation. That consultation may result in modifications to the factors that were mentioned, to use an example of energy security being a factor or social, economic and environmental considerations. Maybe there are others.

My question is: what decisions, related to setting up which projects are category 1 and category 2, do you see making before September?

[5:50 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The designation of a category 2 project would not occur until after a framework is set. The timelines for the development of that framework will depend largely on our conversations with critical partners, particularly First Nations, because it would be important for us to consult with First Nations.

When it comes to designation of category 1 projects, that will be done as soon as possible, soon as practicable following passing of the legislation.

Rob Botterell: Then there would be no harm in treating this as an exposure bill and conducting consultation until the beginning of the fall session and having this as Bill 1 or brought back as the first bill in the fall session. Fundamentally, the work that will need to be done on category 1 and category 2 is going to take a period of time throughout the summer.

My question to the minister: what is the urgency that would invite getting out in front of consultation? "As soon as practicable," whether it's category 1 or category 2, is going to be basically between now and the beginning of the fall session.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: As I had noted earlier in a previous response, this legislation establishes formally the authorities and powers of the Ministry of Infrastructure. The designation of category 1 projects would follow as soon as practicable. We believe it would not take months to designate category 1 projects. We would be looking to do that as soon as the legislation is passed.

Misty Van Popta: Okay. We're going to move on to constraints. Constraint, by definition here, in relation to an infrastructure project means a measure that, unless replaced under section 12, may impede or otherwise interfere with the completion or operations of an infrastructure project. Constraint can mean a lot of different things.

It can be weather-related, outside factors. It could be bylaws, government. It could be many, many different things.

[5:55 p.m.]

Given that a constraint can be any policy, practice or guideline that merely just may impede a project, what evidentiary test will stop cabinet from deleting hard-won community safeguards?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The member's question is best canvassed under division 3, part 4.

Misty Van Popta: Okay. I'm going to move this other one to division 3, but this one, I think, still applies.

Will the minister commit to publishing a quantitative impact screen, like cost per day, before a policy or bylaw is labelled a constraint, rather than relying on a proponent's anecdote?

Interjection.

Misty Van Popta: You need clarification? Okay. If you have a proponent, especially on a category 2, and they say they have constraints, what kind of quantitative measures will be used to say whether it's actually truly a constraint?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The process by which a constraint is identified is part of division 3, part 4.

Misty Van Popta: Okay. Again, it's still a little bit vague: "may impede or otherwise interfere with the completion." Impediments can be many, many things.

If we're in the definitions section, can we get…? What does the minister feel is an impediment beyond just saying whatever impedes a project? Can you read into the record things that you deem would impede a project?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I want to make sure that it's made clear that these are examples only. When it comes to a project constraint, it will depend case on case, on the situation. An example could be a situation where a plot of land has been purchased to be used for a school, but it is not zoned for a school. That could be an example of a constraint. Another example of a constraint might be where parking bylaws are not suitable for an area where a hospital is being developed.

[6:00 p.m.]

These are not constraints in all situations, but they are examples of constraints for the purposes of providing greater clarity to the definition.

Misty Van Popta: So would that mean that tools or…? I'm trying to go back to, say, more municipal things. If a local government has something in place — it's a project that's been controversial for them in their community — and there's public uproar about it, is that something that's being impeded? Is that a constraint that the ministry could come in and override and usher a project through?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: A constraint is a measure that is under local government jurisdiction that may impede or otherwise interfere with the completion or operations of an infrastructure project unless it is replaced, pursuant to the powers available under division 3 of part 4.

Public outcry in itself is not a constraint. That being said, if there was a constraint that a local government was challenged to modify or remove, then that would be an opportunity for the three-step process that is outlined under division 3 of part 4, where we can canvass that whole process more thoroughly.

Trevor Halford: Just on designated projects, I guess once a project is designated, every override tool in parts 2 and 4, at that point, would snap into place. It doesn't look like there's any legislative veto or public hearing requirement before that kind of binary switch is thrown. Is that an accurate assessment?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The tools available to be used on category 1 or category 2 projects are in other sections of the bill, and how they apply…. There are some differences. I'm happy to go through those in detail when we get to the relevant parts.

[6:05 p.m.]

Trevor Halford: I'll make that note to follow up.

Just on designated projects, what would be a trigger to revoke a designated project? Would that be…? Could it be financing conditions? Could it be bankruptcy? Could it be fraud? Is that a cabinet decision that's been made in terms of revoking a designated project? How does that transpire? What's the process for that?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: This question is best canvassed in section 4.

Misty Van Popta: Okay, reading infrastructure project…. Yes. Just jumping back to this one. The definition reaches planning and dismantling stages. What safeguards ensure feasibility work or end-of-life demolition cannot railroad past local and Indigenous stakeholders?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: For greater assurance, nothing in the bill allows for a project proponent or the province or any authority to sidestep obligations to First Nations. The entire piece of legislation must be read to be aligned with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and section 35 of the Constitution Act, as is required by the Interpretation Act.

In terms of dismantling of infrastructure, we're talking about demolition projects or projects that involve demoli-

tion — dismantling of a school, for instance. The project itself would still need…. In order for there to be relevance in this act, the project would still need to be eligible to access tools. The use of those tools would follow in the same way as any other project that this act would be relevant for.

[6:10 p.m.]

Misty Van Popta: Okay, so it's kind of staying on the dismantling theme here. Why does the definition explicitly include dismantling? I mean, I don't know if I would call dismantling an infrastructure project. I guess I can kind of see how it got weaved there.

Through that, there's a little bit of an optic that there's an ability to waive normal hazardous materials rules at the end of life. Can you cite the section that preserves those safeguards with respect to hazardous materials?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I think that the member's question is perhaps looking for guidance as to where to canvass this question under the relevant sections. I would say that it still…. We can probably work through tool by tool how it does or does not impact whatever elements of permitting that a project requires, and we can provide assurances with each tool. I think that that might be more helpful for the member.

Ultimately, whatever project is affected by this legislation is affected in the way of being able to access one of the various…. We categorize them as basically six tools. There are six tools in the legislation, and we can talk through each one and provide greater assurances through each one.

Misty Van Popta: Going on to measures, I want to maybe ask the minister just to dive a little bit more into the terminology of measure, which is enactment, directive, requirement. Would that include…? Especially in project delivery with communications — lots of different types of communications on a project: emails, software, communication tools and things like that. Could the minister please speak to what kind of tools and measures apply in this kind of realm, what kind of communication tools?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Measure as defined under section 1 is intended to refer to the replacement measure of a constraint. Using the examples that we used before, if the constraint that needs to be addressed is a parking bylaw, then the measure might be an alternative parking bylaw for that project. If the constraint is that a piece of land is not zoned for schooling, the replacement measure might be to zone it for a school.

Misty Van Popta: Follow-up to that, would that mean it's in the purview of the ministry to create those zoning changes on behalf of a local government if, say, they're the ones that are the impediment to the process? I'll just leave it with that for now.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The process is laid out in division 3 of part 4.

[6:15 p.m.]

Trevor Halford: Just on the definition of "proponent," can the minister explain: is it cabinet that names the proponent specifically? Or is that…? What transparency rules would be around that?

For instance, if ownership changed, if they were deemed a proponent under this definition and then we saw in six months or a year, either prior to construction or in the middle of construction, that there was an ownership change, would that change the definition of "proponent"?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: For greater clarity, a project will come with its proponent, of course. We would not take a project and then assign a proponent. Rather, the project comes with a proponent. For the purposes of designating that project under this act, under category 1, the proponent would be the provincial government; under category 2, the proponent would be another entity.

That process is set out under section 4. If there were a situation where the name of a proponent changed partway, then the same process could be used to update the name of the proponent as well.

Trevor Halford: Thank you the minister for that clarification. An example would be if there were a successful proponent on a project that would fall under this piece of legislation. Then, if they were deemed to be successful, the value of that business could dramatically increase, right? If they were deemed to be successful, with government as a contractor, then the value of their enterprise, I would assume, in most cases would increase.

What mechanisms do the minister and the government have in place, in terms of transfer of ownerships? I mean, if somebody is successful in getting categorized here for a project, and then they decide at that point that they are going to maybe sell part of the business or transfer part of that business, what safeguards are in place here for accountability and transparency, once those decisions have been made in relation to the proponent?

[6:20 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I appreciate the member's question on this, but in keeping with section 1, the question doesn't seem relevant to the definition of proponent at this time. Perhaps the designation of who a proponent might be, under a category 1 or category 2 project, which is in section 4.

Misty Van Popta: Okay, I'm going to use a little bit of a weird question, just to see…. I don't think it's covered under this section, so I feel like I have to put it under definitions just because there's some latitude there.

Knowing that a proponent is assigned with the project,

so the proponent comes with the project, in the weird case that a foreign sovereign wealth fund quietly buys 51 percent of the shares of a designated proponent after it's been granted a designation, is there a mechanism that the House or the cabinet would have to be able to revisit that decision, and if not, why? Could we ever revoke designation to a proponent?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: For greater clarity, and this goes for myself as well, in case…. Because I don't remember what I said in my previous answers, I make sure to provide greater clarity. The proponent is not designated. The project is designated. We name the proponent as part of the order in council in order to put conditions on the proponent for the designation of that project. By order in council, a designation could also be revoked.

Misty Van Popta: It can. I'm just going to reword that just to make sure I understand. So there is a mechanism to revoke designation if the proponent is found to be somebody or something that we don't want to maybe have ties with or something like that.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: We're starting to get into section 4 again.

Interjection.

[6:25 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: It is, thanks.

Trevor Halford: Under "provincial permit," it has "the prescribed meaning." Is the minister able to expand on what that definition is? Is that encompassing all provincial permits? Is that from Ministry of Transportation? Is that from Housing? Is it from…? Could that encompass every single provincial permit or any exclusions within that?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Provincial permit, as defined, has the prescribed meaning, and it could mean any permit prescribed by regulation. That being said, it is only used in the context of section 7, so not all provincial permits are relevant to the context of section 7.

Misty Van Popta: If we've got a project that's run into local government jurisdictions….

The Chair: Members, if you could have your conversations in the corridor, that would be really helpful. Thank you so much.

Please carry on.

Misty Van Popta: If we've got a project that crossed jurisdictions with, say, regional districts or local municipalities or communities, how does their permitting fit into the provincial permitting process? Is that a completely separate stream? And is there ever a case where the provincial permit would be impeded by the local permit, or vice versa?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I suggest we go to revisit this question under section 7.

Trevor Halford: Just going to the definition of "qualified professional," this says that qualified professional has a prescribed meaning. Why isn't there a list of qualified professionals under this definition?

[6:30 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The question was around qualified professional. I referred earlier to how the act lays out six different tools, and the qualified professional, as defined here, is relevant to one of those tools. It is one of the tools where a significant amount of work actually has to happen in order to develop that tool in the process.

It will be prescribed in regulation, following the development of the tool. We can canvass that in more detail. I'm happy to walk through why that is.

[Jessie Sunner in the chair.]

Trevor Halford: This is another example of putting forward legislation that is going to be subject to change at cabinet's purview.

Again, on this, I think it would be a good idea, when we're talking about defining the term "qualified professionals," that we would have a list underneath that of what those qualified professionals would be, instead of allowing that to be…. I can see how that could be, maybe, expanded at a later time. We've seen, in the course of this, that not having a list of qualified professionals has led to massive confusion.

With that, the minister did say a little while ago she was open to amendments, and we'll put this one to the test. I'd like to move an amendment specifically related to the qualified professionals, with a list of them.

I can read the amendment now, or I can table it.

The Chair: Member, you can read the amendment now.

Trevor Halford: Okay. I move, in Committee of the Whole:

[***Clause 1, by adding the following definition:***

"qualified professional" *means any professional who is a member in good standing of a professional association in schedule A:*

Schedule A:

a) Association of British Columbia Forest Professionals,

b) Association of the Chemical profession of British Columbia,

c) Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia,

d) Applied science Technologists and Technicians of British Columbia,
e) Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors,
f) BC Association of Professional Archaeologists,
g) British Columbia Institute of Agrologists,
h) Certified Management Accountants Society of British Columbia,
i) The Certified General Accountants Association of British Columbia,
j) College of Applied Biology,
k) Contaminated Sites Approved Professionals Society,
l) Institute of Chartered Accountants of British Columbia,
m) Planning Institute of BC,
m) Society of Notaries Public of British Columbia,
o) Pesticide Applicators, Pesticide Dispensers, Qualified well pump installer, Qualified well drillers and Guide outfitters as accredited by the Ministry of Environment,
p) Blasting (Open Pit and underground) certificate, Fire Boss (Open Pit and Underground), Mine Rescue (Open pit surface and underground) certificate, Fire Boss Certificate, Coal Blasting Certificate and First Class and Second Underground Coal (management) certificate as accredited by the Minister of Energy & Mines,
q) Licensed Scaler, Silviculture Accredited Surveyor, Accredited Timber Cruiser as accredited by the Ministry of Forests,
r) Association of British Columbia Forest Professionals,
s) Appraisal Institute of Canada,
t) Burn Boss as accredited by the Ministry of Forests,
u) BC Forest Safety Council or ENFORM,
v) Eco Canada, Environmental Operators Certification Program,
w) Architectural Institute of British Columbia,
x) BC Association for Crane safety
y) BC Financial Services Authority,
z) Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC,
aa) Building Officials Association of BC,
bb) College of Applied Biology,
cc) Well Driller and Well Pump Installer Registry,
dd) Environmental Operators Certification Program,
ee) Mining Health & Safety Branch, and
ff) Technical Safety BC,
gg) Law Society of BC.]

The Chair: Thank you, Member. We'll take a very short recess to review the amendment.

The committee recessed from 6:33 p.m. to 6:40 p.m.

[Jessie Sunner in the chair.]

The Chair: Thank you, Members.

Having reviewed the proposed amendment, I'm ruling it out of order because it renders the clause unintelligible by having two definitions of the same term.

Amendment ruled out of order.

Misty Van Popta: Understanding that the minister will be soliciting for input later on the definition of QP, or what a qualified professional is, will we be able to establish a baseline that would be used for certain industries or different types of work?

We don't need to have a gold-plated qualified professional to do a task that a lesser designation could do. Is there going to be a framework for that type of input on how QPs work in the realm of infrastructure projects?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I would say that the member is exactly right on the intent. It would be established on a permit-by-permit basis, depending on the complexity of the permit and the type of qualified professional that would be required to assess the conditions of that permit. Happy to canvass this further under the relevant section.

Misty Van Popta: Just for clarity, who would create that requirement of what kind of designation? Who sets that? Is it the ministry? You said it's tied to a permit. Who says, on that permit, that it's X, Y or Z?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: We'll be able to canvass this more fully in the relevant section.

Misty Van Popta: Okay.

Specified authority. I just want to jump down to (e). We've kind of got that vague clause again where it says "a prescribed person or entity." Could we, for the record, get descriptions and examples — a better representation of what a prescribed person or entity is when it comes to specified authority?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: So (e) can only be read in the context of the remainder of the list that precedes it. An example of a prescribed person or entity might be a staff member that a municipality has delegated an authority to.

Misty Van Popta: Okay. Is there any type of baseline for who a person or an entity could be? Could it be a general clerk at the front desk of the local municipality or…?

[6:45 p.m.]

It just seems that without any type of firm definition of who a prescribed person could be, it could be deemed somebody very insignificant in the context of a project. And then for that person to have specified authority, it could lead to less desirable outcomes. I would assume that somebody with authority, as the term implies, should have some sort of definition or specification behind who it is.

Again, I just want to put that back to the minister — if there's going to be any type of baseline person on an org chart that could have that type of designation of being the person of….

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Under specified authority, we refer

to decision-makers of these various entities. There's the council of a municipality, the council of the city of Vancouver, the board of a regional district, the local trust committee of a trust area, the minister responsible for the administration of the University Endowment Land Act.

[6:50 p.m.]

When we refer to a prescribed person or entity, we mean somebody who has the authority, who has been designated that authority on behalf of the municipality or the local government.

How this is used in context of the act — very happy to walk through the process in the section that provides the tool that allows local governments to make requests of the province.

Misty Van Popta: Okay, we're going to stick with another definition here that is actually missing, so I'd like to pop it into this section. It's a term that's referred to in part 2, section 3. The word "general contractor" is used twice in clause (b). Knowing that general contractors have a wide scope of work, they have different things that they can do, I'm wondering why that term is not defined — what a general contractor is?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Where a term is not defined in section 1, we use the dictionary definition, so the commonly understood definition according to industry standard.

Misty Van Popta: I understand your response; however, it is a broad term. There's a wide scope of range of items a general contractor can do. From your understanding, from your ministry, what would you deem applicable to being a general contractor? What is included in that scope of that word? Alternatively, what would you not do as a general contractor? Is there any piece of a project, delivery piece, as a general contractor that you would not do?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The member rightly points out that this term is used under section 3 relating to the minister's powers. Happy to canvass the member's questions under section 3.

Misty Van Popta: However, this is in regard to not having a definition for it, which is under part 1. I'm wanting to get a clear definition of what a general contractor is in the scope of section 3.

[6:55 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: As I noted before, the definition of "general contractor" is not included in section 1 because we are using the common meaning. We pulled up the *Merriam-Webster* definition, if that would help, which is "a person or business entity that contracts to be in charge of a building project usually involving the use of subcontractors."

Misty Van Popta: But in other areas, in other definitions like "qualified professional" and "provincial permit," you have listed it, and you've also had the definition as "has the prescribed meaning." In this case, though, it has the prescribed meaning, but it's not included in the definitions.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: For greater clarity, in legislation and statutes, "prescribed meaning" means by regulation.

Trevor Halford: I know we're kind of getting late in the day here, and I just want to make sure I've got this right. I'm going to go back to the amendment that I initially talked about with the professional act, and I'm going to put forward that amendment, to move that amendment. I believe it to be in order now, so I will move that, autograph it and circulate it.

The Chair: Member, could you please read the amendment into the record.

Trevor Halford: I move, in Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, intituled Infrastructure Projects Act, to amend as follows:

[**Section 1 is amended *by striking the text shown as struck and adding the underlined text:***

"qualified professional" ~~*has the prescribed meaning;*~~ *means any professional who is a member in good standing with the following professional associations:*

a) Association of British Columbia Forest Professionals,

b) Association of the Chemical profession of British Columbia,

c) Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia,

d) Applied science Technologists and Technicians of British Columbia,

e) Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors,

f) BC Association of Professional Archaeologists,

g) British Columbia Institute of Agrologists,

h) Certified Management Accountants Society of British Columbia,

i) The Certified General Accountants Association of British Columbia,

j) College of Applied Biology,

k) Contaminated Sites Approved Professionals Society,

l) Institute of Chartered Accountants of British Columbia,

m) Planning Institute of BC,

m) Society of Notaries Public of British Columbia,

o) Pesticide Applicators, Pesticide Dispensers, Qualified well pump installer, Qualified well drillers and Guide outfitters as accredited by the Ministry of Environment,

p) Blasting (Open Pit and underground) certificate, Shift Boss (Open Pit and Underground), Mine Rescue (Open pit surface and underground) certificate, Fire Boss Certificate, Coal Blasting Certificate and First Class and Second Underground Coal (management) certificate as accredited by the Minister of Energy & Mines,

q) Licensed Scaler, Silviculture Accredited Surveyor, Accredited Timber Cruiser as accredited by the Ministry of Forests,
r) Association of British Columbia Forest Professionals,
s) Appraisal Institute of Canada,
t) Burn Boss as accredited by the Ministry of Forests,
u) BC Forest Safety Council or ENFORM,
v) Eco Canada, Environmental Operators Certification Program,
w) Architectural Institute of British Columbia,
x) BC Association for Crane safety
y) BC Financial Services Authority,
z) Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC,
aa) Building Officials Association of BC,
bb) College of Applied Biology,
cc) Well Driller and Well Pump Installer Registry,
dd) Environmental Operators Certification Program,
ee) Mining Health & Safety Branch, and
ff) Technical Safety BC]

It's almost exactly as was submitted before, just with a little bit of whiteout. With that, obviously, we would be open to any further additions to that list we've prescribed.

The Chair: Members, I have reviewed the proposed amendment, and I've deemed it to be in order.

Member, would you like to speak to the amendment?

On the amendment.

Trevor Halford: Yes. I'll be brief with my comments. I do believe that this amendment is coming in good faith. I believe that it will expand upon and give clarity to "qualified professionals."

We've seen this before. We've seen some of the confusion. I'll use Bill 13 as an example — actually, I think, the minister's background is as an engineer — and the importance of protecting it. I'll give an example of protecting the title of professional engineer. I believe that it's really important to define "qualified professionals."

Also, the minister did speak a little while ago about collaboration and how we could find ways to amend. I think this is something. If the minister had added professionals that she would want to list on this amendment, I think that would be welcome.

[7:00 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I appreciate what the member is attempting to do with this amendment and appreciate his diligence in tabling it — again, recognizing some of the challenges that the first attempt had.

For greater clarity, the way that qualified professionals are intended to be used in this act, and we can work through it in more detail when we get to that part, is for a permit-by-permit and decision-by-decision use, a permit-by-permit and decision-by-decision framework for when a provincial decision can appropriately be replaced by a qualified professional.

We need to work to identify that permit and work with partner ministries and statutory decision–makers to determine whether it is appropriate for a replacement decision-maker under this act and who that qualified professional would be. That qualified professional may not be just any registered professional under a certain organization. It is likely that government will want to ensure that that qualified professional has the skills and expertise to be able to provide trustworthy advice on a particular decision.

I will note that there are currently only six regulated professions in British Columbia. This list lists several dozen. There appear to be duplications and some outdated names of organizations as well. For instance, the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C. is now known as Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C.

While I appreciate what the member is attempting to do here, it does not align with the way that the tool is intended to be carried out, so we will not be able to support the amendment.

Amelia Boultbee: In support of this amendment, and I will speak to a couple of the comments that the minister just made. The way that "qualified professional" is defined — or rather not defined or circularly defined, however you want to frame it — in the bill right now leaves it very open-ended what a qualified professional could be, which is very problematic and creates a lot of uncertainty.

I understand or infer from what the minister is saying that in theory once the bill…. Should it pass, there would be regulations that would be made that would enumerate what we're attempting to do here. Whether it's an amendment in a schedule or whether it's in regulation, it sounds like there is some agreement that the definition of a qualified professional must be enumerated and fleshed out.

I guess I would just pose as a question…. Taking into account a couple of the errors that the minister just pointed out with the title of professional engineers, should we be able to take out duplications and fix those errors, hopefully they could find it to support this amendment, seeing as it would be doing the same thing as the regulation, which is what the minister is proposing.

[7:05 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I appreciate the additional information around intent by the member across the way. It is important, however, for the qualified professional reliance tool in the legislation, for government to be able to prescribe the meaning of a qualified professional in order to ensure that the qualified professional that is being entrusted with the decision related to the permit that we have identified is actually appropriate for that permit.

As an example, if we have identified a low-risk provincial permit that could be assessed by a civil engineer, we would want to prescribe that the qualified professional for that assessment is a civil engineer, perhaps with particu-

lar experience in that type of project. We might prescribe that, given the type of decision, we will require two separate qualified professionals in order to independently provide their assessment on it, and that they must be civil engineers.

It can't be, then, that just any professional that is on this list could provide that assessment. Even a professional that is registered with Engineers and Geoscientists, but not of that same discipline and not with that appropriate background to provide confidence to government that they are trustworthy in making that decision, could step in. So the ability to prescribe a qualified professional and what that means for a specific permit is incredibly important.

[7:10 p.m.]

This amendment would remove the ability for us, as government, to prescribe who is qualified for that particular permit decision, and in interpreting this, a permit that should be seen by a civil engineer could be seen by an architect or a biologist. While they are very qualified in their own fields, they are not the qualified professionals for the permit decision that we're putting forward.

Again, we are unable to support this amendment.

Amelia Boultbee: I think the minister might be misunderstanding a little bit. I understand what she's saying, and I totally agree. Yes, I agree, especially with the example that she gave, that the government should be able to prescribe very specifically, very specific qualifications. When you're — I don't know of a better word — circumventing a permitting process, you want to make sure that the person whose opinion is standing in place of it is very, very qualified. So I totally agree.

But this actually does do the same thing because it provides umbrella terms. For instance, the minister used the example of a civil engineer with particular expertise. If this list in theory captured professional engineers, it's still open to the government, cabinet, the decision-maker to select that person because this umbrella term captures it. The only difference between this and a regulation is that it's more clear in the bill. We can see it now.

We would support this clause, and there could be bipartisan support for this amendment should it pass, whereas if it's in a regulation, it's still going to be enumerating those people, whether it's an umbrella term where you get down to the level of granularity of different types of civil engineers, but the government can pass regulations at any time without any bipartisan weigh-in.

I would submit that actually this is the better way to go.

Rob Botterell: I would just make an observation that "'qualified professional' has the prescribed meaning" enables cabinet to designate the meaning of a qualified professional and could designate me as a qualified professional under that definition. I am certainly not a qualified professional for these sorts of decisions. I'm an MLA.

So the proposed amendment is really to put some guardrails around the ability of cabinet to prescribe a particular qualified professional. At least they have to be within one of these professional associations. There may be a need for leg. counsel to adjust some of the wording.

I would make the point to the minister that if you support the concept, which is that when cabinet is selecting a qualified professional or categories of qualified professionals for the purposes of clause 6, we should have clarity around the pool from which cabinet is choosing…. I think that's the intent here. If the minister wishes to see this clarity for the benefit of everybody working with this legislation, then if the minister can't support this particular amendment, that the minister would commit to bringing forward an amendment which achieves the intent in a way that the minister supports.

[7:15 p.m.]

The Chair: I will recognize the minister for a final response.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The amendment simply doesn't meet the function of the way that this term is used in the legislation. We cannot support this amendment.

The Chair: Members, the question is the amendment to clause 1.

Division has been called.

[7:20 p.m.]

Members, before putting the question, I remind all members that only the members of Section A or their duly appointed substitutes are authorized to vote.

The question is the amendment to clause 1.

Amendment negatived on the following division:

YEAS — 5		
Halford	Van Popta	Boultbee
Stamer		Williams
NAYS — 7		
Davidson	Morissette	Lajeunesse
Routledge	Greene	Ma
	Botterell	

Clause 1 approved.

On clause 2.

[7:25 p.m.]

Kiel Giddens: Pleased to rejoin the debate here again today.

On clause 2, we're talking about the minister's general powers. This is a very broad range of powers that are being given to the minister through this clause. We do have

a number of questions on exactly what that full breadth and scope would be.

Maybe, just as a starting question, the minister, perhaps, could clarify exactly the full extent and the intent behind the powers given under this clause. Maybe as the starting place, that would be a good point in our discussion to understand this clause.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Section 2 basically outlines the general authorities of the Ministry of Infrastructure as a new ministry. It consolidates powers that were previously in other statutes.

We consolidated the capital planning and infrastructure powers that were previously in the Ministry of Education and Child Care, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills into the Ministry of Infrastructure. And we have provided powers around acquiring and disposing of land, which are parallel powers to the Ministry of Citizens' Services.

Yeah. It's basically the section that creates the function of the ministry.

Kiel Giddens: Maybe, I guess, something that the opposition has been finding challenging with the new ministry and the powers it is being given…. I think we saw a little bit in the estimates process.

For example, with a hospital project in Ministry of Health, there are stage gates that projects go through. There are still stage gates that are in the control of the Ministry of Health, and then there's a point where it moves to the Ministry of Infrastructure, so when asking questions, it depends on what stage a project is at. It makes it hard for the public, for the financial accountability component of it.

We have a hard time following the money from the public side. I guess I'm trying to understand, just for transparency purposes. Will decisions made under this clause be, in fact, transparent?

[7:30 p.m.]

Are they subject to public reporting in some way? Is that going to be very clearly laid out in public accounts? Where's the place where it will be financially reported?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The Ministry of Infrastructure consolidates the capital functions of the ministries, which were previously in the Ministries of Health, of Education and Child Care and of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills. This means that when it's related to a capital project where something is being built, all those gates, as the member referred to, now rest in the Ministry of Infrastructure.

That said, we do work very closely with the other ministries, because they are ultimately responsible for operations and for actually delivering the services that are intended to be delivered out of the facility. There's certainly no benefit to building a hospital that isn't going to be operated out of. So we do work very closely with ministries on the development of projects.

All the transparency mechanisms that existed under the other ministries now also exist under our ministry. We have our $50 million project list that is published in our annual service plan, and all expenditures are available in *Public Accounts*.

Kiel Giddens: I appreciate some of that context.

On a project-by-project basis, will there be opportunities for MLAs in the Legislature to have an opportunity to review or debate the use of the powers before they've been enacted?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: That's the process that we are undertaking right now.

[7:35 p.m.]

Kiel Giddens: Just a follow-up to that. Obviously, there's the requirement for the service plan and for the $50 million threshold in public accounts, but is there any requirement to publish written reasons for when the minister exercises powers under clause 2 here?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I wonder if the member could maybe clarify his question. Section 2 is around general powers of the ministry. The ministry is regularly engaged in constant activity across our portfolio on a daily, hourly and minute-by-minute basis. Are there particular decisions that the member is referring to?

Kiel Giddens: Some of the powers, obviously, are quite broad, such as acquiring land on behalf of the government or on behalf of a prescribed person or entity, for example.

Going into subsection (1)(e) here — those can be large dollar values — what type of mechanism would be used for the reporting of the written reasons when the minister would use a power that would require a large use of taxpayer dollars?

[7:40 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The Ministry of Infrastructure is still a part of government. It is obliged to follow all of the highly regulated processes of government for spending, in the same way that the previous ministries that undertook this capital work were subject to. Treasury Board process, cabinet decision-making — all of that still applies.

Our capital spending is regulated through the capital asset management framework, which is publicly available for the member's perusal.

Kiel Giddens: Maybe just to continue to follow on that accountability on behalf of taxpayers, is there a…? I guess it's helpful to know that, yeah, that capital planning management framework still applies here. I'm trying to under-

stand, as well, if there are thresholds for Treasury Board that still apply in the exact same way.

Particularly, before exercising clause 2 powers, what step would that…? If there are still Treasury Board approvals needed, at what threshold or at what point would that come into play?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The member may be interested to know that under the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act, all ministries are required to make public, within one month, any expenditures over $50 million.

Nothing in this act changes the accountability measures or processes that the Ministry of Infrastructure has to go through that somehow make it different from any other ministry. The powers under section 2 are quite routine. The Ministry of Infrastructure will operate under the same rules as any other ministry.

Kiel Giddens: Thank you to the minister for the answer there.

Again, I think I know the answer to this next question, but it's not exactly clear, just on first read of the bill. I'm wondering if the powers under clause 2 are delegable in any way, whether it's some other statutory decision-maker in the civil service or otherwise or to another minister or how that delegation is possible.

Hon. Bowinn Ma: First, a correction on what I said earlier — or not a correction, but a further clarification — regarding the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act. I should've made clear that we're talking about capital expense. That was the threshold for capital expense.

The minister cannot delegate any of these powers to any other minister. Under the Interpretation Act, however, which is a separate act, it does note that a minister could delegate to his or her deputy minister.

Kiel Giddens: I'm wondering if there are any judicial or legislative oversight mechanisms to review or challenge a decision made under this clause — an appeal mechanism.

[7:45 p.m.]

Say a local government or a First Nation disagreed with how a specific general power was made. What mechanism could be used? Is it just through the courts, or is there any other due process?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The mechanism would be through judicial review.

Á'a:líya Warbus: I'm just looking at the beginning here, part 2, which identifies the minister's powers in Bill 15. Some concerns have been brought forward, and we've been made aware that a number of Indigenous groups and First Nations leaders from across the province have come forward and identified parts of this legislation that actually don't align with DRIPA.

Many reasons have been outlined, the main one being that they have not had enough time among themselves to organize a response on behalf of all of the different nations across British Columbia. This process, in and of itself, is in conflict with the legislation, from their perspective. Even some of the reporting done by the legislation highlights that their voice, from the onset of these processes, must be recognized and included. That's outlined in section 7 agreements of DRIPA.

I'm just wanting to highlight that the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council has demanded that the province put Bill 15 through a review by First Nations and that it be amended to protect and respect rights and title. The W̱JOŁEŁP First Nation has outright rejected Bill 15 and demanded that it be withdrawn.

They've outlined that they're calling a meeting of all First Nations, by a letter that went out to all of them across British Columbia — they're going to meet at the earliest opportunity, which isn't until tomorrow; it's not much time — in which they urge all First Nations to review the bill.

They don't accept — I'm reading directly from the letter here, which I can ensure that the minister gets a copy of — the province ramming through legislation that will profoundly impact First Nations rights, title and jurisdiction and Crown–First Nations relations.

They want to hold the province accountable under the Declaration Act, and they do not support the rollback of reconciliation through regression to Crown unilateralism. This was signed by the First Nations Leadership Council, the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and the B.C. Assembly of First Nations and was sent out May 12, 2025.

This was after they met with the Premier and outlined their concerns, in which a public statement was made by him in his office that he would move forward with the legislation as is, in complete opposition to their wishes to be involved and consulted and that a joint decision that everyone is satisfied with be arrived at.

"Bill 15 contains" — again, reading from the letter into the record — "no binding requirement for consultation and cooperation with First Nations at the project designation or approval stage, nor does it include related consent-based or decision-making processes."

It goes on to identify section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. "Bill 15 was developed without application of the province's interim approach to implement the requirements of section 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, which requires the province to consult and cooperate with Indigenous peoples when developing laws that may affect their rights."

[7:50 p.m.]

The First Nations Leadership Council outlines that they were not engaged during the policy design stages of

the bill. "Consultation on the bill was limited, amounting to a request for brief feedback in the final days before introduction. However, deferring engagement to the regulation-development phase is inconsistent with the Declaration Act and the interim approach, and cannot remedy the bill's resulting problems and deficiencies. The legislation itself sets the parameters for what can and cannot be done in regulation."

First Nations must be a part of legislative development from the onset, which I think — I could go deeper into the letter — is clearly outlined here.

In saying that, looking at the report that this government tabled — their own report, which they're required to do under DRIPA, 2023 and 2024 — they outlined for Infrastructure ministry and other ministries that, again, they meet regularly with First Nations that have active negotiations and that each negotiation is unique and that, with the help of a centrally tracked system, they'll be able to share information of ongoing and upcoming negotiations which will ensure more transparency with First Nations partners.

From the government's own report and legislation that conflicts directly, which I believe is outlined on the front end of this bill…. The whole thing is problematic from all First Nations' point of view across British Columbia. So they're demanding a halt in the process so that they can be assured that sections 6 and 7 and 3 of DRIPA are all going to be recognized.

My question to the minister is: rather than do Bill 15, why aren't you using section 7 agreements to fast-track specific projects? Why is there not a reference to those agreements to ensure that the alignment is going to be there, that First Nations have the assurance in writing that it's actually going to be done?

There's one small mention, I think, in terms of engagement. No definitions. And this has to do with constraints, far into the bill. But I think the question stands. First Nations leadership has made it very clear that they want a halt, they want consultation, and they want alignment with DRIPA. So the question is: will their voice be considered, and are they going to get the consultation and the time that's required under DRIPA to ensure that the alignment is there to their satisfaction?

The Chair: Thank you, Member, for your comments. Given that we are currently on clause 2, I presume that your comments relate to clause 2.

Á'a:líya Warbus: Yeah, just to be clear, in clause 2…. I may have misspoken around the section that we are specifically in after definitions. Clause 2, the minister's general powers regarding infrastructure projects: "the minister may do the following in relation to infrastructure projects." It's innate in this entire section, speaking to it fully, that everything that's outlined from First Nations leaders across British Columbia does not comply, in their view, to the onset of the entire bill.

[7:55 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: I want to acknowledge what the member is raising here and certainly acknowledge that we had less time to consult on this act than we would have liked to do. We acknowledge that. We definitely acknowledge that.

It was our…. In assessing this act, we identified that it was primarily tools that allowed for government to clean up its own house in terms of permitting, in terms of prioritization, rather than an intention to…. We had expected that we had specifically carved out impacts to First Nations except where regulations might need to be made and that those regulations would be made in consultation with First Nations. We made an error in that, frankly, and did not…. I do want to acknowledge that.

In answering the question in…. Sorry, when I say we made an error, what I mean is that we had interpreted that interest would be quite low from First Nations because we did not interpret the tools that we had provided in this legislation as impacting First Nations, except, again, to provide greater clarity, where those regulations needed to be consulted, developed in consultation with First Nations. Those regulations are in the streamlining tools that are later on in the act.

[8:00 p.m.]

In answering the question specifically to section 2, it should be noted that these powers are not new. They currently exist in other statutes, and the current Ministry of Infrastructure, which was created on November 18, functions through, basically, an order in council that stitches together the authorities that currently exist in other statutes in order to basically make the ministry what it is. This section in particular simply codifies those statutes that are currently being stitched by order in council.

Á'a:líya Warbus: I think, in and of that answer, the minister has actually highlighted an innate issue with legislation that's new and being developed. None of it is through the interim approach that was agreed upon and promised to Indigenous leaders and communities across the province.

Saying that interest may be low is in complete contradiction to the Premier saying that all the projects, or most of them, would be 51 percent owned by Indigenous communities. That part doesn't really make sense to me.

Further into the letter are concerns that, again, the First Nations Leadership Council, the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and the B.C. Assembly of First Nations…. They will do their duty to consult with all the First Nations across British Columbia that they've called to a meeting that's going to happen tomorrow afternoon.

Reading from the letter again, to quote: "The bill pri-

oritizes speed and project delivery over environmental protection, legal clarity and First Nations participation and decision-making. The approach creates new legal and policy risks by bypassing foundational protections and processes to meet Crown obligations."

Key concerns…. Again, no rights-based or consent framework is included in the bill; the language is not there. Unilateral authority granted to ministries and regulators. You can say that consultation will happen, but unless it's written into the legislation, which was supposed to include First Nations' input, then they cannot be assured of that.

Expansive and largely unconstrained powers to delegated regulators such as the BCER and ministers. This includes authority to redefine regulatory categories, override environmental protections and fast-track permits, all without certainty, public transparency or clear standards.

I think what we've been able to highlight here today is that that misstep has already happened in the first draft and creation of this bill. First Nations are very clear that they want a halt to this process and for this to be pulled in order for it to be in alignment with DRIPA. Any new legislation that's going to affect Indigenous peoples across British Columbia, under DRIPA, should be involving their consultation. Their voice clearly says they've not been consulted, and they're not happy with it in the form that it's in.

Exemptions from critical legal and regulatory processes — this is, again, from the letter.

"The bills enable full or partial exemption from key statutes designed to ensure environmental protection and resource management. These include the EAA, ERAA and statutes governing water, wildlife and forests. These exemptions reduce accountability and remove avenues to assess, prevent or mitigate harm to their lands, waters and cultural sites."

What I'm getting to is that if Indigenous nations actually oppose a project, which could happen…. We could say right now that they've been consulted and that that ownership will be there. But if they oppose a project, does clause 2 specifically give the minister power to proceed regardless? And if so, how does the government justify this under DRIPA?

[8:05 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: We are confident that nothing in this act diminishes our obligations under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act or section 35 of the Constitution Act. This is assured by a section that is written into the bill itself — which is not the section that we're debating now, but I want to acknowledge that — and assured by the Interpretation Act, which requires that all legislation be interpreted in a way that aligns with section 35 of the Constitution Act and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

Any project that is designated under this act — which, again, would be designated under a section that is not this section — would need to meet obligations under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, as well as section 35 of the Constitution Act.

I would also like to note, however, in addition to…. I want to acknowledge that the member has raised many important pieces of feedback, most of which are not relevant to this section nor to this act. I believe that the member might be providing feedback on Bill 14. This is Bill 15 debate.

Á'a:líya Warbus: The letter does reference Bills 14 and 15, so the sections that I read from the letter are directly related to Bill 15. And the reason being is….

We're kind of doing a dance here, back and forth. I appreciate what the minister is saying, but the facts are that the legislation itself was pushed ahead. Within DRIPA, as it's written, it clearly states that Indigenous voices, Indigenous leadership in this province, must have their say and their input in all legislation that may affect them. This legislation, they're clearly outlining, affects them — and their consultation, their input was ignored or was not taken or was not heard or was not understood.

They need time to be able to gather the proper feedback and voices. This legislation in and of itself, the way that it's being drafted right now in this House, is not honouring that process. Regardless of what's in the legislation, it's the creation of the bill and the effect it has on the lands that don't add up.

[8:10 p.m.]

Respectfully, the minister spoke of error. That was noted by this side of the House. And the question stands. If there was error or an oversight of Indigenous consultation to the legislation, required by DRIPA in order to pass under good standing of that agreement, and Indigenous leadership is asking for a halt, then my question is: will you retract the bill until it is amended and that this process under DRIPA is included so that Indigenous leaders can be assured that their rights and title under section 35 — constitutional rights that are protected, and we know that because of the many court cases that have been brought forward in this province — are recognized and upheld?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: This legislation will not remove or reduce government's commitments to reconciliation or alignment with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. The ministry did begin engagement with First Nations on this legislation prior to its tabling. Those conversations will continue and will help inform development of regulations that are noted in other sections of this act.

[8:15 p.m.]

The Premier and I will be joining the All Chiefs meeting tomorrow. We look forward to that conversation, and we are looking forward to further engagement, because we have already heard from First Nations during the engagements that have already happened about how this act can

support them in moving projects along that they are involved in.

Given the enabling nature of this legislation, deeper consultation with First Nations is planned for regulation development. I can confirm that projects will continue to undergo consultation with First Nations in B.C.

Trevor Halford: I just want to unpack some of the comments that the minister has made over the last few minutes here. I think that they're worth exploring because they can actually be a little bit troubling.

The minister talked about getting government's house in order in regards to permitting. The minister talked about errors. The minister talked about mistakes.

The minister talked about the fact that, when we talk about consultation with First Nations, they assumed that First Nations interests in consultation would be low. I have a very hard time making that connection. This is why we're in the situation we are with Bill 15. For the minister to say that they made an assumption that First Nations would have a low interest in participating in this bill I think is incredibly troubling. For the minister to say they've made an error in this bill, I think, is incredibly troubling.

Based on the minister's comments that she's made here tonight in the last 15 minutes and making assumptions on the level of interest First Nations would want to have in the participation or consultation of this bill and categorizing that as low, I think we have a fundamental question on whether or not this bill should proceed, based on this minister's comments tonight.

The Chair: Member, I didn't hear a question there pertaining to part 2, clause 2.

Trevor Halford: My question to the minister is a direct one, and it can be on part 2 and the minister's powers. The fact that they assumed that First Nations interest in this bill would be low.… Does the minister still see fit that this bill proceed as is?

[8:20 p.m. - 8:25 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: This legislation is about supporting British Columbians and growing communities by delivering projects more quickly. The projects we're talking about are those projects that deliver significant public benefit to communities. They are schools, hospitals, long-term-care centres, cancer centres.

At the same time, we recognize that the provincial government is not the only entity that delivers infrastructure projects that are critical to communities. They are also delivered by other entities — entities like local governments, the federal government, Crown corporations, First Nations and private sector partners as well.

British Columbians have called upon us. We've been called upon by British Columbians to deliver those critical infrastructure projects that they and their communities need more quickly. That is why we have moved quickly to table this piece of legislation that provides government with tools that help move projects along more quickly when they get stuck. They are not tools that allow the degradation of environmental standards. They are not tools that allow the sidestepping of our obligations to Indigenous peoples or our commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

We do acknowledge that given the accelerated pace at which we have worked to deliver this piece of legislation so that we can speed up delivery of critical infrastructure projects for people in communities, we had a shorter amount of time to consult with First Nations than we would have liked. We did engage with First Nations leadership. We did reach out to all rights and title holders, as well as through, of course, a distinction-based approach used to engage with Indigenous groups.

We have heard very clearly that it was not enough. We are confident that the legislation as it stands does not impact any commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. It does not impact our obligations under…. And nor could it. We would not be able to legislate out of our section 35 obligations under the Constitution Act. We believe there is an opportunity for us — not just an opportunity but a duty — to consult with First Nations on the development of regulation.

There is a significant amount of work in the regulations where the rubber really hits the road in terms of the tools that are provided in this act. In relation to section 2, nothing in section 2 impacts those, nor does it in any other section. The section 2 that we are at right now refers to the minister's general powers and the establishment of the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Rob Botterell: Section 2 outlines the general powers of the minister that include planning and managing infrastructure projects, making recommendations regarding priorities for infrastructure projects.

[8:30 p.m.]

What we've heard this evening is that the First Nations in this province have concluded that the way in which this legislation is brought forward is not in compliance with the obligations that the B.C. government has under the DRIPA and other provisions. It is not for the minister to be deciding, on behalf of First Nations, that their concerns are not warranted. I'm very encouraged that there's a meeting tomorrow.

My question relates to section 2 and the discussion we've now had for a number of hours, because when we talked about the categories of projects, the helpful answer provided by the minister in relation to projects was that a list of category 1 projects would be developed as quickly as possible.

We're in a situation here in British Columbia where there needs to be a balance between making sure that First Nations rights and interests, as provided for in case law, in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, in section 35…. Those are paramount. Those must be fulfilled. It isn't a choice; it's a legal obligation.

Against that legal obligation is that the ministry is going to be inconvenienced. They are not going to be able to move as quickly, as soon as practicable, on category 1 projects, because we certainly don't want breaches of law, and we do want respect for First Nations in this province.

My question to the minister is this: how many projects will suffer irreparable harm if they are delayed for another, say, three or four months while we respect and fulfil our obligations to First Nations?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: The member is asking some important questions regarding category 1 projects, which is the next section. I would recommend we move to Section 3.

Rob Botterell: Then let me rephrase.

Is the minister prepared to implement the minister's general powers in clause 2, in a manner that respects the request of First Nations in this province to have consultation prior to decisions being made that, in the view of the First Nations, impact them — decisions made under section 2?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Members know what the purpose of section 2 is.

Yes, we will continue to consult with First Nations on a project-by-project basis. Given that this is a capital ministry designed to deliver projects, we will continue to do that, on a project-by-project basis.

[8:35 p.m.]

Scott McInnis: I appreciate the opportunity to ask a few questions here to the Minister of Infrastructure. I'm just trying to clarify some things. I'm a little bit confused when we're talking about consultation in drafting this bill. We hear that the assumption was made that interest would be low but that all stakeholders were met and engaged with. Then we hear that there were errors made and maybe not enough consultation.

I want to dig into that a little bit, specifically with section 2, because it sets the table, so to speak, for the bill. To what level were First Nations consulted directly with section 2? This lays out the powers of the ministry when making some of these very important decisions around infrastructure projects across the province. Specifically, to what level was the First Nations Leadership Council consulted on the drafting of section 2?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: We engaged with First Nations Leadership Council staff during development of the legislation. We provided them with regular updates throughout the development and a consultation draft when that was completed.

We also sent letters to all 204 First Nations, offering detailed sessions, and we provided those sessions with all First Nations who responded with interest, on the contents of the bill, including section 2.

Scott McInnis: Thank you to the minister for that answer.

As my colleague the member for Chilliwack–Cultus Lake pointed out, we did receive a letter from the First Nations Leadership Council, outlining some of the concerns they had around Bills 14 and 15, and it lays out the various concerns within each bill. What we've come to understand in the language of that letter somewhat contradicts what the minister is saying.

[8:40 p.m.]

I just want to quote part of that letter saying: "The First Nations Leadership Council and First Nation rights holders were not engaged during the policy design stages of the bills," referring to 14 and 15. "Consultation on the bills was extremely limited, amounting to a request for brief feedback in the final days before introduction."

I guess my question to the minister would be: could she please provide just a little bit more detail on what regular updates were given, related specifically to clause 2? And was there an opportunity in clause 2, when we're talking about the minister's powers…?

Again, I think this is a very important component of this bill. Were the leadership council or other First Nations rights holders given the opportunity to specifically voice their feedback or have input related to clause 2 of this bill?

Hon. Bowinn Ma: Policy concepts relating to section 2 were shared.

Scott McInnis: I was hoping for a little bit more detail because it works in nicely to my follow-up here.

Providing that drafts and things, as the minister states, were shared with First Nations rights holders involved in the consultation process here, how many responses did they receive?

[8:45 p.m.]

Hon. Bowinn Ma: We met with 29 representatives.

With that, I move that the committee rise, report progress and seek leave to sit again.

Motion approved.

The Chair: This committee now stands adjourned.

The committee rose at 8:46 p.m.

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